THE CAREER COUNSELOR'S GUIDE TO LINKEDIN

by **Kevin Grubb**

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LinkedIn, what some call "professional Facebook," is the world's largest professional social network. It is used widely by recruiters, hiring managers, and professionals in hundreds of industries to both develop themselves professionally and to find qualified candidates for open positions. With hundreds of millions of members, LinkedIn allows a user to:

Easily create a professionally oriented presence online.

Discover connections to organizations and opportunities via people he or she already knows.

Learn about trending news in an industry or field and share it with others.

Get introduced to the right person to contact at an employer of choice.

Find job and internship opportunities as well as the individuals who posted them.

This guide will cover strategies to teach students about creating a strong profile, and using LinkedIn to network and connect professionally, and it will share tips on finding internship and job listings on this social network.

CREATING A STRONG PROFILE AND PERSONAL BRAND ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn has often been referred to as "your resume online." This assertion is not far off as there are many similarities between a LinkedIn profile and a resume. As such, some of the points covered here may sound like your advice to students about resume writing. However, where there are differences in the two is also where it is critical to pay attention.

At the top of a LinkedIn profile is a box containing the fast facts about each user. Since this box is the first thing that another LinkedIn user would see when landing on a LinkedIn profile, this box is incredibly important real estate. Here are some tips for making the most of it that you can share with students:

1. Profile photo—The best photo for students is a professional-looking headshot of just the student alone. Many career centers have taken to offering a LinkedIn photo booth at career fairs or other events where they know students will be dressed professionally. This helps students get up and moving on LinkedIn quickly. Unlike resumes, it is important to include a photo on LinkedIn, as this is a social network.

2. Name—A student should use his or her first and last name. LinkedIn does give the option to provide a former or maiden name as well.

3. Headline—These are the words appearing directly under a name, essentially a LinkedIn user's tagline. LinkedIn will automatically populate the Headline with the most recent position listed in the "Experience" section of a profile, but this is a customizable area. Encourage students to think of it as a place to make a concise professional statement. It is also important to consider keywords and phrases in this section that are related to a student's desired industry or profession. When other users of LinkedIn search by these words, the student will be more likely to appear in search results. Students can also consider putting in something like "XYZ College student with a passion for [major/niche interest]."

4. Location and Industry—It is a good idea for students to choose the industry they intend to enter and, if seeking a specific location for work, to choose that location for their Profile. This way, they will appear in searches for that area. It is a good practice to explain the desire to relocate to

that location in the "Summary" section of a profile.

5. Current and Previous Experience and Education—These fields are automatically populated based on what a LinkedIn user inputs into their "Experience" and "Education" sections of the profile.

6. Public Profile URL—This URL is a link that users can send to others, whether on or off LinkedIn, to view what is called a "public profile"—all of the information a user wishes to have publicly viewed when anyone online views the profile. LinkedIn will provide every user with a URL, though it will contain a string of random characters at first. Users can customize this URL to contain something easily recognizable, like a name or shortened version of a name. Encourage students to customize this link so they can easily include it in e-mail signatures or on resumes.

7. Contact Info—In this section, users can input things like e-mail addresses, phone numbers, mailing addresses, Twitter accounts, and websites. If a student has a personal website or public Twitter account, it would be a great idea to provide links to those here.
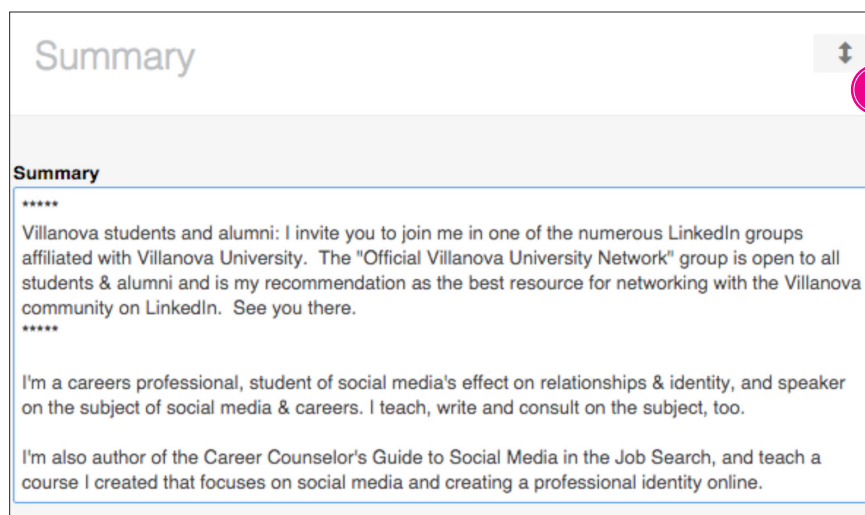
Below the box on a LinkedIn profile are various sections, many of which mirror what can exist on a resume. There are several options to categorize a

