

2-25-1998

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Recommended Citation

"Career Connections Just a Click Away for Job-Seeking Students, Graduates" (1998). *News Releases*. 9166.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/9166

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(Editor's Note: For a password to try the network, call Pam Huber at 937-229-3241)

CAREER CONNECTIONS JUST A CLICK AWAY FOR JOB-SEEKING STUDENTS, GRADUATES

DAYTON, Ohio — A University of Dayton student entering the job market now has a powerful new tool to plug into a friendly network of professionals who can serve as valuable career advisers. It's a 3,000-person alumni network posted on UD's Web site this week.

With the online network, students can quickly and easily get information on alumni who have indicated they're willing to help with career-related issues, and it's searchable by geographic region, job title and college major. The information — accessible only to UD students, alumni, faculty and staff members — can also help alumni who are looking for new jobs.

This means a graduating history major who is interested in landing a job in Chicago and a music performance graduate who wants to gauge the job prospects in San Francisco can go online to find specific people, who have agreed to be available, in those cities and fields. Academic advisers on campus can also use the network to help younger students make contacts that can help them choose a major to meet their career goals or pick elective classes that will help advance their later plans.

It's the beginning of a trend among colleges and universities, says Regis Lekan, director of alumni relations, with similar services offered online by UCLA, Stanford and Boston College, among others. The Web address for UD's alumni network is <http://careers.udayton.edu>.

Because the alumni have agreed to be a resource, students can feel free to ask them in-depth questions, Lekan says. "Students can consult with alumni about careers that are available in their field or how the job market is in a city or with their company," Lekan says. "Those contacts may be able to give the student the name of a human resource person to contact — or, in a small number of cases, they may be able to give the student a job."

Alumni can set limitations as to how they should be contacted — some only accept phone calls at work, some prefer contact to be made by e-mail. And they can easily update their own information should they change jobs or move.

It's "very critical" for students slated to graduate in May to make good career contacts now, says Greg Hayes, director of the career placement center at UD. "The search function allows students to pinpoint their job searches, so they don't have to waste time," he says.

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Alumni can give a realistic picture of their local job market, Hayes says, and can estimate how long it might take to find a job and the prospects for making contacts.

Fifteen years ago at UD, the network of alumni willing to help fellow graduates and students find career positions was kept in the mind of Joe McLaughlin, the man who directed both alumni relations and career placement for the University. He knew which alumni in different cities would send their Sunday want ads to seniors, which ones would make influential career introductions and which graduates would provide a meal, a bed and a friendly ear to an out-of-town student on a job-scouting visit.

About five years ago, the alumni relations and career placement staffs started to develop a more comprehensive and organized system. They contacted graduates in UD alumni chapters in major cities, asking if they'd like to participate in a career network for students. Staff members used notebook binders to catalogue information on those who agreed.

After three years, when all the chapter cities were surveyed, the network ended up filling 20 notebook binders, and the "organized" system had turned unwieldy and difficult to update.

"As we became more aware of the capabilities of the Web, we started to think about making this service available electronically, so that students, alumni and faculty advisers looking for information could access it at any time from any where," Lekan says. UD alumni, students, faculty and staff members use their Social Security numbers and personal identification numbers to access the network. This protects the data for privacy purposes and assures that participants won't end up on unauthorized e-mailing lists, Lekan says.

As she approached graduation in May 1997, Carrie McAteer used the paper-and-binder version of the network to make contacts in her hometown of Chicago. She spoke with six or seven alumni before hitting pay dirt — a referral that landed her a job, albeit a short-lived one. "They were all very helpful and nice, and they returned my phone calls, but the majority of them weren't in jobs I was interested in," she says. The company that she contacted because of the alumnus' recommendation did hire her, but it wasn't a good fit, and McAteer left after seven weeks for a new position with Excell Corp., also in Chicago.

Eric Mansfield, 1991 UD graduate and reporter for WKYC-TV in Cleveland, looks at the network from an alumni perspective. He says he is happy to offer advice to aspiring broadcasters, and he also offers to view and critique audition tapes and résumés.

"I recommend getting experience in your field right away," Mansfield says. "At UD, I was working at WDCR (the student radio station) as a freshman before I even went to my first class, and I had three internships at local television stations before I graduated. If you want to be in the business, you have to get experience," he says.