



Connecting College to Career

# Midwest ACE E-News

January 2011

## Is it Time for a Virtual Career Fair?

Midwest ACE Trends in Recruiting Conference 2010 Session Review

By Susan McKenna, Assistant Director of Advising, Marketing and Communications in the Office of Minority Student Affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

We know from Dr. Phil Gardner's annual research on hiring trends that the economic downturn has resulted in significant changes to the recruiting landscape. In addition to a pervasive wait-and-see attitude, many companies are curtailing hiring altogether; others are reducing their recruiting budgets; and some, who do have jobs to offer, have not yet connected with our particular campuses' pools of job-seeking students. So how do we, as career professionals, continue to help find those opportunities to put recruiters and job-seeking students together?

We need to be as creative as ever. One way we might help our students capitalize on available opportunities is by hosting a virtual career fair instead of, or in addition to, an in-person traditional fair.

Gayle Oliver-Plath, founder and CEO of CareerEco in Atlanta, is making the virtual career fair a greater possibility for many of us. During a breakout session at the Midwest ACE Trends Conference in Chicago on November 19, 2010, she talked about her company and the virtual career fair system she recently developed.

Among the services Oliver-Plath's company offers are: the opportunity to participate in live one-to-one or group chat rooms, a custom-branded site, the opportunity for recruiters to pre-qualify students via advance looks at resumes followed by video chats, flexibility of schedules during the fair, ability for recruiters to seek out particular students based on the students' indicated interests, unlimited job postings, and links to additional resources.

CareerEco uses a revenue-sharing business model, so campus career professionals don't need to find ways to develop the software on their own or incur any front-end expense. Setup is relatively easy, too, so career offices can accomplish a virtual fair even with limited staff and



reduced budgets.

The reduced expenses are a draw for recruiters, too. They can participate from the comfort of their own offices without the expense of a large travel budget and minus the lost productivity. And, as the time commitment is lower and more flexible, potentially more recruiters and more employers can participate in the virtual event.

Those of us who have not considered holding a virtual career fair might want to think again, as students — and alumni — are appreciative of organizations that use current technology, according to Oliver-Plath, who has heard from job seekers who attended previous CareerEco virtual fairs. And a virtual event is more of a reality today, she said, because the technology has improved since the introduction of the concept in the early 2000s.

According to Oliver-Plath, students find many advantages in the virtual fair, including: 1) they only have to upload their resumes once to have them viewed by many recruiters; 2) they can interact with a greater number of recruiters because they don't have to wait in long lines; 3) it is easier for them to apply to multiple jobs; 4) they are proactively invited to chats with recruiters who have seen their resumes; 5) they don't need to stand in line only to find out they are supposed to "go apply online;" 6) they can react better to recruiters' questions because they have more time to compose their answers; and 7) they can see/participate in question-and-answer sessions and conversations between recruiters and other students. In general, students believe they benefit from being immersed in a virtual world that offers more options to interact and better networking opportunities than at a physical fair. traditional and virtual fairs.

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## Is it Time for a Virtual Career Fair?

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Oliver-Plath created CareerEco after becoming interested and engaged in learning about global climate change. As a professional in recruiting and career consulting, she decided to combine her interests and create a recruitment company built on the ideal of using resources responsibly. The company began as an ecologically minded career community online, where recruiters and job seekers interested in "green" jobs could find each other and interact. Oliver-Plath said she wanted to inspire people to become part of the green movement. A natural expansion of her early efforts was the creation of a system to conduct virtual career fairs. And recently CareerEco facilitated virtual career fairs for Georgia Tech and Purdue University, with hopes of other universities following their lead.

With all the benefits a virtual event offers to everyone involved and the interest it generates — especially in student job seekers — is there still a place for the traditional fair? Oliver-Plath said she believes "there is a viable place in the market for both traditional and virtual fairs.

"There are two possible scenarios," she said recently. "If the economy continues to recover and the predictions about employee gaps resulting from

'boomers' exiting the marketplace are true, then employers will become more and more competitive about recruiting, and they will want options to out-recruit their competitors on campus and online. They will want the opportunity to go to campus physically and virtually to fully brand their company and ensure they have adequately covered the key schools they prefer to recruit from.

"If, on the other hand, the economy remains sluggish, then employers may limit their physical presence on campus to once a year. Yet, because they still have recruiting needs that occur throughout the year, offering a virtual career fair gives them the option to recruit more cost-effectively and still remain engaged with the students using today's technology. ... Also, if the economy recovers slowly, employers may opt for more consortium events, live and/or virtual, to improve their economies of scale.

