



Lyles School of Civil and  
Construction Engineering

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE: NETWORKING

September 2025



Civil Engineering Student Advisory Council

# INTRODUCTION

**WE ARE CESAC**  
Civil Engineering Student Advisory Council

CESAC is committed to involving students in all phases of their engineering education. We aim to build the partnership between students, faculty, administrators, alumni, and industry to continue pursuing Purdue's Engineering excellence in education, research, and service.

## What is this Document?

This document will serve as a guide for successfully marketing yourself to companies in order to secure an internship, co-op, or full time job. From the first interaction at a career fair to end-of-interview etiquette, this document will reveal exactly what you can do to secure your dream role. This document is the continuation of an effort to grow the professional development of students.

# Why should I have networking skills?

## Short Term Benefit:

Networking skills make you a more **attractive candidate** when applying for job openings. **Small but memorable interactions** can go a long way in securing an interview or creating **name recognition**.

## Long Term Benefit:

Your network can continue to grow even after you graduate! Building these skills now will open doors in the future, possibly providing **upward mobility** into management or executive roles. These skills also allow you to give back to the engineering community through **mentorship** roles and **speaking opportunities**.

# Career Fairs

## Before

Create a **checklist** of things to have prepared before the fair. Some basics include multiple printed copies of your **resume**, elevator **pitch**, **research** on companies you're interested in, **greetings**, and **questions**. Some big companies may prefer that you apply before speaking with their representatives, so make sure to know this info beforehand.

## During

Approach the recruiter with a **greeting, handshake, and a smile**. Find a time to give them your "pitch," but remember to keep it organic. **Share your story** with the recruiter and use the pitch as an opportunity to connect. Give the recruiter your reason for seeing them, as well as why you may be a good fit. Keep it **brief** (<60 seconds), and end the pitch with a **meaningful question** that shows you have researched the company. This will begin a **dialogue** between you and the recruiter, during which you can ask more questions and get their contact.

## After

Before visiting another company, jot down **notes** from your previous conversation. Within 24-48 hours of speaking with a recruiter, **reach out** to them through whichever contact you obtained (LinkedIn, Email, phone number) and **thank them** for their time. **Reiterate your interest** in the conversation and **ask any other questions** you may have.

# Coffee Chats

## What is a coffee chat?

A coffee chat is an **informal, one-on-one conversation** between a student or early-career professional and someone with more experience in the industry. Despite what the name may suggest, coffee chats do not have to happen in a cafe. In fact, they can even take place in an office or even virtually.

Coffee chats are a great way for students and new hires to **learn** about an industry while **forging connections** with their peers.

## How do I conduct a coffee chat?

The best way to initiate a coffee chat is to simply ask! You can reach out in-person or through email with a **short, polite message** requesting a 15 minute coffee chat.

Research the person's background and their company beforehand to make sure you're asking thoughtful questions. Provide some **context** about yourself before asking them about their story, experiences, and advice. Keep it **conversational** and light!

Avoid asking for a job or referral, as this can seem rude. Instead, follow up after the chat thanking the person for their time and express interest in staying in touch.

# Interviews

## Professionalism

Interviews are **business professional** unless told otherwise, and first impressions begin the moment you arrive. From receptionists to hiring managers, **every interaction matters**. Smile, nod, shake hands, and maintain an attentive yet relaxed posture. You cannot go wrong by showing everyone **respect**.

## Examples, Skills, and Feedback

Prepare examples of times you shown leadership, teamwork, or integrity. Use the **STAR method**\* to structure your answers clearly.

Review both **hard and soft skills**, making sure to collect your thoughts and be ready to talk about your expertise.

Interviews are a two-way street, so **ask the interviewer questions** on culture, skills, or projects to show reciprocated interest.

It is up to you to list your GPA on your resume. If asked about your GPA during the interview, be **honest and concise**. Focus on your growth and the challenges you have overcome.

\*STAR Method: <https://resources.biginterview.com/behavioral-interviews/star-interview-method/>

# Interviews

## Common Questions

Every interview has some staple questions. Be prepared for them:

- **“Tell me about yourself”**- Short elevator **pitch** on experience, goals, and interests.
- **Strengths & Weaknesses**- Be honest, but strategic. Pick strengths where you can highlight **specific examples** and weaknesses that show awareness and improvement.
- **“Where do you see yourself in X years”**- Focus on **growth**, willingness to learn, and **achievable goals** that matter to you.
- **Triumphs & Challenges**- Brainstorm some of your greatest achievements and challenges beforehand. Emphasize how these experiences have **developed you as an individual**, and what you have learned. Remember to **stay humble!**
- **Time with Previous Companies**- The interviewer may ask you about the durations of your past work experience. Stay **respectful** when speaking about your previous employers, while highlighting the **opportunities** you are seeking as you move forward in your career. You may want to mention some **specific professional goals** that were made more achievable by switching companies.

# Following Up

## Email

It is good practice to send a **concise and polite email** within 24 hours of interviewing:

- **Restate** your name/year to jog their memory
- **Thank them** for their time and insights
- Reference a part of the conversation, if necessary
- Reiterate **gratitude and excitement** for the opportunity

## LinkedIn Message

A brief LinkedIn message is a good way to connect after a career fair or coffee chat:

- **Reintroduce** your name/year and where you met
- **Thank them** for their time
- Ask a follow-up question if warranted
- Keep the tone light and express **enthusiasm**