Summary	Skills and Expertise
Experience	Honors and Awards
Organizations	Languages
Volunteering and Causes	Certifications
Education	Publications
Courses	Test Scores
Projects	Patents

user's experiences and skills in profiles, including:

Throughout a profile, no matter what the section, it is important to consider keywords

and phrases relevant to one's desired industry and goals, again, because of considerations for searches on LinkedIn. Many of the sections above are self-explanatory, however there are a few specific tips for students to consider in some of these areas. It's also important to note that LinkedIn allows users to move profile sections up and down on the page, providing flexibility in how things are displayed.

Summary

Summary

*****
Villanova students and alumni: I invite you to join me in one of the numerous LinkedIn groups affiliated with Villanova University. The "Official Villanova University Network" group is open to all students & alumni and is my recommendation as the best resource for networking with the Villanova community on LinkedIn. See you there.
*****

I'm a careers professional, student of social media's effect on relationships & identity, and speaker on the subject of social media & careers. I teach, write and consult on the subject, too.

I'm also author of the Career Counselor's Guide to Social Media in the Job Search, and teach a course I created that focuses on social media and creating a professional identity online.

8. Summary—Although the "Summary" section may be intimidating for students, it can be one of the most impactful sections of a LinkedIn profile. Here, students have a blank canvas on which to describe themselves. Since the profile is essentially a website, it is important to consider writing for the web: write in small chunks, use bulleted lists when appropriate, and avoid long paragraphs. Of course, error-free and clear writing is important, too. Summaries are best when they describe a person's interests— both personal and professional—and are truly reflective of the individual's voice. They also help other LinkedIn users by telling them how they can help the individual by providing a "call to action." Consider having students answer the question, "What information do you seek?" in their summaries to turn up their networking on LinkedIn. To draw a comparison, it may help to encourage students to think of the summary like a cover letter.

Associate Director, Career Center

Villanova University

June 2014 – Present (1 year 4 months)

My focus in this role is on assessment and technology, where I:

► Lead university initiatives to collect career outcomes data

► Manage relationships with technology partners and bring career & professional development technology to the Villanova community

► Create assessments to evaluate programs and services offered by the Career Center

It's my goal to keep us on the cutting edge of these practices, so if you have some neat or new ideas, I'm interested to hear about them.

9. **Experience, Organizations, Volunteering, and Causes**—Within these sections, students can consider including things like internships, part-time jobs, student club and organizational involvement, and volunteer experience inside and outside their college or university. It is important for students to display these things here, just as it is on their resumes. The inclusion of industry-relevant keywords and phrases is important here, as well.

10. **Adding Rich Media to Profiles**—In some sections of a profile—most notably the "Summary" and "Experience" sections—users have the ability to upload rich media: hyperlinks, documents, presentations, and more. These files and links can provide a complete picture of a user's abilities because they add in the option to demonstrate skills and successes. Students and alumni can consider adding in links to published articles, short writing samples, presentations for classes or internship sites, and more.

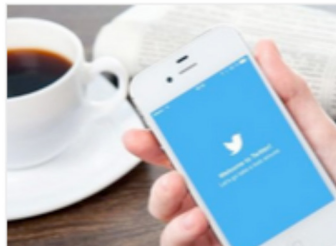"9 Gen Y Careerists to Follow on Twitter" a…
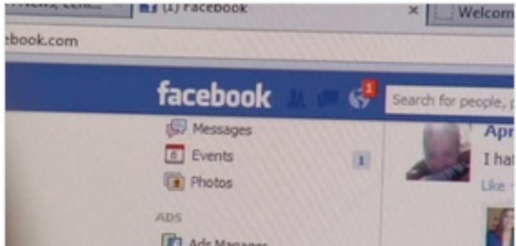
"Cleaning up your online footprint" - a story…

College Career Centers …

15 Job Search Experts to…

11. Skills & Endorsements—This is a keyword and phrase hotspot for a LinkedIn Profile. LinkedIn also allows users to endorse skills listed in a fellow member's profile as long as they are directly connected. Think of it like voting up a specific skill. Encourage students to input at least 10 skills in this section to fill the list and so others can endorse thoroughly. Also, remind them that giving into their networks will help them gain—to get Endorsements, they should consider giving some (honestly, of course) first.

