Networking & Informational Interviewing Guide
For Graduate Students
Networking and Informational Interviews

What IS Networking?

- Sharing of ideas, information, and resources
- Helping and giving to others, and getting help from others
- Listening and learning
- Discovering connections between people
- Building relationships before you need them
- Getting more done with less effort
- Building your personal brand by demonstrating your credibility and trustworthiness.
- An ongoing process of relating to others for mutual information exchange that can not only help you in your job search, but can also help you do your job and live your life better.

What ISN’T Networking?

- Getting something from someone with a lack of gratitude, consideration, or reciprocity
- Asking directly for a job or internship
- Asking someone else to circulate your resume
- A job interview. Mention your strengths and interests in conversations but networking is not an occasion to grandstand.

Why is Networking So Important to Job Searching?

- First and foremost, networking helps you gain an insider’s perspective to help you determine if a given career path, industry, organization, school district, etc. would be a good fit for you. You may have no idea what you would like to do after graduation or what your next career move might be. Talking to different people about what they do is a great way to explore possibilities for yourself. A networking goal of identifying potential career options can be as simple as that.

- At the same time, networking allows you the opportunity to build new relationships. It allows you to share information and advice with others, make an impact, and find common ground with someone who could lead you to an opportunity. It also allows you the opportunity to help someone else. And from the employer perspective, the familiarity we create through
networking helps lower risk in the hiring process. Hiring decision-makers in the US prefer to hire people they already know, or people who have been referred to them by others they trust.

- Approximately 50 – 80% of jobs are found through networking.
- A job notice posted on a company web site or other electronic job board can generate hundreds, or even thousands, of applications from interested candidates. However, sorting through piles of resumes from anonymous job candidates is the method of filling open positions that most hiring decision-makers prefer the least – because of the anonymity. Hiring is costly to any organization but when an insider has “screened” a prospective applicant through networking, the risk involved in selecting interview candidates decreases. Furthermore, recruiters often cannot sort through every single application they receive. The sheer volume would make this task impossible. Effective networking helps you make meaningful connections with others in order to get yourself recognized from the masses, since it allows others to “preview” your fit prior to a formal interview.

Where Do I Begin?

- Determine what you would like to know and the people you would like to meet. What are you genuinely interested in learning?
  Some examples:
  ✓ Discovering what other people actually do on the job
  ✓ Learning about career paths
  ✓ Gaining a better understanding of targeted jobs or industries and how your background applies
  ✓ Gaining specific information about targeted organizations, such as what hiring decision-makers look for in candidates
  ✓ Gaining a better understanding of job market conditions
  ✓ Identifying where the opportunities are in a given industry or organization
  ✓ Learning tips on how to advance in your current career
  ✓ Learning about opportunities in other areas of your current organization

- Be open to multiple possibilities. Think broadly. Don’t limit yourself to just one career option because in doing so, you may not pay attention to information about other opportunities that becomes available to you. Have in mind at least 3 potential career options and/or industries you would like to learn more about, but again, keep your eyes and ears attuned to other possibilities as well. Once you have a few ideas of your own, it can be helpful to research some organizations related to your primary career interests. Create a “wish list” of organizations that appeal to you. Buzzfile.com is a great tool to use to conduct this type of research. LinkedIn is another great online tool you can use for research. Connecting with those who work in your organizations of interest can be an important part of your outreach strategy.
Who is in My Network?

- Everyone HAS a network. If you have ever left your house, you have one too.

Some Sources of Our Networks:

- Grad student classmates/friends
- Classmates/friends from your undergraduate institution
- High School friends
- ALUMNI from Lehigh
- ALUMNI from other institutions you have attended
- Community friends from home and abroad
- Family members
- Family friends
- Former and current co-workers
- Internship supervisors
- Customers or suppliers with whom you have worked
- Faculty
- Neighbors
- Conference and seminar attendees you have met
- Parents of your children’s friends
- Members of professional associations you have met
- People you meet through recreational events
- Anyone you have met or will meet.
Reach Out – Conduct Informational Interviews

- Think about the people you already know and then take the next step of reaching out to them. Let them know the types of careers you have in mind to explore and ask them if they can tell you anything about the companies or industries of interest to you. Or simply ask them to tell you more about what they do. This act of conversing with someone for advice and information is referred to as an “informational interview.”

