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Hospitality Highway Career Fair: An Exploratory Study

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Hospitality Highway Career Fair: An Exploratory Study

Lilly Miller

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Abstract

The goal of this creative project is to conduct research on career fairs and hospitality events to successfully host the first ever Hospitality Career Fair at the University of Arkansas. The lack of career advancement opportunities on the campus for hospitality management students continued to increase despite the rapidly growing industry across the community, so the creation of the career fair would allow improvement for the students and the companies. With a creative project, it allows more creativity and research to develop the overall plan for the event.

The project studies hospitality career events hosted at other universities to gain specific knowledge on what aspects were vital to the execution of the event and how it impacts the students, university, and community. The research showed major positive points to implementing a hospitality specific career fair on a campus, and proved that creating this event would be an accomplishment for the University of Arkansas.

In addition, the execution of the career fair can produce more research on what specifically works for that community and campus and can be used for the future of the Hospitality Career Fair.

Keywords: hospitality, career fair, University of Arkansas

Introduction

Background and Need

A career fair is an event at which people looking for a job can meet possible employers and so that the employers can find new workers for their company. There are no limits to the aspects of a career fair such as the location, age of attendees, interests, etc. Career fairs are a vital resource that students studying at universities should take advantage of in order to see all of the job possibilities in their community and beyond. Career fairs are also an effective way to recruit graduates because they provide recruiters with face-to-face interaction with prospective hires (Roehling & Cavanaugh, 2000). College students are exploring their career paths and interests, so these job fairs are crucial in assisting them in order to feel passionate about the path they want to take. From a study focused on students' experiences, "it was found that most students agreed that participation in the career fair increased student knowledge about their specific areas of interest and that student interest in hospitality and tourism careers increased as a result of attendance at the career fair" (Silkes, C., Adler, H., & Phillips, P. S., 2010, p. 1).

Most career fairs are designed for specific majors or interests when hosted for college students. One study investigating the opinions of hospitality students who attended a career fair "revealed that students would like to see more available jobs that appeal to them, to meet more industry representatives from various industry segments, and attract a greater variety of employers" (Milman & Whitney, 2014, p. 1). At the University of Arkansas, there is not currently a career fair specifically for hospitality majors. The hospitality industry is growing dramatically and there must be changes to keep up with its growth in order to take advantage as "almost 15 million Americans work in tourism and hospitality—in hotels, amusement parks, art museums, and restaurants—making it the fifth largest industry in the country" (New American

Economy, 2022, p. 1). The industry also had an increase in the need for a workforce because of the breakout of the Corona Virus in 2020. This led to the restart of in person events taking place once quarantining disappeared, yet most people were not ready to return to work even though events were returning faster than ever. Hosting a career fair with hospitality businesses and students, could contribute to the potential of growth of the industry in addition to the growth after the Covid outbreak. Other universities such as Oklahoma State University, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and University of Houston, host hospitality events for their students; therefore, studying their successes and failures is vital to creating a hospitality career fair at the University of Arkansas. There are many factors that must be studied from a thriving career fair, besides how the fair was executed.

By examining hospitality career fairs at other schools and a variety of career fairs at the University of Arkansas, the first ever hospitality career fair was hosted and studied to determine drivers and barriers to its success. There are many factors that determine the success of a career fair, such as the event setup, the preparation of the students, the business' eagerness, and more, so the event must be set up in a strategic way.

Problem Statement

The University of Arkansas has around 27,000 students and the School of Human Environmental Sciences had 918 as of Fall 2022 (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2022) and the hospitality program had an enrollment in the vicinity of 150 majors, and 170 minors. In the past, the Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences has hosted a career fair; however, the career fair was agricultural based with no hospitality companies attending the fair. The implementation of hospitality career fairs can allow students to gain knowledge about the different employment opportunities and career paths in that industry

(Lee et al., 2019). Without a specific career fair hosted by the Bumpers College, hospitality students have not been informed of all possible employment opportunities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to gain knowledge about factors contributing to a successful hospitality career fair and to synthesize this information into a development guide for future, hospitality focused career fairs.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided this project:

- To identify factors of a hospitality career fair in a university setting,
- To learn what specific characteristics increased and decreased the success of the career fair from the perspective of the students that attended the career fair, and
- To learn what specific characteristics increased and decreased the success of the career fair from the perspective of the companies that attended the career fair.

Literature Review

Hospitality career fairs are hosted around the country in attempt to provide knowledge to students about the opportunities, internships, and jobs in this industry. According to results in the National Association of Colleges and Employer's (NACE) 2018-19 Career Services Benchmark Survey Report for Colleges and Universities, career fairs are one of the most frequently provided services by college career centers, as 91.7 percent of career centers reported hosting at least one career fair between 2017-18 (NACE, 2019, p. 1). Many studies have taken place in order to examine the aspects of the fairs that were successful, what is needed to prepare, and the results provided.

Setup and Execution Recommendations

There are many suggestions from previous studies that help increase the success of career fairs from past researchers' experiences. Aspects such as the setup and preparation can drastically change the results for career fairs. Regarding student preparation, it was found that with the information gleaned from this study "the librarian has now changed the handout and starts with a list of questions about what they were looking for and what was important to them" (Stonebraker et al., 2019). Roehling and Cavanaugh (2000), found that eighty-six percent of the respondents considered it "important" or "very important" for employers to have recruiting brochures or other handouts available to job seekers. Payne & Sumter (2015) discovered that students recommended "a larger space since it was kind of cramped and I had to travel from table to table".

For the colleges or schools, "career service coordinators, in particular, should be more deliberate in training students in terms of resume writing, business/professional dressing, meeting etiquette, and how to be better prepared for interviews and interact with company

representatives as a whole. In addition, pre-event workshops could provide practical tools to help interested students learn how to get the most out of the event” (Lee et al., 2019). Overall, it is key to adhere to previous research and their recommendations to make an event more appealing and ensure success for all parties attending.

