

# CAREER FAIRS

Career fairs are great opportunities to meet company representatives and showcase your skills and experience. Employers come to WPI careers fairs because they are specifically interested in hiring WPI students and alumni for internships, co-ops, and full-time jobs.

The CDC hosts **career fairs** each year that are open to all WPI undergraduate students, graduate students, and alumni. They include the Fall Career Fair in September and the Spring Career Fair in February. We invite thousands of companies to attend, enabling you to network with key company contacts, identify potential job openings, and enhance your professional communication skills.

## How to Prepare

Before you attend the Career Fair, do some research on the companies that will be there. You can find a list within **Handshake**. When you select the career fair in Handshake you can do an advanced search to learn about majors and job types the company will be recruiting. You should make note of all companies and jobs of interest, even if they are not explicitly recruiting candidates with your major or skills. Often, company representatives who register for career fairs do not list all areas of employment and may be recruiting for a wider variety of students and majors than indicated on Handshake.

Next, learn more about the companies on your list. Research their products, services, mission statement, recent news, divisions, leadership, and employment opportunities. Resources you can use include:

- Company web page
- LinkedIn employer page
- Hoover's Company Profile database (available online through the **Gordon Library**)
- Google the company to find recent articles or press releases

You should also update your resume and have it critiqued by the CDC. Make sure your objective clearly states the type of position you want (e.g., summer internship, co-op, full-time). Anticipate questions employers might have about items on your resume and practice answering them. Finally, bring several copies of your resume to hand out at the Career Fair and carry them in a professional looking folder or portfolio.

## Attire

You should always dress professionally for the Career Fair. Ideally, you should wear a suit—we strongly encourage all students to invest in a good suit by their junior year. If you do not have a suit, men should wear dress pants and a shirt and tie, or khakis and a button-down shirt. Don't forget to wear dress shoes or brown/black shoes and dark socks. You should not wear white socks and sneakers. Women should wear a pantsuit or skirt suit, as long as the skirt is no more than an inch or two above your knee. Women may also wear dress pants or skirts with a button-down shirt or sweater. Do not wear low-cut tops, very high dress heels, or shoes that you struggle to walk in.

Personal hygiene needs to be a priority. Make sure you have had a haircut/shaved recently. It is necessary for you to shower that day and use deodorant and a small amount of cologne. You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

## Strategy at the Career Fair

You should plan to spend several hours at the Career Fair. To make the most of your time, plan ahead of time by identifying which companies you want to visit and in what order. The floor plan is typically available a few days before the event on the CDC website. When you get to the Career Fair, you may also use the floor plan in the event brochure to locate companies on your list. Remember to introduce yourself to any companies that interest you, even if you are not sure that they are hiring for your desired job. Try to distinguish yourself from other students and focus on any items that may help you stand out (e.g., high GPA, relevant course projects, or relevant work experience). If you have extra time, wander the fair to gather information from other companies—the more companies you speak to, the more potential opportunities you can uncover.

You should also be prepared for possible interviews on the spot or the following day.

## Portfolio

If you have a portfolio or sample work, make copies to bring with you, or bring a tablet. This is a great way to show designs, reports, and sample work to employers. It is also a helpful tool if you tend to be shy, as you can focus on your portfolio and talk about your work.

## Your Elevator Pitch

You should plan and practice what you are going to say to employers by developing an “elevator pitch,” a concise introductory message about your professional self. An elevator pitch defines your skill sets, experience, and career goals for the future. It should take about 30-60 seconds to deliver (the time it would take you to ride in an elevator), and should focus on the specific and unique attributes that you can bring to an organization.

## Know Yourself

Take some time for some self-reflection. Think about your key skills and experiences and what you have to offer an employer.

Consider the following categories and examples:

- **Skills**

For example:

- Technical skills – e.g., proficient with AutoCAD, MatLab, Linux, C++; experience with Gel Electrophoresis, protein extraction
- Communication skills, written or oral
- Research skills
- Analytical skills
- Leadership skills

- **Strengths** (i.e., what are you good at?)

For example:

- Motivating others
- Taking initiative
- Time management

- **Personal qualities**

For example:

- Hard worker
- Enjoy working in teams

- **Accomplishments**

For example:

- IQP, MQP, internship experience, leadership roles

- **Values/beliefs** (i.e., things that would be important to you in your work life)

For example:

- Opportunity for creativity
- Relaxed pace
- Action oriented
- Working outdoors
- Team environment

- **Career goals**

For example:

- Conduct cancer research in a laboratory setting
- Work outside in a construction project management role

- **Academic performance**

For example:

- GPA, project / lab work within your courses

- **Activities**

For example:

- Clubs, organizations, teams involved in on campus

## Know Your Audience

Research your audience (company, contact, or event) to customize your elevator pitch to the individuals within it:

- What are the perceived needs of the employer or contact in a potential candidate?
- What immediate benefits can you provide?

- What interests you about the company or industry the person represents and why?

- Align your skills and experience with the needs of your audience.

For information and tips on developing a strong elevator pitch, see the CDC's **The Elevator Pitch** Tipsheet.

## After the Career Fair

You should send a thank you note to each employer with whom you talked at the Career Fair. Make sure to get each employer's business card at the fair so you have their email address. If they do not have business cards with them, get their name and email address. If you do not get a card, you can check the Employer Card Scan database on one of the computers in the CDC lobby. We scan all employer business cards from the Career Fair into the database. Reference the CDC website or the CDC's **Thank You Note Writing** Tipsheet for more information.

If you have not been contacted by an employer within two weeks of the fair, follow-up to check on the hiring status of the job they were recruiting for at the Career Fair. You should call instead of emailing, as emails can get easily get lost in crowded inboxes.

## Remember....

The CDC is here to help you prepare for a successful experience at the Career Fair. Keep these points in mind:

- Get your resume critiqued by the CDC ahead of time.
- Research the companies attending in advance.
- Learn three interesting things about the company so you can ask intelligent questions.



- Stop in during CDC Drop-ins to practice your elevator pitch.
- Bring enough copies of your resume to the Career Fair.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Speak clearly.
- Respect personal space.
- Make personal hygiene a priority.
- Distinguish yourself – focus on the skills, experience, and academic performance that helps you stand apart from your peers.

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