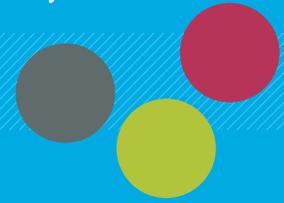


WCPE Briefing

SPRING 2021



Thriving in Challenging Times

As the COVID-19 crisis extended into a second year, the Weigand Center for Professional Excellence continued to adapt to meet students' career-planning needs in a virtual world.

"With face to face interactions no longer an option, the pandemic stopped us in our tracks," said **Holly Coffin**, director of employer relations and internships. "Luckily, this was a temporary setback. We not only adapted to the situation, but thrived."

Pivoting to a virtual environment, the center offered individual advising sessions, career events, internships, workshops and more through tools such as Handshake, Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

"Technology allowed us to expand our reach and provide new ways of offering career services. Virtual delivery increased the experiences and student participation," Coffin said. "Moving forward, we will leverage this knowledge to create a successful hybrid model of in-person and virtual options."

TAKE ME TO THE (VIRTUAL) FAIR

Going into his senior year, **Jackson Piatek '21** started to worry about his post-graduation plans. How would the ongoing global pandemic affect his chances of finding a job?



So when the management and marketing major heard about the WCPE's two virtual career fairs this spring, he signed up for both. The two annual events—CareerFest on Feb. 12, facilitated by College Career Consortium of Illinois, and an Elmhurst University-hosted event on March 9—gave students the chance to meet employers and explore professional opportunities.

Typically in-person events, the career fairs moved online this year because of the pandemic. But the virtual format proved highly successful, attracting over 125 employers from fields as diverse as business, government, health care and social services.

"Students were able to meet virtually with employers through Handshake, our career management website," said Holly Coffin.

"By thinking outside the box, we gave our students more tools for career success."

In advance of each career fair, the WCPE hosted a virtual workshop covering everything from appropriate attire to perfecting the elevator pitch. "Going to the career fair, I felt prepared because of the workshop," said math major **Annie Strah '21**. "I had my questions ready, and I knew what to expect."

For accounting major **Alondra Huerta '22**, the workshop offered valuable guidance in conducting interviews. "As a first-generation college student, I don't have a lot of professionals in my family who can help me find an internship or a job," she said. "So the workshop was especially helpful for me."

As for Piatek, he met with 10 employers over the course of the two fairs—ranging from Jewel Osco and Penn National Gaming to City Year and the Food Bank of Northern Illinois. In the end, he got a full-time offer from Loadsmart, a Chicago-based startup that uses a digital platform to automate processes for freight shipping. He'll start his new job as an account sales representative in June.

"I had a great conversation with the company's representative at the event, and it took off from there," he said. "I'm so happy that I went to CareerFest, because it got me into a job."



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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Meet the Firms

A virtual event in September gave students the opportunity to network with employers in logistics, management, human resources and sales.

The event, Meet the Firms, brought together professionals from Bosch, Elkay, Enterprise and Ingredion for a Q&A session followed by smaller breakout discussions where students could connect with individual employers.

An annual event since 2019, Meet the Firms made a smooth transition to the virtual environment necessitated by the pandemic.

“The COVID-19 environment did not stop us from achieving our goals,” said Holly Coffin. “Employers on our panel shared information about the industries and answered student questions via Zoom. Students were still able to meet and network with the individual employers thanks to breakout rooms. Connections were definitely initiated.”

Student participants said the event was a great way to learn about potential career paths.

“I don’t have much experience in business, so it was very informative to learn about these companies,” said **Elizabeth Tsirikolias ’21**, a business administration major. “I got a better idea of all the different job opportunities in the field.”

A National Trend

The week before COVID-19 shut down the world in early 2020, **Samantha DeRango ’20** was feeling pretty good about her future.



“I had two great job leads from companies that reached out asking me to apply,” said DeRango, who majored in interdisciplinary communication and marketing at Elmhurst. “I felt like everything was really coming together.”

Then the pandemic hit, and both leads evaporated.

In February, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) posted a web story that highlights DeRango’s experience—and points out that she wasn’t the only one. The story, “Young Professionals Struggle to Find Comfort Amid the Pandemic,” cites research suggesting that young people have suffered the most from the COVID-19 crisis and features quotes from both DeRango and Holly Coffin.

“[The job market] blew up in front of [students], and then you tack on trying to find a job,” Coffin is quoted as saying. “I think that a lot of them went into a freeze mode.”

For DeRango, the story has a happy ending. A few months after graduation, she got a LinkedIn message from Q-Centrix, a data-analytics company focused on the health-care industry. Today, she’s working for the company as a demand generation specialist.

“It’s a very progressive company, and I have the freedom to be creative and take on projects that inspire me,” she said. “I could not have gotten any luckier.”

Connecting Bluejays

In January, the University introduced Bluejay Network, an online platform designed to connect alumni with other alumni and with current students.

The site combines the functionality of LinkedIn and other social media sites with an Elmhurst-centric community. For alumni, it provides the opportunity to post jobs, learn about upcoming events and engage with fellow Bluejays. For students, it’s a chance to network with professionals who share their Elmhurst roots.

“Alumni always want to be more hands-on with students,” said Ljiljana Milojevic, director of alumni engagement & annual fund. “With Bluejay Network, we’ve created a space where that can happen.”

In March, **Julie Nosal**, director of career education, led a virtual workshop to introduce the new platform. More than 50 alumni signed up for the event, which focused on interviewing and networking.

