

## **How to Successfully Navigate a Career Fair**

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WCU offers several career fairs throughout the year which give students the opportunity to meet employers who are currently seeking students to fill internship and full-time positions with their companies.

These events are not just for seniors looking for a job after graduation; they are important for students of every class to attend. Students are given the opportunity to take stock of job opportunities, to get a clearer picture of the requirements for specific jobs, to pursue summer internships, or to make themselves known within an organization.

Career fairs are like speed-dating. Students have a very short amount of time to make a good impression for the employer so that he or she will remember you after all of the students seen that day. Students need to prepare for the Career Fair before they arrive.

### **PRE-EVENT**

#### **The résumé**

You'll need to review and update your résumé if you hope to catch the eyes of employers at the fair. The Career Services office offers résumé consultations, along with our peer career mentors (see the back page for full schedule and locations). Make sure that you do not wait until the day of an event, or even the week of, to get assistance on your résumé. Appointments with our career counselors fill up quickly, especially around the date of any Career Fair.

#### **Knowing which companies are there**

One great feature of WCU career fairs is that there is a list online of all of the employers planning to attend. You can access that list on Jobcat to see who is coming to the fair and begin to plan accordingly. It would be advantageous for you to create a custom résumé for each employer to whom you intend to speak. Also, a few companies will allow you to plan for an interview the day of the event if you contact them first.

This online database of employers attending the career fair also gives you the chance to reflect on what exactly you will say when you meet the employer. Do some background research on the company, what they do, what position they are seeking to fill, the job description for that position, what values the company holds, and their specialties. Also, think about how you will fit into that organization and what skills that you have or what classes you have taken that would make you a good candidate for the position. Make sure that you are able to articulate this information when you approach the table.

### **THE DAY OF...**

#### **The clothes**

Would you wear jeans and a T-shirt on a first date to a nice restaurant? No? Well, you shouldn't wear them to the career fair either, or to any job interview for that matter. Everyone attending the career fair should be wearing business professional, which consists of a suit, and for men, a tie. Please see the article "Appropriate Attire for the Jobseeker and Professional" (page 8) for assistance in deciding what is and what is not appropriate for the career fair.

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[http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/October\\_2012.2\\_CareerJournal.pdf](http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/October_2012.2_CareerJournal.pdf)

## **How to approach a table**

Some of the tables entice many students to come speak with them. How exactly do you approach a table that is surrounded by people? If you have taken our advice and made a list of potential employers you'd like to meet, you can explore some of the other tables and come back to that particular employer when it is a little less crowded.

However, that may never happen, so sometimes you may need to wait until the employer has a chance to speak with you. While waiting, take a look at the literature and items placed on the table, and do not check your phone or express impatience.

If the table is free and clear or you've waited until your chance to speak with the employer, approach the table and with a firm handshake introduce yourself and look directly into the eyes of the employer.

## **The proper handshake**

The proper handshake can make or break a good first impression. Your handshake should be firm, but not too firm, and should last between three and five seconds. This is a skill that is important when making a good impression for the rest of your life, so you may want to practice with a friend to perfect it.

## **What should you say?**

You may only have a few minutes to speak with this employer, so what should you say? If you researched the company ahead of time, now is the time to use that knowledge. Tell them who you are, your major, and why you are interested. You probably already thought of how to strategically focus your résumé to make you appealing for this position, so use some of that information to present to the employer.

Describe your experience, skills, goals, and interests and relate them to how you would possibly contribute your skills to this company.

## **AFTER THE FAIR**

### **Follow up**

By following our advice and preparing beforehand, dressing professionally, and making a good impression the day of the event, you more than likely received the card of an employer, or maybe even received an invitation for an interview.

If you received contact information but didn't schedule an interview, you should email them as soon as you can. Write this email much as you would a cover letter.

Remind the employer when and where you met, remind them why you'd be a good fit for the position, restate your intention and interest in working for that company, and state that you'd be available for an interview. Be sure to thank them for talking with you!

### **To prepare for the interview**

The Perfect Interview program offers a great opportunity to practice basic questions you will face in an interview. You can film yourself answering questions and view your response. Its online coach will suggest prompts regarding how to answer, and there are examples of what your response may look and sound like.

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## **Congratulations!**

Congratulations! If you followed the steps in this article, you surely expanded your professional network and made a great impression on several employers. You've gained the basic skills required for a successful job search, and you are on the right path to locating and securing a job or internship. If you need clarification on anything you've read in this article, or if you want further explanation or advice on how to execute any of this advice, please call Career Services to set up an appointment with one of our career counselors. They will get you on the right track!