

Using LinkedIn to Network with Professionals

LinkedIn is a professional networking site designed to help you connect with alumni and other professionals in industries and organizations that relate to your career and academic interests. Think of LinkedIn as a professional Facebook. Students often use Facebook to interact with friends and find others with similar social interests. LinkedIn is a place to share interests, ask questions, and network with professionals from a wide range of job titles and industries.

As a college student or recent alumnus/alumna, you can use LinkedIn to:

- Build your professional network
- Connect to alumni and other professionals in industries and organizations that interest you
- Learn about current trends in fields that interest you
- Know your strongest skills. Please refer to NACE Career Ready Skills Handout for information on what skills employers look for

Getting Started

1. Create your profile and post updates
2. Join groups that interest you and comment appropriately
3. Populate your profile with connections and recommendations

Once you complete these three steps, LinkedIn will become a powerful tool for you to learn about careers and to find a job or internship. Check out http://help.linkedin.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/530 for more information on how to maximize your LinkedIn account.

1. Create Your Profile and Post Updates

Your profile should demonstrate the knowledge and skills you have developed that relate to your professional interests. It should only include information relevant to your job and internship search, much like a conversation at a networking event. Your major, internship/work experience, class projects, honors, and student activities are all relevant, but other information such as the year you were born, marital status, or address is not.

Professional Headline: The headline, along with your name, is the first thing people will see. This can be your job title or a short phrase that sums up your professional “identity.” The Career Center recommends that you use a short phrase that highlights your career objective along with your skills, interests and experiences.

Example:

- Recent grad with experience creating marketing campaigns for Fortune 100 companies. Proven leader with experience in designing biomedical devices and providing customer service

Photo: This is the first image an employer or alumnus will have of you. As a college student or recent alumnus/alumna, your photo needs to project a mature and professional image. Take a photo in business attire and don't use an image that requires you to crop someone out of the photo.

Summary: This should outline the key skills and experience that are relevant to the industry or career field that interests you. Areas to focus on include: professional interests, strengths/accomplishments, extracurricular activities, community involvement, leadership experience, relevant work experience or coursework.

Education: Include your major(s), minor(s) and concentration(s) if relevant to your professional goals. Typically, many students do not include their GPA. Highlight any academic honor societies in the "Honors" section.

Experience: Think of all your experiences that are relevant to your career goals. Paid experiences aren't the only thing that should be included. In fact, if your volunteer and/or extracurricular experiences are more relevant to your internship/career objective, then describe those in this section.

Posting Updates: One of the great features about LinkedIn is that you can post updates to your network. You will want to post an update at least once a week. Try posting an article or Web site that is relevant to your industry. Be generous to your network and share updates that are relevant and timely.

2. Join Groups and Comment Appropriately

By joining groups, you can interact with individuals who have similar interests, attended similar schools, or who have similar career objectives. It is a quick way to connect to a number of individuals while you build your individual connections. It allows you to discover current trends and issues within a particular career field. Best of all, by joining a group, you have access to job listings posted by group members that may not be posted elsewhere.

Network with Alumni: Start by joining groups related to your university/college: Towson University Professional Network and Towson University.

Connect with others with shared interests: Do a keyword search in the "Groups" directory (found under "Interests" > "Groups" > "Groups You May Like" > "More") to find other groups related to industry/career fields, student groups, honor societies, professional organizations, and other interests.

Once you are a member of a group, post relevant articles, ask questions and comment within these groups to raise your professional profile.

3. Populate Your Profile with Connections

The more people you have in your network, the easier it is to connect to others in a variety of industries and locations. You should start by connecting with five people you know. This number should grow as you start using the system.

Start Connecting: LinkedIn will suggest people to add to your network, but it's important that you seek out people you know to add to your network:

- Search for people you already know by name
- Find other people by using the Advanced People Search. Search on school, keywords, current and past employers, and fields
- Find other alumni from your major or who work in an industry you are interested in by using the search engine here: www.linkedin.com/alumni.

Potential people in your network:

- College and high school classmates
- Faculty members
- Advisors for student organizations
- Supervisors and co-workers (present and past)
- Alumni
- Friends of parents or relatives
- Student organizations/honor societies
- Volunteer groups
- Teammates
- Professional associations

Now What?

Once you've created your profile and added connections, you're done, right? Not quite. You should check your LinkedIn at least once a week, try to post updates regularly, and continually reach out to professionals you might be interested in getting to know.

To have a LinkedIn consultation, please call the Career Center to make an appointment, (410) 704- 2233.

Quick Tips for Contacting Alumni with LinkedIn

Networking with alumni is about building relationships and connections in a purposeful, organized way. Networking is not about asking alumni for jobs, but asking for assistance. When you contact alumni to network, it should be to seek out and gather information about careers that interest you. Your questions should focus on asking for advice or assistance based on that purpose. Remember, it is essential that you be informed, confident, and polite throughout this process.

Alumni assist students by providing:

- Information about their company or organization
- Information and advice about a career field or industry
- Referrals to other professionals in their industry or organization
- Consideration for an internship or job opportunity at their organization.

You can connect directly with individuals or go through groups on LinkedIn. In your email or message, state how you are connected and describe who you are. Communicate your objective (i.e., learn about their industry/field/organization and/or get advice on the job search process or preparing for an interview).

Example:

"I found your profile through the Towson University alumni group on LinkedIn. I am a senior history major at Towson. I am very interested in pursuing a career in consulting. Would you be willing to discuss what you do and what recommendations you would have for someone with a social science background looking to enter consulting? We can discuss this via email or phone, whichever is more convenient for you. I look forward to hearing from you."

Sample Questions to Ask Alumni

- What recommendations would you have for someone looking to enter the industry?
- What skills are required? What are the typical entry channels?
- What types of extracurricular and internship experience would best prepare me for a career in this industry?
- I am interested in your organization or industry. What skills and experiences would help me stand out as an applicant?
- Since I am interested in this industry, what are the key companies, organizations and professional associations that I should know about? Are there other alumni or colleagues that you recommend I talk to?

Sample Questions to Ask Alumni Groups:

- How can students find summer internships in your field? Are there other means of gaining experience before graduation?
- What abilities are important for success in your field? What personality traits or characteristics are important? What is the skill set that an employer in your field would look for in a new hire?
- What advice do you have for students who are preparing to enter your field?
- What related occupations and industries might I explore? What other fields could you see yourself moving into?
- Where can someone in an entry-level position expect to be in 2, 5 or 10 years?