

## Best Practice:

### Speed Networking



#### BACKGROUND

The College of Communication Arts and Sciences, its student organizations, and campus-wide career services each held events targeting students in communication-related fields. As each of these groups assessed their event offerings to students, it became clear that change was needed.

Representatives in certain industries, like public relations, avoided career fairs completely in favor of informal recruiting practices, while others would only attend events when they were officially recruiting and the economy was good. The employers that offered the most promise (and frustration) included those from well-recognized organizations with alumni willing to “talk” to students and unknown companies with great field-specific experiences. Many of these top targets didn’t want to pay anything for attending events, even when they were actively recruiting. Students would mob the representatives from the well-known organizations and often ignore the unknown. We needed to convince students to consider organizations they didn’t know, as well as to present students with more connections to the “big names”. Speed networking provided the solution to draw the right employers and students together with just enough structure to make magic happen.

#### SOLUTION

Speed networking, modeled after speed dating, provides a semi-structured way for students and professionals in communication-related fields to meet for a series of five-minute meetings. An electronic system uses an algorithm to create schedules and seat assignments for each participant, based upon the field preferences they enter into their profile. All participants move every round; professionals will not move every round in the 2008 event, but will still move for some rounds.

Students are required to attend a prep session to be eligible for speed networking. The first 130 students registered on registration day (held after all prep sessions) earn schedules for speed networking. Students unable to secure a schedule may participate in the open mingling before the scheduled meetings. If a registered student participant does not show, another student may claim that schedule. A “no show” for speed networking is treated as a “no show” for an on-campus interview; students are deactivated from on-campus interviewing until apology notes are written to each person on their schedule and submitted to Career Services. “No show” professionals/employers are expected to accept e-mails or calls from students to arrange other times to communicate.

#### RESULTS

In the first year, 242 students attended prep sessions and filled the available networking slots in twenty minutes. To manage demand in 2007, juniors and seniors were given preference over underclassmen; attendance at prep sessions dipped slightly (as was intended) and all student spaces were filled. Employer/professional attendance increased by 36% in 2007 to engage over 70 professionals. The event is now a signature event for the college; the college alumni association even hosts a reception for professionals after the event. In 2008, the event will be expanded to include more student and professional participants.