

Guide to Networking

What is networking?

Networking is about gathering information and asking for advice. It is talking with people and creating relationships that are mutually beneficial. Networking is an ongoing relationship rather than an activity that has a particular start and end. It is also a way to learn about different career industries, occupations and job prospects.

Networking is not about asking for a job. However, it can result in getting hired. Do not ask directly if someone has a job or internship opening. The answer will most likely be “no.” Instead, have a conversation with them. Explain your passions and career goals and ask for suggestions and information. If you are polite and respectful of people’s time, you are not bothering them. People like to talk about themselves, their career, and give advice. If someone wanted to know about HWS, wouldn’t you be more than willing to talk with them?

Why is networking important?

Of all of the jobs available only about 25% are advertised. You can learn about the “hidden” job market or the other 75% of the jobs that are not advertised through the people you know.

With whom should I network?

Anyone can be a networking contact; your friends, parents, faculty, staff, coaches, former supervisors, health care professionals, hair dressers, etc. Everyone you know might know someone who would be good for you to meet.

The Salisbury Center for Career Services has a Career Network with more than 5,000 alumni, alumnae, and parents registered with the Colleges as Career Volunteers to help student learn about careers as well as find internships and jobs. The Career Network database is available on student computers in the Career Services Office.

You can also use LinkedIn to find networking contacts. LinkedIn is the world’s largest professional network with over 150 million members and growing rapidly. You can search for contacts in a specific career field of interest, within a specific geographic region and those who are alumni/ae of HWS.

Benefits of LinkedIn

- Excellent resource to build and maintain connections with alumni and alumnae, internship contacts and employers
- Follow companies you would like to work at and learn about the organizations and their employees to prepare for interviews
- Showcase your experience and career interests to potential employers and contacts by creating a complete profile
- Join groups to become immediately connected with professionals with a common background or interest

Brainstorming Networking Contacts

To begin networking, start with who you know. Think of your relatives, family friends, contacts at or through HWS and from previous employment. Your contacts do not necessarily need to be working in your field of interest, but they may know other people who would be valuable contacts for you.

Relatives

Family Friends

Your Friends and Classmates

Social Media (LinkedIn/Facebook)

Contacts from Internship or Volunteering

Professors

Alumni/ae

Other College Staff

Preparing for Networking

Identify what information about yourself you want people to know and practice delivering the information. Use the 30 second pitch guidelines to compose what you will say when you introduce yourself to a networking contact.

Also know what you want to learn from the people with whom you will meet. Research the person on the internet and with social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter or Blogs. Learn about the person's career path, occupation, and organization prior to meeting with him/her.

30 Second Pitch

Use this pitch when requesting a networking opportunity, in an interview when you are asked, "tell me about yourself," or at career fairs.

THREE PARTS:

1. Who are you?
2. What are your major accomplishments/passions/unique skills?
3. What do you want/Where are you going?

By answering these questions you will be able to compose the three parts of your pitch.

1. Introduce yourself. Where are you from? Where do you go to school? What is your major? What are you currently doing? Activities?
2. What are your passions?
3. What are your major accomplishments?
4. What are your unique strengths? Strongest skills?
5. What previous jobs, internships, classes, or volunteer positions have provided you with experience relevant to what you hope to do?
6. What kinds of jobs, companies or industries are you pursuing? What are your goals?

Conduct Informational Interviews

An informational interview is not a job interview, but rather an interview with a person who is involved in some aspect of a career in which you have interest. However, like a job interview, you **MUST PREPARE** and **BE PROFESSIONAL!** An informational interview is initiated by you. When setting up the interview make it clear you are interviewing for information only and not job hunting. Request 20-30 minutes of their time and be flexible.

Why conduct informational interviews?

- Gather firsthand current information about the industry, the organization and the occupation
- Find out about career paths and job titles
- Determine whether an organization's environment and culture are a good fit
- Become a more impressive job candidate having done your "professional homework"
- Find out what professional associations and reading material will help you gain information about your career of interest
- Redefine your career goals to keep you on a path towards your dream career
- Identify your weaknesses and skills you need to improve in order to be competitive in the field
- Establish and expand your professional network

What specific questions can I ask in an informational interview?

