Exchanges and Conferences

For professionals in Student Affairs the primary method of job searching is through conferences and placement exchanges. They provide an opportunity for colleges and universities to interview many candidates in one location, and for candidates to gain exposure to a variety of employers in one location. For a great summary of the placement exchange process, check out the description on the Southern Placement Exchange site. For candidates looking for graduate assistantships, placement exchanges are often the best option. Both NASPA and ACPA tend to have more full-time positions and less assistantships.

**Oshkosh Placement Exchange (OPE)**
For the past 28 years the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh has been hosting this exchange. OPE offers mostly housing and residential life positions.

**Southern Placement Exchange (SPE)**
The annual Southern Placement Exchange is held in Memphis, TN in February or March. SPE is a joint effort of several professional organizations in the southeast and southwest to provide a more regionally accessible exchange. SPE offers mostly housing and residential life positions.

**Summer Placement Exchange**
South Dakota State University hosts this late-season exchange for employers and candidates who have not completed their search. SPE offers mostly housing and residential life positions.

**NASPA Annual Conference**
Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) provides career services at their annual conference each spring.

**ACPA Annual Convention**
College Student Educators International (ACPA) provides career services at their annual convention each spring.

Ethics of the Job Search

Preparing yourself for the job search involves not only physical preparation, but mental as well. In this vein it is important to look at ethical considerations related to the job search. Being ethical in this process boils down to one thing: honest communication.

1. Provide accurate information about your academic work and employment history
2. Talk to your references before listing them on your resume - ensure they will provide a positive one!
3. Only accept interviews with employers you are sincerely interested in and whose criteria you meet.
4. Don’t waste your or the employer’s time – be there when you say you will!
5. Discuss honestly with employers where you are in the job search and where they fit in
6. Only accept one job offer, and honor your commitment
7. Claim fair reimbursement
8. Research your options enough to make informed decisions
9. Don’t trash talk other candidates or employers
10. Be your best self, even when you are not interviewing
11. If you are both candidate and employer, be careful how this comes across

Before the Conference

Get Registered

1. Many schools recruit and interview at placement exchanges. Find one that suits your needs and register to attend. The more you attend, the more schools you’ll encounter which means you’ll have lots of options.
2. When you register, fill out everything completely and check for mistakes. The last thing you want is a mistake on your posting – that’s a real turn-off. Employers look for candidate listings just like you look for job postings.
3. Make sure you pay attention to the type of exchange, as well. Some are for more entry level positions while others host predominantly mid-level jobs.

Research Some More

1. Once you get registered for a placement exchange, take a look around. Employers have listings on those websites for the jobs they’re recruiting for which often include the stipulations they have for hiring, such as master’s required, entry level, graduate assistant, etc.
2. Look at their website. Most schools list their website within their job postings – search it out and see if it answers the questions you have.
3. Don’t be afraid to contact a school. It is a very good idea to shoot an email to a school that has peaked your interest and ask them specific questions about the job they’re offering. You get a chance to do this at the actual exchange, but getting ahead of the game is never a bad idea.

Start Scheduling Interviews

1. The interview schedule process starts as soon as you want it to. You may contact a school and request an interview from them or the school may contact you. Don’t be disappointed if you ask a school for an interview and they say no. It could be that you didn’t fit what they wanted somehow.
2. Remember not to overload yourself. You need at least 15 minutes between interviews for a bathroom break. Remember to confirm with the school how long their interview will last. Some are as quick as 20 minutes while others could be up to an hour long!
3. You don’t have to fill your schedule before you get there. It is up to you as to whether or not you leave some space in your schedule open to schedule
interviews once you actually get to the exchange. Schools will contact you at the exchange if they want to interview you. You will also have an opportunity to ask for an interview from a school once you get there.

Send Out Your Information

1. Some schools will want an electronic version of your resume. Make sure your electronic version is in a program that is common and that it will print out correctly. Don’t forget to include your box number! (PDF is always a great option to ensure format.)
2. Make sure you fill out any applications for graduate school as well. Check the due dates and ask the school if you are unsure of deadlines. Applications for graduate school can get expensive, so get things clear and really think about where you want to apply before-hand.
3. Send out any letters of recommendation requested before the conference. If you know they won’t get there in time, let the school know and bring them with you to the exchange.

Get Ready For The Exchange

1. Make lots of copies of your resume. You never know if a school received your information in time, or if they “misplaced” it, or if they made copies for all their interviewers. Some schools don’t want your resume until they get there.
2. Participate in mock interviews with people who have been through this kind of process – and make it a dress rehearsal. Make sure they are people you can trust to give you honest feedback about your performance.
3. Think about what you’re going to promote about yourself. Be able to articulate the skills you can bring to an organization.
4. Know what you are looking for in a position.
5. Make a plan and organize your correspondence with schools so that you know where you are with regard to their process.
6. List questions you want to ask employers about their school as well as their position so that you know if they’re a good fit for you.
7. Research the schools that you are most interested in and get some details together so that you can show you’ve invested time.
8. Make a “to pack” list and add to it daily before you leave. Here are some things you’ll find useful:
   - A map of the areas you would consider working in.
   - Stapler
   - Pens/Pencils
   - Scratch paper
   - Extra resumes
   - File folders
   - Professional bag/briefcase
   - Breath mints
   - Post-it notes
   - A schedule to write in your interviews
   - Thank you notes
- More than one outfit per day – bring lots of options, even for the social hours at the end of the day
- Aspirin/Ibuprofen (or any other medication you might need)
- Snack food
- Spending money
- Travel iron/steam iron
- Alarm clock

**At the Conference**

**At The Exchange**

1. Be comfortable introducing yourself to people that you do not know – and you should do it a lot while you’re there.
2. Be professional the entire time you’re at the conference. You never know who’s looking at what you’re doing, or where they’re at. You can have a good time without tarnishing your image.
3. Don’t interview with schools you aren’t interested in for practice.
4. Dress professionally, but be comfortable. You’ll be on your feet a lot, and your interviewer will be able to tell that you’re worn down if you’re in pain from new shoes.
5. Be patient and polite.
6. Write individualized thank-you notes after each interview. Include some detail from the interview that lets the interviewer know you were paying attention.

**In The Interview**

1. Don’t be afraid to pull out a sheet of paper to make notes on. You’ll be asking them questions at the end – writing down notes from them shows you’re invested and care about the answers you get.
2. Write down the names of your interviewers or ask for business cards.
3. Be honest and clear. You have already thought about what points you want to get across to the interviewers – make sure you get them out in the open

**After the Conference**

1. Let the schools that you are interested in know it! Keep in contact with them after you get home.
2. Make sure you know where you are in their process. Understanding timelines is important so that you know how to respond to a school when they request an on campus interview or even offer a job.
3. If you aren’t interested in a school, contact them and tell them as soon as possible. Possible employers don’t want to be strung along any more than you do.
4. Keep up the cordiality when it comes to on campus interviews or phone interviews – thank you notes and professionalism are still in order at all times.