

You recently requested an advisory opinion from the NACE Principles for Professional Practice. We discussed your issue and our advisory opinion is below.

ADVISORY OPINION

Principles for Professional Practice Committee

May 19, 2009

Thank you for contacting the **NACE Principles for Professional Practice Committee** for an advisory opinion.

BACKGROUND

You referred to a posting you read on the NACE blog that expressed concern about the use of the networking site "LinkedIn" with students and recruiters. Specifically, the questions were:

Is it okay to be "LinkedIn" with recruiters?

Is it okay to be "LinkedIn" with students? If so, is it fair to link with some students and not others?

If students can access your links to recruiters, and you don't link with all students are they being denied access to an employment network?

How much information should we share via our own profiles?

How should we respond to requests for recommendations?

DISCUSSION

The Committee members noted that the networking site LinkedIn has put an interesting spin on the relationships between Career Center professionals and recruiters. Many may already have both a professional and a social relationship with each other while others may be limited to workplace contact only. LinkedIn has made it easier to connect with each other on a broader scale.

Quoting the LinkedIn website: *"Your professional network of trusted contacts gives you an advantage in your career, and is one of your most valuable assets. LinkedIn exists to help you make better use of your professional network and help the people you trust in return...."*

Our mission is to connect the world's professionals to accelerate their success...."

They go on to say that "through your network you can...

Discover inside connections that can help you land jobs and close deals

Post and distribute job listings to find the best talent for your company"

On the LinkedIn site you can do everything from just staying in touch to providing personal references for others in your network. The real issue here is one of access. How accessible are you willing to be and do you offer the same level of accessibility to all constituents/customers? Do students and employers who are connected to you have an advantage over those who are not? LinkedIn does offer many service and privacy options to its registrants. Committee members discussed the use of the various privacy settings to protect one's profile. Here are a few examples:

Those that you are already connected with can see updates to your connections.

You can choose to hide your connections list. However, some would say this is counter to the purpose of LinkedIn.

When you update your profile it automatically notifies your connections and you can choose to hide this as well.

There was discussion about the recommendation section on LinkedIn and the advantage that some students would have if Career Center professionals wrote recommendations on their behalf for prospective employers to view. The possibility also exists that Career Center professionals may write recommendations for recruiters and advocate for specific companies, giving undue advantage to those organizations. Additionally, employers may write recommendations on behalf of students who were

employed by them for summer or co-op positions. These recommendations have the potential to be viewed by thousands of people without the written consent of the student.

RELEVANT PRINCIPLES

The NACE Principles for Professional Conduct provides standards regarding equal access to employers by students.

One of the three basic precepts for career planning, placement, and recruitment is:

Maintain a recruitment process that is fair and equitable to candidates and employing organizations

Applicable Principles:

Career Services Professionals

#4. *Career services professionals will provide generally comparable services to all employers, regardless of whether the employers contribute services, gifts, or financial support to the educational institution or office and regardless of the level of such support.*

#6. *Career services professionals will maintain EEO compliance and follow affirmative action principles in career services activities in a manner that includes the following:*

a) *Referring all interested students for employment opportunities without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, and providing reasonable accommodations upon request;*

Employment Professionals:

#4. *Neither employment professionals nor their organizations will expect, or seek to extract, special favors or treatment which would influence the recruitment process as a result of support, or the level of support, to the educational institution or career services office in the form of contributed services, gifts, or other financial support.*

#7. *Employment professionals will maintain the confidentiality of student information, regardless of the source, including personal knowledge, written records/reports, and computer data bases. There will be no disclosure of student information to another organization without the prior written consent of the student, unless necessitated by health and/or safety considerations.*

ADVISORY OPINION

The on line communities offer new platforms to connect Career center professionals and students and employers. The career center professionals must ensure that they are offering equal access for students and employers. It is uncharted territory and continuously evolving with new services and applications.

The committee encourages that all parties proceed with caution, carefully evaluating all the ramifications of "linking" to a select group of students and/or a select group of employers. Be mindful that recommendations written on behalf of some students and not others would give undue advantage to a select group. You are encouraged to establish your own in house policy to ensure consistency by all your career center professionals. A related and interesting Legal Q & A article on the issues concerning the use of technology and social networking sites for recruiting, written by George C. Hillavac, Esq. and Edward j. Easterly, Esq., appeared in the March 2009 *NACE Journal*

Thank you for your request for this advisory opinion. If you have questions or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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