CONQUERING A CAREER FAIR

A career fair is an efficient and effective way to learn about organizations, potential employment vacancies and to network in one location with individuals working for many different 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, demonstrate what you know about the organization and discuss how your skills relate to the work and mission of the organization.

Career fairs are also excellent networking opportunities, as you can make a connection with potential employers and learn about industry trends. Career fairs provide employers the chance to educate potential candidates about their organization. Some organizations may not have a specific position opening at the time of the career fair, but they will attend to ensure students know their recruiting timeline and when to apply for future openings. As you attend each event, realize you'll not only hear about open jobs, but you'll also use this as a learning opportunity to make connections for your future and gather career information to make informed decisions.

Career fairs are typically held in large open spaces such as hotel ballrooms, college gymnasiums or convention centers and are similar in format perhaps to college fairs you may have attended in the past. They are often bustling with activity, attracting hundreds of candidates eager to explore opportunities and network; this can be overwhelming at first, so it's best to research employers who are attending and develop your strategy to maximize your time at the event. 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 the Philadelphia Career Connection, TriCo STEM Recruiting Event at Haverford and Philadelphia Nonprofit career fair at Bryn Mawr.

Below are tips on how to make the most of a career fair; we encourage you to meet with a career counselor or Career Peer Advisor for additional support.

**Before the Fair**

**Plan Your Strategy**
- Review a list of participating employers (typically available online, for Swarthmore-sponsored fairs visit [Handshake](#), the [Career Services’ website](#) or our office in 135 Parrish Hall)
- Prioritize the list and decide which employers you wish to meet, targeting industries and types of jobs/internships
- Research each organization you plan to meet 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 your resume to industries/jobs/internships of interest
- Have a more general resume ready, also, for a wider variety of 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; no need to purchase one, simply borrow a suit for free from our Career Closet.
- For non-profit fairs, suits are typically not expected. Instead wear business casual attire, meaning dress slacks or skirt and a collared shirt, tie, tailored sweater or blouse; jacket optional.

Develop Your One Minute Introduction/“Elevator Pitch”

- 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 education, skills, and career aspirations presented clearly and concisely
- Memorize your introduction and practice it aloud

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
- Approach organizations of lesser interest first to practice delivering your introduction and reduce nervousness
- 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 the best way to follow-up with them after the event

After the Fair

Follow-Up

- Send everyone with whom you spoke a formal thank you email mentioning something you learned from them or spoke with them about at the event
- Send letters of introduction to people with whom you did not get to speak
- Attach a resume in case they lost the first one
- Follow up two weeks later with a phone call, if possible, to reiterate your interest in working for the organization