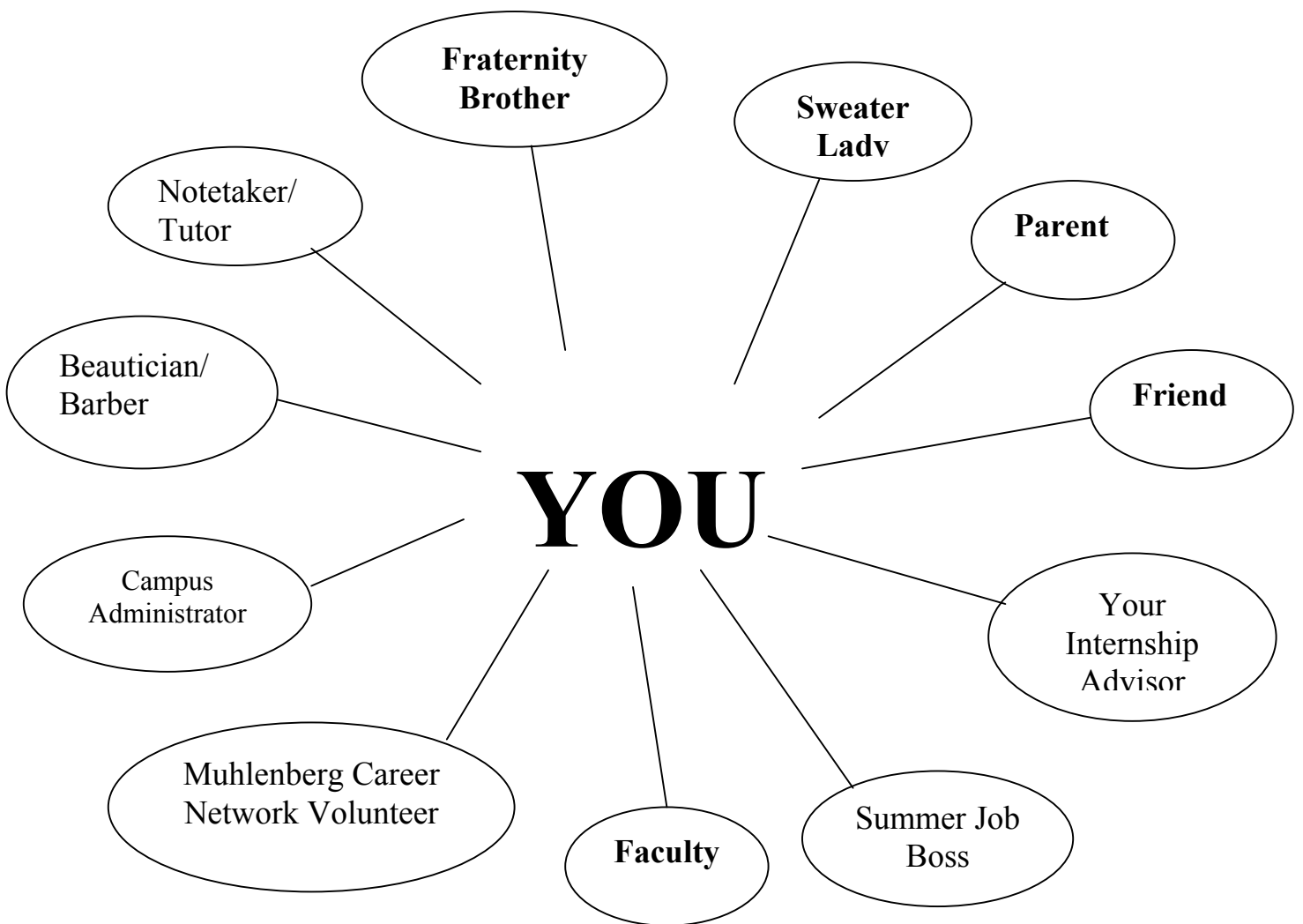


Networking



Networking - building your own system of people linked by their potential to help you in your job search.

Networking

Networking is a vague term. It is hard to define because it has so many different forms. There are no laws to govern networking, but by following rules of etiquette you'll experience greater success. So what is "networking?"

Networking is what you do everyday on campus. If you ask a fraternity brother whether he knows anyone going to New York on the weekend so you can possibly get a ride, you are networking. When you ask people in your residence hall if Toones is really the best place to get CDs and how to get there, you are doing it again. Networking is tapping your connections for helpful information and advice. In terms of jobs, if you ask someone in your history class whether The Outback is still hiring and who you should contact about working there, you just started networking.

Networking is regarded as one of the most effective career exploration and job search tools. How do you begin?

1. **Identify what you are looking for.** For focused job seekers this can be as specific as a position title (auditor) or a particular organization (Pitney Bowes). For students exploring fields of interest to help them choose a major, it may be more general ("What opportunities are there in communications?"). You need to articulate what you are looking for, so you can talk about it with people you know or meet. (You may want to research positions, fields and/or organizations using the OCDP job binders, directories, and books, the Internet and field specific publications so you have a strong sense of what you are talking about.) Practice describing your interests with a friend. Make sure your friend understands what you are talking about from your description.

