

Linguistics Career Launch 2024
Career Management Session 3 of 5

Informational interviewing: *Your best job research tool*

Alexandra Johnston, PhD
Associate Professor of the Practice
Director, Masters Programs & Career Management
Department of Linguistics
Georgetown University
Washington DC



Linguistics Career Launch 2024 Career Management Sessions

1. Networking for introverts
2. Creating & tailoring an effective resume
3. **Informational interviewing**
4. Leveraging LinkedIn
5. **Salary & benefits: Negotiate like a pro**

Alexandra Johnston, PhD

- **Faculty instructor** *Career Management for Linguists* 2018-present: 3-credit, semester-long course for linguistics graduate students @ Georgetown University
- **Global talent development consultant**: 15+ years, delivering professional development to corporate, government, nonprofit and higher ed clients. *I love informational interviews and do them a lot!*



Agenda

- **What is an informational interview?**
- **Who do we interview?**
- **What do we ask?**
- **How do we follow up?**
- **Related:**
 - **How can networking & info interviews potentially lead to authentic, ongoing relationships?**



What is an informational interview?

An **informal conversation** with someone in a position, organization or career area of interest to you.

It's for you to seek **career information or advice** from someone with experience and knowledge in your areas of interest.

- If you are asking for someone's time, ask for ~ **20-30 minutes**
- A common, accepted practice in the US
- It's a **named genre of interaction** that people know about
- Most people working in 'industry' have made use of informational interviews in their own careers and likely will continue to do so

What an informational interview *IS NOT*

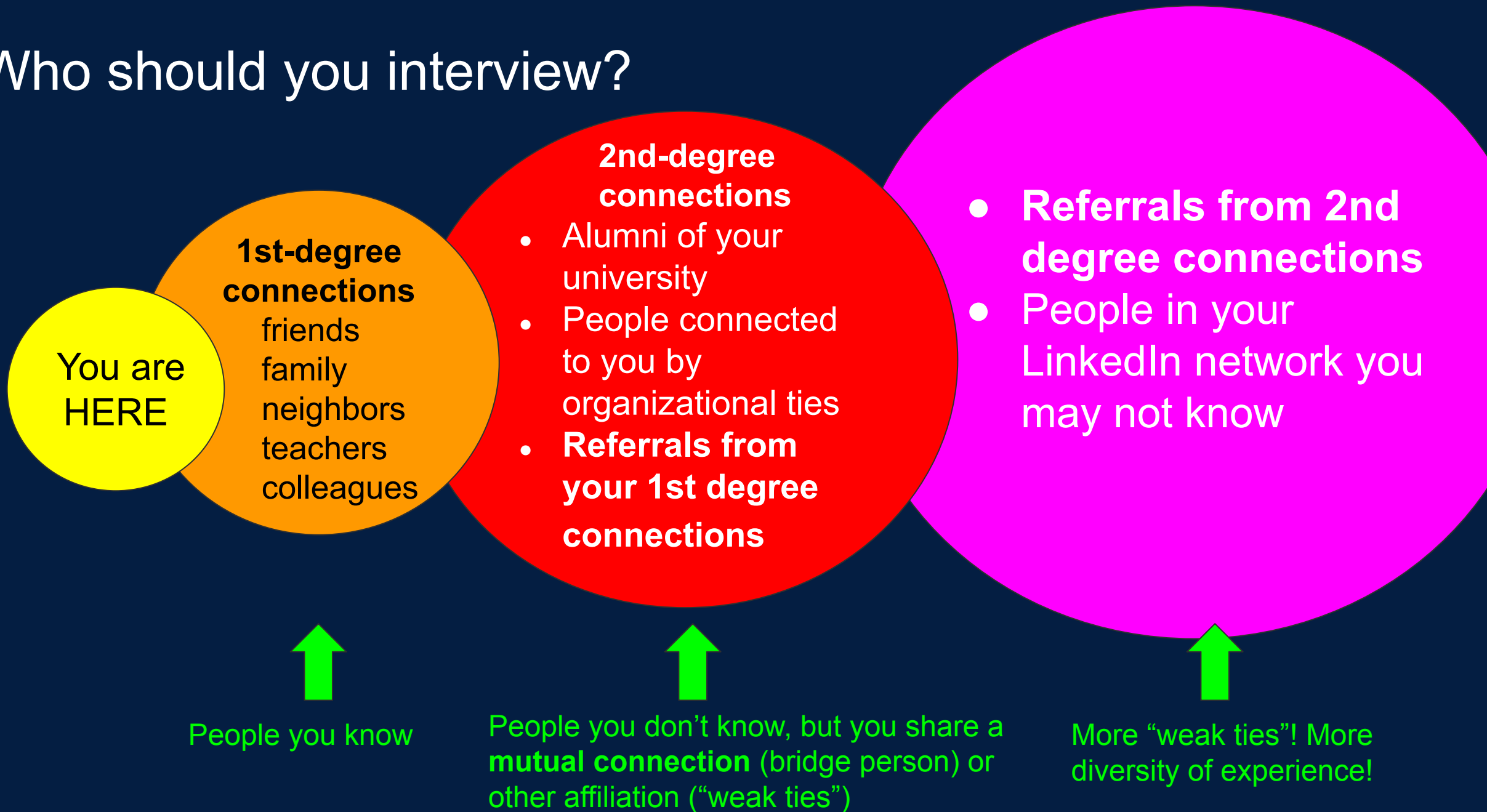
- You are not ‘asking for’ a job
- You are not trying to learn information about open positions in your interviewee’s organization
 - “I’m *thinking about applying* to X position in your organization that’s open right now...”
- You should not be have an active application at the organization where your interviewee works

