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Guide to Career Fairs

Note: Request an electronic copy by emailing psyadv@iupui.edu. It will make following the numerous links in this document much easier.

Why Attend a Career Fair?

If you are seeking a job or internship, seldom pass up the opportunity to attend a career fair. Half the job seeking work is done for you! Where else can you get 40-70 employers eager to make hires all in one place? It's invaluable. And, who do you think recruiters will look at first? Someone they met at a job fair face-to-face, or someone who just mailed in their resume? The three most important reasons for attending a career fair are 1) to meet many recruiters in one place where you can make a positive face-to-face first impression. 2) to increase your chances of getting an interview. 3) to learn about the job market and network with professionals.

Things to Do Before a Career Fair

Ready Your Resume: Make sure you have a prepared resume. Refer to the [Guide to Resumes](#) for tips. Employers expect to be handed a resume at a career fair. Be certain that it is free from errors and that it highlights your goals and transferable skills. Bring several copies.

Research the Companies Attending: Learn as much as you can about the companies you would like to meet with at the fair. Consider the people who are in your online network as a source for information. Send out an email, Facebook or Linked In notice asking for information on "X" company/agency. Another excellent way to learn about a company or agency is to visit their website. Review their mission/vision statements; be familiar with their product or the population they serve. *You can demonstrate a genuine interest in a company simply by asking a couple informed questions when you meet the recruiter at the fair.* Most career fairs at IUPUI will have company names listed on the Career & Employment Events calendar: http://events.iupui.edu/calendar_group/?group=131. Click on the specific fair for details.

Treat a Career Fair Like an Interview: A common mistake that students make is they don't treat the career fair as a serious professional venue. This is your opportunity to make a positive first impression. How are you dressed? Are you prepared with some knowledge of the company? Are you ready to answer some basic interview questions like: Tell me about yourself? Why are you interested in this company/position? What are your qualifications? Additionally, be prepared to ask questions of the recruiter. Here are some samples to consider: What qualities and background are you looking for in employees? What is the application process and timeline for your organization? Do you have a business card I could have for future reference and contact?

What to Prepare to Bring With You: In addition to a smile and positive attitude, bring a portfolio or folder with a note pad and pen. On the note pad be sure you have your notes and questions ready for the companies you would like to visit. In between tables, you can take the time to review your notes for the next company before approaching them. Have several copies of resume printed on high quality paper (25lb resume paper) ready to present to the employer.

What to Do During a Career Fair

When entering a career fair keep in mind that employers are people too and they are trying to make a good impression as well. Be dressed in comfortable and professional attire (the rule of thumb is to be conservative and simple with

hairstyles and jewelry). Most importantly go in with confidence and a positive attitude. Here are some strategies for making the most of this networking opportunity.

The Walkabout Strategy: When you first arrive, walk about the entire room and get a feel for the layout of the fair. Most fairs will have a map and a program highlighting the companies present. If you approach a booth where a recruiter is already with a student, don't immediately get into line. Instead, take a few steps back and listen to the current conversation. This gives you the opportunity to observe the recruiter in action with another student and might give you an idea of what questions will likely be asked of you. After a conversation with an employer, take some time to make some notes in your notebook for later. As you move about the room and make eye contact with many recruiters, introduce yourself by offering a firm handshake. You may not be familiar with the organization but it may be a great career opportunity. Plus, it's good practice speaking with employers.

The Elevator Pitch: A great strategy for introducing yourself at a career fair is using an elevator pitch. An elevator pitch is a short statement that highlights important facts the recruiter should know about you. Before the fair, share your elevator pitch with a friend or colleague and get their feedback. Remember to practice your commercial until it feels comfortable! Your pitch should include the following information: 1) your name, year in school, major 2) what type of opportunities you are seeking 3) relevant experience 4) some knowledge of the company.

Example: "Good afternoon! My name is Lilly Anderson and I am a senior graduating in May with a degree in Psychology. I am looking for a position in with a nonprofit where I can serve disadvantaged youth. I've had an internship with Big Brother/Big Sister this past semester and really enjoy many aspects of my work there. I understand from reviewing your web page that you serve adolescents in through a specialized reading program. This sounds very interesting to me."

Additional Advice

- The recruiter is interested to learn about you. Though friends may provide support, don't travel in groups and get distracted.
- A portfolio or briefcase looks more professional and "grown up" than a backpack or shoulder bag
- Do the necessary preparation before a career fair. Don't just "wing it!"
- Keep in mind that there may be other students waiting so keep your conversations brief. Pay attention the recruiter's body language to gauge if they are ready to move to the next person.
- Be confident. If you don't seem sure of your qualifications, neither will the recruiter.
- If possible, attend a career fair early because some recruiters may leave early.
- Make a personal connection with the recruiter. Recruiters see hundreds of students the day of the career fair. Making that personal connection will be what the recruiter remembers!

After a Career Fair:

Even though the career fair has ended, your job isn't quite done! Here are some follow-up tips to ensure you've made the most of the career fair.

- Write Thank-You notes! In the note, confirm your interest in the organization, highlight your skills, and inquire about the next step. Thank you notes should be written within one week following the career fair, and could be followed up with a call or email requesting a meeting with the employer.
- Keep track of your contacts. Record information regarding your conversation on the back of business cards.
- Employers have their own hiring processes, so please follow their instructions carefully. For example, while a recruiter may collect your resume at the fair, many require applicants to submit their resume online at the organization's website.

Missouri University Career Center. (2010). *Career Specialist Training Manual Appendices*. Also available at <http://career.missouri.edu/handouts>. Special thanks to MU for freely sharing their resources.