How to Navigate a Career Fair

A Career Fair is an excellent setting for students to make connections with recruiters and companies (i.e. build your network), to learn more about what companies are looking for in a candidate, and to find out about available internships and full-time positions. For 1st and 2nd year students, this is a great occasion to practice your elevator pitch, network, and see what opportunities you want to begin working toward.

Before the Career Fair:

- **Research companies** (Google, company website, Hoovers.com, IBISWorld) ahead of time so you know which ones you are most interested in.
- Create a **game plan** of which companies you want to see. All organizations and companies are usually posted in advance of the Career Fair. Make sure to look at the list.
- Write each company on a separate **index card** and jot down a few details about each, as well as how you believe you can contribute to each organization. (These cards are part of your own research and preparation, and should not be used in front of a recruiter).
- Make your **priority list** of companies to talk to. (At the Fair, do not start with priority company #1. Practice with other companies first).
- Practice your “**elevator pitch**,” including reasons why you are interested in XX company.
- Finalize your **resume**.
- Print out 20 copies of your resume on high quality resume paper and keep them neat in a folder or padfolio. You will most likely not get to 20 companies, but better to be prepared.
- Plan your **professional business outfit** before the day of the Fair.
- Prepare specific, individual **questions** you want to ask each company. Examples include:
  - What positions are you looking for right now? (unless they have already advertised these positions).
  - What do you like best about working at XX company?
  - Can you tell me more about YY project you are working on, which I read about in the Boston Globe?
- Prepare comments/information that you want to get across to each recruiter. Examples could include:
  - Telling XX company the 2-3 most important things they should know about you
  - Why you like XX company and why you are interested in working there

At the Career Fair:

- **Arrive early.** Get the floor plan, and map out a route to where your top companies are located.
- Make sure your **phone is turned off** and out of sight.
- **Practice first.** Use your “elevator pitch” and networking skills at a company that is not on your priority list before approaching the ones you are most interested in.
- Note that the lunch hour is often the busiest with one recruiter (if there are two) breaking for lunch. Also, most students will show up then.
- Avoid the last hour of the Fair, if you can. Recruiters can be burnt out by then.
- Use a strong **handshake**, make **eye contact**, smile, and try to be relaxed enough to show your personality.
✓ Give each recruiter your resume and discuss your accomplishments. Do not just leave your resume on the recruiter’s table.
✓ Listen to how other attendees talk to the recruiters. You might learn something.
✓ Don’t interrupt another student talking with a recruiter. Also, be mindful that other students want a chance to talk with the recruiters too, so watch your own time. If the conversation is going well, you can tell the recruiter: “I am mindful of other students who want to speak with you and I would like to continue this conversation at another time. May I follow-up with you by email?”
✓ Don’t leave a recruiter until you have asked for his/her business card so you have the correct spelling of the recruiter’s name and contact information.

After the Career Fair:

✓ Jot down notes about who you met and any important information you discussed.
✓ Send email thank you notes within 1-2 days of the Career Fair to each recruiter you spoke to. Make the notes specific to you, and reference something that you talked about with them at the Fair. A good trick is to write them on the back of the recruiter’s business card, so that you can refer back to them and remember specific details of your conversation when following up. Remember, the recruiters can meet hundreds of students in a day, and you need to find a way to stand out with an experience or project that you have done, why you are driven to work for them, or pursuing your specific career interest.
✓ Do any online applications, if companies require them.
✓ Explore the companies you are most interested in further, and make an action plan to pursue those opportunities.
✓ Follow companies you are interested in on LinkedIn.