

Passport to Success

by Elliot Grossman

As she started her sophomore year at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Christina Schneider was a smart, hard-working student who still hadn't decided on a major. While she wanted to study business, she knew so little about the corporate world that she could neither pronounce the name "Deloitte" nor explain what an auditor does for a living.

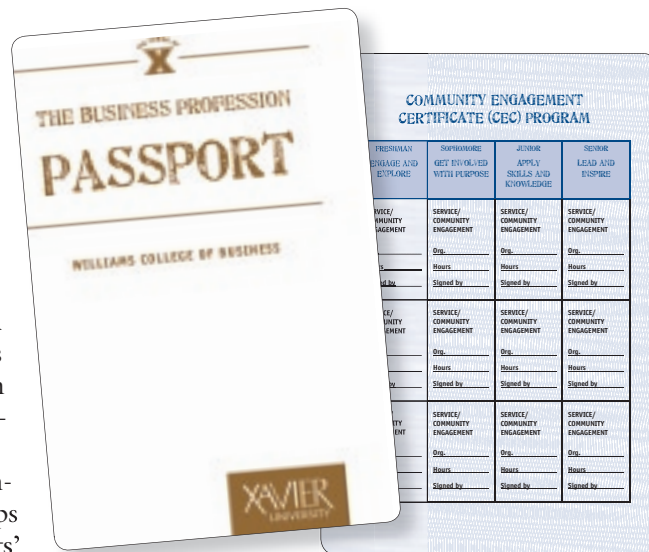
But by the end of 2009, Schneider was the Mentee of the Year at the Williams College of Business and had a summer 2010 internship lined up with Deloitte in Cincinnati. She'd also decided to pursue a career in accounting.

Schneider's transformation occurred in part because of a four-year business development program at the Williams College that helps undergraduate business students focus on their careers as they learn business savvy. The Business Profession Program relies on several factors for its success:

- It's required for graduation. Approximately 80 events are held every year, and some are mandatory for students in each class year; this means students no longer can put off attending résumé workshops, networking with business professionals, and meeting with career counselors. Optional events allow them to explore their interests further.

Students at Xavier University's Williams College of Business follow a closely mapped career development plan that builds from activity to activity and year to year.





All students in the Business Profession Program receive a passport that lists required and optional activities and allows administrators to stamp the booklets as students attend events.

- It's structured, following a logical progression of activities students should participate in during each of their four undergraduate years.

- It uses a booklet, resembling a U.S. passport, that helps everyone keep track of students' progress in meeting program requirements. Completion of the program is noted as pass/fail on student transcripts.

- It's funded by a \$500 charge paid by every undergraduate every year.

Through the Business Profession Program, Schneider, now a junior majoring in accounting and management information systems, learned how to write a résumé, acquired job interviewing skills, developed a relationship with a business mentor, and met recruiters from Deloitte at a career fair. In short, she received extracurricular training on how to succeed in the business world.

Program Basics

The Business Profession Program has a host of benefits for the Williams College students. First, it encourages them to make early decisions about their majors, emphasizing that choices they make in college will have great impact on their careers. That in turn helps them pick electives, because an early declaration of a major makes it clearer which electives are important. Finally, it helps them see the value of internships and other activities that prepare them for the corporate world.

The program was launched in 2000 at the instigation of former dean Michael Webb, who wanted to address under-



As part of the Business Profession Program, Xavier students are required to attend a career fair. Here, senior Long Phan talks to Jessica Ondrovic, a recruiter with the Midland Company, at a 2009 fair.

graduates' "deadly career sins" of procrastination, rationalization, and unrealistic expectations. Webb and other leaders at the college felt that students often delay their career development efforts because they rationalize that they don't have time to pursue them, or they believe a job will be waiting for

them when they graduate.

Management professor Thomas Clark, who was tasked with creating the program, first researched what other universities offered. He found that many career services offices scheduled plenty of random workshops, but attendance was voluntary and the workshops rarely followed any logical sequence. Clark and his colleagues created a program with workshops and other activities that built on each other, the way required college courses do. Clark also established a course focusing on career-oriented communications skills, such as writing résumés and making oral presentations.

Essentially, the Business Profession Program became a way of getting college students to grow up, Clark says. "This program is an acceleration of the transition to adulthood."

