

INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to another edition of Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris. Again, if you haven't subscribed, please do subscribe. Students, I'm out there, doing the best to all the information that I can get. Again, the goal is for you to experience college, not survive college.

Today we're talking about career fairs. That's all you all think about. That's probably the reason why you went to College in the first place, right?

I do have here today with me, a very good friend, our career first experts. Hopefully we'll provide some good information for you to move on.

So welcome Ian.

IAN GIBBONS: Thank you.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Honestly, it's a pleasure to see you again, we should be seeing more each other, but I'll take any time that we get.

IAN GIBBONS: I appreciate it.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: How are you doing?

IAN GIBBONS: Everything's good.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Good.

IAN GIBBONS: It's been a very interesting two years.

I think for everybody with the transition of working remotely and then the uncertainty, coming back to campus at a different capacity where we're here or we're not, not necessarily engaged face to face and now everything is opened up again and having to physically and mentally reengage in face-to-face world. and it's interesting because you know this is about career fairs and I recall that right before we went on quarantine, we had a career fair in this room and I remember telling my faculty... OK, I'll see you in a couple weeks and here we are about to go about two years later.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: No, that's great.

So usually when I start the show I always kind of want to get a little bit about, you know, the people that I, like your background and one kind of a twist that question that I always ask is when you went to college, is this where you envisioned yourself?

IAN GIBBONS: Sure. So I'll start with my background. So I've been with Wake Tech for a little over five years and my title is Manager of Employer Connections.

So what I do essentially is I connect students and alumni with employers. It could be for full-time, part-time, internship, experiential learning, just helping students understand what they would like to do for a career.

My background is it's an interesting mix... I've spent years as an IT recruiter. I did work in career services earlier in my career. Prior to this role, I was a high school guidance counselor in New York.

So, this was a bit of a career change in a sense, but also coming back to a career that I had done earlier in my career.

Now, if I think about myself in college, well, one of the first things I really need to mention is I was not, I was not as strong student in college. I was not focused.

I really did not have education and career as my priority, and I can't recall one career fair that I attended in college.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Interesting.

IAN GIBBONS: Because I wasn't mature enough to know what was good for me ten years down the road or even two years down the road.

But no, I never expected myself to be here when I was in college.

And I say even if you were to speak to me eight years ago, would I have predicted I'll be working in career services in higher ed, I would probably would have said no.

And I think that's, for me, that's one of the beautiful things about my career. Because I'm curious, and if there's something that I was doing that I felt like I... I accomplish everything that I wanted to do or was curious to try something else, well, I pivoted.

And I took my career in that direction.

So, this really has been probably about the 4th career for me. And I share that with students because I recall if there's one thing that really stressed me out when I was in college, I felt like I had to know... What am I going to do for the rest of my life?

And when I graduated, I go to family get togethers... So, what are you going to do? I didn't have an answer.

If I knew then that it's OK to not have it all mapped out, and if I'd known then that I'd be, that I have would have tried several different careers that may have taken some of that pressure off my off my shoulders.

So, here I am, and I'm happy.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: No, that's great because you didn't go back and watch some of the episodes that would, then... But it's almost like a common theme, a common thread for everyone that I've interviewed, including myself.

And I think it's good for students to understand that it is not magic that when you come to college to figure out exactly what it is that you want to do because it is going to change, right?

Let's get right into Career fairs.

What is a Career fair?

IAN GIBBONS: Yeah. So, a career fair, I think people typically think that a career fair is a place where employers and students come together for hiring purposes, which that is what a career fair is in its purest form.

But I think it would behoove students to look at it beyond that because the career fair is also an opportunity to network. It's an opportunity to build connections.

It's an opportunity for career exploration to speak to people in the field, to find out more about their industry, their company, a day in the life of certain roles.

So, you can learn... Is this something that I want to continue pursuing or do I want to perhaps change my major or my career track. So, we can be narrow minded and look at it as just a hiring event.

But I think to get the most out of it... It's useful for students and alumni to look at this as really just a broad event that could be for hiring full-time, part-time or internship, or could be to make connections, find a mentor, or it could be to discover if they are truly on the right path for them career wise you know, gets him inside regards to a particular company or an industry and they may walk away thinking that was a great experience.

I learned so much and I may want to try this field, but if nothing else, it's also practice.

The professional world is really about getting in front of people.

