

The first experience with a career fair can be overwhelming. Did you know that according to a study done by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 13% of all employers surveyed formally interview students and make job offers at career fairs? So, it's important to be prepared!

You can:

- apply directly for job or internship openings
- learn about specific employers
- explore your career options
- research the demand for your major or your skills
- make a one-on-one contact with someone in a specific company
- practice interviewing skills in an informal situation
- do all this and more at a career fair

What to expect:

Each year, the Center for Career and Calling (CCC) hosts a Job/Internship Fair in Upper Gwinn. The University of Washington and Seattle University also sponsor career fairs that are open to SPU students. Up to 100 organizations are usually represented. When you enter the room, you will see company representatives standing or sitting at tables arranged in rows. There may be several hundred career fair attendees circulating among these employers. Without a plan for navigating the fair, it is easy to become overwhelmed or distracted and leave the fair without talking to the employer you most want to meet. To get the most out of a career fair, it is very important to research in advance who will be there.

Who will be there? How to research employers:

38% of employers expect attendees to have knowledge of their company or organization, according to NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers). The best source of information about the organizations that will be at the fair is the CCC's website: www.spu.edu/ccc. You can find additional information on researching companies and industries once you get to the website.

- Click on "Students" on the menu above and scroll over and click on "Jobs".
- From there, select "Company Research" to access sites for learning more about companies.

Bring your resume:

Make sure you have an impeccable resume for the career fair. Go to www.spu.edu/resume for guidelines on how to write a resume, samples and links to additional resources. Once you have a draft, you may have it reviewed during a 15 minute Walk-in Appointment available every Monday-Thursday from 2-4pm or attend our Resume Café the day before the fair (date and time posted on our website). Bring a minimum of thirty copies of your resume because most employers expect one.

Be sure to carry a portfolio or business notebook to hold your resumes *and a notepad to jot down information and questions* you would like to ask recruiters. Have a place to put company literature and the business cards you will collect at the fair.

What to wear:

To make the best impression, dress as you would for an interview in appropriate business attire. If it is not possible or practical to wear a business suit, the next best option is to wear business casual clothing. NACE reports that as many as 88% of employers expect to see business casual or better from a student at a career fair. Remember, a career fair is a "first impression" situation and you will be meeting employers that follow a range of dress codes. Whatever you wear, make sure your clothes are clean and well-pressed.

Plan a strategy:

Before you enter the fair, pick up a packet with employer descriptions and a map of the layout of the employer booths. By studying the map, you will be able to tell where each organization is located. Take a few minutes to become familiar with the layout and mark the location of the employers that interest you. Target and prioritize specific companies. Identify 5 – 7 companies of greatest interest to you. Plan to talk first with lower priority companies on the list so you can rehearse your presentation before talking with your top priority companies.

Typically you will spend only 3 – 7 minutes with each employer. To make the most of the career fair you will need to approach the employer, introduce yourself, and discuss your strengths and how they match the employer's needs. To communicate all this information in a short amount of time, preparation AND practice are essential! Practice with a friend or in front of a mirror until you feel comfortable. It is important to appear confident and enthusiastic.

Prepare and practice an “elevator speech”:

Be direct. Introduce yourself with a firm handshake and a smile. Give your name and tell where and what you are studying. Mention the types of opportunities in which you are interested and describe the skills and experiences you would bring to the position. If given more time, ask questions about the company and career opportunities to further underscore your interest. Do not apologize for lack of experience; rather, mention how your academic studies and interests apply to the opportunities the employer has available. Answer questions clearly and concisely. Have your resume available and offer a copy to the representative. This meeting creates a crucial first impression; making a good impression requires preparation and practice! (You may want to schedule a Mock Interview with a CCC counselor in the (see <http://www.spu.edu/depts/ccc/students/gethired/interviewing.asp>).

Sample Elevator Speech #1

“Hello, I’m Tara Smith; and I am a junior majoring in Computer Science interested in an internship. My background includes coding and software development using several programming languages such as C/C++ and Java, and I have effective leadership and communication skills. After researching your company, I am excited about what you are doing relating to embedded systems development.”

Sample Elevator Speech #2

“Hello, I’m Susan Gregory and I’m an English major. My employment interests include marketing and public relations. I’m looking for positions that match my oral and written communication skills, creativity, and event planning background. I spent a semester in Mexico and became proficient in Spanish. I also have experience writing press releases. I have been involved in the running and directing of the Student Union Board at SPU which puts on major events around campus. I’m excited about graduating in June and entering the work force full time.”

NOW, WRITE YOUR OWN PERSONAL PROMOTIONAL STATEMENT.

Be prepared to use this introduction whenever you meet with a prospective employer.

Questions for the Recruiter

- What is the hiring process for your company in my area of interest?
- What is it like to work for your company?
- How might I learn more about what your company is doing currently?
- What is the opportunity for your company for internships? ...advancement? ... growth?
- What sets your company apart from others in the industry?
- What strengths, education, and experience are needed to qualify for entry level software engineering positions?
- How might I make myself a stronger candidate?
- How do you decide to choose one candidate over another?
- Is there someone in your company I may contact who can tell me more about this particular area of work?

Follow-up after the fair:

Ask the employer representative for a business card and inquire about the best way to follow-up on your interest in their company. After the career fair, you will want to write a short thank-you letter to each employer with whom you spoke, thanking them for their time and reiterating your interest in their opportunities. Send another more targeted copy of your resume with the thank-you note within 48 hours! Most employers will respond with interview requests within two weeks. After six weeks, only six percent may respond, according to NACE.