

MALONE CENTER FOR CAREER ENGAGEMENT

ALUMNI NETWORKING GUIDE

Connecting with alumni is a great way to uncover new information, gain advice from working professionals, and learn about potential opportunities. It can be awkward to reach out to someone you've never met, so we've created a guide to walk you through the process.

GETTING STARTED

- Review the list you've been sent and prioritize contacts that meet your criteria. These individuals are the closest match to your aspirations, work for companies you're targeting, or someone that really piques your interest. Ideally, you're ranking the contacts and separating them into different categories to create a networking strategy.
- Once you've established your top priority contacts (approximately 5-10 people), you'll want to begin by researching the individual, the company, and their role. Find out as much as you can about their background, what they do now, and who they work for. LinkedIn is a great resource for this. Ensure you are browsing in "private mode" under settings!
- Establish a goal for your outreach. You should NEVER reach out to an individual to ask for a job, internship, or an outright favor. The goal is to establish a relationship, gain information, exchange interests, etc. After a few conversations (ideally a phone call or Zoom call) it is appropriate to ask if they would keep you in mind if opportunities arise. They may eventually ask you for your resume as well.

Essentially, when reaching out to Furman alumni, you are conducting an **Informational Interview**. More information about this process can be found below:

An informational interview is a purposeful conversation with a professional in a field of interest. It is an effective way to research careers, gain insight into specific industries, and gather advice from individuals already in the working world. The purpose of an informational interview is not to find job openings, although sometimes it may lead to additional opportunities or network connections. With practice and guidance, informational interviewing can become your best resource for relevant information (no matter where you are in your career development process).

STEPS OF AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

1. RESEARCH CAREER FIELDS

Conduct some initial research on your industries of interest. Visit our Career Pathways pages, discuss with a Career Advisor, or use some of our exploration platforms (i.e. Vault, O*NET, What Can I Do with This Major?) to help generate a list of potential careers and industries.

2. IDENTIFY CONTACTS

First, start by reviewing your own personal contacts. Who do you know? Friends, teachers, mentors, family members, former employers, etc. Then, identify relevant Furman alumni. You can use LinkedIn or the Alumni List provided by the Alumni Relations Office. If you're still stuck, connect with the Malone Center for Career Engagement to discuss your strategy with a Career Advisor.

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3. INITIATE CONTACT

Contact the individual by email, phone, or LinkedIn (see below for sample template). Mention how you found them, and ask about a possible time to talk. Emphasize that you are seeking information and advice, not a job. Be ready to ask questions on the spot if they are available at that moment.

4. PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

Develop your “pitch” or a brief introduction of yourself and your experiences, skills, interests. Write down 5-10 open-ended questions you would like to ask.

5. CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW

If in person, treat it as you would a real interview. Dress nicely, arrive a few minutes early, and bring your list of questions with a notepad to take notes. Give a brief overview of yourself and your interests, be prepared to direct the conversation, but also let it flow naturally. Respect their time, and ask if you can contact them again in the future with additional questions. Ask for additional resources and contacts that can offer further perspectives.

6. FOLLOW UP

Make sure to send a thank you note! Keep your notes and contact additional people, if applicable. Stay in touch, especially to inform them of your progress.

SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT

Good morning/afternoon Ms./Mr./Dr. _____,

My name is _____ and I'm currently a senior at Furman University studying Theater Arts. I received your contact information from the Alumni Office, how are you?

I'm calling today to ask if we can schedule a time to talk further. I would like to learn more about your position at _____, your journey so far, and any advice you may have for me as I approach graduation. Thank you so much for your time!

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SAMPLE EMAIL

Subject: James Paladin: Furman Student Seeking Industry Insight

Dear Ms. Anderson:

I hope this email finds you well. My name is James Paladin and I am currently a first-year student at Furman University. I was given your name and contact information by my professor, Dr. Smith. I'm writing to you today because I'm seeking information and advice on pursuing a career in your industry. At this point, I believe I would enjoy a career in _____ and I'm hoping to gain your perspective on the practical aspects of working in this area.

If you are willing, I would appreciate the opportunity to chat with you about your position, career journey and advice you may have for a student interested in this path. I would also appreciate any suggestions you may have to offer as I consider my options for the summer.

Please let me know if there are any days/times that would work best to meet or talk on the phone. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me at 864-555-5555 (cell) or at james.paladin@furman.edu. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
James Paladin

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- What are your main responsibilities as a...?
- What is a typical day (or week) like for you?
- What do you like most about your work?
- What do you like least about your work?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- How does your job affect your general lifestyle?
- What related fields do you think I should consider looking into?
- How did you become interested in this field?
- How relevant to your work is your undergraduate major?
- What kind of education, skills, training, or background does your job require?
- What are the most effective strategies for seeking a position in this field?
- Can you recommend trade journals, magazines or professional associations which would be helpful for my professional development?
- What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of job (or field)?
- Can you suggest anyone else I could contact for additional information?