Why do informational interviews?

1. Learn! Research! Explore! This is a research tool for your own life!
2. Find out about career possibilities you never knew existed
3. Find out **specific, relevant information** about the realities of working in a position, organization or sector
4. Start a professional relationship that could potentially be long-lasting and supportive

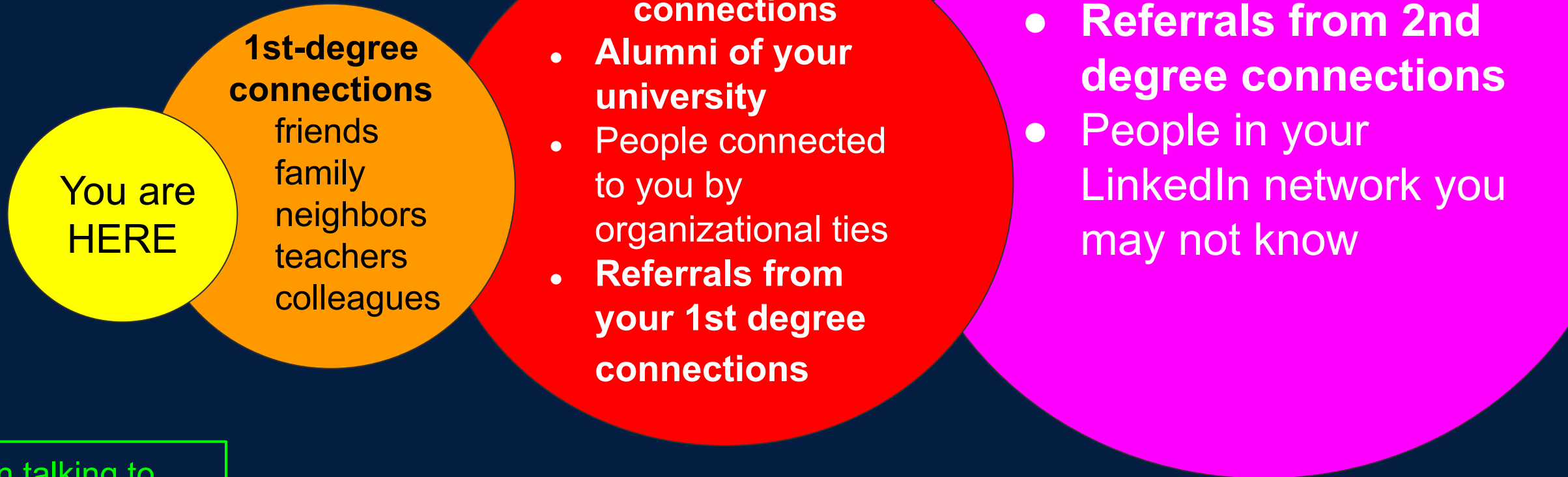
→ your BEST research method for career exploration
→ a way to create your career community