Preparing Students to Attend a Hospitality Career Fair

One of the most important aspects to grasp when attending or participating in a career fair is to come prepared. This applies to all parties involved (students, recruiters, and event hosts). Silkes et al. (2010) recommended preparing the students for details that recruiters may look for, as the amount that hospitality programs prepare students for a career fair can affect the students’ satisfaction with the university as a whole. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Hartman, 2022) shared recommendations for students following their career fair. For example the school librarians that assist with student development suggested that in order for students to stand out among their peers, students should prepare by registering for the fair, fine tuning resumes, selecting appropriate attire and researching companies. In addition, the recruiters and companies that are participating must come prepared to the event too. Recruiters should be ready to take the initiative to engage students in conversation as they approach the display, look over students’ resumes before setting them aside, and give students a business card and invite them to call with any questions (Roehling & Cavanaugh, 2000).

Overall, with each of the studies examined, the satisfaction for student career fairs was positive. According to Stone (1994) about a Philadelphia study on career fairs, "it was a smooth transition. I was checking the comment sheets and all of the students said they got something out of the fair and workshops”. Most students were able to leave the fairs with either jobs, experience, or knowledge. At the Oklahoma State University career fair (called Hospitality Days) it was

reported that after attending the students were already excited to come back and be ambassadors for their program (Oklahoma State University, 2020, para. 1). These events are not only about gaining a job or internship, as alumni from those programs will come back and give back to the students from their companies. (Oklahoma State University, 2020).

Based on recommendations from previous studies regarding hospitality career fairs, it can be determined that there are benefits from setting a plan to execute what students and recruiters are seeking in a career fair. There have been many studies conducted to identify the benefits of the career fairs, what students enjoyed, what employers found helpful, et. cetera. The University of Arkansas can use this information to create a hospitality career fair. The University will be well prepared by using the information gained from the studies. It is known now that career fairs specific to majors can be vital to helping the students while having various success in job and internship placement, public relations, and service learning for students involved in the planning and execution of the event.

Development Plan

There are many aspects of creating a plan for the execution of a career fair. For this event a committee was formed through a class provided by the university and directed by a hospitality faculty member. The committee studied hospitality events across the country to generate ideas on what could lead to a successful event. Staff at the U of A from all departments helped by sharing advice on aspects of the career fair and other similar events. The committee created a theme, designs, and logistics for the career fair to gain results on the success of the event.

The following steps of design were followed to create the plan for a Hospitality Career Fair at the University of Arkansas.

1. Pre-Design

- a. A university class was comprised of 14 hospitality majors at the University of Arkansas that meet twice a week with the professor in charge of the execution of the event.
- b. A form of communication was created with all of the members using GroupMe and email.
- c. Four different committees were created to focus on the various aspects of the career fair: Event Chairs, Industry Relations Committee, Decorations, Communication, Marketing, and Promotion Committee, and Registration Committee. ** I was a member of the Industry Relations Committee, but worked with my advisor personally to assist each group since I gained the knowledge of factors that can contribute to the success of the event from my research*
- d. For the second semester where we executed the event, there were new committees created: Registration, Production, Marketing, and Sponsorship. **I was a member of the Sponsorship Committee.*

2. Theme Development

- a. The overall theme of ‘hospitality highway’ was created.
- b. The logo was designed to apply to all of the documents shared and any merchandise (Appendix A).
- c. T-shirts were designed and ordered with the logo to promote the event and handed out to the committee, faculty, and administrators.

3. Date and Time of the Event

- a. The class decided on three potential event dates.
- b. It was determined that the event would be held in the Student Union Ballroom as the ballroom could be secured without a rental fee.
- c. The dates were approved, and it was determined that March 7th, 2023 was the most appropriate date to hold the event.

4. Budget

- a. T-shirts for committee, faculty, and administrators \$900
- b. Nametags \$100
- c. Food / beverage \$150
- d. Union fee/AV \$150
- e. Total cost of career fair: \$1,300.00

4. Creating a Database of Contacts

- a. The Industry Relations Committee began creating an industry contacts excel spreadsheet.
- b. A Save the Date graphic (Appendix B) was emailed to all hospitality students at the university and to all of the companies on the database list.

- c. A “Save the Date” graphic notice was emailed to all hospitality majors, event minors, and hospitality minors.
- d. Companies were then emailed to gather responses on the names of the employees attending to run the table, if they would need linen or a power source, and what positions they are currently hiring.

5. Applications

- a. Companies were invited to register to attend the event at no cost, (Appendix C) and the list of the number of companies that applied was documented and set up for future communication.
- b. Students were emailed and encouraged to register through Handshake.
- c. Student registration used an automatic printer that would provide a sticker nametag that listed their name, major, and year they plan to graduate, once the student swiped their student ID or gave their school email.

6. Setup

- a. The committees discussed recommended factors from other universities and events and decided which to use in our career fair such as QR codes and resumes.
- b. The floor plan (Appendix D) of the event in the union ballroom was designed for the number of companies planning on attending (the goal was 50 companies).
- c. The ballroom could accommodate 88 companies if the stage is utilized.
- d. We ran a slideshow on the big screen at the front of the room with a thank you to the companies and students with light music playing in the background.

7. Results

- e. There was a total of 237 students that attended the career fair during the three hours. Out of the 60 companies that were signed up for the event, 53 companies set up tables and attended the career fair.
- f. Feedback was recorded from the committee members and the advisor including questions that were sent out via surveys to companies and students who attended the event.
- g. The committee then analyzed the feedback and held discussion about what would be the changes made to the 2024 career fair.

Results

After the execution of the first ever Hospitality Career Fair at the University of Arkansas, a survey was sent to the employers and the students via Qualtrics. The questions selected for the survey were created by the students in the career fair class under the professor’s supervision and sent out from the professor’s email. Most of the questions were formatted in a “yes or no” answer; however, the survey did include questions asking the participant to provide their own answer/feedback. The following data was used to determine what changes are needed for future Hospitality Career Fairs. The results section showcases the answers from both the students and employer surveys.

Employer Data:

The first series of employer questions asked are featured in the table below. Nine questions were asked related to hiring of students for jobs and internships as well as a question related directly to operational aspects of the career fair.

Table 1: Employer responses to questions related to the career fair.

