The following presentation has been developed to convey the value of networking and provide Michigan Engineering students with recommendations and strategies to help you embrace networking as a part of your career exploration and job search. While the College of Engineering has moved to an entirely virtual fall recruitment season, many of the tips and strategies we will share can be applied to virtual interactions as well. While in person opportunities may be limited, the opportunity to initiate and foster relationships still exists. In fact, it may be even more important during these unique times.
Throughout this discussion, our goal is to provide clarity around the often mysterious and sometimes misunderstood process of networking. We’ll start with a clear definition of what networking is, and what it is not, provide details of how to network effectively (in person and virtually), and review foundational principles that will help you navigate a number of distinct networking opportunities. We will also share several sample communications that will be helpful as you develop your personal introductions and correspondence.
For many people, ‘networking’ is a dreaded term. In reality, it’s simpler than it may seem. In fact you’re probably already doing it. In essence, it’s the process of meeting new people, collecting information (that informs your job search) and maintaining relationships with individuals with whom you have a positive interaction.

For our purposes, we are defining networking as the development and cultivation of relationships that provide you with information, advice and further contacts!

Whether you recognize it or not, you are likely already networking with people. Interacting with members of a group, classmates, fellow researchers in a lab, or teammates on a student project team are all examples of relationship building and networking. In the coming slides, we’ll teach you how to network with people you don’t know yet, but just know that you are likely better at this than you might think.

*Definition inspired by Columbia University Career Center.*
The table pictured here is intended to clarify the concept of networking and call out some common misconceptions. We’ll review them here.

1. Networking is a long term investment and not a quick fix. In other words, networking is a skill to be developed over time (multiple connections and ongoing conversations) and success comes from the effort you put in to strengthen and enhance relationships over the long haul. Networking is not a “one and done” situation. In other words, it’s unlikely that one conversation/encounter will lead you to your desired outcome (which is often a job).

2. Networking is a strategic endeavor. Cover all your bases and make connections with a variety of people in your field of interest. Keep in mind, you are more likely to receive a positive response when you articulate a shared interest/connection rather than simply generating cold calls or emails to people you know nothing about. Demonstrating that you’ve done your homework first and actively engaging a potential contact is the way to go.

3. Networking is reciprocal, not unilateral. Remember it’s a conversation. Asking questions is a great way to initiate conversation and show sincere interest in the other person. When you do so, they will be more interested in getting to know you. Be sure to LISTEN to their questions and respond appropriately. If you’re too
focused on your AGENDA, i.e. telling them what you think they need to know about you, you may turn them off and lose the potential for a connection or long term relationship.

4. Networking provides an opportunity to gather information and insight. Use your time to ask questions that will help inform your job search or interest in a company, not to blatantly ask for a job. This will be off-putting during a first conversation and likely impede any further progress.
Networking is important because it works! It’s one of the most effective job search strategies as evidenced by our students and new grads! Each year the ECRC surveys graduating students asking them about their post-graduation plans. One of the questions we ask is “how they found their first full-time job?” During the most recent data collection period (2018-2019), we had approximately 1,300 students answer this question, and the number one way that respondents found a job was through networking. You can see from the pie chart that 33%, a full third of the survey participants, found a job through Networking, followed by Websites (27%), Career Fairs/Campus Interviews (23%), and Previous Internship (17%).

**Note:** For the purposes of this survey, networking is defined as traditional networking (family, friend, faculty, staff referrals) as well as on-campus networking events, and networking through student organizations.

**Data Source:** 1283 new alumni (BSE, MSE, PhD) from the 2018-2019 Destination Survey
Now that you have a better understanding of What Networking Is and Why it’s Important, it will be helpful to understand some of the foundational principles of networking, which is to say that Context Matters.

While the purpose of networking is consistent across events, i.e. initiating conversations with new people in order to gain insight and information related to your future aspirations, the way you execute your strategy may change based on the venue or occasion. Use the setting to your advantage while networking.

1. At a true Networking Event, there is a common understanding of why you are there; start with brief small talk to warm up your audience, then pose questions to draw out desired information while you naturally respond to their comments. Share relevant information about yourself and show interest throughout the interaction.

