

GRINNELL COLLEGE



# How to be Successful at a Career Fair

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## **Attending and Benefiting from a Career Fair**

Many employers participate in Career Fairs because they are an economical way to meet many potential employees in a short amount of time. Regardless of your year, your major, or your career direction, Career Fairs can provide a valuable resource as you explore careers and seek employment. Remember these tips about attending a Career Fairs.

Find out as much as you can about the job fair before the day of the event. Try to learn:

- What organizations will there and what positions will they be hiring for?
- Obtain a list of participating employers; if it is not published, go to the organizers of the event and request one.
- Does it cost anything to attend?
- What is the format for the day? (scheduled interviews, open fair, etc)
- Do you have to be pre-registered to attend?
- What time does the event begin and end?
- Is it an open or closed job fair?
  - Open- anyone can attend
  - Closed- only students of universities sponsoring the event are invited to attend

If you must pre-register in order to attend the job fair, follow the procedures carefully and have all information in by the designated deadline. Usually pre-registration includes submitting a resume or summary resume. With more fairs utilizing on-line features, pre-registration will most likely become more common. The idea behind pre-registering is that employers get a chance to prescreen applicants and possibly make note of applicants they want to meet at the fair. Pre-registration does not guarantee that you will get noticed or that employers will even look at the registrations. Remember to have all information in by the designated deadline.

Career Fairs enable you to:

- Explore different fields and career paths.
- Find out what's going on "out there" in the world of work from a single location.
- Meet and talk to representatives from a wide range of industries and hundreds of organizations.
- Gain valuable interview experience and job search advice from seasoned professionals
- Find out about available positions and submit your resume in person to company recruiters.
- Develop your network of contacts.
- Chance to sell yourself to potential employer and possibly get called up for further screening or interview.

**If you are going to be successful at a Career Fair, there are certain things you must do.**

### **Preparation Before the Career Fair:**

Research the employers and graduate schools that might be of interest to you. Take a look at the list of employers that will be present and identify the companies that you are most interested in approaching. You may also want to learn more about specific companies in advance, take the time to read employer literature in the Career Library or on the web. Know some things about the companies you are interested in, such as their products and services, community support program, staff training and development program, etc. Career Center resources can help you determine company background, mission statement, types of positions available and skills and experience desired.

For students who are not seeking job or internships, Career Fairs provide an excellent opportunity to learn about different industries. Recruiters are happy to talk informally with interested students about the wide range of career paths open to them.

It is important to know what your purpose is in attending the Career Fair, what do you wish to gain from the fair? Write down your objectives and make a list of the employers you want to see, beginning with the most important one to the least important. Since it might not be possible to visit all the employer at the fair, this game plan will enable you to get the information you are deeply interested about before you run out of time.

Rehearse a 1-2 minute introduction of yourself that you can share when you greet each employer. Practice out loud it helps. Include your major, experience and career goals. "Hello I'm Chris Smith. I'm a Biology major and will graduate in May. I'm glad to see your company here and would like to ask you about....." or "Hello, I'm Chris Smith. I'm an English major and want to use my academic background for a summer position. I understand your organization if looking for...."

Be prepared to ask questions and answer questions of the representatives. Questions should be natural, be yourself. Before beginning with your questions, be sure to introduce yourself and establish rapport with the representatives. Listen carefully to their answers. Be courteous. Before leaving be sure to close the conversation and thank them.

### **Questions You May Want to Ask Employer Representatives**

1. How do students get started in this field?
2. What majors would best prepare me for a job in this industry?
3. How does your recruiting process work?
4. What do you like about working for this company?
5. What kinds of additional training would set me ahead in this field?

Just as you get your questions prepared, you should be ready for questions from the employers you will be meeting at the Career Fair. Know that the fair equally provides them the opportunity to meet with

potential employees they could consider to fill a job opening. They could ask you to tell them about yourself, your chosen career path and why you have decided to follow such a path.

Develop a strong resume and bring several copies for distribution, at least two for each company for which you have an interest. Prepare a general resume that's appropriate for the full range of positions you are seeking. A general resume gives a broad overview of your experience and relevant skills. Do not wait until the last minute. Resumes take some time to prepare and refine. For help with starting refining your resume, take advantage of the Career Developments Resume and Cover Letter Writing Workshop, offered at least once a month, at the Career Development Office.

Dress Professionally. This is your chance to stand out! Wear comfortable (but professional) shoes. You will be doing a lot of walking and standing. Don't overlook the importance of making a good first impression; you should wear a suit or dress as close to "interview attire" as you can. Conservative business attire is essential, even for those Spring Break beachside Career Fairs, because first impressions are critical. Remembered pressed clothing is essential in looking prepared and professional.

#### **Formal – Conservative dress**

Women: Suit with skirt (knee level) and blouse, Suit with pants and blouse; dress shoes; no more than three pieces of jewelry ( e.g. watch, earrings, ring).

Men: Suit and tie; long sleeved dress shirt, tie, no jacket; dress shoes.