Question	Yes	No	Maybe	Some were, some were not	Not Applicable
Did you hire any students as interns that you met at the career fair?	4	16			
Did you hire any students (for employment) for your company that you met at the career fair?	2	16			
Did the career fair meet your expectations?	13	1			
Would you recommend we provide a water/coffee/tea station for next year’s event?	9	3			
Was the room set-up/design easy to navigate?	9	6			
Were the students prepared for the career fair?	9			6	
Do you feel you had enough room at your table?	12	3			
Did you know the Hospitality Career Fair was totally designed and executed by hospitality students?	10	4			
For companies with properties in states outside of Arkansas, do you think your colleagues would like to attend the Hospitality Career fair in the future?	2	1	5		6

Based on the replies from the employers it can be determined that few students were hired as interns or in full time positions as a result of the career fair, but they did feel that the career fair met their expectations. Additionally, employers felt students were prepared for the career fair and the fair layout was easy to navigate and had appropriate space for themselves and their associates.

Next employers were asked “what qualities were you surprised or impressed by in these young adults?” The career fair class was seeking information about perceptions employers had on the student body. This was an open-ended question where employers were asked to provide their opinions and thoughts. These comments are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Employer perceptions of students attending the career fair.

Question: What qualities were you surprised by or impressed by in these young adults?
Their eagerness and out-going nature to introduce themselves
Outgoing personalities and how they were dressed
The amount of non-experience some already had
Professionalism
Communication
Resumes were amazing! I’m hoping to see some applications from these students in the near future.
Confidence was awesome
Professional presentation and friendliness
They had resumes with them and asked engaging questions
The students were very outgoing
Organized, # of participants
They asked very well thought out questions

It is obvious based on the employer’s comments that they were impressed with the students who attended the career fair. Highlighted in their responses were professional resumes, presentation and overall friendliness. This could be attributed to the pre-internship course that

hospitality students are required to take where resume development, elevator speeches are prepared, dress for success is discussed and overall business etiquette is studied.

Next employers were asked questions related to improvements they would suggest the career fair committee make for future career fairs. Employers indicated they were impressed with the amount of companies in attendance but felt the room was a tad crowded. This could be because of the amount students arriving at one time making the room appear fuller. Employers also said a map of the union would have been beneficial as well as shorten the event from 2 and half hours to 2 hours. Results are listed in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. Employer’s suggestions for improvements for the career fair.

Question: In what ways could we improve on the hospitality career fair?
Very impressed by the number of employers at the fair, great turn out for the first year
Shorten it, maybe?
I have no critiques
Was too crowded
Use the ballroom space more, and spread tables out. It was very crowded and more space would have allowed better conversations with students because we won’t be competing with our neighbors
As a newcomer to the building I would have appreciated a map to get to the conference room
I wish we had more space between tables. It was kinda tight and hard at times to walk around and set up
Most are wanting manager jobs with no experience. They need to have some basic hotel knowledge
Students that need a job currently. Many that we called didn’t want a job until summer

The survey then asked employers about parking on campus and how the committee could make improvements. Employers stated parking was somewhat difficult and suggested reserving spaces for employers, giving free parking or validating, and wanted more detailed directions than what the committee provided. Parking is a limitation of this event, due to holding the event on

campus. The University of Arkansas does have a significant parking problem. Table 4 displays the employers answers to this question.

Table 4. Employer ideas on how to make parking better for the event on this campus

Question: What could we do to make parking on the university campus better for this event?
Hold it somewhere with easier access
I had an easy time with parking but maybe the department could validate parking or provide a pass
Don't charge us
Have reserved parking
Pre-reserved spaces would go a long way in making the commute easier
Parking was really really bad. Should have reserved parking and people helping with directions
Free parking
Providing parking passes or loading passes
I think that you did the best you could
We had issues connecting to the app which I don't believe is something you all can control
No-we enjoyed receiving the directions

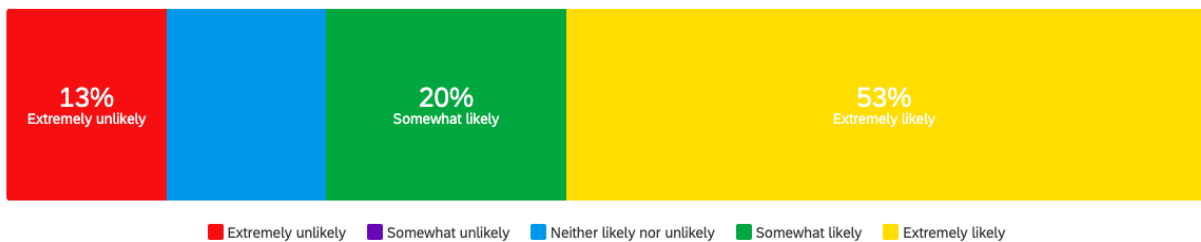
The survey then asked the employers what suggestions they would have for making the process of registration easier had they felt it was more difficult than expected. Most of the responses consisted of no, meaning employers faced no issues with the entire registration process. The only recommendation was to include a link and a QR code so that they are able to reach the link if they are using their phones for emails where you cannot scan. Table 5 shows the positive feedback on the registration steps.

Table 5. Employers opinions on if there needed to be any change for the registration process.

