



# Connecting with Alumni Mentors...

## ...through Career Connections!

Career Connections provides an opportunity for students to connect with LVC alumni for the purpose of **exploration, networking, and mentoring through the job search process.**

One of the best ways to find out about a career or company that interests you is to talk with someone employed in that field/organization. Such an opportunity, obtained through an informational interview, also allows you to:

- establish a network of professionals;
- clarify your own skills, interests, and preferences for work settings;
- practice your interviewing, analytical, and interpersonal skills in a less intense setting

It can be intimidating to initiate an informational interview with someone you've never met, so Career Connections offers a database full of professionals interested in talking with you!

*Best of all, you already have something in common - Lebanon Valley College!*

## Conducting an Informational Interview

Most people, if approached professionally, will agree to spend time discussing their roles and responsibilities with you. Remember, however, that work environments and jobs may differ from one place to another. Therefore, don't rely on the perspective, good or bad, of one person.

**Determine people to contact.** If you know someone who is doing the kind of work or working for the type of company you might enjoy, by all means, contact them first. Other good referrals may come from professors, friends and their parents, or even past employers. Don't forget about Career Connections!

You may not find a person with the *exact* career and background you're looking for, but you may find someone within the same field or even the same geographic area you're interested in.

Keep in mind, professionals have networks too; there is no such thing as a wasted connection!

The important thing is to identify why you want to contact someone in the first place. Their career? Their involvement? Their location? Their industry? Be able to articulate this and relate it back to your interests.

**Initiate a Conversation.** Often a letter/email is the first contact you will make. (*See Starting Out on the Right Foot on the back page of this tip sheet.*) Follow-up with a phone call about 7-10 days later to schedule an appointment. If schedules are busy, suggest coffee or lunch; you pay as the host.

### **Prepare, prepare, prepare.**

Reading about your contact's career field and employer in advance. Conducting this research will help you identify the gaps - the information you *want* to know but *can't* find on your own. Your questions should be designed to help acquire that information.

One of the best ways to learn about a career or company that interests you is to get an inside perspective.

Career Connections offers a database full of LVC alumni willing to provide career advice!

## Networking Appropriately

People don't sit at their desk waiting for someone to call and ask for an informational interview. They are doing you a favor; be sure you are representing yourself and the college professionally! Be as organized as possible by preparing ahead of time, drafting questions and grouping them so that the order makes sense. It takes practice but is well worth the effort! A few 'rules' to follow:

- **Manage your Expectations:** Informational interviewing is about gathering information, not asking for a job or internship.
- **Be Patient:** Respect that your contacts have their own commitments. If you are asking to meet, you will likely have to wait until it is convenient for them.
- **Don't waste your contact's time:** Before making a contact, know basic information about the company/field, as well as what your purpose is for contacting them. If you are inquiring about the profession, have specific questions in mind vs. "tell me all about your field."
- **Don't expect too much at once.** Don't overwhelm your contact with a hundred questions all at once. You can always ask more at a later time.
- **Listen.** When someone is kind enough to talk with you, listen attentively! Show genuine interest; ask follow up questions. But be prepared to answer questions about yourself!
- **Ask** before you use a contact's name as a reference or to approach another prospective contact.
- **Say thank you!** A note of appreciation or a phone call to say how they've helped goes a long way towards ensuring continued success. Consider this a mandatory expectation.
- **Networking is a two-way street!** Ask if you can keep in contact (and then actually do it).

## Starting out on the Right Foot

Your first email should be professional and to the point. Describe your reason for writing, stating you are a student considering career options; ask for a short amount of time (30-40 minutes) to discuss their job and experiences. Be sure they understand this is not a request for a job interview!

### Here is a sample to help you get started:

Hello (Mr. or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_)

My name is Joe Smith and I am a sophomore at Lebanon Valley College. I am currently studying English with the future goal of working in advertising or marketing. I found your contact information through LVC's Career Connections and noticed that you have experience working in publishing. I am interested in asking a few questions about how your career has progressed in hopes of learning more about how I might begin to make connections and gain experience. Would you be willing to talk with me? Please let me know when might be a good time to set up a short meeting. I greatly appreciate your help!

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Joe Smith

Design your questions to acquire information while demonstrating the research and preparation you've done. You may want to send them to your contact ahead of time so that he/she knows what to expect and is able to prepare accordingly.

## Sample Questions

- Describe a typical day at your work place. What aspects of your responsibilities do you enjoy most/least?
- What personal characteristics are necessary to be successful in this work?
- What advice would you have for someone interested in doing the type of work you do? What other settings do people with your background work in?
- What is your perception of the employment outlook in this field? How do people find out about job openings?
- How did you get started in this field? Do you wish there were things you had known before getting started? Any surprises and/or disappointments?
- Do you belong to professional organizations?
- Do you know of other persons I might contact that could be helpful to me? May I mention that you referred me to them?