



On the Right Track

Pre-professional advising at Elmhurst helps students prepare for professional school and for rewarding careers in health care and law. Here are the stories of two alumni who leveraged the Weigand Center's resources to pursue their dreams.



Making Dentistry Fun

An Elmhurst alumna wants children to love the dentist.

For most children, visiting the dentist is a source of dread. **BRIANNA THOMPSON '16**, an aspiring orthodontist who loved her childhood dental visits, wants to change that.

shadowing experience, write my personal statement and get my letters of recommendation.”

At Elmhurst, Thompson got involved in everything from softball to the annual phonathon to the student-athlete advisory committee. In partnership with two classmates, she started an Elmhurst College chapter of Operation Smile, an international charity that raises funds for children with cleft palate.

“We started the chapter because we wanted to help people in need,” she recalls. “Once we got it going, we raised quite a bit of money. One semester we raised enough money to support two surgeries for kids.”

After graduating from Elmhurst, Thompson went on to dental school at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where she says her Elmhurst education has paid off.

“Going to the dentist was always a very positive experience for me,” Thompson says. “My pediatric dentist loved his job and genuinely cared about how I was doing. I’m going into dentistry because I want to make that same impact on a child’s life.”

“Coming in to dental school, I was very, very well prepared,” she says. “The first two years of dental school are typically really tough years. The rigor of the curriculum at Elmhurst, especially in biology and chemistry, meant that it was not nearly as challenging for me as for some of my classmates.”

A philosophy major, Thompson was recruited to Elmhurst to play softball. But she also knew she’d get a strong, well-rounded education—as well as the pre-professional advising she needed to stay on track for dental school.

Now, Thompson is finishing up dental school and applying for residency programs in orthodontics.

“As soon as I got to campus my freshman year, I met with **ERICA ASHAUER**, [director of pre-professional advising],” she says. “She was instrumental in helping me pick the right classes, find a

“For my clinical experience, I’m working with about 40 patients,” she says. “It’s very exciting to see that all my hard work is starting to pay off for my patients.”

ABOUT THE WCPE

The mission of the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence is to prepare Elmhurst College students and alumni for an ever-changing world by igniting their professional curiosity, competencies and purpose. Through career guidance, mentoring, internships and more, the WCPE readies students for a successful launch into their careers and to become effective contributors to society.

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Corporate Attorney

A former pre-med student finds his passion in the law.

When **ALEX ROMANO '16** started classes at Elmhurst College, his major was undecided and his career goals were murky.



“I was in a bit of disarray in terms of what I wanted to do,” he recalls. “After about a dozen conversations about choosing a major, I sat down with my mom, and she said, ‘I’ll make the decision for you: go pre-med or pre-law.’”

So Romano started exploring. First, he met with **ERICA ASHAUER**, director of pre-professional advising, to learn more about the path to medical school. “Erica was very helpful. She plotted out the pre-med classes I would have to take, breaking it down semester by semester,” he says. “It wasn’t just professional advice, though—it was life insights as well.”

The medical path intrigued Romano, but he also found himself drawn to legal questions and communications-based courses. Ultimately, he chose the pre-law path and joined the Mock Trial Team—an experience that proved to be transformational.

“The Mock Trial Team was fundamental in terms of shaping my interests,” he says. “It was also how I got to know Ed Momkus, one of the team coaches and a member of the College’s Board of Trustees. He offered me an internship at his law firm, which was a great opportunity to learn about different practice groups.”

Romano applied to several law schools and ended up at the University of Chicago, which ranks among the top four law schools in the country. After graduating in June and taking the bar exam in July, he’s gearing up to join the international firm Kirkland & Ellis in September as a corporate attorney.

“Kirkland & Ellis is ranked as the best law firm in Chicago and the highest-grossing firm in the world,” he says. “I’m really excited to start working and being a productive member of society. Finally, all my dreams are coming true.”

Romano, whose mother and four older siblings also graduated from Elmhurst, credits the opportunities he found at Elmhurst with helping him get where he is today. “At Elmhurst, I was able to interact with my professors and get the attention I needed to get the GPA I did,” he notes. “If you work hard and get involved on campus, the sky’s the limit for what you can do.”

Court Date

Pre-law students get a behind-the-scenes look at the practice of law.

On April 11, eight pre-law and criminal justice students got a first-hand look at the legal system with visits to two courthouses in downtown Chicago.

At the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, the **HONORABLE WILLIAM J. BAUER '49** welcomed the students into his chambers, where he spoke to them about his long career as a prosecutor and judge. The students then attended a criminal jury trial at the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, where they watched as attorneys questioned witnesses and the jury reacted to witness testimony.

