

Build Your Professional Network

Your professional success relies on both what you know and who you know. A professional network provides you with the connections that aid you in your first job search, move you in your early career, and beyond.

Engaging in professional activities now will help build the core of your network. After all, the people you serve with on committees today or meet at a conference may be the people with helpful advice or inside tips that will prove fruitful for you down the road. Here are a few simple tips to get you started:

- **Host a departmental speaker.** Offer to pick up the guest, go on a campus tour, or take the speaker to dinner. These informal interactions provide you with opportunities to meet someone new and develop networking skills.
- **Join interdisciplinary groups on campus.** Meet graduate and faculty scholars in other disciplines with similar research interests.
- **Attend conferences.** Participate in a panel or listen to other panels on topics you're interested in. Before you go, practice a 30-second intro of yourself and practice your handshake with a friend. At the conference, ask questions, bring cards, and introduce yourself. When you get home, send thank you emails to those you met or talked with, especially those who were most helpful.
- **Do volunteer work or get a job for the summer.** You'll meet people from the community and industry.
- **Pick a mentor with a strong network.** A mentor with a strong network can introduce you to new people and encourage you to engage in different groups.
- **Conduct an informational interview.** Is there a field you want to enter in the future or a particular job you'd like to hold? Identify someone in that field who holds the position you're aspiring to, then contact that person by phone or email and request a brief meeting. Explain that you're exploring career options and gathering information to help you refine your career decisions.
- **Keep in contact with departmental alumni.** Graduate students who finished their degrees a few years before you or who are in classes behind yours can be excellent contacts.
- **Attend talks hosted by other departments.** Introduce yourself to faculty and students you haven't met yet.

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- **Join your professional organization(s).** Look for ways to get involved with your discipline at a regional or national level. Serving on a committee provides opportunities to meet other scholars dedicated to your discipline.
- **Offer your experience or expertise.** Offering your services in the community introduces you to new people and provides you with a network when you need to draw on another's expertise.
- **Build your digital network.** Make sure your LinkedIn profile is completed and that you are searchable by selecting "Open to new opportunities" in your settings. Spend 15 minutes a week connecting with others and cultivating relationships. Recruiters can see who has been active on the site over the last 30 days. Add value by commenting on other people's posts and be sure to add content of your own. In 2020, over 9 billion people will see content on LinkedIn, but only about 3 million users post consistently. That's a huge audience you have at your fingertips!

Reach out to others, and don't worry if you're not successful every time (you won't be, but that's ok!). Building a network takes time and effort, and not everyone will be ready to meet you. Frame your interactions positively and go into each meeting expecting a positive outcome. With a little practice, you'll grow comfortable introducing yourself to new people in a variety of situations. By doing so, you'll be well on your way to building your professional network.