

**Dickinson College**

**Alumni Career Services**

**Alumni Networking Guide**

Dickinson College Career Center  
717-245-1740  
[career@dickinson.edu](mailto:career@dickinson.edu)

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## **NETWORKING**

Networking is a primary career management tool. It can help you learn about a career field, prepare you to work for an organization or help you learn about the locale where you would like to work. And during a job search (remember that studies indicate that 70% of all jobs are found through networking) it can help by giving you access to the “unpublished” jobs, that is those not posted or yet even defined. For posted jobs, networking gives you an advantage as a candidate because you are a known quantity from the start. Hiring managers screen candidates for their experience and skills, but a strong component of selection is “fit” – how the person will get along with the manager and team, and fit into the corporate culture. This is why it is so important to network effectively during career exploration, career transition or job search.

### **What is networking?**

It is connecting (via conversation or email) with people you know to get information, advice, feedback and additional contact names that will help you achieve your present career goal. Networking is NOT asking for a job. Most people do not know about job openings, but would like to help in some way. If all you ask is about position openings, you lose the chance to learn valuable information. In addition, many people are hesitant to bring you into their organization or recommend you if they do not know you. Having a networking conversation allows them to help as well as get to know you.

### **What can networking offer you?**

- Knowledge and perspective about a career field or job
- Opportunity to screen a career or job before starting
- Insight about an organization or geographic area
- An introduction to someone in an organization of interest
- Graduate or professional school information
- Encouragement and feedback

### **Why will people talk with you?**

Most people will connect with you because they know you personally or through membership in an organization, or have been asked to connect by someone they know. Most people want to help their friends and colleagues. Don’t forget that networking should be an exchange – your information and insights may help the other person as well.

Careerjournal.com suggests that giving the contact a frame of reference to understand his or her role can be very helpful. Make sure your contact knows the answers to the following five questions.

- Why are you contacting me?
- Who gave you my name (or how did you get it)?
- What am I supposed to know that’s of interest to you? What kind of help are you looking for?
- What do I need to know about your situation to give you appropriate advice?
- What are the stakes here? How much am I being asked to do? Are there any risks?

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## **Informal Networking Activities**

- Talk with family, friends and acquaintances about your career or job interests
- Maintain contact with professional colleagues inside and outside your organization
- Join and become active in relevant professional associations
- Join or volunteer in community groups or non-profit organizations
- Attend networking events sponsored by Dickinson, professional associations, etc.

## **Professional Networking Site - LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)**

- Is classified as a social networking site whose purpose is career-specific networking
- Is designed for professional networking and job searching
- Allows a member to create a profile with resume-type and additional information
- Creates an opportunity to connect throughout the network to other people, organizations, and special interest groups
- Is primarily an email-based forum; phone or face-to-face contacts may result but should not be expected

## **Dickinson College Alumni group on LinkedIn**

- The official group (red square with white D logo) is the vehicle for alumni to alumni networking
- Joining the group indicates an interest in networking with fellow Dickinsonians
- Being in the same group enables direct email contact between members whether or not they are first degree connections

## **Formal networking; what is the process?**

- Start by **making a list** of people with name and contact information. You can network with anyone, but you should include:

Present colleagues

Former colleagues

Professional association contacts

Family and their friends

Friends and their families

Social contacts, neighbors, service providers, etc.

Dickinson alumni you know or have identified by searching on LinkedIn

Former professors

- For each person identify the type of information or advice that he or she might have that will help your career exploration, career transition or job search. You can also identify information you need so that you can be looking for someone to provide it.
- Decide whether to approach the person by phone, email or in-person (the method selected depends on each situation) to ask for a networking meeting at a future date. The

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“networking” or “informational” meeting can be in-person, over the phone, via videoconferencing such as Skype, or even via an email exchange. “Warm” networking contacts such as professional colleagues, family and friends are most likely to agree to a conversation. People you have contacted through LinkedIn or who are secondary contacts are likely to expect an email exchange rather than a conversation initially. For sample email and phone approaches, see pages nine and ten.

