Introduction

What is Networking and Why Should I Do It?
Networking can feel like an intimidating process, but networking is really just another word for creating and maintaining professional relationships. Law students often tense up at the idea, but in reality, networking involves little more than talking to others about their careers and prior experiences, asking for their advice, and staying in touch. By networking, you are building relationships, as well as relationship-building skills, which will help you far beyond the short-term goal of finding summer or post-graduate employment.

Building your professional network will enhance your career in three main ways:

Career Exploration: Connecting with other legal professionals can help you learn the advantages and disadvantages of career paths that interest you, while also exposing you to new areas you may not have yet considered. Keep in mind that exploration is an ongoing process. You will likely switch jobs one or more times over the course of your career and having a knowledgeable network will help make those transitions easier and more rewarding.

Job Hunting: Many employers rely on their own connections to recommend good candidates, so when job openings occur, few are widely publicized. By meeting people in your desired field, you are greatly increasing your chances of finding out when these “hidden” openings occur. Once you’ve identified a job prospect, your network can also help move your application forward in the hiring process. Of course, your merit will actually get you the job, but it may be your network that gets your resume reviewed in the first place.

Professional Development: Even if you are not actively looking for employment, building your network early on will give you a head start on identifying potential clients, meeting the movers and shakers in your field, and staying informed of important developments in your industry and market. It always makes sense to build your professional network, as it will serve you well for many reasons throughout your career.

Expanding Your Network

Believe it or not, you already have a network – former employers, neighbors, friends, classmates, professors, and so on. Keep in touch with these people as you move through your career! From here, think of your network as ever-expanding two ways – outward and upward.

Outward networking is connecting with people with whom you do not yet share a personal connection. As a student, this most often involves talking with MLS alumni, and it is one of the
smartest steps you can take in finding a summer internship or post-graduate job. Most alumni are thrilled to talk with students about their own practice and their career paths, and to provide insight into the employment market in their city. Don’t think that you must have already decided on your career path or a particular practice area to talk to alumni; remember networking is as much about career exploration as it is career advancement.

**Upward networking** is just as crucial and involves building on the contacts you’ve already made. Never end an informational conversation with a professional contact without asking for the name of someone else who might be able to help. And don’t forget your personal connections! Does your fraternity brother’s father work at the EPA? Maybe you have an aunt with contacts at a San Francisco law firm. When reaching out to these people, be polite and be sure to ask your primary contact before using his or her name as your point of referral.

Here are some resources to help you get started finding new contacts:

**Sourcing New Contacts**

- **LinkedIn** is an amazing tool for reaching out to alums and other lawyers with similar interests. Build your profile to 100% completion to present a professional public image, then connect with people already in your network, as well as those you meet through the networking process. Join the [University of Michigan Law School Alumni](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/University-of-Michigan-Law-School-Alumni) Group and the [MLaw Public Interest Community](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/MLawPublic InterestCommunity).

- Use the [MLS AlumNetwork](https://www.mlsalumninet.com/) to search for alumni by market, practice area, and other criteria. Don’t be shy about reaching out to these alums – the results of your search will only bring up alumni who want to be contacted by students.

- Use OCP’s [Public Service Network](https://www.michigandirectory.com/) to find public service alumni who are willing to advise students. PSN also includes summer public service job summaries written by Michigan Law students who received 1L or 2L funding. These summaries include information about their organizations, the intern hiring process and oversight, a discussion of the work performed, and tips on applying.

- Visit [martindale.com](https://www.martindale.com) and use the advanced search function. You can limit your search by a number of relevant criteria, including law school attended, practice area, and name of company. Martindale is not exhaustive, but can be a great way to identify alumni that may not be covered by one of the other sources above.

- Most law firms have a [directory of attorneys](https://www.martindale.com/) that allows you to search by law school, in addition to searching by name or city or practice area.