Questions about their particular field

How did you get into this career field? Why did you choose this type of work?

Please describe what a typical day in your job is like? What are your responsibilities?

What do you like most about your job? What do you like the least?

How would you describe your work environment?

What is the typical background of someone in your position?

What does it take to be successful in your position? In your industry?

What current trends or issues are there in your field?

What is the future outlook for your field?

What advice would you give to someone just starting out in this field?

Questions about their education and experience

What was your college major? What types of activities did you participate in as an undergraduate?

Describe your career path to your current job.

Did you attend graduate school? When and where?

What experiences do you feel helped you achieve your current position?

If you could repeat a part of your past, what would you do differently?

Questions about their organization

Describe the organizational structure.

Can you give me a brief description of the different departments or divisions within your organization?

What are typical entry-level positions within your organization?

What type of training program does your organization have?

How are employees evaluated?

What long-term trends do you think are affecting this industry?

Who would you consider your major competitors?

Job shadow - Experience a “day in the life” of a particular profession.

What are you planning to do over your breaks? Do you have a day free from class?

Take advantage of your time to gain experience and build your résumé!

What is a job shadow?

Many organizations are willing to have you come in to job shadow or volunteer. The ultimate goal is to explore a career field, potential occupations and gain information about specific industries. Gathering current first-hand information will help you clarify your career path. It is also a valuable way to build up your résumé and network so you have experience documented on your résumé and contacts to assist in your job search.

Job shadowing can be done for part of a day or an entire day, depending on staff availability within an organization. Some students are able to set up a rotational shadowing experience, which allows them to observe a variety of offices and meet many people. Job shadowing is a useful networking tool and may lead to summer internships and/or full-time employment. You do not necessarily need to know someone in the organization. A human resources staff member, a manager, or a director can help you set up a visit.

What are my responsibilities?

You should have a basic knowledge of the career field that you are interested in exploring. After you are matched to your shadow sponsor, you will be responsible for contacting them to confirm your shadow experience and what time you will be expected to arrive. You are responsible for your own transportation to and from the site, and must adhere to the dress code appropriate for the sponsor’s work environment. Most importantly, if you make a commitment to meet a sponsor for the day, **YOU MUST BE THERE!**

Alternative to job shadowing: Volunteer!

Volunteering is another great way to gain work experience and get your foot in the door. Unlike job shadowing, where you may or may not get to actually do more than observe, volunteering will allow you to do meaningful work and gain skills. There are organizations and associations in nearly every town and city that are looking for assistance – especially during the holiday season. Some businesses are willing to have students work as volunteers over break as well – volunteering does not necessarily have to be for a not-for-profit organization.

REMEMBER!

Whether you job shadow, volunteer, or work in a paid position, you are representing yourself, the Colleges and future HWS students/alums that may want to work for that particular organization. Demonstrating professionalism through your appearance, conversation and follow-up will all leave a strong positive impression.

Steps to a successful Networking Experience

1. **HAVE IMPECCABLE MANNERS!** If you are calling someone, call from a quiet location. Put a note on your door to alert entering roommates or friends.
2. Emails should look professional and be 100% free of grammatical and spelling errors!
3. Make preliminary contact through the person's preferred method of contact. Most alumni/ae will request that you use email or phone, but this varies from person to person. Remember that you are not asking for a job, but are gathering information. Here is a sample email message outline you can use as a guide:

Networking Email Outline

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. {Contact's Last Name} :

Introduce yourself briefly- your class year, area of study, any other connections you may have with the alumnus/alumna, and your purpose for writing.

Expand more on your purpose- what are you hoping to gain from this contact (Do not ask for a job/internship! This is initially for networking or informational purposes only.) and why this contact appealed to you (particular interest in their specialty, organization, geographic region, career path). Provide a brief summary of how this relates to your interests or questions.