We did virtual for a while, but there is no substitute for face-to-face and when you go to a career fair... Multiple times it could be 50-60 times within a day. You're practicing your... you

know your communication. Verbal. Nonverbal. You're practicing your elevator pitch.

You're practicing asking questions. You're practicing advocating for yourself.

You're building that confidence, and I often tell students, even if in your first semester, if you don't know exactly what you want to do... go to a career fair because you're going to learn things, you're going to make connections, but you're going to learn more how to interact in the professional realm.

And while it might be intimidating at first, every interaction you have, you're going to build a power meter and you're going to realize you're getting asked similar questions and you're learning more about the process and what to expect.

And I think it's very rare to find a situation where a student who walks in maybe bit nervous if they put themselves out there, they leave the event feeling empowered.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So you actually answered one of my questions.

IAN GIBBONS: Oh, I'm ahead of the game here.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: You are absolutely, which is going to be when a student go to the career fair because usually students think "oh I'm getting ready to graduate," and "now I have to look for work." "That's when I need to go to career fair."

But you didn't mention that it's also the way for students... If you don't know what to do to actually go to one your very first semester, so can you touch on that a little?

IAN GIBBONS: Yeah, I'm happy to expand on that.

So if I were to jump back in a past me. Who, I never attended a career fair in college, and I think that "what was I doing?" The best time to attend a career fair is anytime. It could be before you even get to college. It could be in your first semester. It could be in your first week of school.

Because, so if you think about it like this, it's not that often that opportunity comes to your doorstep.

But a career fair at a college really is that... you have opportunity coming right to your doorstep where employers are coming here for Wake Tech students and alumni. And they understand that there are first year students, second year students, first semester students, so they're not here expecting everybody to have all the answers.

They're not expecting people here to have all the experience. So a student can benefit from attending a career fair anytime, but I would recommend it far sooner than their graduation date because they will be able to make those connections.

They will be able to be exposed to opportunities. They're going to get that practice that, let's say, if they're very far away from truly knowing what they want to do, right, or if they're even far away from being able to take on a job, they're still building their network.

They're still practicing their soft skills as they call them, and you really never know. Employers when they meet with people... They're looking for opportunity.

They're hoping that every student that walks up, hoping they're going to be the one, they're hoping that they're going to have something that they can, you know, find a mutually beneficial arrangement.

So there have been times the students have walked into events not expecting something, but they have a conversation with an employer who didn't even necessarily have something that was the appropriate fit, but they realized there's opportunity here.

This is somebody that that has potential and let's create something that will work for them that we can help get them connected with our company and maybe even down the road when they're ready to take on more, when we have more for them, so it's kind of like the Lotto.

You never know. You know you won't win if you don't play, so you're not.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: You're not advocating that we all go play the Lotto, right?

IAN GIBBONS: Well, I've never won the Lotto, but you don't know what? You never know what can happen, but you never know what can happen but if you don't attend, then nothing is going to happen. And you're not even to be practicing or learning.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That was great.

So you're you're really ahead of the game here, by the way, with the way you are expanding on...

IAN GIBBONS: There's certain words...

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's great.

Let's talk about preparation, preparing for career fair.

Again, I know so for the seniors when they're going to a career fair, like.. OK, I have to get my resume ready. I've go to get my dress ready.

What is the typical preparation, irrespective of where you are like if a student first semester get thinking about going to a career fair, I think one of the hesitations is I don't know what to do.

Do I need to take a resume? There's nothing on my resume. What... What suggestion do you have in terms of preparation? On all the different levels.

IAN GIBBONS: Sure. So this is the perfect opportunity for to begin with throwing a plug to my department which is the Career Services department.

It's a great resource to have somebody be it face-to-face or virtually help students and alumni prepare for their individual needs.

So, any student or alumni can go to careers.waketech.edu meet with a career specialist where they can sit down like this and they can say I've never been to a career fair. I have no idea what to expect. I'd love to get some help.

And then the career specialists will help them based on what their individual needs are.

So, if there's a student that doesn't have a resume, has never gotten dressed up for a professional event... they're going to work with them based on where they are, or if there's a student that's been to ten career fairs and they just need somebody to just take a look over their resume, they're going to help with them there.

But I would say getting the help if you need it is always beneficial. They don't have to go it alone, but one of the first places to really start is you've got to look in words and just think about... So what do I want to get out of this?

