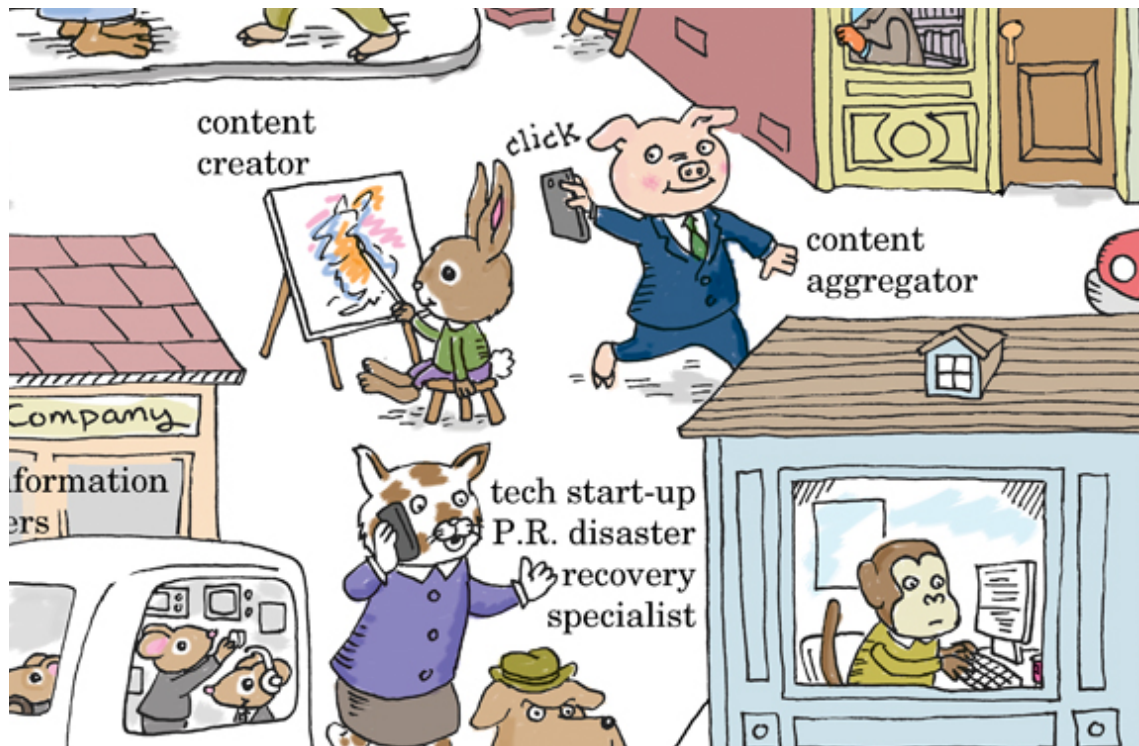


7 Researching workplaces and career communities



Cartoonist Reuben Bolling spoof of Richard Scarry children's books (2015)

“What do people do all day?”

This title to a well-known children's picture book by Richard Scarry sums up one of the biggest challenges of turning a particular set of academic and extra-curricular experiences — your major, your certificates, your student group memberships, your summer jobs — into a pathway to a particular job, organization, or career: how do you know what a hiring organization will want or need? Fortunately, as an undergraduate student pursuing a liberal education at a public research university, you practice the research and investigation skills that you need to answer this question in every one of your classes. This chapter provides advice on the three main modes of researching possible career paths and organizations that you might work for: searching out information about the career online; getting involved in career fairs and professional clubs; and personally asking key members of your social network who are connected to that career, especially through a semi-formal conversation known as an “informational interview.”

