

# EY Center for Careers

## Meet the Firms Tips for Students



### What is Meet the Firms?

The CSUN Meet the Firms is the largest career fair for accounting, IS and IT students and alumni in Southern California, held in both September and February. More than 60 employers participate at each event, including public accounting (Big 4, Mid-Tier, Regional and Local), a number of large corporations and several government entities. 350+ professionals and 600+ students attended the Fall 2018 Meet the Firms. It is held at the Odyssey Restaurant in Granada Hills, in 3 different exhibit rooms, and there is a buffet with a variety of appetizers, fruit, desserts and beverages.

Meet the Firms provide the opportunity for students and alumni to learn about a wide variety of employers and career paths, and make connections with professionals at all levels.

\*\* When you first attend Meet the Firms, your primary goal should be to learn as much as you can, and meet as many professionals from different employers as possible, within the three hour event. Then, you can follow-up with those with whom you made contact to speak or meet in a "coffee chat" to learn more about the employer, what the professional actually does in their work, and anything else that will help you choose a career path.

### What are Employers Looking for?

While experience and at Meet the Firms, individuals with the soft will match with the culture They are interested to learn interest in their company. they will assess your curiosity, poise and



technical skills are always important, professionals are first looking for skills, personality and attitude that and professionals in their company. about your career goals and actual During your brief conversations, communication/interpersonal skills, confidence, and other soft skills.

### What Should You be Looking for?

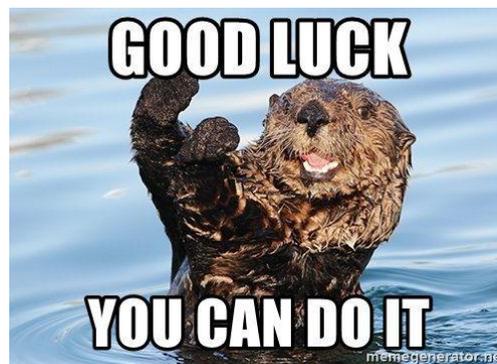
Although you definitely want to make a good impression, you should realize that employers want to impress you, too. After all, if you have a strong resume and soft skills, they will be interested

in you. Therefore, you want to consider and choose the employer(s) and career paths that best match your career goals.

### **Do You Know What You are Looking for?**

In other words, do you know what factors (requirements and preferences) you will consider to help you evaluate and compare employers and opportunities for you to make an informed decision? There are a number of career resources on the EY Center for Careers website - <http://www.csun.edu/acctis/ey-center> - including Career Success Roadmap and Planning Guide, Career Values Self-Assessment, Career Opportunities in Accounting or IS/IT, Life Career Rainbow, CSUN Career Center CareerLink Guide, and Guides for Networking, LinkedIn, and Coffee Chats, and then you can make an appointment with the EY Center for further exploration.

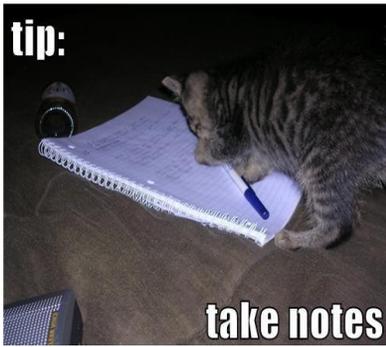
When you speak with professionals, ask questions that are of specific interest to you. Do not just ask a question because someone else suggested it or you read it in a random book or article. You generally only have a few minutes to speak with a professional, so use the time effectively.



### **How Do You Prepare?**

Attend the EY Center's Career Success Programme and Firm Office Hours, as well as the numerous meetings and events hosted by the AIS student organizations (Accounting Association, Beta Alpha Psi, ALPFA, and MISA). You will learn about the accounting and IS/IT professions, learn about employers and career paths, and gain valuable networking experience. Also, as referenced above, use the career resources on the EY Center for Careers website, and come to the EY Center for guidance. (and read through this Guide!)

Visit the Meet the Firms website (<http://csun.edu/acctis/meetthefirms>) to see what employers are coming to the next event, and click on the links provided to visit the employers' websites directly (you can also look at employers who attended the two previous Meet the Firms events as well). Do your homework and learn about employers - size, locations, practice areas and/or departments, career paths and opportunities, training and mentorship, etc. Then, prioritize the list of employers with whom you most would like to speak. You will not be able to speak with all of them at Meet the Firms!



Jot down some notes about each employer of interest, and bring a pad-folio with about 25 - 30 resumes. Prepare a few initial questions to get the conversation started. What should you ask? It's simple - what do you most want to know? Be ready to introduce yourself with a brief statement (~ 30 seconds), and include something that is interesting and unique to help the professional remember you. Approach Meet the Firms as a learning experience, go with a buddy to start, and you will be less nervous. It gets easier after the first couple of conversations.

