ABSTRACT: Networking is a new term for educators. It identifies a process where people and resources are engaged through intentional acts based upon acquired skills. The term is closely associated with self-directed learning and can serve as a collaborative rather than a competitive educational principle. This article examines the applicability of networking for graduate education, including a demonstration of uses, and the identification of skills to be learned by the successful networker.

Networks, networkers and networking are more new words entering educational parlance. While sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and others have been exploring networking for some years, the concepts and words are rather new to most educators. Networking, in an educational context, is a term used to identify the ongoing process of a person engaged in a set of activities with various needed resources, both human and material. Moreover, networking is a series of intentional acts based upon acquired skills. Successful networking is not establishing contacts for some future hypothetical end, but is directly related to the individual's need to know and experience at the present time and for the immediate future. Persons engaged in networking need to determine how to maintain reasonable limits on the resources being utilized, while remaining sensitive to the ongoing interaction that takes place between themselves and the learning resources. Successful networking requires clear and equitable exchange agreements between the graduate learner and each resource to be engaged while in the graduate program.

Colleges, universities and institutes all organize academic resources;
for example, class schedules allocate human and material campus resources to connect students with professors. These activities are seldom oriented toward individual needs. They are oriented toward groups of people, organizing them around normative learning objectives. Students are generally limited to the published class schedule in constructing their programs of study. When networking is included as a valid educational experience, a student may identify and engage a wide variety of learning resources, both on and off campus. As an individually oriented process, the student as networker can engage potential resources wherever they exist — on campus, in the community, in business, industry, and governmental agencies. It is widely acknowledged that these resources can, and do, greatly enhance the learning of any student on all educational levels. Graduate level experiences that are limited primarily to on-campus activities are often poor in resources and must continually struggle to keep abreast of developments in the field.

The creation of professional and personal networks is more than simply locating and using resources. While that is the beginning, there are additional, and even greater, benefits from networking. The skills and understanding required to achieve successful professional and personal linkages cultivate values and qualities often associated with self-direction and self-directed learning. Experienced networkers view the process as increasing their capacity to be causal, collaborative, proactive, discriminative and nonseparable. These qualities help change the nature of educational contexts from competitive to collaborative. Students are generally educated in competitive environments, which are authoritarian, with knowledge and information flowing from teachers to students. Competition also reinforces separateness and judgmentalism—qualities that do not promote first rate scholarship. The underlying principles of collaboration and sharing through networking promote individual self-direction and colleagueship, and help to sustain high scholarly productivity.

In this article we will explore the applicability of the concepts of networking for graduate education, attempt to demonstrate how these concepts can be used in alternative graduate programs, and address the skills to be learned as a successful networker.

**SKILLS NEEDED FOR NETWORKING**

In most external or alternative graduate degree programs, learners have more opportunities to choose and direct their