The program imparts the "theory of exchange"—that is, if an executive agrees to a networking interview, the student will return the favor by writing a thank-you note or telling someone else about the executive's kindness. "It teaches the Golden Rule—that you should treat people how you want to be treated," Clark says.

The mandatory nature of the program also means career services staff don't have to spend so much time trying to convince students to attend events, says Lynda Grossman, who heads the college's professional development center. "The easy part is knowing you're going to fill a room for any program you want," she says.

Therefore, the staff can concentrate on deciding which activities should be required and which activities should be optional so that students, particularly juniors and seniors, can choose the other events that are most suitable for their particular career paths.

Master Plans

The centerpiece of the program is the Passport, a 20-page booklet slightly larger than a U.S. passport. One booklet is issued to each student and features his or her photo on the inside cover.

The Passport contains testimonials about the program

from students who have completed it and inspirational messages about why students should take full advantage of it. But its real power is in the way it guides students through their college years.

It contains a grid that lays out five to six activities required for each student for each year, as well as optional events. In this way, the Passport encourages students—even freshmen—to think about and plan for their careers.

To keep track of students' attendance, the school invested in software that registers identification cards when students swipe them as they enter an event. When students complete activities, the college staff stamps the appropriate space in the grid.

Because students are juggling classes, jobs, and sports activities, the college provides required workshops at multiple times. If students still miss events for valid reasons, staff members find related events students can attend, tutor students in specific skills, or ask them to demonstrate their knowledge of particular subjects.

Must-See Events

The first required activity, which falls during the first week of freshman year, is a presentation by motivational speaker Patrick Combs. Among other things, Combs introduces students to the concept of “unassigned homework.” He tosses a beach ball into the audience and asks students who catch it to read some of the words printed on its surface. These include suggestions such as “Study abroad” and “Follow your bliss.”

Doing this kind of “unassigned homework” is crucial to a student's success in college, Combs tells them, because good grades aren't enough to catch an employer's attention. Students need to pursue activities outside of class, whether they complete three internships, lead a campus club, develop a relationship with a mentor, or learn how to use business software. Students don't earn grades for participating in extracurricular activities, but they learn valuable skills that will benefit them in school and in the workplace.

Combs—a best-selling author who has been inducted into the Motivational Speakers Hall of Fame—also advises students to follow their passions. Those who pursue their dreams will have a better chance of achieving career success and amassing wealth. He tells them, “I want you to choose a job where you get it all.”

Another required activity for freshman year is a consultation with an executive-in-residence. At these events, students meet with retired business leaders to discuss their academic and professional careers. Gerald DeBrunner, a retired vice chairman of Deloitte and an executive-in-residence, says the

A Closer Look

As part of the Business Profession Program, students at the Williams College of Business are required to participate in certain events and activities every year:

Freshmen

- Kickoff program with inspirational speaker
- Sessions on time management and communication etiquette
- CareerLeader online assessment
- CareerLeader workshop
- Executive-in-residence interview

Sophomores

- Orientation for the Executive Mentor Program
- Résumé workshop
- Sessions on networking effectively, becoming a strategic partner, and learning behavior-based interviewing skills
- Training in eRecruiting software to gain online access to internships and jobs

Juniors

- Career fair
- Sessions on effective strategies for searching for jobs and evaluating job offers
- Two optional events

Seniors

- Sessions on financial planning and the transition to career life
- Senior celebration
- Two optional events

Optional sessions

- Developing an elevator pitch
- Studying abroad
- Finding an internship
- Attending an etiquette dinner
- Learning how to use LinkedIn
- Preparing for the career fair

For more information about the program, including an interactive reproduction of the Passport, visit: www.williams.edu/undergraduate/business/about-bpp-activities.cfm.

counseling session helps students clarify their academic paths and choose the right majors, which minimizes the number of students who switch majors later.

DeBrunner wishes the Williams College had had a similar program when he attended. “I could have used a great deal of advice and guidance when I was going to college,” he says.

Executive Input

An optional student activity is the Executive Mentor Program, which pairs interested sophomores, juniors, and seniors with local businesspeople. The mentor program once was a required part of the Business Profession Program, but it is now voluntary, says Sarah Mock, who heads the program. Some students didn't follow up once they were assigned mentors, and that negligence damaged the relationship the college had with its mentors, businesspeople the college had worked hard to recruit, Mock explains. Today,

“Most universities send their graduating seniors to the career services office. We have decided to take personal responsibility for our students’ success.”

