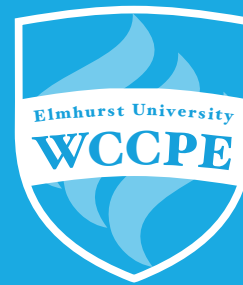


WCCPE Briefing

SPRING 2026



A Transformative Night Out



Violeta Khomutovska '28 was a 10th grader in Ukraine when she decided to apply to colleges in the United States. “It was my huge dream,” she recalls. “And I put everything else away and just focused on that.”

Studying abroad was unusual in the small town where she grew up, making it difficult to find tutors or guidance. So Khomutovska taught herself English at an advanced level and even

homeschooled herself during her final year to focus entirely on applications.

Her hard work paid off with an acceptance to Elmhurst University, along with a generous scholarship.

Khomutovska, a finance and accounting major, arrived on campus determined to make the most of every opportunity. She joined the Honors Program, attended events and focused on networking and meeting new people.

One day, she received an invite to a campus-sponsored Ladies Night Out—and event that would change her career path.

“I didn’t really know what it was,” Khomutovska admits. “I just saw that there would be free food and a workshop, and I signed up.”

What she found was a room full of professionals and an opportunity to connect with women in her industry, banking. At first, she

hesitated. Still adjusting to a new culture and language, she felt a bit awkward.

But conversation cards helped break the ice, and Khomutovska shared her story.

Among those listening was a vice president at Lakeside Bank who invited Khomutovska to lunch. Afterwards, Khomutovska continued building her network. She refined her LinkedIn profile, reached out to contacts and—on a whim—messed the bank’s CEO after noticing he had viewed her profile.

“I didn’t think he would respond,” she says. “But he did.”



Their exchange led to an invitation to connect in person. When scheduling proved difficult, Khomutovska made a bold move: She asked directly about internship opportunities. The response was immediate. “Send me your resume. I’ll take care of it.”

Shortly thereafter, she interviewed for a role. And soon after that, she got a call offering her a paid summer internship in finance with Lakeside Bank.

Looking back, she reflects on how quickly momentum can build from a single step. “It all started with showing up,” she says.

ABOUT THE WCCPE

The mission of the Russell G. Weigand Career 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 WCCPE readies students for a successful launch into their careers and to become effective contributors to society.

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A Focus on Finance

Riley Taylor '27 has always loved numbers. Then during the pandemic, his stepdad gave him \$1,000 to invest in the stock market.

"I invested in a stock called Nvidia, and it did very well," Taylor recalls with a laugh. "That's what got me hooked on the stock market and the analytics behind it—and the idea that you can really help people when you have financial knowledge."



That experience set Taylor on a path toward wealth management. When he was ready to take on an internship, he visited firms in his hometown of Decatur, Illinois, where he met face-to-face with prospective employers. A connection

led him to Brewer Wealth Management, where he completed a summer internship and then transitioned into a part-time role.

Back at Elmhurst for his junior year, a professor connected him with an alumnus at William Blair, who gave him advice and guidance on next steps. Ultimately, Taylor earned a spot in the firm's highly competitive summer internship program.

"I really hit it off with the Elmhurst alum I spoke to," Taylor says. "I still text him to this day, and I'm excited to work alongside him—he's always willing to help."

Taylor also benefited from the services of the WCCPE, doing several mock interviews in advance of his interview at William Blair. "The mock interviews definitely helped me be more comfortable with the process," he says. "You've got to practice and mess up to do well in the real thing."

This summer, Taylor will join dozens of other students in William Blair's Chicago offices, where he'll collaborate on projects, learn from industry professionals and gain exposure to high-level finance work—all in the heart of the city.

Proximity to Chicago was part of what drew him to Elmhurst in the first place. After being recruited to Elmhurst to play golf, Taylor weighed larger universities against the benefits of a smaller, more personal environment. He chose Elmhurst because it combines strong academics and faculty mentorship with direct access to a major financial hub.

He also appreciates the University's hands-on approach to learning. In a financial modeling course, he's analyzing companies and preparing to pitch investment recommendations—real-world experience that mirrors the work he hopes to pursue professionally.

Looking ahead to his internship, Taylor says he hopes to learn as much as possible and get a good start on his chosen path.

"The end goal is that I want to help people," he says. "I want a career that's fulfilling, and I'm open to where that leads."

Changing the Game

When **Netochukwu (Neto) Kalu '26** was in sixth grade in Lagos, Nigeria, she saw a TV interview that changed her career path.



In the interview, a Nigerian track and field athlete outlined the difficulties of becoming a professional athlete in Nigeria, saying that the only way to succeed in sports is to move abroad.

"I thought that was very interesting and also sad," Kalu recalls. "Even if you have a lot of potential, if you don't have the money or the right connections, you can never realize your dreams."

For Kalu, that interview ignited a desire to get involved and help change

the system. An athlete throughout high school, she applied to Elmhurst with the goal of learning about the American approach to sport management and then bringing those lessons home to transform Nigerian sports.

At Elmhurst, Kalu has found plenty of support from the WCCPE. At one Meet the Pros networking event, for instance, she connected with a member of the Chicago Bears' events and strategy department—a connection that helped her get a summer internship with the team.

"When I applied for the internship, I felt less nervous because we had already gone through those conversations like, 'Tell me about yourself,'" she says. "I encourage other students to attend those events, because you can get a lot out of it."

For her internship with the Bears, Kalu worked on event operations and management at the team's training camp. The role involved everything from setting up VIP suites to tearing down games to making sure fans didn't wander into in the wrong place. Along the way, she learned a lot about how to manage a major sporting event.

