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A WORK OF HEART

The real-world experience DePaul provides for students remains laser-focused, even during a pandemic

BY ABIGAIL PICKUS

Hannah Daly (MEd '20) was in her final year of a master's program in clinical mental health counseling at DePaul's College of Education (COE) when she found herself on the frontlines of the pandemic.



Hannah
Daly

Through a unique program called DePaul WORKS, Daly and a cadre of other counseling graduate students quickly turned their classroom learning into hands-on coaching for those caught in the crossfire of COVID-19.

"DePaul WORKS is really tied into DePaul's Vincentian values and mission, and it reinforced to me why I chose this field in the first place," says Daly, who graduated in June.

While the coaching focused specifically on career skill-building and wellness for unemployed individuals living in poverty, Daly found that simply being a warm voice on the other end of the line offered its own kind of therapy. "I have come to recognize the power of connection," she says. "Even just having an outlet, some genuine kind of connection with someone, shows the value and necessity of mental health services and being able to provide them to different people with all different backgrounds."

Although Daly honed foundational skills through classwork and clinical skills through a previous internship, what DePaul WORKS offered was what its name implies: an opportunity to work.

With 63% of graduates across all colleges having held an internship during their time at DePaul and more than 350 organizations actively recruiting DePaul students each year for job and internship opportunities, students accrue an impressive array of professional experience before they ever don a cap and gown.

PANDEMIC SUPPORT

Rebecca Michel, an associate professor in COE's Department of Counseling and Special Education, spearheaded DePaul WORKS after realizing DePaul was sitting on a treasure trove of essential workers.

"After the pandemic hit, I saw how many people were suffering globally, but also locally in Chicago, so I thought, 'We have these students. We have this expertise. Let's do something,'" she says.

DePaul WORKS stands for Workplace Opportunities [Through] Reflection, Knowledge and Skills. An extension of the DePaul University Education and Counseling Center (ECC), the program partners with the CBO Collective, a consortium of 15 Chicago-area nonprofits devoted to workplace development, to offer free telecoaching in English and Spanish. Launched on May 1, International Workers'

Day, a hotline funnels clients to graduate students who volunteer their telecoaching services. When the program first launched, 15 graduate students coached 120 people from the community at large over a six-month period. PNC Bank is a generous supporter of the project.

To make sure students were given the support they needed, Michel arranged for weekly group check-in calls, as well as individual reinforcement from faculty. Students were also advised to refer clients to social services organizations for additional assistance once sessions were completed.

"I felt very supported as we were navigating this new initiative," says Daly, whose only real-world experience prior to DePaul WORKS was her internship at Harold Washington College in Chicago.

Now a therapist with Transcend Counseling Chicago, Daly draws from her own indispensable experience. "In this field, real-world experience is absolutely crucial to being a good clinician," she says.

Michel agrees. "The great thing is that the students are using the skills that they learned in their classes on career counseling and crisis so they're able to support people who really need that help."

MUSEUM MAGIC

The summer before she began studying at DePaul, Jordan Johnson interned at the Milwaukee Art Museum through the Chipstone Foundation.

"Internships are especially important for students not only for the experience, but also to gain the professional networking connections that you need," says the DePaul senior, who is majoring in the history of art and architecture with a double minor in museum studies and African and Black diaspora studies. Johnson is pursuing DePaul's combined degree program (bachelor's and master's) in critical ethnic studies.

She went on to land additional internships at museums, one in conjunction with the Museum Studies Internship course, a 10-week summer class that combines classroom learning with internship experience.

Created in 2016 by History of Art and Architecture Senior Professional Lecturer Cheryl Bachand, a longtime museum professional before she joined DePaul, the course has given DePaul students the leg up they need in a competitive field.

"I wanted to come up with a mechanism for undergraduates to be able to start to gain the skills and get a foot in the door as an intern. It's really hard as an undergrad to land any of these positions because the competition is



Cheryl
Bachand

“Internships are especially important for students not only for the experience, but also to gain the professional networking connections that you need.”

—JORDAN JOHNSON

steep. Often, you’re competing with graduate students,” says Bachand, who forged relationships with 15 participating museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chinese American Museum of Chicago.

Another goal of the course is to level the playing field for students who can’t afford to take an unpaid internship.

“Often internships in museums are unpaid, which usually privileges individuals who have another source of income,” says Bachand. She made sure that internships count for academic credit, thus easing some of the tuition burden students incur. Students also may qualify for LAS scholarships for unpaid internships at nonprofits.

The course also aims to showcase the diversity of the museum field.

“Often, students who enter my classes think that the only positions in museums are as curators, so a big part of this course is introducing them to the wide variety of work in a museum, from publishing and marketing to PR and writing. It’s not just curatorial and exhibition development,” she says.

For her internship at the Floating Museum in Chicago, an arts collective that brings art primarily to marginalized communities, Johnson helped archive hundreds of photos and files for the 2019 Cultural Transit Assembly exhibit, which featured pop-up exhibits on the CTA’s Green Line trains and in parks. She found it to be fascinating work.

“The CTA project was just so creative and eye-opening, especially for somebody who wants to go into curation in a way that rethinks how to put exhibitions together to be more inclusive,” says Johnson.

Johnson also had the chance not only to intern again at the Milwaukee Art Museum, but to curate her own exhibition as well.

“This was a really wonderful experience,” she says. “We took a number of historical objects from their collection and reinterpreted them, not necessarily from the standpoint of how they were used, but from that of the artists or people of color behind it. This was a way to give voice to underrepresented peoples and to give art and history a new perspective.”