Question: Is there anything we could do to make the registration process easier?
Very easy
No
No. It was quite smooth
No
It was super easy
It was a bit confusing. I think providing a link and QR code would be much more efficient than just the QR code. If you use your phone for emails you can't scan etc.
No, registration was easy!
No
I think that you did the best you could
We had issues connecting to the app which I don't believe is something you all can control
No-we enjoyed receiving the directions

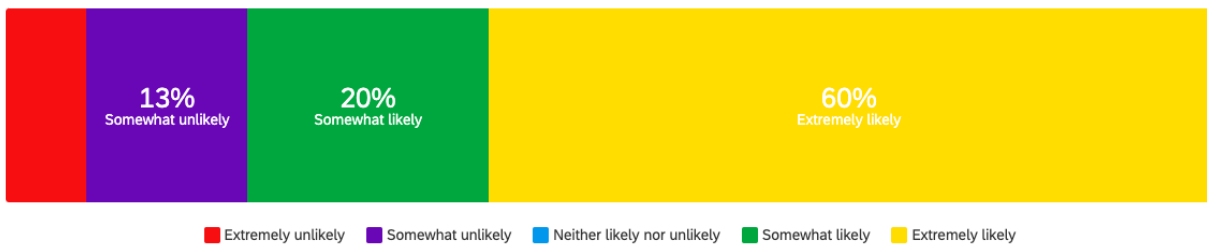
The employers were then asked how likely they would be to attend the Hospitality Career Fair this upcoming year (2024). Only 13% (2) said that they would not attend the career fair next year. The rest of the responses indicated employers were neither likely nor unlikely, somewhat likely, and extremely likely to attend. The highest response was at 53% (8) that they were extremely likely to attend. Table 6 shows that most of the employers would be attending the career fair again next year.

Table 6. Employer's chances of attending the Hospitality Career Fair next year



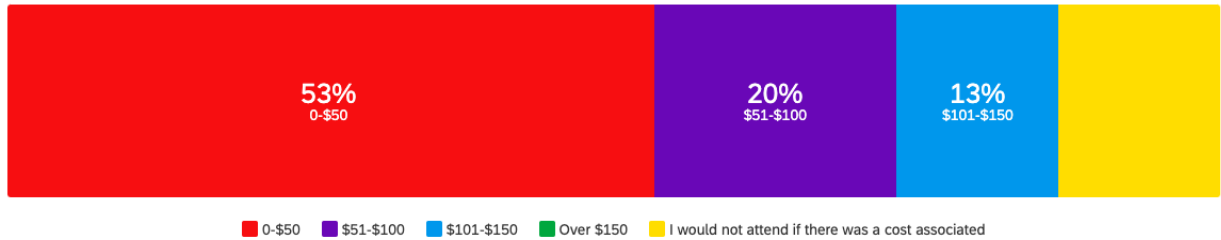
Based on Table 7 below, the employers would likely recommend the Hospitality Career Fair to an associate, while 60% (9) said that they are extremely likely to recommend the career fair as compared to only 7% (1) saying that they are extremely unlikely. In total, 80% (12) said that they would recommend the event to an associate implying an overall positive response to this survey question.

Table 7. The likelihood that they employers would recommend the Hospitality Career Fair to an associate



In Table 8 employers were asked: if the Hospitality Career Fair were to charge per table next year, what is the price you would be willing to pay to attend and showcase your company? The majority, 53% (8) responded that they would pay 0-\$50 to attend the career fair. Additionally, 20% (3) said that they would pay \$51-\$100 and 13% (2) said that they would pay \$101-\$150 to attend. The majority of the employers said they would pay a price to attend, which is a testament to the success of the career fair. Only 13% (2) of the employers said they would not attend if there was a cost associated with the table reservations and showcasing. Based on the responses, the career fair could now charge for tables and most of the employers would still attend.

Table 8. Employer’s responses on if the career fair were to begin to charge for the tables, how much would they be willing to pay.



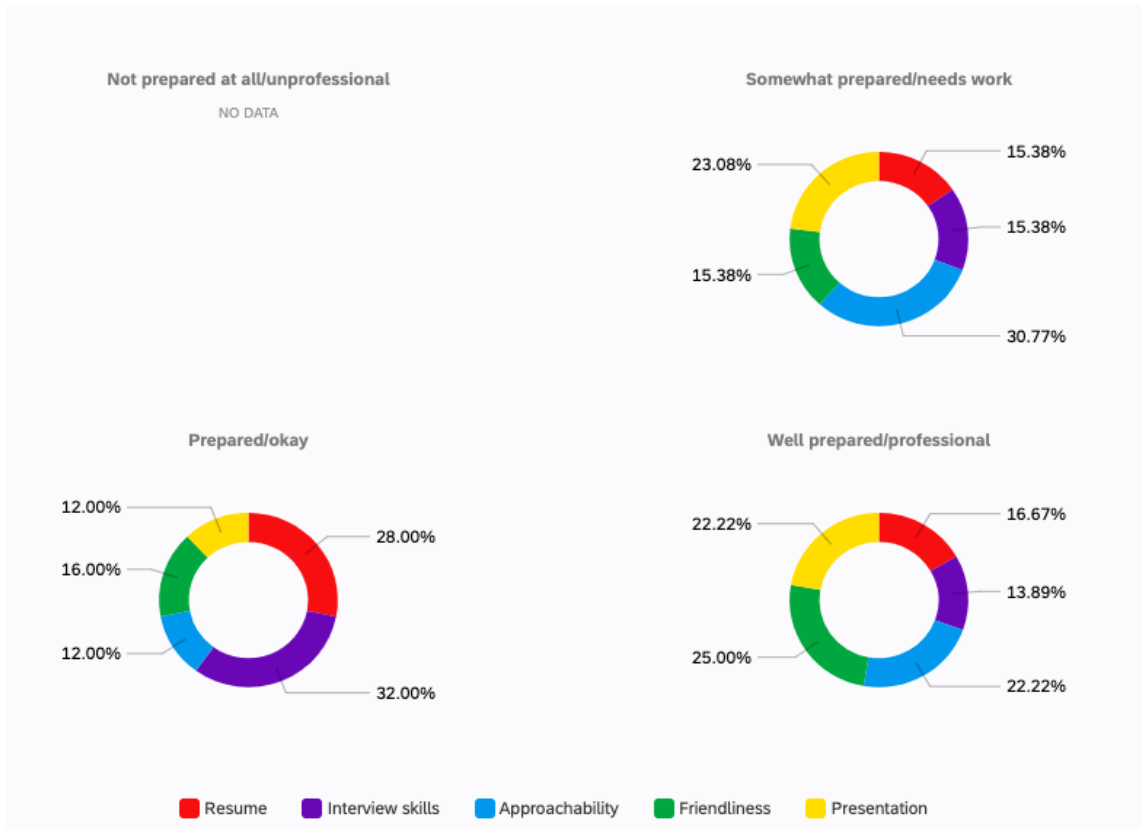
In Table 9, employers gave positive responses to the Hospitality Career Fair and what they specifically enjoyed. Most answered with a statement about the engagement with the students and how everyone was friendly. In addition, some described more of the organization of the event from the table coverings to this being our first hospitality career fair and it being free, and sticking to the bare bones. The employers truly gave great examples on how the event was a success.

