NETWORKING
and
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Prepared by the Office of Career Services

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What is NETWORKING?

NETWORKING refers to the process of identifying and contacting individuals who may be able to provide you with information, advice, or job leads and/or the names of other individuals who may be able to provide you with such information. INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING is a type of networking.

Networking and informational interviewing are proactive strategies for developing personal and professional relationships/connections to gather information and gain exposure. If done properly, they can lead to job opportunities and long-term relationships.

Many of us are used to asking people for information or referrals for a good restaurant or a lead on an apartment or used car. You may have conducted informational interviews when deciding whether to go to law school or whether to select Northeastern. However, many people feel less comfortable engaging in these activities when it relates to looking for a job. With a little guidance and encouragement, we know that you can muster the confidence to conduct productive informational interview and networking meetings -- essential tools for an effective job search.

Why Is Networking So Important?

Networking and informational interviewing are critical to the job search process because most people still get their jobs through some kind of personal connection. Over the past few years, nationwide, approximately 40% of law school graduates have gotten their first job through self-initiated efforts, including referrals by friends and colleagues; and an even greater percentage have gotten subsequent jobs through informal networks. You cannot rely solely on formal recruitment programs and job advertisements to get a job because these positions only represent a portion of the employment opportunities available. Networking and informational interviewing may not lead to a job immediately, but they help you plant the seeds for future opportunities.

The Benefits

The benefits of networking and informational interviewing are countless.

- You will learn a great deal about yourself, get greater focus / clarity with respect to your job search, and gain increased knowledge of the job market.
- You will gather first-hand information on particular firms, organizations or companies, practice areas or industries.
The personal connections you will develop, as well as the information you will acquire, can give you access to the “hidden job market” (the jobs that are not advertised) and a distinct advantage when applying to jobs that are advertised.

The interpersonal and client development skills you will gain are skills that you will need as a lawyer/professional.

You may develop ongoing relationships with individuals who may become mentors, advisors, referral sources, colleagues or friends. These contacts can also be a source of support and guidance during your job search.

Some Ways to Network

Start conducting informational interviews with alumni/ae and others. For more information, see Informational Interviewing below.

Join a bar association – student memberships are generally inexpensive. Some bar associations have networking events, and some have mentoring groups. Joining a section related to an area of interest and attending meetings and volunteering to work on a bar-related project can also lead to valuable professional connections.

Continuing Legal Education programs generally offer student discounts, as well as scholarships for their educational programming. This can be a great way to meet attorneys in your intended field.

Social Networking – Facebook and LinkedIn can be useful tools to find attorneys in your field. There is a NUSL group on LinkedIn, which is searchable by keyword. Remember to keep your profiles on these (and other) social networking sites professional. Potential colleagues and employers often use these sites as a way to gather information about people. Make sure you are giving a professional impression at all times and think about how to use these tools to market yourself.

Twitter allows its users to create lists, which other people can then join. There are lists in existence that cater specifically to lawyers in a certain geographic region or you could start your own list. This is another way to make connections with lawyers in your area. If someone on the list says something that catches your attention, you are able to write back and engage them in conversation. There are at least three lists in existence for Massachusetts lawyers: Boston Law Lawyer List (http://twitter.com/fund_raise2010/boston-law-lawyer-list), MA Attorney List (http://twitter.com/dgvelaw/ma-attys), and Mass Law List (http://twitter.com/kate_otoole/mass-law).

Volunteer Work – do part-time volunteer work in your field. This is a great way to meet people and get your name “out there.”

Law School Alumni events – Keep an eye out for networking events hosted by Northeastern’s Office of Development and Alumni Relations, including the annual “Connections” Program in February. This event is co-sponsored by Career Services
and the Alumni Office and is a great way to make a contact with an alumnus/a who shares your interests. As a Northeastern law school student or graduate, you are also a part of the larger Northeastern community and there may be events of interest to you sponsored by the main university.

**What is INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING?**

An **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW** is a research tool. When used in the job search process, informational interviewing is a way to learn about and explore career options.

You may want to meet with an individual who is knowledgeable about a particular type of legal or law-related work and ask that person for information about:

- what the work is like
- the type of training, skills and experience needed to obtain an entry-level position
- how to best market yourself for such a position
- the employment outlook for that type of work.
- for feedback on your resume and names of other people to contact.

