

WCPE Briefing

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Navigating a Bidding War

For one recent graduate, a job search sparked competition between potential employers.

For many new college grads, finding that first full-time job in your field can be tricky. Employers want to hire people with experience, but how do you gain experience while you're in school?

For **Megan Solana '22**, the postgraduate job search resulted in the opposite problem: when two companies start a bidding war over you, how do you choose between them?



It all started when Megan, a marketing major, accepted a promising job offer from a company she had researched online. She was getting ready for her first day on the job when she was approached by another company, Chicago-based National Safety Apparel (NSA), a manufacturer of ultra high-tech protective gear for industrial safety workers in high-voltage work environments. They asked her if she would be interested in interviewing for a position.

"I went into the office, and I ended up really liking it. And the job proved to be overall a better fit for me," Solana recalls. "I was excited about the opportunity, but on the other hand, I had just accepted a different job offer. So I declined NSA's offer."

But that wasn't the end of the story. Determined to hire Solana, NSA raised the stakes with another offer—one that included a wide range of generous perks, including a higher salary, a fully remote role and even a signing bonus.

Solana wasn't sure what to do, so she reached out to her mentor, **Patrick Yanahan '94**, MBA '10, Elmhurst's entrepreneur in residence, who helped her think through her options. Ultimately, she chose to take NSA's revised offer.

Solana attributes her success in the job market to her early and extensive participation in the WCPE. Her involvement with the center dates back to her first year at Elmhurst, when she took a career exploration class. As part of the class, she connected with Yanahan through an informational interview.

"I was so impressed with Megan that I brought her into my company as a full-blown intern," Yanahan recalls. "We've had a three-year engagement with her, and during that time she's picked up a lot of skills, including the ability to network."

Yanahan also encouraged Solana to pursue training opportunities beyond her college education. She earned certifications from Google Analytics and HubSpot, and then she took additional online classes through Harvard University immediately after graduation.

"By then, Megan had an unbelievable resume—probably one of the most impressive resumes I've seen out of Elmhurst University for somebody at her experience level," Yanahan says.

Today, Megan is a digital marketing strategist at NSA, where she creates content, implements it across the brand's social media channels and analyzes data. And she's thoroughly enjoying the experience.

"I love the track I'm on right now," she notes. "And I would 100% recommend that students take advantage of the valuable resources that the WCPE has to offer. Through my internship, I was able to get real-world experience outside of the classroom, and that's what led to my current job."

ABOUT THE WCPE

The mission of the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence is to prepare Elmhurst University students and alumni for a rapidly evolving 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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Spring Training ●

For Natalie Madigan, an internship with the Boston Red Sox is a dream come true.

A lifelong sports fan, **Natalie Madigan '22** has wanted to work in baseball for as long as she can remember. At Elmhurst, she minored in sport management, took on several sports-related internships and worked closely with her mentor, **Terry Sullivan '67**, a talent scout for the Boston Red Sox.

All that hard work paid off last fall, when Madigan was accepted to a paid internship with the Red Sox at the organization's spring training facility in Fort Myers, Florida. As an intern in game-day presentation and administration, she runs the team's scholarship program, coordinates donation requests and handles any other requests that come her way.

"We have a very small team at spring training, so I'm doing a little bit of everything," Madigan says. "I've had experience in some of it, but other things are new to me, so I'm getting a lot out of the internship."

Madigan says she particularly appreciates the fact that she and her mentor are now working for the same team.

"I kept Terry updated from the moment I applied for the position and all through the interview process," she recalls. "I really looked forward to calling him to say that I got it. And it's very cool to be working in the same organization right now."



Before joining the Red Sox, Madigan spent the summer with Maryland-based Ripken Baseball. As a travel coordinator in the organization's baseball operations division, she traveled extensively to set up showcases and instructional camps.

"Over the course of eight weeks, we drove something like 15,000 miles and traveled to 16 states," Madigan says. "We would be in Ohio one day and Missouri the next, and Texas the day after. It was great to see all the places I never would have gone to otherwise."

As part of her responsibilities with Ripken, Madigan coached and taught in the organization's instructional camps for kids ranging in age from four to 14. "It was very cool to see the kids' love for baseball shine through, not only while they're participating in the camp but also just hearing them talk about their favorite players."

Madigan attributes her extraordinary opportunities in large part to the guidance she found at Elmhurst. "A huge step was my mentorship with Terry," she notes. "Just having somebody in the industry always there to support me and making me feel like whatever I wanted to do in the industry was possible."

As for Sullivan, he refers to his mentee with undisguised pride. "Natalie has been resilient and persistent, and it has paid off," he says. "She has proven to be capable, dutiful and very deserving. I am very proud of how she has conducted herself."

