

HOW TO MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME AT THE CAREER FAIR AND OTHER NETWORKING EVENTS

First, let's consider the purpose of a career fair and other networking events. Many think the purpose of a career fair is to get a job or internship or graduate school offer. No. Actually, the purpose of a career fair is to make a great first impression with an organization you might want to be a part of. This will hopefully land you an interview. The [interview](#) is what gets you the position.

Sometimes, the representatives who you will chat with at a career fair will be making the final hiring/acceptance decisions and sometimes they will only decide which of the career fair attendants will move onto the next step in *their* process. This part is important: recognize that each organization's process can be different; and the more you can know about their process, the more skilled you can be at navigating it.

Let's face it: being able to speak to a recruiter face-to-face is much more effective than just applying online. But many people make the mistake of attending the career fair like it's a trip to the mall – which is the incorrect approach if you're looking to stand out in a positive way and ultimately get that job or internship. What is the

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*absolute** best way to approach a career fair or similar in-person recruitment event? Follow the steps below to rise to the top of the candidate pool at these types of events. See the end of this document for a condensed chart highlighting how to be amazingly successful at the career fair!

1

- ☐ **RESUME AND COVER LETTER** *Ideally, start six or more weeks before the event (because it takes time to get your draft looked at by multiple reviewers).*

Is your resume good or excellent? It matters! A “good enough” looking resume is often not good enough to do what it’s supposed to do: get you an interview. See this guide (<http://nau.edu/Career/Forms/21---page-Career-Guide-Spread-including-Cover-Page/>) for help with writing an excellent resume and cover letter (see pages 6-13) or check our [How to Write An Excellent Video](#) (Cover Letter video coming soon!). There will be walk-in hours and resume review tables in the weeks leading up to the fair. See the NAU career calendar and keep an eye on your NAU email for details (<http://nau.edu/Career/Career-Events/>).

Should you prepare a cover letter? Always! If you want to go the extra mile to show your interest, prepare a cover letter. The most effective approach to take here is to create a customized cover letter for each organization you plan to apply to.

2

- ☐ **PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE** *Start 1-3 weeks before the event. Dress professionally and be well groomed. Watch these videos to see what we mean by ‘dress professionally’ ([masculine/feminine](#)). Why? This*

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subconsciously signifies several things to a potential employer: that you value the opportunity to apply to their organization; you took the time to prepare for this event; you know how to dress professionally if you needed to for their company; and, depending on if you did it right, that you have the ability to pay attention to detail.

You may know exactly how to dress professionally and even have an outfit ready to go, hanging in the closet. If not, you're going to want to start this process at least 10 days before the event. Why? For one, it might take a few days to locate an outfit that you feel comfortable in. Secondly, you will want to wear the outfit ahead of time to get used to its feel - and to be able to choose something else if it's just plain uncomfortable. **Hair:** If a haircut is needed to spruce up your look, you'll want to get that 5-7 days before the event. This will give it enough time to grow to the point that you don't look like you rushed over to the event straight from the barbershop or hair stylist; yet it will still look fabulous! While we're on this topic, in most cases it is good to consider that the absolute safest bet at the career fair is to remove facial hair. That giant fluffy beard or wacky creative mustache looks great – but not necessarily for meeting strangers who are evaluating you more than you may think on how you look. If a clean-shaven face is not possible, be sure the facial hair is trimmed and neat looking. There can be some industry-specific exceptions to the clean-shaven rule – like some forestry jobs or start up companies – so know the culture of the environment you are interested in to make the right decisions for how you groom yourself for these types of events!

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Let's say you have a professional outfit, but you haven't worn it in a while... Try it on at least a week in advance! That way, if it doesn't fit nicely anymore or you realize it still has that grease stain on it that won't ever come out, or that it's of a style/color that would no longer be considered professional, you can make arrangements to buy a new one. To save some cash, consider visiting Goodwill, Savers, or another thrift store. They often have professional clothing for about 10% of what it would cost brand new (heads-up: taking this approach could take several weeks of planning ahead and several trips to check inventory since they are not guaranteed to have what you need in your size). Although this approach takes more advance planning, it is so much less expensive than buying brand new even if it takes some cash to get it dry cleaned!