Table 9. Employers provided an open response answer on what would be one thing you liked the most about the Hospitality Career Fair.

Question: What is the one thing you liked the most about the Hospitality Career Fair?
Seeing so many partners throughout the state
I liked the fact that this was a free event and had bare bones. Students are here to meet employees and vice versa, loved sticking to the roots!
Organized, great people, friendly!
Meeting with students that don't have exposure to the industry I represent. (Theme Parks) There's always a lot to talk about and it makes the process more natural.
Tables with coverings
That people from different degrees came in to see how they may be a fit
Sharing the hospitality industry with students and getting them excited about their careers
Everyone from vendors, professors, and students were very friendly and we enjoyed our time at the career fair. Looking forward to next year
I enjoyed talking with the students and getting to see what things they had done inside and outside the classroom
Talking to the students
The students engaging with our booth

Employers gave their opinions on how prepared the students appeared at the career fair. Results in Table 10 showcased that there are aspects the students could work on but also some aspects they thrived in. The factor that the employers said the students needed the most work with was “approachability” (30.77%) followed by presentation (23.08%). The areas the employers thought the students were well prepared for and were “professional and friendliness” (25%) followed by “presentation and approachability” (22.22%). Interview skills (32%) and resumes (28%) had the highest percentages in the “prepared” and “okay” category with interview skills. The combination of all information leaned more to the positive side as none of the employers ranked any topics in the “not prepared/ unprofessional section”.

Table 10. The ranking of the student's preparedness on the specific topics were given by the employers.



The dress code for the Hospitality Career Fair was business casual. However, there appeared to be a difference of the meaning of business casual among the students based on some of the apparel they wore to attend the career fair. This promoted the committee to ask the employers if this dress code was what they would recommend for the career fair the following year. The most popular answer was Business Attire (36%, 5), followed closely by Business Casual (29%, 4). Only 14% (2) said that they would prefer no dress code, so it is clear based on Table 11 that the employers would prefer a business/business casual dress code to be enforced at the future career fair.

Table 11. Employers gave their opinions based on this year’s event, on what they would prefer the dress code to be next year.

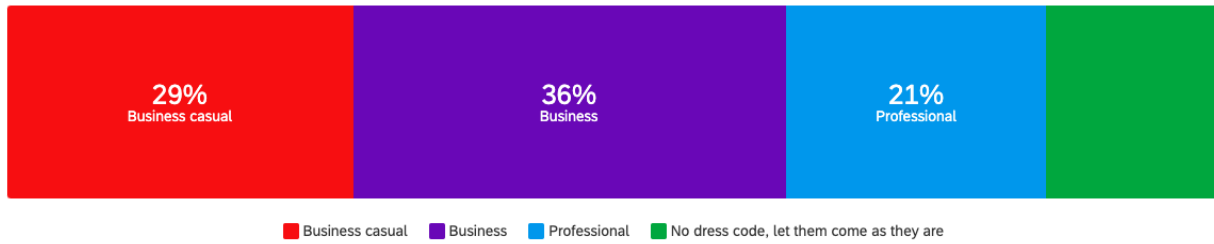


Table 12 shows the open-ended responses to which qualities the employers were looking for in interns and new hires. The most popular answers were: for the students to be approachable, for students to know their availability to work, and lastly for students to know where they were interested in working. There were other qualities such as friendliness, organized, responsible, honest, and outgoing. These responses can be used for the career fair committee to provide students with knowledge on the specific characteristic’s employers are searching for in college students.

Table 12. The employers were asked to list qualities that they are looking for in interns and new hires.

Question: So, we can better educate and advise our students, what qualities are you looking for in interns and new hires?
Willing to work!
Preparedness, knowing what they are looking for in career
Outgoing, hard workers, willing to work and ready for changes in the fly
Organized, responsible, dedicated, available on weekends and holidays
Knowledgeable of sales, grocery pack sizes, brands, foodservice
Honesty, attention, and the will to adjust
Friendly and outgoing we can teach specific skills
Flexible, approachable, an internship can and is a job that they are looking for
Excited to learn, understanding that sometimes you have to take an entry level position before being offered a higher-up or high paying position
Availability
Approachability, willingness to learn

The employers, answered with advice that they would give students when approaching a recruiter and then talking to them. The most popular responses were: to smile when you approach and then ask questions to the recruiter. Other responses included: having a great handshake, do research on the companies that will be attending, and to introduce yourself. All of these answers are vitally important and can be used to assist the students in their knowledge on how to succeed at the next Hospitality Career Fair. The employer’s feedback is displayed in Table 13 below.

Table 13. The survey asked the employers to provide any advice that they would give a student when they would approach a recruiter and talk to them.

Question: Any advice you could give a student when approaching a recruiter and talking to them?
If you know what companies are going to be there, do a bit of research on them, wow them with a fact about their company or corporate team
Great handshake, ask the employer if you can share their resume with them
Ask questions-learn about the vendors
Eye contact, smile, introduce yourself, and then ask a question. That’s really all it takes, but almost all people miss one of those crucial steps.
Makes eye contact, introduce yourself, shake hands. Be ready to share your career goals.
Smile look them in the eye
They did great
Ask questions!! And smile!!
Asking questions shows you’re interested
Always be willing to work and gain any experience you can
Be honest if you are looking for a job or not

Overall, the employers gave informative feedback for improvement in areas the career fair can focus on for the up-in-coming events in years to come. The career fair mostly met the employer’s expectations, especially the students in attendance and the quantity of companies that attended. The aspects cited for most improvement was: parking, the setup / layout of the

ballroom to allow more space per employer, and o better directions to the ballroom as some employers found themselves unfamiliar with the student union and where the ballroom was located. Most employers said that they would most likely attend the career fair next year and even recommend it to their associates. This indicated they were pleased with the event.

