

Networking During Graduate School: Where to Connect & What to Say

The art of building meaningful professional connections

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Learning to broaden your network



- ▶ Networking, much like graduate school, is an investment in your career
- ▶ Fortunately, graduate students are in the ideal environment to hone networking skills and foster new connections that can benefit their career for years to come
- ▶ From classmates and professors to alumni and industry professionals, you're surrounded by countless like-minded people during your graduate studies, offering you an increased opportunity to connect
- ▶ It's never too early to start
 - ▶ Gradually branch out until you're comfortable contacting anyone online or in-person
- ▶ Your biggest opportunities will likely come from 1:1 connections

[Networking Tips for Graduate Students - Northeastern Graduate School](#)

WHAT Exactly Is Networking?

Networking is:

- ▶ Connecting with others to gather and share information
- ▶ Interacting through a relational — NOT a transactional — approach.
- ▶ A critical aspect of career exploration

Networking is NOT:

- ▶ asking for an internship or job.

PRO TIP:

Nearly 70% of individuals are hired by companies where they have a personal or professional connection (according to LinkedIn).

This is the HIDDEN JOB MARKET.

Networking allows you to learn:

- ▶ Trends within fields
- ▶ Personal career journeys (such as someone's post-college transition)
- ▶ Insights into organizations or companies (like workplace culture)
- ▶ Job search resources and interview practices
- ▶ Strategies for achieving your goals and roadblocks/hurdles to consider



How to Connect Authentically

Networking conversations can also open your eyes to career fields and jobs that you may not have considered.

Approach conversations with curiosity and an open mind to connect in an authentic and meaningful way.



WHO to Network With

- ▶ Peers
 - ▶ Classmates in your program/cohort
 - ▶ Fellow students further along in their degrees
 - ▶ In other related graduate programs at URI
 - ▶ Students you meet at conferences and events, or virtually through social media
- ▶ Professors
- ▶ Mentors (assigned or chosen)
- ▶ Alumni
- ▶ Professional Organizations (ALA, IEEE, ACS, AAAS) and Affinity Groups (athletic, social, cultural)
- ▶ LinkedIn Groups
- ▶ Those in positions you envision yourself in upon graduation or later in your career

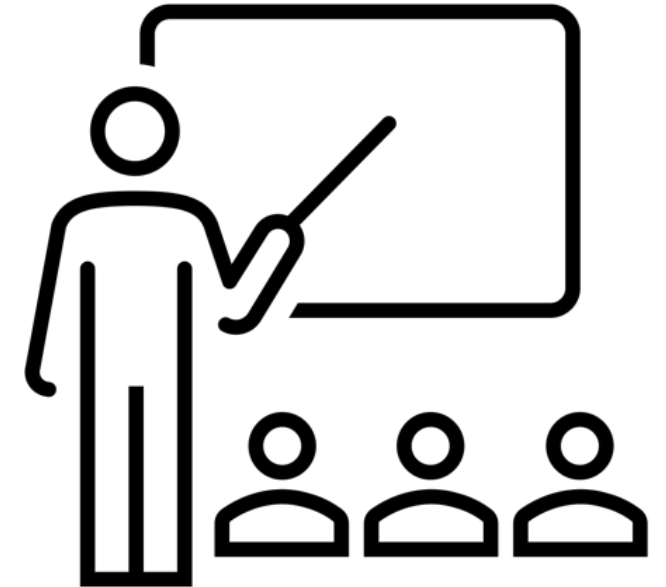


Request an
Informational
Interview

In the Classroom & on Campus

Build personal relationships with Professors, Administrators, Peers

- ▶ **Professors** can offer skills and industry expertise, and connections
 - ▶ Reach out and get to know them beyond class – office hours or meeting for informal chat over coffee (even Zoom coffee!)
 - ▶ Seek out feedback and advice
 - ▶ Express your career goals so they can keep you in mind for any job openings they hear of (IDPs can be good for this!)
- ▶ During class, remain actively engaged, asking and answering questions and showing genuine interest makes a positive impression on professors and peers
- ▶ **Capitalize on connections in your Department or Grad School**
 - ▶ Seek alumni contacts or advanced students in your program
 - ▶ Find out about opportunities, recommendations, and contacts
- ▶ Stay on the lookout for university events and lectures to attend, or clubs to join, Attend Handshake Events



Informal
Networking

Beyond Campus. Connecting with New People – Know Your “WHY”

- ▶ Start by clarifying your goals and objectives for wanting to connect.
 - Curious about exploring careers
 - Considering internship and wonder about fit
 - Interested in a specific career and want an insider’s perspective to determine if your understanding of the work is accurate.
 - Moving after graduation and want to understand market and how to find opportunities in that area.
 - Preparing for an interview in a certain career field and want insight and advice from someone who’s been through the same interview process before.