Looking ahead, Johnson knows exactly what she wants to do. “I definitely want to go into museum curating, whether it’s opening up my own gallery and working on other curatorial projects on the side or working for a museum that speaks to the mission that I want to achieve,” she says.

CYBERSECURITY UNCOVERED

Students at DePaul’s School of Computing have been quietly working on unclassified cybersecurity projects, thanks to a one-of-a-kind educational initiative called Information Security Research and Education, or INSuRE.

“It’s a rare program,” says Assistant Professor Filippo Sharevski, whose teaching areas include computer security.

A project of the National Security Agency (NSA) and the National Science Foundation (NSF), the consortium brings together students from 30 universities chosen for their exceptional cybersecurity programs. Working in teams, they research unclassified cybersecurity issues for NSA, the National Labs, the Department of Homeland Security, and other federal cybersecurity research centers.

Beyond the research itself, the power of this program is the access students gain to top-flight cybersecurity research organizations.

“It’s very competitive to land an internship at a national lab or a cybersecurity research center, but by signing up for this course, students are put in direct touch with the nation’s top researchers and institutions,” says Sharevski.

At the end of the course, students come together to present their research to the NSA and leading researchers from the cybersecurity research organizations, “which is basically a mini job fair. Depending on how good they perform, they have the chance to get a job offer,” says Sharevski.

The project in which **Rob DeCarlo (CDM MS ’20)** participated as part of INSuRE was called Explorer Bot, which involved helping a national lab uncover better ways to handle next-generation traffic disruption.

“This was a really valuable class,” says DeCarlo. “We

were able to devote a lot of time to our research and to diving into a real-world problem that actually matters. It wasn't just writing a theoretical paper. We were trying to solve an actual issue."

DeCarlo currently works as an application engineer and feels his master's from DePaul, and, in particular, his INSuRE experience, have given him the tools to advance his career.

"I can take the skills that we learned and refined anywhere, whether it's IT, security or cyber. This has given me more flexibility in my career choices," he says.

MENTOR POWER

In fall 2018, DePaul's College of Law introduced a new way for students to learn and grow: the Build Your Network Mentoring Program, a collaborative effort with the Chicago Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section.

The program originally paired law students with attorneys who have been practicing for under 10 years. This academic year, the program expanded to include other Chicago-area law schools. Currently, 24 of DePaul's second-year students are participating and make up almost half of the program's total mentees. These law students have been paired with mentors from a wide range of practice areas for monthly activities as well as one-on-ones during the academic year to discuss important topics such as careers, networking, leadership and service, according to **Kathryn Liss (JD '06)**, director of the Schiller DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center, which oversees the venture from the student side.

"A mentor-mentee relationship is vital to enhancing the legal profession," says Liss, who is also assistant director of DePaul's Law Career Services. "This is a way for law students to build their networks and to be exposed to the practice of law. And since these are young legal professionals, it's also a way for them to connect to someone who can still relate to being in law school, and who can offer them insights about everything from taking the bar exam to getting an initial job."

Octavio Duran, principal and owner of Duran Law Offices, a personal injury law firm in Chicago, volunteered to be a mentor. "I want to lead by example, and so far, it has been really good for both my mentee and myself," he says about his relationship with a third-year law student who met with him once a month to go over her goals.

For Duran, whose firm has also taken on DePaul law students as interns, being a mentor has been fulfilling. "I was a gymnastics coach in college, and I've always liked teaching. Beyond just the ability to teach and to see interns and mentees learning and growing underneath our guidance, it's also good exposure for my firm," he says.

It might even lead to future partners. "I hope some of them do join my firm in the future," he says.

DRIVING COMMUNICATION

An internship **Zoë Ihaza (CMN '20)** had at a public relations firm during her freshman year at DePaul solidified her desire to go into the field.

"DePaul is where I specifically gained a lot of passion for integrated marketing communications, competitive analysis and market research," says Ihaza, who expects to earn a master's degree in public relations and advertising from the College of Communication (CMN) in 2021.

During the pandemic, Ihaza was able to pursue another internship at a marketing agency in Chicago as part of the CMN internship program, which combines classroom work with on-the-job experience for course credit.

"This firm stood out for me because it's not just a marketing and advertising agency. They're driven by data, and I'm very intrigued by research. While I was there, I got to do competitive analysis and other market research for several different clients," she says.

The internship was a success, even virtually. "They treated interns as if we actually had been hired. We did an intern pitch project where we served as a mini-agency, and we did a digital strategy pitch for a client. The firm went above and beyond to make sure that interns had the entire experience, even though we were not in person," says Ihaza, who plans to work as a media planner at an advertising agency after graduating.

Michael Elias (EDU '05, MEd '08), who directs the CMN internship program, helps undergraduates and graduate students find meaningful and relevant internships.

"We want to give them the experiences that they're looking for in the real world that directly align with what they're learning in the classroom," he says. "Some of the majors are very clear-cut, like PR students could work in PR firms, journalism majors could work in that industry. But then there are other majors that are less tangible, like media and cinema studies, or communication and media, that may not articulate a career path as clearly."

For these areas, Elias has helped students find more niche opportunities, such as working in music marketing at a record label or acting as a social media manager for a fashion designer.

Through it all, faculty members guide students on everything from supervisor expectations to recession-proof career planning. The ultimate goal is to help students succeed in the real world.

"Internships are an essential component to help students get hands-on experience, figure out what they like and what they don't like, and become more competitive so that they can go out into the world confident and goal-directed," says Elias.



Zoë Ihaza