

# WCPE Briefing

SPRING 2022



## Building a Business

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the world in 2020, Roberto Pena '23 decided the time was right to start his own landscaping business.

He downloaded the Nextdoor app and started advertising his services, and pretty soon he had an influx of potential clients.

"I didn't really have much of a structure, but I learned as I went along," he says. "When you do your own thing, there's a higher risk, but there's also a higher reward."



Pena found that he liked being his own boss—but that he also had a lot to learn about running a business. So he reached out to [Patrick Yanahan '94](#), MBA '10, Elmhurst's entrepreneur in residence, for guidance in taking his business to the next level.

As a first step, Yanahan helped Pena research the competition and identify a unique value proposition for his business.

"We concluded that there are a lot of landscapers out there, but they're terrible communicators," Yanahan said. "I told Roberto, 'That's your ace in the hole.'"

Based on that insight, Yanahan helped Pena develop a text-based communications strategy that relies on an off-the-shelf solution to keep customers informed and engaged. The platform communicates with customers through text messages at every juncture of the relationship, from sending cost estimates to letting clients know a crew is on its way.

But a robust communications plan isn't the only thing that sets Pena's business apart. He also plans to donate a percentage of all proceeds to charities and foundations, based partly on clients' preferences.

"I think this is a great way to set me apart," Pena said. "Hiring my company is a way for people to give back, whether to a large foundation like the Wounded Warrior program or the Elmhurst food pantry."

Now that he has a clearly defined value proposition, Pena is working through the formalities of establishing an LLC and getting his business officially set up. He pitched the concept to investors on April 25 at Elmhurst's annual Bluejay Tank competition, where he received encouragement and additional ideas from the judges.

"Patrick has been a great help throughout this process—connecting me with people and providing business advice and context," Pena said. "Now I'm excited to take the business to the next level and see how I can make a difference."

### 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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# Career Fair

The annual Spring Career Fair, hosted by the WCPE, has always been a valuable opportunity for students looking to jumpstart their careers. Held each spring, the event brings together regional employers to connect with students and provide professional expertise and opportunities.

The fair has taken place in a virtual since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but this year the WCPE was pleased to announce the return to an in-person Career Fair, along with a virtual option in order to accommodate all students.

On March 1, some 135 students gathered in the Founders Lounge of the Frick Center to meet and discuss career paths with 40 potential employers. Including the virtual session, more than 175 Elmhurst students met with employers and hiring organizations one on one and in group sessions.

## A Foot in the Door ●



**Sean Halloran '23** said he was grateful for the opportunity to explore career options in an encouraging, supportive environment. A logistics and supply chain management major, Halloran attended the in-person event with the goal of exploring different sides of the industry and connecting with potential employers for internship and job opportunities.

"I was able to get to know some different companies and expand my knowledge of what's out there," Halloran said. "It gave me a foot in the door, and I learned a lot about what to ask in job interviews."

Michelle Yacu, assistant director of employer relations and events, said this year's event was a resounding success. "We had a great turnout, both from students and from employers," she said. "Everyone was excited to be able to network in person again after two years of online events."

As for Halloran, he's planning to attend next year's Career Fair and encouraged other Elmhurst students to do so as well. "Even if you're not looking for a job or you just want to get information about a potential future career, the Career Fair is definitely a good place to start," he said. "Just seeing what's there gives you insight into where you might want to look in the future."



## Dressed for Success ●

**Alexandria Schweikle '23** won't be graduating for another year, but she's already confident about her career path and long-term goals. A double major in accounting and finance, Schweikle is planning a career in international tax and was enthusiastic about the networking opportunities she found at the WCPE's Career Fair in March.

For Schweikle, the most intimidating aspect of networking is finding the right clothes to wear. So a few days before the Career Fair, she visited the WCPE's Career Closet in search of professional attire.



Located in the basement of the A.C. Buehler Library, the Career Closet offers free professional clothing to help students prepare for job interviews, career fairs and other networking events. Launched in 2020, the Career Closet recently reopened after being closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I was pleasantly surprised to see that the Career Closet had a variety of sizes, colors and styles," Schweikle said, adding that she found a Calvin Klein dress in her size and wore it to the Career Fair.

"Wearing a designer dress was exciting for me because it lets me follow the example of others who have been successful in the field that I would like to go into," she said.

Schweikle said she appreciated the convenience of finding a professional outfit without leaving campus, along with the considerable cost savings offered by the Career Closet. "College tuition can be very expensive, and it's very comforting for students to know that they can get high-level professional clothing without having to worry about dropping a few hundred dollars," she said.