Formal
Networking

As you reach out, begin to cultivate a robust presence online

- ▶ Put your best professional foot forward when making virtual connections
- ▶ After you reach out to people, they're going to search for information on you
 - ▶ The worst thing that can happen is that they search your name, and nothing professional comes up
 - ▶ Don't risk coming across as unimportant or even a risk
 - ▶ Build your online presence by creating professional social media accounts
- ▶ Keep your online presence active and up-to-date
 - ▶ Make sure your LinkedIn page includes:
 - ▶ Tasteful photo and cover
 - ▶ Personal summary
 - ▶ Overview of your skills
- ▶ Be mindful of your *entire* online presence
- ▶ Leverage platforms as a tool to showcase your work and accomplishments
- ▶ Engage with your university and your field on social media (Twitter, Instagram)
 - ▶ Stay current on local events, alumni stories, and funding opportunities
- ▶ Follow leaders in your field on Twitter and Join Groups on LinkedIn
 - ▶ Engage in meaningful conversations happening in real-time

HOW to connect. Message via email or on LinkedIn



Keep it short and make it easy for them
to say yes

4-5 sentences

Convey warmth without being superfluous

Personalized to the particular contact

Highlight exactly why you want to connect with them
specifically

Request an opportunity to meet or Zoom



Include:

Formal greeting

Brief introduction

How you found their contact and why they're on your
radar

Ask for a short meeting

Thank them for their time

Formal closing

LinkedIn invitation Request Example

- ▶ When requesting to connect, write a **personal invitation** – proven to give you a greater chance of having your invitations accepted than using the default.
- ▶ Personal Invitation Components:
 - ❑ How you know them, know about them, or found them
 - ❑ Identify commonalities
 - ❑ Tell who you are and why you'd like to connect
 - ❑ Warm, polite end note

“Dear Mr. Smith,

It was great reading about you in *Power Train* monthly magazine. My MS studies at URI are focused on power train engineering, and I'd very much like to continue to follow your work and connect with you on LinkedIn.

Thank you,

Joe Student”



WHAT to Say: Connecting with New People on LinkedIn

- ▶ I see that you're a fellow UConn Husky. I'm really impressed with your work and accomplishments and would very much like to learn more about your career path. I hope you'll consider connecting.
- ▶ I'm in my 2nd year of a master's program at University of Rhode Island studying [X], and I would really appreciate connecting with you to learn more about your work and career.
- ▶ I am a fellow member of the _____LinkedIn group, and I appreciated your comments about _____. I hope we can connect and possibly speak about it further.
- ▶ I was just reading your blog and really liked your post about _____. I really appreciate your thoughts on _____. Please accept my request to connect.



How to Write a Cold Email

How to Write a Cold Email, Yale Campus Press, 2015

1) Exude a friendly personality.

- ▶ You can begin your email with well wishes: *"Dear Dr. Z, I hope this message finds you doing well."*
- ▶ *"Dear Mr. Doe, I hope you had a wonderful holiday season."*
- ▶ End with a warm touch. *"Thank you in advance for your time. I hope you have a moment to enjoy the beautiful weather this weekend!"*
- ▶ *"Enjoy a much-needed break with your family, and I look forward to hearing from you after the holiday season!"*
- ▶ *"I appreciate your time and consideration on the matter. I'm looking forward to your response."*

2) Use flattery and effusive praise.

- ▶ *"As a successful entrepreneur who has started and sold numerous companies, we would love for you to join our esteemed panel for a discussion on biotech start-ups at the upcoming Biomedical Careers Fair."*
- ▶ *"We received rave reviews from those who attended your Small Group Discussion, and, as such, we would love to feature you in our upcoming Newsletter to share your experiences with those who were unable to attend your discussion."*

3) Validate/Justify Your Email.

