

WCPE Briefing

WINTER 2020-2021



An Innovative Mindset



When the pandemic threatened a summer mentoring program, Elmhurst’s entrepreneur in residence got creative.

When several Elmhurst students signed up for a mentoring program this summer with Innovation DuPage (ID), they didn’t expect to be working out of a garage. But that’s exactly where they started.



The program was originally meant to take place at ID, a nonprofit in Glen Ellyn that connects startups and small businesses with the resources they need to grow. But when COVID-19 forced ID to close, **Patrick Yanahan ’94, MBA ’10**, Elmhurst’s entrepreneur in residence, knew he had to switch gears.

He quickly converted the mentoring program into an internship and lined up seven clients for his team of budding consultants. Representing industries as diverse as insurance, automotive and digital marketing, the clients paid the students to help them solve challenges ranging from sales outreach to database work to market research.

“Innovation DuPage was still closed at the beginning of the summer, so we started the project in my garage,” said Yanahan, president of USA Strategies, a business marketing firm based in Wheaton. “I brought in a projector, a screen and a WiFi booster, and we met with clients—wearing masks, physically distanced and with the garage door open.”

The team relocated to Innovation DuPage when it reopened, giving students more space to work on their projects as well

as the chance to meet entrepreneurs in person. Students gave presentations on timely business topics and dove in to their work with clients.

For the students, the summer offered real-world lessons in market research, advertising, artificial intelligence and project management software.



“We created social media posts for one of our clients, which taught me a lot about how to create leads on LinkedIn,” said **Natalie Camacho ’20**. “I also did a competitor analysis for another client and discovered that I have a passion for market research.”

Camacho said she also learned some valuable lessons about how to approach challenging situations.

“I learned that if you really want to do something in a business setting, you find a way to do it. We didn’t have a place to work, so we met in a garage. It was a great lesson in how to deal with adversity.”

ABOUT THE WCPE

The mission of the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence is to prepare Elmhurst University 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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Business Partners

This fall marked the launch of an innovative new partnership between the Weigand Center and the University's Department of Business and Economics (DOBE).

Designed to help students build key professional skills throughout their college years, the partnership began with a pilot project in **Larry Carroll's** First-Year Seminar class, Social Responsibility: Servant Leadership.

Carroll, professor of business administration, integrated three career-focused components in his class. First, the students completed PathwayU, the WCPE's new tool that helps students assess their interests and skills and match those with potential jobs. Then, they met with **Julie Nosal**, director of career education, to learn more about how the WCPE can help them. Finally, they write a reflection paper about lessons learned and next steps.

"Incorporating those components directly into the class means that it's not just me suggesting that students go and talk to someone at the WCPE," Carroll said. "It's part of the course requirements, so students take it more seriously."

Carroll added that the DOBE sees the partnership with the WCPE—which has been championed by Assistant Professor Shaheen Wolff—as a signature component of its career efforts for students.



For **Jesse James '24**, the career elements of Carroll's FYS class were a valuable addition to the academics.

"My PathwayU results connected literally to what I want to do, which is teaching," said James, a

secondary education and history major. "Through this class I'm not only learning what I believe in, I'm also learning what I want to do with my future."

The DOBE hopes to build on the success of the pilot project by incorporating career-focused components throughout the business curriculum.

"The feedback I'm getting from students is that the project is making them more aware of the services that are available to them," Carroll said. "They're getting to know different areas of the institution. And they're starting to see career exploration as part of classroom learning, not just an add-on."

Zooming In on the Job Search



How do you find a job during a pandemic? That key question was at the heart of a virtual workshop presented this fall by the WCPE in partnership with the Career Transitions Center of Chicago (CTC).

Held on Oct. 20, the workshop covered everything from how to craft a value statement to the importance of maintaining a presence on Twitter. The facilitator, CTC executive director Anita Jenke, leveraged breakout rooms to engage students in the experience.



"The workshop was very interactive, even though it was on Zoom," said **Semra Kurdova '21**, a logistics and supply chain management major from Bulgaria. "I wasn't sure what to write for my value statement, but Anita told me I shouldn't be afraid to include my rich cultural background. She was very motivating."

Twenty-one students attended the virtual session, and an additional 13 watched the recorded version on their own schedule.

The WCPE plans to follow up on the event's success with two more virtual workshops during Spring Term. "It's Your Call," scheduled for January 14, will focus on successful techniques for video and phone interviews, and an April workshop will teach students how to spot fake job listings.

