

Fordham
Law School

New York, New York

GRADUATE
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAM

GPDP MINI-GUIDE:
NETWORKING FOR
GRADUATE STUDENTS

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AND NON-J.D. PROGRAMS

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I. INTRODUCTION TO NETWORKING

The importance of networking can never be overstated. Your contacts are your most important resource in finding a job. Many LL.M. students get jobs through networking, and the majority of practicing attorneys make lateral moves or advance based on professional contacts.

Many people think of networking as attending events and making small talk with people you have never met before. That is one form of networking, but by no means the only form or the most effective. This guide lists several useful networking techniques, including informational interviewing, participation in bar associations, attending continuing legal education courses, and utilizing current contacts, and also gives you tips for nurturing and maintaining your growing professional network.

Anytime you are interacting with a professional, it is important to portray confidence, competence, and enthusiasm, but also humility. Keep in mind that there is a delicate balance between confidence and arrogance. A good rule of thumb is that you should not downplay or hide your accomplishments if they come up naturally in the course of conversation; likewise, you should volunteer any accomplishment or credential that has a natural nexus to the conversation. On the other hand, if you are changing the subject to bring up your accomplishments or credentials, this may come across as arrogant and opportunistic.

Keep in mind that positive professional relationships result from a constructive give-and-take. No party should feel used or taken advantage of. When appropriate, you should offer up your resources, skills, and contacts to help people in your network. A relationship is a two-way street. It is not just about what someone else can do for you—it's also about what you can do for them. Showing generosity and skill is a great way to enhance others' view of your professionalism and abilities.

II. YOUR PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

You should maintain a professional image at all times. Your professional image goes beyond your clothing and appearance; it also involves your demeanor, comportment, and behavior. This does not mean that you need to wear a business suit at all times, but you should endeavor to behave professionally and dress appropriately at all times. This section will discuss your image for different types of events. However, there are some rules that apply at all times, no matter what the situation. Here are a few general rules:

- Use a firm handshake. A handshake that is too weak can convey a lack of confidence, while a handshake that is too strong can convey arrogance or can actually hurt. To give the right impression, you should practice a firm (but not overly firm) handshake that conveys confidence and competence.
- Use good personal hygiene.
 - Make sure your breath is inoffensive. Bad breath has more of a negative career impact than many people realize, and has a very strong negative effect on networking.

- Do not chew gum. However, if you must chew gum (to address bad breath), be very discreet about it. Nobody should be able to tell that you have gum in your mouth.
- Deodorant is a must.
- Your fingernails should be clean and short.
- Do not wear excessive amounts of perfume or cologne. As a general rule, unless someone is embracing you, they should not be able to smell you.
- Smoking is generally frowned upon in the U.S. Do not smoke in business settings.
- Clothing should be conservative. Women should not wear low cut tops or short skirts. Men should avoid loud color schemes or showy cufflinks. When in doubt, it is generally safe to opt for the more conservative choice in attire.
- Smile often and maintain comfortable eye contact.
- Be punctual. For meetings or speaker events, arrive a few minutes early. It is considered rude to interrupt a presentation that has already begun. If you have arrived late to a presentation that has already started, take your seat very quietly, taking care to open and close doors softly, sit in the first available seat, and disrupt the presentation as little as possible.
- Turn off your cell phone and keep it invisible while interacting with others; if you need to text, step out of the room to a private place. If this is not possible, use your phone quickly and discretely.
- Be courteous. Be respectful to everyone with whom you interact, regardless of their position.

A. Business Attire

If you are attending an informational interview or networking event, it is a good idea to wear business attire. Err on the conservative side; it is almost never wrong to be slightly overdressed, and it is far better to be overdressed than underdressed. Follow the guidelines below to ensure that you present yourself in an appropriate and professional manner. Note that the rules below are slightly different than the rules for attire in a job interview, which are stricter and more formal.

- Choose a dark or neutral colored suit.
- Men:
 - Wear a tie in a conservative color with a conservative print.
 - Bow ties are generally not appropriate.
 - Socks should be in a dark color and should coordinate with your suit.

- Men may wear cufflinks, watches, tie clips, or conservative rings (such as wedding bands), but other jewelry is generally inappropriate.
- Women:
 - Generally, a skirt or pants suit is equally appropriate.
 - No sandals or open-toed shoes. Heels should be of a conservative height.
 - Any jewelry should be reasonably conservative.
 - If long hair will be distracting (*e.g.*, you will play with it or it will cover your face), it should be pulled back.
 - Skirts should be of a conservative length (*i.e.*, at or slightly above the knee) and should be worn with panty hose or tights in a flesh tone or black.

B. Business Casual Attire

Many events require business casual attire. These may include bar association committee meetings, CLE courses, and law school events.

For men, business casual usually means dress slacks and a dress shirt, with or without a tie, and dress shoes with dark socks.

