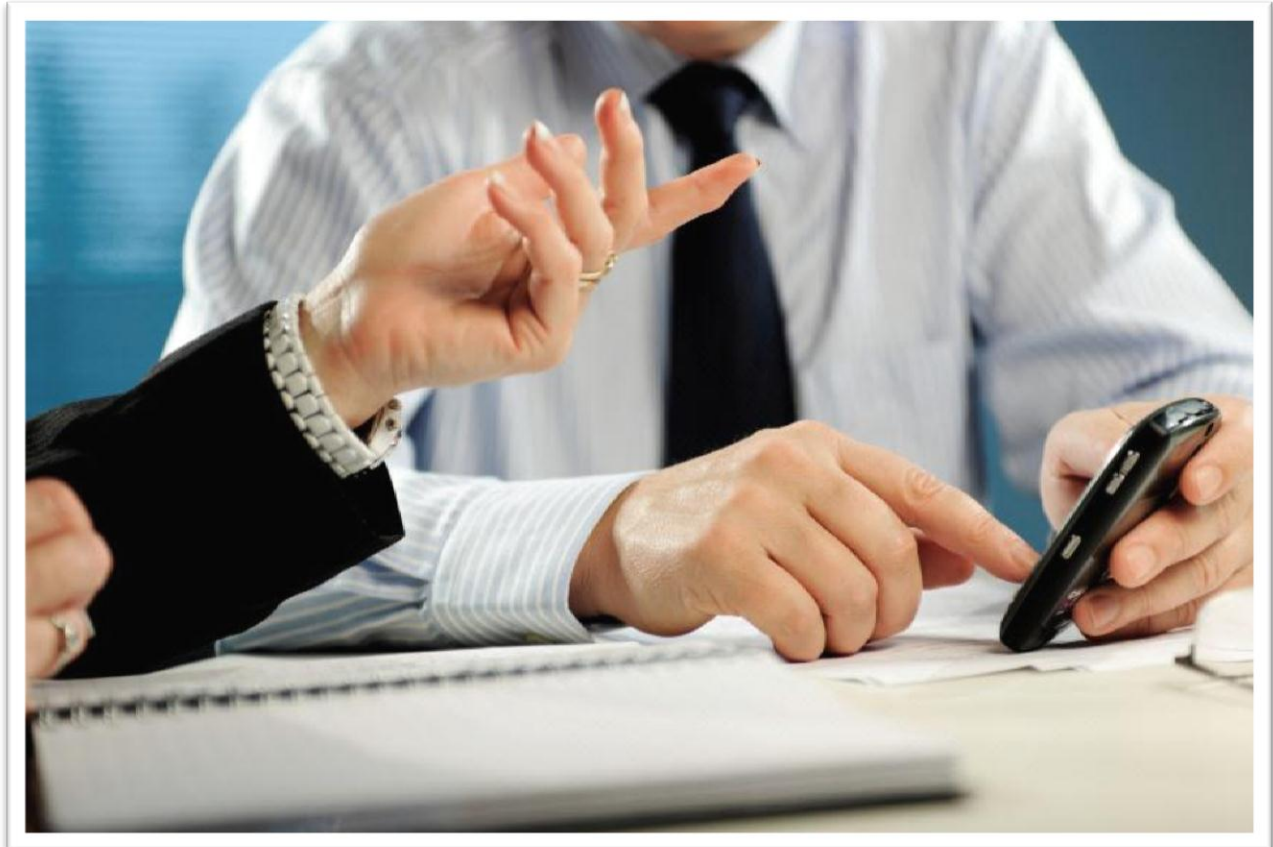


You Can Succeed at the Career Fair



University of Nebraska Kearney
Academic Advising and
Career Development
MSAB #150
308-865-8501
careers.unk.edu

What is a Career Fair?

A Career Fair is . . .

- An event where employers/recruiters and job seekers meet face-to-face;
- Usually held in a large hall or auditorium, where each business has a table or booth staffed with representatives of the company;
- A great place for students (or any job seeker) to gather information about potential employers and make contacts that can lead to a first professional job, or an internship.

How Can I Get the Most Out of a Career Fair?

Your preparation will depend on your purpose. If you are in the early stages of your college career, you may be attending the Career Fair to simply gain exposure to the venue and the atmosphere of the Fair. In this case, you will preview the employers who will be in attendance, dress in business casual, prepare your *30-second sales pitch, and plan to 'walk through' with the purpose of meeting employers and exploring future opportunities. Making a positive impression now can certainly set you up to succeed in the future!

If you are in later stages of your college career and are seriously looking for an internship or a permanent, professional position, your approach will be more formal and more targeted. Review and practice the steps outlined below to get the results you are looking for.

❖ Before the Fair

1. Gather Information about the Career Fair

Visit the Academic Advising and Career Development (AACD) office or log on to our website – careers.unk.edu – to preview the details, i.e., date, time, and place of the Fair. At that site there will also be useful information, including short videos and presentation slides that can help you prepare for the event.