However, you must be careful not to misuse these meetings. You need to be honest and sincere with the people you contact and make it clear that you are not setting up a meeting to ask them for a job but are seeking information about their field. Someone may be more willing to meet with you because they feel that they can offer you useful information even if they cannot offer you a job at that moment.

Whenever possible, informational interviews should be conducted in person (rather than just through e-mail correspondence or over the telephone). When someone meets you in person, they generally get a much better sense of who you are and become more engaged in trying to assist you.

**IDENTIFYING CONTACTS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING AND/OR NETWORKING**

**Start With People You Know**

The first step in conducting an informational interview or “networking” is making a list of people to contact. Everyone will be able to identify some initial contacts. These can include the following:

- Family members
- Friends/acquaintances
- Neighbors
- Current and former classmates
- Alumni/ae of your high school, undergraduate college, graduate school(s) and law school
- Faculty and administrators from your high school, undergraduate college, graduate school(s) and law school
- Former employers
Co-op employers (You may contact co-op employers for the purpose of obtaining information about their anticipated post-graduate hiring needs or to solicit the names of other employers to contact regarding post-graduate employment. However, because of the Non-Communication Rule, you may not apply to them for a co-op).

- Individuals you have met through your interests and hobbies
- Members of bar associations and other professional associations
- Professionals with whom you have had contact
- People with whom you or your family or friends do business
- Politicians who serve your community, city or state

Think About Who You Would Like To Know

- NUSL alumni/ae practicing in your intended field (or in an organization or geographic location that interests you). Career Services can help you identify the appropriate alumni/ae.
- Other attorneys in your intended field
- Attorneys in the news
- Individuals who have written articles that you have read or given presentations which you have attended

**PRE-CONTACT PREPARATION: FOCUS, CONFIDENCE, POSITIVE ENERGY**

In preparation for informational interviewing and networking, you should engage in self-assessment and reflection prior to contacting people. It is much easier for people to help you if you can give them a sense of who you are and what you want from them. You do not necessarily have to know exactly what you want to do but you should be able to articulate what you have enjoyed doing and why, what you think you may be interested in and why, and how they may be able to specifically help you.

Remember that these meetings are about developing authentic relationships as well as seeking assistance. The more genuine and focused you are, the easier it is for people to connect with you personally and provide meaningful assistance. When meeting with people, you need to be mindful of the attitude you wish to convey and the impression you want to leave. You have to be “real” and “true to yourself” but you should be your most confident, positive self. People are more likely to help people who are thoughtful, likeable and genuinely interested in the person they are meeting. People are not attracted to negativity, defensiveness, and insecurity.

**STRATEGIES FOR APPROACHING CONTACTS**

Try to be thoughtful and solicitous when approaching contacts for informational interviews and networking meetings. Since you are asking people who may be very busy for their time and assistance, be as clear as possible as to what you are looking for and always be respectful of their time.

*If the initial contact is in person* – If you run into someone with whom you want to “network” at a meeting, conference or presentation, you may want to take the opportunity to introduce
yourself and make the in-person connection. You should explain why you are approaching the person: It may be because you have a common connection (through a colleague, friend, professor), you just heard her speak, or read an article by or about the person. Ask her if she has a few moments to speak with you at that time or if you can arrange to meet with her at another time. If the person has time, try to solicit her advice, get information or referrals.

*If the initial contact is by letter or e-mail* – In most cases, it works best if the initial contact is written and most people use e-mail, followed up by a telephone call, if necessary. A written approach gives you the chance to be thoughtful in describing who you are and why you are contacting this person. It is also easier to make a follow-up telephone call if you are referring to a previous written correspondence.

**Pointers When Approaching Contacts:**

- When contacting someone you do not know, begin by stating how you obtained his name or by identifying the individual who referred you to him.

- Be clear and specific about the type of information you are seeking. You should be able to briefly summarize why you are contacting her and describe your skills and background. Ask if she has 15-20 minutes to meet to discuss her experiences in the field. Make it clear that you are seeking information and advice (and not a job).

- When e-mailing to set up an information interview, be careful not to ask too many or complex questions via e-mail. It can be onerous for the person trying to respond.

- If you telephone a contact, make sure that it is a convenient time for her to speak with you. If she indicates that she has a few moments to speak with you, briefly explain your purpose for calling and try to schedule a time to either meet or speak at a later date, if necessary.

