What are professional associations?

A professional association is a group of professionals within a career field who come together for:

- Individual professional development and advancement
- Promoting the field as well as educating the public on issues related to the industry
- Networking and collaborating
- Sharing new ideas and practices that set standards for the industry and workplace
- Representing interests of industry before federal, state and local governments

No matter what field you are interested in, there is most likely a related professional association in which to participate and/or join. Once you have identified some options, visit association websites to learn about their resources, services and events; some of these are available to the public. Typically members pay annual dues to receive unlimited access to these resources and/or services and student rates are typically very reasonable.

Examples include:

- American Institute of Graphic Arts (www.aiga.org)
- American Dietetics Association (www.eatright.org)
- American Marketing Association (www.ama.org)
- American Society of Animal Science (www.asas.org)
- Fashion Group International (www.fgi.org)
- Society of American Foresters (www.safnet.org)

Why join a professional organization?

1. To network with professionals and opportunities in your field
   - View jobs and internship postings on listservs or websites that may be accessible only to members.
   - Have access to membership lists for finding informational interviewees.
   - Attend conferences and events to learn more about and meet others in your industry.
   - Find industry professionals across the nation, which is especially useful if you are relocating.
   - Membership signifies your commitment to your professional community and your own professional development. Be sure to include membership on your resume or CV.

2. To learn about your profession
   - Find out about best practices common in your field (professional associations often have influence over setting best practices within their industry, which are the operational standards generally accepted by a group, employer or industry to maintain and assure excellence and reputation).
• Gain access to industry trends and news, and increase familiarity with industry language.
• Be exposed to partners/collaborators (including employers).
• Access to career information about typical job titles and descriptions, credentials, salary and educational opportunities.

How to participate in a professional association as a student:

Student members in a professional association usually have many opportunities to get involved. In addition to student-specific events, many organizations invite students to participate in all association activities.

• Become a student member - many professional associations welcome students.
• Volunteer on a committee to develop relationships with others (the work of professional associations typically gets done by a few paid staff persons and many member volunteers.)
• Attend meetings, conferences, and social and networking events.
• Take advantage of opportunities just for students, such as a mentor program or scholarship programs with funds available exclusively for students in specific disciplines.

Places to find the right professional association:

Professional associations exist for virtually every industry or discipline. As a student, you will find many that are related to your major. Take time to research your options to find the one or two best fits for your personal and professional needs. Look for local or student chapters, as they may have more opportunities to get involved and meet professionals in the region. An example of a student chapter of a professional association at the University of Minnesota is the Golf Course Superintendent’s Association of America, Student Chapter.

Explore these to aide in your search for a professional association:

• Check out the resource list for your major on the Career and Internship Services website, www.careerhelp.umn.edu/majorinfo, or in the major binders in the Career and Internship Services office at 198 McNeal Hall or 411 Science Teaching and Student Services.
• Online lists, such as:
  • www.quintcareers.com/professional_organizations.html
dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/organizations/professional
• “Google” or use your favorite search engine using search terms, such as “animal science professional associations,” or “interior design professional associations.” Some associations focus on a very targeted group of professionals or a very specific niche, so try keyword searches that are creative and focused too (examples include, “National Mail Order Association” and “Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute”).
• College chapters of professional associations are often official student groups, for example the American Society of Interior Designers has a chapter registered as a student group on campus. Check with your advisor, or Student Unions and Activities (www.sao.umn.edu) for more information
• Speak to faculty, mentors, family, or friends for their advice about relevant, well-organized and credible professional associations.