Mastering a Career Fair

Attending a career fair is just one of many steps in the career exploration and job search process. Employers participate in these events to meet students and recruit employees. They can provide general information about career options as well as specific information about current openings. As a student or alumnus, you can attend a career fair to look for a job and gather career information.

WHY ATTEND A CAREER FAIR

Networking: Meet new people – recruiters and career professionals to add to your network.

Internships/Jobs: For college students (undergraduate and graduate), this goal is the most common for attending a career fair -- to establish contacts to obtain an internship for an upcoming semester or summer, or a full-time position upon graduation.

Gain Experience: Even if you are not actively seeking an opportunity, there is nothing like gaining valuable experience in mastering the art of working job fairs-especially if you tend to be shy. More experience will increase your confidence!

BE CONFIDENT AS YOU APPROACH EACH EMPLOYER

The purpose of a Career Fair is for students and employers to meet and exchange information. Don't hesitate in your approach! Take the initiative and introduce yourself. Walking up and introducing yourself to a recruiter may be uncomfortable, and you may feel awkward and unsure about how to begin a conversation. However, recognize that, as in any new situation, first impressions begin with the moment you approach an employer. Make that moment count!

Walk up confidently, say hello, introduce yourself, and shake the representative's hand. Be sure to establish eye contact and smile. Make a general statement about yourself, such as, "I am in the School of Engineering and Applied Science, with a major in Electrical Engineering and will graduate in May, 2011. I would like to know more about career opportunities with XYZ company." The more recruiters you speak with, the more skilled you will become at these first introductions.

DRESS PROFESSIONALLY

You will succeed in creating the impression that you are serious about your future employment opportunities if you dress in appropriate business attire. It is helpful and recommended to find out what the expected dress code is for the career fair that you are attending.

BRING RESUMES

With over 100 companies often being represented at a fair, having enough resumes is essential. The resume should be well written, follow established resume development guidelines, and be professional in appearance. Be sure to have your resume critiqued in Engineering Career Development before career days.

HAVE YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH PREPARED

An "elevator speech" in regards to internship and job searching includes a 30 second overview of an individual's knowledge, skills, and accomplishments. The term comes from the time it takes to complete a normal elevator ride from the top to the bottom floor. An "elevator speech" is an
opportunity to get your point across in a timely manner; namely, who you are, what you've accomplished, and where you hope to go in the future. It is a short speech that is worth memorizing. In the time span of 30 seconds you can let those you come in contact with know what your skills, interests, and future goals are as they relate to internships and jobs.

Sample Elevator Speech:
"Elevator speeches" are used as a marketing tool since they are a way to let those you meet know where you've been and where you're hoping to go in the future. Realizing the importance of each and every personal encounter you make can often spell the difference between success and failure in securing the ideal internship or job. "Hi, my name is Cathy Cavalier. I am currently a second year student attending the School of Engineering and Applied Science at UVA. My major is in Biomedical Engineering with a neuroscience minor. I have volunteered with Madison House throughout my first and second year here at UVA.. Last summer I completed an internship with Luna Technologies where I learned invaluable skills both in the Lab and in research. I have always had an interest in medical devices and I'm hoping to find an internship that will expose me to that field."

SEND FOLLOW-UP EMAILS
Ask for a business card before you leave an employer. This will ensure that you have the proper name and address of the representative with whom you spoke. Send a thank you email within a week of the event. Be sure to remind each recruiter that you met him/her at Engineering Career Day, and that you appreciate having the opportunity to discuss career opportunities with him/her. Mention something specific about your conversation to differentiate your e-mail from others the recruiter will receive. It is also a great idea to attach your resume.

USE YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY
Know which corporations will be represented. Thoroughly research the corporations before you introduce yourself to the recruiters so you will be able to ask intelligent questions and respond to any questions with confidence.

Make a list of the corporate representatives you want to meet. Prioritize them. Consider not meeting with your top choices first. Try out your greeting and introduction on two or three which are nearer the bottom of your list so you will have a chance to overcome any nervousness before you approach your top choices.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS
▪ Can you describe a typical day for someone in an entry-level or internship _______ engineering position?
▪ Why did you choose this career?
▪ What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing your company?
▪ What are the greatest challenges facing your company?
▪ What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?
▪ What are the steps involved in your company’s hiring process? What are the timelines?

DRESSING YOURSELF FOR THE CAREER FAIR
▪ The SEAS Career Fair is business casual (clean-cut, well-fitting clothes, fairly conservative and not too tight or too loose)
▪ Be very well groomed (pay attention to hair, fingernails, teeth, breath, make sure your clothes are stain and wrinkle-free, and that your shoes are clean & polished)
▪ Err on the side of being conservative in your wardrobe (casual business attire is not happy hour attire)
▪ Keep jewelry to a minimum and wear little or no cologne/perfume
▪ Have a tissue on hand to dry sweaty palms and/or foreheads
THE NIGHT BEFORE THE CAREER FAIR
Gather everything you will need for the career fair
- Resumes and pen
- Portfolio (or a folder to hold everything) & notepad
- List of pre-typed questions and/or company background info for quick reminders
- Breath mints (not gum)
- Make sure you get a good night's sleep so that you are rested for the event

SUCCESS AT THE CAREER FAIR
Make a great first impression:
- Smile (even if you're nervous) and use a firm handshake (practice!)
- Pay careful attention to eye contact and body language
- Maintain a positive and enthusiastic demeanor
- Use a natural but forceful tone of voice (especially if you are soft-spoken)
- Approach recruiters with confidence & initiative (don't wait for them to wave you over or make the first move)
- Wait patiently if a recruiter is occupied, or return in a few minutes
- Obtain contact information and inquire about the next steps in the hiring process
- Be sure to collect business cards or other contact information
- Jot down notes after you walk away from recruiter (they’ll be very helpful for writing follow-up thank you or cover letters)
- Turn off your cell phone
- Try to arrive as early as possible (recruiters are more refreshed and enthusiastic)
- Keep your hands free for shaking and exhibit impeccable manners!
- Navigate the Career Fair solo (this is not the forum for a social group)
- Don’t overstay your welcome - especially if there are students waiting at the booth
- Always thank the recruiters for their time

AFTER THE CAREER FAIR
Send a thank-you letter (typed, email, or handwritten if exceptionally neat). Thank them again for their generous time, enclose another resume and remind them of your strengths, skill-set, and interests.
- Keep in mind – recruiters may be contacting you on your cell phone. Ensure that you’re prepared for the call before you pick-up. Also, be mindful of the content and tone of your voicemail message!

REMINDERS – WHAT IMPRESSES RECRUITERS
- Confidence (projected through verbal communication, body language and facial expressions)
- Positive energy
- Genuine interest and curiosity
- Well-groomed appearance
- Evidence of preparation in advance of the fair
- Manners