Who should you interview?



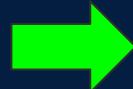
How should you start interviewing?

*Are you nervous or hesitant?
Here's what to do...*



Begin talking to people in your inner circle to build comfort and confidence

1. Start with the people you know



2. Move on to alumni and referrals from people you know



3. Keep exploring "outwards". You might feel like you're getting the hang of it now!

How to prepare?

- You've done the research by talking to your 1st-degree connections and getting suggestions from them about who to talk with. You've researched alumni on LinkedIn.
- Reach out with an invitation
 - Introduce yourself **briefly**
 - State why you're reaching out to them in particular: Did someone recommend them to you?
 - Example: "I wonder if you'd have about **20-30 minutes** to have an **informational interview** about getting started as a **User Experience Researcher** for someone like me with a **background in [XYZ]?**"
 - Offer **specific days and times** in the upcoming weeks and offer to look further out
 - "When would work best for you?" → sometimes isn't the polite offer you think it might be
 - **Manage all logistics** (offering specific days/times, channel of communication, etc.)
 - Be flexible. You are asking THEM to make time and expend energy

A sample invitation to someone you don't know

“Dear [Ms. Schwartz](#),

I hope you're well. I'm a rising senior at Georgetown University majoring in linguistics. After I graduate, I'd like to find a role in responsible tech and AI ethics. My professor, Dr. Alex Johnston, recommended that I reach out to you since you have a background in linguistics and now work as a [PI](#) on Bias in Artificial Intelligence at [NIST](#). Dr. Johnston sent me the “[AI Risk Assessment Framework](#)” that you and your team published and I really appreciated reading it.

I'd like to learn more about sociotechnical testing and evaluation of AI and how you transitioned to this area. Would you possibly have about 20 minutes for an informational interview by Zoom about your work? In the month of August, I'm flexible after 12:00 pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. I'd be grateful if you might have a few minutes during that time frame, or please let me know another time that might work better for you.

Thank you so much,

Name

LinkedIn

PI = Principal investigator

NIST = [National Institute of Standards and Technology](#), Washington DC

How to prepare?

- **Learn (more) about your interviewee**
 - Look up their LinkedIn, website, social media
 - Look up information about the organizations where they've worked
- **Learn *something* about the field, organization, sector**
 - Try *not* to ask anything that is immediately discoverable with a quick internet search
 - Learn some basics so you can use your time together more productively
 - “What is UX research?” → “What does UX research look like in your organization?”, “What methods of UX research are most useful to you in the work you do?”, “What methods should I get more familiar with?”
- **Select and **PRIORITIZE** your questions**
 - Save time for your final question: “Based on what you know about me and my interests, who is someone else I should speak with?” THIS IS HOW YOU GROW YOUR NETWORK
 - “May I use your name?”

What questions should I ask?



Informational Interviewing

[Best practices & Etiquette Guide \(click link!\)](#)

1. I've developed this doc over 6 years of teaching Informational Interviewing & networking techniques
2. *This will be part of a **book** I'm writing!*
Career Diversity for Linguists: Finding Your Fit in the World of Work—something like that. Under contract with Wiley.
3. Add your questions & comments to this doc to improve my book and make it the most useful it can be for *you*!

