

CAREER CORNER

#14 IN A SERIES

Discover the Benefits of Joining a Professional Association

Joining a professional association may well be one of the most important catalysts for your career. If you want to increase knowledge in your field, expand networking possibilities, or jumpstart your job hunt, a professional association membership is an option worth exploring. Almost all career fields have corresponding professional associations that offer valuable information and resources for your career enhancement.

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How Can A Professional Membership Help Your Career?

Information

Whether you are presently employed in a chosen career, engaged in a job search, or a student pursuing studies in a desired field, you will want to stay up-to-date on issues and trends that affect your career path. Professional associations offer a wealth of information that will keep you connected to current developments in your field. As a member, you have access to the association's journals, magazines, and newsletters in both print-based and online formats. In addition to keeping abreast of important career-related topics, there are many other benefits to reap from these publications. Job hunters can gain essential information, which can be useful when interviewing. Referencing a well-known journal in your field will show you are a very knowledgeable and serious candidate and will set you apart from other applicants. As a student, these publications can be great resources for class assignments related to your field of interest. They are also a helpful way to glean more

about what it is like to work in your desired occupation. Student members may also find beneficial information about grant and scholarship opportunities posted in association newsletters.

Networking

Another paramount benefit of a professional association membership is the prolific networking opportunities provided. Professional organizations generally have Web sites, which include list serves and message boards that foster a sense of community for their members and establish a venue to share perspectives and discuss important topics within the field. Many associations also offer opportunities to join their smaller online chapters, interest groups, or committees that focus on specialized areas within the profession. Becoming involved as an active participant or volunteering for a leadership role in one of these groups is another way to learn from others in your field and enhance your

professional development. You will also increase your network of contacts, which can be especially advantageous when job-hunting.

Employment

Connecting with colleagues within the association can open the doors to inside job leads. A professional association offers abundant opportunities for you to identify jobs that may not be advertised. In addition to the employment options you may be privy to, associations usually provide a method of sharing job listings. Their Web site may have a special section devoted specifically to employment opportunities for members only, or there may be a classified section posted in their newsletter.

Membership in a professional association is an excellent supplement to your resume. It conveys to a prospective employer that you are involved and committed to your career field. Employers want to know that your expertise extends beyond college instruction and includes knowledge in the field. Citing professional association membership on



your resume indicates a desire to learn and demonstrates dedication to your professional goals.

Conferences

State and national conferences, conventions, and workshops are more of the perks provided by professional associations to eligible members. Attending a conference sponsored by your association is an excellent way to become more aware of the most recent issues and advances in your profession. You can also discover what similar organizations are doing, meet prominent people in your career field, and build your network. If attending a national meeting is not a viable option, look for those offered at the regional level that are closer in proximity. Student members interested in participating in a conference can usually obtain registrations at reduced rates.

Research

One good way to determine the best association for you to join is to ask for recommendations from others employed in your field. Inquire about the benefits and fees associated with their memberships. The Internet also has many available resources for locating professional associations in your career field (see Related Resources). Most professions have several associations to choose from. Once you access the Web site of the one that interests you, look for a

link on its homepage regarding membership information. Read the procedures carefully. Some associations may have different protocols for joining. Sometimes proof of education or work experience in the field is required.

Costs and amenities should also be examined. Fees for memberships vary. Most are reasonable, but some can be pricey, so it is best to investigate and compare several options. To ensure you choose the right association to meet your needs, take the time to review the types of memberships and benefits offered. If you know of colleagues in the workplace who desire to join or are current members of an association, an organizational membership may be the most cost-effective way to go. Special discounted rates are also generally available for student memberships. If you still have questions, be sure to email or call the contact listed on the Web site. The information you gather will help you to select the professional association that is most promising for you.

Take Advantage of the Opportunity!

Membership in a professional association is an excellent investment for your future. It will promote your professional development and provide great prospects for advancing your career.

Related Resources

- **Yahoo! Professional Organizations:**
http://dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Organizations/Professional/
- **The Internet Public Library: Associations on the Net:**
<http://www.ipl.org/div/aon/>
- **Jobweb Professional Associations:**
http://www.jobweb.com/Career_Development/prof_assoc.htm
- **Seeking Success.com:**
<http://www.seekingsuccess.com/assoc.php3>
- **American Society of Association Executives:**
<http://www.asaenet.org>

The Internet resources listed above may change over time. Enrolled students and alumni can access the most current information, as well as many additional career-related links on the Excelsior College Web site. Go to **www.excelsior.edu**, then log in, and click on the Career Resources link on your MyEC page; for graduates, click on the Alumni Connection.

Questions or comments about this article?

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