Career Fair Preparation

BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A CAREER FAIR:

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

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 for 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 and 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:

- Create a GoldPASS account by visiting goldpass.umn.edu and using the GoldPASS User’s Guide. It can take a few days for your account to be approved, so be sure to do so before the career fair to have access to information and interview opportunities.
- Check GoldPASS for upcoming career fair dates in the “Career Fair/Events” section. The CSE 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, so create a prioritized list of employers you are interested in talking to.
- Attend CSE Career Center workshops and drop-in hours the week before the career fair. Dates, times, and locations can be found on the career fair website. You can also check out the Job Fair Success online workshop.
- Research employers in advance so 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.
- Download the CSE Career Fair app by following the instructions found on the career fair website at cse.umn.edu/career-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.
- Before the career fair, some employers search for students in GoldPASS. Make sure your profile is set to be viewable by employers in GoldPASS if you want to show up in search results, and upload your most up-to-date resume.
- Attend information sessions for companies you are interested in listed on GoldPASS and the career fair app.
- You may have interviews the day or weeks after the fair. To prepare, see the Interviewing Guide and consider participating in Practice Interview Days. Look at the “on-campus interviews” tab in GoldPASS and apply to those you qualify for.

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. Many employers don’t take paper resumes at the career fair, but 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 or professional top and dress pants or skirt. If you have a tie, wear it. If you wear a skirt, make sure it is at least knee length. Clothes should be clean and wrinkle free.
- Wear comfortable dress shoes with matching color dress socks. A professional heel height is 3.5 inches or under.
- Keep your hairstyle simple and facial hair groomed. Avoid the use of cologne and perfume.
- Example photos of professional attire can be found on the CSE Career Center Pinterest page at pinterest.com/csecareercenter

ELEVATOR PITCH:
When you approach an employer at a career fair, it is important that you make a positive impression by giving a short 30-second “elevator pitch” to introduce yourself. Use the suggestions below to help guide what you share. Remember your time with the company should be a conversation. Ending your introduction with a question is a good way to start the conversation.

Opening Introduction:
- Name, year in school, major
- Knowledge of company and interest in their work and/or positions

If not actively internship/job searching:
- Question about the company relating to their products/services, skills and experiences they seek, and/or hiring practices

If internship/job searching:
- Brief overview of skills and experiences (give an overview of what is on your resume) related to the company
- 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 freshman 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. Can you tell me more about this position?

AFTER THE FAIR:
- Reflect upon what you learned, your interest in the fields and companies you talked with, what you did well at the career fair, and ways you can improve on for next time.
- Send a thank you to the employers you spoke to within 48 hours. It is acceptable to email your thank you note. Remind the employer of the date/place, mention something unique about your conversation, and express appreciation for their 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 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 you are interested in that you learned about at the career fair.
- Log into goldpass.umn.edu and click on “Interview on campus” 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 Fairs/Events” to see employers 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 College of Science and Engineering Career Fair this afternoon. Thank you for taking time to talk with me about internship opportunities at your company. It was exciting to hear all of the contributions that past interns have made. I also enjoyed 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