BLACKSBURG -- So many companies wanted to talk to Virginia Tech business majors at the annual fall job fair Thursday that organizers had to open a second room.

Marked by a 28 percent rise in employer participation, the annual event dubbed Business Horizons exceeded expectations.

No one is saying the economy is back.

But it is hard to miss the encouraging signs.

Employers and students engaged for six hours, with some conversations leading to interviews, on one of the most well-known college campuses in the state.

"The job market is certainly better than last year," said Raman Kumar, head of Tech's finance department in the Pamplin College of Business.

The event drew 136 employers in all, up from 106 in 2009, but still below the total for 2008 of 150. The university said 2,000 students participated.

It was one of two well-attended campus job fairs this week, the other being the Engineering Expo, which drew 5,000 students interested in connecting with 240 employers.

Both events came on the heels of a Wall Street Journal survey of top corporate recruiters that found Virginia Tech the nation's 13th best at connecting students with careers. Penn State was No. 1.

A Pamplin College of Business event, the Business Horizons fair connected employers and students in a campus-recruiting format defined by quick conversations, the submission of a resume and, students hope, an invitation to follow up with a company.

Virginia Tech business major Jason Carman, 22, of West Virginia, was just on the verge of deciding whether to join the line at the Ernst & Young booth.

"I've talked to like 20 or so companies so far. It seems like a lot of companies have been interested in me. I already have one interview," Carman said.

He was not alone in being invited back.

At the university's Smith Career Center, the 32 interview rooms are "already booked," said Stuart Mease, who directs undergraduate career services at Pamplin.
The fair was noteworthy for the employers who showed up after skipping in 2009: Amazon, Carmax, cosmetics maker Elizabeth Arden, Norfolk Southern Corp., the homebuilding unit of NVR Inc., and Vanguard, the $1.4 trillion mutual fund company.

They joined Altria Group, parent of Philip Morris USA; cabinetmaker American Woodmark Corp., supplier to Home Depot and Lowe's; the four largest accounting firms; Boeing; The Disney Co.; Target; and a host of government representatives from such entities as the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Homeland Security.

Kassie Wang, 22, of Virginia Beach arrived with about 15 copies of her resume and a list of about that many companies to approach. She carried her questions and comments on a spreadsheet.

"For me it's a numbers game. The more people you talk to, the more exposure you get," said Wang, a senior majoring in management and marketing.

Her best visit of the day was with Lockheed Martin, where she was impressed to see a keen focus on human resources, her top interest area, and employee education and training.

Brittnie Brown, 19, of Halifax, a junior in marketing management, got some pointers from a CIA representative about improving her resume before she resubmits it online. Why might she be a good fit for the spy organization?

"I'm a good communicator, a good negotiator," she said.