"Essentially, I believe employers are going to expect the flexibility to choose between both live and virtual events to remain nimble, which seems to be a bigger and bigger priority in a global, technology-dependent economy. Schools that offer both types of events will be optimizing employers' ever-changing needs."

*Susan McKenna is Assistant Director for Advising, Marketing and Communications in the Office of Minority Student Affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is in the 14th year of her career in Web and print communications at the University. She also advises students and assists them with all aspects of career development..*

**\*\*CALL FOR PROPOSALS – Deadline Extended – New Deadline: January 28, 2011!\*\***

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**The CALL FOR PROPOSALS is accessible as a PDF or Word document by visiting [www.mwace.org](http://www.mwace.org)**

We look forward to seeing you in Lombard, Illinois. Thank you.

**Don't forget - the deadline for submission is now January 28, 2011**

## Back by Popular Demand...Employer Site Visits!

Midwest ACE Trends in Recruiting Conference 2010 Review

### Blue Cross Blue Shield

A group of 24 MWACE members were welcomed to the headquarters of the Blue Cross/BlueShield Association located on Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago by Juanita Esparza of their Human Resources Department.

The association has 750 employees in its Chicago office and another 250 located in D.C. and Columbia, MD. The three main goals of the association are: to protect and strengthen its brand, provide service and support for its products, and lobby on behalf of the association related to health care issues. The roles that the association plays related to these goals involves work as a trade association, a business management function, and a brand manager for the association.

The session included a number of department representatives who outlined the specific department size, mission, and duties of their department. They



### Mercer

Hosted by Julie Franzen and Maggie Griffin

Mercer is a large human resources consulting firm with four major practices:

- Health and benefits. This business is primarily insurance related, helping clients save money through consolidation and studying trends in claims. This is the largest of the four practices, with actuaries making up 40% of the employees.
- Pension plans and retirement issues, with a staff consisting entirely of actuaries.
- Human capital and executive compensation. This practice accounts for most of the entry level hiring done by Mercer.
- Finance and investing design. Finance and economics grads work here, interviewing fund managers.

Internships are available in all areas during the summer. Mercer does on campus recruiting and also reviews resumes from their online applicant tracking system. Non-actuary candidates are interviewed in the fall.

New hires are brought on as analysts, where they may work for three to five years, then move to associate, then senior associate and finally partner, managing a practice. With 17,000 employees in many offices around the country and the world, there is not much need for consultants to travel.

also noted the positions they normally recruit for, the skills necessary to be successful in these positions, and the educational and experience requirements for the positions. The positions often require a business related degree either at the bachelor's or masters level. Typical skills needed include: problem solving, team work, communication-written and oral, negotiating, research, consensus building, analytical, data analysis, content/specific subject knowledge, and industry specific knowledge as appropriate for the department. Some require 1-3 years work experience as well. Some departments will hire summer interns.

Departments involved in the presentation included: Financial Services, Information Technology, Strategic Services, Brand Protection & Financial Services, Clinical Affairs, and Legal/Governance.

For more information about this organization, please contact Juanita Esparza at 312.297.6866 or email: [juanita.esparza@bcbsa.com](mailto:juanita.esparza@bcbsa.com)

*Jerry Donahue is Coordinator of Employer Development at St. Norbert College. Throughout his distinguished career, he has spent over 30 years in the career services field.*

Advice for candidates included:

- Have previous internship experience
- Think outside the box for behavioral questions
- Do not talk about the slacker in the group project and how you did all the work. Talk instead about how you motivated the slacker.

Maggie Griffin talked about what it takes to be successful in the consulting business. Consultants need to build relationships with clients and work at those relationships, whether they are customers yet or not. Consulting is a continual sales process, so the future—and long term relationships—matter. It is cyclical work, characterized for example by annual renewals of benefits.

Griffin went on to advise would-be Mercer consultants to relax in the interview and have conversations with the interviewer. Avoid inappropriate jokes. You will go through a phone screen, so answer questions professionally. Be wary of Facebook, and do not have a photo on your resume since it will be discarded to avoid possible bias.

Training programs vary by practice. Actuaries learn modules on federal forms and human capital has formal classroom training. Other practices use trial by fire or a one-on-one approach, especially if they do not have a large group of new hires to train. Sometimes a practice will use an online orientation for new hires.

*John Scanlan is currently the Assistant Director of the Career Services Center at Cleveland State University with 22 years experience working with students at all levels and all fields.*