In some cases, unique or specialized attire would be the correct choice for the fair. If you aren't sure, get to know the culture of the career path/industry you are applying to. These two actions will help you make the best decision about if your choices could be an exception to this recommendation.

3

☐ **ARRANGE YOUR SCHEDULE** *Start more than two weeks before the event.*

Make the time to do it right. As soon as you know when the fair will take place, figure out if you have classes or other things that could conflict on your calendar – like if you're scheduled to work at that time. Career fairs often last several hours, but might only take an hour or two to do it right. The amount of time you need to attend the fair will depend on the logistics of getting there and back and how many employers/graduate schools you decide you'll

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want to speak with. See below for how to determine the number of entities you will approach. If you absolutely must rearrange your schedule and have a class, check your syllabus/attendance policy. Some classes have a built-in allowance to miss one class day. If there is no such policy built in to your class, politely ask your professor if you could plan ahead to make up the class. If you're on the schedule to work a shift at your current job; follow company policy to request the time off. You might be able to swap shifts with a co-worker. If you plan enough in advance (ie before the work schedule is even made), let your employer know that you will be unavailable during the time that the career fair is going on. Suggesting that you plan to miss an academic class or shift at work may be surprising, but this type of event is *that* important. Opportunities to meet with potential employers face-to-face are powerful enough and rare enough that you should make every reasonable attempt to participate.

4

☐ **CREATE A LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS YOU WILL SPEAK WITH**

Start two weeks before the event. Research the organizations that will be there and form a list of which ones you will approach. Private companies, government agencies, non-profit agencies, graduate schools... these are all possible participants in these events. As you look through the list of registered entities, keep an open mind about which you might consider pursuing. We recommend you have a conversation with as many entities as possible that are looking for someone with your skills. When you look at the list of organizations that will be attending, be sure to consider what they're looking for. Some will only be looking for students of a specific major. Some

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will be open to international students, some will not be able to hire international students. These are important factors to consider when deciding who you will spend time visiting on the day of the fair.

5

- ☐ **YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH** *Start ten days before the event.* Prepare and practice your '[Elevator Pitch](#)'. This is what you will say to each recruiter as you hand them your resume and cover letter. If the event is more informal, know [how to network](#).

6

- ☐ **DO SOME RECON, FIGURE OUT THE LOGISTICS** *One week before the event.* If you are not already completely familiar with it, visit the venue ahead of time. There is nothing more nerve-wracking at one of these events than to not really knowing where it is – especially if you know you will have a limited time while there. So, go check it out. Think about what the venue will be like at the time of day and on the day of the week that the event will be held. Will there be traffic? Will it be very hot/very cold? Where will the closest/most convenient parking be? If you are riding the bus, will the bus schedule be different that day? Working out these details ahead of time will help you immensely on the day of the event. You'll be able to focus on your goal of getting that job/internship!

7

- ☐ **MINIMIZE STRESS** *Especially in the week leading up to the event.* Do everything you can to minimize stress. Get good nights' sleeps. Eat healthy, regular meals. Exercise regularly. Try to get ahead on your homework and

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other things that are due this week. The less stressors you have on your mind during the event, the more you'll be able to focus on your goal.

8

- ☐ **PRINT!** *Start three days before the event.* Don't think that "the printer was not working" will be an acceptable thing to say to a recruiter! Print copies of your resumes and cover letters – on off-white resume paper (this is an actual product that exists and it can be purchased online or in office supply stores). Also print a few general resumes and cover letters in case there are more organizations in attendance than when you checked the list (organizations can often sign up only one or two days before the actual event!). Carry these resumes in a folder so they don't end up wrinkled or otherwise damaged.

