

## ACI's First Career and Internship Fair: A Total Career Development Experience Meeting Employers, Building Skills

April 5, 2018



Representatives of International Financial Group were among those at the Employer Expo.

ACI's March 23 [Career and Internship Fair](#) attracted 170 attendees, providing a rare opportunity for students from 13 ACI colleges and universities to meet 23 employers face-to-face and connect with experts in career development, diversity and networking. ACI presented the day-long event at [North Central College](#), Naperville, in partnership with Citi. Major funding was provided by a [Council of Independent Colleges](#) National Venture Fund Challenge grant of \$21,750, matched by a gift from the Shure Family Charitable Trust.

ACI's fair reached beyond standard career fairs to give students opportunities to interact with employers in both the traditional "employer expo" setting and in less formal settings, including sitting with them at a keynote luncheon and relaxing with them in a networking lounge. In addition, the fair offered seminars that equipped students with skills and information to enhance their job searches and on-the-job performance.

### Skill-building sessions with valuable advice

Skill-building sessions included advice for job seekers, in-person networking (sponsored by GROWMARK, Inc.), workplace diversity (sponsored by the Financial Services Pipeline Initiative), first-time job searches (sponsored by Baker Tilly) and using LinkedIn to effectively market to prospective employers. Speakers from ACI colleges and universities included James Godo, North Central College; Jerry Pinotti, Concordia University Chicago; Maribeth Hearn, University of St. Francis; and René Tucker Martinez, North Park University.

The luncheon keynote speaker was Robyn Clark, managing partner and founder, SuccessWise Consulting, Inc. She advised students: "Nobody ever hires you for what you've done in the past. People hire you for what they believe you can do in the future." Clark also presented a list of nine "Winning Action Strategies" for students entering the workforce: Be Essential, Push Yourself, Exercise Confidence, Build a Fan Base, Practice Regular Self Reflection, Give Back, Negotiate for Success, Always Have a Plan and Understand the Game.



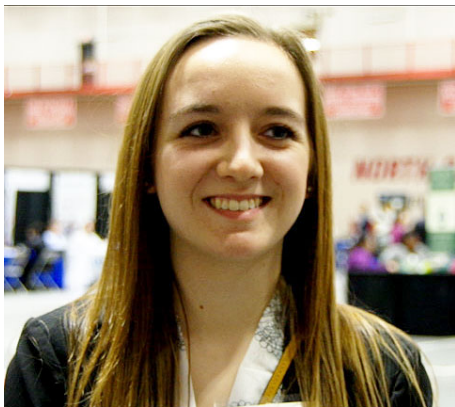
Robyn Clark, SuccessWise Consulting Inc., was keynote speaker.

## Job and internship opportunities focus of Employer Expo sessions

At the fair's two "Employer Expo" sessions, students met face-to-face with employers ready to hire. Representatives from companies such as Essendant and Whole Foods said they spoke with dozens of candidates. Sara Lorenzo, talent development supervisor, TTX Company, said she identified some good prospects. Her firm maintains a highly valued internship program, which hires 30 students each summer. Leah Wallace, Citi's vice president of workforce development and diversity and inclusion, who staffed the company's expo booth, said Citi is committed to hiring students from liberal arts colleges and universities. Citi's "Talent Track" program, launched in 2016 and focused on new graduates, she said, is "proof that liberal arts students are committed to work and are valuable assets to our organization." Citi will be hiring a second cohort for the program this year.



Leah Wallace, Citi, said her company is committed to hiring students from liberal arts colleges and universities.



Ashley Maurer, Monmouth College, learned about new possibilities for employment.

Dr. Arvid C. Johnson, president of University of St. Francis, Joliet, spoke about his own undergraduate liberal arts education at Lewis University, Romeoville. Johnson said courses for his physics major and courses in other disciplines were equally valuable to his education. "What I hope for each of you is that you will take advantage of the courses not just in your majors, but out of your majors," he told students.

Ashley Maurer, a junior math and economics major from Monmouth College, Monmouth, traveled three hours to attend the fair. She said the experience was worth the drive. "I found companies that I honestly didn't know existed before today," said Maurer. "I definitely found options that I may not have even considered before this, which is kind of eye-opening. I liked that a lot."

Frustrated by applying for jobs online and by seldom getting a chance to speak to employers directly, Joseph Schomer, a junior accounting major at the University of St. Francis, Joliet, said the Employer Expo was refreshing. "I love coming to these events, even if nothing happens," he said. "There's still a connection and a chance to talk to somebody."

Augustana College accounting and finance major Brandon Schattner traveled from Rock Island. He graduates in May and is looking for a full-time job. Employer Expo companies were very receptive to him and open to a variety of majors, he said. Plus, Schattner liked the interactions with the employers. "They're thinking about us as students, our career paths and what would be best for us, as well as thinking about what's best for them," he said.

### **Chicago employer connections important for career services staff**

"We don't have many opportunities to meet with Chicago employers," said Kristen Liesen, director of experiential learning, Quincy University, Quincy. "The opportunity to learn about Chicago jobs is wonderful." Liesen and four students left Quincy at 3 a.m. to attend ACI's fair. Transportation grants provided by ACI to member institutions to bring students to the event were helpful, she added.

Jerry Pinotti, director of career services, Concordia University Chicago, said ACI's fair gave students practice telling their stories and exploring career aspirations. "This event gives them the opportunity to meet a lot of different people," he said. "It gives them confidence. It gives them something to look forward to, to prepare for. It makes our jobs a lot easier."

"What really struck me was ACI had some superb employers here. I've never been in a venue where students have been able to hear so many different employers," said Doris Haugen, director of career development, Judson University, Elgin. She planned a follow-up meeting with Judson attendees.

### **Next career and internship fair planned for fall 2019**

Plans are already underway for ACI's next Career and Internship Fair in fall 2019. Early feedback from employers and career services staff at member colleges and universities suggests that fall is a better time for employers to identify summer interns and potential employees, and to give students an early chance to launch employment searches.

*ACI expresses special thanks to North Central College, President Troy D. Hammond, Troy Bristow, director, conference services and camps, and the North Central College events staff for their important contributions to the success of the 2018 Career and Internship Fair.*