2. **Think about people who could help you.** This list may contain specific names of people you know as well as position titles you know exist (without knowing who holds the position). Using the "communications" example from above, the list may contain names of specific faculty in the Communication Department at Muhlenberg, the Vice President of Public Relations (and others on that staff), and the Manager of WMUH. Set a goal of having at least 25 names on the list to start.

3. **Think about your activities, hobbies, and sports.** Add another 25 people to your networking list based on those you know through activities, community service, etc. Note: the people you add to your list don't necessarily have to be working in your field of interest.

4. **Where else can you find people to help you?** Expand your list to at least 75 names by using the Muhlenberg Career Network* binders, directories of organizations related to your field of interest (e.g., Job Opportunities for Business), professional organizations in your career field (e.g., American Counseling Association), geographic directories (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce directory for your targeted city), etc. Resources like these are available in the OCDP, Trexler Library, public libraries, and on-line using the Internet.

* The Muhlenberg Career Network is a group of alumni who have volunteered to assist students with their career/job searches. The network is available to Muhlenberg students in the Office of Career Development and Placement and is updated regularly by the OCDP.

5. **Leave yourself open to chance.** Take opportunities to discuss your interests with acquaintances or people you meet for the first time, for example at a hockey game or on a train. People generally like to talk about themselves (after all, they know that subject better than anyone!), so you can use lines like "What do you do for a living?" or "Tell me how things are in your line of work." Note: variations of this also work at social events if you run out of things to say.

Information Interview

Once you have your list and you are mentally ready to talk about your interests and goals, you are ready to start your networking meetings, or information interviews. They can be informal (talk to Uncle Spud during half-time of the Giants game to let him know you would love to learn more about his job at Merrill Lynch), or they might be quite formal (spending the day with an alumna who does marketing for New York Magazine through the Muhlenberg Shadow Program). Turn any situation into a networking opportunity.

Setting up a formal networking meeting can be done by phone or mail, but should always be done professionally.

By PHONE:

The advantage of calling first is that it is fast and, for people comfortable using the phone, easy. Within minutes you can have an appointment set up or possibly answers to some pressing questions. The disadvantage is that if the person you are calling doesn't recognize your name, she may not take the call; or if you happen to call at a busy time, the person may rush you or decline your request. (See Sample A)

If you reach an answering machine or have the option of leaving a message on voice mail, be as clear and specific as possible. Be sure to include your name, reason for calling, a number where you can be reached and the best time to call; repeat all the information clearly to make sure the recipient has all the information before hanging up.

By MAIL:

The advantage to writing to your targeted person is that you can carefully craft your request. The cover letter gives you a chance to introduce yourself and why you are writing. You can enclose a resume to give the person more information about yourself. The recipient has time to read your letter and consider your request. It is usually best to follow the letter with a phone call about a week or two after the letter was sent. (See Sample B) When you speak on the phone, you can open with "Have you received my letter?" If so, the person will have a clear sense of why you are calling and may be better prepared to help you. If not, you can always explain your request verbally (that's why you practiced!). The mail method is slower, but tends to make students more confident with their request and it sends a sense of seriousness and professionalism to the recipient. This approach may be well received by people who receive numerous requests and demands on their time. (See Sample D)

Whether by mail or phone, your request is usually the same. A common networking request would be for a 20-30 minute information interview. The information interview can be conducted by phone (at a mutually agreeable future time) or in person (at the interviewee's place of work). In either case, YOU are the INTERVIEWER. This means that you ask the questions and you watch the clock. If the person is willing to spend more time than you requested or they offer an office tour, that is a bonus. Be prepared, however, to end the interview at the predetermined time limit by saying something like, "I know you are busy and our 20 minutes is almost over." You could then ask your last question. Take the host's lead from there. If the person encourages you to stay longer, great.

Following is a list of sample questions you may want to ask during an information interview (networking meeting). Be prepared with more questions than you think you will ask. Ask industry specific questions as well.

Possible Information Interview Questions

- ! Can you describe a typical day in your job?
- ! What background is most common for people in your field?
- ! What is your educational and professional background?
- ! If you were in college today, what would you do to best prepare yourself for a job in your field?
- ! What do you think is the most important thing someone starting out could do to be successful in your field?
- ! What are the normal work hours? Are weekends/holidays required? What about overtime?
- ! Describe a typical career path in this field.
- ! If you would move up from your current position, what is a logical next step?
- ! What courses are most important for someone entering this field?
- ! What types of organizations would hire people to do what you do?
- ! In addition to my education, what should I be doing to prepare for a career in this field?
- ! What is the job outlook in this field?
- ! What are the most significant changes facing your field/organization today?
- ! Is advanced education beneficial in this field? Is it necessary? What degrees are most helpful?
- ! What would be an example of an entry level position in this field?
- ! What skills would you be looking for in a candidate for an entry level position?
- ! Are there professional publications or organizations that I should be familiar with if I want to enter this field?
- ! What other job opportunities are open to someone with your experience?
- ! What would be an average starting salary in this field? (General salary questions are fine, but questions about the host's own salary are inappropriate.)
- ! Can you recommend additional people for me to talk to?

