

J-alums to students: 'Find the rhythm of what you want to do'

by Sheng Lee - Wednesday, October 26, 2011

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/15047/j-alums-to-students-find-the-rhythm-of-what-you-want-to-do/>

As part of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Homecoming 2011 festivities, journalism alumni returned to their alma mater to share their expertise with current students about internships, jobs and networking.

The panel session featured Mary (Bagnall) Callen '95, of Portage; Laura Denissen '99, of Milwaukee; Michael Fredrick '97, of Oconomowoc; and Patrick Stiegman '88, of Canton, Conn.

Fredrick, creative director at Bader Rutter in Milwaukee, was awarded a 2011 Outstanding Young Alumni Award by UW Oshkosh's Alumni Association Friday night.

When Fredrick came to UWO, he knew that he wanted to go into advertising. He began his college career as a business major, but figured out quickly that he wasn't any good at accounting.

Fredrick said that while at UWO, he enjoyed his classes with James Tsao, a former UW Oshkosh journalism professor. Tsao's teaching style took students away from the textbook and gave them hands-on experiences in advertising.

A former member of ad club, Fredrick was one of the first five students to advance to the National Student Advertising Competition, where they placed in the top 10. Four of the five students who went to this competition later received alumni awards from UW Oshkosh.

Fredrick offered useful tips about how to find a good job. As an advertising professional, he encouraged students to build a strong portfolio with real-world work. He said that you can't wait around for opportunities to find you; you have to make it happen.

Stiegman, another panelist, also was honored Friday night. He received the Distinguished Alumni Award, the highest honor given by the UW Oshkosh Alumni Association. He is vice president and editor-in-chief of ESPN.com.

Stiegman said that the skills he learned while at UW Oshkosh are still applicable today in his professional career. As a college student, he worked for the Oshkosh Northwestern. He went on to work for the State Journal and the Milwaukee Journal.

He encouraged students to pursue their dreams and to never give up. Stiegman said that he doesn't believe in settling for a mediocre position, and he urged students to do the same.

"Find the rhythm of what you want to do," Stiegman said.

He encouraged students to immerse themselves in internships, because it helps "turn theories into

practice.” Through internships, you can learn invaluable experiences and build the fundamental skills you need, Stiegman added.

To land a job in the journalism field, Stiegman advised students to network aggressively, join clubs and work with professors who may have contacts in the industry.

As a student, Callen knew she wanted to be a newspaper reporter/editor, but her family discouraged her by warning that she would never find a decent job. Today, she is the communication director for Wisconsin’s Newspaper Association.

She worked part time at the Oshkosh Northwestern as a sports stringer. Callen then moved to the newsroom as an intern. During her senior year at UW Oshkosh, Callen put her classes on hold to work at a small newspaper in Ripon. She also worked part time at UW-Baraboo/Sauk County.

Callen encouraged students to apply for internships, because that’s where “you get the big audience.” She also urged students to build strong portfolios, practice interviewing, do their homework on potential employers and attend industry conferences.

Denissen, who is the marketing product manager at Harley Davidson, came to UW Oshkosh with the goal of majoring in journalism. She joined the ad club and the Advance-Titan. After graduating, Denissen got her first job in Chicago in advertising and public relations. She now works for Harley Davidson, where her writing and social networking skills have benefited her greatly.

Denissen stressed the importance of networking and finding a mentor. Mentors will become your job references, she said. She also urged students to not burn any bridges along their career paths and to monitor their social media presence.

“It’s a small world,” she said.

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