

How to Work a Job Fair

Why Job Fairs Are Important

Attending your university's job fair is an important step in getting on the radar screen of recruiters. The recruiters at fairs often are the same recruiters who do the campus interviews. Recruiters are there looking for either interns or permanent new hires. Many companies are looking for both. For many companies, students who attend job fairs or interview on campus are considered first for openings.

The Recruiters

Typically, the job fair recruiters are from human resources (some may be actual hiring managers or recent new hires) Hopefully, there will be new hires at the career fair. New hires have just gone through what you're soon to go through with the interview and hiring process. They can have valuable information on what the company is looking for in a candidate and can share the details of that employer's hiring process.

What Not to Expect at Job Fairs

Recruiters are not there to do job interviews. It's more like a meet-and-greet and information exchange. Recruiters want to share information about their employers so be prepared to receive brochures and business cards.

On your part, you should attend to gain information about what employers have to offer and if/how you can fit into that organization. You will need to bring resumes; although not all recruiters will be collecting resumes, that's not a sign they're not hiring.

Students Who Should Attend Job Fairs

Most universities do not restrict attendance to job fairs other than to their own students or alumni. The most likely attendees are juniors and seniors. However, underclassmen should also consider job fairs. Some employers will hire sophomores for internships and co-ops. A rare few will consider freshmen.

What to Glean from Talking to Recruiters

Recruiters are anxious to talk to you about their company. It's best to have at least some cursory knowledge of the employers. Your career service center can help. Get a list of recruiters before the career fair and do some research. One of the first questions recruiters will ask is, "What do you know about our company?" The career center's library can help with research. Also try the internet.

An extra boost to you is to use the brief meeting with recruiters to get information about the company AND its hiring process. For instance, if you ask, recruiters can tell you what skills or coursework the company wants in a new hire. That gives you an edge on how to mold and present yourself in the actual interview. If you're a junior or undergraduate, such knowledge helps you in deciding any changes to your coursework to make yourself more attractive to recruiters when you become a senior and are interviewing for jobs. New hires can provide some insight into the employer's hiring process and into its corporate culture.

What You Should Do Before Job Fairs

Though you might expect to attend career fairs just to see what's out there and that recruiters wouldn't expect you to know much about their company at a job fair as opposed to a campus interview. In reality, recruiters expect students at job fairs to have some background knowledge of their companies. So you'll need to start researching sooner than most students expect.

- Research. Try the career center's Vault Insider Guide, Hoover's, or Career Search or go online.
- Think about what interests you and what you do well. If you admit to a recruiter that you have no idea what your strengths and interests are, there's little of substance for your discussion with recruiters and you've just made a poor impression.
- Make a reference sheet of quick facts about employers before talking to recruiters.
- Know enough about yourself and the company's needs to relate your background to the company's needs.

Some Don'ts

Don't expect to have lengthy or in-depth discussions with recruiters. You can expect some of the same questions of interviews (e.g., what are your strengths and weaknesses?). Job fairs are often treated as screening tools by recruiters. They are often interested in your grades and coursework primarily. Always have resumes handy.

One mistake I've seen students make at career fairs is to snub recruiters of companies that do not interest them. That's rude and a professional mistake. When approached by a recruiter for a company that disinterests you, listen politely and briefly before moving on; thank the recruiter for the information.

Avoid gang behavior with well-known companies. Too often, students will cluster around booths of well-known companies. In doing so, students miss the one-on-one interaction with recruiters and the opportunity to showcase yourself. That behavior can be overwhelming to those lucky few recruiters and unproductive to optimizing your job fair visit.

Quick Do's

If you're nervous about talking to recruiters. Make a point to talk to other students or career center staff before entering the career fair. It helps to alleviate nervousness.

Take time to make the rounds, talking to as many recruiters as possible. That includes talking with recruiters for companies and industries that may be outside your ideal career path.

Collect business cards and company brochures. Have a bag or briefcase handy for material as you collect them as you'll need a free hand to shake hands with the next recruiter. Having to juggle papers and portfolios to shake hands makes a poor first impression.

Have a pen handy to write down your contact information for the recruiter, if necessary.

Lastly, express appreciation to the recruiter. Thank the recruiter for his/her time before moving onto the next booth.

Some Additional Advice

Pay attention to the recruiters and how they communicate. Since these are often the people who will do the real interviews, notice how they communicate and what their communication style is. Some ask many questions; others hold back and let you do the talking. The recruiters at job fairs are often the recruiters who do campus interviews. You'll have an idea of how to pace yourself in the interview if you know the conversation style of the interviewer.

