

Job Fairs

A job fair is a great opportunity to meet with many employers in a large, informal setting. Employers participate in these events to promote their organizations and to find qualified candidates for internships and full-time positions. The fair provides you with an opportunity to gather information about these organizations, determine your career options, and promote yourself in a less formal situation before beginning the formal job interview process. However, before attending any job fair, you need to do some advance preparation.

Prior to the Fair

- **Obtain a list of participating employers** from the sponsoring school or organization, usually available in print or through a website.
- **Highlight the organizations** in which you are most interested.
- **Research the organizations** just as you would for an interview.
- **Develop a resumé** and have it reviewed by a Career Services staff member.
- **Prepare a short introduction.** Include your name, university, degree, major, and the kind of opportunities in which you're interested with the organization.
- **Practice your handshake.**

At the Fair

- **Dress professionally.** First impressions are important. Your appearance, poise, warmth, ability to communicate, social skills, and attitude will be evaluated along with your education and experience.
- **Allow yourself adequate time.** Arrive early; fairs become very crowded a few hours into the event. Don't come during the last half hour of the event. Some employers leave early, so you may miss the organizations you want to meet.
- **Check-in upon arrival.** Wear your name

tag on the right-hand side of your jacket so it is prominent when shaking hands with the employer. It should include your name, major, and university.

- **Review the floor plan and employer directory,** and decide which employers you want to approach.
- **Be confident in approaching employers.** Be prepared to say hello, introduce yourself, and shake the employer's hand. Establish eye contact as you speak.
- **Be efficient.** If you visit a booth that has a long line, continue to another employer and return to the original booth when the line has diminished.
- **Be organized.** Use a pen and notepad to jot down important information that you may need after the event.
- **Network.** Talk not only to recruiters, but also to other job seekers in line with you. The best jobs are not always advertised, and your peers may know of leads that would interest you.
- **Don't make judgments based on displays.** Some of the best jobs available are not housed in the most attractive displays. Approach the booths that no one else is visiting.
- **Don't just visit the employers with whom you are familiar.** There are often great opportunities with small and medium-sized organizations.

Researching Employers

- What products do they produce, or what services do they provide?
- How long have they been in business?
- Are they publicly or privately owned? For profit or non-profit?
- Who are their major competitors?
- Are there any recent press releases or articles about the organization? What information is provided?

- **Take the materials, and get a business card.** Use the card to write follow-up notes to the organizations in which you are interested. Keep it as a future resource if the organization does not have a particular opening right now.
- **Stay energized!** Take occasional breaks to get off your feet, review materials, and get a bite to eat.
- **Don't expect job offers.** A job fair is usually the initial step in the recruiting process. You will be invited for a more formal interview if an employer is interested in you.
- **Know when it is time to move on.** There may be other students waiting to talk to the recruiter so demonstrate sensitivity by keeping your contact brief.

Items to Take with You

- **Resumés.** Your resumé should include educational background, achievements, skills, and experience. In addition, it should be well written, error-free, and professional in appearance. Make an appointment to have a Career services staff member review your resumé before printing copies. Take about 25 to 40 resumés depending on the size of the event.
- **Pen and note pad.** Take supplies to jot down important details or follow-up suggestions.
- **Portfolio or briefcase.** Leave your backpack or purse at home. A professional-looking portfolio or briefcase makes it easier to organize your materials and provides a place for maintaining any literature or business cards that you acquire throughout the day.
- **A list of references.** Take a list of three to five individuals who can attest to your qualifications. Include a name, address, daytime telephone number, and e-mail address. Provide the information to the recruiter only if it is requested.
- **A professional portfolio.** If there is a chance that you may have interviews at the job fair, take your professional portfolio with you.
- **A smile, a firm handshake, and a positive attitude.**

Interacting with Recruiters

Prior to the job fair, you should determine your career interests and should make an assessment of the knowledge, achievements, skills, and experience that you have to offer.

Prepare a one-minute "commercial" that summarizes your strengths. It should include:

- **Introduction.** Introduce yourself; and offer a smile, a firm handshake, and a copy of your resume.
- **Objective.** Tell the employer why you are interested in the organization and the kind of opportunities you are seeking.
- **Summary.** Briefly describe your background and qualifications. Recruiters prefer to hear that you have some kind of career focus.
- **Reiterate.** Comment again on your interest in the organization and thank the recruiter.

Practice your commercial until it is natural and you feel comfortable with discussing your qualifications and they can be beneficial to the organization.

During you interaction with recruiters, display your knowledge of the organization and ask relevant questions. You will appear more prepared, professional, and confident.

Avoid asking questions about salary and benefits; instead, focus on what you can offer the employer.

What Do Employers Expect?

Candidates who:

- Are well prepared.
- Are focused and know what kind of position they want
- Know what the organization does
- Wear suits and look professional
- Have good eye contact, are interested, and show enthusiasm for the organization and positions

Questions for the Recruiters

After researching the organizations, you should have some questions to ask the recruiter during your interaction. Some examples are listed below. A comprehensive list is available in the Career Services publication, *Effective Interviewing*.

- Ideally, what types of skills and experience are you seeking?
- What challenges do you see for your organization?
- What do you like most about your organization?
- Are there immediate openings in your organization? If not, what do you anticipate being the future opportunities?
- What type of training is given to people entering this field?
- What advice would you give to someone who wants to break into this field?

After the Job Fair

- **Make notes about the organizations that interest you.** Be sure to include any follow-up activities suggested by the recruiter.
- **Send thank-you letters** to the representatives of organizations that interest you within two days of the job fair. Thank the recruiter for meeting with you and reiterate some points of your conversation. Enclose another resume for review and express your interest in pursuing an interview.
- **Develop a record-keeping system.** Use index cards to keep track of the employers with whom you met. List contact information for the recruiter or attach his or her business card. Jot down some brief notes, and include an follow-up steps that you take.

Education Job Fairs

Education job fairs are more likely to include actual interviews as part of the day's agenda. The Career Services staff recommends that you review two publications, *Effective Interviewing* and *Behavioral Interviewing* in preparation for these special events.

Expand your Network

Even if an organization doesn't seem to be actively recruiting people with your particular major or skills, don't despair. Take the initiative to approach the recruiter, inquire about positions in your area of interest, and ask for the name of the person you should contact regarding other opportunities within the organization.

The Virtual Job Fair

In addition to "real-time" events, virtual job fairs offer a chance to expand your knowledge about employment opportunities and circulate your resume. A virtual job fair allows you to interact on-line with a large number of employers from various geographic locations. You can usually submit your resume (as an attachment), to those employers in which you have an interest.

The Virtual Job Fair

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Summary of Job Fair Tips

- Review a directory of participating employers and determine the organizations matching your career interests and goals.
- Prior to the fair, conduct online research of organizations that interest you.
- Develop an error-free professional resumé. Take multiple copies.
- Prepare your one-minute commercial.
- Prepare questions to ask the recruiters.
- Dress professionally.
- Take a pen and note pad with you.
- Arrive early.
- Approach recruiters with confidence, enthusiasm, and a smile.
- Ask each recruiter with whom you spoke for a business.
- Follow up with a thank-you note after the fair.
- Follow the suggested application procedures.
- Contact Career Services if you have any questions about the event.

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