



Networking & Informational Interviewing

What is Networking?

Networking for your career is a planned process in which you will interact with and become known, through formal and informal settings, to people who can provide information about job openings, leads, personal contacts, employers that are hiring, etc. Networking is about talking with people and obtaining referrals so that every contact you make is a "warm" contact. You may feel a bit awkward about asking for help this way. This is a planned event and it takes skill to network effectively. The bottom line: networking is the #1 job search strategy and you'll be professionally networking for the rest of your life.

Why is Networking Important?

Some SUNY Oswego students enter college with a solid network in place through contacts with family or previous work connections. Just about every other student needs to build their network from scratch. The best source of information about any given career is the currently practicing professionals. Since they know the "reality" of the career, they can give you the most up-to-date information you need to know. You will be able to obtain only a finite amount of information from printed materials such as books and directories. It will be well worth your time to talk with people who are involved in the field daily. You will not want to waste their time during networking meetings so don't ask questions that can be answered from other sources. Save your valuable interview time for the intangibles that are not in print. A list of questions is provided later in this handout.

Networking Strategies

Step 1. Identify Your Potential Network

Before you make that first phone call or knock on a door, be sure you know why you are networking and the purpose of wanting to meet with a professional. A common first reaction is "I don't know anyone." Or if you do, the next question is "How do I approach them?" This handout provides a list of questions to ask. The same basic issues apply to a networking meeting as they do to writing a resume and interviewing: know yourself, your education, your skills, and what you are capable of offering the field. Create an agenda and be prepared to present yourself as a confident and competent candidate. It will be helpful if you prepare and practice a one minute presentation of yourself so that people will know who you are and what kinds of information you are seeking. Your networking meeting should have a self-overview, a question and answer period, a time for obtaining referrals for other networking opportunities, and a closing.

Step 2. Points to consider when Networking

- Organize a tracking system with index cards or a computer database to record important information such as your meeting dates, names, addresses, key information, follow-up, etc.
- Decide what you need to learn and develop a list of questions that can be managed in 20-45 minutes.
- Utilize your networking contacts as mentors, not someone who might give you a job or internship; ask their advice.
- Make it a two-way conversation and give back to the mentor (i.e. when speaking with an Oswego alumni/ae, tell them what is new at the college).
- Start small and build a larger network (referrals from family and friends may be a good beginning).
- For a personal meeting, dress as you would if you worked in that field.
- Before your meeting, send him/her a letter confirming your meeting and expressing your thanks.
- Always state how beneficial the meeting was and ask for a referral.
- Use business stationary for cover letters, resumes and thank you notes.
- Include a resume in correspondence but make it crystal clear that it is for information only, not to apply for a job with their organization.
- Always follow up the meeting with a thank you note, reiterating what you learned, how beneficial it was, and naming a referral if one was made.
- Utilize the Career Services office, Penfield Library, the Web and local community resources for employer research in preparation for your meeting.

Step 3. Contacting Your Network

Building your network is a planned process of contacting people who are in a position to give you information and advice about the career fields you think you want to enter. There are several options for you to consider as you begin contacting your network.

A) Alumni Sharing Knowledge

The "ASK" program is coordinated by the Office of Alumni & Parent Relations in King Hall (across from Sheldon Hall). This is a database of over 500 Oswego alumni/ae that have volunteered to serve as Career Advisors to help you. These professionals are there for you to network with and discuss your career objectives. You will need to fill out an application, then meet with a representative from the Alumni office to discuss how the ASK program can best serve your needs. The Alumni office will then match your needs with an alumnus/a and give their contact information to you. These mentors are willing to help in several ways and have indicated on an application which areas they would be willing to assist Oswego students. These include:

- Day on the Job Visit - you could actually spend a day with the alumnus/a at his/her place of employment to learn what it is really like.
- Resume Critiquing - find out what the alumnus/a thinks is valuable to have on a resume. If the alumnus/a is not in a hiring position, determine if the alum's opinion is based on organizational standards or personal opinion.
- Mock Interviewing - the alumnus/a knows what the organization's values are and can ask pertinent, related questions - and discuss with you how you might best present yourself.
- Information about Living/Working in a certain geographic area - a great resource for information, particularly if you plan to relocate. They may be able to provide you with information on housing, professional associations in the area and potential employment leads.
- Hiring Personnel - the alumnus/a may be able to offer you the names and contact information of the appropriate person to enable you to send job search correspondence.