- Talk with the person, make the call or send the email to set up an appointment or request information. Be sure to be specific about the reason for the networking request. Don’t say, “I’m calling to ask if you’ve heard anything”, or “I’m doing some research and I thought I’d talk to you”. Do say, “Bill Smith suggested that I talk with you because of your knowledge about new technology being used in drug discovery”. Or, “Sue Jones suggested that I talk with you because you successfully transitioned from the banking industry to human resources consulting.”
- If you are requesting a meeting try to get a personal rather than a phone meeting, and ask for anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour. Many people who know you will give you an hour but it is often better to ask secondary contacts that do not know you for less time such as 20 – 30 minutes.
- If you are requesting information and expect to get it via email, keep in mind that you should ask at most a few questions so that it doesn’t take the responder too long to craft a reply to you.
- Do some basic research on the industry, company or person so that you will be credible in your exchange.
- Develop a list of questions to ask. Keep in mind that if meeting, it should be a conversation; the list is just food for thought. The questions you ask depend on whether you are networking during career exploration or transition, or during a job search. Lists of sample career exploration networking questions and sample job search networking questions are at the end of the Guide.
- If you have obtained the meeting then you will conduct it. Since you requested the meeting it is your (informal) agenda. Take time at the beginning to develop rapport, restate your background and the purpose of your meeting before asking the questions. (That’s why it is important to be clear in your own mind about how the person might be able to help you). Remember that the best networking meeting is not a question and answer session, but an exchange of industry and career-related information that is useful to both people.
- Whether you have had a conversation or email exchange, remember to ask for additional contact names of people who can help you achieve your present career goal. Some people prefer to give it some thought, so it is often a good approach to request the information and suggest that you contact the person in a week or so to see if anyone has come to mind. If you have received additional names, contact the people you have been referred to within a week. This is not cold calling; you have been referred. Not following up is rude to the initial contact. After you have contacted the people you have been referred to,

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be sure to get in touch with the person who gave you the name(s) to thank them for making the connection. This builds your professional relationship and opens the door to getting further referrals.

- Be sure to thank all your contacts in writing (via email or US mail) and keep them informed about your progress towards your goal.
- Keep track of all your activity.

## **How do you know if you are networking effectively?**

Ask yourself these questions after each contact.

1. Did I make myself known? Does my contact now know my goals, skills and experience and does he or she have a sense of what kind of person I am?
2. Did I get the information, advice or feedback I was looking for?
3. Did I get additional contact names?

## **Frequently asked questions about contacting alumni through the LinkedIn group**

### **1) When should I use the group for networking?**

- a) *When you want information about a particular job function.*

For example, you'd like to know what it's like to be a museum curator, a program manager for a non-profit, or a director of international programs.

- b) *When you're thinking about a career change.*

For example, you've been working in finance but were a studio art minor at Dickinson and are now thinking about teaching art.

- c) *When you're looking for industry advice or wish to connect with a professional colleague.*

For example, you're looking for information about what's going on in the advertising industry or you'd like to have a conversation with someone working in college admissions.

- d) *When you're looking for information about a particular employer.*

For example, you're looking for opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry. You'd like to learn about the business and culture at XYZ pharmaceuticals as you develop your target list.

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## **2) How do I select whom to contact through LinkedIn?**

Use LinkedIn's robust search function by following the path, from your LinkedIn landing page in the ribbon along the top, of Connections/Find Alumni. This will take you to a page with information about YOUR latest education. If you have a graduate degree you will be on the page of your graduate school. You can change to the Dickinson page by using the Change School function on the right of that page. This page is where LinkedIn has aggregated the profiles of all LinkedIn members who have indicated that they attended Dickinson, and there are presently over 13,500 profiles. Keep in mind that some of these individuals have joined the official Dickinson College Alumni group (present membership of close to 6,000).

Search the profiles using keywords, graduation or attended dates, and/or by any of the six available preset searches offered by LinkedIn: Where they live, Where they work, What they do, What they studied, What they're skilled at, How you are connected. The system will return results of profiles matching your criteria, and you'll read the profiles to decide which Dickinsonians might be able to help you. If you can't decide which people to contact, select several and do a little more research on each individual to see if s/he is a good prospect.

Check to see whether the Dickinsonian is a member of the Dickinson College Alumni group. If so, this person is a "warm" networking contact. The alum has joined a professional networking site (LinkedIn) and has affiliated with the college, so you should expect a receptive networking partner. If the alum is not a member of the group, don't hesitate to contact them. They have joined LinkedIn and may not know about the group.