Common Pitfalls of Students

- Having personality and communication issues including both extremes of being sarcastic or arrogant or being unnaturally modest about accomplishments and abilities
 - Leaving the career fair too quickly after talking with only a few recruiters
 - Trying to talk money
 - Being unprepared with questions about employers
 - Being unfocused in goals and unable to articulate good answers to questions about goals.
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Tip for Job Fairs from Career Services Center

Be ready with a one minute commercial about yourself.
When you introduce yourself, use your first and last names and mention your major and classification (junior, senior, etc).
Carry breath mints.
Don't chew gum while talking to recruiters.
Dress appropriately and comfortably for temperature changes and for standing long periods.
Bring resumes.
Leave your bookbag in your car or locker; check your outerwear if possible.
Turn off your cellphone.
Carry a portfolio or small tote. Luckily among the freebies at career fairs are tote bags so that makes it easy to carry all the great free information around.

"Being well versed in a company's background, environment and mission may very well go a long way in demonstrating enthusiasm to a recruiter." Alison Doyle, career writer

The Job Outlook 2005 Survey

The survey of more than 200 employers found that cleanliness and conservative attire are noticed and desired in interviews. The National Association of Colleges and Employers survey found the following as influential:

1. Grooming 70%
2. Nontraditional attire 49%
3. Nontraditional hair color (tie) Body piercing 32%
5. Handshake (tie) Obvious tattoos 28%

Source: Christian Science Monitor (December 9, 2004).

Usual Questions of Recruiters

What's your GPA and major?
What are your interests?
Tell me about yourself.

What do you know about our company?
Are you familiar with our company's products?

Follow-up Pointers

If you need to get back with a recruiter remember a few points. Some recruiters are on the road for weeks at a time, going from one school's job fair to the next. If you need to contact a recruiter after a job fair, have reasonable expectation for getting in touch with the person. Also, you may remember the person vividly but the recruiter may not do the same. A recruiter meets hundreds of students at each university and visits a few universities in a given month. In your phone call or e-mail, you may need to jog the recruiter's mind with a sentence or two of how you met and why you're contacting him/her. Always say thank you.

One Last Tip

The food at job fairs is nearly always for the recruiters and University staff only. They're not being snotty by not feeding students. The box lunches or soft drinks are part of the booth fee recruiters pay to attend the job fairs.

Supplement: Tips on Dressing for the Job Fair

How to Dress for Job Fairs

Your attire should be the same as for interviews. I was shocked to see the attire of students at recent job fairs I attended. Have a suit in a conservative color and style. The general rule of thumb is the darker the suit, the more conservative the image. Be sure the suit's style is also conservative; I was blown away by a male student wearing a suit with a knee-length baby blue jacket at a recent job fair. Think about the dressing styles of people who live in the public eye and hold public positions like politicians and newscasters.

General Guidelines for Career Fairs:

1. Wear a suit.
2. If you can't wear a suit, wear "business casual."
3. Although some recruiters will be wearing casual attire, you will be expected to wear business attire.

For both men and women, dark suits in solids or pinstripes generally are expected. For professional attire, navy blue and black are universally stylish and conservative; pinstripes, dark grays and some green shades are also stunningly professional.

You can add your own personal flares by using accessories strategically. When choosing clothes or accessories, think about the image that you want to project and do project. Some clothes, especially untailored jackets, project a casual image. Clothing experts suggest that tailored suits project professionalism. The wrong details also count. Do not wear do-rags or excessive amounts of jewelry.

Never!

- ❖ platform shoes
- ❖ nose and eyebrow rings
- ❖ tongue piercing
- ❖ denim
- ❖ baggy clothes
- ❖ middrifts exposing belly buttons
- ❖ tank tops or plunging necklines
- ❖ low ride jeans.

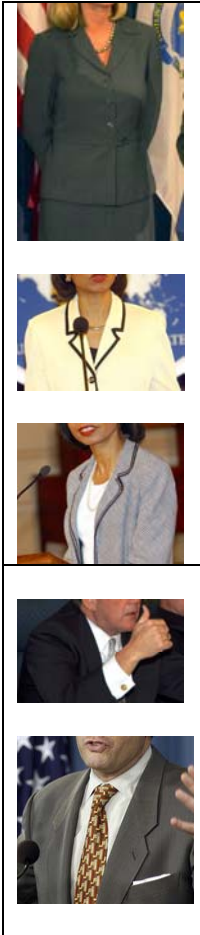
Cover tattoos as best possible. Some women have tried body paint on their leg tattoos so that the area blends in under pantyhose. Concealer and stage makeup are options to coverup tattoos.

How to Dress Conservatively

- The best fabric for suits is wool; it is superior in durability and quality.
- Black belts are the most formal, followed by brown. The more metal on a belt, the more casual it is. Woven leather belts are casual.
- Minimize on jewelry and accessories. Stud earrings have a more polished image. Pearls are considered high power accessories.
- Hair styles should be uncomplicated.
- Clear nail polish and French manicures are the most professional manicure options.

Your wardrobe at job fairs and interviews should be accompanied by a professional demeanor of a good handshake and sincere smile. For interviews and for any professional events such as job fairs, the consistent advice of professionals is to use good posture and have good verbal skills. It connotes confidence. The keys to making a good impression are: neatness, good posture and a strong voice.

For more information, contact an advisor at your university's career center or visit the website www.victoriapilate.com.





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