- Browse the [Student Summer Employment List](https://www.michigandirectory.com/) which lists where students spent their summers. The list can be sorted by geographic area, employment type, and organization name. Everyone listed has agreed to speak with other students about their experiences.
Other Great Resources

- Attend (or organize!!!) meetings and panels about job searching, practice areas of interest, and so on. Talk to panelists about their organizations and find out about summer internships and possible job openings. If the speakers are students, ask them questions about their summer experiences and how they got their jobs. Check both the OCP and law school events calendars for upcoming events.

- Michigan Law professors are an excellent source of knowledge and contacts, in both the private and public sectors. Don’t be shy about asking for their mentorship and advice on certain paths in the law where they have knowledge and/or experience.

- Don’t forget networking opportunities through bar associations in the city or state of your choice as well as special interest associations such as the Armenian Bar Association or the Insurance Law Section of the ABA. Many associations charge only a nominal fee for students. You may also get access to newsletters and unique job postings, in addition to finding alumni. You can also search the licensed attorney rolls of a particular state for Michigan alumni.

Reaching Out to Potential Connections

Once you’ve identified a potential connection, you’ll want to be sure you know the right way to reach out to ensure a positive first impression. Many attorneys and business professionals prefer that students first contact them via email rather than making the first point of contact via telephone. Your outreach email should be professionally appropriate – make sure you proofread to catch any errors!

Your Approach Email

For your initial outreach, draft a brief, customized email to each contact. In your email, you should introduce yourself as an MLS student, explain where you got the contact’s name, and provide a sentence or two of background information about yourself. Then, politely ask for 10-15 minutes of time to find out more about his or her career path. While alumni are often happy to speak to students for more than 10-15 minutes, asking for shorter initial meetings lets the alum feel like he or she is making less of a commitment, and gives him/her to power to decide whether he or she would like to give you more time. Remember, if all of your questions are not answered in the first round, you can circle back with some follow-up questions later on, which is a great way to keep the conversation going.

Although it takes time to craft separate emails for each network contact, a well-written outreach email ensures a greater response rate than a generic correspondence. Mentioning mutual connections in your email, whether a mutual contact, a shared professional or academic experience, or membership in the same student organization, can engender goodwill and impel even the busiest alum to respond. See the appendix to this handout for samples of initial contact emails. Once you’ve completed your
email, ask an OCP counselor or trusted friend to review your outreach; sometimes requests inadvertently come across as overly pushy or apologetic, or with an unclear request.

Students frequently ask whether they should include their resume in an outreach email. Some students choose to do so in the initial email, explaining they’re providing it so the contact can have a better sense of their background. Other students choose to send their resume in a follow-up email once the contact has agreed to a conversation. The approach you take in this matter is completely up to you and your comfort level.

The Informational Interview

First - Research!
Before your meeting, do some basic research about the agency or organization, including the specific office, where your contact works. That way, you won’t waste time asking something you could have learned on your own, and you’ll look much more informed and engaged. You should especially be familiar with anything that is already on a public website.

You should also think about what advice and information you are hoping to learn and create a written list of several questions you would like answered. Review the examples in the appendix to this handout for ideas, but remember that more specific, personalized questions are bound to elicit better advice and help you establish a stronger connection.

The Conversation
When you speak with your contact, your goal is to get advice, information and referrals. It is always better to ask for something the alum can give you – advice – rather than asking for a job. When you aggressively sell yourself or ask for favors too soon, the alum may be reluctant (or unwilling!) to help you because he or she doesn’t yet know you! Impress the contact with your intelligence, interest and drive during your meeting and he or she may be willing to introduce you to additional contacts within their network, provide advice on the application process, or even advocate for your candidacy.

At the end of your conversation, ask for the names of other people with whom you can speak. Contact these people and forge relationships with them as well. Remember, this is an ongoing process—when it comes to your network, bigger is usually better.

