Virtual Career Fairs: Best Practices and Student Satisfaction

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Purpose of the Study: Given the social restrictions surrounding COVID-19, the virtual career fair (VCF) has replaced most traditional in-person career fairs and it may even continue as a viable post-pandemic alternative. This research primarily explores best practices for a VCF and furthermore investigates factors that impact satisfaction of student VCF participants.

Method/Design and Sample: Survey data collected from students participating in a virtual career fair investigate the role of students' preparation time, student perception of employer preparedness and the number of private, one-on-one text and video chat invites students receive in impacting student satisfaction.

Results: Findings from a regression analysis reveal that student's own preparation time and their perception of employer preparedness influenced student satisfaction with the VCF. Additionally, qualitative feedback from both students and employers support the use of best practices.

Value to Marketing Educators: Involved faculty and university administrators can adopt the recommended best practices as a framework for planning, conducting, and evaluating successful VCFs. Both universities and employers will benefit as a result.

Keywords: Virtual career fairs, best practices, preparation, employer, student, satisfaction

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Introduction

Career fairs are utilized by higher education institutions to prepare students for post-graduation employment. Traditionally, career fairs are in-person events on campus requiring recruiters to travel to the university. However, organizations have recently shifted to using virtual media for meetings given in-person meeting restrictions involving physical distancing and capacity restrictions caused by COVID-19 (Standaert, Muylle, & Basu, 2021). Hence, most campus recruiting efforts have shifted online giving rise to the Virtual Career Fair (VCF). This study explores certain relevant topics of a VCF.

VCFs are becoming increasingly important as they offer a number of advantages over traditional career fairs such as wider reach (Galanaki, 2002) and lower recruiting costs (Vik, Norbech, & Jeske, 2018) prompting organizations to shift to using more virtual meetings in the "new normal" post-pandemic environment (Daniel, 2020). Further, the shift of the recruitment industry toward demanding a multimedia approach to attracting and communicating with candidates (Hunter & Nicol, 2002) shifts the balance in VCF's favor.

Given the novelty of VCFs, there is a dearth of research on the topic. Among the few articles, Galanaki, (2002) researched factors that make online recruitment valuable and Vik, Norbech, & Jeske, (2018) explored the opportunities and challenges in such events. However, it appears that no research has yet looked into the best practices of a VCF and features that can impact student satisfaction in these events.

The purpose of the current research is to examine best practices of a VCF and explore factors that can affect student satisfaction with the event. Student satisfaction is an important consideration because career fairs are organized for the benefit of students, specifically to promote employment opportunities. Furthermore, measuring student satisfaction ties back into our main purpose (i.e. best practices) and allows us to pinpoint key best practices. Researchers have found that students are a hard group to please, as even when all key factors in a job fair are present, very rarely do they exceed the expectations of the students (Milman & Whitney, 2014). That presents a big challenge for the success of VCFs as they are much difficult to pull-off well and lack some of the high interactivity of traditional face-to-face career fairs.

From a practitioner point of view, our research contributes by identifying best practices that can be

adopted before, during, and after the VCF. Additionally, we highlight key components of a VCF that should be monitored to ensure participating students are satisfied with the event.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the following section, we highlight VCF best practices. Next, we detail the conceptual development and hypotheses related to key factors that can impact student satisfaction. We discuss the methodology and present the results of our quantitative study in the following section. Employer comments are also provided in the results section. We conclude by discussing the implications of our study and highlight certain limitations and future areas of research.

BEST PRACTICES OF THE VIRTUAL CAREER FAIR

This research is based on a VCF organized by a mid-sized university in eastern US. The event was hosted using a well-known VCF software platform (CareerEco) for a specialized group of approximately 100 students (i.e., juniors and seniors enrolled across four sections of a course offered by the business school). The details of the VCF were emailed to these students regarding the schedule and registration information. Despite the limited number of student attendees at the VCF, we feel that these practices can reasonably be applied to larger, university-wide VCFs or even major-specific fairs (e.g., engineering, business, etc.).

