



Employer Expectations of a Career Fair Designed for Students in the Agricultural Sciences

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Context

- Career Services holds a career fair for the students in the Department of Agricultural Sciences and Engineering Technology (ASET) in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) stream each Spring.

- ASET students have the following majors:

Agriculture:

Agribusiness

Animal Science

Ag Engr Technology

Ag Comm

Interdisc. Ag

Plant & Soil Science

BAAS

Engineering Technology:

Design & Dev

Safety Mgmt

Construction Mgmt

Electronics

Elec & Comp Engr Tech

Purpose of Career Fair

- Primary: Connect employers to prospective employees (our students!) for careers and internships
- Secondary: Introduce employers to our department, our offerings, and our campus, and foster long-term relationships

Research Questions

- What makes for a successful Career Fair event for the employers?
- How can our students best prepare themselves for the encounters?

Literature Review

- Career Fairs (CFs) are one aspect of a firm's recruiting strategy (Silkes et al., 2010)
- Functional areas more commonly studied:
 - Hospitality and Tourism (e.g., Huang et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2014 *right here at Purdue*; Milman & Whitney, 2014)
 - Nursing/medicine (e.g., Brane et al., 2017; Donelan et al., 2014)
- Many more studies from students' perspective than employers

Methods and Procedures

- Annual Spring Career Fair
 - Typically held on a Wed or Thu immediately after TAMU Ag Career Fair
 - Aimed at Ag production and service industries, as well as construction, engineering tech, and energy (oilfield) firms
- Exit survey of employers (n=39), with 10 independent variable questions (5-pt Likert-type)
 - Response variable was 5-pt question on overall rating of the event
- OLS regression, paired t-tests, and descriptive statistics were used to evaluate and compare

Results

- Overall, the CF was perceived as highly valuable, with over 60% of employers rating it with the highest mark (5 of 5), and another 36% rating it 4 of 5.
- ***Candidate Professionalism*** was the only variable of the ten that was significantly correlated with the employers' overall impression of the CF ($p < .01$), with over 60% of employers rating it Great (5 of 5)

Results

- Employers rated ***Candidate Attire*** highly (80% rated 5 or 4), indicating that the students in attendance met or exceeded their expectations.
 - Informal discussion of this result with students led to some eye-opening experiences, with students not realizing that employers really cared about such details
- Little emphasis was placed on ***Community Service*** experience, with nearly half placing only average importance (3 of 5) on it, and over 20% assigning it a 1 or 2

Key Employer Ratings

- Over half of the employers surveyed planned to further interview 1-5 students (fig 6)

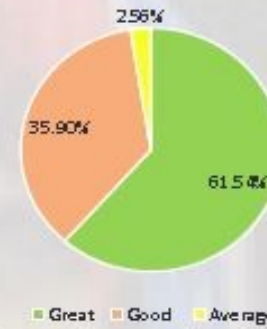


Figure 2. Overall impression of career fair

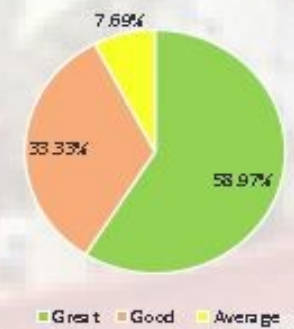


Figure 3. Candidate professionalism

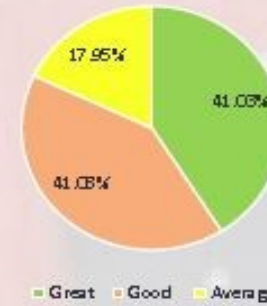


Figure 4. Overall impression of the candidates

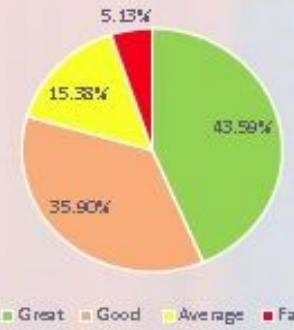


Figure 5. Candidate attire

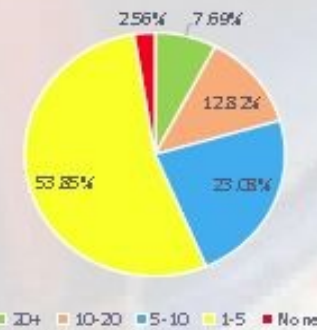


Figure 6. No. of candidates to be interviewed further

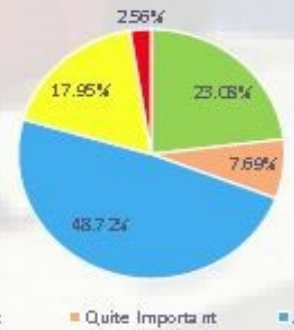


Figure 7. Importance of community service

Implications

- Who cares?
 - Students, because they are looking for careers and internships
 - Faculty members, because we value placing our students in good-fitting careers, based on our goal of producing ***society-ready graduates***
 - Parents, because they are looking for return on their investment;
 - Employers, because they want to focus their recruiting efforts and finances on events that provide value

Areas for Additional Research

- How do ASET/STEM CF experiences compare to others (e.g., Teacher Ed.)?
- How do CFs compare with other recruitment methods?
- Do results differ based on whether the firm was recruiting Ag, Construction, or other STEM students?

- What further areas do you see?



Thank you for your time and interest.
Questions?