B) Professional Associations

Every profession is served by some form of association. If you want opportunities to meet people in a certain career field, you'll do well to join at least one association. Meeting professionals in your field who are fellow organization members provides you the opportunity to develop a list of contacts, most of whom will come to know you on a first name basis. It is important for you to get involved! Your participation exposes you to important role models and allows you to demonstrate your skills and abilities. Additional member benefits are many and can include newsletters and other regular publications, job bank information, industry statistics, and more. The publications often serve as a vehicle for announcing job vacancies in the field.

C) Listserves

The World Wide Web is the largest network on the planet and you can use it to your benefit! A listserv is an electronic mailing list (email) that you can subscribe to online if you have an email account. It works like this: a listserv coordinator manages the list, which could include thousands of people all over the world. If you have a question to ask the group, you email your question to the coordinator, who forwards it to everyone on the list. People who wish to respond do so to the coordinator who then forwards the response(s) to everyone - including you. In this way, you can "listen in" on or participate in "conversations" on topics related to your field. Incidentally, listserves are often used by people in the field to advertise job opportunities. A searchable web site containing over 71,000 mailing lists you can subscribe to can be found at (www.liszt.com/). As with face to face conversations, there are certain rules for communicating by email - "Netiquette" - and people will not hesitate to notify you when you have strayed. To learn about the rules of the road on the information superhighway, check out (<http://www.campus.mci.net/roadmap96/map07.html>).

D) Temporary Employment Agencies

This can be an additional resource for networking purposes. The nature of working temporary jobs through an employment agency is such that you will be moving from company to company in a relatively short period of time. This allows you the opportunity to get "inside" and talk with people who may otherwise be inaccessible. Furthermore, companies tend to hire from their temporary/internship candidate pool over candidates off the street since those people are a known quantity.

Step 4. Setting up Informational Interviews

You can begin by setting up 3-5 informational interviews for each potential career field. Send an introductory letter indicating your interest in speaking with this person and mention the name of the person who referred you, if any. You could consider enclosing a copy of your resume as a means of introducing yourself and informing the person of your educational background and experience. Request 20-25 minutes of their time to get together/speak on the phone. Most people will give you that amount and probably more if you are respectful of them and their time. Follow up this letter with a phone call (allow them time to receive the letter and think about a potential meeting) to set up a phone appointment or a meeting in person. Be prepared to discuss your questions during this phone call and/or to schedule a later date if it is more convenient for your contact. Regardless of what happens, you need to establish a positive and professional relationship with your contact. Be polite, respectful and if you can visit them where they work, arrive 10 minutes early (never be late). Remember, **you are asking for advice, not a job**.

Step 5. Evaluating Networking Information

The information you obtain from other people will assist you as you define and redefine your career goals. It can also help you confirm or reject job targets.

Step 6. Getting Other Referrals

When meeting with a contact, you will want to thank them for their time and expertise. You will also want to ask them for the name of

one or two other people you could contact. You could say "Thank you for this meeting - it has been very beneficial. Is there anyone else that you think I could benefit by meeting?" Be sure to mention who referred you when you contact these people. This step is critical in developing new networking prospects. When contacting new people, be sure to mention the name of the person who referred you (ask for permission to use the person's name). Always send a thank you note within 24 hours to the person you met with and the person who gave you the referral. A network needs to be cultivated over time so it will be mutually beneficial to both parties. You can not establish a network in the month prior to graduating. It is based on relationships with people, and those take time to build.