For more information about best practices for LinkedIn Profiles, visit https://university. linkedin.com/ and check out the videos and handouts located there. The "LinkedIn Profile Checklist" is a great one-pager to print and hand out to students and alumni who want to get a quick start on their LinkedIn profiles.
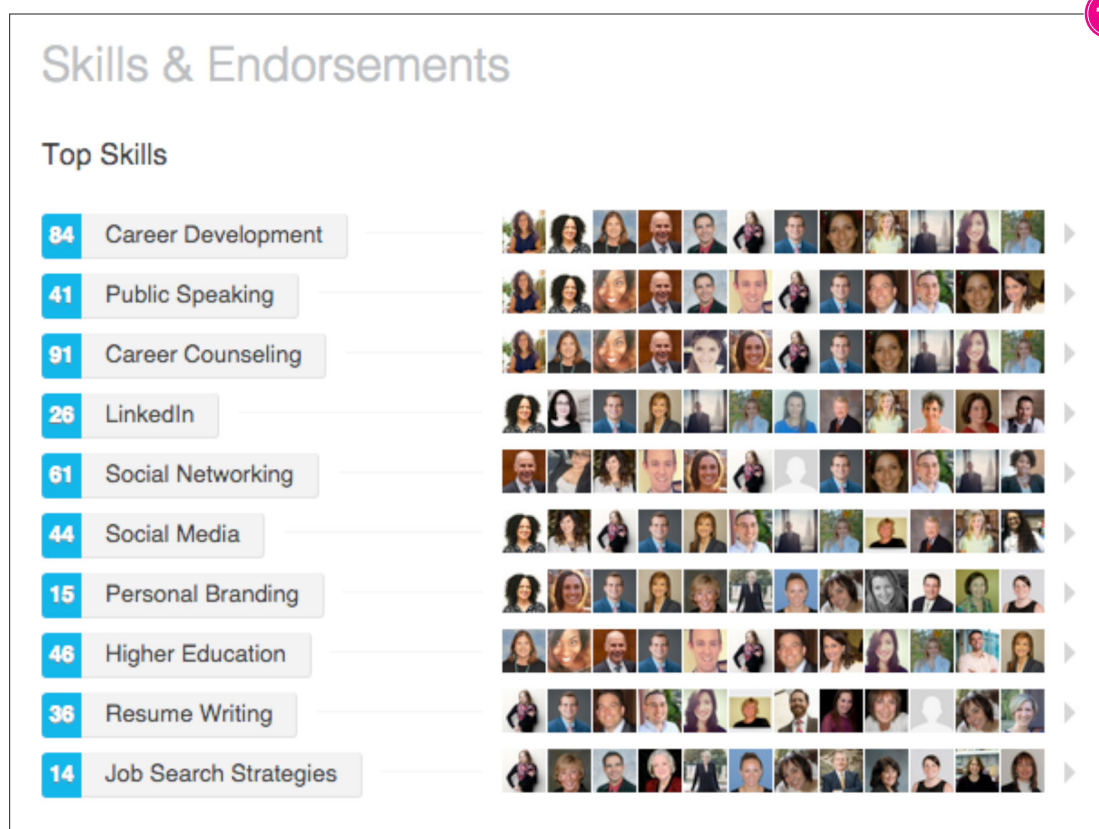
NETWORKING AND CONNECTING PROFESSIONALLY ON LINKEDIN

Creating a strong profile on LinkedIn is only the first step in turning this network into an ongoing professional resource for a student. The next step is to start connecting and communicating with other users about professional interests. Being active on LinkedIn is a critical step to getting recognized, learning about a field of interest, and establishing an online identity.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn recommends that users connect with those whom they know and trust. This advice is best for students just starting out on the network, and then they can expand their connections to include people they are getting to know or would like to know. Here are a few suggestions of types of people with whom it may be good to connect:

- Family members.
- Friends and fellow students.
- Internship or job supervisors and coworkers.
- Professors, advisers, coaches, and former teachers.
- Family friends.

Any of these people could be great references and connections on LinkedIn. What's more, LinkedIn helps an individual see the connections of his or her connections, enabling him or her to understand who of their trusted contacts can introduce them to someone at an organization of interest. A good initial suggestion is to consider connecting with at least 50 people on LinkedIn to make the network's web of connections work well. Growing a network after that can happen naturally. It's not important to race to getting hundreds of connections.

