

Preparing for a Career Fair

Objectives

1. Understand the purpose of a career fair.
2. Develop strategies to best prepare for, attend, and follow up after career fairs.
3. Successfully create and deliver an “elevator speech.”

What is a Career Fair?

A career fair is an event that gives students and employers a chance to meet one another, establish professional relationships, and discuss potential job and/or internship opportunities.

Many employers from a variety of industries attend career fairs, and there are both general and specialized events catering to a particular industry, educational specialty, or profession. For example at FSU, the Seminole Futures All Majors Career Fair, held every fall and spring semester, is a general career fair at which employers are seeking to hire students from a variety of majors. On the other hand, the Education & Library Career Fair, while open to any major, is a specialized event in which employers attending are seeking students majoring in education, library and information studies, or other related majors.

Florida State University Career Center’s Career Fairs

Each year, The Career Center hosts a variety of career fair events such as:

- *Seminole Futures (All Majors Career Fair):* fall and spring semesters
- *Part-Time Job Fair (All Majors):* fall and spring semesters
- *Engineering Day (Technical Career Fair):* fall and spring semesters
- *Graduate and Professional School Fair:* fall semester

To see a list of FSU Career Center-sponsored events, visit career.fsu.edu/fairs.



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Benefits of Attending a Career Fair

There are many benefits to attending a career fair:

- Interact one-on-one with employers of interest
- Practice and enhance networking skills
- Gain awareness of organizations and opportunities for which they are hiring
- Establish professional relationships and gather contact information from employers
- Possibly receive an invitation for an on-campus interview

What to Expect at a Career Fair

Employers attend career fair events in order to meet and recruit excellent candidates. In many cases at FSU career fairs, recruiters are actual Florida State graduates and are excited to come back and recruit students from their alma mater.

Who Can Attend a Career Fair?

There is a common misconception that only juniors and seniors should attend a career fair. However, all classifications of students (including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) can benefit from attending a career fair. Regardless of year in school, students can explore opportunities in their field of interest, learn about organizations, and network with recruiters/employers.

Students from all majors can attend any career fair at FSU. Employers are typically interested in meeting students from a variety of different academic backgrounds. In addition, both undergraduate and graduate students are likely to benefit from attending these events. Alumni and community members are also welcome to attend all FSU career fairs.

Will I Get A Job Offer at A Career Fair?

Students and community members often believe that they should leave the event with an internship and/or job opportunity in hand — this is a common misconception. Although this may happen, it is very rare. *The purpose of a career fair is to enhance one's network, develop meaningful relationships, and learn more about organizations.* Use this opportunity to present yourself favorably, gather useful information, and establish new contacts. Your small investment of time and effort might very well turn into an opportunity you would not have had otherwise.

How to Prepare for a Career Fair

- **Create a strong résumé.** Visit The Career Center to have your résumé reviewed, and be sure to have multiple copies (minimum of 20) printed on professional résumé paper before the career fair. Decide if you need more than one version of your résumé, depending on your job target(s).
- **Develop and practice an elevator speech.** Developing an elevator speech is likely one of the most important components in preparing for a career fair. Prepare an elevator speech before the day's event, and practice it with a career advisor at The Career Center. Use the *Creating an Elevator Speech Exercise* on page 5 of this guide to get you started.
- **Research employers.** Identify which employers you want to talk to BEFORE the event by researching the organizations attending. The Career Center keeps an updated list of attendees on its website (career.fsu.edu/fairs). Researching employers helps you speak competently to representatives and plan your time effectively.
- **Dress for success.** View the “Dressing to Impress” guide located at career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides. Wear a two-piece suit, in a darker color if possible. Wear simple accessories and closed-toed shoes. Avoid cologne, perfume, and scented lotions.
- **Attend a career fair preparation workshop.** Check The Career Center website for upcoming workshops at career.fsu.edu/Students/Workshops.
- **Consider creating a professional business card** (see page 4 for examples and where to buy). This is optional, but having a business card adds an extra level of polished professionalism to a networking interaction.
- **Consider purchasing a professional business portfolio** to help keep your items organized (see page 5 for an example). You can purchase a business portfolio for under \$20.00 at any office supply store. Include copies of your résumé, business cards, and employer literature that you will gather while attending the event. Use the space inside your business portfolio to take notes.
- **Review Handshake Opportunities.** It is important to do this before a career fair, as some attending employers may ask you to apply online through your Handshake account. Visit career.fsu.edu/handshake to check out your account.
- **Evaluate your online presence.** Clean up any social media profiles and adjust your privacy settings accordingly. You may want to do a web search of your name to see what information is available to the public. Address any undesirable web content. You may also consider updating or creating a LinkedIn profile. For more information on LinkedIn, see the “Building Your LinkedIn Presence” guide at The Career Center.

During a Career Fair

- **Leave your cell phone and any other items that may cause distraction in your car.**
- **Arrive early to avoid long lines.**
- **Familiarize yourself with the fair's layout** and location of organizations before entering the career fair event. (A program will be provided upon arrival and accessible through The Fairs App.)
- **Be positive and confident!** First impressions strongly impact networking interactions. This includes a firm handshake, eye contact, nodding your head, and most importantly — SMILING!
- **Make a game plan for visiting organizations.** It may be helpful to visit with your favorite employer after you have had some time to practice interacting with employers. Speak with other employers on your list first to practice and become more comfortable in introducing yourself before approaching your top choices.
- **Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions are those that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer. These kinds of questions are more helpful in starting meaningful conversation with a networking contact.
- **Leave your résumé/business card with each representative you speak with, if you can.** Some organizations are not permitted to accept hard copies of résumés at career fairs. Rather, these employers may encourage you to apply online. Do this! They are interested in your application.
- **Request a business card from each employer** (or contact name if employer is not handing out business cards). This will allow you to follow up accordingly.
- **Ask to sign up for on-campus interviews.** Many organizations who attend FSU career fairs conduct on-campus interviews in the two days following the fair. It is perfectly acceptable to ask an employer, “Are you conducting on-campus interviews this week? How can I get on your list?”
- **Take notes.** Any details you can remember from your interactions with career fair employers may help you when you apply to positions or follow up after the fair.
- **Be open-minded.** Many employers are recruiting students from all majors at FSU career fairs. Be confident in your abilities and focus on the skills you have to offer an employer.