- ▶ *"As a PhD in _____ at URI interested in transitioning from academia into biotech, I was wondering if you'd be willing to share with me your experiences making a similar transition. I would be glad to meet over Zoom sometime in the next few weeks, at your convenience."*

4) Establish a connection.

- ▶ *"I work with Bob Smith in the Department of Chemistry, and he mentioned that you used to work in the same graduate lab. Based on my interests in transitioning from academia to Publishing, he suggested I speak with you about how you successfully made the transition."*
- ▶ *"As a fellow PhD graduate in Biochemistry from URI, I was hoping to get your advice on XYZ."*

5) Make it convenient for them.

- ▶ *"I would love to speak with you about transitioning from academia to science policy, I am glad to accommodate your schedule for an in-person via Zoom."*

6) Use an Enticing Subject Line.

Informational interviewing

- ▶ **Interested in a career outside of academia?**
 - ▶ It can be difficult to make the leap to a non-faculty career without knowing what to expect next
- ▶ Conducting informational interviews with individuals employed in areas where you might want to work after graduating can be helpful to gain insight into new fields
- ▶ **What it is:**
 - ▶ Short (15-45 minute), informal conversations (more relaxed setting than a traditional interview)
 - ▶ Opportunity to gather information on a position or company that you're interested in
 - ▶ Another way to research and expand your contacts beyond academia
 - ▶ A way to show your interest and talk about career goals (potentially with those responsible for hiring decisions)
- ▶ **What it is not:**
 - ▶ A job interview
 - ▶ An opportunity to ask for a job
- ▶ **Identify who you would like to speak with**
 - ▶ Alumni can be great contacts here
 - ▶ Cast a wide net if you have diverse interests
 - ▶ Seek out professionals working in areas that interest you (perhaps government, non-profit, or industry)
 - ▶ You will generate networking contacts that may be beneficial in the future, even if they don't immediately lead you towards a next step in your career path

Example email/LinkedIn template requesting Informational Interview

Dear Ms. Finance,

I will be graduating with an MBA degree from the University of Rhode Island in May 2021, and I have a previous work background in finance. I came across your LinkedIn profile while researching banking positions in the Boston area. I see you have built a successful career in investment banking after graduating from URI, and I would love to ask you a few questions about your career path and how you got to where you are today.

Would you have time for a quick 20-minute meeting via Zoom in the next few weeks?

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Name

Setting up an informational interview

- ▶ Connecting with a LinkedIn contact to request an introduction:

- ▶ Ideal or starting introductions quickly and credibly

Dear Dr. X,

I am a X year PhD Student at UConn studying Y, and I am starting to explore careers outside of academia. I am conducting informational interviews to learn more about these potential opportunities. After doing some of my own research, I found fields 1, 2, and 3 of interest to me. I saw that Person X was in your professional network and was wondering if you wouldn't mind introducing me to that person so that I could conduct an informational interview? I would greatly appreciate it. Thanks for your time.

Regards,

X

- ▶ LinkedIn cold call:

Hi Dr. X,

As I searched for '____ (position)' in the Boston-area on LinkedIn, your name appeared. I was wondering if you would be willing to conduct an informational interview? The ____ track is a career I am interested in pursuing and I was hoping to learn more about it. If you would be willing to meet in person that would be much appreciated. I am currently a PhD graduate student at _____. I have several questions about whether this position might be a good transition from research into _____. I look forward to hearing from you. Thanks for your time.

Regards,

X

Networking Email

Subject line: Request for career transition guidance from a URI Ph.D. student

Dear Dr. Smith,

I hope this message finds you well. I am a Ph.D. candidate in chemical engineering at URI. As I am planning to defend my dissertation next spring, I'm currently exploring my next career step after URI and hoping to learn more about technical consulting. I found your information through a web search and noticed you've been with [company name] since you graduated. I would appreciate the opportunity to learn more about your transition from Ph.D. to work and experience at [company name] as well as any advice you could share with me. If time allows on your end, I was wondering if I could schedule a time to speak with you for about 20 minutes over Zoom or phone.