Considering, this was the first year of the career fair, the results were positive and the survey will assist the next student class in charge of planning and executing the career fair. These students will be able to learn from areas of concern highlighted in the survey and correct them for another incredible event.

Student Data:

Table 14 gives vital information on how students felt about the career fair based on their preparation and the companies that attended. Many students were contacted after the career fair by the companies; however, most did not secure an internship or job. None of the students who responded attended the free resume review offered before the career fair. That can be concluded why 3 of the students indicated they did not feel prepared for the event. Eight of the students said they would attend the career fair next year if a dress code was enforced. Overall, the student's responses were informative but it would have been more informative had more students replied to the survey.

Table 14. The student’s responses to multiple yes, no, maybe questions that focus on the preparation towards the career fair and the companies that attended.

Question	Yes	No	Maybe
Were you contacted by any companies after the career fair?	7	2	
Did you secure an internship as a result of the career fair?	1	8	
Did you secure a job as a result of the career fair?	1	6	2
Did you take advantage of the free resume review offered before the career fair?	0	9	
Were you prepared for the career fair?	6	1	2
Would you attend the hospitality career fair next year if there was a business or professional dress code enforced?	8	0	1

Table 15, indicates that 78% (7) students said they were very satisfied with the Hospitality Career Fair, 22% (2) students stated they were satisfied and no students stated they were not at all satisfied. This implies all the students were at least satisfied with the event and enjoyed the experience.

Table 15. Students ranked how satisfied they were with the Hospitality Career Fair.

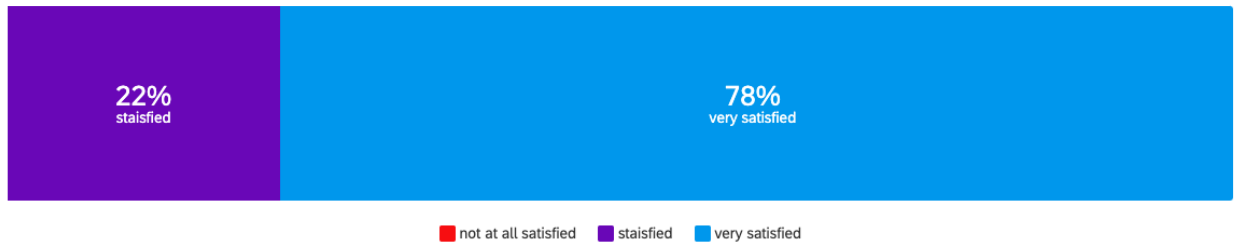
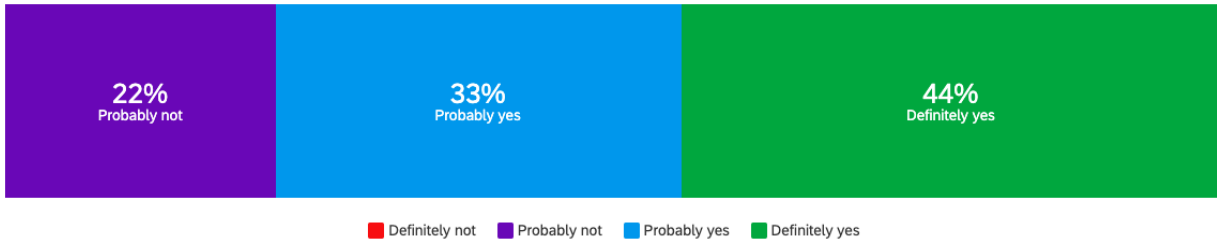


Table 16, affirms students’ feelings regarding if they felt prepared to meet the employers at the Hospitality Career Fair. Most of the students (44%,4) said they were definitely prepared for the event, 33% (3) said that they were probably prepared, and 22% (2) said that they were probably not prepared. The majority of the students felt overall prepared for the career fair (77%). While the remaining 22% of students possibly felt not or under prepared because they did not attend the free career prep services offered to them prior to the career fair.

Table 16. The survey requested the student’s opinions on if they felt adequately prepared to meet the employers at the career fair.



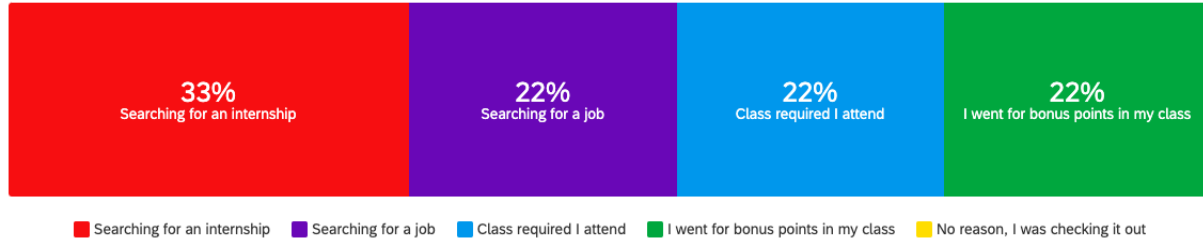
The survey allowed students to list which companies they enjoyed interacting with at the career fair. These results are shown in Table 17 below. Some of the companies listed the most often were: Experience Fayetteville, Omni Hotels, Atrium Hospitality, and the Walton Arts Center. This information will be very helpful when reaching out and making sure these companies will be in attendance next year.

Table 17. Students listed the companies that were their favorites to interact with at the career fair in order.

Question: What companies were your favorite(s) to interact with at the career fair? In order
Destination Rogers, Experience Fayetteville, Omni Hotels
Walton Arts Center, Experience Fayetteville, Atrium Hospitality
Waffle House, Enterprise, Botanical Garden of the Ozarks
Format
Mercy, Walmart, Braum’s
Aimbridge, Atrium Hospitality, Bella Vista
Omni, Destination Rogers, Walton Arts Center

In the Table 18 below, displayed are the answers to why the students attended the career fair. The majority (33%, 3) of the students attended the career fair because they were searching for an internship. The rest of the responses included: searching for a job, class required I attend, and I went for bonus points in my class. Some of the employers enjoyed the variety of students that attended the event so it is exciting to see that the answers are so diverse.

