



CAREER FAIR SUCCESS

Our campus hosts a number of career fairs each year. These are a great way for you to

- make contact with multiple employers at one time,
- learn about organizations and opportunities in your field, and
- hopefully be invited for an in-person interview.

If you think of the 2-3 minute exchange with an employer at a career fair as a mini job interview, you can prepare for it accordingly.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A CAREER FAIR

What is a career fair?

Employers set up tables with information about their companies so recruiting staff can talk to jobseekers. There are career fairs held at professional conferences, in large metropolitan areas, and on college campuses.

When are the career fairs on campus?

There are two campus-wide career fairs each year, one in September and one in February. These are open to all majors. Additionally, the Clark School hosts a number of discipline-specific career fairs throughout the year. You may see the dates and locations on our website.

Which employers come to career fairs?

Employers from a variety of industries, government agencies and contractors come to campus to seek University of Maryland’s high-achieving students. For the campus-wide career fairs, you will be able to see which employers have registered on the event webpage. For engineering-specific fairs, our office will send a list of expected employers about a week before the event. Note that there are often last minute changes.

I’m just a first year student. Should I go to a career fair?

Yes! You can learn about companies that hire students with your major and start building a rapport with recruiters. Some companies recruit in September for summer internships, so it’s worth a try.

Will I get an internship or job offer at the fair?

You might get a chance to interview for a position, if the company is hiring at the time. Attending career fairs is one way to show your interest in particular companies, but it is not the only way to get a job.

Do I have to dress up for the career fair?

For most career fairs, you are expected to demonstrate your professionalism by wearing business professional attire.

How can Engineering Career Services help me prepare?

We offer interactive Career Fair Preparation workshops before the major career fairs on campus. Check our website for upcoming dates and times.

Read on for more tips to help you prepare for the fair!

WHAT TO DO BEFORE A CAREER FAIR

Write a Resume

Prepare a well-written, one-page resume and make multiple copies (Avoid the heavy weight paper). See our *Resume Writing* handout for more specific guidelines.

Have your resume reviewed at Engineering Career Services at least two days before the fair.

When you speak to recruiters at the fair, expect to be asked to expand on the items you have included on your resume.

Research Employers

Review the list of employers planning to attend the fair, so you can look up specific information about those organizations. Check out the company web pages, Handshake listings, and the employer files at Engineering Career Services or the University Career Center. Research information such as:

- products/services
- locations
- customers/clients
- job postings for open positions
- recent headlines in the news
- company structure & history (About Us)

Have a "game plan" - make a list of employers to visit in order of importance to you. You may not be able to see them all, and one or more employers may unexpectedly not be able to attend the fair.

Prepare What You Will Wear

First impressions are important. Conservative, professional business attire is best. Avoid anything that will distract an employer from focusing on your qualifications, such as bright ties, strong cologne/perfume, or excessive jewelry.

You can't go wrong with a suit with comfortable dress shoes. If you don't own a suit, consider wearing dress pants or skirt and a long sleeve shirt or blouse, with a blazer or sport jacket and tie.

Make sure that the suit fits properly, is clean and pressed. Skirts should be no shorter than 2" above the knee (check it when you're sitting down!)

Hair and nails should appear neat and clean. Keep accessories simpler. You want to avoid strong smells (employers may be averse to cologne or cigarette smoke). Be sure to use soap, toothpaste, and deodorant.

Need to go shopping? There are a number of stores around campus where you can purchase professional clothing within a reasonable budget. Check out our *Professional Clothing on a Budget* Handout for recommendations.

What to Bring to the Fair

- Your student ID card
- Resumes (many copies)
- Folder or padfolio
- Pen/Paper
- Breath mints
- Emergency toiletry kit (safety pin, comb, nail file, lint roller, etc.)
- A bag to collect company information
- A handkerchief (for sweaty palms)
- A positive attitude

WHAT TO DO BEFORE A CAREER FAIR

Prepare Your Elevator Pitch

Prepare a 30-60 second introduction to use when you approach recruiters. This should include:

- Your name, major, and expected date of graduation
- Career interests
- Brief description of your work experience and/or activities
- An expression of interest in the organization and their opportunities (try to customize for each different company)

Be prepared to continue your commercial by answering the recruiter's questions. Example: "What type of job are you seeking?" Your answer should be more specific than "Anything" or "It doesn't matter; or I'm flexible." Also, plan to tailor your introduction to each employer you approach, taking note of how your background and future goals fit each one.

Sample Elevator Pitches

Sample 1: (General)

Hello, I am Jenna and I am a first-year Computer Engineering student.

In my courses, I've had the chance to use C++ and Python to complete projects such as....

One of the things that most interests me is learning about the kinds of projects typically assigned to interns.

If you could hire someone to assist you in your work, what criteria would you use to determine fit?

Sample 2: (Customized)

Hello, I'm David and I'm a Mechanical Engineering student with a minor in Spanish.

I'm interested in design and manufacturing. During my time at UMD, I've had the chance to complete an over-terrain vehicle course for my intro to engineering design class and participate in UMD Terps Racing where I collaborated in designing an off-road vehicle. I noticed that Volvo hires interns to and I wondered if I could get more information.

