

## HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF A CAREER FAIR

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Career Fairs provide an opportunity for students and employers to interact and learn more about each other. Students have abundant opportunities to explore internships and full-time opportunities, as well as learn more about organizations that have an interest in KU graduates. The School of Business Career Fair is held each September and over 100 company participants attend. All students should attend. This event enables students to visit informally with employers.

Most career fairs consist of booths manned by recruiters and other representatives from each organization. Some employers send alumni representatives. The employer displays may vary from a simple table with stacks of brochures and business cards with a single representative to highly elaborate multimedia and interactive demonstrations with a team of organizational representatives.

Try to attend at least one career fair before launching your formal interviewing process. For new job seekers, career fairs offer a safe way to make the transition into the “self-marketing mode” without the formality and intimidation often associated with traditional job interviews. Attending a career fair is an opportunity too valuable to miss.

### **Career Fairs provide**

- ✓ An opportunity for networking and building contacts
- ✓ A way to search for an internship or job
- ✓ A forum for professional development
  - Practice communication skills
  - Get feedback from employers
  - Play a leadership role (by volunteering or working with the sponsoring group)

### **Before the Career Fair:**

- ✓ Obtain a list of participating companies (this can be obtained by clicking on the *Events* tab of your KU Career Connections/Symplicity account)
- ✓ Target companies of interest to research (see the BCSC website for company research links). Know something about the organization, their general opportunities, and why you would be interested in working there.
  - Facts to gather before the career fair:
    - Products or services of the company
    - Size in total sales or number of employees
    - Locations
    - Organization: Parent company, subsidiary, etc.
    - Future growth potential and opportunities
    - Any recent news report on the company (locally, regionally, or internationally)
- ✓ Prepare your resume keeping your career focus in mind. Have it critiqued by Career Services. Print extra copies to take to the career fair with you.

- ✓ Attend a workshop to learn strategies for success at the career fair
- ✓ Prepare a one-minute commercial. This is an introduction including your name, major, and career interests. “Hi, I’m Mary Smith. I am a first-year MBA student and I’m seeking an internship in human resources. I’m interested in . . . “ This will allow you to briefly and enthusiastically demonstrate to employers your skills, interests, experiences, and strengths. Practice your commercial prior to attending the Career Fair.
- ✓ Identify and have in mind specific experiences where you have demonstrated your strengths.
- ✓ Be able to back up your skills with specific examples. This will make you stand out.
- ✓ Plan your attire. You will want to look professional (in other words wear a suit or your most professional-looking attire) but it is important to also be comfortable since it is likely that you will be walking a lot and waiting in lines.
- ✓ Arrange a list of questions to ask the employers
  - What opportunities exist for my major? (only if not listed in KU Career Connections/Symplicity or the career fair booklet)
  - What are your company’s plans for growth?
  - What qualities do you look for in new hires?
  - What are your company’s strengths?
  - Describe the work environment.
  - What characteristics does a successful person have at your company?
  - Do you have descriptions of any current openings at your company? (Again, be sure to check KU Career Connections/Symplicity to make sure this information is not already available to you)
  - Do you have literature on your company/organization?
  - If you don’t have an available opening now that fits my background/interests, but I would like to work for your company, how often could I call without becoming a pest? Who should I ask for?
  - Do you have a business card? (Be sure to check the card for a phone number and email—some will have only the company website listed).

### **Career Fair Checklist**

- ✓ Portfolio or briefcase
- ✓ Pens (bring two)
- ✓ At least a dozen copies of your resume
- ✓ Small breath mints
- ✓ Something to take notes with
- ✓ Do not bring your backpack

### **During the Career Fair**

- ✓ Sign in at the registration table, make a name tag, and pick up a program listing the participants and a map of their locations
- ✓ Have an action plan! Do not just wander from booth to booth. Know which companies you want to talk to in the time you have allotted.
- ✓ Smile and be polite. Enthusiasm and attitude are important.
- ✓ Approach the recruiter, offer a firm handshake, look them in the eye, and use your one-minute commercial.
- ✓ Convey 2-3 qualities about yourself that you could bring to the position and why you are interested in the organization.
- ✓ Indicate the knowledge you gained about the organization through your research.
- ✓ Ask knowledgeable questions.
- ✓ Remember, a career fair encounter is not an interview. It is an opportunity to make contacts. Do not persist in conversation if people are waiting behind you. Expect no more than 2-3 minutes with the recruiter.
- ✓ Get business cards of the representatives that you speak with.
- ✓ Collect any company information for your resource files.
- ✓ Reiterate your interest and leave a resume or get the web address where you need to send your resume.
- ✓ Make notes as you leave on the information you've gained, especially any follow-up action that was discussed.

### **Do Not:**

- ✓ Chew gum
- ✓ Fidget or play with your hair
- ✓ Rock from side to side
- ✓ Interrupt employers who are speaking with other attendees
- ✓ Look around while conversing
- ✓ Use fillers such as "um" and "like"
- ✓ Dominate discussion with a representative, especially if there are others waiting.
- ✓ Immediately start grabbing for all of the giveaways at the table. Allow the recruiter to offer them to you. Talking with the companies should be your main objective.
- ✓ Be offended if a company will not accept your paper resume and directs you to their website—many companies can only accept electronic resumes.

### **What employers are expecting:**

- ✓ Students to have knowledge of the industry and/or their company
- ✓ Students to have knowledge of their career goals
- ✓ Students to have experience through internships
- ✓ Students to make eye contact, be sincere, and have a good attitude.

**What employers want to know from you:**

- ✓ Your major
- ✓ Your area of interest
- ✓ Your geographical interest
- ✓ Your work authorization

**After the career fair:**

- ✓ Mailing a thank you letter is not only appropriate, it can also help you stand apart from the many students recruiters met with. Use the contact information from the business card you obtained or contact Business Career Services for the details.
- ✓ You may consider sending an updated or extra copy of your resume with your thank you letter.
- ✓ You can call to verify that your application is complete.
- ✓ Check with KU Career Connections/Symplicity to see if an employer you are interested in will be interviewing on campus. If they are, you will need to register with BCSC for on-campus interviewing. Once you are registered, you can apply for their positions posted to KU Career Connections/Symplicity.
- ✓ If you missed an opportunity to visit with a company that you were interested in, check KU Career Connections/Symplicity to see if they have a position posted and apply. If not, write them a cover letter expressing your interest and enclose a copy of your resume.