Noteworthy Networking

You’ve probably heard about the importance of “networking.” Now is the time to take advantage of any opportunities you may have to make connections with other researchers, both students and faculty, in your field. As many of you start to make post-graduation plans, whether for graduate school, professional school, or the workforce, you will soon be glad that you made the effort to build these relationships now. Looking back on my own undergraduate experience, I wish that I would have met with each and every one of my professors outside of class, even if I hadn’t had class related questions, just to talk with them about their research and professional experiences in order to build a larger network. You’ll never know how someone might impact your life if you don’t reach out to them. I know it can be intimidating to contact professors to meet with them, but most of the faculty at OSU thrive on helping undergraduates find themselves and succeed in their field of interest—if they didn’t care about teaching or research, they wouldn’t be in this profession!

Remember, too, that whether or not you are making a conscious effort, you are networking every day. Each time you consult a research team member, meet with your PI, or join other SURI students for pick-up soccer, you fortify your network. So, don’t let the summer slip away without getting to know your colleagues!

To help you brush up on your skills, here are a few tips for nailing your networking ability:

1. Keep it casual. When you hear the word “networking,” you may conjure an image of some formal event with business people milling about in suits, but successful networking can be achieved at a much more casually as well. Even in the most formal of situations, like an interview, make sure to be yourself and take each interaction for what it is—a reciprocal conversation between two equally interested parties. Never forget that a conversation is casual and at its base, simply an attempt to understand each other better.

2. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Some of the most helpful information you’ll find about your future career or graduate program will come from someone who has been through the process before. Ask someone whose profession you admire if they have any advice on how to be successful or how they knew that this was the right profession for them. Most people are happy to advise an interested student who makes an effort to contact them. Getting the answers to your questions can be as simple as asking, so be confident!

3. Utilize your tech resources “professionally.” In today’s technology saturated world, we really have no excuse not to network! Facebook, for example, helps you keep track of
your personal networks 24/7, post and read interesting articles, and share your experiences with others whom you may not have time to connect with on a regular basis. Although LinkedIn is often the first to come to mind in terms of networking, Twitter and Instagram have also become platforms for professional growth and connectedness. With all the advances in technological communication, however, remember that email is often the most efficient and easily accessible. It never hurts to send an email to an old professor or former graduate student of your lab every once in a while, just to keep in touch. Furthermore, for an example of how technology can be used to enhance researchers’ professional networks, check out Deborah Lupton’s blog post and accompanying document discussing how technology has changed her research and can be utilized to the benefit of those in the field. Lastly, you have been told this before, but please keep in mind that when you apply to graduate/professional school or the workforce, applicant reviewers WILL look at your social media presence. The image you maintain on your media outlets will follow you. On the same note, it is important to keep your accounts, such as LinkedIn, up to date, especially during job and grad school searches. Companies and graduate schools often have premium accounts on LinkedIn, for example, that let them view your profile anonymously.

4. Say thank you. Take a moment to remember those individuals who’ve helped you throughout your research project and undergraduate experience in general. Make sure they know how much you appreciate their help! Even in our increasingly digital world, nothing can replace the sincerity of a hand-written thank you note.

5. Follow up. You may be working closely with people this summer with whom you don’t have the opportunity to work during the rest of the year. Don’t let the conversation go stagnant! Keeping in touch will be very helpful in case you want to seek advice or even a letter of recommendation at a later date.

I hope you found these tips helpful. In any networking attempts, just make sure to be yourself and to be confident. The rest will then fall into place.

All the best,

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