

Preparing for a Career Fair

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Objectives

1. Enhance your understanding of a career fair and its purpose.
2. Become aware of how to research employers and best prepare to attend one of these events.
3. Successfully create and deliver an “elevator speech.”
4. Learn how to effectively navigate a career fair.
5. Enhance your networking skills.
6. Recognize the importance of following up with employers.

Florida State University Career Center’s Career Fairs

Each year, the Florida State University Career Center hosts a variety of career fair events. Some examples of these include:

- *Seminole Futures Career Fair (All Majors):* fall and spring semesters
- *Part-Time Job Fair (All Majors):* fall and spring semesters
- *Engineering Day:* fall and spring semesters
- *Graduate and Professional School Fair:* fall semester

What are the benefits of attending a career fair?

- Opportunity to interact one-on-one with employers of interest
- Practice and enhance networking skills
- Gain awareness of organizations and positions they are hiring for
- Establish professional relationships and gather contact information from employers
- Discover a myriad of internship and job opportunities
- Possibly receive an invitation for an on-campus interview

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What to Expect From a Career Fair

What is a career fair?

A career fair is an event that gives students and employers a chance to meet one another, establish professional relationships, and discuss potential job and/or internship opportunities.

Many employers from a variety of industries attend, and there are both general and specialized career fair events. For example, the Seminole Futures Career Fair, held every fall and spring semester, is a general career fair in which employers are seeking to hire students from a variety of different majors. On the other hand, the Education & Library Career Fair, while open to any major, is a specialized event in which employers attending are seeking students majoring in Education, Library and Information Studies, or other related majors.

What is most unique about a career fair is that employers choose to attend these events in order to meet and recruit excellent candidates. In many cases, recruiters are actual Florida State graduates and are excited to come back to FSU and recruit students from their alma mater.



Who can attend a career fair?

There is a common misconception that only juniors and seniors should attend a career fair. However, all classifications (including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) can benefit from attending a career fair.

By attending a career fair, freshmen can explore opportunities in their field of interest, as well as ask questions about internships and/or job opportunities. Sophomores and juniors can utilize a career fair for these same reasons. Seniors commonly attend career fairs seeking full-time job positions and can actively network with recruiters during these events.

On another note, all majors can attend any career fair. Employers are typically interested in meeting students from a variety of different academic backgrounds. In addition, both undergraduate and graduate students are likely to benefit from attending these events. Finally, alumni and community members are also welcome to attend all FSU career fairs.

What can I expect from attending a career fair?

A common misconception of attending a career fair event is that students/community members often believe that they should leave the event with an internship and/or job opportunity in hand. Although this may happen, it is very rare. The purpose of a career fair is to enhance your job search network and learn more about organizations hiring FSU students.

What other opportunity will you have for employers to come straight to you? Use this opportunity to present yourself favorably, gather useful information, and establish new contacts! Your small investment of time and effort might very well turn into an opportunity you would not have had otherwise.