## **3) How do I contact the alum?**

There are several ways of contacting an alum through LinkedIn. If you are a first-degree connection you can email them directly by clicking on Send Message. If you are a second-degree connection (you are a first degree connection of someone that the alum is a first degree connection of) you can Request an Introduction through your mutual acquaintance. If you do not know the intermediate person well, or feel that may be the situation on the other side, and you and the alum you wish to contact are both in the official Dickinson College Alumni group, you can contact them through the group. To do this, go into the group, select the Member tab, do a search on the name you have obtained using the Find Alumni function, and click on Send Message. This will bring up a dialog box enabling you to directly email your person of interest. If you are unable to reach the alum using another method, you can Request to Connect. Indicate that you are a Classmate of the person and personalize your invitation with a reason that you wish to Connect with them.

## **4) What should I say in my email requesting information or advice?**

Write a concise email. Start by giving a little background about yourself. State why you're writing and, in general terms, what you'd like to talk to the alum about. Be clear in what you're asking for and don't ask for information you could have learned on the Internet. (But you could ask to discuss or confirm what you've learned through your research.) See the sample emails at the end of the FAQ section. But remember above all, your request should sound like YOU.

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## **5) How much information should I ask for?**

Begin with one or two general (high-level) questions and one or two more specific questions rather than a long list of specific questions that it would take a long time to answer. If you are requesting an in-person or phone meeting with someone new to you, it is reasonable to ask for 20 - 30 minutes of his or her time. For an email response, keep questions brief and expect that the individual will devote five to ten minutes maximum in responding.

## **6) Can I ask whether the alum knows about any job openings in their field or with their employer?**

In general, no. Unless - you already know, and know well, the person you're communicating with. Networking is typically intended to be a source of information and advice. If you are looking for work, you will relate that in the context of your inquiry. The alumni may choose to offer information about known job openings, but in general you should neither ask for nor expect to get it. If you form a professional relationship with the alumni, it may be appropriate in subsequent conversations to talk about this.

## **7) What if I don't hear back from the alum?**

Email him or her again. While there is a possibility that the contact information is not valid, it's more likely that the alum is busy. Send a gentle reminder by forwarding your original email with a new, brief note on the top. The note should restate your interest in connecting and include language indicating the alum may have been busy or overlooked your email. If you don't hear after two or three tries, drop it.



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## Sample Emails for Networking Contact (1. Career Shifter, 2. Recent Graduate)

### **Sample 1 (career shifter)** for making an email contact with an alum

Dear Sarah,

I found your profile on LinkedIn and I'm hoping that as someone working in financial services marketing you could comment on my tentative plan to change my career focus from product marketing to services marketing.

I have a deep background in marketing management and growth through new product development. I've managed mature leading-share brands, led a marketing department and created a new product category with significant first-year revenue.

If you're agreeable, I would appreciate scheduling a short phone meeting with you to learn your insights and tips on this change I'm contemplating. If you would prefer corresponding via email, I'd be happy to hear from you that way.

Thanks for considering my request. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,  
John Anderson

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[andersonj@xyz.com](mailto:andersonj@xyz.com)  
610-555-1212

### **Sample 2 (recent graduate)** for making an email contact with an alum

Dear Pat,

I found your profile on LinkedIn and as a fellow Dickinsonian am writing with a request for advice.

I graduated from Dickinson two years ago and have been working as an analyst in the insurance industry. I've now come to the conclusion that I would prefer a job in a field of more interest to me. I studied abroad in Australia my junior year and recently I've been doing Internet research on working in global education. I would now would like to learn more about it from people actually working in the field and see from the information on LinkedIn that you are the Director of Overseas Programs at the University of the World. I would appreciate it if you would have a phone conversation with me or answer some questions via email. I'm particularly interested in your advice on whether I need a graduate degree and what you think of working at a college or university as compared with a private company.

Thank you for your consideration, and I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,  
Morgan Smith

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[Smithm@xyx.net](mailto:Smithm@xyx.net)  
610-234-1967

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## **Sample scripts for making a phone request for a networking conversation with an alum** (Sample 1, career shifter, Sample 2, recent graduate)

### **Sample script 1** (career shifter) for making a phone contact with an alum

Hello Sarah (or Ms. Parker). I got your name from (name the person who referred you). Is this a convenient time to talk for a few minutes?