You may find that you feel a bit awkward during your first few networking conversations – that’s okay! Like any other skill, networking can be improved with practice. Many students find it helpful to start networking with classmates and people they already know so their skills are more polished when they start reaching out to alumni or people with whom they are not already acquainted. Students generally report that their comfort level with networking improves once they’ve had a few conversations. If you are not finding this to be the case, consult with an OCP counselor to develop networking strategies that work well for you.
**Follow-up**

After your conversation, you should plan to stay in touch with your new contact. *Always* send a thank-you note or email within 1-2 days of the meeting. You’ll want to also continue to update alumni on your job search progress based on their advice (e.g., if they referred you to an additional contact, let them know when you’ve connected with that person). Make sure you also update your contacts once you complete your job search, even if it is not with their organization – people like to hear that their advice was useful!

**Some Final Tips…**

**Be Persistent.** If your contact doesn’t answer your initial email, don’t be bashful about following-up in about a week to ten days. Of course, don’t be a pest – if your contact doesn’t answer the follow-up email, try moving on to another potential contact.

**Be Organized.** Keep a spreadsheet listing with whom you spoke and who referred you to each person. Include some basic information about each person such as his or her contact information, the date you last spoke, target follow-up dates, and one or two sentences about your conversation.

**Be Inquisitive.** Ask your contact about what she perceives to be the positives *and* the negatives of his or her practice. Only by having a sense of both can you make preliminary judgments about whether the job matches your skills and values.

**Be Likeable.** Networking is all about building relationships. Being polite and friendly and connecting with people on a personal level is just as important as sounding professional and well-informed.

**Be Respectful.** Make sure you have permission from your contact before using his or her name in further outreach or cover letters.

**Maintain the Relationship.** Send your professional contacts periodic updates about where you landed and what you’re doing. If someone’s advice led to a job or changed your career trajectory, let him know! You may just make his day with a thank you and an explanation of how his advice helped you.

**Have Fun!** Remember you are not reaching out to your network solely to get a job interview. Enjoy the process of meeting people and learning about their careers and allow the relationships to build organically.

*And always* send a thank-you note!
Sample Networking Emails

Michigan Law 1L Interested in NYC Transactional Law

gob.bluth@pinkmanwhite.com

Dear Mr. Bluth,

I recently finished my 1L year at Michigan Law and am focusing my career search on transactional law in NYC. Prior to law school, I worked for two years at a boutique financial services firm in Long Branch, New Jersey, and hope to combine this experience with my legal education in a transactional practice in a large firm in New York City.

I noticed on your firm biography that you also worked in financial services prior to attending law school. I would love to talk to you to learn more about your transition into law, as well as any career advice you might have for me. Are you available for 10-15 minutes in the next few weeks for a quick telephone conversation? For your reference, I’m also attaching my resume.

Sincerely,
Lucille Austero

Michigan Law 3L Referred by Gregory Brady

sharif@adastraperasera.com

Dear Ms. Sharif,

I am a current 3L at Michigan Law School focusing on litigation and hoping to return home to Kansas City to begin my legal career. I was referred to you by your colleague, Gregory Brady, who mentioned that, in addition to being a respected litigator, you are very knowledgeable about the Kansas City legal market. If possible, I’d like to talk to you for 15 minutes or so about your work in class action litigation as well as any advice you may have for a third-year law student searching for employment opportunities in Kansas City.

I will be visiting my family in Overland Park next week and could meet you for coffee or lunch if possible. If not, I would be happy to give you a call instead whenever is convenient for you. I have taken the liberty of attaching my resume for your reference.

Sincerely,
James Kelly
Michigan Law 3L interested in LGBT Rights

 Alejandro Badillo

 Michigan Law 3L interested in LGBT Rights

 Dear Mr. Badillo:

 I am currently a third-year law student at the University of Michigan Law School hoping to pursue a career in LGBT Rights Law when I graduate in May. I spent last summer interning at the New York office of the ACLU in the LGBT & AIDS Project Division. The opportunity was absolutely amazing and confirmed my commitment to the field. As such, I would love the opportunity to speak with you regarding your experiences at Lambda Legal’s National Headquarters and how you arrived at your position, along with any other advice you might have for a newly minted attorney. If you have 15 or 20 minutes for a short phone conversation, I would greatly appreciate it. I have taken the liberty of attaching my resume for your reference.