I'd be happy to provide any further information that would be helpful. Thank you in advance for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Justin Rhody

LinkedIn Message

Dear Mr. / Ms. [Name],

I am a Ph.D. student at University of Rhode Island studying _____ with research experience in _____. I found your contact information via LinkedIn. I am interested in the [Industry Name] industry, and specifically [More Specific Subset of Industry]. I know you are busy and I appreciate the value of your time, so I would be grateful if you had any availability for a brief informational interview in the next two weeks. I am eager to learn more about your experiences in the Department of ____ at URI and your current role at [Company Name].

I am available on [Propose 2- 3 dates and times], please let me know if one these times suits your schedule.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

Email - Referral

- ▶ Subject line: Referral from (Name)

Dear Dr. (Last Name),

Dr. X, my Psychology professor, has encouraged me to reach out to you to learn more about your work at (Organization Name). I'm interested in nonprofits and in particular those related to mental health counseling. I read your biography online and am interested in learning more about your transition from client services to development.

I would appreciate it if you had 20 minutes to speak with me via Zoom at your convenience. I know I would benefit from hearing about your experiences. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Networking Email:

Subject line: Request for a brief chat for start-up career exploration from a URI graduate student

Dear Dr. Rossi,

I'm a second-year Ph.D. student in Marine Affairs at URI. I am curious about career opportunities beyond academia, especially related to _____. Recently, I conducted some alumni career searches via LinkedIn and found your profile. Your career journey from being a Marine Affairs student at URI to becoming a founder of a startup working on _____ is inspiring and admirable. As a head of URI's Society of Women in Marine Science, I am eager to learn more about your graduate experiences and your current role at [company name]. I know you are very busy but I would truly appreciate it if you had any availability for a brief chat via phone anytime next month.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I am glad to provide additional information about my background. hope to have the opportunity to connect with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Cassie Conservation

HOW to conduct an informational interview

- ▶ Do your homework. Research the person and the employer. Prepare questions, but let the conversation flow naturally – let them do most of the talking
 - ▶ What initially drew them to the field
 - ▶ How they envision the future of their industry (including job prospects)
 - ▶ What a typical work week looks like
 - ▶ Work/life balance
 - ▶ Which skills they cultivated during their graduate education that they have found to be most valuable
 - ▶ Additional training
 - ▶ Any collaboration with other organizations or departments
 - ▶ What they like most about their current role
- ▶ You can (politely) ask about money
 - ▶ “What is a representative pay range for this position?”
- ▶ ***Before you wrap up – ask who they suggest you contact next to learn more!***
 - ▶ Gain a few different perspectives and build up contacts
 - ▶ Would your interviewee be willing to send you this person’s contact info or write an introductory email?
 - ▶ You can always follow up with more specific questions in a future email or set up another follow up meeting in a few months
- ▶ **Don’t forget to follow up with a thank-you**



Pointers:

- ▶ Pointers:
- ▶ **1)** Don't dress like a graduate student, even on Zoom. Wear what you would wear if you were working for the place! Dress shirt. No suit and a tie. This isn't a job interview.
- ▶ **2)** Smile when you meet the person and tell them upfront that you appreciate their time (and that it means a lot to you).
- ▶ **3) Respect their time. Via Zoom, 20-30 mins.**

Informational Interview

Develop a set of questions:

What do you want to know about the company, position, industry, or how that particular person made the jump from a grad student to having this career path?

- ▶ What skills that you cultivated during your graduate education have been the most valuable while working at company X?
- ▶ Are the jobs prospects for this field or industry growing?
- ▶ Do you get to collaborate with other departments, companies, or organizations?
- ▶ What do you like most about your current job?
- ▶ How has your work/life balance changed since leaving graduate school for position X?
- ▶ What's a typical work week look like for you?
- ▶ **You CAN ask about money:** Polite questions about pay levels are also appropriate in this venue You can always ask "what is a representative pay range for this position" if you are worried about being too forward.



Info Interview Questions or Questions for People You Meet at Conferences in Your Field

- ▶ **1)** What helped you in preparing yourself to be a ___?
 - ▶ (if they transitioned away from the lab bench asked them HOW they did it. Did they do an internship? How did they make themselves stand out from the crowd? Did they have a unique experience, develop a marketable skill set and how, or did they get their foot in the door through a network contact?)
- ▶ **2)** Which of my skills would be important for me to highlight in order to be an attractive option to companies that are looking for ___?
- ▶ **3)** What would it be like working for your company? How do you think your company culture would change if your company was bigger or smaller in size? (get a feel for the relative growth of the company)
- ▶ **THE BIGGEST TWO QUESTIONS:**
- ▶ **1)** Would it be alright if I sent you my resume so that you could provide feedback as to how I can improve it for companies looking for ___? Or help me better highlight my strengths for this particular position? (don't stutter on this one-ask it at the very end in a **very confident manner** as a means to get feedback/help)
- ▶ **2)** Who else do you know that I could speak to about this? May I please have their contact information? Would you mind introducing them to me?