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**SETTING THE AGENDA FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

Remember that since you are the one who initiated the informational interview, you must set the agenda. You need to share some information about yourself, be intellectually curious, positive and appreciative. It makes people feel good if they feel that they have helped you in some way. Be mindful of their time. It is always a plus if you leave the meeting with some names of other people to contact. If the person gives you names, ask if you can use the person’s name when following up with these contacts.

**Topics to Discuss During an Informational Interview:**

1. The person's daily responsibilities and what his/her typical work day is like.
2. How that person entered that job or career.
3. The types of skills and experience which would best prepare an individual for his/her job or career.
4. The aspects of the job and employer that the individual likes and dislikes the most.
5. The professional journals and newspapers which individuals involved in a particular job or career field read and the professional associations to which they belong.

6. New developments or trends in the career field of which you should be aware.

7. The employment outlook for individuals entering that particular job or career.

8. The types of qualifications employers look for when hiring new employees in that particular job or field.

9. The employer expectations and growth potential in that type of job or field.

10. Your resume and how to most effectively market yourself to employers in that particular job or field.

11. The names of other people whom you could contact who are knowledgeable about the job or field.

**Pointers for the Informational Interview:**

- When meeting with a contact, be conscious of the time. If you asked the individual to meet with you for 15 minutes and the meeting begins to exceed the time limit, indicate that you have already used 15 minutes of her time and do not take any additional time unless the contact agrees to spend more time with you.

- Ask a contact for advice, information and the names of other individuals who you can contact; do not ask for a job.

- Obtain permission from the contact to use her name when calling someone with whom she suggests you speak.

- Obtain permission from a contact to call him again to update her on your progress and to obtain additional advice.

- Be open to the advice or suggestions you receive. Do not reject or discount a contact's advice.

- Always let a contact know that he is welcome to call on you for assistance.

- Have reasonable expectations. Do not expect contacts to find you a job, call others for you, or be able to answer all your questions.

**FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

Because the job search requires keeping track and following-up on calls, meetings and letters, it is important that you stay organized. Keep a record! You should include the contact’s name, the date that you met or spoke, the information and names you obtained; your impressions, and what actions, if any, you took or plan to take with respect to the suggestions and/or information which you obtained. Use whatever organizational method works best for you but make sure that all of your
job search information is in one notebook file or excel spreadsheet and that you record information on a regular and timely basis.

In addition, be sure to write a thank you letter (within 24 – 48 hours) to someone who took the time to meet with you or assist you on the telephone. You may want to inform the contact of the outcome of any meetings or conversations you have with individuals whom the contact suggested that you call. The thank you letter can be typed, a handwritten notecard or an e-mail, depending upon your relationship with the person. When in doubt, err on being more formal.

Lastly, maintain contact with individuals in your Network. You may want to keep them posted on how your job search is going, particularly if the contact gave you advice or a contact that was particularly helpful. You should definitely let the contact know when you get a job. However, be careful not to cross the line between informative and appreciative and being a nuisance.

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**COMMON OBSTACLES TO CONDUCTING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

- **I feel uncomfortable asking others for help.**

  While it may feel somewhat uncomfortable to ask others for help, very few people, if any, find a job without the help, indirect or direct, of others. Moreover, asking for help is not perceived by others as a weakness, and if you ask for help politely it is not viewed as an imposition.

- **I am afraid that people will refuse to help.**

  If you are courteous in asking for assistance and you are clear about the type of information which you are requesting, most people whom you ask for information on job leads or for the names of other individuals to contact for additional information will do the best they can to assist you.

  It is inevitable, however, that you will encounter some people who are unwilling to help you - rejection is a natural part of the process. Often, however, individuals who "reject" you (refuse to meet or speak with you) do so not because they are unwilling to help, but because they are extremely busy or are unsure about what type of assistance you need or because they think you are seeking a job and there are no employment opportunities with their employer.

  If you make it clear immediately, in your letter or telephone call, that you are not seeking a job, but that you are instead seeking specific information, and if you are polite and considerate in the way in which you request their assistance, most individuals who you contact will agree to meet or speak with you.