Although this paper is not about the details of the platform, some of the practices assume such a software platform is being used, which will be made apparent in the shared practices below. It is important that university administrators select a user-friendly VCF software platform as an initial first-step in creating a successful VCF. To ensure the success of the VCF, we utilize some common practices and suggest several unique best practices. Furthermore, we formalize these practices as part of the toolkit to share with the academic community for use in conducting any VCF.

As mentioned earlier, students may have general expectations from career fairs (Milman & Whitney, 2014) and we would assume that these expectations would exist for VCFs. To conduct a successful VCF, we suggest several best practices before, during, and after the fair, which can lead to student satisfaction (see Table 1 for a summary). As many of these activities overlap for both student and employer attendees, they will be discussed in tandem. Furthermore, best practices that were created through our own efforts will be differentiated between those available to a university by the VCF platform vendor alone.

Table 1
Summary of VCF Best Practices

Before VCF	**Brief Description of Activity**
Platform tutorials	A customized document and video on how to register for and then navigate the VCF platform was emailed to all participants.
Resume and company information	The platform registration process prompted students for their resume and employers for their company information, providing students and employers the ability to pre-screen each other before the event.
LinkedIn connections	Students were reminded by email to create and/or ensure their LinkedIn profiles were complete.
During VCF	
First-stop allocation	To minimize initial crowding in virtual employer rooms, students were randomly and equally assigned to visit particular rooms for their first employer visit.
Room monitoring	Employer room queue information was relayed to students via a platform message board to encourage more even distribution among the rooms.
Assistance room	A 'help desk' type virtual room to field questions from students or employers about the platform.
After VCF	
Follow-up emails	Students were reminded to send an email to employers with whom they interacted, expressing their gratitude.

Before the VCF

There are many preparatory activities that both students and employers can do before the VCF. Mittleman, Briggs, & Nunamaker, (2000) show that extensive preparation can overcome issues of student engagement in a virtual platform. We propose the following preparatory activities to improve student experience at the VCF: platform tutorials, providing resumes and company information, and making connections on LinkedIn.

Platform tutorials

Despite the ubiquity of software programs in academia and industry and the subsequent expectation of proficiency for students and employees respectively, learning a new platform can still be challenging for users as it depends on their perceived ease of use of the platform (DeLoughry, 1993, Sproull, Zubrow, & Kiesler, 1986). Generally, students use learning management software to review and submit assignments (e.g., Canvas and Blackboard) and may also have web-based assignment and assessment platforms from textbook publishers for specific courses (e.g.,

MyMarketing Lab from Pearson and Connect from McGraw Hill). Employers on the other end, use customer relationship management programs (e.g., Salesforce and HubSpot) and a host of other internal and external resource management software programs (e.g., SAP, Oracle, and Netsuite), to name only a few.

Learning to navigate yet another program can feel overwhelming or unappealing, despite the claimed user-friendliness of the platform. To overcome these challenges associated with first-time users of a particular software, the VCF participants were sent helpful tutorial materials. Tutorials, offered by the platform vendor are usually standardized and can be distributed to participants. However, we created and emailed a short but detailed customized document and video to both students and employers on how to register and then navigate the VCF platform, including the how-to on registration, profile information, document upload, and text and video chats within a virtual room. As a best practice, we recommend sending a customized video tutorial along with the written document as many students and employers prefer viewing the instructions rather than reading them. Such customized and brief tutorials provided a much-needed early introduction to the platform, which lead to users having an increased familiarity and confidence in navigating the platform on the event day (Simon, Haghirian, & Schlegelmilch, 2003).

Resume and company information

All students and employers who were planning to attend had to register on the virtual platform, at least one week prior to the event. Once students were registered, they could upload their resumes to their profiles and make them available to registered employers. Employers could similarly complete the company profile by adding company and available position know-how to allow students access to such information prior to the event. Students were encouraged to research employers of interest to learn more about the company and then to learn how the company might align with their interests and qualifications. Recruiters were encouraged to review student resumes to learn more about students that meet their expectations.

