Networking

Networking is the process of learning and building relationships. Networking can be conducted in a spontaneous or planned manner. Both forms of networking are beneficial, and it is important to take advantage of both. Your strategy will depend on the nature of your relationships, and your goals for the networking communications.

Examples of Spontaneous Networking

• As Lisa was getting lunch, she saw a Peace Corps representative at an information table in Reamer Campus Center. Lisa decided to stop, and learn about the mission of the Peace Corps, the candidate recruitment process, and was provided with contact information of a past volunteer who could provide further insights.
• Julie meets her sorority sister’s father during Family Weekend and learns about his position at a well-known advertising firm in New York City. As a result of talking with him and following up to thank him for his time, Julie is given a contact to follow up with about their summer internship program.

Examples of Planned Networking

• Neil talks with his Electrical Engineering professor about his interests in renewable energy. Neil’s professor encourages him to speak with an employer from the renewable energy sector that recently presented at a conference he attended, to learn more about the field.
• Recently at a college career fair, Emily met with a Human Resources representative from a national company regarding internship opportunities in California. Although the representative was hiring for the Northeast region, Emily e-mailed the recruiter after the fair and was able to obtain a company contact on the west coast.
• David spent winter break learning about the Arts Administration career path by conducting informational interviews with Union alumni and contacts found through his faculty. David’s informational interviews allowed him to hear of un-posted job opportunities, which led to interviews, and ultimately a job offer.

Identifying and Establishing Your Network

• Identify people you already know including family, Greek Life members, friends, community members, professors, coaches, former employers etc. Even if they are not in the field(s) of interest to you, they can often lead you to people who are.
• Join clubs and professional organizations that relate to your areas of interest. These can lead to valuable connections to professionals within career fields of interest.
• Identify Union College alumni who are employed in career fields of interest through faculty, administrators, LinkedIn, and the Union Career Advisory Network (UCAN).

Strategies for Effective Networking

• Make your initial contact by e-mail, or message on UCAN/LinkedIn. This gives your contact the opportunity to respond when their schedule allows.
• Prepare and practice your self introduction so you are prepared when a networking opportunity presents itself.
• Ask contacts for their career advice not for a job or internship.
• Network with entry and mid-level professionals first. After acquiring sufficient knowledge, and networking confidence, begin contacting more senior level professionals.
• Always follow up networking meetings and conversations with a thank you e-mail or note reiterating what you learned, and thanking your contacts for their assistance and time.
• Dress professionally for in-person meetings and employer visits.
• Organize a tracking system to record names, addresses, meetings, and follow-up.
• If your contact agrees to keep in touch, follow up every 4 – 8 weeks to increase the likelihood that your contact will think of you if/when an opportunity arises.
Conducting Your Informational Interview

Informational interviews are networking meetings where you ask professionals within career fields of interest questions regarding their work, industry, career path, educational background, and job search advice. Informational interviews are conducted over the phone or in-person, and are a great tool for building your network and acquiring insider knowledge.

Step 1: Arranging and Preparing for an Informational Interview

- Ensure your resume is up to date and ready to send.
- Initiate contact by sending a networking e-mail/message stating your interest in speaking with your contacts for 15 - 20 minutes about their career related experiences.
- Arrange a mutually convenient time to meet/talk. Let them know you appreciate their time and are willing to work around their schedule.
- Research your contact’s career field and employer. Becker Career Center has resources that can assist in your research including Facts on File, Vault, LinkedIn, GoinGlobal, ReferenceUSA, and Glassdoor.
- Develop several questions to ask during your informational interview. Reference page 7 for further tips.
- After a few informational interviews you should replace your standard questions with more insightful ones.

Step 2: Conducting the Informational Interview

- Call your contacts from a quiet place where you know you won’t be interrupted and you have good cell reception.
- You can contact Becker Career Center to reserve one of the interview rooms.
- If meeting in person, plan to dress professionally and arrive 10 minutes early at the prearranged location.
- Reintroduce yourself and explain why you are reaching out to them.
- Begin by asking the questions you prepared. However, be flexible if the conversation takes a different path.
- Keep track of time, let your contact know when 15 - 20 minutes is up, offer to end the conversation, and follow the contact’s lead on ending or continuing the conversation.
- Be sincere, show interest, and thank your contacts for volunteering their time.
- Ask contacts if they would provide you with other professionals that can offer additional career information.
- If the connection is genuine, ask if you can stay in touch.

Important: Not every informational interview will go as planned. It is at this point when most people stop. Instead, persevere and acquire the knowledge that will allow you to compete more effectively.

