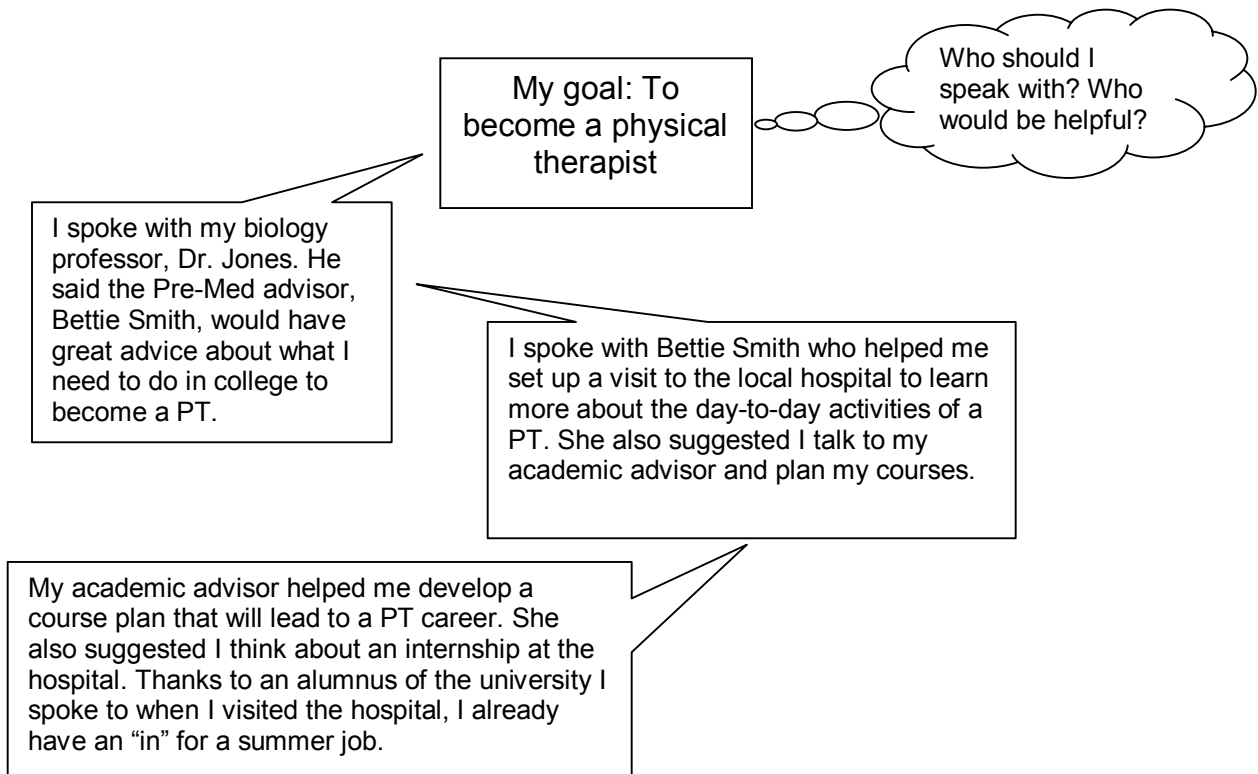


Building Professional Relationships

For many students, college is a time to prepare for a career and to begin developing relationships with people who can help them achieve their goals. A key part of any college experience is developing relationships with professors, academic advisors, student services staff, and others who can help you. This is called networking. Below is an example of how networking can help.



Getting to know people who have had experience with your major or are working in your chosen profession can help you:

- Understand what the major/work is really like;
- Make sure you are well prepared and take the right courses for the jobs you want;
- Find internships and job opportunities;
- Stand out from the crowd when you look for a job or internship.

How Do I Meet People Who Know about My Major or Chosen Career?

Start by telling people you know that you would like to meet someone with experience in your major or chosen field. It is amazing how far your personal network can take you. Talk to:

- Family and friends (relatives, friends of friends, etc.)
- People at school (professors and classmates)
- Casual contacts (people you know through sports, clubs, church, civic activities, etc.)
- Employers & co-workers (summer or part-time jobs as well as full-time jobs)
- Neighborhood contacts (people you see for services, e.g., doctor, butcher, psychologist, dry cleaner, grocer, banker)

What Should I Ask Members of My Network?

When you find a person in your chosen field, you are ready to conduct an *informational interview*. If that sounds a bit scary, remember that most people love to talk about their work and will likely be glad to help you. Informational interviews should be kept short. Ask your contact for 15 or 20 minutes. Arrive at the interview dressed as you would to work in that location. Be prepared with a short list of questions. Examples of questions include:

- What do you like best about your work?
- What do you like least?
- Please describe a typical day.
- What college courses did you take (or wish you had taken) to prepare you for this work?
- What other kinds of college experiences prepared you for this position?
- How did you get your first job in this field?
- What is the normal salary range for people who do this kind of work?

Avoid staying too long—remember, your contact has work to do. Wrap the interview up after 20 minutes at most. Whether you finish your list of questions or not, be sure the last question you ask is “Do you know anyone else I could talk to who does similar work?” If you get a referral, be sure to ask if it is OK to mention who referred you.

How Do I Keep in Touch with Members of My Network?

So you can properly thank your contact, ask for a business card or write down the correct contact information before you leave. As soon as possible, mail or e-mail the contact with a thank-you. Also write notes to yourself about the person you met (such as color of hair or other distinguishing information). A month or year later, it may be difficult to remember which person said what. If you decide to seek an internship or to get some summer experience while in college, send your resume to the contact with a reminder about the interview and ask if the contact knows of any openings in your field.

Use the *Networking Prep Sheet* handout on the next page to prepare to network.

Networking Prep Sheet

My Major and Career Goals:

List of people I know (e.g., professors/co-workers/neighborhood contacts) who may be able to provide contacts:

List and contact information for people in my chosen field/with experience in my major:

Questions to ask in an informational interview:

- What do you like best about your work?
- What do you like least?
- Please describe a typical day.
- What college courses did you take (or wish you had taken) to prepare you for this work?
- What other kinds of college experiences prepared you for this position?
- How did you get your first job in this field?
- What is the normal salary range for people who do this kind of work?
- Do you know anyone else I could talk to who does similar work?

Networking Interview Notes

(Make copies of this page for every two interviews you have.)

Notes from Interview:

- Full name of the person I spoke with: _____
- Date and time of our meeting: _____
- Their job title: _____
- Where they work: _____
- How I met this person (who referred me, etc.): _____

- Something special I learned about them personally: _____

- Email, address and phone number: _____

- Thank-you note sent (circle one): YES NO

Notes from Interview:

- Full name of the person I spoke with: _____
- Date and time of our meeting: _____
- Their job title: _____
- Where they work: _____
- How I met this person (who referred me, etc.): _____

- Something special I learned about them personally: _____

- Email, address and phone number: _____

- Thank-you note sent (circle one): YES NO