



Rising to the Challenge

As colleges and workplaces shifted to virtual operations this spring in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WCPE faced unprecedented challenges in fulfilling its mission. From career workshops to internships to job shadowing programs, the center's core offerings had to be completely reimagined to fit a socially distanced world.



"So many of our services take place in person," said WCPE Executive Director **MARTIN GAHBAUER**. "We moved quickly to develop plans to move each of our programs online."

For internships that couldn't be completed through remote work, the center developed alternative assignments. For in-person workshops, virtual versions were created. And to keep students connected and learning through the crisis, the center created new tools and programs.

"In a few short weeks we reconfigured everything we do to make sure that students can keep learning and growing," Gahbauer said. "Our team has done a yeoman's job of making it work in these challenging times."

Here's a look at how the WCPE is making it work.

Interning from a Distance

SIDONIA DAVIS '20 was working as an intern with the Elmhurst Symphony Orchestra this spring when the coronavirus hit.

"We were in the middle of preparing for our second concert of the season, and then they had to cancel it," Davis said. "After all the excitement and build-up, it was kind of sad."

It was also worrisome: without a concert season to promote, how would she fulfill the internship hours she needed for graduation?

Davis wasn't the only one facing that question. As businesses began to shut down and send employees home, Elmhurst students in every major worried about how they would earn the credits they were counting on.

So the WCPE sprang into action, encouraging internship sponsors to transition their interns to remote work where possible, and developing alternative assignments for interns who couldn't work remotely.

"We knew we had to provide a way for students to get the credits they needed to graduate," said **INDIA WORTHEM**, coordinator of career experiences and communications. "We worked with each student individually to create assignments that were manageable and that met the requirements."

For some students, the alternative assignment involved researching career fields and making a virtual presentation about what they learned. Others created videos to educate people about their field of study or built their own professional website. Still others took professional-development courses on business etiquette or cross-cultural intelligence.

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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Davis was able to complete her internship with the ESO through remote tasks such as office duties, research, updating the organization’s social media channels, archiving and correspondence. As for Worthem, she’s leveraging lessons learned during the pandemic to enhance the internship experience going forward.

“Using technologies like Zoom has given us a wider reach in maintaining relationships with students and employer partners,” she said. “I’m starting to consider other ways we can use technology to increase our engagement with students.”



Boot Camp Goes Virtual

How do you find a job during a pandemic? For graduating Elmhurst students, that question has been top of mind ever since businesses started shutting down in March. To help students navigate this challenging environment, the WCPE partnered with career coach Nadia Whiteside to offer a virtual job search boot camp in April.

Over three Zoom sessions, Whiteside worked with students on everything from building a professional brand to effective networking to nailing the job interview. The series closed with one-on-one mock interviews to bring it all together.

“As the pandemic started to progress, students’ internships were getting canceled and their job offers rescinded,” said **HOLLY COFFIN**, director of employer relations and internships. “We wanted to do something to give them the tools they need to succeed—not just now but also in the future.”

DEREK DOTLICH '20 was one of the first students to sign up for the boot camp. A finance and accounting major, he said the experience provided valuable insights. “I had a job

interview before the workshop, and then I had a couple more afterwards,” he said. “The first one went well, but there was still a night and day difference between the before and after. After the workshop, I approached the interview with much more confidence.”

For **TEDDY IACOBELLIS '20**, a key takeaway was Whiteside’s advice to be authentic in looking for a job. “It’s easy to fall into the habit of trying to mold yourself into what the company’s looking for, but she stressed the importance of standing out and being yourself,” she said. “That really resonated with me.”

The workshop, funded in part by a grant from the Enterprise Foundation, was a huge success, with some 30 students participating in all three sessions.

“We feel this will give students a leg up in the job market,” Coffin said. “There’s so much competition out there, especially in this environment, and this was a creative way to reach students where they are and put them at the top of their game.”

