

---

## University Advising & Career Center

University of New Hampshire • 102 Hood House • Durham, NH • 603-862-2064 • [www.unh.edu/uacc/](http://www.unh.edu/uacc/)

---

# Informational Interviews, Networking, & Thank You Notes

There is truth in the phrase, “It’s not what you know, but who you know.” Informational interviews and networking are key components of any successful job or internship search. The purpose of this resource is to help you gain a better understanding of networking and the different parts of this invaluable process.

## Networking

Most job opportunities are never advertised using ‘traditional’ methods, but are found through networking with friends, family (and their neighbors and friends), faculty, alumni, and acquaintances. A common myth is that networking is about schmoozing and being insincere with people you have no connection with. Actually, it’s about asking people you have some connection with for career information and advice, similar to getting advice about a neighborhood mechanic or a good restaurant. Most will be pleased and flattered to hear from you as long as you're polite and considerate. As with any conversation, take time to consider their point of view, don't badger or harass them, and above all, respect their boundaries. Remember to be yourself, follow through on what you promise and be honest in all of your interactions.

Take advantage of all the networking opportunities right here on campus through the UACC. Participate in job and internship fairs where you can get information and network with participating employers. Use our Career Mentor Network (CMN) to speak with UNH alumni in diverse professions throughout the country. Time and effort will pay off in results.

## Tips for Building Your Network

Most of us are not fortunate enough to have existing networks; here are helpful tips to build your own:

1. Strengthen existing relationships with faculty, friends, and family and find out who is in their network.
2. Connect and associate with people interested in helping you succeed – find mentors and champions.
3. Get involved in professional, social, or community situations by offering your skills and making contributions.
4. Keep track of your discussions with people in your network.
5. Don’t ask for a job. The person you are speaking with may not have any knowledge of potential job openings, which will be awkward and shut the conversation down right away.
6. Participate in groups and join organizations to build your confidence in meeting new people. Student clubs and organizations are a great place to do this and help you build leadership skills.
7. Give back and help others build their networks.
8. It is not too soon to start building networks – this takes time!.
9. Create a top 10 list of dream employers and contact them to request an informational interview.

## Informational Interviews

An informational interview is an opportunity to talk with a person who is currently working in a career field you'd like to learn more about. The purpose of the interview is to gain insight into the field and to gain advice from a professional. While the contacts you make from these interviews may help you find an internship or a job down the road, the purpose of the interview is to gather advice and information – do not ask them for a job.

### **Informational Interviews Help You:**

- Decide whether a particular career is for you.
- Learn valuable, candid, and up-to-date information about a particular career from a person in that field.
- Find out more about the culture of a company.
- Develop a network of contacts within a particular career field.

### **Preparation:**

- Identify people you'd like to meet who are working in a career field that interests you.
- Research the career field, and prepare a list of questions you want to ask.
- Contact the person and set up an appointment in-person, over the phone or via email.

### **Requesting an Informational Interview:**

Writing an email or letter to prospective mentors is often the best approach. Even if they already know you, it is courteous and lets them prepare for your request.

1. Explain where you found their name and why you are writing.
2. Say that you are broadly interested in the field and that you would like to schedule a visit in their office for 20-30 minutes to get some advice and information about their career field. Alternatively you can schedule a phone conversation or ask if you can email them questions. Remember that in-person connections are typically the strongest as you get to know a person that much better.
3. You may want to indicate some days and times that work for you as a place to start, but let them know that you are flexible would like to work around their schedule.
4. When emailing, remember to be formal. Do not use instant messenger (IM) language. Capitalize your "I's etc. First impressions are crucial!

Some people prefer to be contacted by telephone. Before you call to set up the interview, prepare what you want to say so your conversation will flow smoothly and professionally.

1. **Prepare an opening statement. Identify yourself (being sure to state that you are a UNH student or alum) and explain where you found their name and why you are calling.** For example:

*"Hello, my name is Jane Doe. I found your name in UNH's Career Mentor Network database. I'm a UNH student who's considering going into museum administration and, from the database, I see that's your area of expertise. I'm hoping we could schedule a 20- or 30-minute informational interview so I could gather some information about your career field and your career path."*

2. Confirm the date, time, and location of the meeting. Follow through if you book a time! Do not blow someone off and burn bridges.
3. Keep in mind that a career research meeting is not a job interview. It is an opportunity to gather information and get advice from an experienced person working in a field of interest to you.

**The Informational Interview is a professional appointment: Arrive on-time, and dress and act professionally. If you must cancel, call the contact with days of advance notice. Students and alumni have lost out on great networking opportunities because they didn't act professionally.**

### Sample Questions:

The following questions are intended as a guide. Your questions should be customized to suit the individual and industry.

- What is a typical day like?
- What drew you into this line of work?
- How did you break into this field/industry?
- What has your career path looked like?
- What skills are most important?
- What do you like most about your job?
- What are the challenges?
- If you were starting out again, what would you do differently?
- What kind of experience would employers in this field look for in a job applicant?
- What is the market like? What areas do you feel promise the most growth?
- What training or degrees are necessary?
- What are the opportunities for advancement within the field?
- Are there other companies/organizations that you recommend I research?
- What is the best advice you received regarding your career?
- To what professional organizations do you belong?
- Who else would you suggest I speak with to learn more about this field? May I use your name when I contact them?
- Would you be willing to look over my resume and suggest the kinds of jobs for which I might be a competitive candidate?

