Networking is an integral and ongoing part of career exploration. In its most simplistic form, networking is about developing relationships and may be applied in a variety of environments for a broad range of reasons. From a career perspective, it requires talking with people in your field of interest to explore career options, to gather information, and to understand how to market yourself to potential employers. The skill of developing and maintaining contacts remains the most effective way to meet leaders in your profession and keep abreast of major changes in your field. With a strong network in place, you are prepared to make a career move at any point in your life.

It is important to approach networking with the genuine intention of learning and making a connection, not simply to obtain a position. Keep in mind three goals as you engage in networking activities:

**GOAL 1 GATHER INFORMATION**
Seek information that you will not likely find in printed resources, such as the career path of your network contact and his/her experiences in the industry. Ask questions that will provide you with information that can help facilitate a well informed career decision.

**GOAL 2 OBTAIN ADVICE**
Seek recommendations on how to prepare for a career in his/her respective field and tips for success. Request advice about relevant courses that may prepare you for the field, additional experiences/activities that will make you more marketable, and how to get your foot in the door.

**GOAL 3 LEAVE A POSITIVE IMPRESSION**
Consider each relationship as an opportunity for you to develop professional contacts in a particular field or industry. This will require preparation on your part, including conducting industry and company research, reviewing your experiences, and articulating your career interests. If you leave a positive and lasting impression, the network contact may communicate future job or internship leads or introduce you to additional contacts.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR NETWORKING**
Networking can take place in almost any environment, ranging from a train ride to an organized event. Whether you are a student or an alum, Northwestern University provides a variety of organized campus events to help facilitate your networking. Here is a list of the most common career-related venues for networking:

- Career Fairs
- Employer Information Sessions
- Industry Panels
- Conferences
- Employer-Organized Site Visits
- Guest Speakers
- Externship Program(s)
- Social Networking Sites
**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

**STEP 1  
IDENTIFY CONTACTS**

There are many routes available to begin networking. Your list of contacts may include a broad range of people, both inside and outside of your chosen field.

**Personal Referrals**
These are individuals in your current network such as friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, professors, etc. You can also use your personal network to obtain names of individuals they know who are employed in your career area of choice.

**Direct Contacts**
These are individuals that you identify through professional organizations, employer-hosted events, and/or social networking websites. Additional resources include Northwestern specific databases for identifying individuals in your field of interest, such as the Kellogg Mentors Program and the Northwestern CareerNet.

**STEP 2  
PREPARE TO MAKE A CONNECTION**

Identify your skills, values, and interests. In a networking meeting or an informational interview, it is likely that the network contact will inquire about your experiences, activities, and career preparation. It is important that you are not only prepared to ask questions, but also to share information about yourself.

**Develop a Personal Marketing Plan**
It is important to articulate your skills and how you want to use them in your career.

**Research Your Options**
Investigate positions, industries, and organizations that interest you. By conducting general research, you will be able to prepare more targeted questions and consequently obtain more detailed responses.

**Prepare Potential Questions**
Knowing what information or advice you are seeking is an essential component of maximizing your time with contacts. Before your meeting, develop a list of 10–15 relevant questions. Tailor the questions to your needs and the knowledge of the network contact. Keep in mind that the type of questions you ask may be perceived as an indicator of your level of interest in that field/industry.

In addition to organized events/programs, you can independently arrange networking meetings. The most common type of networking meeting is an informational interview. Informational interviews are a method of conducting organizational and occupational research to acquire information about a field, industry, or position. Unlike a traditional interview, you are responsible for directing the conversation and asking the questions. These interviews are particularly useful when you have very little awareness about a career field, limited work experience, or are considering a career transition. Informational interviewing is often the first step to building a professional network.

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"I was able to obtain an informational interview with the Executive Talent Director at Nickelodeon, and practiced with a counselor at UCS before my interview. Since the first informational interview, I have had more than ten with various executives in children’s media. Because my initial one went so well, I’ve been able to tailor the advice for each individual I speak to. UCS has been an invaluable resource, and I am so grateful for all that they do!"

Colette Ghunim  
Sophomore in Communication Studies

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**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

**Sample Questions**

- What is your background?
- Will you discuss your career path with me?
- What are the major responsibilities of your position?
- If there is such a thing as an average week, what is it like for you?
- What are the positive/negative aspects of working in this field?
- What type of individual usually succeeds in this field/organization?
- What are the “hot issues” in this field?
- What trends/developments do you see affecting career opportunities?
- How can I become a more competitive candidate for this industry?
- What steps would you recommend I take in order to prepare to enter this field?
- How are hiring decisions made?
- What professional associations do you recommend I join?
- Can you recommend anyone else for me to contact?"
Networking

DO’s
- Obtain a business card from each contact
- Keep your list of contacts updated
- Solicit referrals to other potential contacts
- Ask contacts to review your résumé
- Show enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and professionalism

DON'Ts
- Ask for a job/internship or expect a job offer
- Neglect to follow up on leads you receive
- Give the impression that you lack confidence and sincerity
- Waste time with conversation that is not related to professional topics

STEP 3
MAKE THE CONNECTION
Once you have identified networking contacts, your next step is to initiate communication. There are a number of ways to make contact, depending on how well you know the person. If this is someone you speak with regularly, a phone call is likely appropriate. For contacts with whom you are less familiar, consider sending an e-mail or a letter. Start the correspondence with an introduction that identifies who you are and how you were referred. Request 20–30 minutes of your contact’s time to visit and learn more about his/her position, career field, and career story. If a face-to-face meeting at his/her site of employment is not possible, consider conducting the informational interview via phone.