How to Work a Career Fair

Before a career fair

1. Create a strong résumé.
 - Visit The Career Center to have your résumé reviewed, and be sure to have multiple copies (minimum of 20) printed on professional résumé paper before the career fair.
 - Decide if you need more than one version of your résumé, depending on your job target(s).
2. Develop and practice an elevator speech.
 - Developing an elevator speech is likely one of the most important components in preparing for a career fair.
 - Prepare an elevator speech before the day's event, but also practice it with a career advisor at FSU's Career Center.
 - Identify resources on page 5.
3. Research employers and objectives for what you plan to accomplish during the career fair.
 - Identify which employers you want to talk to BEFORE the event by researching the organizations attending.
 - Research and follow up with attendees. The FSU Career Center keeps an updated list of attendees on its website (career.fsu.edu/fairs).
 - TIP: If you have properly prepared for the event, you will have more time to focus on representatives from organizations of interest.
3. Prepare to dress for success at the event.
 - View the "Dressing to Impress" guide located at career.fsu.edu/advising/guides.cfm.
 - Keep in mind that 55% of any interaction is visual, meaning it is not always what you say but how you look when you say it.
 - Wear a two-piece suit, if possible. Usually a dark color is preferred.
 - Use simple accessories and closed-toed shoes for females.
 - Choose a conservative tie.
 - Avoid excess cologne and/or perfume.
5. Attend a career fair preparation workshop.
 - Check the FSU Career Center website for upcoming workshop events at <http://www.career.fsu.edu/calendar>.
6. Consider creating a professional business card (see page 6 for examples).
 - TIP: This is optional and not required.
7. Consider purchasing a professional business portfolio to help keep your items organized (see page 7 for an example).
 - Purchase a business portfolio for under \$20.00 at any office supply store.
 - Include copies of your résumé, business cards, and employer literature that you will gather while attending the event.
 - Use the space inside your business portfolio to take notes.
8. Sign up for SeminoleLink *Plus!* services.
 - Refer to career.fsu.edu/seminolelink/ for instructions on how to obtain SeminoleLink *Plus!* services.
 - Update your profile and professional documents prior to attending the career fair, even if you already have *Plus!* services.
 - TIP: It is always best to have access to *Plus!* services prior to attending a career fair event. This way, if employers request that you follow up for on-campus interviews, then you have already begun the process!
9. Consider your online presence.
 - Update or create a LinkedIn profile.
 - Clean up your Facebook profile and put your settings on private.
 - Address all "digital dirt."

How to Work a Career Fair (cont.)

During a career fair

1. Leave your cell phone and any other items that may cause distraction (e.g., backpack, skateboard) in your car.
2. Arrive early to avoid long lines.
3. Familiarize yourself with the fair's layout and location of organizations before entering the career fair event. (A program will be provided upon arrival.)
4. Be positive and confident!
 - Sixty percent of an individual interaction involves nonverbal communication. This includes a firm handshake, eye contact, nodding your head, and most importantly - SMILING!
 - TIP: It may be helpful to visit with your "favorite" employer LAST. Use other employers on your list to practice and become more comfortable in introducing yourself.
5. Ask thoughtful questions!
 - See page 7 for sample questions to ask an employer.
6. Leave your résumé and if applicable, business card, with each representative that you speak with.
 - Oftentimes, employers at a career fair will not take a paper copy of your résumé simply because all documents have to be submitted electronically. Rather, employers may encourage you to "apply online" - do not be discouraged by this request.
7. Request a business card from the employer (or contact name if employer is not handing out business cards).
8. Take notes (in your business portfolio if necessary).
9. Be open-minded. Most employers are recruiting students from all majors. Therefore, it is important to be confident in your major and focus on the skills you have to offer an employer!

After a career fair

1. Follow up with employers! If, for example, an employer expressed interest in looking at your website, be sure to email the URL link like you said you would.
2. Write letters to employers, preferably that same day, thanking them for their time.
3. Be sure to check and sign up for on-campus interviews (with the FSU Career Center), which may be conducted with some organizations following the career fair.

DO:

- Leave your backpack (or any unnecessary items) in your car if you can.
- Bring plenty of copies of your résumé.
- Develop a strong elevator speech.
- Use strong non-verbal communication when interacting with employers (handshake).
- Ask questions.
- Know about the employer you are visiting with.
- Dress professionally.
- Follow up.

DO NOT:

- Bring a cell phone in with you to the event. Leave this in the car.
- Ask an employer "What does your organization do?" or "What positions are you hiring for?" This indicates that you have not done your homework and are not invested in them.
- Ask questions about salary and employer benefits.
- Collect free stuff when you are not offered.
- NOT ask questions!

How to Create an Elevator Speech

When introducing yourself to a potential employer, you should be able to quickly describe your career goals, core strengths, and relevant experiences. This personal commercial is often called an “elevator speech” simply because, if you were to step into an elevator with the CEO/President of an organization you were interested in working for and had 30 seconds to tell this employer enough information to make them want to hire you, what would you say?