*** Informational Interviewing and Networking are not job interviews, although they may lead to them. Show an interest in the person and their career - don't just use them to find jobs. Be polite, respectful and professional - these people may be in a position to have a very positive and profound impact on your career. If you would like assistance with this process, schedule a meeting with a member of the Career Services staff.*



Questions to Ask During Networking Meetings

Knowing what to say during an informational interview is crucial to your success. Choose those questions that are appropriate for your situations and speaking style and don't try to squeeze in too many questions in the time you have available.

Career Paths

Describe your career path. How did each job lead you to your next position?
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?
What are related jobs and industries which I might explore? If you made a career change, what other fields would you consider?
Where can someone in an entry-level position expect to be in two years? five years? ten years?
What is the employment outlook in your field? Describe new developments?
How has your work affected your lifestyle?

What Work is Like?

Could you describe a typical workday for me?
What skills are required in your position on a day-to-day basis?
What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
Despite these challenges, what motivates you to remain? What do you find most enjoyable?
Are there any dangers I should be aware of?
How often do you work past 6pm and on weekends?
Which seasons of the year are toughest in your job?
I'd like to walk through and see with my own eyes where the work is done here. Can that be arranged?

Job Responsibilities

Describe your responsibilities.
How do you spend a typical workday - yesterday for example? How much time do you spend with people? data? things?
Describe your work environment.
What are the titles and responsibilities of others with whom you work?

State of the Industry

Is this field growing enough that there's room for someone like me?
Are too many or too few people entering this profession?
What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
This industry has changed dramatically in the past five years. What have you seen from inside your company?
How frequently do layoffs occur? How does it affect morale of employees?
Why do people leave this field or company?
Who are the most important people in the industry today?
Which companies have the best track record for promoting women and minorities?
Are there opportunities for self-employment in your field/ Where?

(continued on back)

Money and Advancement

What would be my earning potential if I entered this field?
To get promotions, is job-hopping necessary?
How did you get your job?
If you could start all over again, would you change your career path in any way? Why?
How long does it take for managers to rise to the top?
What is the background of most senior-level executives?

Education and Experience

What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
What qualifications do you seek in a new hire?
How do most people enter this profession?
Which of my skills are strong compared to other job hunters in this field?
What do you think of the experience I've had so far? For what types of positions would it qualify me?
What do you think of my resume? How do you suggest I change it?
Can you recommend any courses I should take before furthering my job search?
What companies might be interested in hiring someone with my qualifications?

Fitting In

Considering my background, how well do you think I would fit in this company and/or profession?
How does your company compare with others we've discussed?
Would the work involve any lifestyle changes, such as frequent travel or late-night business entertaining?
Considering all the people you've met in your line of work, what personal attributes are essential for success?
Based on my skills, education and experience, what other careers would you suggest I explore before making a final decision?

Career Preparation

What abilities are important for success and enjoyment in your field? What values are important? What personality traits are important?
What do you like most/least about your job? about your field?
How can students find summer jobs or internships in your field? Are there other means of gaining experience before graduation?
If you could do anything differently, what would you change about your career?
What advice do you have for students who are preparing to enter your field?
What starting salaries/salary advancements can one expect?
Is a graduate degree important? If so, what fields of study are helpful?
Can you recommend sources for more information (specific books, trade publications, professional journals)?
Do you know of other professionals with whom I might speak for more information about this field?

More Information

Where can I write to get up-to-date information on salaries, employers and industry issues?
What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?
Does your organization have a Home Page where I can find more information?
Is there anything else you think I need to know?
With what other people would you recommend I speak? When I call, may I use your name?

