

Success with LinkedIn: Getting Students to Think Beyond Earning an Easy 'A'

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Interested in a course exercise that encourages students to think about the importance of the skills they are learning... beyond the grade? Consider forming an online social networking group with LinkedIn. LinkedIn is free, does not require a UWF email address, and connects students to trusted contacts, starting with you, the professor. Students can then use this tool to exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a broader network of professionals, both inside and outside of their contacts at UWF. To learn more about what LinkedIn is about and how it can help your students, watch the two-minute video at <http://learn.linkedin.com/what-is-linkedin/>

This tool gets students to start thinking about their responsibility for taking the skills they are learning in the classroom with them into the "real world." Here are some ways we've used this tool in our classes:

- Invite current students to join your LinkedIn group as a way to network outside the classroom and see how course skills are applied in the working world.
- Since students do not need a UWF email account to join, you can invite prospective students as well as alumni to join your group as a way to recruit students to UWF programs and to help current students find alumni willing to share rules of the road.
- Use LinkedIn as a way for undergraduate and graduate students to locate possible peer advisors for graduate programs they are considering.
- Work with colleagues in your department to invite students from disciplines that complement each other as a way to help students build relationships that can help them later in careers, where working on interdisciplinary teams will be the norm.
- Invite adjuncts from your department as a way to increase their sense of community and ownership in engaging students in applying course and program skills outside the classroom.
- Invite community members, prospective employers, and professional society representatives interested in getting in contact with UWF students. Set up discussion forums to facilitate dialogues that help students connect with the Northwest Florida community.
- Invite representatives from businesses inside and outside of Northwest Florida that have services to offer students and that can help with economic development in Northwest Florida and beyond.

Although this is great tool for engaging students, keep in mind that the current job market in almost every field is simply too competitive to suggest that online social networking alone is sufficient to land a job. Given this reality, if you suggest participation in LinkedIn to your students, be sure to develop a career advising page that helps students develop an approach to job hunting and career planning that includes online social networking and other important face-to-face

approaches (e.g., consider our "Landing a Job in Informatics" site at <http://uwf.edu/sahls/certificate-informatics/careers.cfm>). As one example, here is the extra credit exercise we use in our courses:

EXTRA CREDIT: Extra credit will be given to students who post to the Current Events discussion forum a job description with a subject line, "EXTRA CREDIT: NOW, this is the job I want!" with ALL of the following information:

- Job title
- Educational requirements listed for this job title
- Average or expected salary range for this job title
- A list of steps from "Landing a Job in Informatics" that you will take in the immediate future to be in a competitive position for interviewing for the job
- Comments on whether you found this exercise useful and suggestions for any other links or information we can add to our "Landing a Job in Informatics" page

Comments we have received from students on this exercise include:

- "This exercise helped me organize and plan my future goals. Now I know exactly what I want from my education, and what steps I have to take to ascend the stairs that will lead me to my career goal."
- "This site was like a virtual job fair/career tutorial. It gave a lot of useful information and the cost is great for what's offered."

Be sure to remind students that online networking is a reflection of their "digital brand." Students should develop depth in these relationships by reviewing profiles to see if there are members with similar interests or something else in common (e.g., live in the same city, graduated from the same high school, had the same former employer, etc.). When asking these individuals to join their personal network, students should personalize their brief invitation message to each one. If students would like to meet up with someone in person that has expertise they could benefit from, we suggest they offer to treat them to a coffee at a local cafe, for example. Always remind students to be professional and respectful with any and all leads they develop from online social networking as they never know which one could end up soliciting them as an applicant for a future position.

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