

Networking & Informational Interviews For Alumni

Why Is Networking So Important?

Networking is the #1 way to find a job!

Approximately 70-80% of job seekers find jobs through networking. Networking can occur face-to-face, by phone or email, or through online sites such as the OWU Alumni Network (<https://owu.wisr.io/login>) or LinkedIn.

Networking can help you achieve your professional and personal goals!

By networking, you create ambassadors who will advocate for you and help connect you with the right people. These connections also help build your confidence and demonstrate your credibility.

Quick Tips on Networking!

Networking in its purest form is simply talking to people, making connections and developing rapport to grow your circle of influence. Being successful requires a serious commitment of time and energy. Keep in mind the following tips for successful networking:

Nurture relationships – follow-up is key!

Establish connections – get out of your comfort zone and meet people.

Talk with alums – they are often eager to help students succeed!

Write thank you notes – you will remain positive in people’s minds as a result.

Offer assistance – remember it is not about what you “get,” but what you can offer.

Really be real – show your interest and be genuinely you!

Keep at it – continue to put yourself out there. Perseverance will get you far.

What to Expect From a Career Fair

A career fair is an event that gives job seekers and employers a chance to meet one another, establish professional relationships, and discuss potential job opportunities.

Career Connection at Ohio Wesleyan University holds an annual fair that is available to Alumni:

- **Career and Graduate School Fair (usually held in September)**

How to Work a Career Fair

BEFORE

Do your homework: Research the people, employers, or graduate/professional schools before the event!

Create a strong résumé: Have your résumé reviewed, and be sure to have multiple copies printed on professional résumé paper.

Plan your strategy: If possible, create an agenda and plan who you are going to approach, in what order, and for how long.

Prepare to dress for success: Wear business casual or professional dress.

Consider your online presence: Update or create your LinkedIn profile.

Know your elevator pitch: Develop an answer to the question “tell me about yourself.”

What to include in your Elevator Pitch

- Your name and present status/situation
- Brief overview of your unique experiences, skills, and qualifications
- A connection between what you can offer and what you know about them
- Pertinent questions that the employer can respond to

DURING

Arrive early: Bring your confidence and thoughtful questions with you!

Names are important: Learn people’s names and introduce yourself. Request a business card.

Note the non-verbals: Give a firm handshake, maintain solid eye-contact, and be positive.

AFTER

Always follow-up: Write thank you notes or emails within 24 hours! (See last page)

Stay engaged: Be sure to check and sign-up for on-campus info sessions or interviews.

What is Informational Interviewing?

An informational interview is the best way to jumpstart the career discovery process, and it is simple to do! It is a meeting you initiate with someone who has a job, employment site, career path, or background that interests you. The goal of this interview is to learn from someone else's experience so that it can inform you about new options, best practices, resources, and connections. At the same time, by taking an interest in someone else, you can cultivate a professional relationship. Informational interviews are a highly effective networking strategy, and when managed correctly, your conversations and follow-up correspondence will make it easy for your contact to keep you in mind when opportunities arise within their organization or another site.

Requesting an Informational Interview

Once you have identified valuable contacts, send these individuals a request for an informational interview via email, LinkedIn, or the OWU Alumni Network. Include your request in the body of the message, and do not attach a résumé in your initial introductory email. If you are using LinkedIn, be sure to use a 2-phase approach: 1). Send a short welcome message and ask to connect. 2). Follow up by thanking the individual for connecting with you, and then provide the days/times that you would be available to conduct an informational interview in the coming week(s).

THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR MESSAGE

- Let them know how you got their name and why you are contacting them. Make it clear that you are looking for information, not a job! *This is important.
- Provide some background information about yourself, such as how you became interested in their company or industry and any related experience you have.
- Make your request and ask for 20-60 minutes of their time (you can determine the amount). Thank them in advance and tell them how you will follow up.

If you do not get a response after a week, then you will want to send a brief reminder message to make sure they did not overlook your initial request. If you still do not hear back from the person, move on to another individual.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LAYOUT

Begin by thanking the individual for their time, restating the objective of the discussion and the time allotment, and briefly reviewing your background. Informational interviews should be casual and conversational. Prepare specific open-ended questions that indicate your knowledge of the industry or career path, and it is best to focus on topics that cannot be researched online. Be sure to listen attentively and take good notes, and always follow up with a thank you message.

Informational Interview Questions

Please see sample questions below:

ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL

- What is the best path to this career?
- What attracted you to this industry, your company, and your job?
- What aspects of your career are the most and least rewarding/challenging and why?
- What would you do differently if you were starting over?
- If you were in the job market tomorrow, what would you recommend doing?

ABOUT THE JOB

- What are your primary responsibilities? How do you spend your time?
- What qualities/attributes do you look for when hiring a _____?
- What are the most valuable skills in your job? Which experiences enabled you to develop these skills?
- How do you keep your skills current? What do you read? What professional associations do you belong to? What seminars or continuing education do you find useful?

ABOUT THE COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

- What makes your company/organization unique?
- What do you see as the biggest competitive challenge for your company/organization?
- What is the culture like at this company/organization?

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

- What have been your biggest surprises in this field?
- What are the common misconceptions about working in this field?
- What are the vulnerabilities of this industry? What worries you?
- What do you expect of people starting out in this industry? What educational and personal qualities in candidates attract you?

FEEDBACK ON YOUR CAREER SEARCH

- Are there other positions / career paths to consider based on my background and interests?
- What strengths and weaknesses do you see in my current background?
- Is there anything else that would be helpful as I consider this field?
- Looking at my résumé, what advice would you have for me on next steps?
- Who are other individuals you would recommend I reach out to?

Following Up

Always send a thank you letter within 24-hours following an informational interview, networking event, or career fair. It is a professional courtesy and demonstrates your consideration, enthusiasm, and appreciation for the opportunity to interview or have a discussion. Check the letter carefully for grammar and spelling, and make sure the interviewee's name and title is correct. Thank you letters are commonly sent via e-mail, but they can also be hand written.

Include the following elements in your thank you letter:

- Thank the individual for their time spent meeting with you.
- Emphasize the value of the information you gained and how you will incorporate suggestions.
- Express your willingness to be of service to them.
- Explain what your next steps are and who you may be reaching out to next.
- Mention that you will keep in touch with them.