Make the Most Out of On-campus Career Fairs

Twice a year, students flock to the U of I’s Business Career Fair. On-campus career fairs are also arranged by other organizations, including ACES Career Services, Engineering Career Services, The Career Center, and others. For many recruiters, Career Fairs are an opportunity to meet students and educate them about the career opportunities within the companies they represent. With over 1,500 students attending a fair each day, students may wait in lines and navigate crowded passages to meet with recruiters for only a few minutes. And, although it’s fun to visit many companies and to collect “freebies,” a good strategy will make a Career Fair less hectic and more rewarding.

A good Career Fair strategy involves being prepared—knowing what to expect and what’s expected of you. Students who are well prepared to make a positive impression have a good chance of being contacted for available openings. Here are some tips to help you be successful at a campus Career Fair.

PREPARE BEFORE YOU GO!

1. Research Companies and Industries. Investigate which employers are expected to attend the Career Fair (companies register on I-Link) and plan on targeting specific companies. Create a list of companies you want to see and learn about these companies ahead of time. Gather information such as the company’s products, competitors, location(s), public vs. private, and industry growth rate. Know what positions the company has posted on the I-Link Job Board. Note your questions, to ask when meeting recruiters. Recruiters are more likely to follow-up with job seekers who know key information about their company and the positions being offered and demonstrate genuine interest.

2. Practice your 30-Second Pitch. Before the event, rehearse a 30-second self-promotion pitch that summarizes who you are, demonstrates that you know something about the company, the work they do and why you’re interested and qualified for an open position. Practice your pitch so that you can present it clearly and confidently.

3. Dress Professionally. Recruiters expect students to wear professional apparel. Invest in a professional suit or coordinating skirt and blazer for women. If you have a jacket or backpack, check them at the coat check. It will be cumbersome to carry these items through the Fair.

4. Perfect your Résumé and Submit it to Employers Online. Have your résumé critiqued and proofed several times. Submit your résumé to companies participating in the Career Fair ahead of time via the RSVP function on I-Link Business. Bring plenty of copies of your résumé to the Career Fair, keeping them in a nice portfolio until ready to hand out. Although high quality résumé paper is desirable, it is not required for the career fair. Many employers actually prefer to have electronic versions of your résumé, so make sure you are registered on I-Link Business, where recruiters can easily obtain copies of your résumé.

Business Career Fairs are open to all University of Illinois students. An I-Card is required for admission and professional attire is strongly encouraged. Each day of a Business Career Fair showcases over 100 companies; different companies attend on each day. Check I-Link Business “Career Fairs, Info Sessions and Workshops” for complete career fair information.

Session so that you can learn more about the opportunity.

3. Network with Recruiters. Before you leave an employer’s booth, ask for the best way to follow up and who at the company should be your contact. The easiest way to do this is to ask for a business card. If a business card is not available, write down the contact’s name, company name and e-mail address. Be sure to get the correct spelling. As always, remember to be polite and thank the recruiter for his/her time and consideration.

4. Take Hand-out Materials. Pick up all the literature available from companies you are interested in, including free giveaways. These materials will help you understand the company and position, and may prove invaluable for future interviews. Keep in mind that although ‘freebies’ are fun to get, you will be carrying them around with you at the Fair, which could be awkward!

AFTER THE CAREER FAIR

Follow Up with the People You Met. Recruiters typically talk to hundreds of students at a Career Fair. Since you’ll only meet a handful of recruiters, you’ll remember them better than they’ll remember you. Be sure to follow up with these recruiters by attending company Information Sessions and sending a brief thank-you e-mail to those employers that interest you the most.

If requested, complete on-line applications (on company websites) immediately for full consideration.