“The court trip gave me insights into an attorney’s career that a book can’t teach,” **VALENTINA APPARI '22** said of the experience. “It gave me even more clarification that law is something I want to pursue.”

The excursion, led by pre-law advisor **LISA WOODS**, reflects a growing emphasis on pre-law advising at Elmhurst. Earlier this year, the College hired its first dedicated pre-law advisor and centralized pre-law advising in the WCPE. In addition to the court visit, recent activities have included a workshop on the LSAT and a panel discussion about the law featuring several attorneys.



Students who participated in the April court trip included (left to right) Katie Nibbi, Stephanie Quaiver, Taylor Fisher, Tim Koch, Casey DeLury, Marjorie Flores, Valentina Appari and Alexandria Schultz.



A Career Center of Distinction

Elmhurst's career services are attracting national attention.

It's official: Elmhurst College offers exceptional career services to its students.

That's according to the latest report by Colleges of Distinction, which named Elmhurst a Career Development College of Distinction for 2019-20.

The popular college-rankings site awards the Career Development badge to institutions that “not only exhibit high-impact practices in their undergraduate programs, but also meet further criteria specific to career development and services,” according to the organization’s website. These criteria include integrated career-preparation programs, 24/7 accessibility of services and strong relationships with employers.

“This is a national award that reflects stringent criteria,” said **MARTIN A. GAHBAUER**, WCPE’s executive director. “To be recognized is an honor for us. It speaks to the commitment that the College has made to our Center, and it speaks to our mission of igniting students’ professionalism and combining a strong liberal arts program with robust career preparation.”

In addition to the Career Development badge, Elmhurst also earned College of Distinction honors for several academic programs and for the College as a whole in the latest rankings.

A Day in the Life

Shadowing experiences give pre-health students a preview of their chosen career.

Many students enter college with specific career goals but without a clear idea about what their chosen career entails on a day-to-day basis. The Weigand Center’s shadowing program helps solve that problem by connecting students with professionals in their field for on-the-job experiences. Participating students observe the professional’s daily activities and emerge with greater clarity about the future.

Here, two aspiring health care professionals reflect on their shadowing experiences.



“I shadowed **JOHANNA MONTOYA '12**, a physician assistant who’s an Elmhurst alumna. The experience not only gave me exposure to the medical scene, but it was also interesting hearing from an Elmhurst College alumna about the process of becoming a physician assistant.

“The medical center where I shadowed is in a lower-income community, and it was interesting to see how different medical providers work together to give their patients proper medical care. Shadowing gave me a different perspective on the role of physician assistants in medicine and their importance in health care.”

- JAILENE ASCENCIO '20



“I shadowed two physicians: **DR. VICKY URIBE** and **DR. LAUREN WILLIAMS '11**, a surgeon who’s an Elmhurst graduate.

“Dr. Uribe explained everything very well and was more than welcoming. She even let me listen to patients’ lungs and look in infected ears! I learned a lot about her duties, including charting, running meetings, patient loads and how the online system works for putting in orders and keeping track of patient files. I was very excited to see a wide range of patients, from newborns to teenagers, but the one patient that interested me the most was the premie.

“I also had a great time shadowing Dr. Williams. It was really helpful to see what it’s like to be on call for a major hospital. This experience helped me to be sure I want to be a doctor! Even though there was a lot of paperwork, it was still so interesting to me—almost like you’re solving a puzzle to help each patient get the best possible care.”

- MARY LOTESTO '20



Smoothing the Path to a Professional Degree

New partnerships make it easier for students to pursue degrees in health care and law.

For students who are interested in law or health care, the route to a career can be long and arduous. Earning the required credentials takes time, and there's no guarantee of acceptance to advanced study.

To make the path to a career a little easier, the Weigand Center has several longstanding partnerships with other institutions that offer preferred admission to professional programs or reduce the time it takes to earn two degrees. Now, the College is introducing new partnership programs in law, optometry and respiratory care.

Starting in fall 2020, students will be able to get an early start on a law degree through a new agreement with **Northern Illinois University School of Law** in DeKalb. The 3+3 program, also known as an accelerated-degree program, allows students to begin law school after only three years of college—saving both time and money.

Aspiring optometrists will be able to apply to both Elmhurst College and optometry school while they're still in high school, thanks to a new partnership with **Midwestern University Chicago College of Optometry** in Downers Grove, Ill. Participating students earn their bachelor's degree at Elmhurst and then transition to optometry school without having to take the Optometry Admission Test.

Finally, the College has partnered with **Rush University** to launch a new 3+2 program that enables students to earn both a bachelor's degree from Elmhurst and a master's degree in respiratory care from Rush in just five years instead of six.

The new programs join more than a dozen existing programs and partnerships that smooth the path to a career in health care or law. For more information about these opportunities, contact the WCPE.



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