

## Professional networking for Undergraduate Researcher students

The following information provides guidance for undergraduate research students looking to learn more about networking with researchers within their field.

What is “professional networking”? Professional networking is building and using connections with people in your school, job, or field in order to expand your access to information, opportunities, and resources.

Why should I network? Learning to communicate with those in your field is an essential part of working in the research community. Not everyone is good at networking, or even necessarily enjoys it, but conversing with experts in your field can open up avenues to internships, graduate school placement, or job/internship opportunities.

Here are a few reasons to network:

1. You are seeking out more information about a graduate program, job, or internship
2. You would like to discuss a particular aspect of someone’s research
3. You would like to join a faculty member’s research group
4. You would like information about funding or scholarships
5. You are interested in visiting a lab or research facility

**Who can I “network” with?** Networking is essentially having a conversation with people within your field, whether you know them or not, so it can happen in many different places, times, or contexts. You may network with a trusted advisor or mentor, or you may want to reach out to someone you met at a conference or read about on their online profile.

List of potential people for networking:

- Faculty
  - Faculty you know
    - faculty in your classes
    - your faculty research mentor/PI
  - Faculty you don’t know
    - Google
    - ask your faculty mentor to recommend someone to contact
- Graduate students
  - Grad students you know
    - your TA
    - graduates who work in your lab or research group
  - Grad students you don’t know
    - graduate students you meet at events, conferences, etc.
- Undergraduate peers
  - Undergrads you know
    - your friends
    - other undergraduates in your lab
  - Undergrads you don’t know but met at a research event
  - Does your friend know someone who is working in a research group you are interested in joining? Ask that friend to introduce you, whether through email, social media, or in person. You can then ask the student about their experiences in that research group and for advice on how to join.
- Staff at your university’s Undergraduate Research Office
  - Many colleges and universities have offices dedicated to helping students find undergraduate research opportunities, resources, and funding.

- Google “[your school’s name] and undergraduate research office” to find this office. The staff there will be happy to help you out.

**Where do I network?** Networking can happen in person, through email, on the phone, or even through social media. Here are some common ‘places’ you might network as an undergraduate research student.

- Conferences, lectures, symposia, etc.
- Reaching out through email or social media
- In your own research lab or studio

**How do I network?** Discerning what steps you should take in any networking scenario is not always obvious. Here are some examples to give you an idea of some of the more typical networking scenarios. Keep in mind that these are not the only ways to network.

- *Scenario 1:* Call or email someone you don’t know for information or advice. You can email a professor at your own university or a researcher from another institution.
- *Scenario 2:* Talk to someone you don’t know at an academic or research event or setting. Introduce yourself after a talk or at the poster session. Make sure you have a comment or question about their presentation.

**Networking do’s and don’ts:**

- DON’T email someone just to make pleasant, but pointless, conversation through email in an attempt to ‘build a relationship’ with someone.
- DO email someone with a specific question about their research, presentation, or program.
- DON’T email someone with a long, detailed description of your interests and aspirations in your first communication.
- DO use your first email to introduce yourself briefly, explain how you found out about the person, and ask them a specific question. You can also request to set up a phone conversation if you have questions which you think will be easier to discuss verbally.
- DON’T worry if the person doesn’t respond back immediately. Sometimes people are busy or miss emails.
- DO send a follow-up email in 5-7 business days. If they don’t reply to your follow-up email, then you should move on to someone else.

## Emails examples

### *Example #1*

Subject line: question about joining your research lab

Email body:

Dear Dr. Smith,

My name is Jane Adams and I am a sophomore student majoring in Kinesiology. I have learned from other students that there may be an opportunity to join your lab as a student researcher. I am very interested in learning about the research process, and I am particularly interested in the work your lab does on the link between hand-eye coordination post-traumatic brain injuries. Could I schedule a time to meet with you to discuss whether I would be a good fit for your lab?

Thank you,

Jane Adams

Kinesiology major

[janeadams@myuniversity.edu](mailto:janeadams@myuniversity.edu)

### *Example #2*

Subject line: question about independent study

Email body:

Dear Dr. Thomas,

My name is Mel Vin and I am a junior student majoring in English. I'm interested in doing an independent study next semester on the influences of Wakandan religion in superhero comics. I read on your faculty webpage that you have written articles and books on various themes in American comics. Could I schedule a time to meet with you and discuss my ideas? And, if possible, would you be willing to supervise my independent study?

Thank you,

Mel Vin

English major

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