

How to Work a Career Fair

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Reasons to Attend a Career Fair

Regardless of major, academic year or future goals, here are a few benefits of attending a career fair:

- ✦ Increase your chances of receiving an interview with an employer.
- ✦ Expand your network of contacts.
- ✦ Investigate positions, occupations and career fields you could pursue with your major and background.
- ✦ Learn more about employers/available positions.
- ✦ Receive sound job search advice from seasoned company recruiters.

What to Expect at a Career Fair

Having realistic expectations of a career fair is important in succeeding in your career search. This is a list of common career fair expectations:

- ✦ Treat the recruitment fair as a “mini-job interview.” First impressions can be lasting impressions, so make the best impression you can!
- ✦ Employers expect you to be prepared (dress professionally, ask thoughtful questions, have a polished résumé, etc.).
- ✦ Employers expect to interact with students simply researching careers and employers, as well as those seeking employment.
- ✦ Your goal should be to land an interview—not a job offer. Most recruiters are not authorized to hire candidates on the day of the fair.
- ✦ You should expect to have a relatively short amount of time to sell yourself and make a positive impact on the employer. Employers’ goals are to be exposed to as many job candidates as possible.

Attending a career fair for the first time can be a little overwhelming. However, if you prepare, you will get as much out of the event as you put into it.

Before the Fair

Simply attending a career fair is not enough; make your participation count by preparing purposefully!

Target Your Top Companies/Organizations: A list of companies/organizations who will be attending is available at <http://career.ucsb.edu>. Take this list and plan your strategy for which companies you would like to visit. Research the organizations in which you are most interested.

Prepare a résumé that is well-written and error free! Make sure you have multiple copies of both your résumé and list of references on hand.

Register with Handshake at <http://career.ucsb.edu> so that you may sign-up for any on-campus interviews that may result from the career fair.

Create a list of questions you want to ask employers (see back for sample questions)

Prepare to answer questions because employers will be asking them! You will be expected to think on your feet, so be prepared to answer their questions.

Learn to sell yourself by creating a 60 second elevator pitch, and make sure you practice it! Your speech should include the following:

1. Introduction: Introduce yourself, offer a firm hand shake and a résumé.
2. Objective: Tell the employer why you are there and what sort of employment you seek.
3. Summary: Briefly summarize education, experience, strengths, etc.
4. Closing: Reiterate your interest and thank the employer.

Here are some topics you might cover in an elevator pitch:

- ✦ Who am I? What do I offer? What field or industry am I interested in? (Identify yourself in terms of a job function or contribution.)
- ✦ What need or issue does the employer face and what problem can be solved?
- ✦ What are the main contributions I can make? What benefits can employers derive from my skills, based on my proven accomplishments?
- ✦ End with a question to invoke further conversation: What do you think about...? How can I get a spot on your interview schedule? Can we set a phone appointment to discuss the issue of...? Can I send you my résumé?

Then determine how effective and memorable the elevator pitch is by using this checklist:

- ✦ I can state who I am, what my work is and what makes me unique in 60 seconds.
- ✦ In my 60 seconds I say my name and concentration of interest.
- ✦ My 60 seconds has multiple parts, each of which can stand on its own and invite conversation by the listener.
- ✦ I communicate how I do what I do differently, uniquely or unlike my competitors.
- ✦ I have a slogan or tag line or memory hook.
- ✦ I have a 30 second version of my 60 seconds that communicates the same information.
- ✦ The response I get from either version leads into further conversation. For instance, "Interesting; how do you do that?"

Resource: Email, August 13, 2008, Val Matta, VP Business Development, CareerShift, LLC

Brush Up Your Personal Appearance. At least a week before the career fair, get a haircut and make sure your suit is appropriate, fits, and is clean.

Arrive early to avoid long lines and catch all employers as some will leave before the career fair has ended. As you arrive, be polite to people in the parking lot, hallway, or restroom – pretty much anyone could be a recruiter.

In Summary:

- ✦ Prioritize employers with whom you would like to speak.
- ✦ Identify the information you hope to obtain.
- ✦ Identify personal strengths you would like to convey.
- ✦ Specify those goals you hope to achieve by attending the career fair.

During the Fair

Bring your student ID to expedite the check-in process. Pick up a map of employer locations within the fair. Be confident, display enthusiasm, confidence, sincerity and the ability to communicate clearly. Smile, walk with good posture, and make consistent and direct eye contact. To further exhibit confidence and individuality, visit employers' tables on your own.

Chart your course and survey the room to determine where employers are located and in what order you plan to visit them. If possible, avoid standing in long lines. If there is a long line to speak with a representative, keep moving and return later.