If you end each networking contact with the last question above, you can see how your list of 75 will quickly grow to 150 and even more people. It is critical to your success to have a system to track who you met, when and how, the outcome and your action steps. Creating a database is very effective (then you can merge addresses into your letters, etc.), but you can also create an index card or 3-ring binder system. If you are a MULES portfolio user, you can enter the information into the "Networking" section. There is no right or wrong way to organize your contacts, as long as you keep them organized. (See Sample C)

Remember you are conducting an information interview and your objective is to gather information while sharing enough information about yourself for the host to help you. It is reasonable to expect to learn about the individual's job, career path, field of work, and organization. The host may go above and beyond the call of duty by asking if there is any other way to help you. If so, it would be fine to explain that you would like advice in identifying summer internship or job opportunities in this field or to ask for comments on your resume. It is NOT appropriate to ask for a job. The fastest way to lose a networking contact is to abuse a networking contact!

Follow Up

Always follow-up your interview with a thank you letter. If you spend a significant amount of time with more than one person during an office visit, each person should receive a separate letter. With that in mind, don't forget to ask for business cards from people you meet.

Communication is the key to successful networking, and you never know when you might get a break. Always remember to report back to your contacts when you follow their advice, make contact with someone to whom you were referred, or when you are successful in obtaining a job or internship. It is always nice to let people know how they helped and that you are willing to help them should the occasion arise (believe it or not, it will).

SAMPLE TELEPHONE OPENING (Sample A)

When somebody in the organization answers the phone,

"Hello, may I please speak to Ms. Alumna?" or "Hello, this is Art Wilson calling from Muhlenberg College. Is Ms. Alumna available?"

Once you reach the person with whom you would like to meet, be prepared to quickly explain why you are calling and how she can help you.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Alumna. My name is _____ and I am a Muhlenberg College student considering a career in advertising. I got your name from the Muhlenberg Career Network as someone who volunteered to help students. Would you be willing to meet with me for 20 or 30 minutes for an information interview so I can learn more about your position as Account Executive?"

SAMPLE TELEPHONE OPENING FOLLOWING A LETTER (Sample B)

Once you reach the person with whom you would like to meet, be prepared to quickly explain why you are calling and how she can help you.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Alumna. My name is _____ and I am a Muhlenberg College student considering a career in advertising. I am calling to follow up on my recent letter requesting about a half hour of your time to learn more about your position as Account Executive at Ogilvy & Mather. Have you received my letter?"

When making the arrangements for the visit, be as flexible as possible.

"Although I do not live in New York, I can make arrangements to be available at your convenience. Is there a date and time that would be best for you?"

If you will only be in the area for a short time, suggest possible dates, but be understanding if the person is unavailable at that time.

"Although I live in Miami, I will be in New York City for my sister's graduation during the week of May 15. Would it be possible to meet that week?"

SAMPLE INDEX CARD (FOR FILE SYSTEM) (Sample C)

Name: _____	Contact: <i>(Friend, alumnus/a, former employer, etc.)</i>
Company: _____	e-mail: _____
Address: _____	
Phone: _____	FAX: _____
CONTACT INFORMATION:	
Date: _____	Format: <i>(phone call, letter sent/received, visit, etc.)</i>
Notes: _____	

Action Taken: _____	
Next Step: _____	

SAMPLE WRITTEN REQUEST FOR INFORMATION INTERVIEW
(Sample D)

832 West Pond Road
Milton, NJ 91000
September 3, 2000

Dr. Rudolph Ehrenberg
Dean of Students
Muhlenberg College
2400 Chew Street
Allentown, PA 18104

Dear Dr. Ehrenberg,

Recently I heard about the innovative programs and student focus that have made Muhlenberg College the "caring college." A friend of mine, Justin Block, attends Muhlenberg and told me that you are one of the most respected administrators at the College. My career goal is to become a college administrator. I am in the process of investigating this career field and I would like to speak with you about your position. Would you be willing to meet with me for a brief information interview?

While at Shippensburg University I have been integrally involved in the administration of the college by serving as Treasurer of Student Government and as my class president. My biggest accomplishment was researching and modifying the college policy that regulates fraternity events on campus. My enclosed resume highlights some of my other achievements and skills.

Working to improve the college environment is challenging and rewarding and I think it would be an exciting career field. I look forward to the opportunity to meet you and talk to you about your career. I will call you in the next week to discuss this and, hopefully, to set an appointment with you.

Sincerely,

Joe Q. Student

Enclosure

NETWORK! NETWORK! NETWORK!

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Company: _____ Title: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ FAX: _____ E-mail: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Date: _____ Format: (phone call, letter)

Notes: _____

Action Taken: _____

Next Step: _____

Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Company: _____ Title: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ FAX: _____ E-mail: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Date: _____ Format: (phone call, letter)

Notes: _____

Action Taken: _____

Next Step: _____