A quick way to get started is to take advantage of LinkedIn's "Add Connections" option. To access this area, users can roll over the "Connections" tab at the top of LinkedIn and then click on "Add Connections."
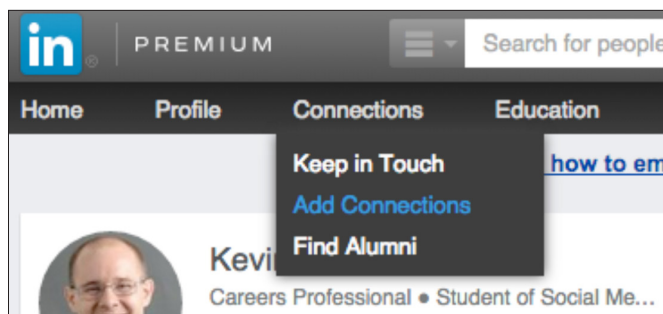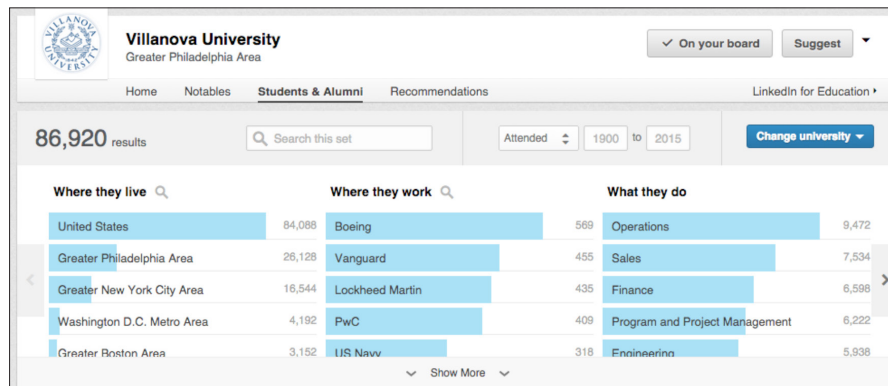

Then, a user can add one of their e-mail addresses into the text box on the resulting screen. Once the e-mail address is validated and connected, LinkedIn will import the address book from that account to suggest connections and help manage a user's contacts.
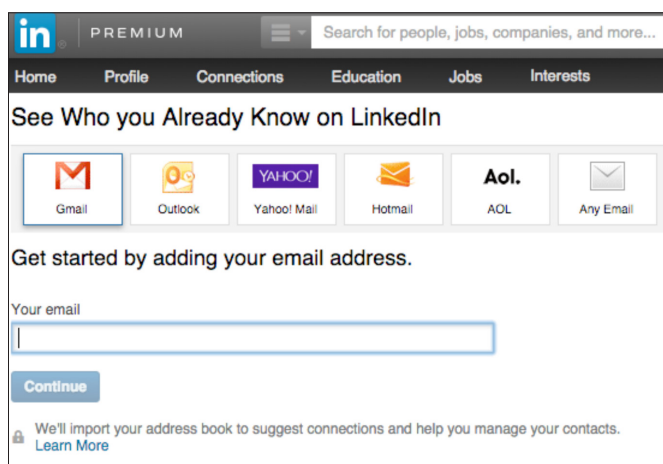
An important note about this method of adding connections—The list of potential new connections that will result from this search will likely be large. It will be tempting to simply ask them all to connect in one click. However, doing so will not give the user an option to customize a message in the connection request. This is a critical misstep. You'll learn more about customizing messages to connect below.

One often-cited tool on LinkedIn that can help students find connections is called the "Alumni"

tool. This page can be found at www.linkedin.com/alumni and looks like this:

With this tool, any user of LinkedIn can search information about alumni from colleges and universities around the world. Although the search will default to appear as using the college or university in the "Education" section of a profile, any user can "Change university" using the button on the right-hand side of the page to search all alumni information available on LinkedIn. Searches can be done by any keyword or by the predetermined categories on LinkedIn, which include the following:

- Where they live.
- Where they work.
- What they do.
- What they studied (on Page 2, revealed by clicking the right arrow).
- What they're skilled at (on Page 2, revealed by clicking the right arrow).
- How you are connected (on Page 2, revealed by clicking the right arrow).

If a student is interested in learning more about a potential connection found on this page, it's a good practice to encourage the student to view the person's full profile to gain as much that can be known as possible. The full profile may explain more connection points and can provide detail that would be important to strengthen the relationship.

It should be noted that when connecting with others on LinkedIn, a user will be prompted to describe how they know the other person,

as seen in the screenshot below. There is also the option to include a personalized note along with the connection request, a message that the person will be able to see on the other end. **It is essential to encourage students to customize this message to describe the nature of the intended connection.** The message cannot be long, but including a brief note about how the student knows the other person will go a long way in facilitating the connection. Encourage students to consider including:

- An introduction.
- An explanation of the common ground or shared affiliation.
- The "ask"—what they hope to learn or do.
- Sincere thanks.

