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CAREER SERVICES

CAREER FAIR PREPARATION GUIDE

Career Fairs and Job Fairs are a great way to find out information on employers and make some connections. Just like all other aspects of the career search process, good preparation is the key to making your attendance at a career or job fair an effective use of your time. Here are a few tips on effective preparation and participation:

KNOW YOUR OBJECTIVE

A career fair can be overwhelming. Oftentimes, there are over 100 employers participating. If you don't know what you're looking for in a career, you can easily get lost in this mass of employers and spend hours talking with companies with which your background and objective and their job needs are not compatible. Before attending a career fair, you need to have a general idea of the type business and job you want, and what you are qualified for.

CONDUCT SOME PRELIMINARY RESEARCH*

At least a week or so prior to the career fair, take a list of the participating companies, along with the majors they are seeking, and do some preliminary research. Internet research is generally the most effective and least time-consuming method.

At this point you don't need to know everything, but some basic background information you might like to consider will include:

- Financial stability of company
- Growth rate of company
- Publicly or privately held company
- Longevity of company
- General job description of available positions
- Average annual income and progressive income potential
- Promotion trends (internal candidates vs. external candidates)
- Benefits package
- Relocation policy
- Minimum qualifications

Once you've determined this, you are ready to identify specific employers. This is not something you can do in one afternoon at the computer. You need to allocate some time to conduct this preliminary research. You should start at least a week or two in advance.

* Trinity Advantage: Visit the Career Services staff to go over research strategies and tips on finding helpful information. We can also take you around the office and guide you through the various resources and services that Career Services offers.

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RESUME PREPARATION E-mail: careerservices@trinity.edu • Website: www.trinity.edu/careerservices

Make sure your resume is up-to-date and current, and that you have multiple copies available. A cover letter is not necessary at a career fair. Here are some things to double check:

- Objective. Do not be too specific. Remember, you will be providing the resume to numerous employers.
- Quality. Do not photocopy! Use a good quality resume bond, a good word processing system such as Microsoft Word, and a laser or high quality ink jet printer.
- AVOID GIMMICKS! It is not necessary to use neon-bright paper. Nor do you need to use cardboard or manila folders, loose leaf binders, plastic sheet protectors or any other gimmicky items. These things only get in the way of what's important – your background and qualifications.
- No handwritten changes, alterations or additions.

HOW DO I DRESS?

Participating in a career fair is no different than going to an interview - the dress code is the same! Remember that you will be meeting company representatives and recruiting managers. These are people who will decide your fate one way or another, and will probably be involved in the interview process later. **First impressions are lasting impressions!** You want to stand out among the crowd and gain an edge over your competition.

Make that first impression a solid one by dressing as follows:

- Navy or charcoal business suit
- Starched & pressed *white* dress shirt or blouse
- Color coordinated silk tie (men)
- Black, shined dress shoes (women, closed toe—no sandals)
- Black dress belt - no suspenders (men)
- Dark socks (men)/dark or neutral hose (women)
- Attractive watch (any other jewelry should be minimal, basic and very conservative; women, one set of conservative earrings).
- No “rings” (nose, tongue, etc.) or other visible piercings
- Hair trimmed and conservative in style
- Minimal makeup
- Leave your backpack at home - use a briefcase, portfolio, etc.

HAVE A PLAN

By now you should have a plan of attack and know the employers you want to approach. Get to the fair as early as possible, and spend the first 20-30 minutes acclimating yourself. It is not a bad idea to stroll every aisle and check things out. Now it's time to go talk to your selected employers. Properly working a career fair takes time so, if at all possible, give yourself a minimum of 3-4 hours.

INTRODUCTION

Don't be shy - walk right up to the employer you want to visit with, introduce yourself in a clear voice, and give them a firm handshake. Fifty-five percent of impressions are created visually and through your non-verbal communication skills - this first impression may determine if you are invited to interview. Here are some visual and non-verbal factors of which to be aware:

- Dress, grooming and appearance
- Smile - this is one of your best assets!
- Good eye contact
- Firm handshake
- Good posture - stand up straight
- Tone of voice - enthusiastic, but pleasant and conversational.

Express an interest and be positive: “I'm familiar with your company and what you're looking for, and I'm *very* interested.”

HAVE SOME QUESTIONS

You should have some specific questions for the company representative, and it's always good to take brief notes. Some of the things you might want to know are:

- When will you be interviewing?
- Will you be interviewing on campus?
- When can I expect to hear from you?
- I've done an extensive amount of research on your company, but can you provide me with additional information?
- When do you expect to fill the available positions?
- Who should I contact with any additional questions?
- Can I provide you with any additional information?

Be positive, assertive, and enthusiastic. Never ask questions that can be construed negatively, such as "what is your turnover rate?" or "how many hours per week do you work?"

The company may want to schedule an interview at that time, so have your planner. On occasion, companies will want to conduct a first interview on the spot, so brush up on your interviewing skills and be ready! When leaving the booth, make sure they are aware of your enthusiasm and interest in the position, and be sure and thank them for talking with you. Don't forget to get a business card from the person with whom you talk.

FOLLOW-UP

Companies talk to many dozens of candidates at a career fair, and it is not uncommon for them to return to the office with over 100 resumes. Hopefully, you have already made a strong impression, but some strategic follow up is also beneficial. Immediately forward an email or letter to the person you talked with, reiterating your interest, and tell them how much you look forward to pursuing the opportunity further.

CONCLUSION

A couple of final thoughts on making your attendance at the career or job fair successful. First, don't box yourself in to just the employers you researched in advance. Plan to spend some time just wandering around the site visiting booths that look interesting after you've talked with your preferred companies.

Also, many candidates are hesitant to talk to an employer whose booth is situated in the same general vicinity as another employer with whom they've already talked. Don't worry about this at all. Professional recruiting people expect you to explore many opportunities, and it's their job to sell top candidates on their organizations. They know you're looking at all options - as you should be. Don't miss out on a potential opportunity for this reason.

Career and job fairs are a great way to network, showcase yourself, and get to know potential employers. But if you aren't prepared and don't have a plan, it can be a disorganized, wasteful day. Stick with this basic outline, allocate some time for research and preparation, and you'll have a great day.

GOOD LUCK!

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