

Meet the Firms

Tips for Students

What are Employers Looking for?

While experience and technical skills are always important, at Meet the Firms, professionals are first looking for individuals with personalities and attitudes that will match with the culture and professionals in their company. They are interested to learn about your career goals and actual interest in their firm. During your conversations, they will assess your communication and leadership skills, ability to get along with others, poise and confidence (not aggressiveness) and other soft skills.

What should you be looking for? Although you definitely want to make a good impression, you should realize that firms want to impress you, too. After all, if you have a strong resume, firms will be interested in you. Therefore, you want to choose the right firm with whom to start your career.

Do you know what you are looking for - in other words, do you know what factors you will consider to help you evaluate and compare firms and opportunities for you to make an informed decision? A primary goal of Meet the Firms (and all networking activities) is to learn about your profession and firms, make initial contacts, and then continue your research with professionals one-on-one at later times to continue to learn more. (For additional guidance, visit the EY Center for Careers website - <http://www.csun.edu/acctis/ey-center> - to find tools for Career Planning, Networking, Coffee Chats, etc. - you can also make an appointment with the EY Center.)

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 and sincerely.

How Do I Prepare?

Attend 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 professions, learn about firms and career paths, and get valuable networking experience. Also, go to the EY Center for Careers (JH 2224) to meet with the Director and staff to get additional guidance. (Use the tools referenced above on the EY Center for Careers website.)

Use this Meet the Firms website to see what firms are coming, and click on the links provided to visit the firms' websites directly. Do your homework and learn about firms - size, locations, practice areas / departments, career paths and opportunities, training and mentorship, etc. Then, prioritize the list of firms with whom you most would like to speak. You will not be able to speak with all of the firms at Meet the Firms!

Jot down some notes about each firm, and bring a pad-folio with about 25 - 30 resumes. Prepare a few initial questions to get the conversation started. Also, be ready to introduce yourself with a brief (~ 30 seconds) statement, 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 a firm based on a conversation with one or two students or staff. The management team really determines the culture of the firm, 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. Reference relevant courses, experiences, student involvement/leadership roles, volunteer activities, skills, etc., based on what you already know they look for, and what they are telling you directly during your conversations. Do not list a bunch of skills such as “I am really strong with communication, leadership and multi-tasking skills” - this offers no real value. Instead, share examples that highlight your skills (this is the same for your cover letters and interviews).

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 charcoal, navy blue, or gray. A white or light colored shirt is generally best, with the collar pulled down smoothly and 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 should wear make-up, but appropriately - this is not “Friday 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 for many of you 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 mingle. You will feel less intimidated if people you know are around you. Arrive early to get yourself mentally prepared; you will also avoid the additional nerves of rushing to get there on time. It will also give you the opportunity to talk to more firms once the event starts.

Review the layout of where the firms are located (there is a map on the Meet the Firms website), and chart a game plan. Some firms will have a large crowd throughout the evening, so be strategic so that you do not spend most of your time waiting in long lines.

You may consider starting with a firm 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 and say "Hello". Remember to smile, make eye contact, and extend your hand. Offer a firm, business-like handshake. Since most individuals shake hands using their right hand, it is best to put your nametag on your right side, so that they can see your nametag when you extend your hand.

Introduce yourself (remember your 30 second introduction above), and the questions you have prepared (also see above). Ask about the other person - their position, how long they have been with the firm, and why they selected that firm and specialty. Then, you can ask some other more in-depth questions about the firm 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 while it is very important to establish a rapport, you also want to learn about the firms specifically.

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.

With larger firms, 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 firm 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 firms that are on your priority list, stay until the end, and try to visit with one or more firms that may also be of interest. This expands your learning experience, your networking, and your opportunities. Be open minded - each firm, and each group of firms 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 firms 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 firms - 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 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 research you have already completed, and what you want to know, within the context of what you are looking for. Always, be CURIOUS!

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

- Partners, Directors or Managers: you can ask about their expertise in an industry, the role they serve for their clients, 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 their firm.

- 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.
- Staff: you can ask about their day-to-day responsibilities, how they are assigned to jobs, how they are evaluated, how their experience matches with their expectations when they entered the firm, and why they chose the firm they did. It would also be appropriate to ask about their experience during the recruiting process.
- Recruiter: you can ask about the recruiting process, the transition from student to staff person, what the firm specifically looks for, and any of the items above.

Before you move on to another person or firm, always close the conversation in a professional manner. Extend a friendly handshake, tell the individual that you enjoyed speaking with them, and thank them for speaking with you. Ask for a business card, and if true, share your interest in speaking with the person again in the future. Do not linger too long with one individual as there are probably many others waiting to speak with them.

After speaking with one or more professionals with a firm, 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.

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 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 so. Do not expect that they will respond - some do and some do not. If you are going to apply for a position with their firm, let them know, so that if they are interested in helping you, they can put in a good word about you with the recruiter.