Career Closet allows students to take home up to four pieces of gently worn clothing at no cost. And the benefits go beyond impressing potential employers at job interviews or career fairs. As Schweikle put it, "It's always nice to feel confident with what you're wearing."

## Job Opportunity ●

For most students, the annual Career Fair is an opportunity to explore careers, connect with employers and build their networking skills. For **Michael Beierwaltes '22**, this year's event was all that—and a job offer, too.

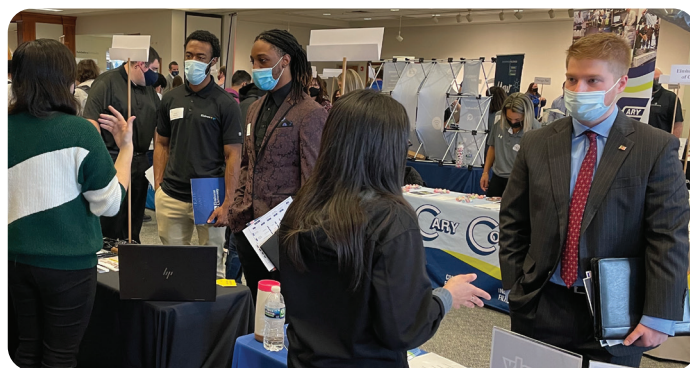


Beierwaltes, a computer science major with a minor in mathematics, has found the WCPE's resources to be a useful asset in the past. Through the WCPE, he has set up a Handshake profile, received guidance on putting together a resume, and participated in mock interviews.

But this is the first year that Beierwaltes attended the Career Fair. "The WCPE always tells us how important networking is, and they always highly recommend going to a career fair," he noted. "So this semester I worked up the courage to go."

Wanting to make the most of the opportunity, Beierwaltes made sure he was prepared in advance of the event—researching companies, polishing his elevator pitch and

attending the WCPE's prep session. At the event, he spoke to several employers in the tech industry to learn about job opportunities in his field of interest.



"It was a great experience. The companies wanted to get to know me and hear about what I was looking for," he said.

The day after the career fair, Beierwaltes received a call from the CFO of Hands-on Technology, one of the companies he spoke to at the fair. That first call led to several more, which led to an on-site interview. Within a month of the Career Fair, Beierwaltes had a solid full-time job offer.

Beierwaltes is still exploring other options, so he hasn't made a commitment. But in the meantime, he's accepted a part-time job at the company for the remaining months of his senior year and pursuing several other leads from the career fair.

"I'm very thankful to have this opportunity," Beierwaltes said.







# Celebrating 25 Years

In 1996, Bryant Cureton, then president of Elmhurst College, posed a question to a group of Elmhurst trustees: What does it mean to be a true professional?

That question was central to the formation of what would become the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence. Founded in 1997, the WCPE was designed to combine Elmhurst's traditional strengths in the liberal arts with a focus on professional preparation.



"What emerged from that conversation all those years ago was a consensus that a true professional has a strong moral compass," said Elmhurst University Trustee **Russell Weigand '64**, a new board member at the time. "You could be skilled in the elements of your job, but you couldn't be a professional without being honest and compassionate."

This year, the WCPE is marking 25 years of preparing students to launch successful careers and become effective, moral contributors to society. In February, the center kicked off a celebratory year with a party for students in the Founders Lounge. In May, faculty, staff, employers and friends gathered for a festive happy hour to look back on 25 years of connections.

In the years since its founding, the center has dramatically expanded its reach. In its first year, for example, 54 students participated in the center's internship program. Today, more than 200 students typically engage in internships and other career experiences with employers ranging from Argonne National Laboratory to Ernst and Young to Walt Disney World.

Originally known as the Center for Professional Excellence, the WCPE was renamed in 2016 in honor of a \$2.25 million gift pledge from Weigand and his wife, **Joyce Slone Weigand**.

"When I was an undergraduate, there was very little career support for students. It was up to you to make those connections," Weigand said. "The center has become a valuable resource and one of the truly distinctive elements of Elmhurst University."

**Larry Carroll**, a professor of business administration who served as the center's founding director for 21 years, said that as the center has grown, it has remained true to its roots.

"There's a DNA in this institution. Elmhurst has always been focused on finding ways to help students become better prepared," Carroll said. "Going back to Bryant Cureton's focus on what it means to be a true professional, the center has had a very successful 25-year run."

Speaking at the May event, Martin Gahbauer, WCPE executive director, reflected on the WCPE's evolution to become a powerful circle of influence. "We look forward to what the next 25 years will bring," he said. "And we look forward to continuing the critical work of helping our students reach their full potential."

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