Do not expect to “click” with every professional. Do not judge an employer based on a conversation with one or two professionals, especially at the staff level. The management team really determines the culture of the employer, so try to speak with at least one or more managers and above.

Be prepared to share who you are, what you are looking for, and what you feel that you have to offer. This should be a two-way conversation.

\*\* Don't expect to learn everything that is important to you during your brief Meet the Firms conversations. Look at Meet the Firms as an opportunity to make initial connections, and then you can follow-up for coffee chats (phone or in-person) after the event.



### How Should I Dress?

It is extremely important to be well groomed and presentable. The dress code for Meet the Firms is business professional. If you use cologne or perfume, it should be applied very lightly. Do not wear a lot of jewelry. You should avoid smoking before or during the event. Make sure your clothes are ironed / pressed, your teeth are clean, and your breath is fresh.

Men should wear suits – preferably a dark neutral color such as black, charcoal, navy blue, or gray. A white or light colored shirt is generally best, with the collar pulled down smoothly or buttoned down. Your tie should be knotted neatly and the knot pulled up to the center of your collar. Dark shoes with matching belt and socks is also recommended. A well-tailored suit is more important than an expensive one, but quality will show. This is a formal event, and you should avoid removing your jacket.

Women should wear business suits, preferably in dark colors. A light colored blouse or a tailored button down shirt complements nicely. Either a pantsuit or a skirt suit reaching your knees or just below is fine. Closed toe shoes that match your suit should be worn with heels that are not too high - do not wear stilettos. Little or no jewelry is preferable and dangling earrings should be

avoided. Women can wear make-up, but appropriately - this is not "Saturday night at the club". Hair should be trim and pulled back or styled for women.

Remember that many of you will be entering professions that in many cases are conservative. You do not want professionals distracted by your appearance or by your accessories. You will feel more confident if you are dressed appropriately and neatly with a professional appearance. Invest in a reasonable quality suit - you will use it often throughout recruiting and your career.

### How Should I Act?



Although it is natural to be nervous at the event, there are many things you can do to make yourself feel comfortable when you arrive. Going to the event with one or two friends will make it easier to start. You will feel less intimidated if people you know are around you. Arrive early to get yourself mentally prepared, and you will avoid the additional nerves of rushing to get there on time. It will also give you the opportunity to talk with more employers throughout.

Review the map of the 3 rooms and where the employers and other organizations are located (on the Meet the Firms website), and plan your strategy in advance. Some employers will have a large crowd throughout the evening, so be efficient so that you do not spend most of your time waiting in long lines, or spending most of your time with one or two employers.

\*\* It is not advisable to show up without any planning in advance. It does not make a good impression to walk up to a table and ask, "What do you do?" On the contrary, having notes about an employer including questions to ask them specifically makes an excellent first impression!

You may consider starting with an employer that is not at the top of your list. You will get some practice and feel more relaxed, and you may even be surprised that your interest level increases after speaking with them.



To start a conversation, approach a professional or student and say "Hello" and your name. Smile, make eye contact, and extend your hand with a firm, business-like handshake (but not one that is bone crushing!). Most individuals shake hands using their right hand,



so it is best to put your nametag on your right side and they can see your nametag when shaking your hand.

**Introduce yourself briefly.** Then, you can ask the other person about their position, how long they have been with the employer, and why they selected that employer and career path. Utilize your prepared list of questions, and if time permits, you can ask a couple of more in-depth

questions about the employer and the work that they perform. Do not ask personal questions. If they ask you about your interests, you can then ask about theirs. Remember you only have a few minutes with each person, so the focus is to establish a rapport and gain an initial understanding of the employer, roles and career paths.

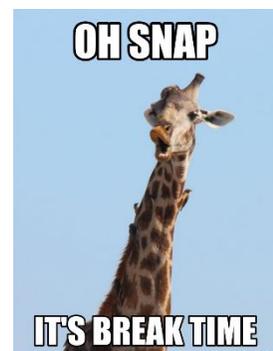
**Some of the professionals and students will want to talk about their work. Others prefer to engage in small talk.** Brief small talk can help build rapport. Small talk may relate to a variety of subjects including the weather, sports, movies, food and restaurants, travel or vacations, current events, school, your campus organization, your current job, or your hobbies and other interests. If you find you have something in common with a professional, even if totally unrelated to the profession, you may establish a connection that will be very helpful to you. *It is best to avoid controversial subjects including religion, politics, and personal or family problems.*



**Make sure you listen to what the professional is saying.** It is easy to become so preoccupied with the next question you want to ask that you do not listen to what the other person is saying especially if you are nervous. Remember that listening is a very important skill. Asking follow-up questions based on what the individual is talking about will let them know that you are listening and will help extend the conversation. Be curious, and as long as you are asking relevant questions, you'll be fine.