### Follow Up:

Send a **thank-you note** to every person who grants you a career research meeting. Not only will this express your appreciation for their assistance, it will also help to establish you in their minds as a courteous, professional person. You never know who will be helpful to you in your job search later on, or whose good impression of you could make all the difference.

## Using the Career Mentor Network

### Intended Users

The University Advising and Career Center (UACC) Career Mentor Network (CMN) is for UNH students and alumni only.

### The Purpose

The Career Mentor Network is a database of UNH alumni and parents in a variety of professions who have volunteered to give you career advice. It is a network of people willing to offer you ideas and information based on their experience. These mentors want to give you advice and information. **Never ask members of the CMN to find a job for you!** This is not why they volunteered.

### Access

You can access the CMN via MonsterTRAK:

### To Register:

1. Log onto MonsterTRAK at [www.unh.edu/uacc](http://www.unh.edu/uacc)
2. Click on the **MonsterTRAK** link at the top of the page.
3. If you are a first time user, the UNH password is **wildcats**.
4. This will bring you to the Register/Upload Resume page.
5. Please complete the quick personal profile. You do not have to upload a resume at this time.
6. Click on **Main Menu** to continue.
7. Once on the Main Menu, click on the **Career Mentor Network** in the middle of the page.
8. Then click **Search**.
9. Then use the search fields to identify alumni. Limit your criteria to one area to maximize the results.

10. Once you click search and see the results, click the arrow next to an alum whom you are interested in talking with.
11. Read their profile and if you want to email or call them, scroll to the bottom of the page and click **Contact this Mentor**.
12. Print or note the contact info, as the alumni limit the number of hits they can receive each month.

### **Contact Limitations**

To protect members from excessive contact, we ask that you do not mass email or mass call the contacts in the database. Instead, thoughtfully select a few (3-5) at a time and be sure to customize your contact with them.

Remember: even one contact, if handled correctly, can get you everything you need. If you talk with one person, and ask them who else you can talk with, you'll end up with a rich network of contacts.

### **Networking Protocol**

Contact each member in the manner and location they have requested on the data sheet. Mentors are eager to speak with you so don't give up if you can't reach your contact immediately. Whether your outreach is made via telephone or email, make sure you are professional. **For a first contact via email or phone through the CMN, we recommend that you follow the Career Research Meeting 'opening statement' example discussed earlier in this resource.**

### **Follow Up**

**Write a thank-you note for every person with whom you speak.** Thank-you notes are not only gracious but expected, and they encourage the person to talk with you again, should you ever need to. You can email the thank you note, but follow a professional letter format (such as in a Word template).

The University Advising and Career Center provides assistance to students and alumni at each step of the job search process. Visit us in Hood House 102.

### **Alumni/Parent Membership**

If you are a UNH alum who would like to be a mentor on the Career Mentor Network, please contact us at [career.advice@unh.edu](mailto:career.advice@unh.edu) for more information and a password.

## **Rules for the Road:**

### **Learn To Act Like a Professional**

The way in which you act and present yourself during the internship and job search can create lasting impressions that will have an impact on an employers' hiring decision. Your written communications, phone interactions, and in-person behavior are all judged by future employers. Put your best foot forward at all times and remember that follow-up actions speak just as loudly as in-person actions. Etiquette is not optional – it is expected at all times! People talk and your professional reputation is at stake.

#### **Email:**

- **Answer Quickly.** You should respond to all emails within 24 hours. If the email requires an answer that you cannot provide immediately, at least email back saying you will follow-up shortly. This applies to phone calls, too.
- **Do not write in CAPITALS or all lower case.** Your recipient may view capitals as if you were yelling. All lower case sentences are seen as unprofessional.
- **Refrain from abbreviations or emoticons.** Your recipient may not know the meaning of BTW or LOL, and generally smileys ☺ are seen as unprofessional.
- **E-mails are a form of professional writing.** Each email that you send represents you and leaves an impression. Employers consider emails and cover letters as writing samples. Just because you can send an email quickly, doesn't mean you should write it quickly.

- **Use a professional email address.** kegstandchamp@hotmail.com does not send the right message to an employer. Remember to type/sign your name at the bottom of the email, so they know how to address you in response. Your email address may not indicate your first and last name.

### Phone and General Communication:

- **If you commit, live up to it.** If you make a commitment to a phone call or a meeting, follow-through. Employers assume that all of your actions are a reflection of how you would act on the job. Even if your commitment is for information only, do not burn bridges – people talk!
- **Always send a thank you note.** It is **expected** that you will follow-up with a thank you note after all networking, research meetings, and interviews. It is professionally required that you send a thank you to anyone who has taken the time to assist you.
- **Create a professional voicemail message.** First impressions make a huge difference and often this is the first interaction with an employer or alum. “Dude” or “yo” type language is inappropriate. This also applies when you answer your phone.
- **Nail the introduction.** If you meet someone in person, look them in the eye, shake hands and introduce yourself, “Hi my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a junior at UNH majoring in Psychology. I am at the career fair to search for summer internships. Do you offer internships?” If you are calling a contact to schedule an informational interview, introduce yourself and let them know how you found their name.

