Successful Networking

UMass Amherst
Networking is about building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships, and connecting with people who are willing and receptive to being helpful – and offering yourself as a resource. At its core, networking is the exchange of information, ideas and support.

Ideally, networking is a “win-win” where both parties benefit. For job seekers, the benefits are not always equal nor immediately apparent. Networking takes practice and effort, but can yield significant results and open up incredible opportunities.

In-person networking occurs at recruiting events, corporate information sessions, receptions, work-related events, professional meetings, conferences, alumni events, and seemingly random places where you meet new people. Networking also occurs online via email, LinkedIn or other social media.

Potential initial networking connections include:

- Undergraduate Advisors
- Career Coaches
- Faculty and department chairs
- Fellow classmates and alumni
- Immediate supervisors (both past and present)
- Family, friends and neighbors

Faculty and staff are an important part of your network and can be influential in connecting you with employers and alumni. Approach networking with faculty and staff with the same formality you would an alumnus or recruiter. Show them you understand the etiquette required when connecting with those to whom they refer you.

Effective networking requires you to be friendly, personable, open, confident, flexible, persistent and resilient. In order to make networking work for you, you must be proactive, conduct research, and understand and leverage the power of follow up!

**In-person Networking**

Approach individuals and introduce yourself professionally. Break the ice with small talk to make you both comfortable and to get the conversation started. This is where you could use a version of your Elevator Pitch.

Approach “open” groups where people are facing outward to some degree, as it will make joining the conversation easier. “Closed” groups are those who have their backs facing out and appear to be in close conversation with one another. Wait for the group to open up, to then introduce yourself.

When appropriate, introduce people to each other. Pay attention to the conversation so your introductions can include information about each person to get the conversation started in a positive manner.

If you have made a connection with the person and wish to be able to follow up, you may ask for a business card. This can be a signal that you will be moving on to another conversation and can be communicated in the following manner “I’d love to follow up with you in the next couple of weeks. Would you mind sharing your card with me?” You may also offer your own card to the individual. If desired, ask to call and the best number to use. Savvy networkers will make a note on the back of a card to remind themselves of some detail related to the conversation, which will then become the opening for the next communication.

When leaving a conversation, be courteous and respectful. It is perfectly fine to say something like “It has been nice speaking with you and learning about X. I’m going to go talk with several more people and look forward to another opportunity to connect with you!” Don’t feel pressure to ask everyone for their card.
Online Networking
Reaching out to professionals you have no connection to you can be intimidating. To increase your chances of success, leverage your network by joining alumni networking groups on LinkedIn, connect with faculty and staff, and do your research about others and the companies they work for.

Be thoughtful and strategic about who you approach, and don’t send the same cover letter you sent with your application. Research an open position and know what you have to offer, and initiate the connection only if you are a good fit. In order to elevate your request, familiarize yourself with the company, industry and trends, volunteer for a project or offer your assistance with a specific initiative.

Follow-up
Be proactive and follow up within 24 hours after a new contact connects with you! This is a real opportunity to make an additional positive impression, show strong communication skills and move the relationship forward. You’ll set yourself apart by taking this action as many people who network do not follow-up and lose valuable potential resources!

Don’t take it personally if people don’t respond or a new relationship does not become significant! The more people you meet, the broader your network will become, so focus first on people you know, ask for referrals to their network and continue to branch out.

Keep your networking contacts organized using a system that works for you. Track types of communication, interactions, dates and next steps, and remember, practice makes perfect! Networking is an essential skill that opens doors, in both your professional and professional life. Take a deep breath, push your fear aside and start building your network today!

Examples of Networking Requests:

Good morning Mr. Smith,

Thank you so much again for taking the time to speak with me at the Annual East Coast Conference on Soils, Sediments, Water and Energy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in October. It was great to have a chance to hear about your background in Environmental Science. In fact, learning about some of the projects you worked on has further heightened my interest in this field.

When we spoke, you mentioned that if I was ever in Boston to let you know and we could possibly grab some coffee. If that offer is still open, I would like to take you up on that, as I will be in Boston in early January and would love to have an opportunity to chat with you more about your background and how you got started in your field. I will be in the city January 7-11th, so if you have any availability during that time, please let me know.

Thank you,
Jackie Stelman
(413) 123-4567

Dear Mr. Houston:

Janet Bordwin, Career Director of the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, provided me with your contact information. I am a freshman interested in studying Math & Statistics and am seeking to learn more about actuarial careers. Ms. Bordwin mentioned that you had significant experience as both an internal auditor and comptroller with a couple of insurance companies. She also indicated that you might be a tremendous resource for me.

If you have time, I would like to set up a meeting with you to do an informational interview to learn more about your career.
Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
James Kenney
(413) 124-6789

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LinkedIn is the world’s largest online professional networking site, including over 443 million professional profiles and executives from each of the Fortune 500 companies. Since 94% of recruiters cite LinkedIn as a primary recruiting source, you definitely want to take advantage of the opportunity to display a strong profile that will attract their interest in your candidacy. With over 155,000 UMass Amherst alumni profiles listed, LinkedIn is an invaluable tool you can use to make connections and begin building your professional network! Use the Building an Effective LinkedIn Profile Guide.