ALWAYS CUSTOMIZE THIS PERSONAL NOTE AREA WITH A THOUGHTFUL MESSAGE.
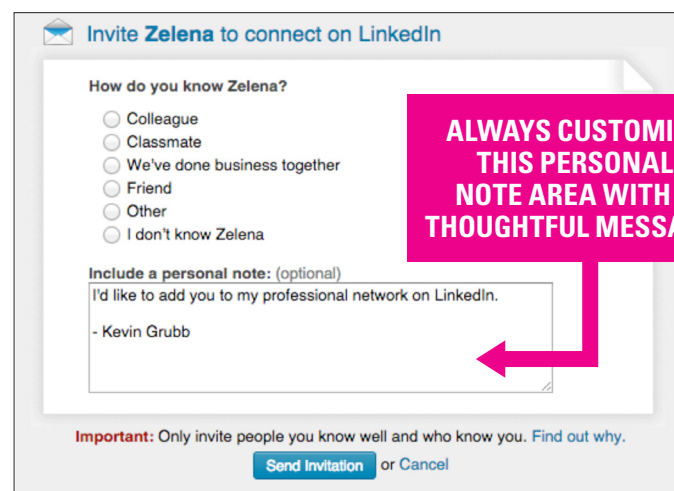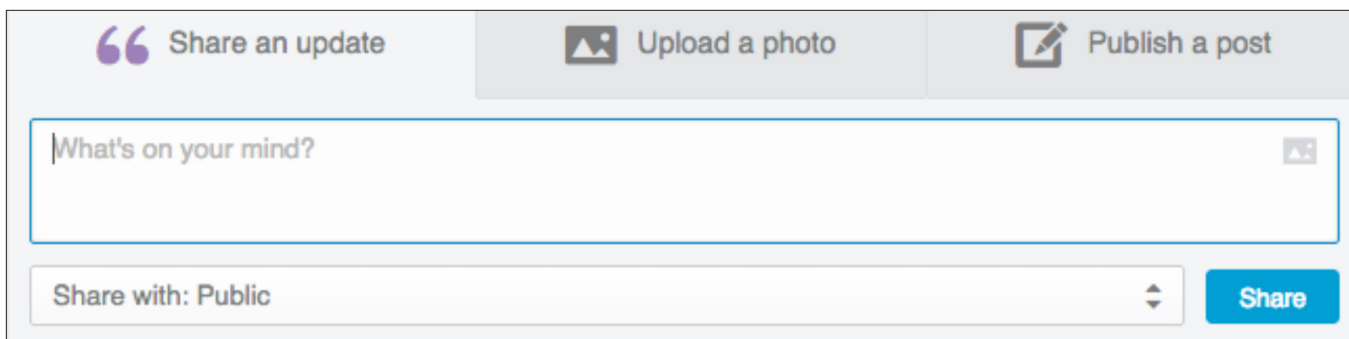
SUGGESTIONS FOR STATUS UPDATES

The next step after making connections is to consider a plan for communicating on LinkedIn. A good place to start is with a status update—where a user can share thoughts, questions, or ideas with those who are in his or her network.

Here are a few ideas that students can consider sharing as a status update:

- Questions about their field of interest or perhaps about a topic from class.
- An interesting article they've stumbled upon. It would also be good for students to share a thought or opinion on the piece to let others know their point of view.
- An update on an academic achievement, project, or paper.
- A success story from an internship or job.
- A blog post they have written or other content they have created and added to the Internet.

It's a good idea for students to share statuses often, as these statuses will appear in the feeds of other users on LinkedIn with whom they are connected. Students can also comment on or like the status messages of others in their networks on LinkedIn. This could be a great way to engage with professionals and learn about trending topics of interest.

In addition, LinkedIn has a feature called "LinkedIn Pulse," which allows any user to follow stories from around the web and from influencers whom LinkedIn has asked to write articles about ideas critical to their fields.

LinkedIn Pulse is a customizable area where users can find trending stories in specific industries, which may be great to share as status updates as well. Students can search this area for fields relevant to them by clicking on "Pulse" under "Interests" at the top of LinkedIn.

Writing articles on Pulse is now a feature for all LinkedIn users, so students can consider making LinkedIn their primary place to blog. In the "Career Counselor's Guide to Blogging," you can read more about strategies for building a strong blog.

