

JOB FAIRS

If the thought of a job fair conjures up visions of a campus gymnasium filled with booths of recruiters lining the walls, you've got the right idea. These events vary in focus and format, but they all provide an opportunity for employers and students to meet in an informal setting to exchange information. Employer representatives will offer company literature and assess your qualifications. While you will most likely have only a few minutes with each representative, some job fairs provide an opportunity for you to have more in-depth interviews with the employers during or the day following the fair. You can access the Career and Professional Development Center's website: <http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/events/jobfairs/index.html> to learn more about upcoming on campus and off campus job fairs.

Your purpose at a job fair is to present your qualifications and to learn what opportunities the employers are likely to offer. Many job fairs include a mix of business, technical, research, non-profit and governmental organizations. That is why it is important to learn whether they are hiring for the position that is most suitable for your education, skills and areas of interest.

Your approach to a job fair should be similar to that of an interview. This means dressing appropriately as well as being prepared to answer and ask relevant questions (See: Career Success Guide entitled "Personal Presentation"). Remember to bring plenty of copies of your resume.

1. Before You Arrive at the Job Fair:

- **Update Your Resume!** Once you have revised your resume, have it reviewed by your Career Consultant.
- **Research Yourself!** This means reviewing your resume, experiences, and career goals and being able to successfully discuss your qualifications.
- **Research the Employers!** Many job fairs will have a website where you can obtain a list of employers and their available positions. Identify employers you would like to meet and visit their websites to learn more about their organization. Take notes about employers you plan to target and review your notes the day of the fair.
- **Prepare Your Elevator Pitch!** This exercise was developed from the concept of selling yourself or your business to a complete stranger from the time it would take to enter an elevator until you reach your desired floor. Preparing your pitch is useful in introducing yourself at a career fair. Please review the samples and instructions below to assist you in developing your own pitch.

"Elevator Pitch" Examples for Job Fairs

"Hello, I'm Julia Stuart. I am a junior in Mechanical Engineering with an interest in design and testing. I have completed several Mechanical Engineering projects and last summer I did an REU at the University of Iowa on building robots. I am also the President of the Robotics Club on campus. I'm very interested in gaining experience in product development with a company such as P&G. I'd like to learn more about internship opportunities within your organization."

“Good morning, I’m Scott Rodgers and I am a senior Electrical and Computer Engineering major. I am concentrating in Software Engineering and last summer I completed an internship with Raytheon. I’m now interested in pursuing a full-time position with GE because I admire the diverse product culture and the amount of effort devoted to developing new employees into strong engineering professionals. Could you tell me more about your leadership development program?”

Tips for Developing Your Elevator Pitch

- Provide the listener with a brief overview of the pieces of your background which most relate to your current interests
- Show appreciation of and/or familiarity with the company.
- Try not to focus too much on what you want out of this opportunity. Present yourself as adding immediate value to a company in terms of your experience and skill set.
- Make sure that your message is concise, yet informative. The delivery should not take longer than one minute, although thirty seconds are ideal.
- Be prepared for resume probes after you’ve given your pitch.
- Practice your pitch until it sounds natural, not rehearsed.

2. When You Arrive at the Job Fair:

- Obtain an updated list of employers and job fair information that may contain specific information about the employers and their available positions.
- Explore the layout of the job fair and make note of where your targeted employers are located. Some lines may be longer, so plan your strategy to make the best use of your time.

3. While Standing in Those Long Lines:

Job fairs are notorious for long lines and can be tremendous time-robbers for busy students who are trying to target the same employers as every other student. Take advantage of your time waiting in line:

- Study the employer’s materials to make sure that you know about them before you begin a conversation with the recruiter.
- Network with those in line with you. An excellent way to start the conversation is “What type of position are you trying to find with this employer?” Often you will find that people are eager to discuss themselves and also tell you what they know about the employer. Your job in this situation is to listen carefully. You may find out more about this employer than you could have ever found out using traditional research methods.

4. When You Meet With the Employer:

- Smile, offer a firm handshake and introduce yourself to the employer.

- Offer your resume and present a 30-60 second commercial about yourself (see sample below).
- Ask questions to learn more about the position/s, organization and its hiring practices.
- Before leaving, inquire about suggested follow-up, request a business card and thank the employer for speaking with you.

5. After the Job Fair:

- Write follow-up thank you emails, being specific about where and when you met with the employer, and attach your resume.
- Assess your interactions with each employer, deciding which positions may be of interest to you.
- Provide any follow-up information the employer requested during the job fair visit. This may include a transcript, cover letter or letter of recommendation.

A job fair also provides you the opportunity to practice your communication and interviewing skills. Whether or not you get the "perfect job" through a job fair, you will be able to gain knowledge about specific employers and career fields. You will also gain confidence and be more comfortable speaking with employers to help in a successful job or internship search!