

ACI's Career Development Conference and Employer Expo Builds Career Readiness, Offers Access to Prospective Employers

Oct. 11, 2019



Students attending could meet with up to 25 employers and graduate school representatives.

More than 100 students attended ACI's Career Development Conference and Employer Expo, where they had the opportunity to meet with 25 employers and graduate school representatives, and attend seminars on career paths in specific fields, plus networking, implicit bias in the workplace and financial literacy.

The students, from 13 [ACI-member colleges and universities](#), were among 185 people who attended the day-long event Oct. 4 at ACI member [North Central College](#) in Naperville. In addition to students registered for the conference, about 150 of North Central College's

first-generation freshmen toured the conference during the day. ACI previously hosted its first career fair and professional development conference at the college in March 2018.

Diverse opportunities for students

Students said the conference gave them a rare opportunity to speak with potential employers and learn helpful career and life skills. For example, [Concordia University Chicago](#) junior Salam Hussein came prepared with a specific list of employers she wanted to meet. "I've been looking for internships, and as a freshman, it was really difficult to get one," she said. "One of the companies seemed very interested. I'm really looking forward to following up."

Malik Johnson, a junior computer science major from [Rockford University](#), said he spoke with employers about internships and with graduate school representatives about earning a master's degree. "It's nice coming to places knowing that the people here are willing to talk to you about their companies, presenting themselves while I'm trying to present myself as well. That's a good experience for me," he said.

Likewise, Matt Dee, a North Central College accounting, finance and economics major, said the experience was helpful, especially the "broader focus" with graduate program representation. "It's one thing to have a job fair where there are just employers," said Dee. "But it's great to have all these other opportunities to look at further enhancement to one's educational background."



More than 100 students from throughout Illinois traveled to North Central College to meet potential employers and to attend skill-building seminars.

Employers spoke highly of student attendees

Employers were pleased with many of the student candidates they met. "I've spoken to many viable candidates whom I'd definitely hire," said Stephanie Douglass of State Farm Insurance Co. She also said the event speakers and skill-building sessions were "super helpful" for students. Omar Coronado and Alexis Salvador, representing Wells Fargo, said they told students about the company's internships and collected several resumes for company recruiters. "It's great to see the level of engagement and students taking the next step," said Coronado. "We've been able to give feedback and discuss career paths."

The event gave Kayla Zembruski, Dayton Freight Lines, Joliet, an opportunity to share information about the company's varied internships. "We are looking for management interns and management trainees. We need people to manage day-to-day operations in a fast-paced environment," she said, adding many students had good "elevator speeches" and came prepared.

Speakers share expertise in networking, workplace topics and life skills



Michelle Silverthorn delivered a presentation on the effects of implicit bias in the workplace.

Students heard a variety of speakers who discussed relevant skills and workplace topics. Michelle Silverthorn, CEO, [Inclusion Nation](https://inclusionnation.org), a diversity consulting firm, said that to transform workplaces into diverse and inclusive spaces, leaders must design workplaces centered on courage, authenticity and belonging. She cited examples of how differently people experience upward mobility in their firms, depending on gender and race. "Changing the rules" can help companies become more diverse and inclusive places, Silverthorn argued, and help companies keep employees over the long term. Silverthorn also cited several strategies to transform workplaces. "The workplace should not be a place where we go and toil, and leave when the day is done," she said. "That is the old rule. The workplace should be where we can be our best self, our whole self, our authentic self." View Silverthorn's TEDx talk at <https://inclusionnation.org/ted-x-talk/>

J.D. Gershbein, CEO, [Owlish Communications](https://owlishcommunications.com), spoke at breakfast about building professional networks. Personal branding, he said, differentiates a person from others, and one social media network, in particular, is significant. "The site on which you build your brand is LinkedIn. The LinkedIn profile has become the key point in the business world," he said, adding that business relationships are the "connective tissue" of a person's career.



J.D. Gershbein spoke about branding and networking.

Skill-building seminars focused on careers in financial services, insurance and nonprofits, email etiquette, micro-internships, first-time job searches and building credit. Seminar sponsors were Baker Tilly, Fifth Third Bank and Upkey.

Locally based employers, as well as 11 Fortune 500 companies and one federal agency were among employers and graduate school programs represented at the Employer Expo:

Employers

ALPFA (Assoc. of Latino Professionals for America)
Aon
Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Illinois
Buckeye International
Call One
CBRE
Central Intelligence Agency
CME Group
Consolidated Electrical Distributors, Inc.
Dayton Freight Lines
Environmental Design International
Fifth Third Bank
Inclusion Nation

Marsh
Northwestern Mutual
Owlsh Communications
Shure
State Farm
Wells Fargo
WestCare/Sheridan Correctional Center
Wintrust

Graduate programs

Dominican University
Lewis University
North Central College
Saint Xavier University

ACI will host the next Career Development Conference and Employer Expo in October 2020. ACI expresses special thanks to North Central College President Troy D. Hammond, Kenneth Hannah, assistant director, conference services and camps, and the North Central College events staff for contributing to the success of the 2019 ACI Career Development Conference and Employer Expo.