



How to Work a Career Fair

Emily Breckenridge, Career Development Specialist

With the Fall Career Fair quickly approaching, it is time to make sure you're ready. This year's Fall Career Fair will be 12:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 27 at Hermann Union Building (HUB). With more than 125 companies in attendance, it is sure to be a great opportunity for IIT students. Whether you are currently seeking employment or not, you should always attend career fairs, because it is a chance for you to meet, and network with prospective employers and professionals in your field. But how can you prepare at the last minute?

BEFORE THE FAIR: Start by checking out the Career Management Center's website to see what companies are attending: www.cmc.iit.edu. From this list, make your own list of which companies you want to meet with while you're there. Next, visit each company's website, and take notes. Find out as much as you can about the company, especially:

- What their mission/purpose is;
- What their products are;
- Who their clients are;
- What the company culture is like;
- Who their competitors are, and how they compare to other companies in the industry.

If you need additional information beyond what's available on the company's website, visit www.hoovers.com or www.lexisnexis.com. Next, write out a list of questions that you want to ask each employer. Questions show the employer that you have done your research, and that you are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Avoid asking questions about salary, benefits, vacation, etc.

Once you've done your research, and made your list of questions, develop a career fair strategy. How much time can you spend at the Career Fair? Which are your target companies? Make sure you have plenty of time to devote to each employer before you need to leave the fair.

Next, make sure you have your resume in tip-top shape. Your resume should focus on the employer's needs; communicate your abilities for the kind of work you want; stress contributions and accomplishments; quantify results; indicate your career direction and interests; be appealing to the eye, concise, easy to read and professional-looking; communicate that you are responsible and focused; and be completely error free. For more information on resumes, visit the TechNews archives through <http://technews.iit.edu/> for the August 28, 2007 article, *How to Write a Winning Resume*.

You'll also need a memorized elevator pitch, which includes your name; your education; the types of jobs you're interested in; your relevant experience; and your top

three qualities and how those qualities will benefit the company. For more information on elevator pitches, visit <http://technews.iit.edu/> for the September 19, 2007 article, *First Impressions: How to Deliver a Professional Elevator Pitch*.

After you've done all your homework prepare what you'll bring, and what you'll wear. Print out plenty of copies of your resume on high quality resume paper. Always bring more resumes than you think you could possibly need! If you have business cards, bring plenty of those as well. If you have a suit, wear it! Men are required to wear a tie or jacket, or both. Women are required to dress business appropriate, including the length of their skirts. Make sure your clothing is clean, and pressed. Jewelry should be kept to a minimum, and tattoos should be concealed. It is also suggested that you carry a leather portfolio or professional-looking notebook, which contains a notepad, a pen, your resumes and business cards, and the list of questions you have prepared.

AT THE FAIR: When you get to the fair, turn off your cell phone! The worst impression you can make is to have ringing interrupt a successful conversation with an employer. When you approach an employer, extend your hand for a firm handshake, and smile. Deliver your elevator pitch, and maintain eye-contact through the entire conversation. Before you end your conversation, make sure you've inquired about how you should follow-up, and ask for a business card.

AFTER THE FAIR: Follow-up according to the instructions you received from each employer. Also, make sure you send thank you letters within a few days of the fair to all of the employers you spoke to and for whom you have contact information. If you have questions regarding proper thank you letter formats, or questions regarding the Fall Career Fair, please contact the Career Management Center at (312) 567-6800.