Browse around the AACD website, beginning with <http://bit.ly/l8jl8p>, to access links to other helpful job search and employer information.

2. Research the Employers

The list of employers, usually with links to their companies' home pages, will be featured on the Academic & Career Services website. Decide which employers interest you, and which may be hiring for positions for which you qualify. Visit their websites to find out what the businesses do, where they are located, and why you might want to work there. Determine how your skills and experience fit with what they are looking for. Take notes, and jot down questions you might want to ask the recruiters. You will make a good impression on employers when you can speak intelligently about their companies, the opportunities they offer, and the qualifications you have that match their needs.

Employers expect job seekers to know something about their company. They are not impressed by questions such as, "What does your company do, anyway?"

3. Update Your Résumé

Your résumé should be a concise summary of your education, experience, and skills. Providing a professional résumé will give employers an accurate picture of your background and abilities, and will help improve your in-person presence, as well. After reviewing your résumé, you should have a renewed appreciation for your accomplishments and the value you can bring to employers. Several (3-4) weeks before the Fair, have staff at UNK's Academic & Career Services office critique your résumé. Allow enough time to revise and polish it.

4. Attend the Pre-Fair Networking Reception

If there is one, make plans to attend the pre-fair networking social (and RSVP accordingly). This will be an opportunity for you to meet some of the employers in a more relaxed atmosphere. Brush up on your social skills and use the **SMILE** technique to make a great impression:

S – Smile and Shake Hands

M – Make Eye Contact

I – Introduce Yourself

L – Learn and Use Names

E – Engage in Small Talk

People hire people they like, so developing confidence and an ability to talk to people in many different situations will increase your employability.

5. Develop your “30-Second Sales Pitch”

Be able to present yourself to potential employers concisely and confidently. Develop your ‘sales pitch’ in four parts:

- Provide a greeting, your name and a brief background
- State your immediate purpose or career goal
- Use your research about the company
- Explain what you can contribute

Open each conversation with a smile, a firm handshake, and your ‘sales pitch’ delivered with enthusiasm and self-assurance.

Example:

“Hi, my name is ____ and I will be graduating in ____ with a degree in _____. After graduation I’m hoping to obtain a position in _____. I’m especially interested in your company because _____. Based on my experience in _____, I believe I can bring ____ to your organization.”

**Adapt to each company and for your particular purpose.*

6. Prepare for a Mini-Interview

Many employers conduct short screening interviews with candidates at the Career Fair. To prepare, review and practice responding to standard interview questions (you can find lists online, on the ACS website (<http://bit.ly/jHQIOv>), or in our informational packets). A few common questions may include:

- a. Tell me about yourself.
- b. What are some of your strengths / weaknesses?
- c. What type of work experience do you have?
- d. How did you choose your major (or this particular field)?
- e. Why do you want to work for this company?
- f. What campus activities have you been involved in, and have you taken on any leadership roles?

The impression you make at the Fair will determine whether you will be considered for a more formal interview at a later date. To increase your confidence and professionalism, schedule a mock interview with staff in the Academic & Career Services office before the Fair.

7. Plan Your Attire

First impressions count! If you are seeking a professional position, or even an internship, wear conservative business clothes; a suit in a dark color is most recommended. Be sure your shirt/blouse is ironed and your shoes are polished. Avoid trendy clothing and definitely stay away from anything lacy or revealing. Men, wear socks that match your slacks, and women, wear neutral-colored hose with closed-toe

shoes. Minimize your accessories, and go light on (or avoid altogether) cologne or perfume. You want to be remembered for what you say, not for your jangly bracelets or your overpowering fragrance.

- ♦ **Hint:** Bring a portfolio or a professional-looking folder instead of a purse or a backpack. Have printed résumés to distribute to employers with whom you meet.
- ★ As a backup, bring a pdf version of your résumé on a flash drive. In recent years, some employers have preferred receiving the electronic version.

❖ At the Fair

1. Plan Your Strategy

Arrive early and study the map of the employers' booths. From your previous research, you will know which employers you most want to meet with. Some experts recommend starting with an employer who is not on the top of your list in order to practice your sales pitch and your interview skills. This is up to you; if you arrive full of confidence and ready to 'wow' someone, by all means, go straight for your top choices.

Avoid cruising the Fair with your friends. Interactions with employers should be personal and professional.

2. Make Your Contacts Brief, Yet Meaningful

You want to meet with multiple employers, and employers attend the Fair to meet with a wide variety of potential candidates; out of respect for both parties, make sure you manage your time carefully. Make your conversations interesting and memorable. Offer your handshake and your sales pitch, answer the recruiter's questions concisely and enthusiastically, and ask a few questions of your own to affirm your knowledge and your interest.

Questions to Ask:	Questions to Avoid:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ What qualifications will make a candidate stand out? ♦ Can you describe a typical day for someone working as a ____ at your company? ♦ What do you like most about working for your company? ♦ Can you describe the company culture and management style? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ How much vacation do employees at your company get? ♦ What's the starting salary for this position? ♦ What benefits does your company provide? ♦ Will your company pay back my student loans?

