Career Fair Preparation

BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A CAREER FAIR:

- Explore different fields and discover positions, companies, and career opportunities.
- Develop a network of contacts; approximately 70 percent of jobs are found through networking (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- Gain experience interacting in a professional environment.

If you are not actively internship/job searching:

- Learn more about companies and positions, and become “known” to employers for future opportunities.
- Find out what employers seek in applicants (skills, experiences, qualities) to help you better prepare in the future.
- Meet potential contacts for informational interviews. See the Major/Career Exploration guide for informational interview tips.

If you are internship/job searching:

- Learn about internship/job opportunities that you may be qualified for.
- Learn about on-campus interviewing opportunities.
- Get noticed by companies. Employers from previous career fairs reported that they planned to follow up with at least one student, and the majority planned to follow-up with 5 to 10+ candidates.

BEFORE THE FAIR:

- Check GoldPASS (goldpass.umn.edu) for upcoming career fair dates in the “Career Events” section. The Science and Engineering Career Fair is held every September and January/February, and the U of M Job Fair is held every February. GoldPASS will have information about all companies attending and positions available. Then create a prioritized list of employers you are interested in talking to.
- Research employers in advance so that when you approach them you are able to articulate why you are interested in their organization and can ask specific questions. See the Researching Employers and Industries handout for research strategies.
- Bring your list of questions with you to the fair.
- Prepare your 30-second “Elevator Pitch” to introduce yourself (see Pg. 2 for examples). Be ready to answer some basic questions about yourself and why you are interested in the company and positions.
- Update and print your resume and include enough for your prioritized list, plus at least 10 extra copies in a portfolio or professional folder. Consider tailoring your objective for each company on your prioritized list. You may also want to bring copies of your transcript.
- Before the career fair, some employers search for students in GoldPASS. Make sure your profile is set to be viewable to employers in GoldPASS if you want to show up in search results, and upload your most up-to-date resume.
- Get ready for interviews. You may have interviews the day of the fair or shortly after. To prepare for interviews, see the Interviewing Guide and consider participating in Practice Interview Days.
- Check out the “Job Fair Success” online workshop at: cse.umn.edu/career

DAY OF FAIR:

- Arrive early and familiarize yourself with the floor plan.
- Consider “warming up” with organizations that are lower on your priority list before approaching your top choices.
- When you approach an employer, give a firm handshake, make eye contact, smile, and introduce yourself.
- Offer your resume to the employer and tell them about yourself (see “elevator pitch” on Pg. 2).
- Be polite, honest, and enthusiastic. Speak slowly, clearly, and concretely. Most importantly, relax and be yourself.
- Be engaged in your conversations with employers and discuss your qualifications and interest in their company.
- Ask employers about their hiring process and how you can be considered for opportunities.
- Ask employers about setting up an informational interview to learn more about their company and opportunities. See the Major/Career Exploration Guide or the Internship/Job Search Guide for tips about setting up an informational interview.
- If an employer directs you to apply online, don’t be discouraged. It is important that you make an impression at the booth. Some employers will note if you visit the booth and later verify that you applied online.
- Before you leave, ask for a business card and their preferred method of follow up. Thank them for their time.
CAREER FAIR ATTIRE:
- Dress professionally—a suit is appropriate if you have one, otherwise wear a dress shirt and dress pants. Make sure your clothes are clean and wrinkle free.
- Wear comfortable dress shoes with matching color dress socks.
- If you have a tie, wear it. If you wear a skirt, make sure it is at least knee length.
- Keep your hairstyle simple and facial hair groomed.

ELEVATOR PITCH:
When you approach an employer at a career fair, it is important that you make a positive impression right away by giving a 30-second “elevator pitch” to introduce yourself. Use the guidelines below to help guide what you share in your “elevator pitch.”

Opening Introduction:
- Name, year in school, major
- Knowledge of company and interest

If not actively internship/job searching:
- Question about the company

If internship/job searching:
- Brief overview of skills and experiences (give an overview of what is on your resume)
- Your objective (what type of position you are seeking)

Example (not actively internship/job searching):
Hi, my name is Sara Anderson. It’s nice to meet you. I’m in my freshmen year at the University of Minnesota, and I am studying Chemistry. I have just begun my coursework but I am very interested in your internship program because of the bacteria testing your organization conducts. What types of qualities do you look for in internship applicants?

Example (Internship/Job Searching):
Hi, my name is Mark Johnson, it’s nice to meet you. I’m a junior at the University of Minnesota majoring in Electrical Engineering. My background includes coursework in electrical circuits and digital system design and I’m familiar with the MATLAB and SPICE programs. I am looking for an electrical engineering internship for this coming summer. I know that your company has recently expanded their product line to include wireless communication devices, and I am really interested in this area. I saw your posting on GoldPASS, and I feel that I would be a strong candidate for your internship program.

AFTER THE FAIR:
- Reflect upon what you did well at the career fair and what you can improve on for next time.
- Send a thank you to the employers you spoke with within 48 hours. It is acceptable to email your thank you note. Remind employer of date/place, mention something unique about your conversation, express appreciation for time/information (be specific about what you talked about).
  - If internship/job searching: Reiterate interest, re-state qualifications
  - If networking: Ask to set up an informational interview
- Keep in touch with employers. Keep in contact with them when you have a question, information that is pertinent to them, or to follow up on positions you have applied for.
- Consider connecting with the recruiter or following the company on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com).
- Apply for any positions that you are interested in that you learned about from the career fair.
- Log into goldpass.umn.edu and click on “On Campus Interviews” to see what companies are interviewing on campus. Submit your application materials to be considered for interviews.
- Log into goldpass.umn.edu and click on “Career Events” to see if employers are hosting information sessions you can attend.
- Prepare for any upcoming interviews you have—see the Interviewing Guide for help.

Thank You Note Example:
Dear Mr. Marx,
It was nice to meet you at the Science and Engineering Career Fair this afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about internship opportunities at your company. It was exciting to hear about all of the contributions that past interns have made to your organization. I also had fun learning that you went through the same study abroad program as me when you were a student at the University of Minnesota.

As you advised, I applied for the internship online, but I also wanted to send you an electronic copy of my resume. Do you know when you will be contacting applicants? Or, is there another person you recommend me connecting with to learn more about the position? Any information would be helpful as I am very excited about this opportunity. Thank you again for taking the time to talk to me at the career fair. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Kate Middleton