9

- ☐ **CHECK YOUR DETAILS** *On the day of the event.* As a part of your professional dress, make sure the following details are in check... 1. Make sure your outfit is wrinkle and lint-free. 2. No excessive odors. Bad breath, too much body odor, or too much fragrance will all make less than favorable impressions at the fair. 3. Bring your student ID for a smooth check in.

10

- ☐ **A FINAL NOTE*** *The absolute best way to prepare for these events means that our suggested steps are our highest form of recommendation. Some people are able to advance in hiring/acceptance processes without doing every single step that we recommend. It is because of this that we ultimately recommend you attend the fair no matter how many of these steps you were*

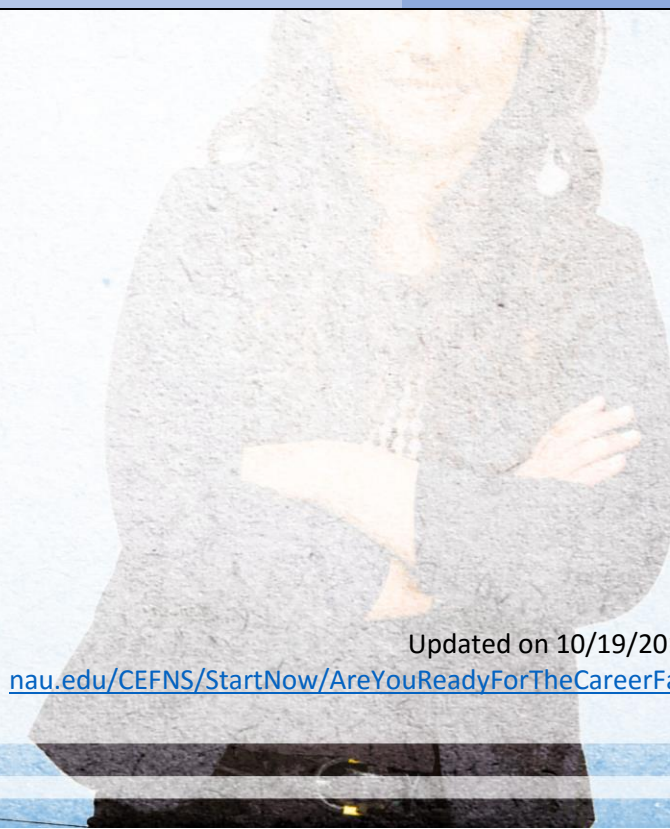
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able to complete. We also recommend you attend even if you're not looking for an opportunity at this time. At the very least, seeing the career fair scene will make you more prepared for events like this in the future.

	How To Be Terrible	How To Be Mediocre	How To Be Amazing
When You Get There...	You show up later than desired, sweating excessively because it was harder to find the location than you expected. You no longer have enough time to approach each organization that you wanted to.	Ask your friends where the event is. They describe it. You <i>think</i> you know where to go...	Visit the venue ahead of time. You know exactly where the event will take place and what the parking and traffic will be like.

Resume	Did I need to bring a resume?	You have copies of general resumes printed on computer paper.	You have a customized resume and cover letter for each organization you want to speak with – addressed to the actual recruiters who are in attendance at the event.
How You're Dressed	Sweatpants, a ripped t-shirt with a hoodie tied around your waist and flip-flops. Skateboard in hand and a backpack on your back.	Business casual – this is between mediocre and amazing. We recommend you dress professionally, but in some cases, business casual would be okay.	Professionally (masculine/feminine) – and you checked your backpack in at the 'coat check' or left it in the car.



When You Finally
Get To Talk With
The Recruiters
Representing An
Organization

You say something like,
“...so, what do you guys
do?”.

You talk about how much
you really need an
internship/job and heard
they were hiring... You keep
talking to them and ignore
their non-verbal queues that
they’re ready to talk with the
next person in line.

You deliver your elevator
pitch while handing over
your resume.

The recruiter invites you to
have an interview with their
organization.