In the event that you have not heard back from your prospective network contact, try sending a follow-up e-mail. If your second attempt is also unsuccessful, move on to potential interviewees who may be more receptive to your networking efforts.

STEP 4
CONDUCT THE NETWORKING MEETING
On the day of your networking meeting, dress professionally and arrive at least a few minutes early (if your interview is in-person). Remember to stay within the amount of time you originally specified. Steps to follow for the interview include:
- Start by thanking the network contact for his/her willingness to speak with you.
- Determine a quick topic to break the ice and establish rapport.
- Provide the network contact with a little background on yourself and your interests.
- Begin discussing your prepared list of questions, but let the dialogue progress naturally.
- Take notes throughout the meeting to retain valuable information.
- End your interview by expressing your appreciation for their time and ask if you can stay in touch.

STEP 5
FOLLOW-UP
Like any relationship, it is vital that you maintain correspondence with your contacts after the initial interaction. After speaking with your contact, send a personalized thank-you note that highlights the value of the meeting. If a suggestion, tip, or referral the network contact provided was helpful, mention this in your note. Write and send your thank-you note within 48 hours. Sending a thank-you note to everyone you speak with will help you maintain your network.

Develop a contact log to track contact name, date of the contact, the outcome, and any other important notes in order to organize your communications. Continue to maintain these networking relationships by mailing seasonal greeting cards, sending e-mail messages, calling them on the telephone, and/or inviting your contacts to an occasional coffee break. Rather than only touching base when you need assistance, aim to connect with your contacts on a quarterly basis. Regular maintenance of your network will help to strengthen your professional connections and ensure mutually beneficial relationships.
Career Fairs

Career fairs provide an opportunity for networking, a way to search for an internship/job, and a forum for professional development.

BEFORE A CAREER FAIR

Check the website to determine the companies attending the fair. Research company websites and identify 5–7 employers most aligned with your career goals. Based on your research, develop potential questions to ask the recruiters. You will also want to update your résumé and prepare copies before the event.

Appropriate attire is often influenced by the industries recruiting at the fair. At Northwestern, most attendees wear business professional attire; this means suits for both men and women.

DURING A CAREER FAIR

Approach employers with a firm handshake and introduce yourself. During your conversation, ask inquisitive questions about the organization and available positions. At the conclusion of your conversation, hand your résumé to the employer and ask for his/her business card.

AFTER A CAREER FAIR

Send a thank-you note or e-mail to employers who were of particular interest to you. If there were employers you did not have the opportunity to connect with, send them a message articulating your interest and regret that you did not meet them at the event.

ELEVATOR SPEECH

An elevator speech is a concise and memorable introductory statement that quickly conveys important and interesting information about you. Employers are typically interested in the following:

- Name, university, year in school (or year of graduation), and major
- Opportunities sought
- Relevant experience
- Highlights of skills and strengths
- Knowledge of the company

SAMPLE ELEVATOR SPEECH

Hello, my name is Adam Jenkins and I’m a senior in Psychology at Northwestern University. I saw a job listing on your website for an entry-level Career Advisor position and I wanted to share with you a little about my experience. Last summer, I interned with University Career Services. Because of my ability to communicate with students and understand their needs, they asked me to stay another quarter to work with them this fall. My experience at UCS reaffirmed my interest in obtaining a position as a Career Advisor for a university. I was hoping you would tell me more about the new programming initiatives I saw listed on your website.

Career Fairs

Fall Job and Internship Fair
Aimed at current NU students (undergraduate and graduate level) and NU alumni. Employers from a variety of industries are available to provide information on full-time jobs and internships.

Winter Job and Internship Fair
Aimed at current NU students (undergraduate and graduate level) and NU alumni. Employers from a variety of industries are available to provide information on full-time jobs and internships.

HireBig 10 Plus International Virtual Career Fair
Online fair for all international students and alumni from any of the Big10 universities. Employers seek candidates for internship and full-time opportunities.

HireBig 10 Plus Virtual Career Fair
Online fair for all current students and alumni from any of the Big10 universities. Employers seek candidates for internship and full-time opportunities.

Public Service Career Expo
For current NU students and alumni. Employers representing non-profit, community service, education, and government sectors provide information on internship and full-time opportunities.
Social Media, Your Privacy and Your Reputation

Social media platforms create an illusion of privacy, which is not quite accurate. As a social networking participant, your information is potentially accessible to a range of individuals. Prospective employers, professors, graduate school admissions committees, or the media may view your sites. As a result, your social networking activities may reach a wider audience than you anticipated.