As part of the best practice, the registration process resulted in the pre-event sharing of information allowing proactive individuals from both parties to refine their interest lists beforehand or even make contact prior to the event. Providing students and employers the ability to pre-screen each other before the event may have led to more intentionality—knowing whom to speak with and why (Forrest & Kearns, 2001)—resulting in more meaningful interactions and time-saving on the day of the VCF. Further, availability of resumes and company information on VCF profile allowed company representatives and students to easily retrieve information during or after an interaction at the fair.

LinkedIn connections

The next preparatory step involved students creating or updating their LinkedIn profiles which has become the standard for professional networking and interactions (de Janasz & Forret, 2008, McCorkle & McCorkle, 2012, Pentina, 2010) as employers are increasingly relying on them to search for candidates (Madia, 2011, Safko, 2012). As a best practice, all registered students were prompted by faculty and university administrators, via email, to ensure their LinkedIn profiles were complete with an updated professional profile photo, work experience, skills, etc., as that can attract more attention from potential employers (Peterson & Dover, 2014). Students, with an updated LinkedIn profile could connect with their preferred registered employers to gain more information about the organization and its employees. By researching the companies and connecting with recruiters on LinkedIn, students were also better prepared to meet the recruiters during the VCF. Additionally, due to the LinkedIn connections, students could continue interacting with potential employers even after the event thereby increasing their chances of securing employment and also expanding their professional network.

During the VCF

Although preparation helped all VCF participants navigate the VCF with more confidence, there were additional event-day practices that ensured participants avoided issues and had a better experience during the event. We suggest first-stop allocation, room monitors, and a dedicated assistance room.

First-stop allocation

One of the challenges of a VCF is the issue of virtual crowding. This problem is not unique to the VCF and exists for in-person career fairs also. In a physical career fair, students can easily observe the crowding and thereby move to a less crowded employer. However, in a virtual space, such crowding is not visible before entering each virtual room (assuming the platform does not provide the room count before entering). Also, most VCF software present the employer rooms in a sequential manner and thus there is an order effect, or a natural tendency to enter the room which is on top of the list while rooms much lower are less attended.

Virtual crowding creates lots of issues for employers also, especially if an employer's room becomes congested and there are multiple students who all wish to participate in text/virtual chatting with company representatives. Conducting various chats simultaneously can be difficult and students may become dissatisfied having to wait for chat responses from a company representative. On the other hand, a lack of student visitors can also create an issue for employers.

To minimize these issues, we recommend the following best practice. As students initially entered the VCF, they were randomly and equally assigned to different employer rooms. This assigned "first-stop" room demanded no time or communication requirements on the students (e.g., one-on-one text or video chats with the employer) beyond the requirement to visit the assigned virtual room first and learn about

the opportunities offered by the employer. For example, if there were 20 employers present at the fair and 100 student attendees, then students were randomly spread among the rooms resulting in groups of 5 students across each of the 20 employer rooms. Even if the 100 students were not all present at the start of the event, they would still abide by their assigned first-stop to approximate an even distribution across the rooms throughout the event.

This approach helped prevent bottlenecks that may have arisen from distribution inequalities at the start of the event due to initial student preferences. Some may argue that this forced approach contradict the natural interactions that should take place at such an event and may lead to displeased students. However, this method allows a student to meet and learn about opportunities with a company that they would not have normally considered. Students were made aware of the distribution policy beforehand so they knew what to expect and after the first-stop, they could then proceed to visit their preferred employers. Despite these efforts to reduce overcrowding initially, long participant queues could develop naturally at a later time during the event. To address this issue of room capacity, we used virtual room monitoring as a secondary solution.

