Networking is an essential part of your career development. It can help you learn more about your major and career choice, internship opportunities, job search ideas, graduate school information, etc. Students are often times intimidated and unsure about networking. Networking is NOT that difficult and should not be considered scary.

It is important to begin thinking about the network you already have in place. Your network may include friends, relatives, neighbors, former or current employers, coworkers, faculty, etc. It is easiest to begin the networking process with these individuals. Connect with all of these people and share your plans and goals. If it is an internship you are looking for, tell them what you are looking for and what you have to offer an organization. If it is information about a certain career field, share with them what you are interested in and what you are hoping to learn.

Some people with whom you connect through your network may be willing to actively assist you by distributing your résumé, referring you to employers, or “putting in a good word” for you. Do not ask for, or expect, special favors from people you do not know very well. You do not want to impose on their good will. Networking is a two way street- be willing to help others in ways you are capable.

In order for a network to be productive, you must maintain regular contact. Keep your network informed of what you are doing and any progress you have made. Let them know the results of any referrals they may have given you. Do not forget to say thank you for any assistance they give you! Be sure to utilize the Bobcat Mentor Network in your networking plan.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is a great way to build relationships with new individuals and those whom are already in your network. An informational interview is an opportunity for you to get to know an individual in your field of interest by asking questions about their career path and experience. You may learn more about a specific field or industry, a specific organization and its culture, job search strategies, and possibly be connected to other key players within the field or organization. Informational interviews are a more productive and efficient way to approach your career development and job search. This is not the time to ask for a job. As mentioned before, informational interviews allow you to build relationships with individuals in your field of interest. These days, many job opportunities are found on a referral basis so it is important to stay connected.

Who?

Seek out professionals who have a position that you would like to pursue someday, work in a setting you are interested in, work for a well-known organization within your field, etc.

How?

Informational interviews can be set up through personal contacts, phone inquiries, or formal written inquiries. Also, be sure to check out the Bobcat Mentor Network to get connected with OHIO Alumni. It is best to uphold a high level of professionalism when planning and
facilitating these interviews. If you received this person's contact information from someone else, be sure to mention their name. Do not forget to emphasize you are looking to learn and gain information, not job opportunities.

**Preparation?**
Most individuals are flattered and excited to share their personal career development story. It is important to come prepared with thoughtful questions and conversation starters. Treat this meeting as you would a real interview. Dress professionally and research the field and organization this person works within.

**During?**
Depending on your goals and the status of your own career development there are several guiding principles you should focus on during an informational interview. Take this opportunity to learn about the individual's background, work life, trends and challenges within the field, opportunities for advancement, job market, skills that professionals need to be successful in the field, personal advice, and referrals to other sources of information.

Here is a short list of possible questions to get you thinking:

1. What do you do in your job?
2. What preparation did you have for this job?
3. How did you find your job (or how do people in this field find jobs)?
4. What do you like/dislike most about your job?
5. Is it difficult to balance your work and personal life within this field?
6. What are the trends and challenges within the field and how have they affected your job?
7. What is the typical career path for someone in this field?
8. What are the primary skills I would need to do well in this field?
9. What can I do to make myself more competitive in this field?
10. Could you refer me to someone else to whom I could talk about this career field?

**After?**
Be appreciative of the person's time and send them a thank-you note. Talk about what you took away from the conversation and address any issues you planned to follow up with. Also, take time to reflect on your experience. Organize information you gathered and plan your next step. If you received contact information for additional individuals, touch base with them in a timely manner.

*For more information visit the Career & Leadership Development Center web site.*
*From the Job Search section, click on Networking.*