CONQUERING A CAREER FAIR

A career fair is an efficient and effective way to learn about organizations, potential employment vacancies and network with individuals working for several organizations. Employers utilize career fairs as an opportunity to meet with potential candidates face-to-face, collect resumes and screen candidates for interviews. Typically interviews are conducted within a few weeks following the career fair. However, some employers may decide to conduct a screening or introductory interview during the career fair itself. Either way, be prepared to make a great first impression, show what you know about the organization and discuss how your skills relate to the work of the organization.

NOTE on NETWORKING: A career fair could also be known as a Networking Fair. This type of networking event is an excellent time to make a connection with potential employers, learn about industry trends and develop your professional experiences. Many career/networking fairs are a time for employers to get their name out to potential candidates. Some companies may not even have an opening at that time, but want people to know them for future openings. So, do not go into a career/networking event thinking you'll only hear about open jobs, but also look at it as a learning opportunity to make connections for your future.

Career fairs are typically held in large open spaces such as hotel ballrooms, college gymnasiums or convention centers. They are often bustling with activity attracting hundreds of candidates eager to explore opportunities and network. Participating organizations typically send one or two representatives to meet with candidates. Some career fairs are open to the public while others are limited to certain populations. For example, many career fairs co-sponsored by Career Services are limited to students and alumni of co-sponsoring schools.

Career Services highly recommends that you add a career fair or two to your job or internship search process. We co-sponsor a number of annual career fairs in cities where Swarthmore students and recent graduates typically seek employment, including the DC Government and Nonprofit EXPO held at Georgetown University every February and two nonprofit career fairs in Philadelphia held each spring.

Many job and internship seekers are not fully knowledgeable about the value of career fairs, or even what to do during the actual event. Below are some tips on how to make the most of a career fair. If you need more help with conquering a career fair, stop by our office for additional support.

Before the Fair

Plan Your Strategy

- Get a list of who will be there (typically available online through Career Services’ website or in our office)
- Prioritize list and plan who you wish to talk with, targeting industries and types of jobs/internships
- Research each organization that you wish to talk with and develop “talking points” about their work

Prepare Materials for the Career Fair

- Prepare a resume and have it reviewed by a Career Peer Advisor at least a few days before the fair
- Target resume to types of industry or jobs/internships of interest
- Have a general resume ready for all opportunities; cover letters are not necessary
- Copy at least 15 resumes on resume paper (free resume paper is available in Career Services)
- Purchase a portfolio or folder for your resumes and materials you will collect at the fair (or borrow one from Career Services)

Dress for Success

- For career fairs featuring for-profit and government employers, wear a suit in a dark or neutral color
- Borrow a suit from our Career Closet if you don’t have professional attire
- For non-profit fairs business casual attire is generally accepted (NOT student casual); business casual usually means slacks and a collared shirt or blouse, jacket optional.
Develop Your 1-Minute Introduction
- You will need to introduce yourself, demonstrating that you know something about the organization
- Express why you are interested in the organization
- Be able to relate your background and skills to what you know about the employer’s needs
- Talking points include your education, skills, and career aspirations presented clearly and concisely
- Memorize your “infomercial” and practice it

Sample Introduction:
Good afternoon, my name is________ and I am a _____major at Swarthmore College. My understanding is that your organization ______________. I am very interested in gaining an entry-level position in the field of________. As you can see in my resume, I have been involved with________ at Swarthmore. My most recent experience _______ has helped me to develop strong ________ skills which I would bring to your organization.

During the Fair
Initiate and Prepare
- Arrive early so you can learn the room layout and plan your time accordingly; some organizations will leave before the end of the fair, so it’s always good to arrive early
- Bring a good pen and mints. Find the water fountain.
- First approach organizations of lesser interest to practice delivering your introduction and reduce jitters
- Be patient and anticipate crowds and lines; if an organization of interest has a long line, come back later
- Take breaks if you feel overwhelmed

Observe Career Fair Etiquette
- Keep an open mind and consider organizations with which you are not familiar
- Talk to people not on your list when you have extra time
- Instead of immediately getting in line, approach the table from the side to pick up materials to review while waiting in the line
- Step back far enough to be able to listen and observe recruiters speaking to other students
- Avoid taking every free item you see; don’t play with the giveaways

Network and Make a Great First Impression
- Introduce yourself with a smile and handshake
- Launch into your one-minute introduction
- Ask questions and take important notes after your conversations
- Be sure to get a business card from everyone you meet or jot down their contact information
- Ask representatives what the best way is to follow-up with them after the event

After the Fair
Seal the Deal
- Send everyone you spoke with a formal thank you email
- Send letters of introduction to people you did not get to speak with
- Attach a resume in case they lost the first one
- Follow up two weeks later with a phone call to reiterate your interest in working for the organization

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