"I've worked in operations on campus, but there's a significant difference between a Division III school and an NFL team," she notes. "Working for the Bears gave me an idea of what professional sport management could look like back home in Nigeria."

The End of an Era

When Julie Nosal '03, M.A. '11, took a job at the Center for Professional Excellence (CPE) in June 2000, she had no idea she would spend nearly 26 years at the University, earning two degrees along the way.

Nosal, who started as a coordinator and went on to become an adjunct faculty member and director of career education, will retire from her role in the WCCPE at the end of May while continuing to teach part time. Here, she reflects on her career and looks ahead to an active retirement.



You started at the WCCPE when it was still the CPE. What was it like back then?

When I joined the department, we were in a small ranch house on Walter Street. I was in the living room, and Larry Carroll, the director, had an office in one of the bedrooms. One of the other bedrooms was a mini conference room. We used to have barbecues in the backyard, and we'd invite the whole campus.

How has your role changed over the years?

At the start, I did a little bit of everything—I was the receptionist, the assistant and whatever else I needed to be. Then I started working on the mentoring program and giving presentations. For a while I ran a program called Professional Bridges, which gave students an opportunity to go to professional conferences. Eventually I took on the career education program.

What were some highlights of your time at Elmhurst?

I feel blessed to have been able to do one-on-one advising with students as well as classroom instruction. I love those “aha” moments when you can guide a student as they figure out how their major could lead to a rewarding career. Also, some of the students who went through our mentoring program are now mentors for us, which is so cool. I love it when people come full circle.

What's ahead for you?

I have two dream trips in mind: one to Hawaii and the other to Italy, because I'm part Italian and I've never been to Europe. I'm also looking forward to doing a lot of reading and gardening, and I'm going to help out my youngest daughter, who has three little kids. But first, my husband and I are heading to Alabama for a much-needed beach vacation.

Building Career Competencies

What are the skills employers are looking for in a new hire? And are college graduates equipped to deploy those skills once they enter the workforce?

Those were some of the questions that most intrigued Sondra Simpson when she joined the Elmhurst faculty in 2013 after a 25-year career in branding and marketing.

“As a teacher, I pay close attention to the content students are learning, but I also care about preparing them to apply the content,” says Simpson, associate professor of business and director of the Elmhurst Management Program. “The world is changing, and these folks need to be ready for their careers.”

So Simpson set to work. She encouraged her students to take on internships and leadership experiences, and she invited clients to engage students in real-world consulting experiences. She also sought out evidence-based resources to guide her teaching.

One of those resources was the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), which in 2014 developed a set of “career readiness competencies” that graduates need to succeed in the workplace. Ranging from communication and critical thinking to leadership and teamwork, the eight competencies are based on annual employer surveys and provide a framework for students in planning coursework and other activities.

“When I first learned about those competencies, I knew that was the research I wanted to do,” Simpson says. “I replicated that study and took a sabbatical to analyze the data and figure out what students should have on their resumes to demonstrate those competencies.”

Her results validated the importance of the NACE competencies and identified several gaps where graduates were not meeting company expectations. At the top of the list: professionalism, collaboration, problem-solving and communication.

Based on her research, Simpson designed EDGE, a program that weaves career competencies into coursework throughout the undergraduate business curriculum. Eight-week courses offered at every level—first-year, sophomore, junior and senior—show students how to build the career competencies. Meanwhile, client-based projects offer the opportunity to solve real-world business problems and make professional-level presentations.

In one recent example, Blistex turned to Simpson's class for support in launching a social media presence. After hearing the company's needs, four student teams pulled together data for a competitive analysis and created recommendations for implementation. At the end of the course, the teams presented their work to Blistex.

“The presentations were so well received,” Simpson says. “The company implemented a good portion of what my students

recommended and as a result had a significant improvement in their recruiting and retention efforts. Meanwhile, the students get a career-relevant experience on their resume.”

Inspired by the positive outcomes from the EDGE program, Simpson has collaborated with colleagues from other universities to conduct competency-based research, including a book chapter that earned a “best paper” award at a national conference.

“Our courses have made a difference in preparing students for the workforce,” Simpson says. “Now, we’re excited to share our results with a wider audience.”

Measuring Alumni Outcomes

Results from a recent survey confirm what WCCPE staff members already knew: Elmhurst graduates have an outstanding track record in the job market.

Based on protocols from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the survey collected data about postgraduation outcomes from students who graduated in December 2024 or May 2025. The WCCPE then supplemented the survey answers with additional data from sources such as LinkedIn.

Survey results indicate that 88 percent of recent graduates had found employment, joined the military or enrolled in further education within six months of graduation. Moreover, 90 percent of those graduates had engaged in some form of experiential learning, including internships, field placements and clinical placements.

“We also found that nearly nine out of every 10 students from the graduating class interacted with the WCCPE in some way—whether they came in for advising, attended a workshop or went to a career fair,” says Martin Gahbauer, executive director of the WCCPE. “And of those students, one-third used at least three of the WCCPE’s services. That’s a high percentage of heavy users.”

Elmhurst’s survey results compare favorably with those of peer institutions, Gahbauer says. And he notes that the data will be helpful in everything from institutional reporting to recruiting. “The admission and athletics teams have already asked for the data,” he says. “They can use it to underscore that Elmhurst offers a great education that sets students up for postgraduation.”

OUTCOMES BY THE NUMBERS

88%

of graduates went on to join the workforce, enter military service or continue their education in the six months following graduation

90%

of students completed an internship, field placement or clinical placement prior to graduation

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