

# BUILDING YOUR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Jennifer MacDonald | The New School

## WHY BUILD COMMUNITY?

- ❖ To meet people in your field and build relationships with others who share similar interests
- ❖ To help you refine your field within academia, or outside of academia, a professional position
- ❖ To get advice from professionals working in a position or field that also interests you
- ❖ To learn about and find jobs that may never be publicly advertised – [the hidden job market](#)
- ❖ To learn how to transfer skills and abilities learned through your degree to careers outside of the academy
- ❖ To identify possible mentors

## HOW TO BUILD YOUR COMMUNITY:

We meet people all the time – opportunities may occur at any time, in any situation. Always be open to opportunities. The following are examples of where and with whom to engage persons in your field. These can be opportunities to meet other academics or to meeting professionals outside of the academy:

- ❖ **Professional Organizations:** Memberships in organizations can keep you updated on current events and job openings. They also serve to connect you with prominent professionals in your area or sector.
- ❖ **Conferences and Conventions:** Large, structured events like conferences or conventions are excellent opportunities to expand your network and meet other professionals in your field.
- ❖ **One-on-One Meetings:** Meeting individually with industry professionals is an excellent opportunity for you to learn more about what the job entails, the path they followed, and so forth. These meetings can range from an informal chat with the person sitting next to you at a conference, to an exchange of email with a scholar whose opinion you seek, an email to a professional holding a position that interests you, to a more organized information interview over coffee, in their office, or any other mutually agreed upon setting.
- ❖ **Your colleagues in your program:** the friends you meet, the colleagues that you work with as graduate students will be your first ‘network;’ you also network through your classes, seminars, lectures and workshops. Colleagues, faculty, and guest speakers are often good sources of information.
- ❖ **Alumni Networks:** your program alumni are an excellent source of knowledge for a wide range of professions, including the academy. If your alumni office doesn’t have an internal contact, use LinkedIn to research alumni and send the contact a message.

## CONVERSATION THEMES:

### Academic:

- ❖ No matter what your topic is, whether or not it’s your dissertation, **questions arising from your dissertation** or the latest paper you are working on, these are all typically conversation topics; if you are a grad student, it can be questions you’re exploring, **your dissertation interests**, your **research papers**
- ❖ Questions about your **methodology** (in brief – “Case Study”, Survey)
- ❖ Why your question matters, your **dataset**, your **evidentiary base**
- ❖ How far along you are; what remains to be done
- ❖ **Major themes; broader impacts**

# IMAGINEPHD

A CAREER PLANNING AND EXPLORATION TOOL FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

powered by [the graduate career consortium](#)

## Professional:

- ❖ Ask the individual to **tell their story**. People often enjoy having the opportunity to talk to someone about what they do and why they do it.
- ❖ Ask questions about what their **typical day** may look like; what percentage of their day do they spend in research, in team projects, emailing, writing, dealing with interpersonal issues: essentially to permit you to gain an understanding of their **day-to-day activities** in order for you to assess whether or not you would enjoy those activities
- ❖ Ask what **obstacles and challenges** they may have encountered and what they did to overcome them
- ❖ Ask who they could put you in touch with if they are unable to respond to your question

## TIPS:

- ❖ Leave your cv/resume behind -- it's a conversation not an interview and you will learn more if there is no pressure to hire
- ❖ It's about relationship building – not speed dating – better to have a quality conversation with two people than to have many superficial interactions. Ready more about the [Introvert's Guide to Networking](#)
- ❖ If you are attending a conference reception, remember that what you say and do matters; refrain from having no more than one or two alcoholic drinks, if you have any at all
- ❖ Attend the session of the person you may wish to meet later at the reception; ask a good question at the session and be memorable; maybe save asking for a copy of their paper until the reception
- ❖ Offer to pay for the coffee or the lunch even though you are on a very strict budget
- ❖ Remember to send a quick thank you email if someone has been generous with their time and agreed to meet with you
- ❖ A business card can be useful if someone would like your email address to send you a paper, for example, or names of additional persons who can help; business cards can be useful to write the 'gist' of the meeting on the back of the card; i.e., I really enjoyed your paper and could you email me a copy or we talked about the survey needs of user design firms and we agreed to follow up with coffee to talk further.
- ❖ If you are considering relocating and need to network with people [long distance](#), consider using Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email.