How can social media affect a job/internship offer? A growing number of employers now use social media to research candidates. For many, this is an easy way to gather information to use in their employment selection process. The following is a list of the most common indiscretions that can interfere with your future employment:

- Promiscuous or inappropriate photos
- Alcohol or drug-related experiences
- Complaints about bosses or supervisors
- Vulgar language or content
- Overly self-disclosing information
- Music or videos with profanity or nudity

What can I do?

- Adjust your privacy settings. Most social networking sites offer the option to only allow access to users you have approved.
- Review your profile pages. Revise or remove information that may create an unfavorable professional image.
- Perform an internet search on yourself and verify that the content listed is accurate and appropriate.

Given the widespread use of social media, it is likely that you communicate through at least one of these venues. Remember that the content on your site has the potential to portray you in a favorable or unfavorable manner, so take precautions to safeguard your image.

In addition to in-person networking, social media can greatly enhance your job or internship search. Online communities and services once used to maintain connections with peers are now frequently used to build relationships with prospective employers and professional mentors. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other platforms are recommended to 1) market yourself to potential employers, and 2) aid in your overall search strategy.

LinkedIn is a networking site designed to help you locate the “experts” in your chosen field and to help you develop a stronger professional presence online. When using LinkedIn, consider the following:

- Continually revise your profile in the same way you do your résumé; making sure it is error free and rich in industry specific keywords and skill sets.
- Join groups that are occupationally relevant as a way to locate networking contacts and to gain advice from a larger community.
- Use proper etiquette by avoiding contacting people you do not know without any connection or introduction.
- Research companies and your possible connections within organizations.

Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service designed to help you locate resources and connections and to develop your own following. When using Twitter, consider the following:

- Follow individuals and groups that will aid in your professional awareness and development such as @northwesternucs, companies of interest, and industry experts.
- Use twitterjobsearch.com or tweetmyjobs.com to search tweets for job/internship postings.
- Search using hash tags such as #jobpostings, #intern, #employment, #career and #tweetmyjobs to find tweets containing relevant information for your job/internship search.
- Create a “Twesume,” a résumé of no more than 140 characters that can be tweeted to your followers, employers or used as your bio.
- Tweet photos or videos of your work through Twitter or applications like Twitpic or TwitVid.

Facebook and Google+ house numerous employer pages where recruiting events and company-specific opportunities are often posted. Like or add companies of interest or industry experts.

WordPress, Posterous or Tumblr aid in developing your own blog, where you can offer insightful commentary or respond to news related to your industry.

YouTube provides a valuable medium for filmmakers and artists, or for sharing your video résumé. Upload your own videos to make available to employers during your job search.

Flickr and Issuu allow you to upload samples of your work to be viewed by prospective employers.

Pinterest helps you create a virtual pin board that can showcase your résumé, writing samples, press clips and other work samples. Alternatively, you can use it to pin items that reflect your industry or your interests.

QR Codes can be included on custom business cards to link your card to your LinkedIn profile. Pingtags.com is one service that can create a QR code for this purpose.

Using Social Media in Your Employment Search

Northwestern UCS is active on multiple social media channels. Follow us to receive career tips and news, campus recruiting, workshop and event listings, industry trends and more.

Facebook, YouTube, Issuu and Pinterest:

- Facebook: @northwesternucs
- Twitter: @northwesternucs
- LinkedIn: Northwestern University Career Services LinkedIn Group

UCS Twitter #Hashtags

Choose to follow certain UCS Twitter hashtag(s) to receive information-specific Tweets:

#UCSAAlum: Information pertaining to NU alumni
#UCSGrad: Information pertaining to NU graduate students
#UCStudent: Information pertaining to NU students
#UCSEmployer: Information pertaining to NU employers
#UCSEvent: UCSD events, workshops & career fairs
#UCSJob: Job announcements
#UCSIternship: Internship announcements
#UCSInfo: All UCS information, resources & career-related articles pertinent to NU undergraduate students, graduate students & alumni
#Northwestern: Other NU events, all of the above

Where can I find Northwestern University Career Services online?

Northwestern UCS is active on multiple social media channels. Follow us to receive career tips and news, campus recruiting, workshop and event listings, industry trends and more.

Facebook, YouTube, Issuu and Pinterest:

- Facebook: @northwesternucs
- Twitter: @northwesternucs
- LinkedIn: Northwestern University Career Services LinkedIn Group
University Career Services (UCS) provides comprehensive and centralized services to Northwestern undergraduate students, graduate students and alumni. We offer an array of services and programs to assist with your career-related needs:

Walk-In Advising
Individual Counseling Appointments
Internship Advising Services
Graduate/Professional School Advisement
Employment Advising Services
Employment Databases and Research
Career Fairs
On-Campus Recruiting
Career Information Center
File Services
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