

WCPE Briefing

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A Leap of Faith

Growing up in London, **Marvin Tchangwa '24** knew he wanted to pursue a career in medicine. What he didn't expect was that his journey would take him halfway around the world to an American suburb he'd never heard of.



But after high school, he started getting recruited by colleges in the United States that wanted him to join their track and field teams, opening the door to unexpected opportunities. One of those colleges was Elmhurst University.

"I had never heard of Elmhurst. I didn't even know that it was close to Chicago," recalls Tchangwa, a biochemistry major. "But if I had stayed in the U.K., I wouldn't have had the opportunity to continue with track and field. I decided to join my two passions together and go for a slightly longer journey in the U.S. It was definitely a leap of faith."

As an international student, Tchangwa knew he would need support in navigating the path to medical school, so he reached out to the WCPE even before he arrived on campus. In a series of video calls over the summer before his first year, Erica Ashauer, the WCPE's director of pre-professional advising, helped him plan his courses to maximize his time at Elmhurst.

"Erica was there for me from day one," he says. "I wanted to graduate in three years, and she created a plan to make that

work. Year by year, semester by semester, she was always on top of things. I don't think I could have gotten that tailored help anywhere else."

Ashauer also connected Tchangwa with an opportunity to shadow a local neurologist—the kind of transformative experience that can be particularly challenging for international students to access.

"She spoke to the physician about me, and they took me on. Afterwards, they wrote amazing letters of recommendation that helped me get into medical school," he says. "And it all started with Erica pushing me and telling me what I needed to be a strong candidate."

When it came time to apply to medical school, Tchangwa cast a wide net, applying to both MD and DO programs on both sides of the Atlantic. As the acceptance letters started to come in, two stood out: Tulane Medical School in New Orleans and Cambridge Medical School in the United Kingdom, his top two choices from the beginning.

Choosing between Cambridge and Tulane wasn't easy for Tchangwa. He couldn't rely on rankings or match rates since the U.S. and U.K. medical systems are so different. What's more, the path he chose would determine which country he would call home for the next 10 years. But after several months of careful thought, he ultimately chose Tulane.

"I've enjoyed my time in the U.S.," he says. "I've enjoyed my time here with the shadowing experiences, with volunteering and with the people I've met. I want to explore, and I feel like in the U.S. there's more to explore. So I went with that, and we'll see where the next four years take me."

ABOUT THE WCPE

The mission of the Russell G. Weigand Center for Professional Excellence is to prepare Elmhurst University students and alumni for a rapidly evolving world by igniting their professional curiosity, competencies and purpose. Through career guidance, mentoring, internships and more, the WCPE readies students for a successful launch into their careers and to become effective contributors to society.

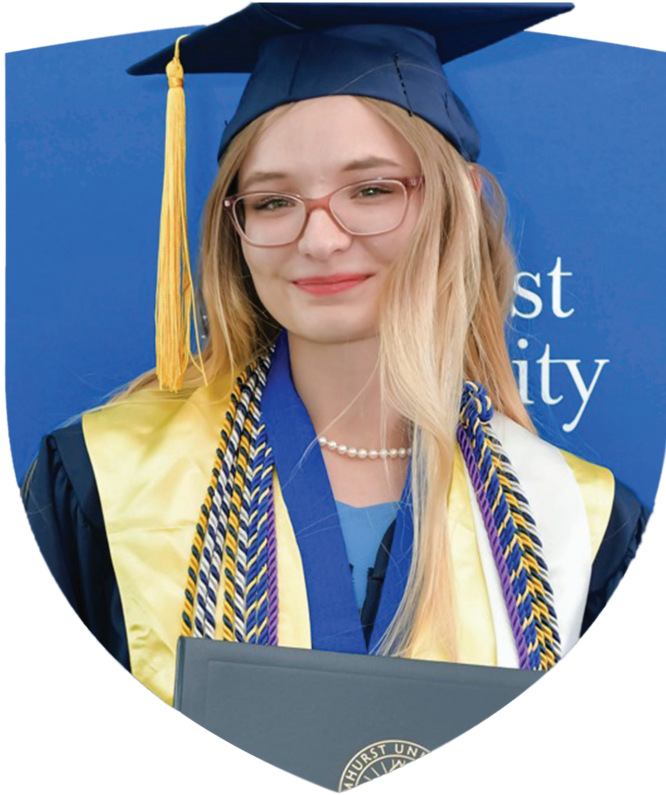
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From the Classroom to the Courtroom

