In a mere 30 seconds quick, and potentially lasting, impressions are made based on appearance. According to Susan Bixler, CEO of The Professional Image, Inc. (2005), before you speak a word, your clothes, hairstyle, grooming, carriage, smile and eye contact have made a silent impression on your interviewer.

The Career Center recommends that students dress professionally when meeting employers. However, there are some events where students can also dress business casual, including: career fairs (unless you are targeting a specific position or company), company information sessions, or employer panels or lectures. In some cases professional business attire, or interview attire which is more formal than business casual, is more appropriate. When in doubt, ask the host or sponsor about the recommended attire for the function you will be attending and use your best judgment. Remember that employers form a lasting impression of you based upon how you look and the attitude you project.

If purchasing new business casual attire, err on the side of investing in quality that is classic rather than trendy. Everything should be neat, clean, well pressed and should not show wear. Athletic shoes/accessories are not appropriate. If it is pouring rain and you are rushing to get to an information session between classes, no one will expect you to show up looking ready for a photo shoot. Observe professional men and women in your industry if you are unsure what’s appropriate or are considering changing your look. Plan ahead so you are as prepared as possible to present yourself in a professional manner.

FOR WOMEN

Pants / Skirts
• Women may wear casual pants or skirts. Fabrics should be crisp; colors should generally be solid; navy, black, gray, brown and khaki are always safe bets. For the most business-like appearance, pants or skirts should fit well- neither baggy nor too tight. Skirts should come at least to your knees while you are standing. Generally slits in the center back of a skirt – to facilitate walking or stair climbing – are acceptable. No jeans.

Shirts and sweaters
• In addition to tailored shirts or blouses, tailored knit sweaters and sweater sets are appropriate business casual choices for women. Cotton, silk and blends are appropriate. Fit should not be tight. Cleavage is not appropriate for business and job search occasions.

Jewelry
• Wear a conservative watch. Keep choices simple and leaning toward conservative. Avoid extremes of style, color and size.

Cosmetics
• Keep makeup conservative and natural looking. A little is usually better than none for a polished look. Nails should be clean and well groomed. Avoid extremes of nail length and polish color – clear or natural is preferred. Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly or not at all.

Shoes
• Should be leather or fabric. Appropriate colors are black, navy or brown that coordinate with your other attire and accessories; white and pastels are not appropriate. Thin straps and high heels are not appropriate.

Hose
• Not essential for business casual, but recommended if wearing a skirt that is knee length.

Binder/Briefcase
• Use a binder or portfolio that is dark in color. A briefcase is not recommended.

FOR MEN

Pants, Shirts and Belts
• Khaki pants or slacks, neatly pressed, and a pressed long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirt are safe. Wear a leather belt and leather shoes. Avoid tight or baggy clothing. No jeans.

Ties
• Ties are generally not necessary for business casual, but it never hurts to slightly overdress by including a tie or sports jacket. The colors and pattern of your tie should be subtle and conservative. Match some color in the tie with other colors in your shirt.

Jackets
• Jackets are optional for business casual attire.

Socks
• Wear dark socks, mid-calf length so no skin is visible when you sit down.

Shoes
• Leather shoes should be worn. No sandals, athletic shoes or hiking boots.

Facial hair
• Just as with interviews: Facial hair, if worn, should be well-groomed. Know your industry and how conservative it is.

Jewelry
• Wear a conservative watch. If you choose to wear other jewelry, be conservative. Removing earrings is safest.

Binder/Briefcase
• Use a binder or portfolio that is dark in color. A briefcase is not recommended.

Grooming
• Cologne or aftershave should be used sparingly or not at all. Your hair should be neatly groomed and professional. Visible tattoos or piercings are not recommended.