Gathering information online

With tools like Google, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, and even the free economic information provided on the Web by local, state, and federal government, every job search and career exploration should begin with an online search. One good strategy is to try to put together a two-page dossier of information on each organization that interests you as a possible future employer. This needs to be more than a few bullet points; you should know enough about the organization, and the work opportunity, to understand what they do, why they do it, and how you might fit into the mix. For example, here are some questions to answer:

- What is the mission of the organization? What is the purpose of the job?
- What products or services does the organization provide to the world? Does it have any competitors?
- Is the organization for-profit or non-profit? Is it publicly-owned or privately-owned?
- How is the organization seen by others in the same industry or profession? What is its reputation for work culture?
- What does the organization say about itself?
- Who currently heads this organization? (Any connection to you?)
- What types of changes, trends, societal and economic factors are occurring or impacting the work that this organization does?
- How large is the organization? Do you know if the work opportunity you seek is under a certain division, department, program or project within organization? What can you find out about this part of the organization?

Of course, the most important background to prepare before submitting materials to an organization — and before attending an interview — is to understand the competencies required for the position that you're seeking. Remember, your interviewer will likely employ a **competency-based interviewing** strategy (as discussed in chapter 4), so try to figure out:

- What are the minimum/required qualifications and preferred/desired qualifications for the job you seek? (Which ones do you possess?)
- What are the duties required of the job? (Which ones do you have experience or transferable skills for?)
- What kinds of challenges would someone expect on this job? (Which ones have you faced in similar ways through other experiences?)
- What are the three most important things you would learn by being affiliated with this organization or trying out this work opportunity?

Much of the information about the competencies required for a particular job will be contained in the position announcement or advertisement for the job itself. But if not, use other sources — even the web sites or job advertisements of the organization’s peers and competitors — to figure out what competencies you might be asked about in an interview (Kessler 2006).

LinkedIn provides some good tips for researching the 3 million prospective employers listed on their service:

LinkedIn advice for researching employers

1 Discover Top-of-Mind Topics

Most company pages contain a feed of recent articles and announcements. Take a hard look at the news they share. This will reveal company initiatives and topics. For an easy way to stay up-to-speed during your search, simply follow your target companies on LinkedIn.

2 Uncover Connections

The “How You’re Connected” tool shows who you might know at a company. If you’re not connected directly, looking at the 2nd degree connections will show which of your 1st degree connections can make an introduction. Reach out to current employees to learn about the company’s culture.

3 Align on Culture and Values

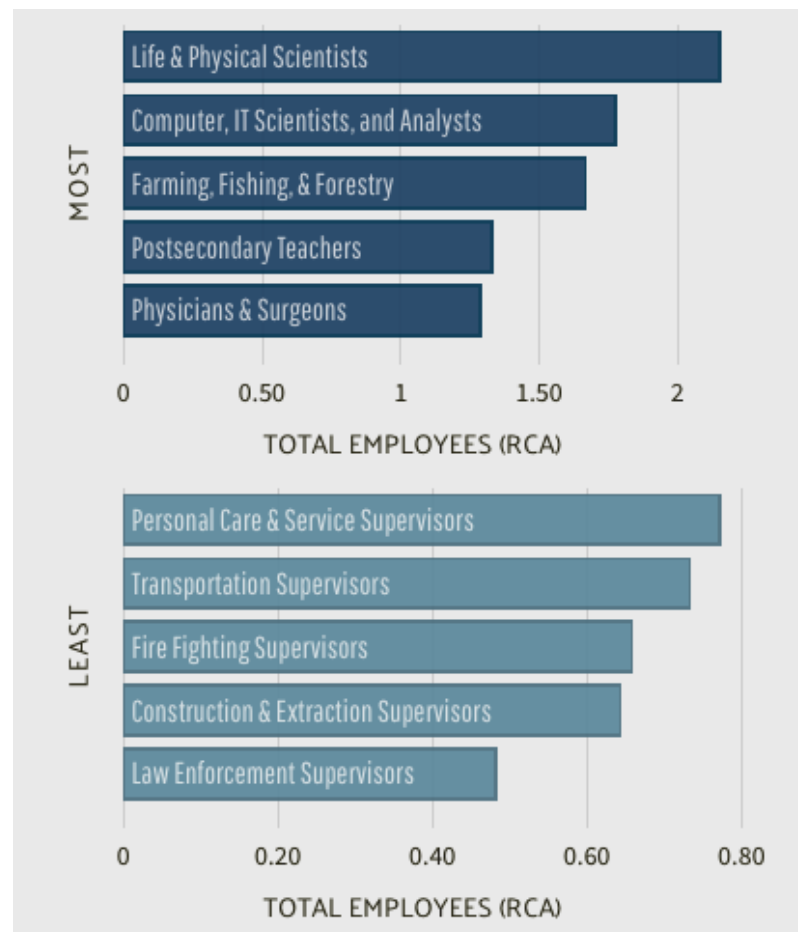
Most Company Pages contain a mission statement of some kind. Seek to uncover where your values align with a prospective employer. You’ll have a much better answer when the hiring manager asks, “Why do you want to work for us?”