2. If you’re attending an Information Session or Tech Talk, approach the presenter(s) afterward and share a reaction or pose a question to something they shared. This shows you were listening and that you’re interested. This paves the way for a natural conversation. The presenter will be flattered and more likely to remember you!
3. Conferences bring together people with a shared interest or field of specialty. Start a conversation by asking a participant about their experience at the conference so far. Learning from another’s perspective helps you broaden your conference experience and may lead you to other potential contacts.

4. Casual Coffee Meet-ups are often less structured and less formal than the previous events and venues. Small talk may extend further to build rapport and allow you to find areas of common interest that will strengthen the relationship.
We have already established that networking is intentional and strategic and often requires a fair amount of preparation. It’s also important to note that opportunities to network can arise spontaneously every day! Consider common situations that you have found yourself in, a colleague invites you for coffee, or you sit next to someone at a conference symposium. These situations can present **impromptu** or spontaneous opportunities for relationship building. Don’t let them pass you by. In fact, seek them out, initiate conversation with others. You never know where the conversation may lead and you certainly have nothing to lose.

**ALWAYS BE READY TO NETWORK** – you never know when you will be in the room with a potential employer or someone who can connect you to future opportunities. Classes, design teams, MDP, Student Organizations, conferences, can all present opportunities for connections.
Being proactive in your networking strategy means that you’re planning ahead. Decide what field you want to learn more about and then seek out opportunities to engage with people in that industry or field of interest. When it comes to proactive networking, start simple. Speak with family, friends, colleagues, faculty, GSI’s, teammates about your interest and goals, while giving them an opportunity to talk about theirs. You’re likely already doing this with those in your closet circles, but try to be more open with your extended network as well. The reciprocal nature of these conversations can help you gain insight and potentially identify new contacts. It may also lead to the discovery of a mutual interest you can pursue together. This doesn’t require any additional effort, follow your typical conversational style, but be more intentional regarding the topics you discuss.
Employer engagement at the College of Engineering is consistently strong. Organizations participate in a variety of events each year to get to know our students and to identify candidates for current and future job opportunities. These events are typically structured to allow students to learn more about the organization while sharing something about their own career interests and aspirations. When interests are aligned, it can lead to ongoing dialogue and potential future interactions, collaborations, interviews etc. Career Fairs, Career Days, Information Sessions and Tech Talks are among the most common networking events we see on campus. In addition, employers may reach out to target groups and individuals directly to foster more personal relationships through Student Org Meetings and/or Coffee Chats.

As you begin to prepare for these events, it’s important to plan your self introduction. In other words, what will you say after you’ve said hello? This is where the Elevator Pitch comes in. . . .
The term Elevator Pitch is a reference to the amount of time we typically spend on an elevator – 30 to 45 seconds. Imagine, you have entered an elevator on the 1st floor and you’re headed to the 10th floor. You happen to be riding with the CEO of the company, and you have roughly 30 seconds to make a quick introduction and positive impression. What would you say?

Simply stated the elevator pitch is a brief introduction that includes your name, educational background, something unique about you (that’s relevant to your audience) and explains why you’re interested in talking with them. The idea is to open a conversation in a compelling manner and inspire your audience to engage with enthusiasm. As you prepare for any networking opportunity, you’ll want to keep these principles in mind. Help your audience (conversation partner) get to know you in a way that’s meaningful to him/her. Pique their interest and give them something to follow up on.

Armed with this context, we’ll take a look at a few sample pitches that illustrate the recommended elements and flow. The first two are samples for a formal career or networking event, such as the Career Fair or Career Day. The third example is more appropriate for a non-career event, such as a conference or informal gathering. As you
develop your pitch, let it be unique to you and consistent with your natural style. Your goal is to get the conversation started. It does not have to be perfect!
The first pitch is for an actual position with a company that has hired from Michigan Engineering previously. In this scenario, the person wants to emphasize their leadership skills because they know that leadership experience is a requirement for this company and role. In this case, the student was interested in learning more about the position. However, based on your individual interests, you could ask what skills set strong candidates apart from others? What type of projects an engineer would work on, etc. As you gather more information, you’ll want to continue to share relevant information about your experiences and skills.

As a reminder, the goal of your pitch is to share enough about you that they can ask you informed questions to get the conversations going.
Sample Pitch 2: Career Event

Hi, I’m Sally Smith. I’m a second year graduate student studying Mechanical Engineering, and I am interested in Ford’s new college graduate positions.

