



CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Career Fair Strategies for a Lasting Impression



What is a Career Fair?

A career fair is an event in which recruiters from private/public businesses, non-profits, government agencies, school systems, and/or graduate schools meet with students and alumni to discuss available positions, desired qualifications, and application procedures. The event is an excellent way to make contact with several organizations at once and discuss potential internship, co-op, and full-time or part-time job opportunities. It's also a great way for an enthusiastic, ambitious, and curious freshman or sophomore to learn more about multiple industries and opportunities.

Top 5 Reasons to Attend

1. It's a **great networking opportunity** allowing you to obtain crucial contact information in a personable way and in a relatively short amount of time.
2. It provides you with more **practice marketing yourself to potential employers**. Each contact you have with a recruiter at a career fair will be a "mini-interview" in which you'll have to discuss your skills, experiences, and education in relation to the organization's needs.
3. It's an opportunity to **explore potential career options** you might be interested in pursuing with your major. *Hint: Many employers are open to hiring students of any major as long as the student demonstrates the right combination of skills (e.g. communication skills, leadership, decision-making, etc.), experiences, and work ethic.*
4. It can increase your chances of **identifying potential experiential opportunities** while in school or locating post-graduate employment.
5. **Convenience!** Never again will so many **employers come to you**. Once you graduate, you will have to seek out the recruiters/hiring managers with the organizations of interest to you.

Preparation...Follow-Through...Follow-Up

Before the Event

- **Clarify your career goals.** If you need help identifying career options/goals, visit Career Opportunities to schedule an appointment with a career counselor.
- **Update your resume** and have it critiqued by a professional staff member at Career Opportunities. **Do not** wait until the last minute as the best resumes are frequently completed in several drafts.
- **Research organizations** of interest prior to the event. A list of participating employers will be available in the office and online (www.valdosta.edu/career) one week prior to the Career Fair.



- **Prepare your 30-second introductory “sales pitch”.** Who are you and what can you offer?
- **Bring several copies of your resume**, work samples (if applicable), and completed applications (if applicable). Appearance and organization is a must so keep all documents in a professional portfolio or briefcase.
- **Dress professionally** just as you would for an interview. First impressions are very important!
 - If you’re not looking for a full-time job, then business casual dress is acceptable. **Don’t wear: jeans, shorts, sweats or similar type of clothing.**

During the Event

- Make sure you **check in at the Student Registration table**, pick up any information regarding services/events available through Career Opportunities, obtain a list of participating employers, and review a map of room layout if available.
- Exercise your face muscles. **Smile often!**
- **Offer a firm handshake** and **thank the employer** at the beginning and ending of your meeting.
- Consider the best ways to **utilize your time effectively.**
 - Rank companies of interest and visit your top choices first. Make sure, however, to check with other companies for additional opportunities.
 - If there is a long line for one employer, read company literature or move on to another employer. You can always check back.

During the Event (cont.)

- Make sure you **obtain business cards** from each representative you speak with so you'll have contact information for future correspondence.



- **Demonstrate knowledge of and interest in the organization** by asking thoughtful, intelligent questions relevant to the industry and specific organization. Consider the following potential inquiries:
 - How have recent economic factors affected the organization?
 - How has the size and structure of the organization changed in recent times?
 - What professional associations would you encourage me to join?
 - How many locations is the organization represented in?
 - How would you describe your physical workplace?
 - Can you explain your recruiting process (recruiting schedule and methods utilized)? Can you tell me about the feedback I'll receive from each of the methods used?
 - What is the general turnover rate within your organization?
 - How many graduates, and from which disciplines, are you recruiting this year? What about opportunities from areas of less demand?
 - What expectations does your organization have of new graduates in their first year of work (typical work assignments)? How is performance evaluated? By whom and how often?
 - What types of people excel in your organization?
 - What opportunities exist for career advancement within the organization as a whole or my unit of interest specifically?
 - Does your organization hire staff on a contract basis for projects? I'm interested in the area of _____; how should I approach the organization regarding such opportunities?
 - I don't seem to be in the discipline range that you are targeting today. What possibilities of employment might there be for me with your company with my degree, skills and abilities, and experience? What is the name and position of the person I should contact for more information?

(Questions adapted from University of Western Sydney *Career Fairs: What to do before, during, and afterwards* handout)

- Be prepared to **answer questions** from the recruiter as well. Topics may be related to...
 - Your skills, weaknesses, career goals, etc.
 - Your education (grades, major, classes, etc.).
 - Your experience (jobs, volunteer work, likes/dislikes, etc.).
- Take time throughout the day to **jot down notes about each organization** you're considering.

After the Event

- **Send a thank you letter** to the recruiter of each organization you're interested in **within 48 hours**.
- Follow up with any requested information.
- Continue with your job search. For more assistance contact Career Services.
- *Consider additional ways to acquire experience while seeking employment. Sometimes part-time, volunteer, and internship opportunities can lead to full-time employment.*

The Essential Do's and Don'ts

- **Do arrive early!!!** It shows the employer you're serious. You're likely to have less competition during the first hour than throughout the rest of the event. Also, you will have access to the greatest number of employers as many are traveling and may pack up early towards the end of the event.
- **Don't chew gum** during the event or smoke beforehand. **Avoid cigarettes and perfumes/colognes** which may result in allergic reactions and therefore a negative first impression. Don't take the risk with either.
- **Do leave your children, spouse, and parents at home.**
- **Do not bring food or drinks** to the event.
- **Do speak with recruiters** rather than socializing with other students.
- **Don't rush to pick up freebies.** You are there to collect information on the organizations.

Why Am I Being Told to Apply On-line?

This is a common recruiting method and frustrating to students attending career events. "*What's the point?*" you might ask yourself. Just remember two things that have already been addressed – **Networking and Follow-up**. View the event as a chance to speak with someone "*on the inside*." Set yourself apart after the event by contacting this person to let them know you appreciated speaking with them and inform them that you have completed the application procedure as instructed. This will demonstrate the follow-through, enthusiasm, and initiative that employers are seeking in candidates as well as ensure you've made contact with someone in the event of a computer glitch. Career fairs can still be productive recruiting methods for employers and job seekers when approached in the right manner!

REMEMBER

You are representing yourself as well as Valdosta State University. Many employers recruit repeatedly with us because of high quality students such as yourself. Please continue to make us proud by dressing and behaving in a professional manner.