In giving your elevator speech, it is best to connect your personal experiences and qualifications with the organization and describe why you are a good “fit.”

Your elevator speech should include the following elements

- Your name and present status/situation
- Brief overview of your unique experiences, skills, and qualifications
- A connection between what you can offer and what you know about them
- Pertinent questions that the employer can respond to

Use the lines below to begin to answer questions that will help you construct your elevator speech.

1. Who am I? (Include your full name, current status as an FSU student, major/minor)

2. What do I have to offer? (Include unique experiences here - previous work experience, student organization involvement, volunteer work, internships)

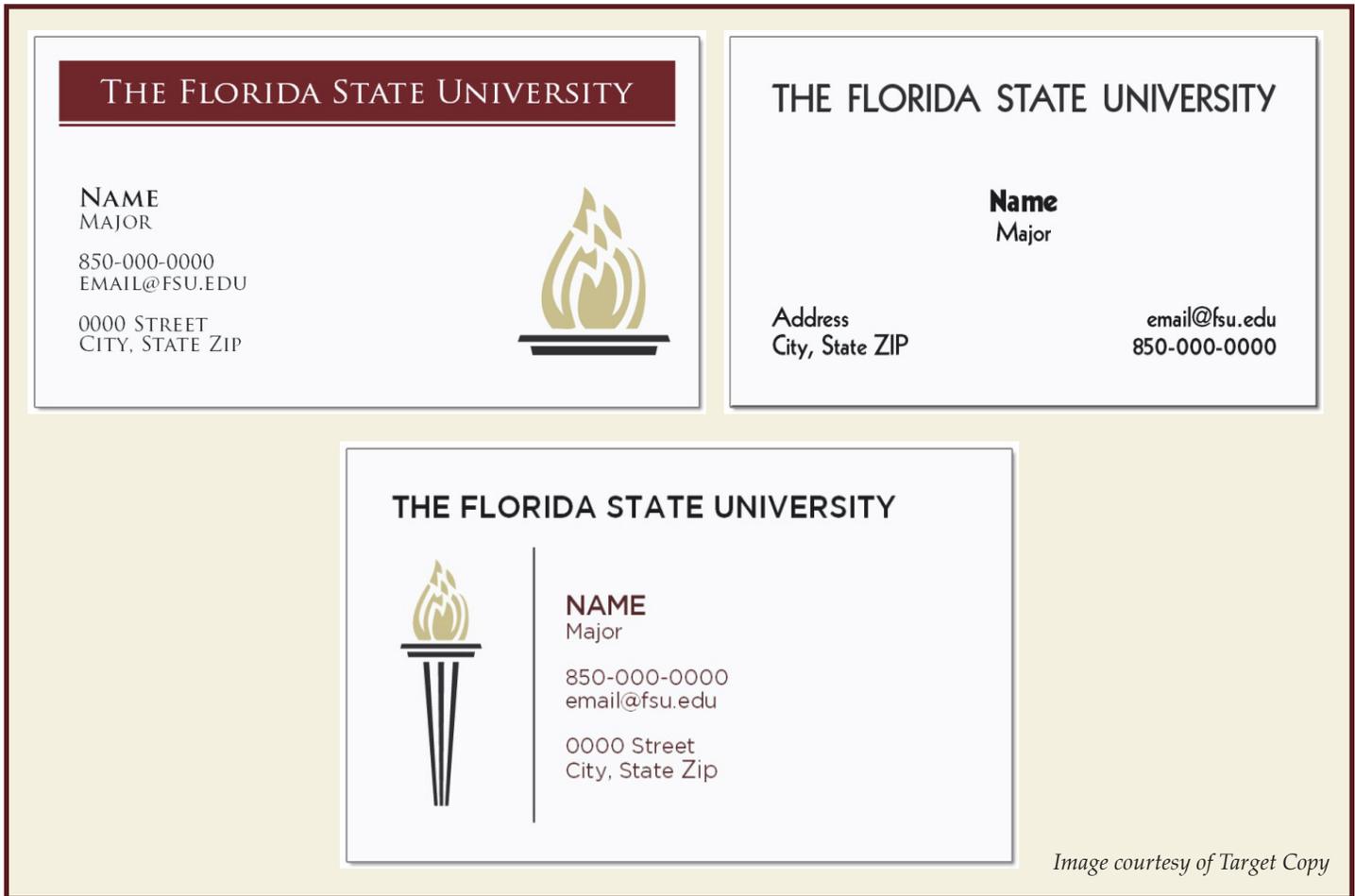
3. Why am I interested in your organization (or this industry)? (Use this opportunity to demonstrate that you have done your research)