I’ve spent the last year in an automotive powertrain lab researching technologies to increase engine efficiency. I am also currently an officer for the Graduate Society of Women Engineers.

I’m hoping to apply my research and leadership skills in your automotive program, specifically on your new model vehicles. Can you tell me more about it?
Sample Pitch 3: Non-Career Event

Hello, my name is Mitch Igan, and I am a first year graduate student studying industrial and operations engineering at the University of Michigan.

I’m currently studying theories of group dynamics and human motivation and the impacts on organizational performance.

How about you? What’s your background and what do you do?
Here are some tips to help you build rapport and navigate comfortable, confident, engaged conversations with new acquaintances.

Match and mirror the postures and behaviors of the person with whom you’re speaking. This will allow that person to be at ease, which in turn will allow you to relax. Ask questions to show interest and gather information. Listen and acknowledge what is being said, bringing new, relevant information to light in response. Maintain a natural conversational flow.

Rapport Building:
At this point, we will change gears and turn our focus to Virtual Networking opportunities. LinkedIn is a powerful online tool to help you identify potential networking contacts. When it comes to virtual networking, reasonable expectations are essential. It is unlikely that one conversation will lead to a job offer. Instead, focus your efforts on the immediate goal of conducting an informational interview with a professional who works for a desirable company or works in a role to which you aspire.

In an Informational Interview, you are the interviewer, asking experienced professionals questions to gather information and insight from their experiences. The goal is not to replicate this individual’s path, but instead to learn from their experiences, and gather information that will be helpful to you in the future. For example, gathering information from these individuals can help you create more customized resumes and cover letters and prepare for more meaningful conversations with recruiters at future career fairs. The connections you make can also blossom into long term relationships if you nurture them and reciprocate the kindness they granted.

In the next few slides you’ll learn several methods for connecting with people for networking purposes and Informational Interviews.
• Form 1st degree connections (people you already know): co-workers/peers/acquaintances in your field.
• Second degree connections – Used Advanced Search to find new contacts.
• Join groups – Alumni Association, Professional Organizations, Other orgs people of interest belong to.
First (1st) Degree Connections are people you know.

Networking requires you to talk with others about yourself and your aspirations. Developing an effective elevator pitch is the first step to engage others in these conversations. However, while your ‘self-reports’ are important, it’s also important to form relationships with people who can observe your work and your contributions first hand, and become advocates and supporters for you. Form these relationships by getting to know those around you. Consider classmates with whom you worked on a project or in the lab. Consider previous supervisors. It is these people that can speak to your strengths and accomplishments when you are not in the room, so be sure to stay connected to them throughout your lifetime.
Second (2\textsuperscript{nd}) Degree connections are people with whom you share a mutual contact, a friend of a friend so to speak. This concept/approach of seeking 2\textsuperscript{nd} Degree connections is not exclusive to LinkedIn, as it can be applied to your daily interactions and established relationships with others as well. Ideally, you’re looking to identify 2\textsuperscript{nd} Degree connections who will be willing and able to help you. Keep in mind that not all 2\textsuperscript{nd} degree connections are created equal. You’re likely to come across people with varying degrees of interest, compassion and time. Don’t devote too much effort to those who are unlikely to find time to help, i.e. Curmudgeons. Reach out once or twice and if no response (or half-hearted response-as in Obligates) move on to other more promising connections. You’re looking for the Boosters. They will be easy to spot. They will likely respond to your message enthusiastically and promptly (within a reasonable time-frame), and offer time for an informational interview. They will follow through on what they say they will do, and they are more likely to engage in an ongoing relationship.
Once you’ve identified your desired contacts (i.e. your promising 2nd Degree connections), evaluate your mutual contacts to determine where the most likely support will come from. Which of your shared contacts will be likely to reach out on your behalf and appeal to the person you’d like to meet. Reach out to this 1st Degree connection in the manner that is customary for your communication. Do you typically call, text or email when you’re engaging that person? Use the same mode in this situation. Whatever mode you choose, be sure to start with a warm greeting. Explain why you’re writing (or calling) and provide supporting information. In other words, let them know who you would like to be introduced to and let them know why (what are you hoping to learn from that person?). Be sure to thank them for their time and support. Approaching your connections in this manner demonstrates a high level of professionalism and will likely yield positive results.
Contacting People you do not Know