Room monitoring

During the VCF, the allocation of students across every employer room was monitored by designated staff/university administrators, who tracked rooms that were under or over capacity. Although the virtual platform did not have actual capacity restrictions in a particular room, some rooms had relatively more students than others resulting in longer queues, overwhelmed recruiters and frustrated students, as discussed previously. Monitors could easily relay this information to all students on the platform via a message board to encourage more even distribution among the rooms. This best practice was impactful in two important ways. First, it provided opportunities to students to stay engaged and actively communicate with available employers instead of wasting unnecessary time waiting in queues thereby resulting in more successful one-on-one discussion between students and employers. That being said, it is important that universities select a VCF platform that can accommodate private text and video chats between students and employers to provide the needed privacy for such interactions and to simulate what naturally happens in in-person career fairs. Second, it created a more even distribution of students across rooms which is beneficial for all employers, who are an important stakeholder in such events, making it mutually beneficial for both the students and the employers.

Monitoring by staff/administrators provided students with a seemingly birds-eye view of the employer rooms which was otherwise unavailable to students on the virtual platform. This practice was similar to what students could reasonably do for themselves in an in-person career fair as they quickly walk-around and scan available employers to approach. Although students had the ultimate choice of the employers they visited after the assigned first-stop, having live updates on room capacity allowed students to make efficient use of their limited time in the VCF platform and avoid entering each room to assess capacity. Previous research shows the value of this type of scaffolding when introducing students to new procedures or activities during unusual conditions (Neden, Cleak, & Thomson, 2020).

Assistance room

VCF platforms, though user friendly, may prove to be difficult to navigate for students and employers due to the unfamiliarity (Simon, Haghirian, & Schlegelmilch, 2003). Maintaining a 'help desk' type virtual room, dedicated to fielding questions from students or employers about the platform, can be an effective solution and our recommended best practice. Much like a 'help desk' found in a university library, this virtual room served as an information station to resolve any concerns for the event participants. Students and employers alike had unlimited access to this room in case they had technology issues or needed help navigating the software. For example, students who were having difficulty participating in a video chat with an employer (e.g., initiating a chat, technical difficulties, etc.) could come to the assistance room for help.

After the VCF

The day after the event, university administrators emailed all student attendees and encouraged them to send follow-up emails to express gratitude to the employers they met, regardless of their interest in those companies/positions. Email templates were not provided to the students since employers appreciate organic and thoughtful emails (Maxwell, Ogden, & Broadbridge, 2010, McMurray et al., 2016). As part of a best practice, follow-up contact after an initial meeting not only showed professional etiquette but also acted as a quality signal from students to employers thereby increasing a student's chances of receiving a call-back from a company recruiter (Renzulli, 2019). Additionally, these follow-up emails could create positive spillover effects regarding employers' perceptions of the event and the university overall which could be beneficial for the university's employer relations.

These best practices before, during and after the VCF may have helped create better experiences for both employers and students. Beyond best practices, student satisfaction is a key indicator of a successful VCF so it is important to be studied in this context. In the next section, we shift from best practices to show empirical evidence of key factors of student satisfaction in a VCF.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

A key metric to measure the success of a virtual career fair can be student satisfaction. In this section, we explore how student outcomes during the VCF such as the number of text and video chat invitations received during the event, along with student preparation and students' perception of employer preparation can

impact satisfaction among students. The dependent variable of this study is satisfaction, adapted from Brown & Peterson, (1994). A global measure of satisfaction was used (Bagozzi, 1980) which captures the construct more completely.

Successful outcomes like favorable grades in an examination or in a course (Bean, 1980, Bean and Bradley, 1986; Siegel & Bowen, 1971; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975) can be factors impacting student satisfaction (Keller, 1983; Pike, 1993; Noel-Levitz, 2011). It is not surprising that as students receive better educational outcomes they are more satisfied. This line of reasoning could extend to a VCF where students rate their satisfaction in terms of their successful interactions at the VCF. Such interactions in the VCF are the quantity of text and video chats that students are invited to participate in by the employers. It is hypothesized:

H1: The number of text chat invites a student receives will be positively related to their satisfaction with the VCF.

