Science Societies

Revisiting with connections and expanding networks

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February 27, 2025



The Societies' annual meeting (CANVAS) may be in the rearview mirror with a number of months passing, but connections made at the event should not be forgotten. Whether you are making connections with other graduate students, industry professionals, or scientists in similar research areas, following up with a connection is important. Agriculture is a small world—you never know who you may connect with and what it will lead to. Opportunities are out there, and as the saying goes, "It's not what you know, but who you know." Not every connection may need to be revisited,

but the possible collaborations, interviews, and connections you make can lead to future career prospects.

Although many students are aware of the importance of strengthening relationships created at CANVAS, it is often seen as a confusing and daunting task. This following is your “How To” guide on bolstering connections and expanding your network after the CANVAS meeting.

(Revisiting) your connection

Academic conferences are considered a golden opportunity to publicize yourself and your research to an audience of your academic peers. At the end of the conference, you will have collected business cards, pictures of name badges, and/or presentation titles of people and research that caught your interest. Now, it’s important to remember conferences are a whirlwind of events and that “star professor” or “interesting graduate student” you connected with also met many other individuals. It’s easy for a name to be forgotten or a face to become hazy in memory days after the interaction or after meeting many people. Thus, it’s important to revisit your connection after the event to ensure they remember you! Take the time to write a thoughtful email or message via LinkedIn. Taking the step further to contact your person of interest helps fortify the memory of your interaction and establishes a relationship of communication between the two parties.

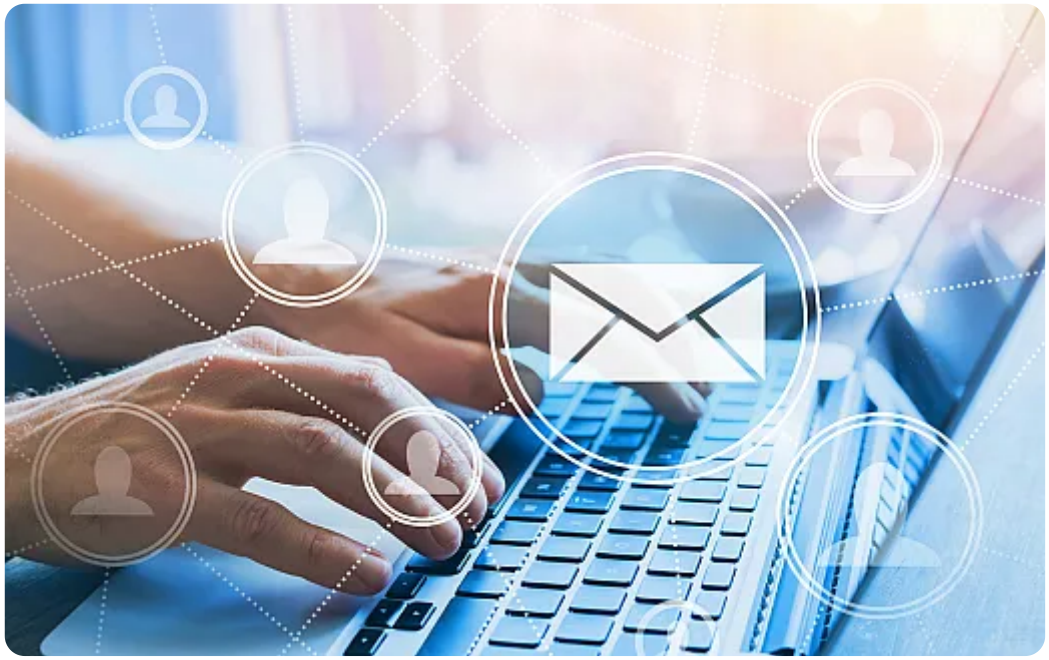
What if you made a connection, but you lost the business card given to you or forgot their name? Fear not! With a little detective work and some useful data (e.g., the session they spoke in, their presentation title, or where they work), you can probably find the person you are looking for by searching the conference website. If you met at CANVAS, you can use the “SciSoc Mtg” app to search for presented research talks and obtain essential contact information, such as the person’s name.

Career-important relationships are not only encountered at academic conferences, but also within your department, college, and university-wide networking events. It is easy to solely focus on your research and the work within your lab group, and yet, there is a bounty of incredible research conducted at your institution that can be further explored through collaboration and discussion. Do not be afraid to take advantage of university events to become better acquainted with peers within and outside your discipline! Varying backgrounds and subject area expertise can help you build a network of unlikely connections that may yield greater fruitful interactions given their proximity to you. An advantage of on-campus network building lies in the ease of maintaining the connection. After meeting a person of interest, make sure to reinforce the relationship when time allows. This can be as simple as impromptu hallway conversations or asking the individual for coffee and discussion. Reconnecting doesn't always have to be complicated. What matters most is demonstrating your professional interest!

