Hello and thanks for listening to CareerCast, I’m Ryan Bettis, and I’m joined by Cameron Frangenberg and Katie Udrone, and today our topic is how to work a career fair. Despite a job market that is suffering from rumors of recession and an apparent gloomy economic picture. College career fairs still serve their primary purpose of providing an opportunity for job seekers to meet and greet with companies looking for up and coming college students.

It is important for “you” the job seeker, to be well prepared by developing a checklist of things to do before, after, and during a career fair, and how to maximize your time.

Before attending a career fair you need to find out who is coming and make a list of employers you already know you want to talk to. Make another list of employers that you’ve never heard of, but who hire for the occupation you want. Visit the website of all the employers on both lists. Look for listings of internships or jobs and make notes of questions that you want to get answered.

Have a plan, even if your plan is to only explore. Your approach will be different depending on your objective. If you have researched the organization in advance, you will feel more comfortable in approaching the representative because you are already somewhat familiar with them.

Develop one or more versions of your resume highlighting the skills and abilities you want to market to employers. You will want to learn the qualities they look for in college students, which specific courses you should be taking to prepare you for a career with their organization.

And last develop and practice a little one minute opening speech that can break the ice and help you get your foot in the door.

Now that you are well prepared and have made preparations for the career fair, you are ready for anything. First you need to look through the program booklet to make sure every representative you would like to talk to is actually present at the career fair. It is a good idea to prioritize your list of people you want to talk to make sure you get to talk to your top choice companies. Now you should approach a representative and use your “one-minute” commercial to introduce yourself. The goal of this “one-minute” commercial is to connect your background with the needs of the company you are speaking with. You should tell the representative your name, classification, major, and your career plan. The representative will be impressed that you have a career plan of how you would like to pursue your goals. Give the representative a firm handshake and make sure to keep direct eye contact. Then you should ask about the jobs the company is looking for, see if any possible internships or summer jobs are available. Be sure to ask about where to apply and find out about any application deadlines and procedures. Also, ask about opportunities that you could expect from the jobs the company is offering. Recently, more and more companies are asking for resumes to be attached with your application when you apply online, but you should still offer to give your resume to the representative at the career fair. Make sure to ask for the representative’s name and the contact information for each person you talked to. Before you leave, you should write down any details you think you may need to refer to when you decide to take the next step and make sure you were able to talked to every company you wanted to. Remember to focus on getting information on jobs and career opportunities, not just the free souvenirs and giveaways.

Now that we’ve learned what to do before and during a career fair, one of the most important parts of succeeding in a career fair lies in what you do afterwards. After a career fair, you should take notes on everything that you can remember talking to the company representatives about. If you wait too long, the conversations will start running together in your head, and you’ll forget what you said to whom. This is important because you need to know what you said to each company in case any follow-up meeting occurs and reading over the notes again will keep everything fresh on your mind. The next thing that you need to make sure to do after the career fair is to follow up on any promises you made to the company. For example, if one of the representatives showed interest in a web page that you
designed, then make sure and e-mail that company the URL to the website. This shows that you care and that you want to be a part of their company and staying in touch with them will make sure that they do not forget about you. The best thing to do after a career fair is to send thank you notes. Write or e-mail each of the people you met and thank them for their time. Reiterate your interest in the company and relevant skills and experience. Most job seekers fail to take this simple step, often losing out in the end to those who did express their thanks. The last and most important step in succeeding in a career fair is to plan to follow up with each recruiter about two weeks after the career fair. Contact them and express your continued interest with the organization, your assurance of your ability to contribute to the organization, and get more information about next steps in the process of getting hired at your dream company! Thank you for listening to this CareerCast and happy job searching.