**Goal:** Maximize your chance of getting an informational interview without the benefit of a referral
- Messages need to be quick to read
- Quickly identify people who are willing and excited to help you
- Some people will never get back to you, and this is OK because you are not wasting your time on a connection that will never happen

It is also possible to reach out to people you don’t know, even without an introduction. In your research, you might find an alum who had the same major as you and is working for a company you hope to work for. In this case, you would craft a short, concise, upbeat message that inspires action. While we can’t guarantee that you’ll receive a response, following these tips will increase the chances that you will. Remember, some people will never respond, no matter how much effort you put into the message. And that’s ok. Just move on to the next potential. Those who are willing to help, are likely to respond quickly.
When you are trying to connect with someone new for the first time, we recommend following these 5 tips for tips for crafting an effective outreach message.

1. Keep it Short: 100 words or less. (People don’t have time to read lengthy email messages, particularly from people they don’t know.)
2. Highlight your connection or shared interest. (This could be the University of Michigan, a colleague who referred you.)
3. Provide generalized interest, what is it you would like their help with? (i.e. you want to learn about their experiences within a particular industry sector)
4. Do not mention interest in a job. (This puts people on the defensive and will probably ensure that you don’t receive a response)
5. Express appreciation for their time and maintain control of follow up. (This gives you an in for sending a reminder email. You’re simply following through on your commitment, not pestering them. Also, be sure to follow up if you say you will!)
Sample Email

Subject: Michigan engineering student seeking your advice

Dear Ms. Smith,

My name is Anne Arbor, and I am a University of Michigan Civil Engineering undergraduate student who found your information on the UM alumni LinkedIn group.

I am interested in learning more about project engineer roles at a construction management firm, and your insights would be very helpful to me. May I have 20 minutes of your time to ask you about your experiences at Hensel Phelps?

I recognize that this may be a busy time for you, so if we are unable to connect by email I’ll try to reach you next week to see if that is more convenient.

Thank you,
Anne
The informational interview is a great way to obtain information about a field of interest. Ask questions that help you better understand the role, i.e. how you would spend your time, what are the opportunities and challenges, industry trends, etc. so that you can determine whether it may be a good fit for you. Refer to this list as a starting point or for inspiration. But be sure to select questions that are meaningful to you and your goals for the conversation. Since these conversations typically last about 20 minutes, you should expect to ask 3-4 questions. Prioritize your questions and ask the most important questions first. Finally, remember, this initial contact sets the tone for future conversations and may lead to referrals to additional people to connect with (building your network).
Consider these the Golden Rules of Networking.
1. Networking is a continuous process. You should always be growing your network and fostering your relationships. Show respect and care for your relationships. When connections feel valued, they are more likely to help you when you’re in transition or seeking new opportunities.
2. Networking may sound scary, but in reality, you’re just having a conversation with another human being.
3. Consider the context and setting you’re in and apply the most effective strategy for the situation.
4. Be yourself, you’ll feel more comfortable and confident, and you’ll also allow your audience get to know the real you.
5. If you offer to do something for someone in your network, follow through. Likewise, if you receive advice and action steps from a new contact, be sure to follow through and follow up to let them know the outcome. It’s a professional courtesy to do so. A sure way to damage a relationship is to ask for help and then not follow through on the recommended actions (or not follow up).
6. Treat others as you wish to be treated.
Feel free to explore these additional Resources as you continue to build your networks!

Networking Resources

- **Engineering Career Guide**
  - [http://career.engin.umich.edu/careerguide](http://career.engin.umich.edu/careerguide)

- **Networking Tips for Introverts**

- **University of Michigan Alumni Association**
  - [https://alumni.umich.edu/career/](https://alumni.umich.edu/career/)

- **Additional University of Michigan Resource**
  - [https://careercenter.umich.edu/article/networking-resources](https://careercenter.umich.edu/article/networking-resources)

- **LinkedIn Groups**
  - Michigan Engineering Alumni - OFFICIAL GROUP
  - Official Group: Alumni Association of the University of Michigan