4 Find Similar Companies

Each company page will have a “People Also Viewed” section. This is a great tool for finding companies you hadn’t yet considered.

Besides searching out information about particular organizations online, you should also consider how geographically mobile you are willing and able to be in your job search, and review information about different cities or regions and the jobs, industries, and careers which are prevalent there. Much of this is public information, and is freely available from government sites like the US Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov>). Increasingly, outside organizations are adapting this public data to make it easier to use and visualize. You can use a new online resource developed by the MIT Media Lab called “Data USA” (<http://datausa.io>) to query employment data for just about any city in the US. For example, in the Madison, WI area, you can find out which occupations are both overrepresented and underrepresented compared to other areas:

Data USA statistics on occupations in Madison, WI



(<http://datausa.io/profile/geo/madison-wi-metro-area/#economy>)

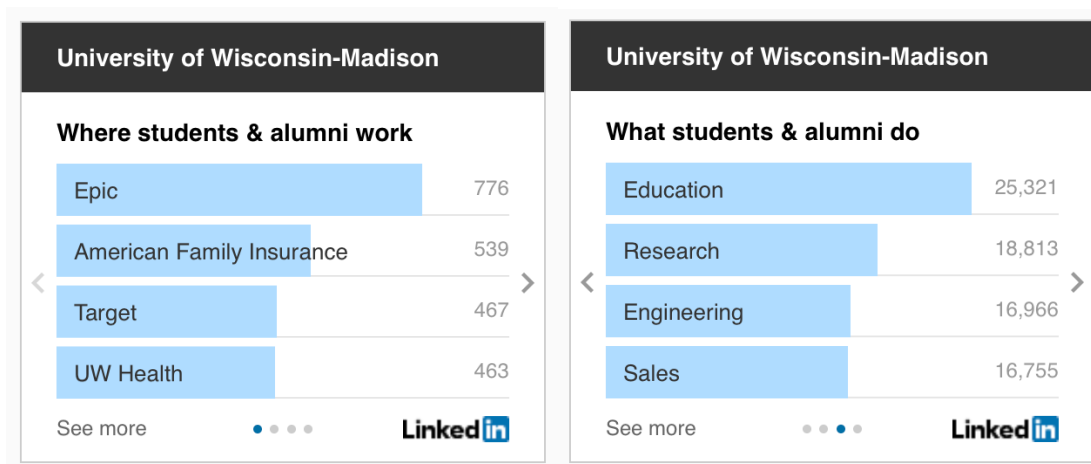
Web searches, while easy and effective, are nevertheless anonymous and sterile as well. But we've already seen that several social networking web services allow you to leverage the **wisdom of crowds** by tracking what other people have done with a certain major, job, or career.

For example, LinkedIn can be a great tool not only to popularize your own career, but to learn about the career paths (and connections) of others. Education journalist Jeffrey Selingo (2015) gives an example of how to do this:

Say you want to know more about people who majored in biomedical engineering in college. The search on LinkedIn returns some sixty-six thousand LinkedIn members with that degree. Their top three employers: GE Healthcare, Medtronic, and Siemens Healthcare. Click on GE Health- care to see that its nearly five hundred majors are employed as engineers, researchers, and in sales, and twenty of them went to Marquette University. Dive a little deeper into profiles to find out details about their lives, the jobs they held, their skill sets, and how they are connected to other companies and people.