Career Services, 142 Campus Center

Regular Hours: Monday - Friday, 9:00am - 4:30pm,

Summer Hours: Monday - Friday, 9:00am - 4:00pm

Phone: (315) 312-2255 *Fax:* (315) 312-5443

Email: Bob Casper, Director: casper@oswego.edu

Gary Morris, Assistant Director: gmorris@oswego.edu

Home Page: <http://www.oswego.edu/careerservices>

Telephone Strategies for Getting Information Interviews

The telephone can be one of your most important allies in gathering information for your job search. It can also be one of your biggest obstacles if you fear rejection and/or do not know how to present yourself. To make telephoning easier and more productive, develop a script and practice it. Below are some examples that you might tailor to your personal script.

When Speaking to a Secretary:

Hello, this is Lilly Morris. May I speak with Katherine Williams?

- If contact is not in and/or the secretary asks the nature of the call, reply:

*Beth Gordon suggested I call her regarding some research that I am doing in the field of _____.
When would it be convenient for me to call back?*

- Assuming the secretary provides you with the information, reply:

Thank you very much. I'll call back at (restate time).

When Speaking to Your Contact:

- If you have been referred, your opening might go something like this:

Hello, this is Lilly Morris. Beth Gordon suggested that I call you regarding the possibility of setting up a brief interview with you. She tells me that you are an excellent source of information on the field. I'm interested in exploring new career options and am meeting with a small group of people for information and advice. Is it possible that we could set up a brief meeting?

- If your contact agrees, confirm the time, date, and place, and be sure to get clear directions to your meeting site. Before you meet with your contact, send him or her a letter confirming your meeting and expressing your thanks.

- If your contact does not have time or does not wish to meet with you, reply:

I appreciate your being unable to meet with me. Could you suggest someone else in your company or your field with whom I could meet?

- If you've uncovered the contact person on your own and have not been referred, your opening might go like this:
Ms. Williams, this is Lilly Morris. I am calling because (select the appropriate option):

- ...of your expertise in the field of _____
- ...of your recent promotion to _____
- ...of your association with (professional or other relevant organization).
- ...you are a fellow alumni/ae of _____
- **OTHER**



After you've opened the conversation, continue with your explanation of the purpose of your call.

- *If your contact asks if you are looking for a job, be honest, but make it crystal clear that you are not contacting this person to apply for a job; the meeting is for information purposes only. Your reply might go like this:

Although I am currently applying for various positions, my meeting with you would be for informational purposes only. I hope to use your advice and suggestions in gaining additional information about the field and potentially develop leads.

*Sample letter
requesting an
informational
interview*

423 Scales Hall - SUNY @ Oswego
Oswego, NY 13126
January 3, 2008

Ms. Denise Williams
Director
ABC Advertising Agency
12345 W. 11th St.
Oswego, NY 13126

Dear Ms. Williams:

Ms. Beth Gordon, a faculty member in the Public Relations Dept. at SUNY Oswego, suggested I contact you. I have been meeting with Ms. Gordon as a means of exploring the field of advertising as a potential career option and she has been extremely helpful.

I have enclosed my resume for your review. Although I am not looking for a job, I thought it might be useful as a way of informing you of my educational background and experience. Based on my conversations with Ms. Gordon and others, I believe my interest lies in the area of copywriting. I like to write and work with people and I'm willing to work very hard to get where I want to be in my career.

I realize your time is very valuable but would it be possible to meet for 20-30 minutes at your convenience? I would enjoy a chance to ask you some questions and learn from your expertise. I will contact your office within 10 working days to follow up with this letter. Thank you in advance for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Lilly Morris

*Sample letter
thanking a contact
for a referral*

423 Scales Hall - SUNY @ Oswego
Oswego, NY 13126
January 3, 2008

Ms. Beth Gordon
Faculty, Public Relations Dept.
SUNY @ Oswego
Oswego, NY 13126

Dear Ms. Gordon:

I wanted to drop you a quick note of thanks for referring me to Ms. Williams of the ABC Advertising Agency. I have written her a letter requesting a 20-30 minute meeting at her convenience. It is my hope that this meeting will be as helpful and informative as my interactions with you have been. Again, thank you.

Sincerely,

Lilly Morris