“The audience included everyone from a 1981 graduate to a 2020 graduate, so we had the whole range,” she said. “It was a great way to reintroduce the WCPE to alumni and share that connection.”

Also this year, the WCPE launched StandOut, an online video platform designed to build the interviewing skills of students and alumni through mock job interviews. By recording and reviewing their virtual interviews, students can more easily critique and improve their performance.

For more information, visit BluejayNetwork.com.





Internships in a Virtual World

As COVID-19 continued to disrupt workplaces and business models this year, Elmhurst students scrambled to find virtual internships. For some, remote work opened up new opportunities that might not have been available in a pre-pandemic world.

A PRACTICAL CHOICE

Kaylee Johnson '21 has a passion for writing and hopes to work in the entertainment industry. But she recognizes the challenges of breaking into a competitive field, so she added a business minor to her English major and decided to look for an internship on the business side of the field.



"I figured having business on my side could help me get my foot in the door to work in an office role," Johnson said. "Then I can work my way into other areas of the industry."

She explained her goals to **Holly Coffin**, who connected her with **Katie Kailus '09**, founder of a marketing and public relations agency in California that focuses on the music industry. Since joining Kailus Media as an intern in February, Johnson has been generating publicity for the firm's clients by researching and reaching out to companies that might promote their products.

"I'm learning a lot about how to communicate on a professional level," she said. "I had a class about this at Elmhurst, but it's really helpful to practice it in the real world."

"If it weren't for COVID, I would have probably done a local internship in an office setting," Johnson added. "But since people can't meet in person now anyway, a remote internship seemed not only plausible but practical. The experience has opened my mind to new opportunities."

FILM EDITOR

For **Marcel Wojcik '21**, pandemic restrictions opened the door to a virtual internship with a film editor in Los Angeles.

As an intern with **Zach Anderson**, a film editor with deep connections in the film and advertising industries, Wojcik is sourcing sound effects, editing footage, putting together music cue sheets and more for companies like Netflix, MTV and ViacomCBS.



"A lot of what I do involves finding music tracks that are appropriate for a particular project," said Wojcik, a digital media major. "Zach sends me footage and tells me what emotion or mood he's looking for, and I search in the audio libraries for tracks that fit."

Wojcik said the experience has taught him some important lessons. "I'm learning a lot of new technical skills in Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere and other programs. But I'm also building soft skills like adaptability, collaboration and teamwork."

Going forward, Wojcik hopes to launch a career in game development or a related field.

"I think my digital media major is opening up a lot of opportunities for me, because I've had exposure to many different disciplines," he said. "And now this internship has given me a foot in the door."

TEACHING ENGLISH

Ailyn Trujillo '21 is in Elk Grove Village, and her English-language students are in Latin America and beyond. But the distance doesn't stop them from engaging regularly in lively discussions about everything from the origin of St. Patrick's Day to the meaning of happiness.



It's all part of Trujillo's internship with Sumling+, an online language-learning social entrepreneurship startup based in Colombia. From her home in Illinois, she leads virtual English conversation clubs and assists with other administrative tasks.

"The purpose of the company is to make language learning more accessible to everyone," said Trujillo, an intercultural studies major. "I've always been very fond of language learning and learning about different cultures, so this has been an exciting opportunity for me."

Trujillo didn't have any teaching experience before her internship, so she was a bit nervous at first. But seeing her students gain confidence in their English skills has helped to convince her that teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is the right path for her.

"As an intercultural studies major, I've taken a lot of classes about communication between different cultures," she said. "This internship has given me a chance to apply the concepts I've learned."



Business Pitch



Seven Elmhurst students showed off their entrepreneurial spirit at the second annual Bluejay Tank competition on April 21, pitching business concepts ranging from a music production company to an app designed to help college students keep track of their wallets.

Modeled loosely on the popular TV show Shark Tank, the competition gives students the chance to pitch their business ideas to a panel of experienced entrepreneurs in exchange for feedback and a shot at \$3,000 in cash prizes.



Mallory Burke '22 won first place for GrillGirlz, a BBQ grill deep-cleaning service that she started last summer with a \$120 loan from her parents. With nine employees—all women—the business is on track to earn a net profit of more than \$18,000 this year.

With her \$1,500 prize, Burke plans to trademark her business, provide safety training to employees, build a website and expand to other states.

“Before the competition I was at a point where I wasn’t sure where to take my business,” she said. “Winning gave me the confidence to push forward. And as a participant, I’ve made connections with people who can help me succeed.”



Matthew Gans '21 won second place and \$1,000 for MGProductions, a photo and video marketing company that has produced ads for Aston Martin and other top businesses. Third place and \$500 went to **Luis Chavez '22** for Scanology, an online tool that helps high school students find the right college.

As part of their prize, all three winners will have the opportunity to meet with venture capitalist **Larry Hayward**, partner and co-founder of Independence Equity, to get tips on presenting their business plans to investors.

This year’s judges were **Daisy Betance '11**, founder of organic skin-care company Little Buddha; **Michael Foytlin '21**, who won the 2020 competition; and **Bruce Fischer**, director of the master’s program in project management. **Mark Heintz**, a strategy consultant and future adjunct professor for the graduate certificate program in entrepreneurship, served as the judge foreman and scoring tabulator. Entrepreneur in Residence **Patrick Yanahan '94, MBA '10**, and Weigand Center Executive Director **Martin Gahbauer** served as facilitators.

“All seven business plans were well thought out and very relevant and sound,” said Yanahan, who facilitated the event. “I can’t say enough about how impressed we were with the quality of the forward-thinking presentations of these young people, and the genuine energy and drive that they exhibited.”

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