- Also think about new people you would like to meet and ask for introductions. It is not often that the people you already know can lead you to information about opportunities. More likely, it is the friends, colleagues, classmates and family members of your friends, colleagues, classmates and family members, and other new people you meet, who can provide helpful advice and information and possible job leads. So, the important point here is to ask for introductions. And to keep thinking about others you would like to meet.

- Informational interviews are critical. Have genuine interest in the information you discover and show this by affirming it. If you are only looking for a way to get in front of someone to promote yourself, you will anger and disappoint your contact.

The Power of “Weak Ties”

- The real power in networking lies in the extended networks of those we know, such as the friends and colleagues of our friends, and the new people we meet. These individuals are referred to as our “weak ties,” whereas the people we know well are referred to as our “strong ties.” Our strong ties are typically people similar to ourselves, who are in close proximity, share the same networks, and are often aware of the same opportunities. Weak ties, on the other hand, are people who are not routinely in close proximity to ourselves, are part of different networks and, consequently, are often aware of different opportunities. For this reason, connecting with weak ties is extremely valuable.

Venture Beyond Your Friend Groups

- We are all “programmed” to gravitate toward people similar to ourselves. However, do not make the mistake of constantly seeking others who share your academic discipline or have an experiential or cultural background exactly identical to yours. To truly grow and learn, we must become curious about others and position ourselves to meet new people. Networks must be diverse in order to be most effective.
Lehigh University, The Center for Career & Professional Development

- Your fellow classmates can be valuable resources, so get involved with them. On campus, introduce yourself to other students across colleges, disciplines, and cultural backgrounds. Meet people everywhere you go – in class, at meeting places on campus, during recreational events, campus organizations, conferences, symposia, community events, etc. Talk about what you are studying and what you would like to do after graduation. One never knows when a relationship with a classmate can be mutually beneficial in terms of career interests.

- Specific resources for getting more involved on campus can be found in Attachment I

Connect with Lehigh Alumni, Employers, and Others Outside the University

- You are now part of the larger Lehigh community, which includes alumni. Alumni enjoy talking to current students as a way of “giving back” to the university. Reach out to them.

- Information about various ways to connect with alumni, employers, and others can be found in Attachment II.

How Can You Help OTHERS?

- Networking is just as much, if not more, about giving than receiving. As you are corresponding with others, always be thinking to yourself, “How can I help this person?” Listen for opportunities to offer assistance. You may offer a helpful article or book or some other information, or an introduction to another person you know who may be valuable or have something in common. Ask people you are connecting with how you can help.

Sample Networking Outreach Email

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am a current graduate student at Lehigh University and found your profile while browsing the LinkedIn alumni database. I admire your career in _____ and hope to pursue a similar path. Would you be willing to connect with me and possibly offer some advice? I would greatly appreciate your time!

Thank You,

Your Name

Please note – this is just an example. Be sure to tailor your communications to the appropriate situation.
Rapport-Building Questions

- Immediately asking someone about current job openings is a networking mistake. Most people do not like being asked this question. The typical reply is, “Just visit our web site,” and the conversation ends, eliminating your opportunity to learn something, help someone else, find common ground, and make an impact for a personal referral to a hiring decision-maker. A major function of networking for job seeking is to **get yourself recognized from the masses of other applicants by making a connection and positive impact with a company insider who might keep you in mind for open positions and possibly refer you.** The first step in this process is to build a positive rapport with company insiders, giving them a **reason** to refer you to a colleague or hiring manager. After a person has accepted your request for advice/expertise, consider asking just a few questions. A list of sample questions is included in this document but also think of your own – what do you genuinely want to learn?

- Sample networking questions can be found in **Attachment III**

- Ask one question at a time when using email and don’t ask about **everything** you want to know at this stage. Create a “placeholder” for a future meeting. Express gratitude. If the information exchange goes well, ask if you could meet **in-person** for a 20 or 30 minute informational interview over lunch or coffee in the near future. Be clear that you will pay for lunch or coffee. During these meetings, continue to ask for information, advice, and expertise, and follow-up with a written thank you note within 24 hours of your meeting. Follow the advice you receive.

Offer

- Always be thinking to yourself – “How can I help this person?”
- Ask how you can help the people you connect with.

