Career Fair

Career fairs are a great way to connect with potential employers. The School of Informatics and Computing hosts two career fairs each academic year – one during the fall semester and one during the spring semester. By attending the career fair, you can learn more about specific companies and organizations, investigate open positions and career possibilities, and discover the skills and qualifications you need to develop to become a more competitive candidate in the future.

What to Expect:

• Most career fairs are held in one large room with rows of tables that are staffed by representatives from participating organizations and decorated with table displays and company swag.

• Student registration tables are usually located at the entrance to the career fair. You will be asked to wear a name badge to identify yourself, and there is typically a coat room for you to stow your belongings.

• Lists of attending organizations and maps identifying their locations may also be available.

• Be prepared to wait in line at check-in. By attending earlier in the day, you are more likely to be able to meet with your desired employer.

• Depending on the time of day, the career fair is likely to be noisy and crowded. If you lose focus easily, try to attend when classes meet or towards the end of the day when traffic has slowed.

How to Prepare:

• Research: Review the list of organizations that will be attending the fair. This information is available in SoIC Careers and on the SoIC website. Research the employers that are of interest to you by visiting their websites. Come prepared with questions to ask the representatives.

• Strategize: Prepare a strategy for working the fair. Prioritize employers with whom you would like to speak, identify the information that you would like to get from them, and specify the goals you hope to achieve by attending the fair. Don’t speak with your favorite employers first – take time to get used to navigating the fair before you talk with them.

• Resumes: Print an adequate supply of resumes on quality resume paper. Bring at least 15 copies.

• Attire: Plan to dress in professional business attire – a full suit or suit alternative. Jeans, sweatpants, leggings, tennis shoes, flip flops, and other casual attire are not appropriate and will not be allowed in.

• Practice: Practice answering some general interview questions and prepare questions that you would like to ask the employers based on your research and your current career goals.

At the Fair:

• Employers respond positively to a direct approach: make eye contact, offer a firm handshake, and tell them what you are looking for, including two or three possible interest areas.

• Prioritize your time to meet with all of the employers on your list. Be sure to give your resume to each employer, but don’t get frustrated if you are directed to apply on the company website. This is becoming standard procedure in hiring practices.

• If you are interested in interviewing with an employer, ask if they are conducting next-day interviews or will be participating in on-campus interviews during the fall.

• Know your schedule for the next day in case the employer asks you to participate in next-day interviews.

• Write down information on the back of business cards to reference in your thank you notes to employers. Don’t be shy about asking for a business card – employers will not necessarily volunteer to give them out.
After the Fair:

- Be sure to apply for open positions via SoIC Careers. If employers are holding on-campus interviews during the semester, applying through SoIC Careers is the first step in the interview process. You must remember to apply by the resume submission deadline. Some deadlines will be the day of the fair.

- Write a thank you note/email and send it the next day to the address on the employer’s card. Be sure to thank the employer for his or her time and restate your interest in and qualifications for the position.

- If the employer indicated that they would be hosting next-day interviews, make sure you have your phone with you that evening or the next day, and check your voicemail promptly. Return all calls immediately.

- Follow up! Within one week of the fair, make contact with the representatives you spoke to, unless you have already discussed an alternative arrangement, like an interview. Employers may leave the fair with hundreds of resumes, and fewer than 5% of students follow up after the fair. This simple step can give you a significant advantage.

Questions to Ask:

You will have a brief amount of time to ask the representatives questions about the position. Be sure to introduce yourself before jumping into your questions and thank them at the end of the conversation. Do not ask questions that could be easily answered by the company’s website.

Sample questions include:

- (After you describe your academic and work experience) What are typical entry-level positions for someone with my major, skills, and experience?

- What type of previous work experience do you look for in candidates?

- Do you have a formal internship program?

- What skills do you look for in candidates?

- What is the best way to apply to your organization, and how long does the hiring process usually take?

- Will you be on campus to interview?

- What qualities do you think make your company stand out from the competition?

Questions You May Be Asked:

Be sure to prepare responses to typical interview questions:

- What kind of position are you looking for?

- Why are you interested in working in the field you described?

- Why are you interested in this company?

Recruiting Outside of the Career Fair

Keep in mind that not all companies choose to recruit at campus career fairs. Throughout the semester, some companies will choose to participate in information sessions, tech talks, lobby tables, class visits, or student organization events in addition to, or instead of, attending the Career Fair. If a company you are interested in is participating in any of these on-campus sessions, you should plan to attend.

Additionally, both large and small companies are finding candidates through other means such as LinkedIn, social media, hackathons and case competitions, and virtual career fairs. If a company you are interested in is not attending the Career Fair, contact Career Services! We can help you develop a plan for reaching out to that company and learn more about their job and internship opportunities!