Am I going there for a job opportunity? Am I going there to build my network? Am going there just to walk around and see what it's like and just practice my soft skills? And they can never start too early for that.

But if there were some, some suppose that apply... Having a resume is important and a resume doesn't really have to have experience. High school is experience. Volunteering is experience. You know, some project, depending on what your major is, is experience. Getting just professionally. It really does it. It makes an impact.

I know now everybody has the financial means for a particular, you know, for a suit or things along those lines, looking into resources like dress for success might be something that's helpful, but if nothing else, just find the most dressed up outfit that you can and wear that because it also puts you in a different mindset. You're there for business. You're there for work.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

IAN GIBBONS: And just practice your elevator pitch, which is, you know what are you going to say to people? And that really could be... I'm here. You know, I'm a I'm a first semester IT student. I'm still learning about my major. I'm still learning about careers and I'm really here as an exploratory to find out what's out there and then also from there just see what I have to

offer.

So just really telling you like it is because many of these employers, they've been in student's shoes, they know what it's like to not have all the answers. They know what it's like to be in an exploratory phase.

So, I would say don't be afraid of... just you've just got to be yourself.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

IAN GIBBONS: And I say that the final thing is to realize it's a conversation. It's not an interrogation.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's a good point.

IAN GIBBONS: And I think a lot of students in a long life forget that.

So yes, you are selling yourself to them, but they're selling themselves to you.

So, I think that kind of evens out the playing field and who holds the power and you've got to recognize, OK, so they need to also make sure that they're ticking all of my boxes.

And I think that changes what the just the landscape of the playing field.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: You actually hit on the points that I always, you know, tell my students when they are getting ready for an interview... I always say you've got to be confident, right? Not overconfident.

You have to be confident because that puts you at ease and the reason I say that is because students always feel like an interview is the end of the world.

So much so, to the point that there will say things to just make them look good when it's not necessarily even true, right?

They just put themselves on that cross there to be crucified.

IAN GIBBONS: That will come back to haunt them.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

So, I said, you know, just go in there and be confident, also remembering that a company needs you just as much as you need them.

IAN GIBBONS: Right.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: So, hit it right on the point.

So, let's kind of debug some of the career fair myths that we hear out there.

One is oh, these companies are out here just to show face. They're not really looking for anyone.

IAN GIBBONS: Yeah, so that's not typically the case, so I'm not going to say that it's not ever the case, but even if the company was there to show face... I'll touch on this first. Even if they were there just to show face, that's still doesn't prevent it from being a networking opportunity because they may be there for needs that they're going to have two months down the road. Four months down the road. Six months down the road. And they're building their brand, they're getting their name out there, but they're also meeting people that they can draw upon when they're ready to pull the trigger on their position.

But outside of that... For companies to attend an interview, it's time. It's money. It's resources. And a lot of organizations are not really too apt to send their resources to an event and spend the money that it might take to get there without a need that they're trying to fill.

So that's not typically the case, but even if a company were just here to get put their name out there, I would encourage students to not look at that as a bad thing because you can still network with this person and it may lead to places maybe down the road.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Perfect. You debugged that myth one.

Second myth is when I go to career fair or hear students say I always go to career fair... I don't get what I want and I think it touched on a very, very important point, which is you're not going there... Maybe you should plan your agendas a little bit, right?

Not specifically to... I need to get work and if I don't get work then that's the end.

You know, I never thought about the opportunity to actually, you know, talk to the people to kind of see what the language is, to see kind of what they're required.

For me, that is something that I'm still getting out of the career fair, but I think for a student is job or no job, right?

If I don't get it, then the one hour I spent at the career fair is wasted.

So I'm very happy with touching on the other advantages of going there without just, but let's assume that a company talks to a student that went to career fair.

They usually will say, well, you know Professor Chris, I interview with this company, and I haven't heard back from them. Should I follow up? When should I follow up?

Can you help with that?

IAN GIBBONS: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

So, I think one thing to point out is that... attending career fair... it's part of the hiring process.

So, let's say if the student was there with that mind set... I want to get a job.

A couple things they have to realize is that this is this is the first step out of potentially numerous steps with numerous organizations to get that job and to think of it more as a marathon than a sprint because the hiring process for any organization, it could be two months, three months, even four months.

I myself have had an opportunity where the first time I spoke to somebody on the phone with an organization, and then I finally got an offer... Five months later.

