

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
CAREER SERVICES

HOW TO EVOLVE FROM STUDENT TO PROFESSIONAL

A GUIDE TO THE CAREER EXPO



What is the Career Expo?

The Career Expo is a place where opportunities are endless. Representatives gather in one location with one goal in mind - meeting you!

There is something available for every student, whether it be learning about future employers, connecting with prospective graduate schools, finding part-time positions, exploring internships and job-shadowing opportunities, or just discovering the careers that local, regional and national companies have to offer.

Anywhere from 80 to more than 100 representatives will have booths at the Career Expo. You can listen to representatives and ask about available opportunities. Representatives may also ask you questions to find out about your interests.

Overall, a Career Expo is a place where you can practice skills, develop professional contacts, and learn more about yourself. Use the time with your future in mind, and remember, it's all about what you want to gain . . . at the Career Expo.

Why should I go?

The Career Expo provides benefits to you regardless of where you are in your education. By just walking around, you will see who is hiring and what they are looking for in candidates. Your goal as a student is to gather information to plan the next steps of your education while also building skills that will help you with future opportunities.

FRESHMAN

- Get comfortable with speaking to employers.
- Discover the careers where different majors can lead.
- Observe body language and demeanor of those with confidence and professional style.
- Give presenting your professional side a try.

SOPHOMORE/JUNIOR

- Seek out focused information, such as job-shadowing and internships.
- Practice interview and networking skills.
- Discover which opportunities are most interesting to you.

SENIOR/GRADUATE STUDENT

- Make connections with employers.
- Discover which entry-level positions can help you toward future goals.
- Land an interview or job offer.

How do I prepare?

Preparing for the Career Expo before you arrive helps you create a solid first impression. First, refer to the Handshake database to learn about companies and organizations that will be at the Career Expo.

From the Career Services website – usm.edu/cs - navigate to Handshake using the icon. Log into your Handshake account using your SOAR email and password. If you have never logged into Handshake before, refer to the Southern Miss Career Guide for instructions on how to validate your account (also posted on the Career Services website).

Once in Handshake: Click Events > Career Expo > View All Employers
Read and gather information about the companies and organizations of your choice. You can filter the data by major, job type and employment type. You will also be able to see a brief description of the company, company website, booth number and requested position openings needing to be filled.

With well over 80 representatives, find what peaks your interest!

Next, prepare a list of questions to ask the representatives.

Here are some sample questions:

- What skills are you looking for in a potential candidate?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- Are there any specific internships or full-time jobs available within your company?
- What would a typical day be like for this position?



THEN, DRESS TO IMPRESS!



BUSINESS CASUAL

PROFESSIONAL



WOMEN

MEN

Dress slacks, blouse, cardigan, dress/skirt with cardigan or suit jacket, basic pumps with low heels

Dress slacks, polo shirt or long-sleeved buttoned shirt tucked into pants, dress socks and dress shoes

It's just as important to know what not to wear.

Jeans, T-shirts, athletic gear, shorts, open-toed sandals and tennis shoes are not appropriate items to wear while at the Career Expo.

Employers want to see you as a potential professional hire, not as a student!

TIP

DO NOT STRESS IF YOU ARE COMING FROM A CLASS WITH YOUR BACKPACK. EMPLOYERS EXPECT THAT TO HAPPEN FROM TIME TO TIME.

What should I bring?

- A portfolio with a list of questions to ask employers
- 10-15 copies of your résumé – printed on résumé paper
- Pen
- A friendly and approachable attitude!

TIP

TRAVEL LIGHT. MAINTAIN A FREE HAND TO SHAKE HANDS WITH EMPLOYERS AT ALL TIMES.

Be sure to get your résumé critiqued by Career Services before the Career Expo.



IMPORTANT TIPS THAT MAKE YOU SHINE LIKE A V.I.P.

Start your conversations at the Career Expo with two companies of low interest for practice; then make your way to your top five to seven companies of higher interest.

Gain the advantage over your peers by learning which positions companies are hiring before arriving at the Expo (Handshake).

If your schedule allows, come early when recruiter enthusiasm tends to be highest.

Pre-register in Handshake.

(Handshake > Events > Career Expo > Join Event)

→ Pre-registering for the Career Expo allows you to upload an updated résumé into the Handshake system for employers to view, if they choose, prior to coming to the Career Expo.

NAVIGATING THE CAREER EXPO AT A GLANCE

STOP BY THE REGISTRATION TABLE FOR SUPPLIES



Name tag



Map of employers



Survey and bag

MEET AND GREET A MINIMUM OF 5-7 EMPLOYERS



Shake hands
and give 30-60
second elevator
pitch



Listen, ask
questions, hand
out résumé(s)



Thank the
employer,
shake hands,
get a business
card

WRAP UP BEFORE YOU LEAVE



Gain a clear
understanding of
how to follow up
with employers
of interest



Write down
any notes and
use the bag to
collect company
information



Complete the
survey and
drop it off at
the registration
table

MAINTAIN ETIQUETTE



- Do dress professionally
- Do travel light
- Do brag about your skills
- Do bring plenty of résumés
- Do maintain eye contact
- Do turn off your phone



- Don't chew gum
- Don't brag about earning extra credit for class
- Don't ask about salary and benefits
- Don't be distracted by your friends
- Don't give a wimpy or bone crushing handshake

Your Elevator Pitch

What is an elevator pitch? Imagine riding an elevator with an employer. You have just enough time to convey your information in the span it takes to get from the bottom to the top floor. This is the premise behind the 30-60-second elevator pitch. You can also choose to think of it as an introduction within the timeframe of a television commercial.

At the Career Expo, when talking with a representative, simply introduce yourself by stating your first and last name. Tell about your major, career goals, skills/strengths, and why you are interested in talking to the representative about his/her specific organization or business. That's it. Therefore, your elevator pitch is something you can practice well before the day of the Career Expo.

A Handshake

Never underestimate the power of a good handshake. If done right, a handshake is a nonverbal way to convey confidence. Extend your right hand. Hands should meet, web to web, using the thumb as an anchor. Your handshake should be firm (not bone-crushing or unpleasant). Hold the handshake for three to four seconds. No wimpy handshakes, please!

Follow Up

After talking to a representative at the Career Expo, you have made an initial connection. Take out those business cards and notes to follow up. Send the representative a thank you card or email within 24-48 hours after the Career Expo. Since many students will not make the effort, you will stand out in a good way. Sending a thank you note shows the receiver that you are interested and serious about the exploration process. If during your discussion, you were told specific instructions about the next steps in the job search, follow up appropriately.



“As a student-athlete, I always enjoyed the opportunity to attend. The outcome of this was that I made connections that I have valued to this day, and I gained exposure to business etiquette before many of my peers.”

— Suyi E. Georgewill, Production Manager, Cintas



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