

Maximize Your Career Fair Experience

September 15, 2015- Kate Lorenz & Karla Miller, CareerBuilder.com and Career Development Services

Fall is upon us, and it's time to start preparing for a great entry-level job and internship/co-op opportunities. Career fairs are great places to get your foot in the door. These events provide job and internship seekers with important face time with close to a 100 businesses and organizations that are actively looking for candidates, all in one place. **However, making your mark at a career fair doesn't happen just by showing up.** A successful career fair experience takes planning, preparation and the confidence to sell yourself. If you want to use this resource to help jump start your search, follow these tips before, during and after the fair.

Before the Fair - It All Comes Down to Homework

- **Obtain a list of exhibitors.** Your first step is to find out which companies will be participating. You can do this by contacting Career Development Services or by doing your own research within BulldogCareers. Once you have the list, highlight several companies that are of interest to you and are interested in you.
- **Do your research.** Research the companies that will be attending the fair. Look at their Web sites, read the criteria submitted to Career Development Services. Look for recent acquisitions that indicate the company is growing, new products that have been introduced, or any other business news that gives you an idea of where the company is headed and how you can play a role.
- **Put your tools together.** Once again, it's time to dust off your resume and make sure it is in tip top condition. Make sure it is current and that it sends a clear, concise picture of who you are and what you have to offer. Double check for spelling and grammatical errors and make sure your contact information is correct. If you need help, stop by Career Development Services in Patton Hall room 101.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** Get together with a friend and practice answering typical interview questions such as "Tell me about yourself," or "What kind of position are you looking for?" Additionally, develop a list of questions you want to ask each company. One of the best ways to look prepared and professional is showing up with thoughtful, intelligent questions.

During the Fair - Put On Your Best Show

- **Dress the part.** When you go to the career fair, you will undoubtedly see people walking around in jeans and t-shirts. Don't be one of those people. A career fair is your chance to make a good first impression with a potential new employer. Wear a conservative business suit, make sure you look well groomed, and carry your materials in a professional folder or portfolio.
- **Don't forget your ammo.** You spent all that time making sure your resume was ready to go, so don't blow your chances by forgetting to bring it. Bring many copies printed out on professional resume paper. Be prepared to hand these out many times throughout the day.
- **Be confident and proactive.** A career fair is no place to be shy and demure. The best way to make a lasting impression is by being aggressive. Approach the companies that interest you, make eye contact and introduce yourself with a firm handshake. Take the initiative and tell them about yourself and why you are

interested in their company. Answer questions succinctly, with solid examples of your strengths and qualifications. Ask your prepared questions and listen intently to the answers. Tie in what you know about their company from your research to the type of job you are seeking.

- **Ask for information.** Whatever you do, don't leave a company booth without getting a business card and company brochure. This might be the only opportunity you have to meet with the hiring manager face to face and you will want his or her contact information later.

After the Fair - Close the Deal

- **Follow up.** Just like a job interview, it is important to follow up after a career fair. Using the business cards you collected, write letters/e-mail to key company representatives. Thank them for taking the time to speak with you, reiterate your strengths, and let them know that you will call them to follow up in a couple of days. Then, be true to your word and call. Just make sure you don't waste the opportunity you had at the career fair. Your due diligence afterwards can be as important as your preparation