

The Importance of Career Fairs: Finding Your Direction.

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USF offers a broad range of career exploration events. Last semester I went to a technology centered career fair hosted by career services and after attending I felt like I truly knew what I wanted to do with my degree by the end of it. After talking with multiple recruiters, I met with recruiters from ReliaQuest. ReliaQuest is a major provider of cybersecurity solutions for a broad range of clients internationally. They offer a program later this semester called the “RQ Spring Labs” where you come in on Fridays and spend 5 hours getting hands on experience using their Greymatter cybersecurity system. This Essay will be about how I learned about this program, continued networking with RQ’s recruiters, and the steps I am taking to ensure a spot in the program.

Each semester USF hosts a variety of career fairs for different industries and disciplines, including technology. In fact, career services is hosting another technology career fair on February 27th, similar to the one I went to last fall. Before I went to this event, I felt like I didn’t have a lot of direction with my degree. I knew I wanted to do something in the tech sector, but technology is such a broad industry and there’s so many directions to head in. After I left I felt reinvigorated in my studies and knew where I wanted to go in the tech sector, cybersecurity. When I first arrived I spoke to various recruiters who had connections to the federal government. As a disabled veteran, I get a 10-point hiring preference for federal jobs and thought that would be a great place to start. After talking with various federal recruiters, I wasn’t so sure if I wanted to work for the government again. I ended up talking to recruiters from ReliaQuest about becoming a security analyst. This position really spoke to me as I was taking ethical hacking and was really enjoying the course work. This when I first heard about their spring labs program. The spring labs program takes place over 4 weeks with 5 hours spent in their offices getting hands on

experience as a security analyst. On top of getting hands on experience in the cyber field, participants who do well can leave with either an internship, or full-time job depending on how far a long you are in your degree. I was ecstatic to learn about the program as I was looking for a potential internship that could lead to full time employment. When I got home I immediately put in an application and began preparing myself to become a security analyst.

With the career fair taking place in late September meant I had a lot of time to prepare. Since then, I have been keeping my ears open to any networking opportunities and information sessions. On top of honing my networking skills and doing my best to show as much interest in the program as possible, I have been fine tuning my cybersecurity knowledge as a part of USF's Whitehatters Computer Security Club. As an organization, the Whitthaters are fairly well known throughout Tampa bays cybersecurity community. Right now I am working on a writeup for the Bandit over the wire war game, which when completed will get me into the Whitehatters hall of fame, a nice bullet point to include into my resume. On top of being an active member of USFs Whitehatters, I have been studying profusely for the CompTIA Security + certification, the baseline certification needed by security analysts for most cybersecurity companies.

Another set of events I have been attending in hopes of securing a spot in the spring labs program is by attending the information sessions hosted by RQ on campus. This includes the first Whitehatters meeting of the year, which saw the head of ReliaQuests recruiting office come in and explain the program exclusively to members of the club. Here I asked many questions about what they are looking for in a applicant and put my best foot forward. What I learned here is they aren't as concerned with your previous technical knowledge or certifications as much as they care about your interest in cybersecurity as a whole. When I learned about this I switched gears a little bit and have began focusing more on building my cybersecurity portfolio, rather

than focusing all my energy into the certification. The first write up I completed was on TryHackMe's SOC Security Analyst course. This course has taught me a lot about being a security analyst and has given me a fairly good baseline of understanding on the technical aspects of the job, and I believe this will help my chances greatly when it comes time for the interview in March. This week I also went to an information session hosted on campus for the program. Although the same information was covered as in the Whitehatters meeting, it showed my interest in the program. I was able to introduce myself to some fairly senior members of the company and learned I would be able to bring a sample of writeups to the interview and overall get a leg up over my competition.

In conclusion, attending career events have been essential in my academic journey. My advice to any students who are still feeling anxiety about life after graduation is to attend the career fair on February 27th to see what's out there. If I never attended that first career fair I likely wouldn't feel the motivation I have now and wouldn't be setting myself up for success as a security analyst for ReliaQuest. On top of learning about the program at a career fair, I have gained invaluable insights into the program by attending information session hosted at USF. These information sessions have given me a sense of confidence that I'm sure will give me a leg up over the competition .