Phoning It In

For students applying to medical or dental school, an important part of the process is getting a recommendation letter from a committee of faculty members and others who know them well. At Elmhurst, that process typically involves an in-person meeting between the student and a chosen group of faculty and administrators. This year, some adjustments had to be made.



“We had all the interviews scheduled long before the decision was made to move to online classes,” said **ERICA ASHAUER**, director of pre-professional advising and health professions advising. “When the College shut down, we worked with the IT department to establish a conference phone line so that we could do the interviews by phone.”

Ashauer said it’s been a seamless transition. “We’re still able to learn more about students’ passion for the field and how their experiences have helped prepare them for professional school,” she noted. “Some schools do phone screenings with applicants as part of the application process, so doing these interviews by phone helps students prepare for that.”



An Evolving First Leap

Each spring, the WCPE's First Leap program introduces first-year students to the day-to-day realities of the workplace through four days of job-shadowing experiences and classroom learning.

But this spring, it wasn't clear how the program would work. How do you run a program that relies on job shadowing when workplaces have closed their doors and students aren't supposed to leave their homes?

So the WCPE developed an entirely virtual version of First Leap. Instead of in-person meetings, the team pulled together

professionals from across industries for two days of online workshops covering everything from business etiquette to networking to marketing. And instead of on-site shadowing, students participated in informational interviews with professionals in their field of interest.

"First Leap is an important opportunity for first-year students to get an early start on career exploration," said Consiglia Intile, coordinator of career education and First Leap. "I didn't want them to miss out, so we sat down and came up with an alternative way for students to learn about industries and jobs."

Entrepreneurship Initiative Kicks Off

On Feb. 19, the College officially launched its Elmhurst Entrepreneurs initiative with a kick-off event in the WCPE lounge.

The event featured a talk by executive entrepreneur **MARK HEINTZ**, who has launched several award-winning businesses, on what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur. Attendees also had the chance to meet **PATRICK YANAHAN '94 MBA '10**, the College's inaugural entrepreneur-in-residence.

On April 16, the WCPE followed up on the success of the kick-off celebration with a virtual event, "How Economic Downturns Create Opportunities for Entrepreneurs." Some 40 students, faculty, staff and community members tuned in as **MITCH HARRIS**, owner of Strongbox Fitness in Glen Ellyn, shared how he's adapting his business model in fast-changing times.

Now the Center is busy planning a series of events for the fall, including a meet and greet with robotics entrepreneur **JEROME DUBOIS**, a speaker series and the "Bluejay Tank" pitch competition. Check back this summer for details!

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Going Places

When **TIFFANY LUTKA '17** went to the WCPE to look for an internship during senior year, an opportunity with the DuPage Convention & Visitors Bureau caught her eye. She wasn't exactly sure what a visitors bureau was, but "something about it appealed to me," she says, so she applied.

She got the internship, and it went so well that the organization hired her as a full-time marketing and sales assistant after her graduation from Elmhurst. Soon, she was promoted to marketing coordinator and put in charge of the organization's website relaunch.

Lutka's hard work paid off in April, when she was named to Destination International's 2020 30 Under 30 class. Each year, the organization recognizes 30 future leaders in the tourism and convention industry.

Lutka joins honorees from destination organizations across the globe, including Canada Puerto Rico and Ireland. The honor gives her the opportunity to engage in year-round professional development and networking opportunities.

"I was one of the youngest to win this award, and I've only been with the organization for a short time," Lutka said. "I'm proud to win, and I'm excited to keep growing."



Student Stories



A Passion for Computer Science

GABRIELA NAVAR '20 knew she loved computer science, but she wasn't sure exactly how to translate that passion into a career. So, when she heard about the WCPE's Professional Career Preparation class, CPP-399, she signed up right away.

"There are more than a couple of careers paths for computer science majors," she said. "The class was really helpful in learning what sort of job I would be best at."

As part of the class, Navar took the Myers-Briggs personality inventory, which helped her refine her career goals. She also developed her interviewing skills and learned about the importance of developing core competencies like problem solving, teamwork and leadership.