- **It’s a better use of my time to be doing something more concrete, such as responding to job postings.**

  It’s easy to think that the internet contains every job posting, but that’s not the case. There are plenty of jobs that never get posted. Some employers use networking and referrals to find employees. Some employers may plan to post the job, but they never get around to it because they quickly hire someone who was recommended by one of their employers or colleagues.
Some employers aren’t positive they want to hire someone but are thinking about it. They may meet someone they click with and decide to hire them before they even think about posting a job.

In *Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams*, author Kimm Walton suggests that “for every hundred resumes you’d plan to send out, you’re better off making even one contact.” Mailing out resumes may feel more productive than making contacts. After all, mailing out resumes is quantifiable evidence of your job search and can be done quickly and painlessly, while making contacts may take longer and may not feel as concrete. But never underestimate the benefit of being a known quantity. An employer is likely to look more favorably on an applicant to whom she has a personal connection (directly or indirectly) than an applicant who is just one resume sitting in a pile of hundreds.

- **I am embarrassed about not having a job or not being sure about the type of job or career in which I am the most interested.**

Most individuals are aware that the legal job market is competitive and understand that many new graduates as well as experienced attorneys may have difficulty finding a position. As a result, most individuals are sympathetic and willing to offer job seekers advice and suggestions. In addition, most individuals have been unsure of their career interests and goals at one time or another in their lives, and have sought the advice and guidance of others. No one will be surprised that you are unsure about what type of law you want to practice or that you need to obtain additional information about different types of legal or law-related positions. Instead, most individuals will be impressed that you are taking the initiative to research your options.

- **I do not want to “use” people.**

If one of your friends called and told you that her niece was interested in applying to NUSL and asked you to speak to her about your experiences, would you feel used? Annoyed? Offended? Most of us are flattered when people ask us to share our experiences and opinions.

If you are sincere and considerate when you network and conduct informational interviews, you will not be "using" people. Most people find it extremely rewarding to help others. This should not be a one way relationship - try to think of some way you can be of help to those who help you. For example, if you discuss their work and later read an article that relates to your discussion, forward the article. Remember one day soon, you will be on the other side of the relationship and will be offering your advice and assistance to others.

- **I am shy and it is extremely difficult for me to approach someone in person or by telephone who I do not know well.**

It is generally more difficult for people who are introverts to make professional connections through networking. However, networking is a skill that can be learned and is essential for everyone during a job search.

Many people find it difficult to “work a room.” Everyone has to find their own way of making personal/professional connections. You may prefer arranging individual meetings, rather than
talking to people at an event. You may prefer initiating a contact through a written correspondence instead of the telephone.

You may want to do your initial networking by contacting people with whom you feel most comfortable, such as a former supervisors, professors, and neighbors and work up your confidence before you contact someone with whom you have a more tenuous connection. You may want to do a “mock” informational interview before you meet with someone.

If you’re still feeling uncomfortable or intimidated, try taking it one step at a time. Start with one phone call or one e-mail. Don’t try to tackle an entire bar association or alumni network all at once. Sometimes changing perspective and narrowing focus can make it easier to face our challenges.

The bottom-line is that even though this task is more difficult for some people than for others, it is one that may be necessary for your job search. People need to know themselves and figure out how to network in a way that honors who they are yet accomplishes the goal of developing professional connections.
Below are some sample letters to send to someone to set-up an informational interview. Many professionals advise that you **not** send a resume with these letters. This is because you do not want to send mixed messages about the fact that you are looking for a “connection” and not necessarily a job from the contact. If you want to send your resume because you feel it would give someone a good sense of your background, try to make it clear that that is why you are including it.

**Sample 1**

Dear ___________:  

I am currently a third-year student at Northeastern University School of Law, and I am contacting graduates who are doing trusts and estates work in order to learn about this type of practice. I was initially interested in doing corporate transactional work, and for the most part, I chose co-ops and courses to obtain knowledge and experience in that area. However, this quarter, I am taking a trusts and estates class which I am really enjoying, and it has made me interested in learning more about this practice area.

I had two years of work experience between college and law school working in a residential school for adults with developmental disabilities. When I went to law school, I felt “burnt out” from direct service work and was looking for a career change. I am now realizing that I miss working directly with clients and I am trying to find a way to combine my skills and interests.

I would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you for fifteen minutes to learn more about trusts and estates work and to get your guidance. I will be following up within the next week to see if we can set up an “informational interview.”