Step 3: Follow up

- Send your contact a thank you e-mail or letter immediately following your conversation.
- Track each networking conversation and note: the date, key information/insights, and next steps established to help facilitate future conversations with this contact.
- If your contact agrees to keep in touch, mention in your letter that you’ll be doing so. Multiple communications (e.g., following up every 4 - 8 weeks) increase the likelihood that your contact will think of you if/when an opportunity arises.
- If the individuals you spoke with provided additional contacts, update them as to whom you’ve followed up with.
Self-Introduction

Alumni events, guest lectures, career fairs, conferences, athletic events, college reunions, and neighborhood gatherings are all great venues to engage in networking. Prepare and practice a concise introduction so that you’re always ready to network effectively. Include your full name, class year, major, career field of interest, and ask your contact if they would mind if you asked them a couple of questions about their career field. For example:

Hi, I’m Robert Plant (shake hands). It’s nice to meet you. I am a first year student at Union majoring in psychology. I’m interested in learning more about the publishing field and heard that you work at XYZ Publishing. Would you mind if I asked you a couple of questions about your experiences working in publishing?

Requesting an Informational Interview via E-Mail

Subject: Union College Student Seeking Alumni Advice

Dear Mr. Brown,

I’m an Electrical Engineering major in my junior year at Union College, and have an interest in renewable energy. Professor Smith provided me with your contact information and suggested I send you an e-mail because you are currently working in the renewable energy sector and recently presented at a conference he attended. I would like to learn more about your experiences in the industry and any advice you’d be willing to share to further my knowledge in this field.

Would you be willing to speak with me for 15 - 20 minutes at a time that’s convenient for you? I have attached my resume to give you a better sense of who I am. Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Neil Butler

Thank You E-Mail

Subject: Thank You

Dear Mr. Brown,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me earlier today regarding your experiences and knowledge with renewable energy. Your insights in preparing for a career in this sector were extremely helpful. As we discussed, I will be following up with Mr. Yang about his career in renewable energy. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Neil Butler
Union Career Advisory Network (UCAN)

UCAN is a searchable database of approximately 13,000+ Alumni and Friends of the College who have offered to share information and advice relative to their career and/or graduate school interests. The UCAN database is exclusive to Union College students and alumni and is accessible through the UConnect Alumni Community. To gain access, all students need to attend a UCAN Orientation, offered at Becker Career Center.

Requesting an Informational Interview via UCAN (Note: UCAN does not allow you to attach your resume.)

Subject: Union College Student Seeking Alumni Advice

Dear Ms. Jacobsen,

I’m a junior, English major at Union College, and have interest in pursuing a career in the field of television and film production. I found your contact and employer information through the Union Career Advisory Network. I was excited to see your experience with MTV. I am eager to learn more about your experiences in the industry and any advice you’d be willing to share with regards to succeeding in the field.

Would you be willing to speak with me for 15 - 20 minutes about your experiences in media production at a time that’s convenient for you? I can be reached at doej@union.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Jane Doe

Follow Up Message

Subject: Following Up

Dear Ms. Jacobsen,

I am following up an e-mail communication that I sent six days ago. I recognize your time is valuable and this is a busy time of year. If you could spare 15 – 20 minutes of your time to speak, I remain interested in learning more about television and film production. Thank you for time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Jane Doe
LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the world’s largest professional network with 562+ million users in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. You can connect with Union College alumni, professors, classmates, family members, friends, individuals you’ve met at networking events, career fairs, or conferences, current and former coworkers and supervisors. To set up a LinkedIn account, meet with an Advisor at the Becker Career Center. Be sure to have an up to date resume completed prior to the LinkedIn appointment.

What you need to do before you send a message? Create a LinkedIn profile that includes both your first and last name, professional-looking profile picture, headline “Student at Union College,” location, industry that you intend to enter, current and previous experiences and education, and a customized public URL. In addition, you may add a summary section, volunteer experiences, organizations, relevant courses you’ve taken, skills, projects, languages, honors & awards, publications, patents and certifications. Meet with an Advisor at the Becker Career Center to create an effective profile.

Searching for Union College Alumni
- In the main search bar, type Union College
- Click on “See Alumni” box
- Search for Alumni by: where they live; where they work; what they do; what they studied; what are they skilled at; and by what years they attended Union College

Requesting to Connect with Individuals on LinkedIn
- In the main search bar, type in the individual’s name, and click on their profile
- Click on “Connect” in the blue box
- Select “Add a Note”
- Include a personal message using the below example
- Once an invitation has been customized, send invitation

Customizable invitation via LinkedIn (Note: 300-character limit.)
- Keep it brief
- State connection first as it gives the recipient a reason to care
- Tell them why you’d like to connect

Dear Sam Brown,

I’m a senior, music major at Union College, and interested in teaching. I saw your profile in the LinkedIn Alumni pages. Would you be willing to speak with me for 15 - 20 minutes about your experience being a teacher at a time that’s convenient for you?