Kurdova said she's already expanded her professional network as a result of the workshop.

"LinkedIn is new for me, but after the workshop I set up my profile and started connecting with people," she said. "I followed Anita's advice on how to make those connections, and I even connected with Anita herself."

Based in Chicago, CTC offers workshops for Elmhurst students and discounted career coaching for Elmhurst alumni. For more information, visit elmhurst.edu/cpe.



A Virtual Leap

Some students make it all the way through college without ever meeting any working professionals in their chosen fields.

Then there's **Teresa Nguyen '23**. Over the course of just three days last spring, Nguyen had virtual informational interviews with eight professionals in fields ranging from human resources and marketing to career coaching.

It was all part of First Leap, the WCPE's Spring Term course for first-year students. Combining classroom learning with advising and job shadowing experiences, the program introduces students to the realities of their chosen career.

This year, the pandemic caused a few changes to the program. In-person meetings evolved into online workshops on topics like business etiquette and networking, and on-site shadowing made way for virtual informational interviews.

"I had some academic knowledge about my field before First Leap, but the professionals I spoke to during the program gave me a clearer vision of my path," said Nguyen, an international student from Vietnam with a double major in digital marketing communication and multimedia journalism. "I also broadened my network and got some valuable tips about my resume and the skills I'll need for my career."

Most students in this year's First Leap class didn't have as many informational interviews as Nguyen did, but they all benefited from the program.

"One of my students was hired on the spot during her informational interview. Another student impressed his interviewer so much that the professional referred him to a colleague who was hiring," said Consiglia Intile, coordinator of career education and First Leap. "Moving First Leap online was quite a challenge, but in the end it was such a success."

A Pathway to Success

This fall, the WCPE introduced a new tool to help students navigate the path to a successful career. PathwayU is an award-winning platform that uses predictive science to help students explore their interests, identify their goals and set a course to achieve them.

Students start by taking a series of assessments designed to help them consider not just the type of work they want to do but also their life's purpose. They then explore careers that fit their profile and learn more about the skills and education those careers demand.



For **Elizabeth Melnick '24**, a double major in psychology and management who's planning a career in human resources or industrial/organizational psychology, PathwayU provided a welcome confirmation of her goals.

"The assessment offers insights into whether your interests correlate to your major and your career plans," she said. "My results lined up perfectly with what I want to do. It's good to know that as of right now, I'm heading in the right direction."

PathwayU isn't the WCPE's first career counseling platform, but administrators say it's the most effective.

"One of the great things about PathwayU is that advisors have access to the students' results. That means we can follow up with the students and walk them through it," said **Julie Nosal**, director of career education. "It also connects to other tools, giving students access to information about careers, internships and job listings. It's a one-stop shop for all things career related."

Elmhurst launched the platform shortly before Fall Term began. So far, student response has been overwhelmingly positive.

"Just about every student who's taken the assessment has said that the results are exactly right," Nosal said. "It's about finding your passion. That's what we're all about in the WCPE, and we're excited to have this tool to help in that effort."





The Virtual Mentor

The global COVID-19 pandemic has affected just about every aspect of higher education this year, and the WCPE's mentoring program is no exception.

The program, which connects students with successful professionals for career support and advising, typically involves face-to-face meetings between mentors and their protégés. This year, COVID-19 restrictions forced the program to go almost entirely virtual. Instead of meeting in person, most participants are connecting through Zoom, Microsoft Teams and other online channels.



But the transition to virtual hasn't diminished the impact of the program, according to **Julie Nosal**, director of career education. "The mentors adjusted very easily to the virtual environment, and the students are still having a good experience," she said. "In fact, I had more mentors at this year's online mentor orientation than I usually do in person."

Carolina Zepeda '17 said connecting virtually with her protégé was easier than she expected.

"The transition was a little bit challenging, but we made it work," said Zepeda, a nurse at Advocate Christ Medical Center who mentored nursing student **Elizabeth Heidenreich '20** during Spring Term. "The cool thing about this generation of students is that they're very tech-savvy, and they're used to communicating online."

To smooth the transition to the virtual environment, the Weigand Center team made a few adjustments to the program. For instance, mentors no longer need to submit monthly activity reports. Instead, they check in with the WCPE team occasionally by email.

"I want the professionals to concentrate on building strong relationships and giving students the tools they need," Nosal said. "Right now we all need to be flexible and adaptable, and mentoring is no different."

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