H2: The number of video chat invites a student receives will be positively related to their satisfaction with the VCF.

Students' preparation may also lead to satisfaction. From a psychological perspective, Cherrington, (1980) asserts work of an individual to have both an instrumental and a terminal value. The instrumental perspective posits that work leads to some end goal. However, the terminal value considers work to be fulfilling in itself which is uplifting, producing "a feeling of dignity, self-respect, and independence" (Cherrington, 1980, p. 26), and meaning and satisfaction (White, 1959). This view posits preparation as a rewarding activity in itself, which can lead to satisfaction, independent of any end goal or outcome. In short, individual preparation may increase satisfaction with a particular activity. Formally stated:

H3: The total amount of time students spend across various VCF preparation activities will be positively related to their satisfaction with the VCF.

Prior access to student information allowed employers to prepare in advance, possibly pre-select candidates and even make pre-event contacts with chosen candidates. Such opportunities to prepare in advance of an event is beneficial for the employers and may lead to more employer intentionality whereby they clearly know beforehand with whom to interact and why (Forrest & Kearns, 2001). The preparation of employers arguably made VCF interactions more meaningful and allowed employers and students to better utilize their time in the event. Employer preparation, as perceived by the students, may increase student satisfaction with the VCF. Effort heuristic literature speaks to this relationship between effort and subsequent positive evaluations. The more pain and trouble a person experiences to attain something the more they tend to value that thing (Aronson & Mills, 1959). For example, if a student puts forth more effort than usual on writing a paper or studying for an exam they are more likely to positively evaluate their own work and then expect higher grades. In the case of this research, the more time a student devotes to preparing for the VCF may lead to more positive evaluations of the event. This self-perception of one's own effort can also extend to external sources. Kruger, Wirtz, Van Boven, & Altermatt, (2004) argue that perception of others effort (e.g., time and physical exertion) also influence an individual's judgement, known as the effort heuristic. For example, people tend to believe that a piece of art that takes four days to create is better than the piece that takes only one day. Employers incur information costs in terms of time and resources to find the right match (Alonso, 2018) and as students perceive employers to have put forth more effort in preparing for the VCF it also increases their evaluation of the fair. Formally:

H4: Student perception of employer preparation for the VCF will be positively related to student satisfaction with the VCF.

METHODOLOGY

Methods and procedure

To empirically support our research, we collected data from both participating students and employers. Post VCF, an online survey was emailed to a total of 85 undergraduate students (female = 40%) from a medium-sized US university in the Mid-Atlantic region. All measures discussed below (i.e., satisfaction, preparation, and chat invites) can be found in the Appendix. In our sample (N=79 after case wise deletions), 53.4% of students were seniors, 47.7% were seeking internships, and 54.5% percentage were looking for jobs. Additionally, a brief survey was sent to employers to capture qualitative feedback about the VCF.

Student satisfaction was measured and aggregated using 4 items adapted from Brown & Peterson (1994) ($\alpha = .870$). Student perceptions of their own preparation was measured using 5-item index that combined the total amount of time they spent across various preparatory activities, like researching companies, working on their resumes, and learning the virtual platform. To assess perceived employer preparation, students were asked a single item: "What is your perception of the overall readiness and preparation of employers for the virtual career fair?" (1-Not at all prepared; 7-Extremely prepared).

To measure student chat invites, the amount and type of interactions students had with employers were counted and self-reported (i.e., total number of private text and video chat invites from employers to students). Arguably, much like a grade on an exam the chat invites measure can serve as a benchmark of success from the students' perspective as it would seem that the greater the number of employer interactions the greater the chances of a student receiving internship and job offers.

Analysis and results

The data collected was analyzed to discover factors that contributed to student satisfaction with the VCF. Students made an average of 7.19 virtual room visits, participated in 4.68 one-on-one text chat invites, and 2.26 video chat invites. We first measured the overall

satisfaction of the students with the VCF. Results of a one-sample t-test indicated that the mean satisfaction score was significantly greater than the mid-point value of 4 ($m = 5.27$, $p < 0.05$), thus implying that students were satisfied with the event.

