

# Career Fairs

## *Tips for Success*

**Research Employers Before You Go.** Many students are not prepared to speak with employers at career fairs, but you can impress employers and find opportunities by doing some research about them beforehand. In advance of the fair, find the list of companies/organizations who will be attending. If necessary, at the fair, discretely look up the company on your phone before you introduce yourself so you can sound interested and informed. These conversations are a great way to learn more, make connections and find opportunities!

**Prepare for Employer/Recruiter Conversations.** Develop a 30-second “elevator pitch” (a brief, professional introduction) and know it well. It should highlight your key skills, abilities and interests and some benefits you can provide employers in your area of interest. Offer a firm handshake, introduce yourself, and remember to smile! Welcome the recruiter to UMass Amherst. Show enthusiasm and have your resume ready. Be prepared to talk about your career interests, your academic and extracurricular experiences and how they connect to the employer’s needs.

**Bring Copies of Your Resume.** There is no place to make extra copies at the fair, so bring plenty. Put them in a folder or folio to keep them neat and organized.

**Wear Appropriate Attire.** First impressions are important. Dress well. An employer is more likely to take an interest in you if you are appropriately dressed in at least business casual clothing. If the event is geared towards more business-type environments, a suit is appropriate.

**Develop a Fair Strategy.** Typically career fairs are busiest during lunch hour, so come early. Walk the fair alone or with a friend, but not in a pack. Fairs close promptly at publicized ending times to accommodate employer travel arrangements, but some recruiters will leave early if they already have enough good candidates for their positions.

**Don’t Start With Your First Employer Choice** (unless you are very practiced at career fairs). If your schedule allows, you may find it easiest to start with the employers in which you're less interested. This will help you practice your introduction and ease any nervousness you may be feeling. Eavesdrop on other conversations if you can do so discretely. You will then be more confident when you speak with your targeted employers. Balance this with the reality that you may have little time to spend at the fair, and may need to wait in line to speak with recruiters.

**Don’t Load Yourself Down With Giveaways.** If you want to be taken seriously, go back later, after all of your important contacts have been made, and then ask for one of those flashing pens or cool T-shirts you absolutely cannot live without.

**Take Notes and Follow Up.** As your conversation winds down, inquire about potential opportunities, the application process, and perhaps other people you could reach out to at the company/organization. The representative at the fair may not be able to answer all of your questions and may be able to suggest additional contacts. Note any relevant upcoming employer information sessions, on-campus interviews, and projected hiring deadlines. Ask for a business card, and within 24 hours send a short, professional thank-you email.

**Remember!** Eye contact, a firm handshake, matching your skills to the employer’s needs and lots of enthusiasm are the four key ingredients to a successful career fair!

# How to Ace a Career Fair

## A Recruiter's Point of View

As someone who used to hire students from career fairs, I have some pointers for you on how to interact with recruiters there.

When developing your approach with campus recruiters, put yourself in their shoes. They meet a lot of students in one day, and with so much traffic, the more **charismatic** students stand out more, even from those who may be more qualified.

For example, nine times out of ten, the student being interviewed is professional, eager to please, and will probably do fine in the role. As a recruiter, though, I don't want "fine"—I want "great," someone I would hire on the spot. **Here is how to become one of the greats:**

**1. Have a game plan:** Don't even think about going to a career fair without knowing who's going to be there and with whom you want to speak. I talked to so many students who just stumbled on our booth, and they asked dumb basic questions that are answered on the home page of our website – a waste of my time. Even if you do happen to come across a company that you didn't intend to approach but looks promising, take a few minutes to **sneak out and look them up on your phone**. You want to make every recruiter feel like they are your top choice.

**2. Have a clue:** You must do your research. These days, companies have put themselves out there so much on the web and through social media there's no excuse for not knowing basic information such as core services and key players. Also, if you can find out in advance who is doing the on-campus interviews for one of your top picks, don't be afraid to contact them ahead of time to introduce yourself.

**3. Understand how you're being evaluated:** To make the recruiting process more objective, most employers have recruiters fill out a simple ratings sheet for each interviewee. These sheets are usually standard and cover the following:

- **Personal appearance:** If you dress like you're serious, people will treat you like you're serious. I once had a student give me a résumé that was very impressive—but he was in a sweatshirt. If he didn't make an effort, why should I?
- **Professionalism:** Have your 'elevator pitch' down, because there's a good chance you'll be asked some form of the question, "Tell me about yourself." Your response should be brief, focused and include some general background information, demonstrated leadership, and what you will bring to my organization.
  - **Example:** "I'm a junior History major with a minor in IT and a certificate in Arts Management. I know that non-profit management today is about much more than helping others. I'm involved locally in community service, and as co-chair of a community outreach committee I've organized projects for the United Way and Habitat for Humanity. I've researched your organization and know that you are looking for interns. I want to bring my skills and experience to help with some pressing social issues you work on. On your website you highlight some changing federal policies. How will the candidates you are looking for today help address these concerns?"

***The best way to perfect your elevator pitch is to practice. You should be able to recite this in your sleep.***

- **Confidence:** We know you're nervous, but one of the fastest ways to turn off a recruiter is to appear overly nervous. Naturally you will be anxious. The trick is to appear as if you're not. Pro tip: look people in the eye when you speak, and be secure in your delivery (of that information you practiced, even in your sleep).
- **Leadership:** Every recruiter scorecard has some ranking for leadership potential. Since you may not have any real career experience yet, this will be evaluated by how you spend time on campus. Have you assumed leadership roles within a student organization? Volunteer experience? What interests or passions do you have outside of class that could demonstrate leadership ability? Employers know that such skills readily translate into the office environment.
- **Etiquette:** Finally, candidates who ascend to the top of the "must have" list understand the basics of etiquette. It's about a firm handshake, addressing recruiters as "Mr." or "Ms.," and following up with a post-meeting thank you note or E-mail. These days, success is heavily reliant on interpersonal skills, meaning that great manners are more than just a courtesy. They are a highly-valued skill set.