

Dickinson College

Alumni Career Services

Alumni Networking Guide

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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 location in which 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that studies indicate that 70% of all jobs are found through networking) it can help by giving you access to the “unpublished” jobs, that is those not posted or yet even defined.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?

Informal Networking Activities

- Talk with family, friends and acquaintances about your professional 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
- For a free tutorial, visit (<http://learn.linkedin.com/>)

Dickinson Works

Dickinson Works is volunteer program where alumni have agreed to provide career information and advice to other Dickinsonians. The volunteers fill out a profile for the DickinsonWorks program database that that allows you to search for them by career field, major, graduate education, geographic location, alumni name or employer. Talking with alums is a great way to learn about careers and build a network. Dickinson Works volunteers have not agreed to act as placement representatives so please do not send your resume or ask for a job unless prompted by the alum. Doing so rarely results in a positive outcome and is generally a turn-off for the recipient.

For additional information, see Frequently Asked Questions about using Dickinson Works on page 6.

How do you network formally; 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 DickinsonWorks
 - Former professors

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- 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 “meeting” can be in-person or over the phone. “Warm” networking contacts like volunteers from Dickinson Works, 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. 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 make specific 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 30 minutes to an hour. Many people who know you will give you an hour. It is often better to ask secondary contacts that do not know you for less time.
 - 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. Contact these people 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, 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 (typically by email) and keep them informed about your career.
- 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 using Dickinson Works

1) When should I use Dickinson Works?

- 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.

2) How do I select whom to contact?

Search the database by profession, location, education, individual name, graduation year, or employer name. The system will generate a list of names, and you'll read the profiles to decide which Dickinsonians might 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.

- a) Do a name search on the Dickinson home page
- b) Google them
- c) Check them out on their employer's home page if there is a search box
- d) Check out their LinkedIn profile

3) How do I contact the alum?

You can tell by the information listed whether they want to be contacted by email or phone. Put your reference source (referred through Dickinson Works) in the email subject line or the first sentence of your phone approach.

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

Write a concise email – in general no more than nine sentences. 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.

5) What should I say if I'm making the request by phone?

The request should sound much like you'd make using email, but you may want to make the language slightly more "business casual". If you get the person on the phone, this will be a dialog, if you leave a message, it will be similar to the email request. The initial phone call is to request a meeting at a later date, be prepared in case the alum is free to talk to you right then. Remember to state your referral source in your first sentence. Sample scripts for a career changer and for a recent graduate are at the end of the FAQ section.

6) 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 30 minutes of his or her time. For an email response, keep questions brief and expect that the individual will devote 10 to 15 minutes maximum in responding.

7) Should I include my resume with my request?

No, but you can send it if asked. You should, however, relate some career information to give your request context.

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

No. Unless - you already know, and know well, the person you're communicating with. Dickinson Works is 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.

9) 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. Remember that these are "warm" contacts; our alumni have volunteered to provide career advice. 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.

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

Sample 1 (career shifter) for making an email contact with an alum in Dickinson Works

Dear Sarah,

I obtained your name from the Dickinson Works database of alumni volunteers willing to provide career advice to fellow Dickinsonians. 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

andersonj@xyz.com
610-555-1212

Sample 2 (recent graduate) for making an email contact with an alum in Dickinson Works

Dear Pat,

I obtained your name from the Dickinson Works database of alumni volunteers and 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 in Dickinson Works 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

Smithm@xyx.net
610-234-1967

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

Sample script 1 (career shifter) for making a phone contact with an alum in Dickinson Works

Hello Sarah (or Ms. Parker). I got your name from the Dickinson Works database of alumni volunteers willing to provide career advice to fellow Dickinsonians. Is this a convenient time to talk for a few minutes?

The reason I called is that I see you're 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 with an alum in Dickinson Works

Hello, Jessica (or Ms. Brown). My name is Susan Smith and I got your name from the Dickinson Works database of alumni who will give career advice to other Dickinson grads. Is this a convenient time to talk for a few minutes?

I read your career information in the database, and saw 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.)

SAMPLE CAREER EXPLORATION NETWORKING QUESTIONS

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?

SAMPLE JOB SEARCH NETWORKING QUESTIONS

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?