 All the best,
 Jon Hughes

 Michigan Law 1L Interested in EPA

 schultz@theepa.gov

 Michigan Law 1L Interested in EPA

 Dear Mr. Schultz:

 I have just finished my first semester of study at Michigan Law School and am targeting a career in environmental law. I found your contact information listed on the Law School’s Public Service Network. I came to the Law School from the University of Virginia with a background in political science and public service and I have experience working as an Environmental Compliance Intern for Albemarle County while in college. Therefore, I am very interested in learning about the time you have spent at the Environmental Protection Agency and the advantages – and challenges – of working for the federal government. If you have any time for a short, 10 to 15 minute phone call, I would be very grateful. For your reference, I’ve attached my resume. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

 Kindest regards,
 Kimberly Schmidt
Sample Informational Interviewing Questions: Alumni/Professional Contacts

The goal of informational interviewing is to get information, advice, and referrals. Use the suggested questions below as a template to help direct the discussion, but remember the best conversations flow freely. Don’t be constrained by a script.

Information about His or Her Background
1. What has your career path been like since graduating law school?
2. How did you get involved in this area of law?
3. What initially drew you to this particular position?

Information about Job Requirements and Characteristics
1. What are the most interesting or challenging aspects of your job?
2. What are your primary job responsibilities?
3. What is a typical day like? Typical week?
4. How would you describe your job in terms of ... [any characteristic that is important to you, such as: autonomy, control over your work, flexibility, salary, advancement, creativity, hours, challenge, diversity, security, authority, visibility, travel, benefits, work/life balance]?

Information about a Firm/Agency/Organization
1. What do you like most about working for [the alum’s particular organization]?
2. If you could change anything about your job, what would it be?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in [the particular practice setting, e.g. small firm, large firm, government agency, public interest organization]?
4. Does your organization typically hire new graduates or more experienced attorneys?

Information Regarding a Particular Field or Practice Area
1. What are the changes facing this field?
2. Do you foresee the demand for attorneys in this sector growing or shrinking in the next 5 years?
3. What are some of the opportunities for professional advancement in your field?

Advice Regarding Career Preparation
1. What type of background/experience would you look for in a new attorney?
2. What qualities or skills would be most helpful to a young attorney’s success with your employer?
3. What do you suggest I do to prepare myself for a career in this field? What courses, clinics, internships, activities, or pro bono opportunities should I be considering?
Advice about Building a Satisfying Career
1. What are some qualities I should be looking for in an employer?
2. What are some things I should focus on as a young attorney to help my career advance?
3. Is there anything you now know that you wish you had known before you started, and would you change anything about the path you took to get where you are today?

Advice for a Successful Job Search
1. Do you have any advice on job hunting?
2. How do people find out about job openings in your field? Are there any particular websites or job boards I should be checking?
3. Are there ways I can strengthen my resume? Is anything missing?
4. Are there any publications I should read or organizations or associations I should be aware of?

Finally, ALWAYS Ask for...

Referrals for Other Professionals Willing to Help!
- Do you have any suggestions regarding other people with whom I should speak? Can I use your name when I speak to this person?
Sample Informational Interviewing Questions: Student-to-Student

Information Concerning Summer Internship Experience
1. What did you do at your summer internship? What was a typical day like?
2. Were you able to get a writing sample from the work you did?
3. Did you interact with clients?
4. Did you have a mentor at your internship? Was it a formal or informal relationship?
5. What type of feedback did you receive on your work?
6. What did (or didn’t) you like about the internship?
7. Where did you live during the summer?
8. Is there anything you know now that you wish you knew before you started?

Information about and Advice Regarding the Application Process
1. Whom should I contact if I am interested in applying?
2. What was the application process like?
3. Do you have any advice for my application/what they are looking for?

Information about Summer Funding
1. What type of funding did you receive?
2. Are there any application requirements or deadlines I should know about?
3. Were you able to live comfortably for the summer?