In the closing paragraph, indicate that you would like to speak further with them about your questions or their career. You may wish to say that you will follow up with a phone call, make certain that you follow through. Thank the networking contact for his/her time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Your name

4. Follow-up with whatever method of contact you have both decided works best. If the person you are interested in speaking with requests to continue speaking via email, then do so, if they would rather set up a time to talk via the telephone, make arrangements and make sure to call them promptly at the time you have decided on.
5. For in-person meetings wear professional clothes that are clean and wrinkle free. Be on time (at the latest) or 5 minutes early. Be confident in your abilities, but above all, be an eager, attentive listener. Bring a list of questions, extra résumés, and something to take notes on. Research your contact's company; this will help in starting your conversation and creating your list of questions. It will also show you to be a prepared and serious job candidate.

6. When calling, state a clear purpose up front. Create an “elevator speech” you can deliver on the phone in 10 seconds or less that includes your name, how you got this person’s name and number, a statement to build commonality (possibly referencing your shared experiences at Hobart and William Smith) and your purpose for calling. Always ask if this is a good time to talk or if not, if you could set up a better time to speak.

7. Be brief. If on the phone, take no more than 5-10 minutes. Emails should be brief and to the point. In-person informational interviewing should be no more than 30 minutes.

8. Never ask for a job or internship during a networking conversation. Ask for advice about the field, or guidance about how to find an internship/job. Expanding your network is not done by force, but accomplished deliberately and thoughtfully. The impression you give in your first contact will remain with you.

9. Prepare a list of questions ahead of time. Remember that you are leading the conversation. Here are some possible questions to ask:

- How did you get into this career field (major/degree, certification or training, experience, interests)?
- What are the different sub-disciplines and specific positions found within this field?
- How is your department within your organization structured and what are the different positions/roles within your department?
- Do you have any advice for someone hoping to enter this field?
- Are there any current trends in this field that are important to be aware of? And the future outlook?
- Are there any other individuals that work in this field that you would recommend as good contacts?
- Are there any trade associations or professional organizations that would be good to join/good resources?
- Be prepared to talk about faculty members and campus happenings.

10. Demonstrate appreciation. Make sure to let the person know how much you appreciate their taking the time to help you learn about their field. Perhaps mention one thing you learned which was especially helpful.

11. Keep communications open. Networking is a two-way street. Its purpose is to benefit not only you, but also the person who is offering information and support. You may be able to offer helpful information to a networking contact even at this stage in your search. Your contacts, professors and internships may be of interest to your networking contact. You may also have special skills (webpage design, stats analysis) that may benefit this contact.

12. Ending your conversation. Again, thank the person enthusiastically for their time and knowledge. Confirm future plans (if any) you might have made to speak further. Always offer them your resume.

13. Follow-up and feedback. When you receive a referral from your networking contact, be sure to follow-up the referral with a phone call. Chances are strong that your contact has already spoken with the referral and informed him/her that you will be contacting them soon. Both individuals are expecting you to call. Once you have made contact with the referral, follow-up with both the referral and the original networking contact. This is proper etiquette and will emphasize that you did follow-up on the referral.

14. Write a thank you note! Thank you notes set you apart from the 90% of the individuals who do not send them. It demonstrates good manners and appreciation, shows follow-through, and implies your sincere interest in what the individual had to say. Hand-written notes provide a personal touch.

Networking Thank You Note Outline

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. {Contact's Last Name}:

Thank the person to whom you are writing for his/her time and effort. Reiterate your interest in their company and the industry.

Reflect on the conversation that you had and relate the information that you were able to gather- show off your listening skills! Refer briefly to the conversation you shared and perhaps one thing that was most helpful that you learned through your conversation.

Again, thank the individual for his/her time (or referral). Tell him/her you look forward to speaking again in the near future. Remind them that you would be more than happy to serve as a resource for them if they ever need any help that you might be able to offer.

Sincerely,
Your name

15. One final and important step: Communicate with any networking contact once you have landed a job and thank everyone who helped you along the way.