Tips for Following Up After a Fair

Follow-up is a critical part of attending a career fair event. Here are a few suggestions for following up with an employer:

- **Review and organize your notes.** When following up, it is important to remember the details of your interactions with specific employers. You can mention topics you discussed, answer any questions the employer had for you, or refer to any other pertinent information when reaching out. To do this effectively, you must keep yourself organized. You do not want to accidentally refer to something discussed with an employer other than the one with which you are following up.
- **Follow instructions** given to you by the employer. For example, if an employer encourages you to apply online, be sure that you submit your application online within the next two days.
- **Complete the online application process** if required.
- **Send a thank you letter**, preferably within 24 hours of meeting the employer. See the “Writing Effective Letters” guide at The Career Center or online at career.fsu.edu/Resources/Career-Guides for tips on writing follow-up letters.

Possible Questions to Ask Employers

Below are some examples of appropriate questions to ask an employer at a career fair. Use these only as a starting place to develop your own questions. Be sure to thoroughly research the organizations in which you are interested. Then, devise 2-3 questions of your own.

- What are common career paths within your organization?
- What kind of training programs do you have for new hires?
- What qualities and/or characteristics do successful candidates possess?
- What is the organizational culture like?
- How can I make myself better prepared for the world of work?
- Are there courses that I should take that will help me in your industry?
- How do you enjoy working for this organization?
- What can I be doing now while still in college to make myself more attractive when job searching?

Career Fair Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Leave your phone, backpack, and any other unnecessary items in your car if you can.
- Bring plenty of copies of your résumé.
- Develop a strong elevator speech.
- Use strong non-verbal communication when interacting with employers (handshake).
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Research the employer(s) you are visiting.
- Dress professionally.
- Follow up.
- Remember you are representing all of FSU when attending a career fair (whether it is at FSU or not!). Attend to professionalism at all times.

Don't:

- Ask an employer "What does your organization do?" or "What positions are you hiring for?" This indicates that you have not done your homework and are not invested in them.
- Ask questions about salary and employer benefits.
- Visit an employer just to collect free stuff.
- Make eye contact with an employer and then walk by without acknowledging them. Even if you are not interested in their organization presently, you never know what benefits this professional contact might bring you.

Sample Business Cards

What to include on your business card:

- The university's name (Florida State University)
- Your full name
- Your major and/or minor (e.g., Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management)
- Contact information, including a professional phone number and email

Additional, optional information may include:

Your GPA, student organization memberships, home address, and/or a personal/professional website (such as LinkedIn)

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

NAME
MAJOR
850-000-0000
EMAIL@FSU.EDU
0000 STREET
CITY, STATE ZIP



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Name
Major

Address
City, State ZIP

email@fsu.edu
850-000-0000

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY



NAME
Major
850-000-0000
email@fsu.edu
0000 Street
City, State Zip

Images courtesy of Target Copy

Locations for purchasing business cards:

- Any office supply store
- Copying and printing businesses
- www.vistaprint.com
- www.123print.com
- Target Copy

If you were to step into an elevator with the CEO/ President of an organization you were interested in working for and had 30 seconds to tell this employer enough information to make them want to hire you, what would you say? When introducing yourself to a potential employer, it is helpful to be able to quickly describe your career goals, core strengths, and relevant experiences. This personal commercial is often called an “elevator speech.” In creating your elevator speech, it is best to connect your personal experiences and qualifications with the organization and describe why you are a good “fit.” Use the exercise below to help you get started.



Creating an Elevator Speech Exercise

Your elevator speech may include:

- Your name and present status/situation (year in school, current position, major, etc.)
- Brief overview of your unique experiences, skills, and qualifications
- A connection between what you can offer and what you know about them
- Pertinent questions that the employer can respond to

Answer the questions below to help you begin constructing your elevator speech.

1. **Who am I?** Include your full name, current status as an FSU student, and major/minor.
2. **What do I have to offer?** Include unique experiences here — previous work experience, student organization involvement, volunteer work, internships, etc.
3. **Why am I interested in your organization (or this industry)?** Use this as an opportunity to demonstrate that you have researched the organization.
4. **What do I have to offer and how am I a good fit with your organization?** Use this as a summary statement.
5. **Questions I have for the employer.** It is best to end with an open-ended question — see page 3 for examples.

TIP: Practice delivering your elevator speech before attending a career fair. The more you practice, the more comfortable you will feel. Meet with a career advisor at The Career Center to receive feedback on your elevator speech.

Summary

The purpose of attending a career fair is to enhance your job search network. Simply attending a career fair is not enough; you must strategically navigate the fair and do your research on employers before attending the event. It is important to adequately prepare for this event, which includes preparation before, during, and after a career fair. Being intentional when attending career fairs can be a great way to explore your future options, learn about employers and opportunities of interest, and make meaningful connections with important industry professionals.

Additional Resources

Select Career Center Library Resources

100 Conversations for Career Success: Learn to Tweet, Cold Call, and Network Your Way to Your Dream Job.....VD L3
Backpack to Briefcase: Steps to a Successful Career....IA A7
Guerrilla Networking: A Proven Battle Plan to Attract the Very People You Want to Meet.....VD L48

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