### **The day of the Career Fair**

Arrive early to the Career Fair, this will give you an opportunity to take a few moments to familiarize yourself with the layout and plan a strategy. Check and see if any new companies have registered when you arrive at the fair. Next determine an order in which you wish to visit companies. Don't waste your time interviewing with companies that you have no desire to work for; do make sure to interview with all the companies you do want to work for. If you did not prepare for a company you want to interview with, try **eavesdropping** on several of the interviews ahead of you so you can better prepare; also to get some company literature from the booth before getting in line so you can read about the company while waiting.

Make a good first impression! Be personable and have a sense of humor. Keep your interaction conversational and comfortable. Approach the recruiter with a smile and good eye contact. Try to be relaxed and friendly, while remaining assertive. Ask them if they have time to answer a few questions about their company. Ask thoughtful, prepared questions tailored specifically for that company and/or industry. Tell them about yourself (using a brief personal statement that you prepared and rehearsed in advance).

“Close the deal”, leave on a good note. Take the initiative and ask what your next step should be. Leave them with your resume (and any other supporting materials). Ask for a business card so that you can follow up with them later. Thank them for giving you helpful information about their company, and for considering your resume. Thank the recruiter for providing you with helpful information and shake their hand. Tell them it was a pleasure talking with them, and that you will be in touch.

### **Guidelines**

- Be respectful when approaching the recruiter as other may be concluding their visits.
- Give a firm handshake, maintain eye contact, and smile.
- Address the recruiter politely—introduce yourself by name, major and graduation date and begin your commercial.
- Remain poised and exhibit a positive attitude and an interest in the conversation.
- When speaking with a potential employer or internship site, present your resume and mention your purpose for attending the fair.
- Relate your education, skills, interest, or experience to the specific needs of the employer/
- Ask open-ended questions; carefully listen to employer dialogue as it may yield clues to leads or opportunities.
- Be responsive to employer questions and be honest with recruiters concerning your qualifications. Listen carefully to what the representative has to say!
- Keep your hands free to shake hands or to write down important information.
- Request a business card and be sure to take organizational literature. If a business card is not available, get the name and title of the person you spoke with—be sure to get the correct spelling.
- Do not chew gum.
- Show confidence in your voice. The Career Fair may be noisy and if the recruiter cannot hear you, they will not remember you.
- Conduct yourself professionally at all times.
- Keep up your energy and enthusiasm up the entire day. The last employer you meet may have the job you want most.
- Make notes after talking with each employer. You will collect a lot of information and need to keep it all organized.

### **Employer Turnoffs at Career Fairs:**

- Lack of focus or not knowing what types of positions attendees are seeking.
- Attire that is sloppy or unprofessional.
- Not having copies of a resume
- A lack of enthusiasm or interest.
- Taking the promotional items but not being interested in conversation.
- Poor communication skills and not making eye contact.
- Asking about salary information.

## **After the Career Fair**

Follow-up is essential to making the most of your Career Fair experience! Recruiters appreciate the professionalism and careful attention shown by students who follow up on the initial Career Fair contact. Be sure to send thank you letters to employers that you meet within one week. Refer to the business cards you collected during the Career Fair for recruiter contact information. If an employer has requested additional information, send it out within the week.

General Do's & Don'ts for Career Fairs:

### **Do:**

- Do dress professionally; Career Fairs require the same attention as interviews. Wear comfortable shoes.
- Do greet the person with a firm handshake and maintain eye contact.
- Do prepare a one-two minute commercial. Prepare a script that introduces yourself, states your knowledge of and interest in the company and relates your background to the position or organization.
- Do develop informed questions to ask beforehand. Bridge the gap between yourself and the recruiter. "What is a typical day like?" or "How would you describe the ideal candidate?".
- Do stand alone and be independent. Try not to move in groups with your friends.
- Do have an open mind. Approach lesser known companies in order to discover their potential.
- Do have a sense of humor and be personable. Bring an appointment book in case you have the opportunity to set up an informational interview. Keep these materials organized throughout the fair.
- Do inquire about the best way to access future information and/or job opportunities at a company.
- Do "close the deal!" Take the initiative and ask what your next step is. Take a business card so you can follow up with a thank you note.

### **Don't:**

- Don't be afraid of the recruiter. They attend these Career Fairs to meet qualified candidates!
- Don't pretend that you are interested when you are not.
- Don't schedule an appointment if you don't intend to keep it. You may be preventing a student who is really interested from obtaining an interview.
- Don't overstate your abilities, you'll end up in a job that you are not able to do. Present yourself and your abilities in a convincing manner.
- Don't monopolize the recruiter's time. Sell yourself, make a good impression and give the next student the opportunity to do the same.
- Don't ask questions about salary!
- Don't complain about former jobs, bosses, or classes! Avoid negative words like "can't" or "won't".
- Don't insult the recruiter. Cultivate the recruiter as a contact in your network.
- Don't just throw your resume on the table. It will probably be thrown into a pile. Take time to market yourself.
- Don't jump into a conversation that the recruiter is having with another student. Patiently wait for your turn.