

Career Connect



Business faculty Mary Evens, Helen Martin, and Julie Lemmond were on hand to greet students.

The lobby in Scarpelli Hall was a hub of activity in the midafternoon of March 5. Fueled by free pizza, salad, and cold drinks, students had opportunities to connect with faculty, staff, and potential employers.

More than 60 students, alumni, and community members participated in Clark's Career Connect event geared for students enrolled in programs in the college's Business and Entrepreneurship area of study. The event was organized by the Career Services team: Emily Meoz, Alex Kison, Trisha Haakonstad, and Niira Krupnick, with support from student employee Liz Knapp. Kison led the logistics. Last May, the college's Career Services team hosted a large-scale Career Fair in Gaiser Student Center featuring 70 regional employers, attended by more than 300 students, alumni, and community members. That event was broad and included all the college's departments and programs.

This year, the team decided to create a smaller event focused on only one area of study. Instead of asking students to trek to Gaiser Hall, the career fair was held in Scarpelli Hall, where most of the college's in-person Business and Entrepreneurship classes are held. It made sense to invite the students to gather in the familiar lobby just outside their classrooms. Starting the event at 3:30 proved to be thoughtful timing to catch students. Offering free pizza proved to be another successful enticement.



Emily Meoz, director of Advising & Career Services (*pictured above*), explained the team's impetus to transition from a very large, broad event to a smaller, focused career fair: "The Career Connect event idea started as a mini-career fair idea, which grew into a broader connection and career event idea, to include staff and faculty who support students in a particular area of study alongside employers from the related industry. Finding ways to adapt what we're doing to make more meaningful connections and opportunities for students is exciting."

Advising Services, Career Services, and Student Success

Coaches worked together to staff the event and assist students.

Students stopped at a table to chat with Business faculty Mary Evens, Helen Martin, and Julie Lemmond, who answered their questions.

Student Success Coach Lana Strickland assisted students and addressed how a success coach could help them.

Career Services staff were available to take professional LinkedIn portraits to aid students, alumni, and community members in their job search.

Clark College Human Resources staff assisted those interested in applying for an open position at the college. Other employers, including IQ Credit Union, Columbia Springs, Neil Jones Food Company, and Rally Pizza were on hand to talk with students about work opportunities and internships.

Students were given a list of sample questions to ask potential employers. That made it easier to practice talking with a potential employer about opportunities.

In this smaller, more intimate venue, students mingled with like-minded students they might already know from their classes. They had opportunities to speak with professors in their program.

Meoz said, "Overall, this was a great pilot Career Connect event. It serves as an example of how we can bring faculty, staff, and employers together to support students based on area of study. I was impressed with how the Career Services team came together to make this idea a reality in a relatively short period of planning time."

Career Services promoted the event to students via:

- Emailing students in Business and Entrepreneurship area

of study programs

- Working closely with faculty to promote the event to their students
- Advertising the event in Penguin Digest
- Promoting the event through social media

Looking around at the students making connections, Theo Koupelis, Clark's Dean of Workforce, Professional and Technical Education (WLTE) and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), summed it up: "It's buzzing! It's buzzing!"



Two students chat with the owners of Pizza Rally about operating a small business.

Career Connect Q & A

Q: What was the impetus for moving away from the big Career Fair format in Gaiser Student Center to this smaller, more

focused event?

A: We had a great turnout at the big Career Fair during spring 2023. We considered doing the same style of event again. The larger style Career Fairs can be great and very exciting, but they can also be overwhelming for participants and hard to assess whether they are effective for students making progress towards finding job and internship opportunities.

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Q: Were you pleased with the attendance?

A: Yes! Since this was a brand-new event, we were not sure what to expect, but we had great collaboration and support from some faculty members who brought their classes or shared directly with their students. We had a successful pilot event.

Q: What were some positives about this event?

A: It was great to see students engaging in an intentional way with the employers, faculty, and staff. The focused nature of this small Career Connect event created an intimate space that was not as overwhelming as a large career fair can sometimes be.

Q: What tools did you provide to assist students in making connections at the event?

A: We developed a Bingo card to encourage participants to connect across the event. We will use the completed Bingo cards as an assessment tool to see how students made connections and engaged during the event.

We also provided students with sample career exploration questions to help guide their conversations and connections. Some employers told us that they were impressed with the kind of intentional questions students were asking.

Q: Will you have similar Career Connect events during spring term?

A: Yes, that is the plan. We haven't identified dates or specific areas of study yet, as we wanted to first see how this pilot event went for Business and Entrepreneurship. Now that we have a solid foundational event to build upon, we look forward to seeing how we can adapt these events for other areas of study at Clark. We're eager to work with our faculty and staff partners and local employers to plan more Career Connect events for spring. Our long-term plan is for each area of study to have a Career Connect event at least once during an academic year beginning fall 2024.

Photos: Clark College/Susan Parrish