A regression analysis was conducted to analyze how students' satisfaction was related to both student preparation for the VCF and the student chat invite metrics. Overall, the model was significant ($F(9, 69) = 3.165$, $p = .003$, Adjusted $R^2 = .200$) with various control variables included (see Table 2). Results indicate that none of the chat invite variables were significant predictors of student satisfaction with the VCF, thereby not supporting either H1 or H2. On the other hand, both preparation measures were significant and positively related to satisfaction, namely student preparation time ($\beta = .423$, $p < 0.05$) and perceived employer preparation ($\beta = .246$, $p < 0.05$), in support of both H3 and H4, respectively. So, students were more satisfied with the event when they invested more time to prepare for it and when they perceived that the employers were also prepared.

Table 2
Effects of Preparation and Chat Invites on Student Satisfaction

	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Coefficient Standard Error	Significance Level
Preparation			
Student preparation time	.423	.022	.000
Perceived employer preparation	.246	.111	.021
Chat Invites			
Number of text chat invites	-.128	.097	.351
Number of video chat invites	-.005	.089	.966
Control variables			
Actively looking for employment	-.051	.309	.658
Actively looking for internship	-.131	.304	.260
Graduating this semester	-.058	.461	.617
Gender	-.053	.298	.632
Number of companies visited	.084	.080	.529

In addition to the empirical evidence provided, given below are some student comments collected from the survey that reflect what they liked about the VCF, in general, including some comments that can be directly attributed to our VCF best practices:

"You did an amazing job adapting to the virtual environment.
"It was easy to use the virtual website."
"Platform was easy to navigate."
"Organized well."
"The platform was fairly easy to use."
"No lines." (this probably pertains to the lack of long room queues)
"The flow of the entire fair was smooth."
"I liked the communication throughout the entire fair."
"The fair was easy to navigate."
"I got through everyone I wanted to talk to very fast."

Although it is possible that some of these student comments pertain to the VCF platform only, it can be argued that our best practices before and during the event center around the platform, and thus the two are inseparable. Given this, we can attribute these comments to our efforts as well.

In addition to the student data collected, a short post-VCF survey was sent to participating employers asking them what should be changed in our future VCFs. Below are a few responses that reflect the overall sentiment expressed by the employers, again including some comments that may directly be attributed to our VCF best practices:

"This was run better than any others I have attended, I wouldn't change anything!"
"I'm not sure that I would change anything."
"I don't think I would change anything on your end, it was great…"
"I like the flow of Candidates."
"The engagement of students one on one virtually was better than traditional fairs."
"Ability to look at prior notes about our contact w/ the student."
"The system was easy to use and could include our company info."
"Receiving Resumes before the fair."
"Ability to upload flyers and marketing materials in advance."

DISCUSSION

Student's own preparation time and their perception of employers' preparation were found to influence student satisfaction with the VCF. Knowing that preparation is key, it is important to learn what preparatory activities were administered to the students. These preparatory activities, along with several other best practices were discussed in this paper. Numerous VCF best practices are explored to ensure a successful event and satisfied students. These practices are proposed to occur before, during, and after the event and can be reasonably implemented by university administrators/faculty using a virtual platform for the VCF. Many of these practices are commonly used in career fairs, like resume exchange or encouraging

students to update LinkedIn profiles. However, many of the best practices shared in this research were uniquely created, like platform tutorials, first-stop room allocation, room monitoring, assistance room, and follow-up student emails.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the platform of many business and academic interactions, like virtual instead of in-person career fairs, it is important to consider the impact on the participants. Although the number of employers visited or the number of private text or video chat invites from employers could indicate success, and thus lead to student satisfaction in a VCF, students did not attribute their satisfaction to these chat invite metrices. Often, assessments are solely based on metrics, like grades for a student, that serve as an indicator of success and satisfaction. In the case of the VCF, it seems that as students dedicate more time to something, and when they perceive other participants (i.e., employers) to do the same, they have a more positive experience. This can extend to preparation or effort literature in any employee or student context.

