NETWORKING

Networking is necessary to make connections in your field. There isn’t a limit to the number of people you can talk to throughout your time at CalArts to create a powerful network. Take advantage of CommonSpace, the online social networking space for CalArtians, LinkedIn, and other industry-specific means to build relationships with your fellow CalArtians, and other industry professionals.

Many formal employment positions and even freelance gigs don’t get publicly advertised, in fact, 85% of employment is landed through some sort of networking or referral source. However, networking isn’t about asking for a position, but making genuine connections that can later lead to opportunities.

Here’s what you need to know...

Who You Are
Make sure you take the time to get to know yourself and develop a thirty-second pitch. This way you can articulate who you are clearly and effectively at any moment.

What You Want
Be specific and brief – in fact, practice making your specific request. Think about what you need and for what purpose. When do you need it? In what form do you need it? Let individuals know about your career objectives. Describe your experience, interests, and goals, when appropriate. Ask for their advice. If they request, give them a business card. Feel free to ask to be referred to other contacts.

Appearances are Important
To make a good first impression, you will want to dress nicely. As an artist there’s no need to wear a three-piece suit (unless that’s your thing), but business casual, or dressing a notch above what you believe the typical dress code might be in their line of work would be appropriate. Remember that you want to make the professional feel comfortable to be with you. Be sure to practice proper hygiene and grooming.

Networking Etiquette
If you can, be sure to research those you want to connect with ahead of time, and shake hands and make eye contact with professionals as you introduce yourself. When you meet new networking contacts, try to focus on what you have in common. Be clear about what you hope to get from the conversation and demonstrate interest and enthusiasm. For example, “It’s great to meet you, I’m excited to meet another producer and am interested in learning more about non-profit theater companies.” Feel free to ask new networking contacts for their business card, and offer to stay in touch.

As soon as possible, write down your impressions of each connection you’ve made after a networking event, conference, or mixer. With whom did you feel the most comfortable and at ease in your conversations? Make sure you write down the name and the title of each person with whom you want to stay in contact. Even better, ask them for a business card and ask them if it’s ok to follow up or stay in touch. Make sure you jot down on the back of the card the date and time of when you met the professional and any other details you want to remember.

Demonstrate Professional Courtesy
If you spend more than fifteen minutes chatting with someone, follow up with a thank you note to express your appreciation within one to two days.

Request an Informational Interview
If you follow up by email, here’s an example of what you might say: “Hello, it was great to meet you at the alumni event yesterday! If you’re willing, I’d love to set up a convenient time to chat further – either in person, or by phone – about your position... or your career path... or career options within the field, etc. I’d very much appreciate the opportunity and look forward to seeing you again soon.”

After your informational interview, stay in touch! A strategic move on your part would be to stay in touch with someone who has extended themself to you. Write your contacts once or twice a semester. You may share good news about your academic or professional development, send them an article of something you read that might be of interest to them, or just inquire about how they are doing. This reactivates your connections.
Keep Track
Use whatever means necessary to keep a directory of your professional contacts. Many people use Google contacts, you may choose to build an excel spreadsheet, store index cards, notebooks, business card files, or even an app like Card-Munch. Whatever tracking system works best for you, use it. Remember to note how you met the professional, when you spoke to them last, whether you followed up with a thank you note, and any other memorable details like when you told them you’d be in touch again (3-6 months is generally a good rule of thumb). Be sure to keep accurate records of phone calls including what subjects were covered.

PRACTICE YOUR PITCH
Have a thirty-second pitch ready to concisely state what you are looking for in a job, your skills, expertise, and related experience for each employer that you visit. Practice on your own so you can keep your pitch conversational and natural without rambling.

Example
“I am a graduating BFA Graphic Design student. My experience emphasizes traditional graphic design as well as motion graphics and title design. I’ve taken on several roles across campus, using my organizational skills to showcase visiting artist speakers, and have worked as an intern at a small design studio. I’m interested in a full time Graphic Design position within an agency setting like yours, which is why I’m here and look forward to hearing more about what you do!”

Create Your Own
Hello, my name is ____. I’m a _____ at CalArts. My background is in _____ and I’m interested in _____. I’m here because _____. Or I’m seeking... or my skills are in... or I plan to...