More Info Interview Questions. Choose Just Some.

Career Questions:

Which jobs and experiences have been most helpful in preparing you for your current position?

▶ Would you describe your tasks or projects that require creativity? (Substitute a skill or interest of yours. e.g., analytical thinking, quantitative aptitude, relationship building)

▶ Which particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job?

▶ How would you describe your environment and the people with whom you work?

▶ Are there trends or changes in your industry that you foresee?

▶ Will my education prepare me for a job in your field? If not, how can I improve my candidacy?

Job Search Questions:

▶ Which strategies would you recommend for getting a job in your field?

▶ Which skills are the most important to highlight during my job search?

▶ If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate: Would you mind taking a look at my resume?

Two Golden Questions:

▶ If you were in my position, with an interest in _____, what steps would you take today?

▶ Based on my interest in _____, who else should I be talking to?

Perfect your elevator pitch

- ▶ Be prepared to capitalize on brief encounters with new acquaintances and potential employers
- ▶ Practice giving a short explanation consisting of:
 - ▶ The kind of work you're doing
 - ▶ Your professional interests
 - ▶ What you hope to accomplish in the next phase of your career
 - ▶ A brief explanation of your past experience



More on
WHERE to
Connect:

Reach out to
your favorite
authors or
presenters

Find

Find the email addresses of the authors of your favorite peer-reviewed journal articles



Show

Show them some appreciation

- Tell them what you liked about their article
- Ask an insightful question

WHERE to Connect:

Make the most of events, even virtual ones!

- ▶ Conferences, seminars, and trainings are excellent opportunities to mingle with others in the field and practice expanding connections beyond the university
- ▶ Look beyond campus for industry events or speakers in the local community
 - ▶ If you plan to relocate after graduation, be strategic about finding virtual events in these areas
- ▶ Always do your research before attending: who will be there?
 - ▶ If there's someone you're interested in meeting, contact them beforehand and arrange to meet, or follow up afterwards with an email
 - ▶ Locate their bios and articles, learn more by searching their LinkedIn and Twitter profiles
 - ▶ If in person or in a breakout room, you may only get 30 seconds to interact with this person
 - ▶ make it count by discussing a very tailored question or topic based on your research
 - ▶ or simply pay them a compliment and connect on LinkedIn or send an email
- ▶ Come to each event with one question that is useful to the audience but will also give the presenter a chance to look good and show off their knowledge
- ▶ Arrive a little early and plan to stick around through Q&As to talk to people around you

Following up after seminars, conferences (yes, even virtual ones!)



Make notes after an event

What you talked about
How you remember them



After large events,
including virtual events,
create a spreadsheet to
keep track of everyone's
names, company, date,
and discussion topics



If you made a good initial
connection, follow up with
an email and connect with
them on LinkedIn



Continue to keep in touch

Send them a quick message to see
if they're going to the next annual
conference

Or congratulate them on a new
publication

Establishing strong relationships

- ▶ Be a resource to others
 - ▶ Share your time and knowledge with fellow students
 - ▶ Organize a study group
 - ▶ Forward relevant articles
- ▶ Be mindful of others' career goals
 - ▶ Offer to make an introduction on a peer's behalf
 - ▶ You may even inspire your connections to reciprocate the favor in the future
- ▶ Demonstrate that you value your connection to others



Maintaining effective professional connections

- ▶ Stay in touch – follow up consistently
- ▶ It takes work!
 - ▶ It's essential that you are proactive in sustaining the relationships you make during grad school so they don't dissolve over time
 - ▶ It's really all about *giving* – this will make the ask easier (or they will think of you when they have something of value to offer)
 - ▶ Email them every periodically - send articles of interest, or things that could help build their career, reputation, or network
- ▶ Continue to ask for guidance