Can I use AI to Prepare for the Career Fair?

While you can use AI, we ask that you exercise caution when doing so. This will ensure that everything comes from your genuine professional voice and sounds authentic.

AI Do's:

- Conduct research on organizations attending the fair that you are especially interested in. Much like when preparing for an interview, find out more information about the company, what their mission is, any projects they are working on, and anything about the organization you find interesting.
- Use AI to brainstorm questions you could ask the company or that the company could ask you.

Sample Prompt: "If I am talking to an engineering recruiter at a career fair, what are some good questions to ask them about their organization?"

AI Don'ts:

- Don't use AI to write your elevator pitch. This limits sincerity and often does not match your natural voice. Try to tailor your pitch and questions to multiple employers to show genuine interest in their company.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A CAREER FAIR

When you meet an employer, smile and offer a firm handshake as you introduce yourself. Offer your resume to the recruiter rather than waiting to be asked for it. (If you are given a name tag to wear, place this strategically on your RIGHT side so as to be in line with your RIGHT hand.) Demonstrate confidence and interest.

Answering Questions

Listen carefully to recruiters' questions before responding.

Practice responses to frequently asked questions such as the examples listed below.

- Tell me about yourself.
- In what type of position are you most interested?
- What interests you about this field? Why did you choose your major?
- Why do you think you might like to work for our organization? What do you know about us?
- What are your career goals?
- What courses did you like best? Least? Why?
- What is your overall GPA? Do your grades accurately reflect your ability?
- Describe your computer skills/experience.
- What background and experience will you bring to our organization?
- Why do you think you are a good candidate to work for us?

Asking Questions

At career fairs, focus more on "big picture" questions. Recruiters are often representing the company as a whole and may not know specifics. Avoid questions like, "To whom would I report?" or "Describe a typical day on the job." Save questions like this for when you are interviewing for a specific job.

Ask questions that demonstrate you have thought about your career goals and researched the organization.

Examples: "I am interested in the area of telecommunications and noticed on your web page that you have internship opportunities in your telecommunications department. Can you tell me more about the job duties of a co-op?" or "What skills are most important for your design position?" (See below for more examples.)

- What qualifications do you look for in people you hire for these positions/your organization?
- What skills are most important for the engineering co-op position available in your department?
- What type of projects do interns typically work on in your organization?
- What particular computer equipment and software do you use?
- What is the on-boarding process (training) like for new interns or entry level employees?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- What do you like most about working at _____? What are some of the challenges?
- What is the typical trajectory of someone hired as an intern/co-op/entry level _____?
- Can you describe the hiring process at your company?
- What are your hiring plans for the coming year?
- What additional experiences would you suggest I get between now and the time I graduate?

Ending the Conversation

- Ask for a business card or contact information. At the very least, try to get the first and last name of the company representative you met.
- Inquire about the best method for following up with an organization.
- Thank the recruiter for their time and indicate an interest in communicating again.
- Make notes as you leave about the information you gathered, especially the follow-up plans. Do this before you approach another employer table.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A CAREER FAIR, CONT'D.

Additional Tips for Career Fair Success

Arrive early in the day. Be there when recruiters are fresh, alert and attentive. Be patient and anticipate crowds and lines. Try visiting the tables with fewer crowds first.

Act and speak professionally. Be sure to speak loudly and slowly enough to be easily heard and understood.

From your first semester at UMD, you can build relationships with recruiters at local career fairs... the same ones tend to come back year after year. Don't wait until your senior year to show up!

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE, RESPECTFUL FOLLOW-UP

After the Fair

It is important to understand that your work is not done once you've finished speaking with a recruiter – it has just begun. An effective way to stand out is to write a thank-you email within 24 hours of your meeting the recruiter.

Thank You Notes

When writing the note (email), refer to the date and location of the fair or event, and mention any unique or highly specific points discussed so the recruiter or new contact will remember you. Any important information discussed should be restated and emphasized in your letter. Include any information you neglected to mention.

There should be no errors (misspellings or typos). Proofread your letter carefully, and have someone else review it too. Attach a .pdf copy of your resume.

Maintaining the Contact

Subject: University of Maryland Career Fair, September 23, 2021

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

Thank the employer for taking the time to meet with you at the fair. Include the name and location of the event and the date.

Mention something specific you discussed at the Career Fair (for example, an internship program you discussed or a new company project the recruiter mentioned that interested you). Confirm your interest in the company and reiterate how your skills and qualifications match what the company is seeking.

State that you've enclosed your resume. Give your phone number and mention that you look forward to hearing from the employer and learning more about possible opportunities (or a specific opportunity you discussed) with the company. Thank the recruiter for their time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Your name

There are many ways you can keep in touch with networking contacts that you make. For instance, you can:

- Request to connect on LinkedIn.
- Send a short note about how the discussion helped you in a given situation.
- Invite your contact to speak or participate in a campus event.
- Notify a contact of the results of a referral (whether you got the job or not).
- Ask for additional specific advice/coaching.
- Seek out your contacts at professional meetings or conferences.