GETTING INVOLVED IN LINKEDIN GROUPS

One of the richest resources on LinkedIn comes from its members; the millions of people around the world who share ideas and information. This often happens inside LinkedIn Groups—communities of people who come together based on a specific affiliation, interest, profession, identity, and more. There are millions of groups on LinkedIn, so there's a good
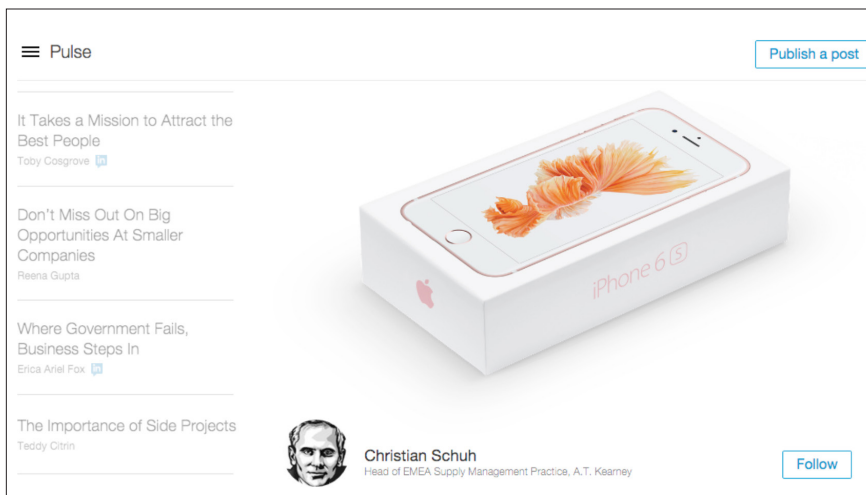
chance that a community exists where students can jump in and learn quite quickly.

With millions of groups, the first question is often, "Where do I begin?" If your college or university and your office has a group that students can join, that's one solid suggestion to make immediately. Getting students involved with others in your school's community could help them make career connections either on or off campus that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Another suggestion for students is to find people on LinkedIn that they know and admire professionally, then take a scan of those individuals' group memberships on LinkedIn. This can be seen at the bottom of a person's LinkedIn Profile, provided that the individual allows group memberships to be publicly viewed.

Finally, there is the search feature on LinkedIn that allows users to search everything on the site— including groups—by keyword. It's a good idea to recommend that students find groups relevant to their professional interests as well as groups that match other current or past affiliations or identities.

Once inside a group, there are plenty of

professional development opportunities and ideas to go around. Here's a walkthrough of what it looks like inside a group:

1. Active Discussions—As a member of a group, LinkedIn users have the ability to view and comment on discussions that other group members have started. These discussions can be posts about hot topics in a field, or questions to gather opinions and feedback. Getting involved in some of these Discussions could be a great way for a student to learn and get recognized by others in the field.

2. Searching Group Members—By clicking on the number of members at the top of a group, LinkedIn users will be taken to a page that lists all other members of the group. This is a great way to find individuals in a specific group who may be particularly helpful for an individual. One great thing about joining groups is that any user can send a private message to another group member without being directly connected (up to 15 of these per month). This would allow students to get in touch with professionals of interest without requesting to connect.

3. Subgroups—Many large groups have

subgroups, or communities within the community. This can be a great place for specific discussions around practice areas or within different regions of the country. Group managers have the ability to add subgroups to help organize groups and make them valuable places to network.

4. **Posting a Discussion**—Of course, group members also have the option to post their own discussions for others. Depending on the group's norms, it may be a good idea for students to post discussions about:

- Their job or internship search ("_____ student seeking advice about securing an internship in _____ industry").

- A question about a specific idea or topic in a field of interest.
- An article of interest. It would be good for students to add their own commentary or thoughts on the article to communicate about themselves.

It is also worth noting that LinkedIn allows people to see statistics about groups when searching them. This information displays how active the group is and how many members it already contains. It would be wise for students to investigate the statistics before joining groups to help them understand what to expect if they decide to join it.

FINDING JOB AND INTERNSHIP LISTINGS ON LINKEDIN

As the world's largest *professional network,* LinkedIn is home to not only people and conversations, but to job and internship listings that appeal to students. There are several ways to explore these opportunities and specific features of LinkedIn that enable users to go beyond viewing traditional position descriptions.

SEARCHING FOR COMPANIES

One of LinkedIn's greatest assets for a job seeker is the ability to view employment-specific information about an organization on what are called "company pages." These are landing pages on LinkedIn that are created and maintained by individuals who have a LinkedIn profile and work for the company. There are millions of them. Company pages contain information like:

- A brief overview of the organization.
- A listing of products and/or services the company provides.
- Job and internship opportunities currently available.
- A listing of recent promotions.
- Ideas about similar companies.
- The skills most often cited in profiles by those who work there.
- A place to explore who you know at the organization based on your LinkedIn network.