Questions to start with and build rapport

- Remind them of who connected you or how you learned about them
- Create a **co-membership link** (Erickson & Shultz 1982)!
 - This is an aspect of social identity, interest, affiliation that you share
 - You're both Georgetown alumni
 - You're both speak/study Arabic
 - You graduated from the same undergraduate institution, share the same major, went to the same degree program
 - "I saw on your LinkedIn that you're a returned Peace Corps volunteer. I'm was in the Peace Corps in Benin and worked on public health initiatives."
- How did you find your first job in this field/area/organization?
 - Draw people out about their own experiences

Questions about their work

- Could you describe a typical work day for me?
 - Be aware that you'll often get 'better' answers by asking something more specific:
 - What parts of your job do you find most rewarding? Most challenging?
 - What's something you're working on right now that you're excited about?
- What are your main responsibilities in your role?
- How does your division fit within the overall organization?
- What challenges do you face?
- Is your workload relatively constant or are there different parts of the business cycle / time of year that are busier than others?

Questions about 'organizational culture'

- What lifestyle adjustments does this work require?
 - Frequent travel? A lot of overtime? Being on call? Flexibility for remote work?
- Thinking of all the people you've met in your line of work, what personal attributes / skills are essential for success in this role/organization/sector?
- Considering my background, how well do you think I would "fit in" with this company and/or profession?

Questions about skills and expertise

- What education / training / skills would you recommend for someone to advance in the field?
- What skills and qualifications do you seek (or are sought by this company) in a new hire?
- Which of my skills are strong compared to job hunters in this field?
- Where should I seek to develop my skills?
- What do you think of my resume? How would you suggest that I change it?
- What additional courses or skills training I should take?
- Is an advanced degree (Masters/PhD) necessary in this organization/sector? Nice to have? Doesn't make a difference?

Questions about salary and advancement

- What is the earnings potential if I enter this field?
- What are some **salary ranges** for entry-level positions? For mid-level positions?
 - Avoid asking personal questions about salary like “What do YOU make?”
- Are frequent moves among organizations necessary to move up the ladder?

Following up after your informational interview

- THANK THEM
 - Mention something **specific** about the interview
 - Include **follow-up actions** you'll take as a result of your interaction
 - “I’ll make sure to email X to see if I can set up a brief conversation. Thank you so much for recommending them to me to talk to and letting me use your name when I reach out.”
 - “I’ve already looked up the organization you told me about and learned...”
- Be brief, be grateful
- Send as soon as possible (24 hours after meeting)

How can I keep professional relationships going?

You've had that first "touchpoint" (meeting/interaction)—now what?

- 2nd touchpoint: Reference the **first meeting**. Mention something **specific** that was interesting or useful that they said or did. **Express gratitude!**

Future touchpoints:

1. **You take action on something they gave you advice, knowledge, or resources about** and it worked out! Express gratitude.
2. **They introduced you to someone** or acted as a 'bridge person' for you. Tell them how that meeting went (include a detail or two) and how you'll move forward. Thank them!
3. **You experience a milestone**
 - You graduated. You accepted a job offer. You moved. You're establishing yourself in a new career area or geographical area. You're embarking on a new project.
4. **You come across a resource that might interest them** or made you think of them.
5. **You hear something good about them**: Express support or interest. Probably more gratitude.

Am I bothering people??

- A polite inquiry—plus one follow up if you don't hear anything—is fine
 - Especially if you have a bridge person! Especially if you share an institutional link! (Alumni are awesome)
- You DO have things to offer that interviewee:
 - Your **respect** through careful preparation
 - Your **engaged listenership**
 - Your **thoughtful inquires** about them and their work
 - Many/most people like talking about themselves and the work they do!
 - Your requests for **advice**
 - Most people love giving it!
 - A chance to **'give back' and help others** as they were helped in their journey
- If you don't hear back? Or your invitee says “no”?
 - Don't take it personally. A lot of people are very busy!
 - Get feedback from a trusted source (“Was it something I said or did?”)

Connect with me:

*Alex Johnston ([LinkedIn](#))
johnstam@georgetown.edu*