Table 18. Students' responds with why they attended the career fair.



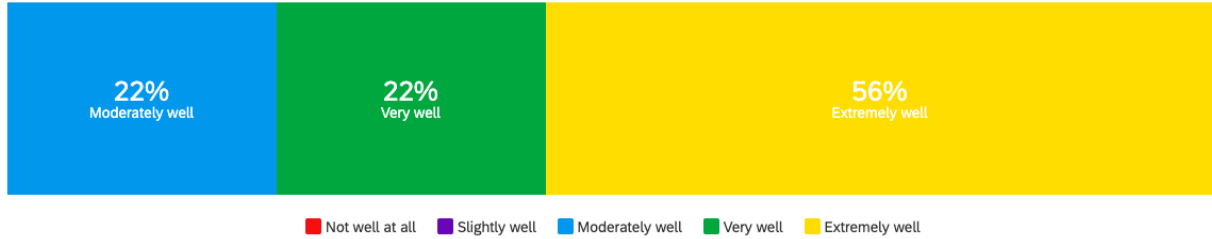
Based on the answers from Table 19, the students expressed an overall positive experience with the career fair layout as evidenced by 44% (4) who rated the layout as the extremely easy. The remaining 56% (5) said the layout was somewhat easy. None of the students answered the question with neither easy nor difficult, somewhat difficult, and extremely difficult. The employers had more of a negative response to the layout of the event while the students found it very simple.

Table 19. The student's ideas on if it was easy to navigate the layout of the career fair.



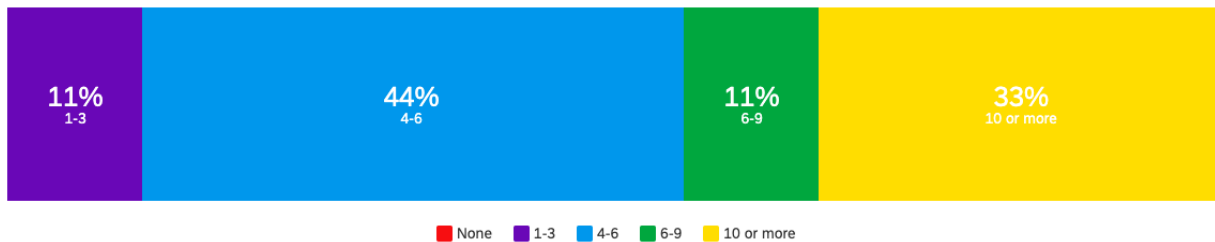
The career fair class used their marketing team to advertise the event via social media and campus involvement. The majority of the students (56%, 5) said that the career fair committee advertised the career fair “extremely well”. The remaining split the votes in to both 22% (2) by stating the advertising was “very well” or “moderately well”. The answers “slightly well” and “not well at all” were not selected leading to an increase in the overall success of the advertising. These results are displayed in Table 20.

Table 20. The advertising of the event was rated by the students.



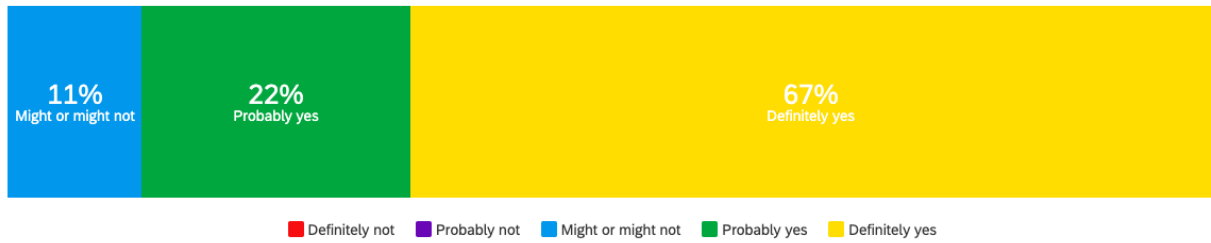
The number of companies that the students interacted with were documented in Table 21, which stated that 44% (4) of the students talked to 4 to 6 companies and 33% (3) talked to 10 or more. Additionally, students tied their interaction with companies from 1 to 3 and 6 to 9 with 11% (1) of the students. None of the students did not talk to any companies during their time at the career fair. The percentages lean more to the right of where students talked with the higher number of companies, indicating students did a good job of approaching multiple employers.

Table 21. Students gave an exact number to how many companies they spoke with at they career fair.



One of the highest percentages shown for all the questions in the survey is shown in the above table. Table 22 displays the results showing how satisfied the students were with the companies in attendance. Roughly, 67% (6) of the students stated that they were “definitely satisfied” with the companies in attendance, while 22% (2) were “probably satisfied” and the remaining 11% (1) said they “might or might not have been satisfied”. No students answered that they were “probably not satisfied” or “definitely not satisfied”.

Table 22. Students responded with if they felt that they were satisfied with the companies that attended the career fair.



Only one student answered this question regarding if there was anything the committee could improve on for the upcoming year and in the future. The student said that they would prefer to have all of the tables against the walls like a big square around the building and that it was difficult to walk and see all the tables at once. This opinion matches more with the employers’ ideas on how the spacing and layout for the event felt to them. The researcher felt this was one of the biggest takeaways from this study and will be communicated with the next Hospitality Career Fair Committee. This response is listed in Table 23 below.

Table 23. A student responded to the open-ended question of if there is anything the career staff could do to improve the Hospitality Career Fair.

<p>Question: Is there anything the career fair staff can do to improve the hospitality career fair?</p> <p>I prefer to have all the tables against the walls like a big square around the building. It was difficult to walk and see all the tables at once.</p>

The student’s appeared to be satisfied with the end result of the career fair. Most students felt that the event was well advertised and that the layout was easy to navigate. Students indicated they were able to talk to companies that they found attractive for meeting their career objective: which was mainly finding jobs and internships. The students did not use the resume review that was held before the career fair, which may have been why some did not feel as

prepared as others when talking with companies at the fair. The responses provided great insights on what can be improved upon for future hospitality career fairs.