Women's business casual attire is a bit more flexible, and thus is a bit more difficult to define. Business casual would typically consist of a dress skirt or slacks, paired with a blouse or sweater and dress shoes. Open-toed shoes may be acceptable, but must still be conservative. Sandals are not acceptable. Skirts may be worn with or without panty hose, but must still be a conservative length.

When in doubt, dress in business attire unless there is reason to believe that this would be perceived as inappropriate.

C. Casual Attire

There are many events where it is appropriate to wear casual attire, including many events around the Law School, however you should still endeavor to maintain a professional appearance as much as possible. Remember that you want your appearance to convey to others that you are a capable, responsible person. Even when wearing casual attire, your clothing should be clean, well maintained, and fit you well.

D. The Art of “Mingling”

For many people, the idea of walking into a room full of strangers and striking up a conversation is a frightening proposition. It can be particularly daunting if English is not your first language and you are just learning U.S. business customs and etiquette. If you find yourself in a situation where you need to “mingle,” the tips below will help you get comfortable.

- *Do not approach a group of two.* They may be having a private conversation and you should not interrupt. Look for groups of 3-5 people.

- *When approaching a group, listen for a few moments, then make a comment that adds to the conversation.* Do not dominate the conversation or change the subject; but also do not stay silent. Wait for a brief pause and then speak; try to avoid cutting anyone off.
- *Ask open ended questions.* Open-ended questions (questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”) get people talking.
- *Stand in the longest drink line.* This will give you the opportunity to interact with those who are standing in line alongside you.
- *Approach the speaker(s).* If the reception follows a speaker event, approach one of the speakers with a thoughtful question. This will not only give you the chance to meet the speaker, it will also give you the opportunity to mingle with others who are waiting to ask the speaker a question.
- *Maintain general knowledge of news events.*
- *Avoid controversial topics (politics, religion, etc.).*
- *Pay attention to body language and non-verbal cues.* In particular, try to gauge what is a comfortable distance for the other person to be standing from you. When first approaching a group, maintain eye contact – do not avert your eyes.
- *Excuse yourself politely when the conversation reaches a natural end.* Remember to introduce yourself and ask for business cards.

E. Using Business Cards



We have law student business cards available for order (available on the GPDP website at law.fordham.edu/llm/gpdp). But it is important, if you order them, that you use them appropriately. If someone asks you for a business card, you may (of course) give it to them. Additionally, if you are offering to help someone with a need that they have and they will have a reason to contact you, you may give them your card. But if the person is someone with whom you wish to network, who you are hoping will help you in some way, you should not give them your card (unless they ask for it). Rather, you should ask for their card and follow up with them via

email. In the email, it is generally appropriate to say that you enjoyed speaking with them about X, and you hope that your paths cross again at a future event. If you are aware of another similar event that is happening in the future, you can ask them if they plan on attending.

F. Overcoming Shyness

Networking can be intimidating for anyone, but it can pose a particular challenge for people who naturally have a tendency to be introverted or shy. Luckily, there are networking techniques and situations that will allow introverts to shine. For example, look for opportunities to have one-on-one interactions, or to contribute to a small group project. You may have to force yourself at first, but the more you get out and do it, the better you will become at networking. You may even find that you enjoy it after a while! Remember to expect rejection – everyone has successes and setbacks in networking. Focus on your strengths so you can approach any situation with confidence.

III. NETWORKING TECHNIQUES AND VENUES

A. Informational Interviewing

1. General Information

Informational interviewing is a wonderful tool for students to build their knowledge about a practice area or setting and also serves as an incredibly effective networking device. An informational interview is a meeting that a job seeker arranges with a contact of interest with knowledge in particular practice area or setting in order to learn more about that practice area or setting. The goal is not to interview for a specific job; rather, it is to make contacts and learn what it means to practice in a particular field or in a specific practice setting. Students should think of an informational interview as the reverse of a job interview. This is an opportunity for you to ask questions. Some questions you might ask include:

- What is the day-to-day work like in a particular practice area?
- What are the various career options for successful attorneys in a particular practice?
- What are the skills necessary for success in a particular practice?
- What is the most challenging aspect of your job? The most rewarding?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you obtain this position? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present role?
- Are there any classes you suggest that I take in order to prepare for a career in this practice area?
- What sorts of changes are occurring in a particular practice area?

- Do you know of other people whom I might talk to regarding this practice area?
- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this practice area? Are there any materials that you suggest I read?

This information can then be used to write more informed cover letters and to better articulate your interest and applicable skills in an interview. In addition, an informational interview is an opportunity to meet and impress a successful attorney with your questions and professionalism. This type of first meeting creates a lasting impact when done skillfully. Note that the questions described above are simply examples of questions you might ask. You should formulate your own set of questions based on your interests and the interviewee's position and experience. Ideally, the questions will act as conversation-starters.

