

Tips for Attending Health Professions Day¹

What is a health professions day or fair?

A health professions day or fair is similar to a job or career fair. It is usually a one-day event set up to connect interested students and community members to large numbers of health professions program representatives. Program representatives are there to recruit prospective applicants. So, if you are interested in learning more about a particular program, school, or potential career, use the opportunity to participate in a health professions day or fair to your advantage.

What can I expect?

You can expect anywhere from 25 to 120-plus health professions program representatives at different booths or tables. Health professions program representatives are anxious to give away program brochures and other materials they have brought with them from their institutions. Their job is to meet as many attendees as possible to promote their schools or programs. As it is likely that the table you want to approach will be crowded, be patient and observant. Also, prepare to compete with background noise once it is your turn to speak with a representative.

What are the benefits of attending a health professions day or fair?

Consider a health professions day or fair to be one-stop shopping for your health professions interests and needs. It will provide an excellent opportunity for you to talk to numerous health professions program representatives at one time and place. Some direct benefits of attending a health professions fair include:

- Making contacts in an efficient and economical way.
- Learning more about specific health professions programs, schools, and careers.
- Talking to admissions and program representatives face-to-face.
- Asking someone for feedback about your educational background, your experiences, your resume, your portfolio, and for suggestions on how to become a more competitive applicant.

Be prepared to make the most out of attending a health professions day or fair. Use your time to collect valuable school/program information via conversation and program materials so that you can prepare to be a competitive applicant and complete a well-informed application.

What can I do to make the most out of attending a health professions day or fair?

1. BEFORE – The Preparation Stage

Do your homework. Contact the department/organization sponsoring the event and find out some of the following details.

- Is there an admission fee?
- How many schools will be represented?
- Is there a published list available ahead of time on the day of the event?
- How will the health professions program representatives be organized? By alphabetical order? By health profession? Etc.?
- What is the starting and ending time of the event?
- What is the dress code?

¹ Adapted from "Job Search Strategies: Preparing for a Career Fair" from Career Fair '99, Stanford University Career Development Center, Stanford, CA, 1999. Re-adapted from the "Health Professions Fair 2003: Get in Touch with Your Future" Handout, UTSA College of Sciences Undergraduate Advising Center, San Antonio, TX, 2003.

- Are there any special procedures that you need to do to participate? (This is rare.)

It is very easy to feel intimidated at such an event. Wandering around aimlessly will only enhance this feeling. Have a plan--even if your only plan is to explore. This will help you to have some idea as to which health professions programs you want to approach. An example of a plan may be by geographic location of institutions or by health field(s). Be open-minded and flexible, you might be surprised what you find out.

Bring a pen, folder, note pad, and/or some sort of log sheet to keep you organized. A highlighter can be useful to help indicate which school(s) you want to see. Also bring questions that are pertinent to your interests. Oftentimes, these will be dependent on your goals. Sample questions include:

- What qualities, background, and experiences are you looking for in an applicant?
- What courses would you recommend taking before applying for your program?
- What is the application process for your school or program?
- Do you have a business card I can have for future reference and contact?

2. DURING – The Actual Event

Approach a representative and introduce yourself. Don't sit back and wait to be approached. Shake hands, make good eye contact and tell the representative your name, major and interests. The more focused you are the better. Create a one-minute "commercial" as a way to sell yourself to a school. This is a great way to introduce yourself. In one minute or less you need to introduce yourself, demonstrate your knowledge of the school, and express enthusiasm and interest.

Thank representatives for any brochures or promotional materials you were given. This is not a time to pick up holiday gifts for your family; be reasonable with your consumption of recruiter giveaways. Collect business cards and jot down a fact on the back to jog your memory when you write a follow-up letter/email.

Other Do's and Don'ts:

- Exhibit a sense of direction and focus.
- Be assertive without being rude.
- Don't monopolize someone's time.
- Be sensitive to others waiting behind you.
- Realize that admission representatives/recruiters like to talk to groups.
- Maximize your time at the health professions fair.
- Observe other students as well as health profession program representatives for clues.

3. AFTER- The Follow-Up

You are only as good as your follow-up! Keep track of those health professions programs and representatives with whom you spoke. Send a thank you letter to those representatives you wish to pursue. This will set the stage for future correspondence.