

Professional Networking as a Graduate Student

October 31, 2018

Networking means many different things to many different people, especially in graduate school. With many graduate students feeling uneasy about the post-PhD job market, the pressure to network, both socially and professionally, has reached a peak. This article will focus on networking at a professional level, defined simply as getting your name out into the academic world. The advice contained within this article may appear most relevant for students approaching graduation, but it is never too early to begin the networking process. Three methods of professional networking will be discussed: conferences, academic Twitter, and personal webpages.

Conferencing

For graduate students in psychology, conferences are the most ubiquitous opportunities to network at a professional level. Before discussing how to network at conferences, it is worth mentioning that most universities offer some sort of financial assistance for travel expenses. Of course, the amount of available funding and procedures for applying will vary by institution, but typically, a reimbursement process is followed (e.g., you will receive your travel stipend upon your return from a conference).

It's important to consider the most efficient ways to network at conferences. One method is to meet principal investigators (PIs) with whom you may be interested in completing a postdoctoral fellowship. The more you interact with these PIs, the more likely they are to consider your job application and provide you with an interview after your graduation.

Although meeting faculty is certainly important, special effort should also be made to reach out to fellow graduate students. I remember attending my first conference and meeting with an advanced graduate student upon my return. The student asked how the conference went, and I told her that I did not feel I had networked well. She said, "Well, did you meet any other graduate students?" I replied that I had indeed met quite a few graduate students, and she replied, "There you go — that is networking!" It took a bit of reflection for me to understand, but now, I realize that other graduate students may be some of the most essential people with whom to network. Importantly, fellow graduate students may be future collaborators — including both those whose research is similar to yours and those farther afield. Furthermore, fellow graduate students are resources, as they may have had academic experiences that you have not (e.g., applying for a certain award) and therefore may be able to share knowledge and advice to help you succeed. For these reasons and more, it is essential to ensure that your networking attempts do not exclude your graduate student colleagues.

Academic Twitter

One way to reach out to and meet other graduate students is through academic Twitter. Academic Twitter is not an independent entity but rather an academic way of utilizing traditional Twitter. This means that this is an easy and free method of networking, and for these reasons alone, Twitter is

certainly worth a try. (As a side note, academic Twitter provides more than an outlet to network; it also offers access to useful resources and references. For example, I recently learned about Google Dataset Search, a Google toolbar specifically designed to search for public data sets, via Twitter. Furthermore, many academics share article preprints on Twitter, providing you with a chance to learn about novel research in your field ahead of publication.)

Academic Twitter will assist you in building a professional community by helping you keep up with a circle of academics of interest to you. To this end, Twitter goes hand in hand with conferences, as the colleagues you follow are likely to attend the same conferences as you. At larger conferences, locating all the talks and people you would like to see can be difficult; however, Twitter helps you (1) schedule meetings and (2) follow along with noteworthy research, as many academics will tweet about the conference using a hashtag. In the event that you cannot attend a conference, Twitter remains an alternative venue that will allow you to get your name out in front of a potential employer, for example by replying to a tweet about a preprint to ask questions about a researcher's work.

If you want to give academic Twitter a try, here are a few general accounts you may follow: [@ProfessorIsIn](#) (Karen Kelsky, focuses on academia and nonacademic matters), [@GradSlack](#) (general resource account that answers graduate student questions and comments), and [@FromPhdToLife](#) (Jennifer Polk, provides tips for academics who want to transition to nonacademic careers).

Personal Webpages

Personal webpages are another way to get a head start on networking. These webpages go hand in hand with your curriculum vitae by providing you with an extra layer of visibility; they also allow you to highlight a bit of your personality. I would argue that this is just as crucial as highlighting your academic skills while on the job market. Webpages can help PIs and future employers evaluate you as a good fit for a lab or job.

To get your website started, you will need to find a host. One option is Google sites, a free host with simple and generic website templates. Another option is WordPress.com, which is slightly more customizable than Google sites but starts at \$4 per month. A third option is Squarespace.com, which offers quite attractive layouts but starts at \$12 per month. Ultimately, you will need to consider a combination of personal factors before deciding on the most suitable webpage host for you (e.g., where you are in your graduate career, what types of jobs you are aiming for).

Summary

The networking methods discussed in this article are simple, versatile, and efficient ways to reach large numbers of people, and you can utilize them in the way that best fits your style. I hope that these tips and information about conferences, academic Twitter, and personal webpages will help you get your name out into the academic world — whether you are a first-year graduate student or are nearing graduation. Happy networking!