THE ART OF NETWORKING

Networking is focused on building relationships, not asking for a job or internship. It’s typically not recommended that you bring a resume to a networking reception; however, it is perfectly acceptable to create professional networking cards to hand out to any contacts you meet.

Try to talk to a variety of individuals at networking events. Keep in mind that people from all stages and walks of life can provide helpful advice, so do not simply hang out with your friends or converse with the same person all night. Make your way around the room, trying to engage in conversation with as many people as possible.

Navigating a Networking Event

The idea of attending a networking event may be overwhelming even to experienced networkers. The tips below will help you successfully navigate your next event:

• Extend a strong handshake, maintain eye contact, and smile.

• A polished appearance will help you to make a positive first impression. Dress neatly and professionally. Do not overdue makeup, jewelry, or accessories.

• Place your nametag on the right. When shaking hands, this allows the eye of person you are greeting to easily follow your right arm up to your nametag.

• Hold your food or drink in your left hand, so that you are free to shake hands with your right hand.

• A networking event is not the place to consume large amounts of food, even if the offerings look delicious and you are extremely hungry. Do not overload your plate, and avoid spending all your time at the event eating. It’s recommended that you eat a small meal ahead of time.

• If possible, find out before the event who will be in attendance. This will enable you to do some research on the people you may come in contact with, so that you can intelligently enter into a discussion with them. It will also allow you to determine if there is anyone at the event that you would particularly like to meet. Have some questions in mind – what exactly do you want to learn about their career field or organization (See “Informational Interview” handout for tips)?

• Do not monopolize a conversation. Avoid controversial topics, such as politics. Exhibit a positive and upbeat attitude, even if the person with whom you are speaking seems negative.

• When you’re ready to leave a discussion, simply excuse yourself by saying something like, “Thank you for your time. I enjoyed meeting you and hope we have the chance to connect again. There are some other people I would like to meet, so please excuse me.” This is also a perfect opportunity to hand out your professional networking card.
Following Up

A key ingredient to effective networking is proper follow up. When possible, obtain a business card or jot down contact information so that you can send a thank you note or email to your new contacts. Be sure to reference any noteworthy items which you discussed at the event. If appropriate, you can even ask for an additional meeting to further any conversation which started at the reception, or request an informational interview. Also be sure to utilize LinkedIn to connect with your new contacts.

No matter what path your career journey takes after Messiah College, networking opportunities will likely be a part of your working life. Many types of organizations conduct events for employees, volunteers, donors, clients, etc. Additionally, these events are typically held at functions such as professional conferences, political campaigns, fundraisers, and recognition dinners. As a Messiah alum, you will also have ample opportunities to attend networking events, such as those that take place during the “Into the City” trips. By perfecting your networking skills now, you will be more equipped to succeed at similar events as a professional.