Let's take a look at a specific company page to explore what students can do there. For example, if a student is definitely interested in opportunities at Enterprise Rent-A-Car, you can suggest the student type in his or her name into the search box and select the company when it appears in search results.

1. Recent Updates—Here, the company shares updates about itself and who it is. Often, it will post jobs for which it is hiring.

2. Follow Button—The yellow "Follow" button in the top right-hand corner allows users to follow a

company and receive updates from the organization on the home screen after logging in to LinkedIn. This is a great way to learn what is happening in real-time at an organization and to understand its culture.

3. How You're Connected—A critical piece of the company page is the "How You're Connected" area, where you can see exactly who in your network works at the organization. As you can see in the screenshot above, I have 255 second-degree connections at Enterprise, which means I am not directly connected to anyone who works there, but I am only one person away from a total of 255 people there. That would make for quite an easy introduction and open door if I want to learn more about Enterprise from someone who actually works there.

4. Careers—Finally, the "Careers" area would allow me to see more about what it's like to work at the organization and what kinds of job opportunities are open right now.

What if a student is not sure about specific companies of interest? Or the student is considering a variety of fields or majors? A great recommendation here is to have the student conduct a company search and filter by specific options. Here's a look at the "Company Search" page and some ideas to help students explore it:

• **Searching by Location**—Perhaps you are working with a student who is from the Chicago area and would like to return there for work. You can start by suggesting that the student narrow the company pages by Location. There is an "Add" button here to add any area of interest, including international locations. Searching LinkedIn company pages in this way can help the student do some geographic-based organizational research.
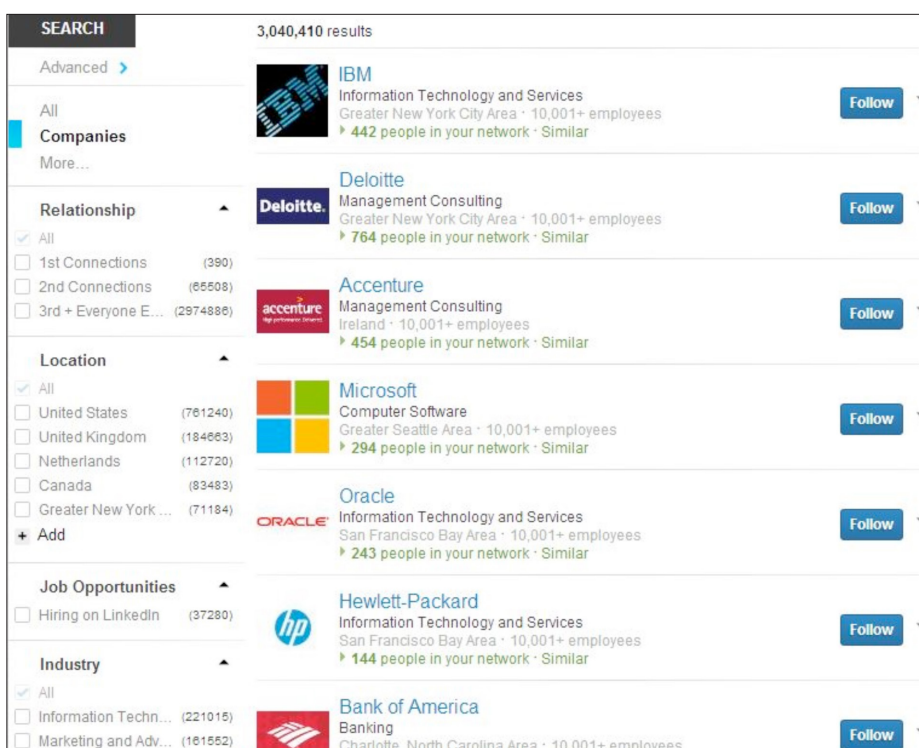
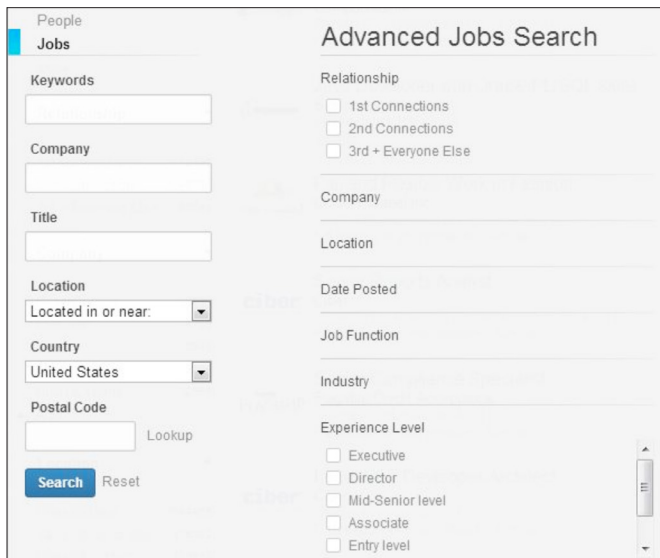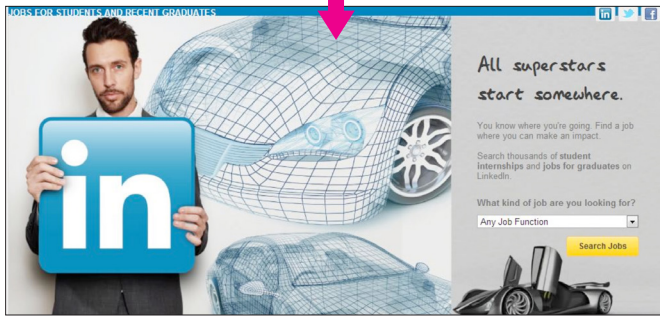• **Searching by Industry**—Another option is to encourage the student to search by industry. Let's say that same student wanted to live in Chicago and work in the marketing industry. After selecting the Chicago area in "Location," the student could then select the "Marketing and Advertising" option in the "Industry" area. Now, the student would be able to see all of the organizations in Chicago that work in marketing and could tell if anyone in his or her already existing network might be able to make a connection.

