



When faced with the daunting task of finding a job, it is nice to know that career fairs exist – not too many major life transitions have such a ready-made, free, and publicly accessible way to make the needed connections.

To make the most of a career fair, you need to be prepared. Here's a step-by-step approach to help you make the most of this great opportunity to connect with employers.

## **Before a Career Fair**

*At least 2 weeks before the career fair*, take a good, hard look at your résumé.

- Is it up to date? Does it reflect your most recent experiences, projects, and job-related accomplishments in a compelling and concise way? (One page is best.)
- Is your contact information complete and current?
- Is the format clean, organized, and easy to read?
- Are you able to give a recruiter examples or details about every item on that résumé?

Based on your review of your résumé, make the necessary changes, and have your most detail-oriented friend or colleague edit it for you. Revise and proofread again.

*The week before the fair*, find out which employers will be represented at the fair. Most career fairs share a list of recruiters who will be attending. For on-campus career fairs, you can find a list of employers attending on Handshake. Make a priority list of which employers you intend to target and visit those employers' websites to learn about their organization: their mission, customers, products, history, employment, etc.

Print enough copies of your résumé (plus some extras) to share with recruiters from companies or organizations you intend to target.

Prep a 30-second introduction to open conversations with recruiters at the fair. Your introduction should include:

- your name,
- your major or area expertise,
- your graduation date, and
- why you stopped to talk to this person

For example:

"Hello, my name is [insert name]. I'm a junior here at UML studying [insert major] and I graduate May 20xx. I saw on Handshake that your company would be attending today, and I was excited to talk to you about the internship opportunity you have available."

"Hello, my name is [insert name]. I'm a senior here at UML studying [insert major] and I expect to graduate this coming May. I noticed on your website that your organization [insert something you found interesting]. I am interested in learning more about that. How can my background be an asset to your company?"

## **UMass Lowell Career & Co-op Center**

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Practice this introduction out loud until you feel comfortable and confident.

*The day or two before the career fair*, plan and prepare your attire and accessories. The goal is to make a good first impression, so be well groomed: have neatly trimmed hair, be freshly bathed (forgo perfumes and colognes), and wear clean, wrinkle-free clothing in good repair. While the safest bet is to wear a comfortable suit, a business casual ensemble is appropriate so long as the pieces are coordinated and present a neat, tidy appearance. Footwear should be neutral in color and socks/hosiery should coordinate with the shoe color. Shoes should be closed toe. For accessories, leave flashy jewelry at home. You want recruiters focused on what you have to say rather than what you're wearing.

Carry a professional-looking portfolio (sometimes referred to as a padfolio) with a pad of paper and pen. Store and protect your résumés in the portfolio and use it to collect business cards or emails from recruiters. Don't carry much else, if anything – you need to be free to shake hands.

### **On Fair Day**

Arrive as early in the event as you can. Some recruiters may leave the fair before it's over, so if you arrive in the later part of the event, you may miss your targeted companies.

Bring a friend if you must, but once you arrive at the fair, go your separate ways to begin conversations with your targeted companies. Approaching recruiters with your friends may indicate a lack of confidence; especially if your friend is doing all the talking. Recruiters take notice.

If you're feeling shy, keep these things in mind:

- **Recruiters want to meet you:** They came to the fair to meet interested students like you! They want to get to know you and see how you might fit in an opportunity at their company or organization.
- **It's okay to be nervous:** Everyone acknowledges a career fair can be a little intimidating, so it's okay to say to a recruiter that you're new to the career fair scene, but really wanted to take this opportunity to speak to him or her.
- **Be confident:** Smile! If you are confident, the recruiter will be confident in you.

Collect business cards, or an email, from recruiters. You may find it helpful to write a note or two on the back of each card to remind you what you spoke to each recruiter about.

### **After the Career Fair**

Follow up with your target companies by writing a thank-you e-mail to recruiters with whom you had good conversations and/or with whom you'd like to continue discussing opportunities. You might reiterate some specific qualification you have for their opening and restate your enthusiasm for the organization. And, of course, ask for the interview!

### **Finding Career Fairs**

The UMass Lowell Career & Co-op Center utilizes Handshake, and this should be the initial spot you check to learn about on-campus and off-site recruiting events. Employers and other campuses can invite UML students to attend their fairs / recruiting events using Handshake. For some industries, professional associations will host career fairs or interviewing days; meet with a Career & Co-op Center staff member to discuss options specific to your job search.

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