Introduce yourself when it's your turn to meet the employer. Take a deep breath, smile, shake hands firmly and begin your "elevator pitch." Make direct eye contact with the employer throughout your conversation, and watch your tempo and tone. Avoid speaking too quickly and/or too loudly or softly.

Ask Meaningful Questions

- ✦ Ask one or two meaningful questions without monopolizing the employer's time.
- ✦ Do not ask about salary at this time.
- ✦ If you are an undergraduate, ask about internship, co-op, summer job and scholarship opportunities.

Prepare to Follow-Up

At the end of your conversation, do the following:

- ✦ Thank the employer for his/her time.
- ✦ Leave a copy of your résumé.
- ✦ Ask the employer for a business card, company literature and protocol for follow-up.
- ✦ If the employer says they do not have a position in your field, ask for the address of the Personnel Office. Nearly all employers hire all majors.
- ✦ As soon as you walk away from the employer, jot down a few notes about your conversation. You may want to include a few memorable discussion points in your follow-up letter.

After the Fair

Give yourself the competitive edge and don't make the mistake of thinking that as soon as you have spoken to the last employer and left the facility that you are finished. Follow-up is essential!

Send a thank you email that evening, and to sweeten the pot, send a thank you letter within one week of the event. Most candidates do not send thank you letters. Give yourself the competitive edge!

Be persistent and observe follow-up procedures suggested by the employer. Once you have complied with these procedures, and a reasonable amount of time has passed since you heard from the employer, it is okay to send an email or call to inquire about the status of your application.

Use UCSB's Career Manual. It is an excellent resource and available for free at Career Services.

Summary

You have made the most of your career fair experience when it results in subsequent interviews. If you have followed the "before," "during," and "after" steps, you are probably on

your way to landing one or more interviews—and better yet—a career!

Statistics from career fairs indicate that 49 percent of candidates receive interviews from job fairs, 65 percent of those eventually receive offers. This process may take three to four months (or longer). Again, the larger the company, the longer this may take.

Career Fair Checklist

- ✦ Pen and Notebook
- ✦ At least a dozen résumés
- ✦ Copies of your unofficial transcript
- ✦ Appropriate clothing including comfortable, professional shoes
- ✦ Small breath mints—no gum!
- ✦ A positive attitude

Resources:

Based on "How to Work a Career Expo," Auburn University.

"Keys to a Successful Career Fair." Clemson University Career Expo Handbook. 2000.

Reuter-Alm, G. "Three Ps for Succeeding at the Job Fair." Career Development Associate, Eastern Michigan University

Top Tips for Using Career Fairs

Do not force your résumé on a recruiter who is not accepting résumés. Instead, ask about their application process, and be prepared to follow their procedures.

Dress professionally as if you were going to a job interview. This will project an image of maturity, and will give you an edge over casually-dressed students.

Research companies of interest ahead of time.

Knowing about the company before you approach them will show the recruiter that you are seriously interested in their organization. Recruiters often rave about how Gauchos do advance research.

Introduce yourself. Walk up to the table, initiate the handshake, smile and tell them your name, and start asking your questions. If possible, have a visible name tag with your image and year on it. Team up with a buddy if you both have similar interests.





Know your objective. To a recruiter, nothing is worse than hearing *“I’m not sure what I want to do, I just want a job.”* Recruiters are not there to be career counselors. Don’t be afraid to share your goals and interests. This way, they can better recommend to you what particular areas of the company would be more relevant for potential opportunities.

There are no stupid questions. Employers are there to help you learn about what they do, and how best to apply for future jobs and internships. Be curious and friendly. See sample questions at the end of this guide.

Collect business cards if they are offered, along with relevant recruitment literature. This will provide you with complete contact information for following up.

Take notes. After visiting with each recruiter, stop and jot down your impressions of the company, position, and the meeting. Talking to many recruiters in a day can cause names and faces to blur.

Follow-up, but try to be patient. It often takes recruiters time to go through the stack of resumes they collect. Ask them what their timetable is, and follow-up accordingly.

Some Good Starting Questions...

- ✦ What exactly does your company do?
- ✦ What are some typical entry level positions your firm hires?
- ✦ What types of academic backgrounds do you seek and why?
- ✦ What are some of the key qualities and requirements you look for in your top candidates?
- ✦ Does your firm have a summer internship program?
- ✦ If so, what types of positions and requirements do you have? How many positions do you anticipate?
- ✦ What attracted you to this company and why?
- ✦ Do you have any advice for someone like me if I am interested in getting a position with your company?

NEED A RÉSUMÉ CRITIQUE? Drop-in hours are Monday through Fridays from 11am to 4pm in the Career Resources Room at Career Services, Bldg. 599. We review cover letters as well.