When [Gillian Husack '24](#) enrolled at Elmhurst as a first-year student, she planned to pursue a career in forensic psychology. But then she got involved in the WCPE, which opened the door to a whole new set of career options.



At the end of her first year, she participated in First Leap, a three-day program designed to give students an early start on career exploration through interactions with professionals in their field of interest. Then she attended some career workshops tied to her major.

“Those experiences helped me understand that law school might be a good fit for me, because I love to debate,” she recalls. “That helped spur a shift in my goals and path.”

Husack switched her major to criminal justice and psychology, joined the pre-law program and started preparing for a career in law. A key turning point, she says, was when she joined the University’s Mock Trial program in her junior year, eventually becoming president and co-captain of the team.

Through Mock Trial, she says, she learned a lot about trial procedures and came away with a better understanding of how attorneys work with witnesses and clients. More broadly, she gained real-world insights from taking on the perspective of a

trial attorney. “Practicing what you want to do in your career gives you real, firsthand knowledge,” she notes. “Being in a mock trial room gives you experience that you may not get even in law school. That really stuck with me and helped me choose my path.”

As she got closer to graduation, Husack found more opportunities to engage in WCPE programs. For example, she participated in a practice interview with a panel of faculty and staff members posing as employers.

“That was something a lot of people don’t get to experience—and for free, too,” she says. “At first it was nerve-racking, but remembering that it was a stepping-stone got me through it. And the experience helped me prepare to interact with professionals, which is an important part of navigating the world.”

Husack says the WCPE was also instrumental in helping her navigate the path to law school admissions. She took advantage of the Center’s many resources, including LSAT prep materials and one-on-one advising with Adekemi Dosunmu, Elmhurst’s pre-law advisor.

“There’s a lot to know about law school admissions, and she helped break it down for me,” she recalls. “That was a big help, because it demystified my understanding of what I didn’t know and what I did know.”

After receiving acceptance letters from three law schools, Husack chose Chicago-Kent College of Law. Two days after graduating from Elmhurst, she decided to get a jump-start on her law school studies by taking a summer class. And she’s glad she did, because the experience helped her ease into a new way of learning.

Looking back on her time at Elmhurst, Husack says her experiences with Mock Trial and the WCPE were instrumental to her success. “If you just do the baseline courses, you might not necessarily figure out what you want to do for a career,” she notes. “So my advice to future students is to apply yourself. Make the most of the opportunities available to you. That’s the most rewarding thing you can get from Elmhurst.”

Creating Change as an Educator

Mateo Gomez Bedoya '26 has always had a passion for helping people. But it wasn't until he taught a literacy class for Spanish-speaking adults in his hometown that he realized just how deep that passion runs.



Born in Colombia, Gomez Bedoya came to the U.S. at age 13 with his parents and younger sister. Originally, he planned to pursue a career in business administration. But a part-time marketing role with a local insurance agency convinced him that business wasn't for him.

"I had a good position," he says. "I was getting paid, I had commissions and I had clients. But I realized business wasn't my passion, because I wasn't helping anyone directly. My passion was helping people."

As he explored alternative career options, a number of people suggested that he consider teaching or even taking on a leadership role in education. He decided to double major in secondary education and Spanish with a double minor in Italian and ESL. And when he heard about a teaching internship at Addison Public Library in his hometown, it sounded like a perfect fit for his interests. He worked with the WCPE to complete the paperwork, and soon he was teaching a twice-weekly literacy class for native Spanish-speaking adults who hadn't finished high school.