Sending an email

If the someone you spoke with offered you helpful advice (research, career, etc.), sending a brief "thank you" email is a great way to follow up on the conversation. The goal is simply to show that you paid attention and valued their insights and remind them of who you are. Look up their email address online (or use the business card you might have received) and send a brief email.

Though daunting, this is a great way to receive career advice or better understand a career path. Some graduate students never get to interact with scientists outside of their major advisers, committees, or university. Reaching out with an email can also help you cultivate a wide range of mentors, both faculty and non-faculty, during your graduate school process.



Sending an email to connect or say 'thank you' is a great way to create a line of communication between you and your person of interest. Photo courtesy of Adobe Stock/Song_about_summer.

If you sense that the person you spoke with might be a possible mentor, consider following up with them after your initial interaction to request an informational interview, i.e., a 30-minute chat during which you can learn more about their work and solicit advice.

See the box for an example of how you could edit the thank you email above to include an informational interview request.

Connect online

Now, you have made your connection and are working on deepening the relationship by reaching out online. A great place to do this is through LinkedIn. Most working professionals, especially within the industry and government sectors, keep an active LinkedIn page.

Example of an informational interview request

Subject: Follow-up from our conversation on soil health at CANVAS in November

Dear Dr. Pickles,

It was great meeting you at the Annual meeting where we connected after your presentation on soil health parameters in continuous corn grown in space. You mentioned this being a growing field of research interest, and despite my work being in underground soybeans, I would like to know more about soil health and how this area of research is growing.

At your convenience, I would like to talk via Zoom about your work and potentially your career path that led you to work as a professor for Yellow University. Additionally, I noticed your career shift when connecting with you on LinkedIn. I would like to know your experience in this career shift from industry back to academia. The Zoom would be no more than 30 minutes, and I'd like to have it within the next few weeks if your schedule allows for it.

Thank you for your time.

Your name

Associated university or position

If the person you connected with fell within the lines of entrepreneurship, business, industry research, or science communication, it is both appropriate and a great idea to connect with them online. Additionally, they may post career opportunities on their LinkedIn profile in association with their employer. You can send a full direct message via LinkedIn using the same verbiage as the thank you email mentioned before. Another option may be simply to "Request to connect" and then select the "Add a note" option where you include a brief message, such as: "It was great hearing you speak about (topic) at the (XYZ) session! I'd love to stay connected."



LinkedIn is a powerful tool for making connections and building your network with people from all over the world. AI-generated image courtesy of Adobe Stock/ant.

What not to do

There are many unofficial rules of contact etiquette. Here are a few “Don’ts” to keep in mind when reconnecting to grow your professional network:

- **Don’t immediately ask for a job or a huge favor:** Don't treat the initial connection as a direct opportunity to ask for something significant.
- **Don’t control the conversation:** Give the other person space to share their thoughts and experiences; actively listen and ask follow-up questions.
- **Don’t be disingenuous or brag**: Be authentic and focus on genuine interest in the other person's career.

Real-world connection

“At the annual meeting in St. Louis, I came across one of my Ph.D. committee members who was talking to who I thought was a professor at Kansas State University. The three of us began talking about extension work that we all do at our respective universities. Come to find out, he was a Ph.D. candidate and recent hire who told me about two extension professor positions open at KSU, both of which I applied for, but not before I reconnected with this person via email. Not only did I follow up about his research and progress of his Ph.D., but I also asked for more information about the positions and Kansas agriculture to better prepare my applications. Now we are both hired at KSU in similar positions, collaborate on extension projects, and have a friendship as we both navigate the early career transition.”

—Dr. Tina Sullivan

- **Don’t be overly casual or unprofessional:** Maintain appropriate decorum in your communication, both online and in person, until things become more casual. There is no set amount of interactions until things become more casual. It will depend on both you and the person you’re connecting with.
- **Don’t fail to do your research:** Before connecting or reconnecting, learn about the person's background and field for relevant conversation topics. See where they did their graduate work or postdoc, learn about their current research, see what classes they teach, etc.
- **Don’t make negative comments about others:** Avoid gossiping or criticizing colleagues. The community is smaller than you believe, and statements can get back to the people you are speaking about.

- **Don’t miss the opportunity to speak about your own value:** Be ready to articulate your skills and experiences when asked.

Connecting with the Graduate Student Committee

This article was produced by the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Graduate Student Committee. If you would like to give us feedback on our work or want to volunteer to join the committee to help plan any of our activities, please reach out to Jessica Bezerra de Oliveira (Send Message), the 2025 chair of the committee! If you would like to stay up to date with our committee, learn more about our work, contribute to one of our *CSA News* articles or suggest activities you would like us to promote, watch your emails, connect with us on X (Twitter) and Facebook, or view the committee page.

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