You can try this yourself. On LinkedIn, search for “University of Wisconsin Madison” to see the nearly 300,000 alumni who are listed on this service. (You can save this search for viewing and filtering later.)

Various alumni career data available on LinkedIn

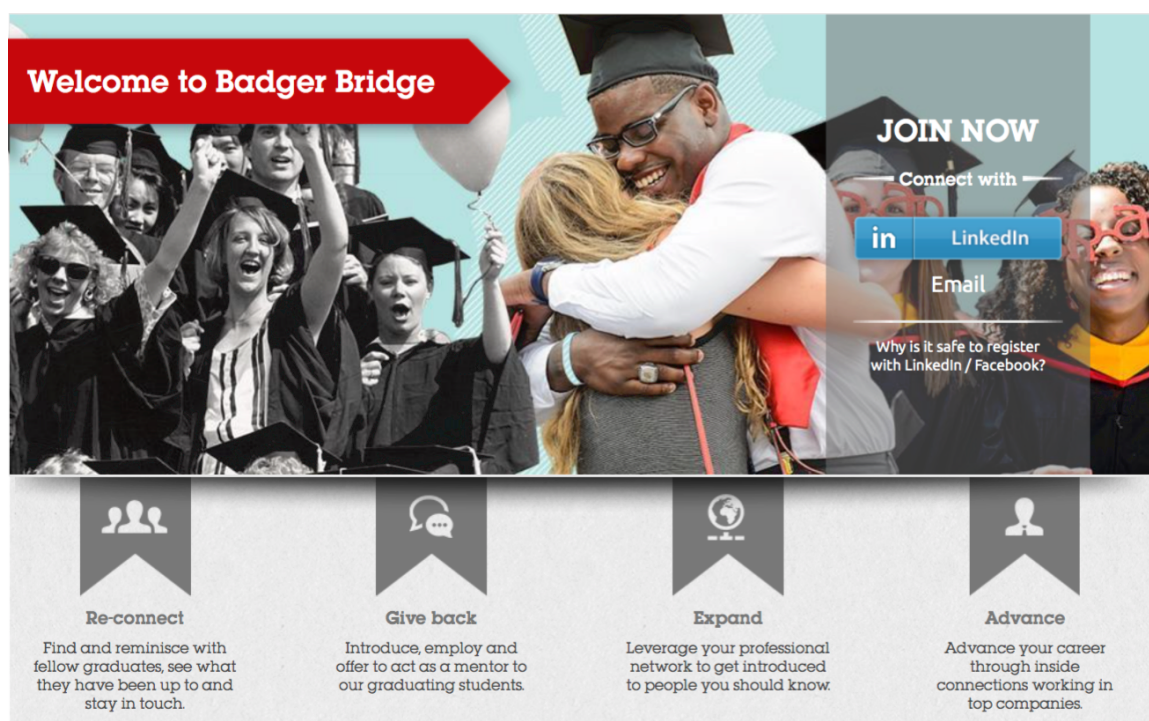


(LinkedIn 2015)

As a UW-Madison student, perhaps the best way to use LinkedIn in this way is by becoming a member of a new service sponsored by the Wisconsin Alumni Association, called **Badger Bridge**. This social network sits on top

of LinkedIn and provides a safe space for current and former UW-Madison students to meet, trade information about internships, and even build long-term mentoring relationships. Membership in Badger Bridge is free, so sign up today at <http://badgerbridge.com/>

Badger Bridge welcome screen



(badgerbridge.com 2016)