4. What do I have to offer and how am I a good “fit” with your organization? (Use this as a summary statement)

5. Questions I have for the employer. (Best to always end with a question - see page 7 for sample questions)

- TIP: It is important that you practice delivering your elevator speech to a recruiter before attending the career fair. The more you practice, the more comfortable you will feel. Meet with a career advisor at the FSU Career Center to receive feedback on your elevator speech.

Sample business cards



It is typically best to include the following information on a professional business card

1. The university's name (Florida State University)
2. Your full name
3. Your major and/or minor (e.g., Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management)
4. Contact information, including a professional phone number and email

Suggestions on where to create/purchase business cards

1. Any office supply store
2. Copying and printing businesses
3. www.vistaprint.com
4. www.123print.com
5. Target Copy

Optional information to include on a professional business card

1. Your address
2. A personal and/or professional website (including LinkedIn)
3. Student organization involvement (e.g., Senator for Student Government Association)
4. Cumulative and/or major GPA
5. QR code

Sample portfolio



Tips for following up with an employer

Follow-up is a critical part of attending a career fair event. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Request the recruiter's business card.
 - Ask for a contact name and email if the recruiter is not handing out a business card.
 - DO NOT be discouraged if an employer is not handing out business cards. Keep in mind, recruiters travel to several universities across the United States and may prefer not to distribute their contact information to every individual. This is why it is important to ask appropriate questions about the hiring process, obtain a contact name, and be sure to follow up.
 - Follow the instructions given to you by the employer. For example, if an employer encourages you to apply online, then be sure that you submit your application online within the next 2 days. Remember, you are likely going to leave your résumé and/or business card with the employer. Therefore, they will be looking for your application online.

- TIP: The FSU Career Center collects business cards from every career fair attendee. If you forget to ask for a business card or an employer is not handing them out, then you can access this information through SeminoleLink.

2. Inquire about on-campus interviews.
3. Complete the online application process, if required.
4. Send a thank you note - preferably that same day.
 - See Guide to "Writing Effective Letters" under the Interview Appreciation Letter section, career.fsu.edu/advising/guides.cfm.

Possible questions to ask employers

- Q. What are common career paths within your organization?
- Q. What kind of training programs do you have for new hires?
- Q. What qualities and/or characteristics do successful candidates possess?
- Q. What is the organizational culture like?
- Q. What suggestions would you have for a student in their ____ year in school? How can I make myself better prepared for the world of work?
- Q. Are there courses that I should take that will help me in your industry?
- Q. How do you enjoy working for this organization?
 - TIP: It is important not to solely rely on these sample questions. Be sure to thoroughly research the organization and devise 2-3 questions of your own.

*Attending career fairs can be the perfect way to explore your future and start thinking about employers and jobs of interest. The purpose of attending a career fair is to enhance your job search network. Simply attending a career fair is not enough; you must strategically navigate the fair and do your research on employers before attending the event. It is important to adequately prepare for this event, which includes preparation before, during, and after a career fair. Remember, you have a lot to offer an employer. Best of luck in your career fair experience!



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Alternative Format Available.
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