2. How to Set Up and Prepare for an Informational Interview

The first step to an effective informational interview is to identify people with whom you would like to meet. This list may include attorneys in a specialized practice area at law firms or attorneys at specific corporations or public service organizations. Fordham Law School alumni, fellow alumni of your previous law school or university, and attorneys from your home country are all great resources for informational interviewing; however, students should not request informational interviews with individuals with whom they have no connection. Martindale.com will allow you to search for Fordham Law School alumni and fellow alumni of your previous schools (including foreign schools).¹

After identifying people with whom you would like to meet, the next step is requesting a meeting. Requests for informational interviewing can be done by email or phone. When requesting the meeting, be very clear that you are not requesting a job interview - just an opportunity to discuss his or her career path and practice.

Prepare for the meeting by researching the individual that you are meeting with and his or her organization and practice area. Wear business attire and be ready with a series of questions. Since this is an informational meeting and not a job interview, you will be asking most of the questions. At the close of the meeting, ask if there are any other individuals he or she would recommend you speak with for informational purposes.

Because this is not a job interview, you do not need to bring resumes to an informational interview. If you choose to bring your resume, do not present your resume to the interviewee unless you are asked for it.

After the meeting, send a thank you note via email or post immediately. There is a very good chance that your paths will cross again with this individual and a strong first impression can go a long way.

¹ Under the "People" tab at the top of the Martindale home page, select "Advanced Search." If you are searching for the name of a foreign university, you may wish to try multiple variants on the translation, as it may be listed in more than one way, or to search for just a small part of the name.

B. Participation in Bar Associations

Many attorneys maintain membership with a bar association. It is through these organizations that attorneys share ideas, gain clients, and keep abreast of the many changes in the legal profession. For students, bar associations are wonderful tools for networking. Through participation in a bar association, students can work directly with attorneys in a particular legal market and learn about the “hot issues” of a specific practice area. Bar associations are inexpensive for students to join (typically from \$10-\$50 for an annual membership) and provide students with myriad networking opportunities, including social events, meetings, committee work, and programs.

Some bar associations allow student members to join a specialized practice area committee. As a member of a committee, you will be an active participant in all the committee's functions and will work closely with successful attorneys on that committee. There is no better way to show a practicing attorney what an asset you would be to his or her organization than to impress him or her through your work on a bar association committee.

For the reasons set forth above, we highly recommend that you become actively involved with one or more bar associations, and that you explore opportunities for committee membership. For more information on bar associations, please see the Handbook for LL.M. and M.S.L. students.

C. Attending Continuing Legal Education Classes

Upon admission to the bar in New York State (and in most other U.S. jurisdictions), each practicing attorney is required to satisfy the Continuing Legal Education (CLE) requirements of the state. Fordham Law School has been certified as an Accredited Provider of CLE in the State of New York. Several times each month, lectures and conferences offering CLE credit are held at the Law School, and many are open to Fordham Law students free of charge. CLE courses offer students a unique opportunity to attend an event in a specialized practice area with a group of practicing attorneys, many of them Fordham Law School alumni. Often, [CLE events](#) at Fordham Law School will include a brief social period before, during, or after the program.² This is a great opportunity for students to network with practicing attorneys.

Various bar associations and the [Practising Law Institute](#)³ also offer CLE programs. While CLE courses tend to be expensive, law students are often eligible for full or partial scholarships – you should not hesitate to ask the provider about these opportunities. You may even ask to volunteer at the event in exchange for a waiver of the fee (especially if you wish to attend but do not need CLE credits). This is a great way to meet speakers and attendees.

D. Current Contacts

You should not overlook people you already know and interact with, either professionally or personally (friends, colleagues, classmates, professors, relatives, etc.), as resources who may be able to introduce you to potential networking contacts or as potential networking contacts themselves. Indeed, these can be among your most valuable networking resources. You can also

² <http://law.fordham.edu/office-of-public-programming-cle/cle.htm>.

³ <http://www.pli.edu>.

use your social media platforms to identify contacts that may be useful in your job search. LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) can be especially useful; developing a good profile and cultivating a strong network of contacts on LinkedIn can create many good networking and job leads.

Once a potential networking contact is identified, a student may wish to set up an informational interview or a more informal meeting (*e.g.*, a casual lunch or coffee), depending on the nature of the student's relationship with the contact. Regardless of the type of meeting, students should treat these meetings similarly to an informational interview. Students should dress and act professionally; ask lots of questions; and convey confidence, competence, and enthusiasm. As with an informational interview, students should always follow up these meetings with a thank you email or note, and should maintain regular contact.