His students in the program, primarily immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala, ranged in age from 25 to 65 years old. Their backgrounds varied too, with some having dropped out of school as early as first grade. Wherever they started, their goal was to reach the next level in writing and reading Spanish and eventually earn the equivalent of a high school diploma in Spanish.

In his teaching, Gomez Bedoya drew from a Spanish curriculum he developed last summer with funding from Elmhurst, as well as a curriculum provided by the Addison Public Library. Starting with basic sounds in Spanish, he led the students through syllables to words and then sentences.

"Within a couple of weeks, we were reading short stories, then longer stories," says Gomez Bedoya. "Some of the students even read short books."

Gomez Bedoya says all the students made excellent progress, and every one of them reached the next level of proficiency in reading and writing Spanish. But one student in particular stood out: Alfonso, an older gentleman who had dropped out of school at an early age and entered the literacy program at the basic level.



"The teacher helped me a lot. I didn't know how to read—very little—and to write, less. My family is proud because I learned so much."

—Alfonso, literacy student at Addison Public Library

"When Alfonso started the class, he didn't know how to write. So I gave him a little whiteboard to take home," Gomez Bedoya says. "Every day he wrote on it, and by the end of the class, he was writing sentences. That was a big accomplishment that he achieved through a lot of hard work, and I was very proud of him."

Looking back on his internship, Gomez Bedoya says it was a powerful experience that strengthened his desire to pursue a career in education. Specifically, he plans to teach English as a Second Language at the high school level before moving on to leadership roles.

"My ultimate goal is to become an assistant principal, then a principal, and one day be a superintendent," he says. "Because teachers can make change in their classrooms, principals can make change at the school level, and superintendents can implement policies that will benefit all students."



Introducing New Academic Affiliations

Elmhurst University recently added four new pathways for students to get special consideration or early admission to professional programs in healthcare and law. Designed for students with clear and specific career goals, these academic affiliations can streamline or even accelerate the path to a chosen career.

The new programs join some 15 existing opportunities, ranging from a veterinary medicine affiliation with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to a radiation therapy affiliation with Northwestern Memorial Hospital. “About one-third of Elmhurst students are interested in careers related to health care and law,” says Erica Ashauer, director of pre-professional advising, health professions advising and pre-law advising. “These affiliations can give them an advantage in entering the field and getting a jump start on their careers.”

The new programs are as follows:

DePaul University College of Law (Guaranteed Admission Program)

A new partnership provides guaranteed admission to DePaul University College of Law for up to three Elmhurst University students who meet certain criteria, including minimum GPA and LSAT scores. In addition to guaranteed admission, the three accepted students receive guaranteed scholarships of at least 25% of tuition.

Aurora University MS in Athletic Training (Guaranteed Admission)

This program offers up to 10 guaranteed seats in Aurora University’s MS in athletic training to Elmhurst exercise science majors who meet the program’s criteria. By streamlining the path to graduate school admissions, the partnership paves the way for students to reach their goal of becoming athletic trainers.

Illinois College of Optometry (3+4 Accelerated Track)

This partnership enables pre-optometry students at Elmhurst to apply for early admission to the Doctor of Optometry (OD) program at Illinois College of Optometry. Students who meet the program’s criteria (including a biology major and certain GPA requirements) can complete both a bachelor’s and an OD degree in just seven years rather than the typical eight-year timeline.

Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine (Podiatry Early Admission Program)

This program allows high school seniors to apply for early admission to the LECOM School of Podiatric Medicine, securing a seat in podiatry school years ahead of the traditional process. Accepted students complete four years of undergraduate studies at Elmhurst and then go on to four years of podiatry school at LECOM.

For more information about Elmhurst’s academic affiliations, visit elmhurst.edu/affiliations or contact Erica Ashauer or Adekemi Dosunmu.

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