With larger employers, **try to speak with a variety of professionals and not just students or staff.** Students who have completed an internship can share their internship experiences, and staff can share their initial full-time experiences. Professionals who are more senior have greater knowledge and experience about their employer and the profession, and management has greater influence on who gets selected for interviews.

**Take a break and get something to eat and drink, briefly.** Visit the employers that are on your priority list, stay until the end, and try to visit with one or more employers that may also be of interest. This expands your learning experience, your networking, and your opportunities. Be open minded - each employer, and each group of employers are different from one another, not necessarily better. It all goes back to YOU - who you are, and what you are looking for. Different types of employers offer different benefits, advantages, and opportunities, so make sure you explore various alternatives to help you ultimately make the right choice(s).



**Do not spend all your time with only one or two employers** - putting your eggs in one or two baskets can severely limit the outcome.

**Know when to join a group.** It is generally appropriate to join a group at any time, however, make sure you observe the conversation before joining a group. Sometimes individuals might be involved in a private conversation and you may seem to be intruding. Avoid joining large groups because you may not get any special attention. It is best to join a small- or medium-sized group that consists of both students and professionals. Walk up to the group, listen to the conversation they are having, and introduce yourself, when the opportunity arises.

Better than joining a group, approach someone who is standing alone, waiting for someone to speak with. Consider the opportunity to speak one-on-one and gain their direct attention, so take the initiative.



### **What Questions Should I Ask?**

Remember that your questions are prompted by what you want to do with your career, what is important to you, what research you have already completed, and what you still want/need to know to evaluate employers and career paths. Always, be CURIOUS! (Don't ask questions you think will impress them!)

Depending on the level of the individual with whom you are speaking, there are various types of questions that might be appropriate and helpful.

- Industry/Government Management & Public Accounting Partners & Managers: you can ask about their roles, experience in an industry, their relationship with clients (if relevant), some of the choices they made during their career, and what opportunities they see for themselves in the future. You can also ask about the long-term opportunities and factors to be successful with the employer.
- Public Accounting Seniors: you can ask about the transition from being a staff person to planning and running jobs, and what they did to become successful and be promoted.
- Industry/Government/Public Accounting Staff: you can ask about their day-to-day responsibilities, how they are assigned to work, how they are evaluated, how their experience matches with their expectations when they started with the employer, and why they chose the employer. It would also be appropriate to ask about their experience during the recruiting and/or job search process.
- Recruiter: you can ask about the recruiting process, the transition from student to staff person, what the employer specifically looks for, and any of the items above.

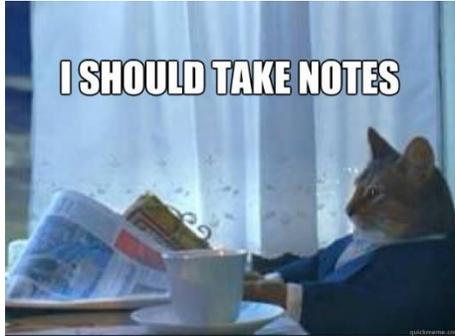
### **How to Exit a Conversation**



Expect most conversations to be about 3 to 5 minutes; some may go longer, but don't overstay your "welcome". Remember that there are other students and alumni waiting to speak with the student and professional representatives. Also, take advantage of the 3 hours for the event and the large number of employers participating.

Be aware of the time, and gracefully thank the other person for speaking with you, note that there are other students waiting to speak with them and that you don't want to monopolize their time, and ask for their business card (or contact information). Smile, shake hands, walk away and jot down some notes before going on to the next employer.

## Take Notes



After speaking with one or more professionals with an employer, take a few moments to **jot some notes in your pad-folio**. Include details to help remind you about the professionals and what you conversed about with each one. Make note of items that came up in conversation, a specific story you may have shared, and any items that may require follow up. By the end of the evening, it may be difficult to differentiate one conversation from another.

## Send Thank You Notes

**Within one or two days, follow up with a personal note (email)** to professionals with whom you spoke. Keep your correspondence brief and to the point. You should thank the person again for speaking with you and tell them how much/why you enjoyed meeting them. Include something that came up in your conversation to remind them about you, and express interest in a future meeting, if you would like to do so. Do not expect that they will respond - some do and some do not. If you are going to apply for a position with the employer, you can let them know, so that if they are interested in helping you, they may put in a good word about you with the recruiter.