E. Alumni Networks/Regional Connections

Alumni networks or regional connections can yield useful networking contacts, as long as they are used wisely. For example, you would not want to simply contact everyone who graduated from Fordham Law School and works in a large law firm in New York—that would be ineffective and inefficient. However, if you have a specific company in mind that you are very interested in and you are looking to cold-call someone in that firm for an informational interview, it may be effective to reach out to someone at that company or firm with whom you share a common background, whether it is that you graduated from the same school or come from the same country. Keep in mind that the closer and more specific the connection, the better.

F. Community Involvement

Getting involved in your community can be a good way to build your social and professional network. Get involved with something you are passionate about, whether or not it is related to the law. Pursuing your passions is a great way to make genuine connections with others, and those connections can become great relationships that can benefit you personally and professionally. In addition, meeting new people in a setting that is more familiar or comfortable to you (such as a soccer league, a dance class, a religious or civic organization) will be good practice for when you enter a scene that is less familiar to you (such as a cocktail party at a bar association). Whatever your passion, there is an outlet for it in New York City, and getting involved with groups in the community (*i.e.*, outside of the law school) will be a good opportunity to expand your social and professional network.

G. Law School Events

Law school events tend not to be the best place to network, as they are usually filled with lots of law students who are all competing with one another to network with one or two lawyers. In that setting, it is difficult to make a strong impression. As a general rule, you will have more success in networking if you are one of the only students in the room. That is not to say that you should not attend law school events; the law school organizes many wonderful events for students throughout the semester and they are very valuable for many reasons. Additionally, students have made valuable contacts at law school events in the past. Your ability to network at Law School events will be heightened if you are the organizer and the one coordinating with the speakers for an event. This will give you the opportunity to distinguish yourself by collaborating with the

speakers.

H. Social Media/LinkedIn

LinkedIn can be a very powerful networking tool when used properly and it is crucial that you have a polished LinkedIn profile. Another social media platform worth checking out is LLM-United.com, which is a platform that exists specifically for LL.M. candidates and alumni to connect with one another.

IV. NETWORKING DO'S AND DON'TS

- *DO ask for advice.* People are generally very happy to give advice and share their wisdom with students. Asking people for advice can help launch or solidify a networking relationship.
- *DO NOT ask for a job.* While people are happy to share advice, they are generally turned off when a networking contact asks them for a job. It is not necessarily taboo to ask someone for a job, but just be aware that at that point, you are generally shutting down the networking connection.
- *DO remember that networking is a two-way street.* Try to find ways to help others and you will find they will want to help you in return.
- *DO BE APPRECIATIVE.* Be respectful of others' time and express gratitude for the time a networking contact spends with you.
- *DO find a way to contribute to a project.* One of the best forms of networking is collaboration. Work with others on projects for a bar association committee or volunteer with a community organization.
- *DO make networking a priority and build on it continuously.* A network is not something you can build overnight. It takes time to cultivate. It is much better to start now and spend a couple of hours per week on networking than to wait until you are actually in the midst of your job search to begin in earnest.
- *DO make sure you spell names correctly and use the correct gender.* A quick Google search will usually tell you whether a person is male or female if you are unsure. Use "Ms." For women, not "Mrs."

V. A FEW NOTES ABOUT U.S. BUSINESS CULTURE/ETIQUETTE

For those of you who are not from the U.S., it is important to be mindful of the ways in which U.S. business culture differs from that of your home country. Being culturally aware will help prevent you from unintentionally offending people. Here are a few tips:

- If you attend an event with a speaker, do not talk while the speaker is speaking.
- Be mindful of appropriate distance and personal space. Let the person you are speaking with adjust his or her body to a comfortable distance.
- Keep appointments once they are made. If you miss an appointment, you likely will not have a second chance.

- “On time” in the U.S. means five minutes early. Five minutes late may be acceptable with an apology. More than five minutes late requires a phone call to warn of the delay and an apology. Generally speaking, avoid being late!
- Participation is expected in meetings. A quiet person may be viewed as unprepared or having nothing important to contribute.
- Wear conservative attire.
- Smoking is unpopular in the U.S. and can be viewed as a sign of weakness. Do not smoke (or smell like smoke) in a business setting.
- Use “Ms.” when addressing a woman in writing rather than “Miss” or “Mrs.”

VI. KEEPING IN TOUCH

Remember that networking is not so much about meeting people as it is about building relationships. One meaningful relationship can be more valuable than a hundred handshakes. Handshakes are valuable because of the relationships they can turn into. This is why it is important to follow up with the people that you meet. It is the follow-up that turns a handshake into a relationship.

Keep in touch with your networking contacts by seeking them out for advice or volunteering to help them in some way. Ask them if they know anyone else you should contact, and then keep them apprised of your interactions with that person. If a piece of advice they gave you turned out to be particularly useful down the road, reach out and thank them again and let them know how helpful their advice was. Do your best to keep the lines of communication open.