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# When a little means a lot

*Alumni don't need to take much time from their busy schedules to make a big difference as career mentors to current students.*

**Story by JUDI HYMEL**

For one alumnus, it's often simply a matter of answering an e-mail.

For another, it can involve half of her day.

For a third, it once entailed an overnight stay ... and some ironing.

In other words, being a mentor for an Illinois Wesleyan student means as much or as little time as alumni have to offer. Whatever the time commitment, "this is a very rewarding way to reestablish a relationship with your university and it can involve a small amount of your time," says Warren Kistner '83, director of Illinois Wesleyan's Hart Career Center.



**Renee Dunlap '84 (far right) gives Illinois Wesleyan senior Emily Israel an inside glimpse into the optometry profession during a half-day, "job-shadowing" mentorship. Other alumni who participate in the mentor program respond to students through phone calls or e-mails.**

For several years, the Hart Career Center Mentoring Program has linked alumni and friends of the University to students, helping guide hundreds to post-graduate career success. The program has also helped IWU alumni find interns or quality candidates for their organizations.

But with only about 250 alumni now registered for the program, it needs a boost, Kistner says. He would like to expand the mentor register to 1,000, and has begun marketing the program more aggressively, producing a new brochure and highlighting the program at alumni events around the country.

Kistner has found that a great way to explain the process and value of the program is to hear from alumni who have served as mentors. *IWU Magazine* asked three such mentors to discuss their experiences.

**Help on a tight schedule**

Although he hasn't worked in the movie industry for long, Brian Udovich '98 has risen fast. He obtained a master's degree in producing from the American Film Institute and his thesis film *The Monster and the Peanut* won the Academy of Television Arts and Science's (Emmy) first prize in drama for student films in 2005. Now working with Snoot Entertainment/Occupant Films in Hollywood, he coproduced a new horror movie, *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane*, that was recently sold to famed film executive Harvey Weinstein at the Toronto Film Festival.

Despite his tight schedule, Udovich makes as much time as he can for fellow Titans who are interested in the film industry. It might be a quick e-mail response, or a phone conversation. "It's a great feeling, helping out fellow alumni," he says. "It was tough to get here, so I can shed some light, on a grander scale, of the field when students contact me with an interest in this forum." Udovich also feels a sense of debt. "I wouldn't be here right now if it weren't for an Illinois Wesleyan alum who gave me an internship. That experience was worth every dime I paid at Illinois Wesleyan."

### A real eye-opener

Renee Tomes Dunlap '84, an optometrist at Gailey Eye Clinic in Bloomington, says she likes opening students' eyes to the world of optometry, as well as the reciprocal enthusiasm and interest those students bring into her office.

A student will typically "job-shadow" Dunlap for half a day. While making sure her schedule isn't too hectic, Dunlap tries to schedule the student to come in when she is likely to be doing a variety of tasks, from routine exams to post-op treatment to emergency care. She also tries to have lunch to get to know the student better and to allow him or her to ask her any questions they might have about the shadowing experience or optometry in general.

Though the job-shadowing can slow her routine slightly, she welcomes students — in part, because her patients are so receptive to them. "I'm done, and they'll still be talking to the student," she says with a laugh. "My patients really seem to enjoy it."

Interacting with students also gives Dunlap a chance to build awareness of her field. "There are a lot of misconceptions about what we do. Many students just think this is about eyeglasses and contacts, but it's about medical care, too."

Even though their time together is short, Dunlap says she is often able to ascertain a student's interest level. She has been able to encourage some to follow her career path or saved others from wasting their time and money when she sensed their paths were leading in a different direction.

IWU senior Emily Israel, who is in the midst of deciding about her own career options, values such candid advice. While she has applied to a physician's assistant school, she is still curious about other fields and so requested to spend time with Dunlap for a few hours one day at her office.

“It was really nice because we’re both from Illinois Wesleyan and I felt like she was more open with me — not just about her field but other fields, too — than some of the other (intern) experiences I’ve had,” Israel says.

### Smoothing out the wrinkles



**From left, Zaman and Syed I. Ahmed '04 visit with Chaudhury, who mentored them in college.**

A native of Bangladesh, Faizal Chaudhury '96 knows firsthand the difficulties students from other countries face in trying to find work in the United States. For that reason, he especially enjoys offering his insights as a mentor to IWU's international students.

Several years ago, the Hart Career Center put Sameer Zaman '03, also a native of Bangladesh, in touch with Chaudhury for career help. Chaudhury, who is an internal audit consultant in Chicago, suggested changes to Zaman's resume and offered him interviewing advice. When Zaman landed a job interview at the Chicago office of a leading accounting firm, Chaudhury suggested Zaman stay at his

and wife Sharmin's home so they could prepare for the interview the evening before.

That night, when Zaman revealed that he planned to go to his interview in a wrinkled shirt, Chaudhury got out his iron.

“I don't iron, and I told Faizal I thought it didn't matter that my shirt was not ironed. He said, ‘No, it will matter.’”

Zaman got an offer from the company the day after his interview — and has been friends with Chaudhury ever since.

“In my opinion it's the easiest and most satisfying way to give back to Illinois Wesleyan,” Chaudhury says. “It's allowed me to continue to have that strong sense of belonging to the IWU community, and to keep up with the news from campus from a student's perspective.”

He is now helping Bukola Olaosebikan '09. A native of Nigeria, Olaosebikan is concerned about her internship opportunities because many U.S. companies now require applicants to be permanent American residents. Chaudhury e-mailed her with advice and encouragement. “Make sure you do internships every summer — even if you are in Nigeria,” he wrote her. “Be active in student organizations (get leadership roles) and, most importantly, make sure you have good grades. If you take care of all these issues, I am sure you will have no problem getting a GREAT job after graduation.”

Olaosebikan says her mentor's insights were invaluable, and hopes more alumni will consider participating in the program to share their priceless knowledge. "Being a mentor isn't a full-time job," said Olaosebikan, "but it is a crucial investment in the life of somebody who may never be able to repay you." Perhaps not, but for Illinois Wesleyan's alumni mentors, sharing their professional expertise with students can be its own reward.

### Mentoring: how it works

Thanks to a sophisticated database called eRecruiting, IWU alumni who volunteer as mentors can control both the types of student contacts (e-mail, telephone, or in person) and how many they receive during a month, according to Hart Career Center Director Warren Kistner.

"You could reply to an e-mail with an answer that is second nature to you, but it could be the deciding factor for a student on whether they consider a certain career path," Kistner says.

To become a mentor, the alumnus/alumna must contact Kistner to inform him of his or her interest. Then the center will send the alumnus an e-mail containing a username, password, and instructions on creating a profile. The profile provides general personal, academic, professional, and mentoring information. This process is simple and takes only minutes.

A student can then review the information submitted, with the exception of the mentor's name. Only if the mentor has not reached his or her maximum number of contacts for the month will the student be given access to the mentor's identity.

Because there may be times when there are no students matching a mentor's profession, position, or geographic location, a potential mentor may not be contacted immediately, Kistner says. However, by recruiting a large number of mentors, Kistner hopes to ensure that IWU students will find a likely match when they search for career advice.

Participants do not have to be an Illinois Wesleyan graduate, Kistner adds —parents and friends of students also are welcome to participate.

To become a mentor, contact Kistner at [wkistner@iwu.edu](mailto:wkistner@iwu.edu) or (309) 556-3237.