Using LinkedIn

The University of Chicago Graham School Career Resources

What is LinkedIn?
LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) is a social media site focused on professional networking. It’s different from Facebook and other social media sites in that the focus is squarely on presenting yourself as a professional, rather than socializing with your friends. It provides an opportunity for you to showcase your skills and qualifications, research job fields, industries, companies, and organizations, find alumni, and search for jobs. A basic LinkedIn account is free of charge.

Create a Profile
Your LinkedIn profile acts as a kind of billboard advertising you and your skills and abilities. Therefore, take great care in creating your profile and be sure to get some feedback on it from a trusted friend or co-worker.

Before creating a profile, think about the kind of job you’re aiming for in your job search. What are the core competencies you must have in order to do that job? Which prior experiences (academic, professional, volunteer, etc.) have prepared you to do this kind of job well? You will need a clear idea of how to talk about your experiences and education in a way that conveys you are qualified for the field/industry in which you are seeking employment.

Once you’re ready to create a profile, review the LinkedIn New User Starter Guide (http://learn.linkedin.com/new-users/). This guide takes you through the process step-by-step.

Build Your Contacts
The nice thing about LinkedIn is that it focuses on professional networking. This means it’s fairly safe to assume that most people on LinkedIn want to be connected to as many people as possible. More people than you realize will accept your connection request because they want to build their network too.
Join Groups
Being part of a group on LinkedIn allows you to get helpful information and be part of a conversation. There are a variety of groups on LinkedIn – alumni groups, professional groups, organizational groups, etc. Professional-oriented groups can be a great way of staying up-to-date on the latest issues in that industry/field. To learn more about LinkedIn groups, see http://learn.linkedin.com/groups/.

Research Industries and Fields
LinkedIn is very helpful as a search engine, so even if you’re not ready to build a profile yet, you can use LinkedIn to learn about career fields and industries that interest you. Do this by typing keywords in to the “people” search box; the results you get are people who have used that term in their profile. Read through those profiles to learn the nature of their job, their job title, and see the path they took to get where they are (all this information is available on a fully filled out and fully public profile). This is a great way to learn about the career options that line up with your interests.

For instance: if you type the term “intercultural” in the “people” search box, you will get a list of people who use that term somewhere in their profile, including individuals who work as intercultural trainers. By reading their profiles, you can learn about what an intercultural trainer does. Now that you have a job title, you can do a more targeted internet search for professional associations and companies/organizations that hire those individuals.

Research Companies and Organizations
Many companies and organizations have their own profiles on LinkedIn. If there is a particular place you would like to work, search for it in the search box under “companies.” You will then be able to see a lot of helpful information such as who works there (and is on LinkedIn); whether any of those people are in your network; most common job titles; where people worked before and where they work after leaving that company; and more.

You can also follow a company or organization, which will provide updates directly to your LinkedIn account. This is a great way to stay on top of what’s happening at a place you’d like to work.