

How to Work a Career Fair

Career and internship fairs provide an important means of making an in-person contact with organizations and companies. Here are some tips to make the Career Fair work for you!

Bring many copies of your resume to give to employers.

Come prepared - do your homework. Before the fair, review the list of employers and their job opportunities. Check websites and/or printed materials in the Career Center. Ask very focused and specific questions based on your research. This impresses representatives because it shows a genuine interest in them.

Know what you are going to ask. Prepare one or two questions for each employer. The questions should reflect your research and your personal interest. Be sure to take time to research companies, their competitors, and their industry to gain a competitive edge.

Generic questions include:

- Can you tell me more about the opportunities available at your organization/company?
- What qualities and background are you looking for in job candidates?
- How can I find out about other positions or career options within your organization? Is there another contact you would recommend?
- Do you have internship opportunities and if so, how do I apply?
- May I have your business card for future reference and contact?

Dress appropriately. First impressions are important. We strongly recommend "business casual" attire for career fairs. Men - No earrings or caps. Women - Avoid revealing clothing.

Allow yourself adequate time. Come as early as possible. You may return between classes. Fair close promptly at publicized ending time.

Get your bearings. When you first arrive, review the map and directory for the fair.

Prioritize the employers you're most interested in. Scope out who you want to connect with and plan accordingly. Assume that you will need to wait to speak with some organizations. Pick up company literature and/or listen in as the representative speaks with other students.

Introduce yourself. Don't sit back and wait to be approached. Shake hands, make good eye contact, and tell the employer your name, major, and your interests. Have your resume ready. The more focused you are, the better. If you are still unsure how you would fit into the organization, you may ask the employer open-ended yet specific questions: What qualities do you look for in your employees? What kinds of summer internships are available?

Create a 30-second commercial as a way to sell yourself to an employer. Job fairs offer only brief contact with organizations, so be prepared to make the most of your time. The goal is to connect your background to the organization's needs. {In one minute or less

you need to introduce yourself, demonstrate your knowledge of the company, express enthusiasm and interest, and relate your background to the company's need.}

Assess from your research how you would fit into the organization. Employer websites often have answers to commonly asked questions. If the job for which the employer is recruiting does not match your interests, ask the employer about other opportunities in the company.

Take notes when you inquire about next steps and the possibility of talking with additional managers. The representative at the fair may not have all the answers to your questions. Write down the name, telephone numbers, etc. of other staff in the organization, to contact later. Note specific employer information sessions, on-campus interviewing, and projected hiring dates that will affect you.

Collect business cards and jot down a fact on the back to jog your memory when you write a follow-up letter. Having the business card serves two purposes: first you have a direct contact with the organization, including the proper spelling of the representative's name, direct telephone line, etc. Second, you can send a thank you note/letter to those representatives you wish to pursue or with whom you have a significant conversation. Sending thank you notes is a good professional habit. This sets the stage for future correspondence.

Be courteous! Welcome the representatives and thank them for being here. In addition to representing yourself, you also represent SMC. All of the organizations at the fair are there because of their interest in you. Some representatives are alumni. Demonstrate sensitivity to other students waiting to speak with employers by keeping your questions brief and offering to continue your conversation at a later time. Enjoy the fair and your interaction with the employers. Let your positive attitude show!

Learn what's going to happen next. As you leave each employer, learn what happens next and what, if anything, you should do to advance your candidacy.

Other Do's and Don't's

- DO be assertive without being rude
- DO be sensitive to others waiting behind you
- DO bring plenty of copies of your resume
- DO realize that recruiters like to talk to groups
- DO thank recruiters you speak to for their time
- DO ask questions about hiring practices and your area of interest
- DO observe other students/employers for clues
- DON'T expect this to be an interview opportunity
- DON'T monopolize the recruiter's time
- DON'T exhibit a lack of direction and focus