



Spring 3-30-2016

Diving Deep: Students Immersed in Alumni Advice During Career Excursion to Chicago

Jasmine Wright
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Wright, Jasmine, "Diving Deep: Students Immersed in Alumni Advice During Career Excursion to Chicago" (2016). *News and Events*. 2843.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2843>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Diving Deep:

Students Immersed in Alumni Advice During Career Excursion to Chicago

March 30, 2016

Story by Jasmine Wright '17; Photos by Lloyd DeGrane and Career Center staff

Nearly 30 alumni hosted 21 students on the inaugural Career Immersion Excursion (CIE) in Chicago. Over a packed four days, students visited eight employers, heard alumni dispense career advice in formal presentations and through informal chats, and attended small-group dinners and receptions. At every opportunity, students heard first-hand stories about career trajectories, working in marketing or public relations, and what it really means to be an entrepreneur. CIE was led by Hart Career Center staff and was made possible by the support of Cathy Carswell '65, an IWU Trustee. Following is the first-person account of attendee and English-writing major Jasmine Wright.



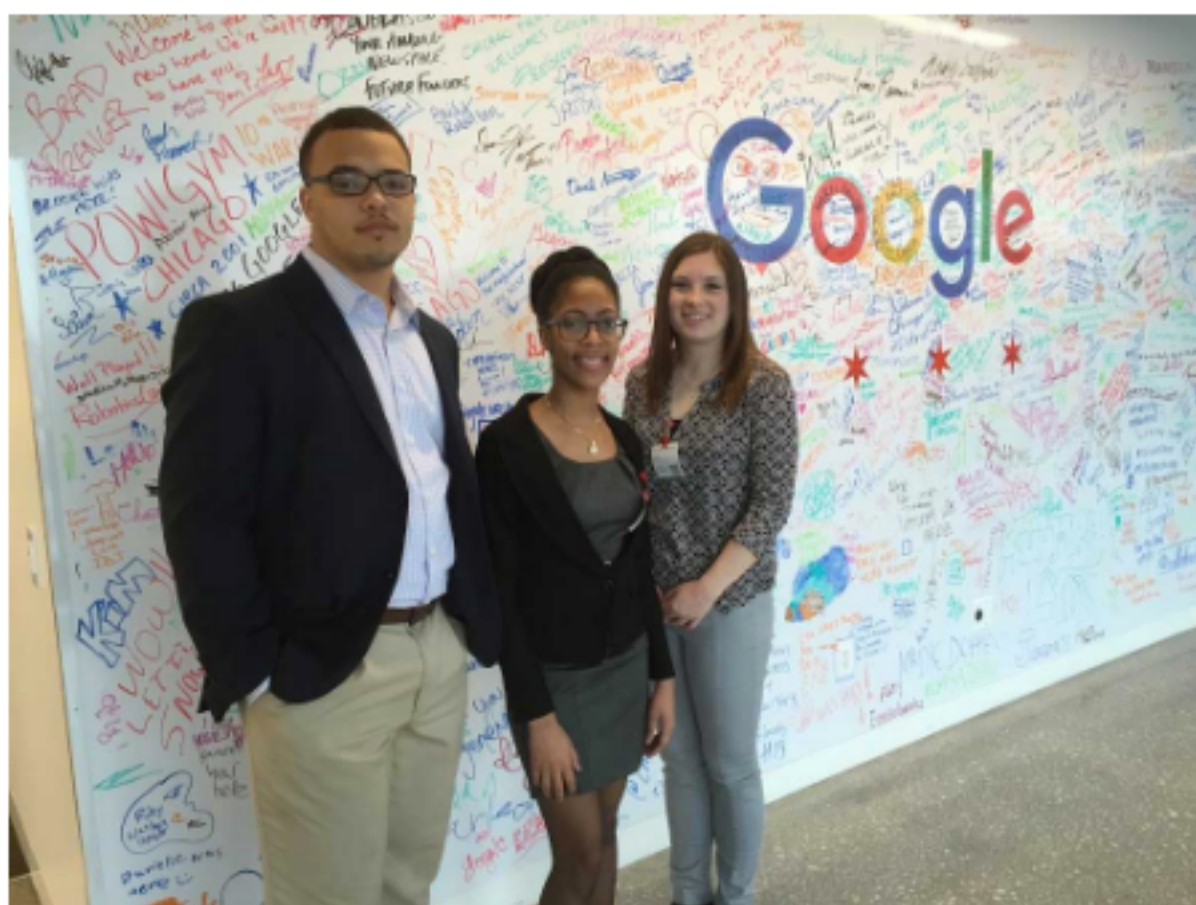
Students spent their spring break getting immersed in career insights in Chicago.