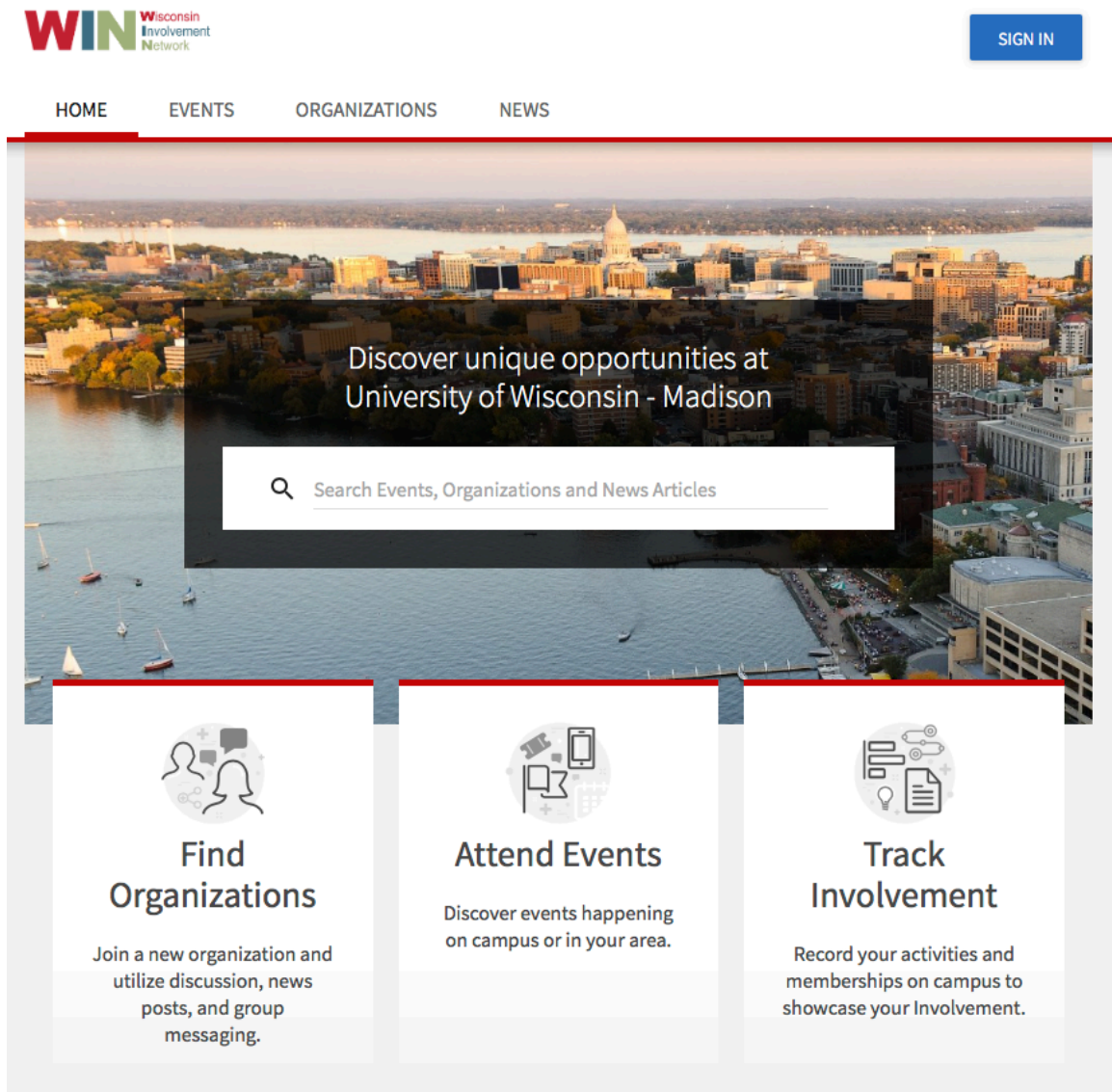
Other social networking platforms are used by UW-Madison alumni too. For example, you might try the Twitter feed of an alumni group in a particular city or region to find someone who might be willing to answer your question. Professor Downey maintains a publicly-viewable Twitter list of UW alumni feeds at <https://twitter.com/gjdowney/lists/uw-alumni-chapters>

Participating in student clubs and career fairs

Here at UW-Madison, besides the great online tools described above, you also have access to a some great “offline” tools for gathering quality information about prospective employers: professional clubs run by and for students targeting various industries and professions, and the large-scale career fair events held every semester right here on campus.