3. End With a Request

To close a conversation, thank the employer for his/her time and ask for a business card. Reiterate your interest in the company, and offer to follow-up after the Fair.

4. Debrief and Make Notes

Before you leave the building, while it is all still fresh in your mind, find a quiet place to sit and jot down notes about the different employers you met with. Note who you talked with, what some of your main topics of conversation were, your feelings about the company and positions they have available, and how you intend to follow-up.

- ♦ **Hint:** Some students do not wait until they are completely finished ... they go back to the "candidate's table" after every two or three meetings to regroup, to have a soft drink, to write their notes, and to review the next companies' information before they go out onto the floor again. Meeting, greeting, and interviewing can be a strenuous exercise, so take your time and do whatever it takes for you to make the best impression possible.

❖ After the Fair

1. Review Your Notes

Within one day, review what you wrote about each employer while you were at the Career Fair, and add any additional comments or thoughts you have had since.

2. Send Thank-You Letters

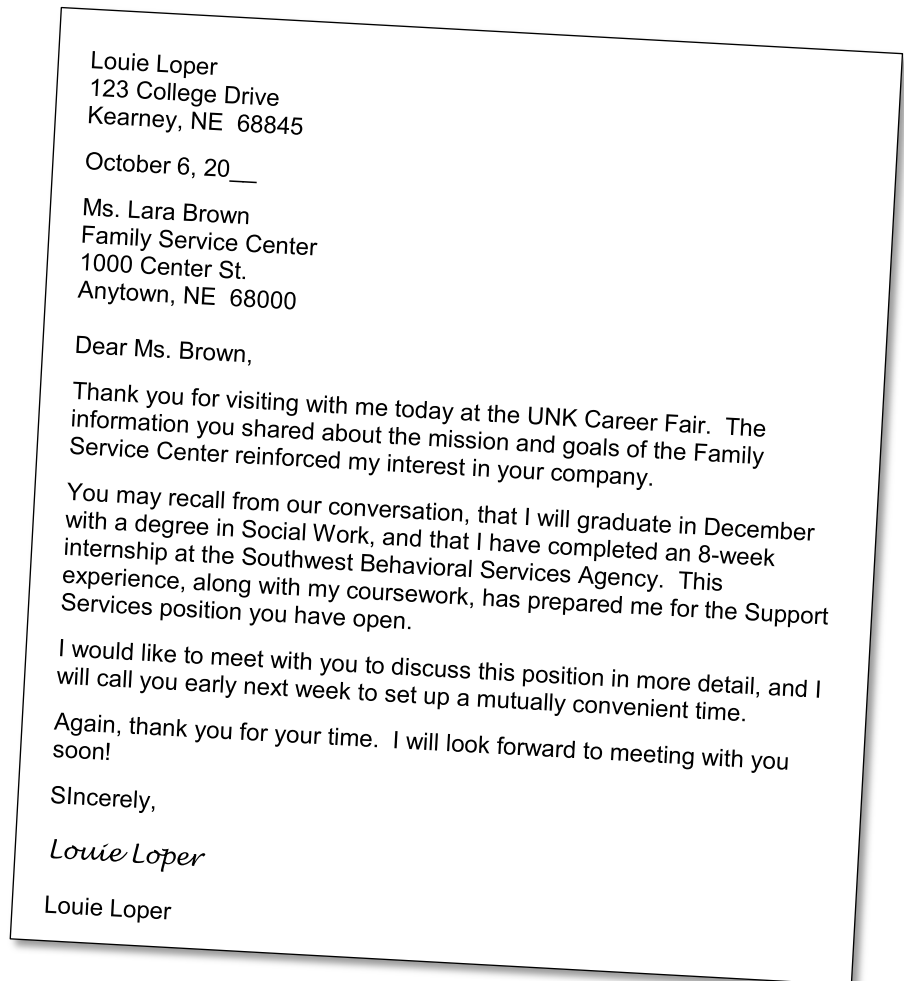
Write thank-you notes to employers you met with. (This is where business cards will come in handy.) Remind them that you met at the UNK Career Fair (be sure to specify, since many employers hit several career fairs during one week), and provide some detail that will help them remember you. Restate your qualifications and interest in their company, and express your desire for a more formal interview. End by saying that you will follow-up with a phone call.

- ♦ **Hint:** While emailed thank-you notes are usually acceptable, one that arrives in the mail will help you stand out from the crowd.

3. Evaluate Your Strategies

Think objectively about the way you conducted yourself at the Career Fair.

Did you adequately research the companies? Were you smooth and confident with your '30-second sales pitch'? Did you ask thoughtful questions? Did you allow enough time to meet with the employers you really wanted to meet? (Squeezing the Career Fair in between classes might not really do it justice!) Were you dressed and groomed appropriately? Did you collect business cards?



As with anything, getting positive results (an invitation for an interview ... or even a job offer) from a Career Fair will take practice. That's why **we recommend attending several on-campus Fairs before your senior year.** Check our website (careers.unk.edu) to see when the next one will be held, then make plans to attend. Your future is in your hands!