Continuing the Relationship

- A connection with someone may lead to an opportunity in the more distant future. For example, someone you meet may think of you in regard to an opportunity 6 months after your initial contact. As mentioned above, if you would like to continue a relationship with someone, discuss a way to stay in touch.
- Also, while electronic tools such as LinkedIn and alumni databases can be of great help in making initial connections with others, they are not meant to replace face-to-face meetings.
Follow Through

- Make sure you do what you say you will do – this is an important part of building trust and credibility. And again, follow the advice you receive.

Referrals to Hiring Managers

- In the event your outreach activity results in a referral to a hiring manager, send that hiring manager a formal cover letter and resume and in your cover letter, be sure to mention the name of the person who referred you in the very first sentence.

Additional Networking Tips

**What to Do**
- Be brief
- Be courteous
- Ask for advice and information
- Be clear about the information you are seeking
- Show genuine interest in others by asking them to share their career stories
- Express gratitude
- Be positive and curious

**What Not to Do**
- Don’t ask numerous questions in a single email
- Don’t be abrupt or rude
- Don’t rehash your entire resume
- Don’t apologize for “bothering” the people you contact
- Don’t explain your anxieties or challenges (e.g. “I haven’t found a job yet and I’m worried,” or “I sent out 500 applications but no replies yet, maybe I’m not in right career,” or “I’m losing hope”)
- Don’t ask open-ended questions about yourself, such as, “What do you think I should do after graduation?”
- Don’t waste others’ time by not being prepared to discuss what you specifically want to know
Attachment I - Ways to Get Involved On Campus to Connect with Other Students

**Graduate Student Senate Events**

**Cultural Breakfasts (Ongoing)**
This event is an opportunity for students to have breakfast and chat in a very relaxed setting. Graduate student ethnic clubs (i.e. CSSA, India Club, Thai Student Association, etc.) cook the food of their homeland for other students. It takes place at the Packer House (217 W. Packer Avenue) on Thursdays from 10 AM to 11 AM.

**GSS General Meetings (Ongoing)**
The mission of the Lehigh University Graduate Student Senate is to serve as the representing body of the Graduate Student community in all matters pertinent to the graduate programs and Graduate Student life at Lehigh University. Check the web site for meeting information.

**Special Events**
From Halloween Parties to Pumpkin Picking to Wine and Cheese, the GSS holds a variety of events throughout the year to help students enjoy their time at Lehigh and develop their social and professional skills.

**Toastmaster’s, Lehigh University**
Meet fellow students and improve your public speaking skills. Contact the GSS for additional information.

**Graduate Life Office Events**

**Tuesdays @ 10 (Ongoing)**
This event is an opportunity for students to have breakfast and chat in a very relaxed setting. Bagels, muffins, coffee, tea, and juice are served at the Packer House (217 W. Packer Avenue) every Tuesday from 10 AM to 11 AM.

**Women’s Exchange**
Women’s Exchange is a meeting for female graduate students to talk about finding work-life balance in graduate school and the unique issues that face female graduate students. Events take place at the Packer House (217 W. Packer Avenue).

**What’s Brewing**
Students will be asked to talk for 5-10 minutes on a subject they are passionate about – that is NOT their research. Students will have the opportunity to talk about the presentation in a relaxed way and learn more about their peers beyond academics. Details coming soon! Keep checking.

A full list of student clubs funded by the Graduate Student Senate is available here:  
https://gradlife.web.lehigh.edu/gss/current_clubs

A full list of GSS-GLO events that is updated and current can be found here:  
https://gradlife.web.lehigh.edu/gss/calendar

**Global Union**
The global union hosts numerous events focused on international education, cultural and social issues. More information can be found here:  
http://global.lehigh.edu/globalunion/about
LinkedIn
Connect with a broader range of professionals through LinkedIn. Use the alumni feature and groups, especially the Lehigh University Alumni group. This group grows by approximately 200 new members every month.

- Join the Lehigh University Alumni LinkedIn Group
- Search the LinkedIn alumni feature by selecting the “connect” tab and then clicking “find alumni”
- Browse here for more LinkedIn how-to’s

Alumni Club Events
Get to know members of the extended Lehigh community. Alumni enjoy connecting with students as a way of “giving back” to the university. Attend alumni events taking place across the country, including here in Bethlehem. Some events are purely recreational and some involve a career or professional development theme.

Career Networking Receptions Sponsored by the Alumni Association
Join alumni during these events which are scheduled throughout the year. Check the schedule periodically.

Graduate Life Facebook Fan Page
This feature is especially great for connecting with young alumni.