On a large campus like UW-Madison, navigating through the vast landscape of more than 800 student organizations and opportunities can be daunting. But there's a quick and easy portal to find professional organizations called the **Wisconsin Involvement Network**, accessible online at <http://win.wisc.edu>

Wisconsin Involvement Network (WIN) portal



UW-Madison (2017)

Clicking on the “Organizations” tab lets you filter the list by “Academic/ Professional” groups to find opportunities like these:

- Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy Student Chapter
- Actuarial Club
- Advertising Club
- Agricultural Business Management Club
- AHANA-MAPS Pre-Health Society
- AIGA Wisconsin (graphic designers)

... and that's only the first page of over fifty pages of listings!

Your involvement in one of these clubs can be as intense or as casual as you wish. At first, you might just want to attend a meeting to get to know some other students with your shared career interest — and to discover what majors they are pursuing, what courses they are taking, and what internships they've experienced. (See, you are building your social network already.) Over time, you may want to participate in some organized outings (like a visit to a regional employer) or even run for a leadership position in the group. Whatever your level of involvement, you are sure to learn more about the language, culture, and expectations of the career you are interested in.

Career fair events are in some ways the opposite of student clubs, providing punctuated “breadth” of exposure to employers from many different fields at once, rather than regular “depth” of experience with particular professions week-by-week. Here at UW-Madison, L&S SuccessWorks participates in half-a-dozen campus career fairs each year: a fall Career and Internship Fair, a fall Public Service Fair, a fall Multicultural Career and Internship Fair, and a fall Computer Science Job Fair (the Career and Internship Fair and the Public

Service Fair are also offered in the spring).

And before each event, students can attend free preparation meetings for last minute work on their résumés — or even to hear tips directly from the employers who will be at each fair! In a given year, over 400 different employers attend these events, and nearly 2,000 students register to participate. (That might seem like a lot, but it is actually less than 13% of all undergraduate students at UW-Madison — all the more reason for you to strive to be one of this select group!)

..... ONLINE RESOURCE

L&S SuccessWorks career fairs

<https://successworks.wisc.edu/the-basics/navigating-career-fairs/>

The Fairs App

<https://app.thefairsapp.com/#/fair/529/announcements>
.....

Planning your participation in these events beforehand is important. As Kay Clowes writes in her recent book “Put College to Work” (2015), “In order to make job fairs worth your while, you can't just stumble in, look at each

company's booths, take some preprinted brochures, and leave. You're going to have to do some research and planning and approach the job fair booth like it's your first interview at a particular company instead of an information session. That's because — essentially — this is an interview."

Example list of employers seeking L&S students at our 2016 career fairs

3M	Johnson & Johnson
AbbVie	Kohl's Department Stores
Aflac	Kimberly-Clark Corporation
Alliant Energy	Land O' Lakes, Inc.
American Family Insurance	Milwaukee Tool
AmeriCorps NCCC	NetSuite
Associated Bank	Northwestern Mutual
AT&T	Oracle
Baker Tilly	Peace Corps
BP America, Inc.	PepsiCo Beverages & Foods
Brady Corporation	Procter & Gamble
BrightEdge	Qualtrics
Cargill	Robert W. Baird & Company, Inc.
Cintas Corporation	Sentry Insurance
City Year Milwaukee	Target Corporation
College Possible	Target Stores
Covance	Teach for America
Dell Inc.	Thrivent Financial
Enterprise	Trek Bicycle Corporation
Epic	True Value
Ernst & Young LLP	U.S. Cellular
Ford Motor Company	United Airlines
Georgia-Pacific LLC	Urban Teachers
Harley-Davidson Motor Company	UW Credit Union
Hormel Foods Corporation	IBM
	Yelp

L&S SuccessWorks (2016)

A great way to prepare and plan for a career fair is to visit L&S SuccessWorks to talk to an expert in the specific cluster of occupations that you might be interested in — what we call a **career community**. Our career community

advisers offer extensive, specialized knowledge about occupations within each community, as well as connections to employers, alumni, and events. The current career communities available include:

- Communications, Arts & Entertainment
- Environment, Natural Resources & Wildlife
- Government, Policy, International Affairs, & Law
- Healthcare & Human Services
- L&S Business & Entrepreneurship
- Nonprofit Management & Education
- Scientific Research & Development
- Technology, Data & Analytics

You can find out more about these career communities, and make an appointment with a community adviser, at <https://successworks.wisc.edu/what-are-career-communities/>

No matter what specific career community you're targeting, career fairs can be large, energetic and hectic events, so it pays to be prepared to take written notes of the conversations you have and the people you have them with. "Carry a nice pen and put a notepad in your folder so you can take notes," advises Kay Clowes (2015). "Type up and print out the notes you made about each company during your research. Carry those with you in case you want to brush up as you go. Trust me; after you've talked to a half-dozen company reps, you're going to forget some of the details you so carefully researched."

Here are some more preparation tips from SuccessWorks advisers:

- Set up your profile in **Handshake** to research employees attending the fair and apply for internships & jobs
- Get **The Fairs App** on Google Play or the iOS App Store for detail on all employers attending the fair
- Update your resume by coming to SuccessWorks drop-in hours and **career fair prep night**
- Choose appropriate attire – business casual or business professional (jeans, flip-flops, short skirts and low-cut tops are not appropriate). SuccessWorks even offers a **career closet** for students to find free professional clothes!

Once you do get in front of a company representative at a career fair, Clowes recommends “Make sure that you ask questions about the company culture, what the recruiters love about the company, what projects you might be working on, the management structure, and any training it might offer entry-level employees.” Here’s a list of ideas from L&S SuccessWorks — questions that previous students have found to be effective at their own career fairs:

- What skills or traits do you look for in candidates?
- What is your company’s hiring timeline?
- What are some of the key responsibilities of this job/internship?
- What is a typical career path for someone coming in at my level?
- What kind of training program does your firm have?
- What is a day like in this position?
- What type of formal education is required for entry-level, mid-level, upper-level, positions?
- Do people filling this type of position work in a structured or non-structured environment?
- How is performance evaluated? How often?
- What degree of task variety would a person see in their first year?
- What is your company's policy on continuing education? For example, will they reimburse you for classes taken towards higher education?
- Is relocation/travel typically required in this career field?
- Where does your organization have offices within the U.S.? Worldwide?
- How easy/difficult is it to transfer to another location?
- What professional societies or associations should I join?
- Which professional publications in this field should I read?

Such questions help convince recruiters that you’re curious about what they do — and serious about what you can offer to them.

Finish your conversation with a recruiter by asking for a business card or information on who to contact in the future. And after talking to a recruiter, take a moment to write down a few key points about your conversation — this allows you to follow up afterward with a short thank-you email. It’s important to do this within 24 hours of your conversation with the employer, since many recruiters travel to multiple career fairs within the same week. Make sure to

refer to key points you may have discussed with the employer to remind them of your conversation. Here's an example:

Dear [recruiter name]:

It was a pleasure speaking to you at the [name of the career fair] at UW-Madison on [date]. I am very interested in finding a position in [name of position] and enjoyed hearing from you what it's like to work at [name of organization].

[Add in anything else related to your conversation, especially the next steps you need to do to continue through their process such as apply on-line, etc.]

I appreciate your time and look forward to pursuing an opportunity at [name of organization].

Sincerely,

Conducting an informational interview

Whether you use LinkedIn, Badger Bridge, Twitter, or in-person contacts through clubs and career fairs, your eventual goal in reaching out to your social network should be to conduct an **informational interview** about a particular career, organization, or job, with someone who has direct experience with that area. Remember, in an informational interview you are not asking for a job — you're asking for advice, insight, and even mentorship. One goal for any informational interview should be to keep the interviewee as an available contact in your social network for possible job referrals later.

Here's a sample template for reaching out to an interviewee:

Hello, my name is _____. I am a college student at the University of Wisconsin investigating career opportunities and trying to make some good decisions. I was referred to you by _____, and after hearing about your career and current position, I thought you might be able to help me answer a few questions. Would you have 20-30 minutes sometime to talk with me so I can find out more about your organization and how someone with my background and skills can fit into this field?

