THE ART OF NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

What is career networking? Having conversations, formal and informal, with people who have career information you want and to whom you can offer information (these conversations are 2-way streets). Networking allows you to help others just as they help you.

What is informational interviewing? The formal approach to gathering this information. These are interviews, which you initiate, and schedule to gather information, advice, and referrals and to be remembered.

Advantages:
- Greatly improve the quality and quantity of your career options (the 75% opportunities in the "hidden market" vs. the 25% of advertised opportunities)
- People like to hire people they know (reduces uncertainty)
- You are less likely to encounter rejection because you are not asking for a job -- you are asking for information
- You can gain information about the career field and about specific jobs and organizations, which you would never find anywhere else, especially insights into organizational culture and specific personalities. These insights have tremendous effect on your eventual job satisfaction and success.
- Networking allows you to find a job that fits you - that maximizes your chance for success - rather than trying to find a job you might fit into.

Effective Networking: What are the issues?
- The psychology of networking: fight the supplicant attitude (Yes, a busy professional does want to talk to you.) You are 1) a potentially valuable resource and 2) a useful source of information about the field you're researching.
- Creating a network - how do you start?
  - Faculty
  - Alumni
  - Professional associations
  - Volunteer work
  - Colleagues, past and present
  - Family and friends
  - Church and social groups
- How do you start networking in a new place where you have NO contacts? Is there really a place where you have no contacts or can't create contacts quickly? Think about referrals you can get from contacts here to contacts there, volunteering, joining professional associations.
Effective Informational Interviewing

- "The key to networking success is to focus on gathering information while also learning to handle rejections." *

- In networking interviews, you are seeking information, advice and referrals on your job search approach, your resume and further professional contacts.

- "The biggest turn-off for individuals targeted for informational interviews is insincere job seekers who try to use this to get a job." *

- "The best way to get a job is to ask for job information, advice, and referrals; never ask for a job." *

- You might start with an approach letter or email: who you are, your contact reference, your purpose, and when you will call to set up an appointment. Do not include the resume in that letter. Take it to the interview with you.

- Structuring the informational interview: You are the interviewer. Come prepared with questions, a clear statement of your goals. Know what you want from the interview. Fit it to the professional contact's available time, usually 30-60 minutes. Be guided by her/him as to when you should wrap it up.

- Start the interview by stating your goal clearly: "I am particularly interested in learning more about opportunities, necessary skills, and the future challenges for this field."

- Communicate your objective and interests clearly (they need to know, at least generally, what you are looking for before they can help you). Follow this with investigative questions about the field and then with questions about how to polish your job search (resume critique, who else to talk to, what specific skills you should add to your abilities).

- Resume critique: ask your contact if this is an appropriate type of resume for this field, how he/she thinks an employer would react to it, if he/she sees any areas which need to be improved. Leave a copy of the resume with the contact or, if she/he has made suggestions, mail them a copy of the improved resume with your thank you letter.

- Follow up with a thank you · and later with an update. Stay in touch.

*See Interview for Success, Krannich & Krannich (in the Career Services Resource Center, Room 225)