So, they have to realize that just the first step... But then from there comes more work.

You have to be able to... You have to follow up with the people that you didn't meet with.

You have to nurture those connections. You have to grow them, and sometimes you meet somebody at the career fair that is not the ideal person for you to be doing business with, and then you have to kind of work that contact to be able to reach the right person.

But it's always a good idea to follow with somebody after career fair. And I would say soon afterwards, whether it's the same day or the next day, but definitely within two days later.

Yeah, every student should get a business card with somebody they interact with. And part of that is, if nothing else, just the pleasantries. Send them a thank you for their time.

Remind them who you are. Remind them of your skill set. If you are excited, remind them that you're excited.

But I also recommend... even if you're not interested, it's still a good idea to send a thank you note, because being polite in this game will get you far and you don't know who that person knows.

You don't know when you might be able to call upon there was a network, even if they had nothing to do with what your needs are.

So, look beyond just what's in it for me... What can I get out of it? Think about it also as... How can I treat people well? When you treat people well... Good things come to you.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Great.

So, career fair is almost every discipline, because we always hea... Oh it's only just the technical programs have career fairs, true or false?

IAN GIBBONS: That's false.

We have career fairs for, I think it's tough to say every discipline, because Wake Tech is always growing and expanding and there are also certain departments that also host their own smaller hiring events.

But we have a Business and IT we have Applied Engineering, we have the Engineering College transfer, we've had Health Sciences career fairs, we've had criminal justice career fair, Early Child Education career fairs. Automotive, Diesel and Heavy Equipment... Skilled Trades.

So, I'd say among one of our largest programs, there are career fairs that I've been involved in, but Cosmetology, for example, they do their own hiring events.

Umm. And a large career fair isn't necessarily appropriate fit for every program.

There's certain programs where we have employers come in and speak to the students in their class, or we have an employer do an information session where we rent out this space here and, you know, put in employer here and students come.

So, a lot of it depends on the program's needs, the size of the student population and the employer's needs.

But also, if there's not a career fair and the student wants to get out there, there are opportunities outside of Wake Tech to attend events. NC State holds career fairs that are open to the public. NC Works holds career fair that open to the public and we've got our online job board which is called Essential Network, which anytime... if you want to look for a job at four o'clock in the morning and you can't sleep.

You can turn the TV on or you can go to College Essential Network and look for jobs.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's great. Yeah, this is been great.

I think and again you know usually with my closing and I will ask the student... If you have any questions you know let me know I'll bring them to you.

But before we close though, what is one advice or motivation that you for students to encourage them about career fairs?

For me personally, again you know, you touch on career points that I want to use for my closing.

Which, I never really thought about. But you know, for you, what is what are your your last few words of encouragement or advice that you have for students and career fairs?

IAN GIBBONS: Yeah. So... So I would say for students, don't dismiss, don't belittle their skills, they're experience, even transferable.

I know a lot of students and alumni... they're here learning new skills and they feel like they don't have anything they can offer.

But if they if they work before, they're going to school before they do have skills that are transferable.

And I think a lot of them don't really recognize their worth.

And also following up on that, recognizing their worth, realize that you are also shopping the employer.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Right.

IAN GIBBONS: It's a two-way street. I think that really... that's very empowering.

It's not just what can you do for them. What can they do for you? And really the biggest thing is... Wake Tech we have so many resources here.

I did mention careers that waketech.edu... students

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: I was actually going to tell you... to please tell them where they can find you.

You were right on point.

IAN GIBBONS: Yeah careers.waketech.edu, but any student or alumni has a small army of career specialists that will one on one help them with anything that they need.

And if a student were to come back to the same person ten, 15, 20 times with questions, that's what we're here for.

So, I think it's wild... so every student here has a really a career coach essentially, they do. So use the resources. You don't have to go it alone and it's there for you and it's free.

So, get the back up. You know, get the coach in your corner to help champion you to where you want to be.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: That's great.

Well, there we have it. Another edition of Let's Talk Ed with Professor Chris.

If you haven't subscribed, please do. Please, please do. This was again.... very good information about career fairs and if you have any questions again get it to me, or get it to Mr. Ian here.

Ian... it was a pleasure.

IAN GIBBONS: Great seeing you.

CHRIS O'RIORDAN-ADJAH: Yeah.

IAN GIBBONS: Awesome, thank you, this was my pleasure. My pleasure.