Arrange a time that is convenient for your interviewee. Try to hold the interview in person if you can; only use the phone or email as a last resort. And dress appropriately for the meeting, to show professionalism and respect for your interviewee's time.

Each informational interview should be tailored to the particular person and work area that you're learning about. But here is a generic list of structured interview questions to start with:

1. Tell me about your duties and responsibilities in your job.
2. What is a typical day like in your job?
3. What is the environment like in which you work?
4. What are the three most important aspects of your job?
5. Who do you collaborate with in your job? How does this collaboration help you be more effective in your job?
6. What major did you have in college? What courses did you take that are helping you in your job?
7. Did you complete an internship as part of your college experience in preparation for your job? Describe it.
8. If you knew someone was coming into your job, what strengths would they need to have to be effective?
9. Could someone do your job with different strengths than yours? How?
10. What advice would you have for someone who is looking at going into a career similar to yours?

Finally after the meeting is over, thank your interviewee, not only in person, but with a follow-up note or email a day later as well. (Busy professionals use their email history as their record of who they've talked to and why — so if you leave a positive impression, you are more likely to be able to call upon this person again in the future!)

Your departmental, college, or campus career services office will have more tips and contacts for informational interviews. And the web site JobShadow.com has an archive of transcribed interviews with professionals in a wide range of careers who talk about their jobs.

Ultimately, all of your career research — especially your informational interviews — should feed back into the social networking dynamics described in chapter 6: you want to be able to find mentors who you can call upon again

and again for advice, and who will advocate for you when job opportunities arise. People you meet through your daily activities in and out of the classroom — instructors, advisers, supervisors, and coworkers — can all be productive mentors as you build trust and respect with them over time. And friends and family from back home can be important mentors as well.

Here's how one former student in the class was able to put her job research and social networking together to find a great job after graduation with Fortune 500 manufacturer Kimberly-Clark:

I took the Taking Initiative: InterLS 210 course my junior year. At that point I knew I wanted a more business-focused career, but worried my liberal arts degrees could be a turn-off for companies that “only look at business degrees.” Throughout the semester, I realized how proud I was to be a liberal arts student and how I could use it to my advantage in the job-application process.

I worked with L&S Career Services in practicing interviews, learning how to make the career fair productive and networking. Throughout my senior year, I became very comfortable setting up informational interviews to make connections and learn about potential career interests. [...]

The funny story with Kimberly-Clark is that I did not make my first impression at the career fair [...] Through my connection's connection, I emailed the vice president of sales to learn about career opportunities — something I never would have done without practice through the class!

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to research an organization before applying for a job with that organization?
2. What is a “competency-based interview” and how should one prepare for it?
3. What kind of information about organizations or specific career paths can one learn by searching LinkedIn?
4. How can exploring your “career community” help you prepare for an on-campus career fair?
5. What is the value of conducting an informational interview? How does an informational interview differ from an employment interview?
6. What is Badger Bridge and how might it be useful to your career development?
7. Why might you want to join a student organization related to your professional goals?

READ MORE ABOUT IT

Thomas Wolf, *Managing a Nonprofit Organization in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). If you are considering a career in a non-governmental organization or other nonprofit, this book can help you understand what to expect.

Nina Vasan and Jennifer Przybyla, *Do Good Well: Your Guide to Leadership, Action, and Social Innovation* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2013). This how-to guide focuses on the non-profit world and entrepreneurship.

Dan Schawbel, *Promote Yourself: The New Rules for Career Success* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013). Good advice for turning informational interviews into mentoring relationships.

Sarah Dunham and Lisa Vollmer, *What To Do With Your History or Political Science Degree* (New York: Random House, 2007). Contrary to its title, this book is useful for more than just history or political science majors — the advice applies to any L&S degree.

Katharine Hansen, *A Foot in the Door: Networking Your Way into the Hidden Job Market* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2008). Practical advice on informational interviewing and finding job information through networking.

Lindsey Pollak, *Getting from College to Career* (New York: Harper, 2012). A great all-around guide to the career search process.