Along with the results from our quantitative study, the qualitative feedback collected from students and employers provide interesting insights about the best practices. Generally, students reported that various facets around the virtual fair such as the website were easy to use. Further, students felt comfortable navigating the event. Collectively, the employers admired the smooth functioning of the fair and opined that the multi-step process leading to their interaction with students such as accessing resumes was seamless. Additionally, the employers reported satisfaction as most of their needs were met and concluded that the VCF was comparatively better managed than other similar events. The overall sentiment expressed was encouraging and corroborates how our best practices may have contributed to the success of the VCF.

Implications

Our research contributes to VCF literature and practices in many significant ways. Faculty and university administrators who are involved in VCFs can facilitate the planning of the fair in a way that ensures best practices are followed before, during, and after the event. The best practices mentioned in this paper can also serve as a guide for universities as they explore VCF software options to ensure that these best practices can be delivered. Much of these best practices help to ensure that students and employers of the VCF are prepared to participate which can lead to satisfaction. Many of the preparatory activities are initiated via email before and after the event making it easy to implement. These practices are easy to implement for universities, and furthermore, appreciated by the employers.

As the use of virtual media for businesses evolves due to the pandemic, new tools and techniques will continue to emerge. The results of this study will enable universities and employers to remain successful despite the changing circumstances. By establishing preliminary best practices, this research contributes by providing the framework for planning, conducting, and evaluating successful VCFs. Both universities and employers will benefit as a result.

Limitations and future research

Though our research highlights some key contributions it is not devoid of limitations. Creating a control group of students who do not participate in the preparatory activities and yet have the same probability of success in the VCF would make for a stronger analysis on the effects of satisfaction and also the effectiveness of our best practices. Empirical results support the positive relationship between measurable best practices (i.e., student preparation time and perceived employer preparation) and student satisfaction. We suggest creating ways to measure the effects of other best practices, specifically, those activities that occur during and after the VCF, to provide robustness to the findings. Furthermore, given that preparatory activities of the students affect their satisfaction with the event, administrators can consider ways to better persuade, incentivize or require such activities from students. Additionally, qualitative data like post-event interviews could provide some interesting insights (e.g., exploring the underlying reasons of why preparation impacts satisfaction and how the best practices are perceived).

Our work also points to a number of areas that can be explored in future. This paper provides best practices that coincide with using a specific user-friendly VCF software platform (CareerEco). Much could be discussed on the platform options that allow for seamless communication between students and employers. Additionally, further research can explore the many tools that administrators are provided on the platform to help with the registration process, creation of employer rooms, and navigating through the event on the day of the VCF. Although we believe that these results are generalizable, more details of the utilized platform, and even competing platform options, could be discussed to help universities in their selection of VCF software.

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Appendix

Measures

Satisfaction

Please respond to the following items regarding the virtual career fair process (1= Strongly Disagree to 7= Strongly Agree)

1. Overall, I was satisfied with the virtual job fair process
2. I felt that the virtual job fair process was very fair
3. I found the virtual job fair process very exciting
4. I found the time spent in the virtual job fair process very worthwhile

Student Preparation Time

Please respond to the following items regarding the time you spent on each activity. (1 = No time at all to 7 = Great amount of time)

1. Researching company profiles on their websites
2. Researching company profiles on LinkedIn
3. Researching company profiles using other sources
4. Working on my resume
5. Spending time in understanding the virtual job fair platform

Perceived Employer Preparation

What was your perception of the overall readiness and preparation of employers for the virtual job fair? (1 = Not at all prepared to 7 = Extremely prepared)

Chat Invites

1. How many companies invited you to a private, one-on-one text chat?
2. How many companies invited you to a private, one-on-one video chat?