The next section will discuss recommendations for future career fairs in the hospitality program and the School of Human Environmental Sciences.

Discussion and Recommendations

In this section results will be discussed and recommendations will be made based of the data presenting in the results section. Data from both employers and students will be discussed as well as future recommendations for the career fair in general.

Discussion:

There was substantial data provided by the employers regarding both students, interactions, layout, and the career fair in general. While there is a great deal of information provided the most crucial points of discussion related to: the layout of the career fair, parking / directions to the student union, clarification of the difference between a job fair and a career fair, and students having a lack of experience in the hospitality industry versus the levels jobs they were seeking.

The main aspect of the Hospitality Career Fair that was mentioned in the survey was the layout of the career fair in the ballroom. With the employers most likely having experience with other career fairs and layouts of similar events, they had many opinions of how the layout and spacing could either be improved or changed. There was a question asking if the layout was easy to navigate and just a little over 1/3 of the employers said that it was not easy to navigate through which is also later shown with that being some of the single, open-ended responses to the recommendations for where the career fair could improve. Employers felt that it was too crowded and this led to it being hard to hold conversations with the students and to be spaced out enough from the other employers' conversations too. In addition, they also felt that since it was crowded it led to it being more difficult to set up and move throughout the tables.

Another popular topic with the employers when discussing the possible improvements that could be made in the future to the event is the parking and directions to the University of Arkansas Union Ballroom. Some employers wished that there had been directions given on how to get to the best available parking option and then also to the ballroom from the exact parking location. Most of the employers recommended that there either validated parking or reserved parking spaces for the career fair that day.

Employers thought highly of the overall attitudes and skills of the students that attended the career fair, but saw that there could be some improvements to their goals and preparedness. Based on the data, the employers only hired a few select number of students for internships or full-time jobs and this could have to do with how they also said that some students were prepared while some were not instead of all of them being prepared for the event. One of the main themes seen in the responses on specific ways that the students could be ready for the career fair in the future is a general understanding of the jobs they are looking for and to be advised of opening positions instead of experienced managing jobs right away.

Through the event and having the ability to study the reactions to the career fair, there was one main theme that we created to explain most of the disconnect between the students and the employers. There is a difference in a career fair and job fair and that is not seen to be known based on the survey responses. The employers were surprised with some of the students with the lack of experience that they had in the industry but still wanted jobs that most do not get at an entry level.

Opposite of the employers' feedback was the students' who attended the career fair. Areas of discussion based on the data were: layout of the career fair, why students didn't attend

the pre-career fair preparation opportunities, and their lack of industry experience related to the level of jobs and internships they were interested in applying for and obtaining.

The layout of the career fair was one of the top recommendations that the students mentioned in the surveys. The singular student that responded freely on what specifically could use improvement said that they wish the tables would be across the outside of the walls around the building so that it would be easier to see all the companies. Most said that the layout was somewhat easy to navigate through so this is showing that the students think there could be overall improvement to the layout in the future.

Multiple questions that were listed in the survey for both the employers and students were about preparedness for the Hospitality Career Fair. Most of the students felt that they were prepared but some still said that they were not or that they maybe were. With this being said, not a single student that answered the survey attended the free resume review that were offered before the event to prepare them for it. In addition, only one person secured a job because of the career fair and that could have a link to the preparedness too.

Lastly, another topic of interest the students presented was the expectation of jobs they were in search for at the career fair. The students were looking for managing roles from the company employers instead of more opening roles as in part-time. The employers expressed that some of the students did not have much knowledge in the industry yet were still expecting so much from the employers.

Recommendations:

With the information from the discussion topics and the survey data, multiple recommendations have been created for the future Hospitality Career Fair. The responses of the

students and employers were overall positive but showed where there could possibly be improvements for an even more successful event.

There was not a specific question targeting this idea but a coffee, tea, and water station was mentioned in the survey responses from the employers. This was also talked about with the career fair students and professor in the class after the career fair and we decided it would be helpful for all attendees to have this area.

For the career fair class, it was decided that everyone could save funds and benefit from not creating and buying t-shirts to promote the event and to keep the nametags but change the design. The shirts were used to draw attention for the first year, but it is not needed for the upcoming ones. The nametags were very helpful for the students and the employers so they should have a design where the students could reuse them for other events and not just this specific career fair.

The standards of the dress code are another topic that the employers, students, and career fair class discussed. There are multiple options that could be recommended or required for students for the career fair from no dress code to professional attire. From the responses, the recommendation we think would work best is to do business casual. This allows there to be a standard for the event but also allow a greater number of students to attend if they did not plan as well. There would be a strict restriction on no athletic/casual wear as in no athletic shorts, flip flops, and athletic shoes. This also would allow the students to show the employers that they are serious about the event while also showing off their personality of an outfit.

The Hospitality Career Fair led us to realizing that the students may be running from a class or work and this created the problem of having backpacks and/or bags. An area for the

students to store their unwanted items would make it easier on the students to get around the event but also would provide more room in the walkways. This would help the overall negative views on the layout and how it was too crowded by allowing students to not be able to run into each other with their bags.

Incentives would also be a significant way to gain engagement and get the attendees excited for the event. This could consist of giveaways during the career fair or even company “swag bags” to the employers that attend. This would keep everyone involved throughout the multiple hour event and have the companies feel that they are getting their image and name out more to the other employers and students.

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Appendix A



March 7th, 2023 • Union Ballroom

Appendix B



HOSPITALITY CAREER FAIR

SAVE THE DATE

MARCH 7TH, 2023
2PM - 5PM @ UofA
BALLROOM



If you have any questions, email
cfhosp@uark.edu

Appendix C

THE HOSPITALITY HIGHWAY

HOSPITALITY
CAREER FAIR

HOSPITALITY HIGHWAY



FOLLOW THE INSTAGRAM:
@UARKHOSPITALITYHIGHWAY

UNION
BALLROOM

03.07.2023

Scan to register!

Free for employers!



2PM-5PM

Appendix D