Campus and Community Events
Attend career fairs and other events on or off campus (including sporting events: http://www.lehighsports.com/) bringing you together with outside professionals, even if your expected graduation date is several years in the future. Networking is a process that takes time. The earlier you begin to forge relationships, the better your prospects for finding opportunities when you are ready to go on the market.

Employer Information Sessions
Organizations who conduct on-campus interviews at Lehigh usually host information sessions on campus prior to their interview day. It is extremely important to attend these events if you have been selected for an interview. If you were excited about a certain company but were not selected for an interview, attend the information session anyway. Some students get themselves added to interview schedules when they meet the recruiters in person during these sessions, and make a positive impression.

The schedule of information sessions can be found on LUCIE:
- Logon to LUCIE
- Select the “Events” tab
- Select “Information Sessions”
Employer Tailgate Parties and Other Events
Learn about the culture of organizations and show you are serious about their opportunities by attending their events. Employers are more likely to extend offers to students who participate in their live events, than to those who do not.

Professional Associations and Conferences
Join professional associations related to your discipline. Connect with other members and look for opportunities to volunteer. Your faculty will provide guidance regarding academic conferences.
Attachment III - SAMPLE NETWORKING QUESTIONS

• Who are the company’s competitors and how are their actions predicted or handled?

• What is management’s philosophy toward the employee?

• Is the company planning to expand, maintain or downsize?

• How would you describe the work climate?

• How did you start with the company?

• What has been your career path?

• How have you put your education to use?

• If you were to start over, what career changes would you make?

• What are the upward and lateral moves at your company, and how difficult is it to advance?

• My major (or degree) is (marketing, etc.). How could I put that to use within your company?

• I am very interested in (or skilled at)(name you area of concentrated study or skill). How could I put my interests to use?

• Is there someone you know at another company in this industry who would be willing to talk with me as you have?
MORE SAMPLE NETWORKING QUESTIONS  (from Networking, by National Business Employment Weekly)

THE PERSON:
Early questions in networking to gather information (don’t ask of later contacts once you know)

- What are your responsibilities and what do you actually do during a representative day of work?
- What’s the typical career progression in this field? If there isn’t one, where do you see your career going?
- What functions or activities are included in your work?
- How did you get into this field? What made you decide this was the kind of career for you to pursue?
- What training, special credentials, or experience were required to get hired in your field/your position?
- What are the greatest satisfactions you derive from this kind of work?
- What don’t you like about this field or about your job?
- What other career options will your present role allow?

THE INDUSTRY:

- What are the most desired skills, abilities and personal qualities in this field? What are the basic prerequisites for gaining employment in this field? What training or development do companies in this field generally provide?
- What are the most common problems or issues confronting people in this field?
- What forces do you see affecting this field or your job in the foreseeable future? New technology? Government regulations? Changing competition? Changes in the work force?
- What are the best sources for learning more? Who are the best kinds of people to network with, to learn all I can about this field?

THE GENERAL MARKET:

- What general economic, operational, and employment trends do you see in the industry? Who are the industry leaders? Why?
- What sort or size of company do you think would be most interested in skills and experience like mine?
- What’s a realistic compensation range for someone with my skills and abilities?
- What do you see as the long-term trends or prospects in my field?

THE PRODUCT:

- Is my frame of reference clear to you? Does my career path make sense?
- Is my job search objective clear? Is it realistic? Have I articulated my Technical Skills clearly? Have I provided convincing examples of my experience and transferable abilities?
- What skills or technical credentials do you think I need to be an attractive candidate for the kind and level of position I want?
- Are there other industries, sectors or roles to which you think my skills and abilities would transfer readily? Do you think I should research or explore other directions?
WHERE DO I FIT:

- Understanding my skills and background, where do you think I would fit within the organization?
- What barriers do I have to overcome to break into this industry?
- What entry-level opportunities are common?
- What if any, new technical credentials do you think I would need to move into this field?
- What are the most effective techniques for obtaining work in this field? Are there any companies or employers you feel would be good targets for my efforts?

TARGETING SPECIFIC LEADS:

- Are you personally familiar with any companies in this area, or with some individual in any of those companies? Have you heard of any events or developments that suggest a particular company might have a need for someone like me?
- What have you heard about the company (in terms of reputation, market share, profitability, hiring trends, management style or “culture,” strategic plans, effect of external factors or conditions)?
- Do you know of any openings or opportunities for someone like me right now?
- Where’s the best place to look for news of jobs or openings?