The class led to an opportunity to attend CareerFest, an annual job fair sponsored by the College Career Consortium of Illinois and Elmhurst College that brings together recruiters from more than 100 organizations to meet students who are looking for internships and full-time jobs.

Navar, who put herself through college by working full time at Chipotle, left CareerFest with not just one job offer but two.

"I took an offer from Ace Hardware to be a software engineering associate," she said. "I'm super happy about the offer, and I'm very grateful for the opportunities I had at Elmhurst that helped me get it."



Suited for Business

OLIVER BESMAN '21 has had an interest in the business world ever since high school, when he participated in a national contest on developing business plans.

"We developed a sports and entertainment promotion plan that focused on turning a dilapidated stadium into a place where a lot of people want to go," he said. "I won first in the state of New York for that plan. Getting that success felt pretty good, so I knew that was the field I wanted to pursue."

Once he started college, he started looking into internships. "I've heard over and over that it's hard to get a job if you don't have any sort of experience," he said. "But once you've gotten one internship, the second one is easier to get."

He spent the summer after his first year with Needham & Company, an investment bank in New York, doing equity research on global wireless data companies. This summer, Besman has a virtual internship lined up with Aon, a professional-services firm with offices in Chicago.

"I'll be working mostly with the retirement team, calculating benefits and working with clients on their retirement plans," he said. "The nice thing about Elmhurst's location is that it's easy to find jobs or internships in the Chicago area."

Besman, who plans to graduate in three years, credits the WCPE with setting him up for professional success.

"I worked a lot with the WCPE on my resume, and it got to the point where it was strong enough that I started getting some responses," he said. "I also worked a lot with India Worthem on preparing for interview questions. And she is a big part of the reason why I got an internship."



On the Air

HANNAH BRUMMER '20 only spent two years at Elmhurst, but she packed a lot of career preparation into that short time.

A transfer student from Harper College, Brummer connected with the WCPE before she even started classes—a connection that helped her land an internship with the Chicago Bandits, a professional softball team in Rosemont.

"I worked game days, sitting in the ESPN truck while they were broadcasting live and running up to the press box to relay stats," said Brummer, a communications major. "I found out that I really like broadcasting."

That realization led her to a part-time job with US99, a country music radio station based in downtown Chicago. As a promotions coordinator for the station, she worked on location at radio station events and live broadcasts and interacted with listeners. One day, she even got to be on air.

"I started at US99 on June 3, 2019, and I've been working there ever since," Brummer said. "I didn't have any experience with radio, but I've realized that this is what I want to do. I'm really thankful to the WCPE for pushing me out of my comfort zone and helping me get to where I am today."

Brummer continued to take advantage of the WCPE's programs, including the Professional Career Preparation course.



“We did a mock interview, which was really helpful because it felt just like a real interview,” she said. “Now, when I apply for jobs in the future, I’ll know exactly what I need to work on. We also did resume building, and now I’m really confident with my resume.”

As she gets ready to graduate, Brummer has some advice for her fellow Bluejays.

“Do as many internships as possible,” she said. “You might be afraid to chase after your dream, but you never realize what you can accomplish until you set your mind to it.”

Prepared for the Fair

Job fairs are an increasingly important way for college students to meet employers, make connections and even sometimes get a job interview. But they can also be overwhelming. How do you know which employers to approach? What questions should you ask? What should you wear?

On Feb. 11, Elmhurst partnered with Career Transitions Center of Chicago to host a workshop in advance of career fairs in February and March. Designed to help students approach career fairs with confidence, the workshop offered tips on everything from business etiquette to networking to the best questions to ask.

“In talking to employers who attended our career fair, we got a lot of compliments about how well our students were prepared—that they looked professional and that they knew which companies they wanted to talk to,” said **HOLLY COFFIN**, director of employer relations and internships. “That’s something that we stressed in the workshop: the importance of doing your research before you go.”

Based in Chicago, CTC offers on-campus workshops for students throughout the academic year as well as discounted career coaching to Elmhurst College alumni.



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