SEARCHING FOR JOBS AND INTERNSHIPS

Beyond searching for companies, students also have the ability to search for jobs and internships posted by people and organizations. LinkedIn has created the "Student Jobs Portal" (located at linkedin.com/studentjobs), which specifically filters job postings that would be appropriate for students. This is a great place to recommend to students who are just beginning their search.

Within the advanced search page, students can also target job and internship listings relevant to them. Let's take a look at this page and some suggestions for students to search.

A SCREENSHOT OF THE STUDENT JOBS PORTAL

• **Searching by Keyword**—One starting point is to search by keyword. Perhaps a student has an interest in jobs related to sports, but is not sure where or how to apply it. By searching for jobs with that keyword, the student could start to explore what positions could look like.

• **Searching by Location**—Similar to a search for company pages, this is a great field to search if the student knows or has ideas about working in a specific area of the country or world.

• **Searching by Job Function**—Using this field, students can search for positions that fall within a certain job function. For example, perhaps a student wants to work in writing or editing, but does not yet have a preference of industry. He or she could select "Writing/Editing" in the job function area to find positions in which that would be a primary role.

• **Searching by Industry**—Similarly, if a student knows which industry or field is a target, then he or she can select an industry in this area to find only positions within organizations that identify with that industry.

• **Searching by Experience Level**—Students could consider checking off the "Entry level" or perhaps "Associate" box to look at full-time positions; there is also a box for "Internships" (not shown here).

Job searching on LinkedIn follows many of the same rules as on other job-search sites. Two key considerations for this kind of search are:

• **Seeing Who Posted the Position**—On some postings, users may be able to see who actually posted this position. It would be a good idea to view that person's profile to know more about both the recruiter and the organization.

• **Applying with LinkedIn**—Some postings will allow users to apply for the job using their LinkedIn profiles. Students can simply "one click" to apply. However, users should think carefully about how their profiles are targeted to the specific position. In some cases, sending a carefully tailored resume may be the best bet.

There's little doubt anymore that LinkedIn has given job seekers access to more information about jobs and internships, the companies who offer them, and the people who make up those organizations. Using this network, students have unique ways to make connections with information and opportunities that can lead to satisfying career paths. Encourage your students to consider LinkedIn no matter where they are in their career development. Everyone, from the person trying to identify the possibilities of an academic major to those with niche interests, can benefit from the world's largest professional network.

For more on LinkedIn for students and higher education professionals, check out university. linkedin.com and explore the resources provided. See you on LinkedIn!

Kevin Grubb is an associate director at Villanova University's career center, where he focuses on digital media and assessment. He is also a consultant and speaker, and trainer. Connect with Kevin on his personal website, www.kevincgrubb.com, on Twitter @kevincgrubb, or via his LinkedIn Profile.