The First Step

Our first visit was to Kelly Scott Madison, a media agency, where we heard from President Joni Williams '82. Joni majored in music theatre and after graduation, she returned to her small town, where her only opportunities for networking were her parents and her dentist. Because she knew her dentist had professional contacts, she reached out to him for help. Joni toured with various musical theater groups around the country, but eventually realized that was not her passion. She emphasized the importance of seeking information from everyone we know, because we never know when that contact will come in handy.

Joni's presentation set the tone for the entire trip: if we learned nothing else, we quickly discovered the importance of networking as the most important piece of advice we needed to take away from the trip. Alumni at Weber Shandwick and Foote, Cone & Belding talked about the importance of networking as well. The last site visit of the day was Old Town Pour House, a property of Bottleneck Management co-owned by Chris Bisaillon '93. With enthusiasm in his voice and a laid-back demeanor, Chris emphasized the necessity of hard work, investing, and networking, which we'd already learned was the topic of the day. As a college football player, member of Phi Gamma Delta (FIJI), and a young investor in a cement company in his hometown, Chris let it be known that anything is possible. By stressing the necessity for getting out of our comfort zones, being able to make mistakes (as long as we learn from them), and using the IWU community to our advantage, Chris set the bar high for us as students that evening.

The day had been filled with sound advice from alumni and other employees at each of the companies we'd visited, and we expected the same from those we would visit in the following days. Our heads were already spinning, and we were excited for the next day's agenda at Google and beyond.



The author, Jasmine Wright '17 (center), is flanked by Stephon Rudicil '17 and Emily Yerkes '18 at Google.

Work Hard, Play Hard

Walking into Google felt like strolling into my favorite clothing store on a shopping spree with no limits on my credit card. Google's legendary perks were on full display; we walked around the facility with our mouths agape as we saw pinball machines, massage therapy rooms, chocolate on demand, and treadmills with desks attached to them. Though the benefits seemed to be infinite, Account Manager Susan Powalowski '11 made it clear that Google was a "work hard, play hard" business. She emphasized the endless possibilities at Google, noting that those who work for Google do not have to be "tech geniuses." There were marketing opportunities, several creative teams, advertising teams, and so much more.

Before Susan described the way Google assigns employees to jobs that best suit their strengths and experience, and before hearing alumni in a variety of fields relate countless stories of "I thought I wanted to

do this, but *then...*", I was certain I would be a public relations professional.

Even with that semi-specific job title, I was still unsure of what exactly I would do. Would I go into event planning? Would I be on the marketing team? Would I be behind the scenes on the creative team? After the Starcom MediaVest Group site visit, Senior Vice President Chad Maxwell '02 unknowingly relieved me of that anxiety.

Starcom MediaVest Group is a large company with employment opportunities in marketing, advertising, public relations, human resources, and the creative teams. Chad treated our session at Starcom like a "101 introductory course" and explained each department's responsibilities in detail. I had some knowledge of social media marketing, but I learned much more during the visit. Chad gave us a 'behind the scenes' sneak peak of Audi and Airbnb commercials, and through that, I learned how to successfully work with a team. We learned how the marketing and creative teams came up with the idea to promote a three-dimensional, car showroom without the actual cars. The Airbnb marketing team worked with TV host and comedian Conan O'Brien to promote Airbnb as one of the best websites to book an overnight stay in an airplane, a celebrity's home, or even in the rafters above the studio where *Conan* is filmed. Chad also discussed the Multicultural Marketing niche that specifically caters to underrepresented minority sectors.

After that site visit, though I felt as if I was back at square one in my uncertainty of a career field, I also felt like I had a fresh start. So many alumni changed their career paths several times, networked, and found new interests in a different field. We heard from Diana Lopez '08, a philosophy major who found a love for digital marketing and now works at ePage City, Inc. Megan McKeen '00 majored in sociology yet found a passion for insurance – the field where she's currently a senior account executive for Byrne, Byrne and Co. And Susan Powalowski majored in International Studies with a concentration in Western European studies, with no idea she'd ever be employed at Google.

Starting Anew

After attending CIE, I see my future full of possibilities. I have broadened my interests to social media marketing and media communications in order to fulfill my passions in communicating with people in the digital world as well as promoting community outreach in a variety of neighborhoods. Lesly Ingram '17, a biology major who attended CIE, agreed: "[CIE] opens your eyes and broadens your horizons to a world that you never knew existed." Other students attending CIE had similar ideas. Olivia Kief '17, a marketing major, said CIE gave her a "a whole new perspective on my future career path and career opportunities." Sarah Udelhofen '17 learned new elements within her marketing major, and added that a highlight was meeting alumni who genuinely care about our futures and us. And when asked why a student should consider attending a future CIE, marketing major John Shipman '17 summed it up like this: "If you are a business student at IWU, the only reason you wouldn't want to attend CIE is because you don't want to better yourself, plain and simple."



Stephon Rudicil '17 (right) chats with alum Justin Ahrens '94, who founded his own marketing design company.

Chicago Immersion Excursion Photo Gallery

