

# Employers Pull Out the Stops To Woo Recruits on Campuses

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## FULL TEXT

As job recruiters swarm back to America's college campuses, career fairs aren't enough to stand out in the competitive labor market. Now, some employers are pulling out all the stops with intimate gatherings and flashy presentations.

Young professionals coming out of college this spring are in high demand. Employers plan to hire at least 30% more new graduates this year than they did last year, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers. In some fields, including technology, finance and consulting, starting salaries are even in the six figures. And while many in Gen Z say they wish to work remotely at least part of the time, some are eager to partake of office life.

Fifty-three Baylor University students attended an invitation-only speed-networking event with employees of Academy Sports + Outdoors in the presidential suite of the campus's football stadium in late March. The students were chosen because of their grades, activities, majors and desired careers paths. They ate hors d'oeuvres and learned about Academy while taking in a sweeping view of the gridiron through floor-to-ceiling windows. One student, senior Madison Manherz, said she took the event more seriously because of its location and exclusivity. She prepared by tailoring her elevator pitch to the company. Her father brought to campus a dress and heels from her family's home in The Woodlands, about 150 miles away from the campus in Waco, Texas. Students across majors – considering jobs in finance, marketing and the supply chain – attended the event. Dubbed "Academy Night," the Baylor event is one of several that the company is hosting at Texas universities as an official re-entry to in-person recruiting, said Bill Ennis, Academy's senior vice president and chief human-resources officer.

Booths at a career fair are "kind of impersonal" compared with a private event in the presidential suite of a stadium, Mr. Ennis added. Academy expects five to seven Baylor students to accept offers the company made after the event and plans to hire 35 to 40 students from Academy nights across the state.

"This environment, this wow factor, probably drew out a few more kids," he said.

This semester, several companies are operating from a similar playbook, giving students standout experiences to make a stronger hiring pitch. Companies and colleges said more of this semester's recruiting, including at career fairs, is in person than at any time since the pandemic began.

Tesla Inc. parked vehicles near Baylor's library for several hours in advance of an information session on campus in February. University of Southern California's undergraduate business school held an in-person, Boeing-sponsored case competition for students during the current spring semester. Executives and Boeing alumni helped mentor the students and judged the presentations. Boeing paid scholarship money to the winners.

Arrive Logistics, an Austin, Texas-based freight-transportation company, sent the company's two co-founders to the Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, for a lecture in an executive speaker series, and the next day one held coffee chats with juniors and seniors, said Nicole Furnia, director of university relations for Arrive Logistics. The company hires students for several roles, including in business development.

"Gone are the days of the regular info sessions," said Ms. Furnia. Many students haven't experienced a recruiting cycle on campus and are learning how to network and interview in person, she added.

At the end of March, St. Cloud Technical and Community College, in Minnesota, held its first in-person job fair since 2019, and the school estimated that more than 540 students and 150 employers attended. On April 1, the University of Houston's College of Education hosted an in-person teacher job fair, its first in more than two years, bringing in representatives from 45 Texas school districts.

Jack Diaz, a 22-year-old student graduating in May 2023 from Northeastern University, attended a Boston event in recent weeks for college students seeking jobs in fintech and connected with a recruiter from John Hancock on LinkedIn afterward.

It was the first time that Mx. Diaz, who uses the gender-neutral honorific, had attended a career fair since high school. In person, "it was just easier to understand the kind of work I would be doing," Mx. Diaz said.

The John Hancock recruiter, Omolara Oshodi, said she logged in the next day to more than 100 emails from attendees, which was exciting in a competitive market. She said candidates will be considered for a fall hiring push for 150-plus roles in finance, communications, engineering and sales.

Many employers and colleges say virtual information sessions and early conversations will continue in parallel with in-person recruiting, especially for companies with limited travel budgets or those seeking to attract a wider pool of applicants.

More than 40% of 114 companies said coffee chats, information sessions and career fairs would take place equally virtually and in person in the future, according to a survey from research company Veris Insights.

McKinsey & Co. said its incoming summer class of interns and full-time hires comes from the widest variety of schools the firm has ever had, which can be attributed in part to digital recruiting, said Kristin Altenburg, associate director of recruiting.

Before the pandemic, the insurance company Travelers Cos. would have pizza or coffee with students at Bentley University in Waltham, Mass., said Janet Ehl, the career center's executive director. To replicate the get-togethers virtually this spring, company representatives sent gift cards to a food-delivery service before video meetings with students, the company said.

In lieu of live, online information sessions, North Carolina Central University in Durham, N.C., asked employers to record short videos that play on a loop in some academic buildings or at the beginning of some classes, said Cierra Wilson, the university's assistant director of employer relations. The career center posts some of the videos on social media, too.

Ms. Wilson has advised companies to strip down production for Gen Z students, who perceive videos that are too slick as inauthentic. Short videos can help companies "build their brand awareness" at the historically Black university, she said, adding that companies are competing to hire students of color.

"They're inundated with so many employers wanting to connect with them," she said. "They're finding the employers they connect with the most are authentic."

Credit: By Lindsay Ellis

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