—Ali Malekzadeh

about 75 percent of eligible students—about 500 in all—decide to participate annually.

These students write profiles of themselves, and mentors choose from among them, considering factors such as major, family background, common interests, and personality. Mentors coach students in what they need to know professionally, socially, and ethically—such as making eye contact, writing a résumé, and understanding elevator etiquette. Students who participate tend to find the relationship extraordinarily valuable.

For instance, when Alberto Gomez was a sophomore, he accompanied his mentor, Jose Guerra, to a discussion hosted by the National Society of Hispanic MBAs. By the end of the event, Gomez had obtained the business card of a retired Procter & Gamble CEO and an invitation to lunch. The retired executive had been intrigued by a question about integrity that Gomez had posed to the panel.

Now a junior majoring in international business and finance, Gomez has established a networking connection with the man who once headed the world’s largest consumer products company and is the board co-chair of one of Cincinnati’s largest museums. The experience has taught him that he can network at the highest levels.

If not for his mentor, Gomez might not have been at the panel discussion. And if not for the advice his mentor had been giving him for months, Gomez might not have handled himself as well as he did that night. He and Guerra meet about four times a month, often for breakfast, and they e-mail even more frequently. During these interactions, Guerra acts as a tremendous resource for Gomez, offering business advice, support—and honesty.

As Gomez says, “He doesn’t tell me what I want to hear. He tells me what I need to hear.”

Measurable Results

The optional and required components of the Business Profession Program combine to prepare students on many different levels for the challenges they will face when they enter the working world. Finance and marketing major Jessica Khourie says that, because of the program, she’s had three internships, networked with marketing professionals, refined her career focus, and honed her résumé. “The program has made me feel more confident in my knowledge of business and my interaction with business professionals,” she says.

Not only that, the program has measurable results. In 2008, 95 percent of Williams students had found jobs within three months of graduation. The school attributes that rate, in part, to the Business Profession Program.




Xavier student Christina Schneider visits with her mentor, Matthew Thomas, environmental health and safety manager and co-op program manager for Ohmart/VEGA Corp. in Cincinnati.

The program also receives widespread support, from faculty and staff to Dean Ali Malekzadeh, who personally hands out student résumés to the university’s board of trustees and the business school’s advisory boards. He also makes phone calls to get job interviews for students.

“Most universities send their graduating seniors to the university’s career services office and, in effect, make someone in career services responsible for finding a suitable career for the students,” Malekzadeh says. “Our faculty and staff have decided they will take personal responsibility for our students’ success.”

The Business Profession Program has proved so successful that its basic format has been adapted by other schools, including the School of Business at the University of San Diego in California. Launched in 2009, USD’s program has become an effective tool for recruiting students—and impressing parents.

“Parents eat it up,” says USD’s associate dean, Stephen Standifird. “When they hear about this program, it’s often a deal maker.”

As an inspirational passage in the Passport notes: “Employers are impressed with students who maximize opportunities, seek out leadership roles, and can demonstrate accomplishments and results.” Every graduate entering the working world today needs an edge, something that will catch the eye of a potential employer. The goal of the Business Profession Program is to provide students with that edge. 

Elliot Grossman is a public relations consultant for the Williams College of Business at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Global and Regional Events of 2010

ICAM 2010 | April 18–20 | Anaheim, California, USA

Asia Regional Conference | May 23–25 | Singapore

It's hard to believe that more than half of the 09–10 academic year is behind us. Even still, AACSB is gearing up for two crucial events—ICAM 2010 and the new Asia Regional Conference debuting in Singapore this May.

The International Conference and Annual Meeting connects you to the world of business schools like no other event—this is the networking and educational opportunity you don't want to miss. The Asia Regional Conference explores global best practices and AACSB accreditation in the Asian context. Between the two conferences, you can garner innovative ideas from business educators and industry experts, while concentrating on the issues specific to b-schools in the Asian region.

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Lessons for Aspiring Deans Seminar | April 17–18 | Anaheim, California, USA

Global Accreditation—Getting Started | May 22–23 | Singapore

Register and learn more: www.aacsb.edu/seminar