The reason I called is that (Name) told me that you are working in financial services marketing and I was hoping you could comment on my tentative plan to change my career focus from product marketing to services marketing.

To give you a little more information about myself, I have a deep background in marketing management and growth through new product development. I've done a lot of things in my career including managing several mature leading-share brands, leading a marketing department and creating a new product category that generated large first-year revenue.

If you're agreeable, I'd like to schedule a phone meeting with you to learn your insights and tips on this change I'm contemplating. It should only take 20 or 30 minutes."

### **Sample script 2** (recent graduate) for making a phone contact

Hello, Jessica (or Ms. Brown). My name is Susan Smith and I got your name from the (name referral source). Is this a convenient time to talk for a few minutes?

(Name) told me that you are working in global education. I graduated from Dickinson two years ago and have been working as an analyst in the insurance industry but I'm now interested in a career in your field. I studied abroad in Bologna my junior year and recently I've been doing Internet research on working in global education. Now I'm contacting people like you who actually work in the field so I can learn more about it. Would you be willing to schedule 20 or 30 minutes to talk with me?

(If your contact asks what it is you want to know about, say something like, I'm particularly interested in your advice on whether I need a graduate degree and what you think of working at a college or university as compared with a private company.)

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## **SAMPLE CAREER EXPLORATION NETWORKING QUESTIONS**

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### **Job information**

- What made you interested and how did you enter this field?
- Could you describe a typical workday?
- What are your specific responsibilities?
- What kinds of people do you work with?
- Who succeeds in this field?
- What personality traits do you need to be successful?
- What are your greatest challenges?
- What do you find most rewarding about working in this field?
- Would you enter this field now?
- Is there a typical career path?
- What kind of compensation could I expect in the first year? What is the career potential?
- Given my education, skills and experience, what other careers would you suggest?

### **Preparation/Training**

- What is the best preparation for this kind of work?
- What additional training is needed?
- Do you recommend a graduate degree? If so, which one?
- What experience do I need to be a competitive candidate?
- What are good sources of additional information?

### **How To Get A Job in the Field**

- What are the criteria for being hired in this field?
- Ideally, what should I have on my resume?
- What are typical entry-level positions?
- Are there any special preparations for a job in this field?
- Can you recommend employers I should look into?

### **Characteristics of the Field**

- What changes have you seen in your industry?
- What trends do you see in your field?
- Who is the industry leader?
- Why do people leave this field?

### **Additional Assistance**

- Can you provide names of others who would be able to give me information and advice in this career field? May I say that you suggested I contact them?
- Would you be willing to review my resume?
- Are there important things I need to know about this field that I haven't brought up?

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## SAMPLE JOB SEARCH NETWORKING QUESTIONS

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### Sample questions to develop rapport and get information.

- How did you become interested in this field?
- Did you have any practical experience or training prior to your current job?
- Which of your qualities contribute most to your success in the field?
- What do you enjoy most about your job?
- What is your biggest frustration?
- How did you get your current job?
- Would you enter this field again?
- What kinds of changes have you seen in the field in the last few years?
- What kinds of changes do you expect in the next few years and what will cause them?

### Sample questions for a business discussion.

- What are the short and long-term trends in the field?
- Since you know the industry well, what opportunities do you see in the future?
- Which are the most important companies and who are the most important people in the industry today?
- Which companies in the field use the latest technology, are the best place to work or are the most highly regarded? Which ones are the opposite?
- What publications or web sites do you recommend to learn more about the field?
- Which professional organizations should I consider joining?
- What are your recommendations for professional development activities?
- Can you recommend any particular employers I should look into?
- Do you think my resume covers the most important skills and experience for this type of position?
- Have you known other people with a background like mine who have made a successful career change?
- Since I'm making a career change, what should I do to establish my credibility?
- Are too many or too few people entering this field?
- How does this job function fit in the corporate structure?
- Here are some of my target companies. What do you think of them? Are there any others you would suggest?
- Do you know anyone who now works or used to work in these companies?
- Can you suggest a good search firm in the industry?
- Can you refer me to others in the field that might be able to provide me with additional assistance?