

# Connecting with Alumni

Alumni can be one of your greatest resources. Many Amherst alumni are happy to meet or hear from current students and help in any way they can.

## Networking with Alumni IS...

- A purposeful conversation to learn about a field of work, employers that interest you, a geographic place, various career paths, and more.
- A two way-dialogue that involves cultivating a relationship over time.
- An opportunity to speak about Amherst, majors you may be considering, your career interests, and how you developed these interests.

## Networking with Alumni is NOT...

- An opportunity for a job request or financial solicitation
- To be done hastily or without planning
- A chance to contact alumni en masse through a one size fits all generic email. Be selective and tailor your communication.

## FINDING ALUMNI

If you have decided that you would like to connect with Amherst College alumni, there are several ways:

### Alumni Directory

The Amherst Alumni Directory is a tremendous resource. Almost all Amherst alumni have a profile created by the College, and many alumni have also added information about their education and employment. You may search alumni by name, location, employer, job title, and industry. Once you get the results of your search, review individual profiles and decide who might be helpful for you to connect with. Make a list of 5-10 alumni who you think might be helpful and read more below about how to reach out to them appropriately.

### Alumni Networking Events

Networking opportunities with alumni are everywhere! You may encounter opportunities for alumni networking at receptions, career fairs, presentations and information sessions, Five College events, and professional conferences. In preparation for a face to face conversation, develop your “elevator pitch,” a 1-2 minute introduction in which you describe your background, what you are interested in, and why you would be good at it. Next, be sure to ask a leading question, which will allow the alumnus to begin sharing information. Remember, you have Amherst in common, a shared experience of great value to both of you! Ask for a business card, and jot down a few words about your conversation on the back. This will help you write a thoughtful follow-up note.

# CONNECTING WITH ALUMNI

## REACHING OUT TO ALUMNI

Once you have selected a few alumni that you want to contact, take the time to do so appropriately. This is not something to be done hastily or without much thought. You must use the directory responsibly and give each alumnus(a) the research and attention that a request of his/her time deserves.

### Preparation

Before you reach out to alumni, it is important that you do your homework. First, you should determine your goal(s). Why do you want to speak with this person? This should be clear when you communicate with the alumnus so he knows whether he can be helpful and can anticipate certain kinds of questions you may have. Next, you need to do some research. Gather any information you can about him and his organization to help you determine what you might be able to learn.

### Contact

If you are trying to make a connection with an alumnus by email, make sure to address the following:

- Mention Amherst College in the subject line.
- Target your correspondence to a specific person and use a formal greeting (Dear Mr. Smith).
- Introduce yourself—major, campus involvement, internships, career interests, etc.
- Describe the specific criteria you used to locate them (organization, role, major, grad program, location, etc.).
- Indicate why you are reaching out (career exploration, industry research, job search advice, etc.)
- Ask how they would prefer to communicate (by phone, email, video call).
- Indicate what you hope to learn from the conversation or what question(s) you hope to discuss.
- Provide your contact information (email address, phone number).
- Thank them for their time.

**\*\*See a sample email on the following page.**

# CONNECTING WITH ALUMNI

Dear Mr. Smith,

Greetings from Amherst! I obtained your name from the Amherst Alumni Directory. As a sophomore economics major with a focus on international studies at Amherst College, I am interested in learning more about your work for the Global Finance Solutions department at Deutsch Bank. More specifically, I am interested in hearing about the nature of your work, how your work is driven by financial analysis, and how much is driven by international political and cultural developments. I hope that our discussion will help me make some decisions about internship options for next summer.

I'm sure your schedule is incredibly demanding, but I hope we might be able to arrange a time to talk. Would you be able to spare 20 minutes in the next couple weeks to speak either by phone or Skype?

Thank you for your time and hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

## PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION

Once you have set up a time to talk, do some additional preparation. It will help you make the most out of your conversation. In order to ask relevant, appropriate questions, continue your research of her company and career path. Do not ask questions that could be easily answered via a simple web search. Do ask questions that will help you meet your objective for the conversation. What is it that you want to learn? What advice do you need?

We call these conversations Informational Interviews. The tables are turned from a conventional interview, and you are the one typically guiding the conversation or asking most of the questions. See the Informational Interviewing handout on our website for more information and sample questions. Remember that alumni are volunteering their time to help you. Be cognizant of this and remember to be gracious and act responsibly.

## FOLLOWING UP

You should always follow-up when connecting with alumni. Here are some tips to help you do so appropriately:

- If you don't receive a response from alumni after reaching out, follow up after a week. A career advisor can help you craft an appropriate follow-up email. Do not follow up more than twice.
- Take careful notes during your conversation so that you can follow-up on tips and advice.
- Show your appreciation by sending a thank you note. You can choose to send an email or hand-written note.
- Share special information with your alumni contacts, especially when you accept a position.
- If you see them in the news or read an article about something relevant to their work or your conversation, send them a note.