Thank you in advance for your time.
Dear ___________: 

(Co-op Employer Name) suggested that I contact you about my interest in labor/employment law. I am a graduate of Northeastern University School of Law and have two years experience doing general civil litigation in a small firm. I would like to set up an informational interview to talk to you about your practice. I have always been interested in labor and employment issues and would like to find out more about the field and what opportunities there may be for someone with my background.

I have had some exposure to the employment field. In my current job, I have represented several plaintiffs who have filed complaints with the MCAD and have drafted a summary judgement motion in a wrongful termination case. While at Northeastern, I took a number of labor and employment classes. I also had the opportunity to do some research and writing on labor and employment issues when I was on co-op with Mintz Levin. My other co-ops were as a judicial intern for Superior Court Judge Carol Ball, as a legal intern for Northeastern’s General Counsel’s Office and as a legal intern for Cetrulo and Capone.

I would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you for fifteen minutes to learn more about your work and to get your advice about entering the labor and employment field. I will be following up within the next week to see if we can set up a meeting.

Thank you in advance for your time.
Dear ______________:

I am currently a third year student at Northeastern and am planning to move to Chicago when I graduate. I am particularly interested in immigration law. I am contacting Northeastern graduates working in the Chicago area so that I can become more familiar with the legal landscape in Chicago and to get names of immigration lawyers/firms so that I can begin making some contacts in the field for my last co-op and for post-graduate opportunities. I would like to set up a time for a brief telephone conversation with you.

I am moving to Chicago because my partner recently accepted a job in the city. I have already completed three co-ops, working on immigration issues at Greater Boston Legal Services and at a small firm in Boston as well as a judicial intern for a Massachusetts state trial court judge. Prior to law school, I was a domestic violence advocate at a battered women’s shelter in Boston.

I will be visiting Chicago during the week of March 11th – March 15th and was wondering if you have any time available during that week to speak with me. Thank you in advance for your help.
Dear __________:

At the suggestion of __________, I am contacting you concerning my interest in finding out about opportunities working in the federal government. I am a graduate of Northeastern University School of Law with four years of litigation experience.

I have both private and public sector litigation experience. When I first graduated law school, I worked as an Assistant District Attorney for Suffolk County for two years. I worked in a number of courts, prosecuting minor felony cases. For the past two years, I have been working for a small firm, which represents plaintiffs in medical malpractice and product liability cases. While I have learned a great deal in my current position, I miss the satisfaction I had from doing public sector work. While most of my experience has been doing litigation, I am also very much interested in public policy. Therefore, I would be interested in finding out about policy-type positions that may or may not involve litigation.

I would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you for fifteen minutes to learn more about the types of opportunities that exist in the federal government for someone with my type of background, to get your advice about how to best market myself for such positions and to get names of other people that you think may be helpful to speak with. I will be following up within the next week to see if we can set up a meeting.

Thank you in advance for your time.
EXAMPLES FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING

**FACEBOOK**

When adding someone as a friend on Facebook for professional networking purposes, you should always add a personal message. The approach you take will likely depend on the connection you have to the person. If you are attempting to contact someone that you do not know, it may be helpful to keep the personal message short and to the point. After you receive a response from the person, then you may want to consider further communication or perhaps a request for an informational interview.

*Example:*

Dear __________,

I am a fellow NUSL grad (class of 2009), and I noticed that you are friends with my classmate Jane Doe. I am interested in connecting with other NUSL alumni, especially those working in the area of environmental law.

Best,

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**LINKEDIN**

When adding someone to your network, we recommend that you include a personal note, but we do not suggest that you use the impersonal default language suggested by LinkedIn. You should introduce yourself in way that is professional and succinct. After you receive a response, then you can consider further communication or perhaps a request for an informational interview.

*Example 1:*

Dear __________,

I am currently a student at NUSL (class of 2011). I see that you worked at the MA Attorney General’s Office. I just completed a co-op with their criminal division. I’d like to add you to my professional network.

Best,

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*Example 2:*

Dear __________,

You may recall that we met at the Massachusetts Bar Association networking event last week. I’m a fellow NUSL grad (’08). I enjoyed our conversation about the labor and employment field. I thought it would be a good idea to follow up with a LinkedIn connection so that we can stay in touch periodically.

Best,