An Early Start ●

Elmhurst's First Leap program introduces students to career options during their first year on campus.

Kaitlyn Gleba is still in her second year of college, but she's already gotten a close-up look at her intended career and even landed a part-time job in her field.

It's all thanks to First Leap, the WCPE's four-day Spring Term course for first-year students. Designed to foster career exploration and networking, the program combines classroom activities with advising, informational interviews and job shadowing experiences.



As part of the course, Gleba spent time in the University's Office of Information Services, speaking with staff members about the tech field and learning more about career opportunities. After the program ended, she was encouraged to apply for a student worker position in the department—and got hired.

"Through the program, I gained insight into what the Information Systems field has to offer," Gleba says. "And I was able to gain my first job in the Information Systems department here at Elmhurst so I can see if this field is really for me."

Gleba was one of 14 students who completed First Leap last spring, learning more about fields ranging from art therapy and marketing to strength and conditioning coaching. Student response was overwhelmingly positive.

As participant **Mathew Serrano** put it, "Not only did the program help me learn more about the field I want to get into, but it also helped me to better self-advocate. After all, networking is the most useful tool in the professional world. I walked into class with little knowledge about the workplace and left knowing much more."

Consiglia Intile, coordinator of career education and First Leap, says Gleba's experience is a perfect example of the impact First Leap can have on a student's career path.

"Even just doing an informational interview is so important, because these people can become part of your network for life," she says. "Having that network early on gives you someone to go to for questions and doubts and uncertainties. It really does make an impact."

As for Gleba, she's eager to participate in even more career exploration.

"This program was excellently put together and it was able to accomplish my expectations and more," she says. "I am looking forward to joining the Sophomore Success program and can't wait to see how my future unfolds."

Sophomores Succeed ●

Building on First Leap, the WCPE's Sophomore Success Workshop provides valuable career insights for second-year students.

It's not easy to choose the right career if you don't have a solid understanding of your interests, your strengths and your values.

That's where Sophomore Success comes in. A three-hour workshop held in the fall for second-year students, the program builds on the center's First Leap initiative to help students continue to explore their interests and refine their career paths.

The workshop combines practical information such as upcoming cocurricular opportunities and deadlines with personal-development activities designed to help students explore majors and clarify their values and goals.

"We did a small-group activity and talked about the six personality types," says **Cesar Bermudez '24**. "I was able to identify the social personality type as the best fit for myself, and then I was able to make a connection with this personality type to the career that I am choosing to pursue."

The program provides an important bridge between the exploratory nature of First Leap and the all-important next step of getting on-the-job experience through internships. By helping students pinpoint their goals more specifically, the program paves the way for future career initiatives.

"The Sophomore Success Workshop helped me better understand who I am as a person, and helped clarify that I am heading in the right direction with my career choice," Bermudez says. "It is always fun learning more about yourself, especially when doing it with a group of people."





Hatching Success

Angel Garcia '24 took first prize at the Fall 2022 Bluejay Tank Pitch Competition for a business concept that would prepare high school students for greater success in college.

Garcia won \$1,500 for his pitch, Bluejay Hatchlings: The Elmhurst Experience. Designed for high school juniors and seniors from underserved communities, the nonprofit organization would host summer programs to improve the college experience, leading to higher graduation rates and greater employment success.

“Having a program like this on campus is conducive to inspiring students’ creativity and entrepreneurship, and I am thankful for the opportunity to be a part of it,” Garcia said.

Garcia’s was one of six business concept pitches given by seven student entrepreneurs during the most recent Bluejay Tank competition, held in mid-October. The students vied for \$3,000 in prize money and real-world business advice from a panel of Elmhurst faculty and working entrepreneurs. The winners planned to use their prize money to take their ideas to the next phase of development.

Jessica Pavliukovecas '24 won second place and \$1,000 for her pitch, TuneUp. Her car service app would keep up with a vehicle’s health by giving reminders for regular services, diagnosing problems and finding the best repair shop in the area.

Miftha Syed '24 and **Aaliya Khaja '24** won third place and \$500 for their pitch, Instapark. Geared toward colleges and universities, the app, which would be funded by the schools, would help students find parking spots using geolocation. Using the Elmhurst U. parking lots as an example, they showed how their app would find vacant parking spots by having drivers record when they parked in or left a spot.

The Bluejay Tank Pitch Competition is offered by the Elmhurst University E-celerator, a resource for students interested in launching a new business or innovating within an existing one.

“The E-celerator exists to inspire students to realize their entrepreneurial dreams,” said **Martin Gahbauer**, executive director of the Weigand Center for Professional Excellence. “The Bluejay Tank competition helps bring that mission to life.”



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