### Interview:

- **Always arrive 15 minutes early.**
- **Research the organization.** When they ask you what you know about their organization, you better have an answer! Employers expect that you will do your homework in advance.
- **Prepare questions.** Employers expect you to have questions prepared for them about the job or internship and the organization. Write these down in advance and refer to them in the interview. When they inevitably ask, “Do you have any questions for me?” you never want to say “no”.
- **Show enthusiasm.** Do not treat the interview as a shopping event. Take every interview seriously and show your passion. Employers will not be interested in you if you are not interested in them.
- **Always send a thank you note.** Always – there are no exceptions to this rule! Send the thank you note within 24 hours. You can email it, but keep it in a formal format.
- **Turn off your cell phone.**

## Thank-You Letters

As a professional courtesy, it is expected that a thank-you email or letter will be sent within 24 hours of each job interview or informational interview. You can email the notes or handwrite them; either way the format should always be professional. Expressing your appreciation for their time and consideration in writing will help you stand out from other candidates as many people neglect this important step. Keep your letter brief—no more than three or four short paragraphs. Here’s an outline of a sample thank-you letter:

**In the First Paragraph,** thank the employer for the opportunity to interview for the job. You can also reiterate your interest in the position at this time. If you are sending multiple thank you notes to people at the same company, you may want to try to personalize each note by saying something like “I enjoyed speaking with you about...”

**In the Second Paragraph,** mention any relevant skills or qualifications you forgot to emphasize during the interview, or highlight your discussion, reiterating important points you made about your qualifications and interests.

**In the Third Paragraph**, close the letter by thanking your contact again and refer to any next steps you and the interviewer discussed. If you really want the job, say so at this point. *“I am very interested in this position and would love the opportunity to...”*

The following sample letter is based on the outline above. Of course, your letter will be unique to you, the job you want, the employer you are targeting, and your qualifications.

### *Sample Thank-You Letter*

Your Name Here  
102 Hood House  
Durham, NH 03824  
603-862-2064

January 20, 2008

Robert Jones  
Lab Manager  
XYZ, Inc.  
2234 Long Ridge Rd.  
Stamford, CT 06457

Dear Mr. Jones:

Thank you for meeting with me this morning to discuss my qualifications for your Protein Lab Junior Associate position. I enjoyed our conversation a great deal and continue to be very interested in the job.

Your comprehensive outline of the job’s duties and responsibilities gave me a good picture of the position and my ability to succeed in it. As I mentioned this morning, I am confident that my previous biology and biochemistry lab experience will enable me to make a positive contribution at Protein, Inc.

Thanks again for your consideration. I am excited about this potential opportunity and I look forward to hearing from you regarding the second round of interviews.

Sincerely,

Your Name Typed Here

## Networking – The Elevator Pitch

An "Elevator Pitch" is a concise, carefully planned, and well-practiced description that summarizes your skills, interests and goals which you could deliver to a hiring manager in the time it would take to ride up an elevator (about 60 seconds)  
Things to include:

- What you want them to know about you
- What distinguishes you from other students
- What are your goals for this year (find a job in xyz industry, etc...)
- Question or hook for them

### To begin, fill out the following:

Name:

Major:

Minors/Option/Concentration:

Relevant/Internship Experience (quick overview):

Leadership Experience (clubs, associations, volunteerism, etc...):

What you are particularly good at:

### Now pull this information together into a script in the form of an introduction, such as:

“I’m a senior Communication major with am very passionate about sports. I have interned at the Whittemore Center Arena here at UNH in their marketing and events team and gained great insight into the field of sports marketing and event planning. In addition to my internship, I have also been volunteering with Seacoast Reads and SHARPP where I have gotten better at relating to people of all ages and backgrounds. I hope to find a position upon graduation in marketing in the sport industry. I noticed that you were a Kinesiology major at UNH and that you are now working in sports marketing and I am curious about your career since you graduated.”

Depending of the situation (interview vs. elevator ride), you may use all or part of this introduction. It’s important to be flexible while highlighting the important points in each opportunity you encounter.

**Draft your pitch or introduction:**

**Now practice it on another student and remember:**

- Use a firm, but not crushing handshake
- Look the other person in the eye
- Use the script in the beginning, but it should be conversational in tone
- Utilize the question at the end to turn the conversation over to the other person, a.k.a. relief
- In real life, you may not finish as the other person may jump in

**Questions you can ask the other person:**

- What intangible assets are important for a career in \_\_\_\_?
- What kinds of experiences would you recommend to someone interested in your field?
- What are the rewards/challenges/frustrations of your work?
- What was the best advice you received from someone in your field when you were just starting?
- What qualities do you think that successful people in your field have?
- Does your company hire interns or summer help and if so, could you refer me to a contact?

*Updated 5/07*