Thank you,

Andy Smith
Networking at a Career Fair

Career Fairs provide a great opportunity to network with multiple recruiters in a convenient location. The organizations participating may offer full-time positions, internship, and/or volunteer experiences. In addition, employers are eager to speak with students who are exploring career fields of interest. Below are some tips for making the most of these events.

**Before the Event**

*Research organizations of interest that will be attending the event.*
- Research the organization’s mission, customers, competitors, products, and services. Utilize Becker Career Center resources including Handshake and Glassdoor, the organization’s website, and industry journals and articles.
- Be sure to consider small or lesser known organizations as they can provide exceptional opportunities to learn about a profession and how the business works.
- Use UCAN and LinkedIn to identify alumni who work at the organizations or fields of interest and contact them to conduct informational interviews with a goal of furthering your knowledge.

*Prepare and finalize your resume.*
- Have your resume critiqued by a Becker Career Center Advisor before attending a Career Fair. Employers can tell who has had their resume reviewed by a Career Advisor and who has not.
- Print 15 copies of your resume on heavy bond/high quality/watermarked paper. Bring resumes in a portfolio with a notepad and pen.

*Prepare and practice your introduction.*
- Prepare a short introduction that includes your name, class year, major and whether you are interested in full-time or internship positions. For example, “Hi, my name is Sara Goodwin. I am a junior at Union College, majoring in Biology. Through my research, I understand that your company hires Research Interns and I am interested in learning more about these opportunities.”
- If you are exploring career fields of interest, your introduction should include similar information. For example, “Hi, my name is Chad Wilson. From my research I understand that your organization employs teachers throughout the world. I’m interested in learning about the characteristics of a successful teacher and more about the field.”
- Practice your introduction and handshake to increase confidence and comfort with introducing yourself.
- Prepare questions to ask the representatives (refer page 7 for for sample questions).

*Anticipate questions from employers and be able to carry a conversation with them.*
- Employers will ask why you are interested in their organization and the opportunity; be prepared to answer.
- Be prepared to answer questions about your experiences/skills and to provide a copy of your resume upon request.

*Dress code is business professional.*
- This style includes: solid, dark or neutral colored pant or knee length skirt suits; long-sleeved dress shirts/high neckline blouses; clean dress shoes/socks that you can comfortably walk in; conservative ties; and a neat appearance.

**During the Event**

*Treat the event as a professional atmosphere/meeting, and not a social event.*
- Arrive 20 minutes prior to the start of the event. Review the employer directory to identify employers of interest.
- Be prepared to wait in lines to speak with the representative and greet each employer with a firm handshake, make eye contact, and smile.
- Listen carefully to the representative so that you can respond clearly and succinctly to their questions.
- Remember the representatives’ names, always ask for a business card or write down their name and email address.

**After the Event**
- Send a thank you e-mail/letter, which should include a reference to your conversation.
Questions to ask While Networking

Background Questions
- How did you get started in the industry? What has been your career path?
- How/why did you decide to pursue the career in which you are working?
- What was your undergraduate major? How did it help prepare you for your career? What additional training/education have you had?
- Where can someone in an entry-level position expect to be in two years? Five years? Ten years?

Position Specific Questions
- What are the primary responsibilities of your job?
- What do you like most/least about your job?
- What parts of your position do you find most challenging?
- How did you get your current position?
- What are the characteristics of the people who succeed in this position?

Company/Industry Specific Questions
- What do you like most/least about your field?
- How would you describe your work environment?
- What are the key challenges for the department/company?
- What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities in this field/company?
- Who does your company view as competitors?
- Relative to your competitors, what is your competitive advantage?
- What are the key metrics that you use to evaluate your department/business?
- What is the employment outlook in your field? Can you describe any developments that are on the horizon?
- What are the trends affecting the industry?

Graduate School Questions
- Is a graduate degree important? If so, what fields of study are helpful?
- What courses/prerequisites should I take to better prepare myself for graduate school?
- What is unique about your graduate school and program?
- What is the success rate of graduates from your program finding employment upon graduation?
- What types of assistantships are available at your institution?

Recommendation Questions
- What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
- How do most people enter this profession?
- What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?
- Can you recommend sources for more information (books, trade publications, journals, websites, etc.)?
- What advice do you have for students who are preparing to enter your field?
- Are there other people with whom you recommend I speak? When I contact them, may I use your name?
- Can you recommend any courses I should take before furthering my job search?
- How can students find summer jobs or internships in your field? What other means of gaining experience before graduation would you recommend?
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