



COUGSFIRST!: A CONDUIT TO CAREER SUCCESS

Story and photos by Sue McMurray

The degree of passion and loyalty of WSU alumni doesn't happen at every university. Nowhere else is this more evident than at the annual CougsFirst! show and after party, where over 2,000 WSU alumni and friends gathered to reconnect and network.

Founded in 2011 by Glenn Osterhout ('82 Mktg.), Jack Thompson ('84 Bus. Adm.), Rob Tobeck ('94 Phys. Ed.), Mike Bernard ('84 Bus. Adm.), Paul Dent ('83 Fin.), and Mike Politeo ('79 Econ., Pol. Sci.), CougsFirst! is a business network encouraging WSU alumni and friends to utilize Cougar owned and managed businesses throughout the country for their products and services.

PANELISTS SHARE TIPS FOR SUCCESS

This year, 38 Carson College undergraduates attended CougsFirst! to meet alumni and learn more about Cougar owned businesses. Prior to the show and after party, the Carson Center for Student Success teamed with Osterhout to convene a panel of speakers, who shared tips on successfully navigating their upcoming careers.

"It was so exciting to go to Seattle and listen to successful business professionals give us advice on how to navigate our own career path," said Alayna Piwonski, a human resources major. "I am so thankful for all of the opportunities the Carson College of Business has given me."

Panelist Sarah Coke ('11 Psych.), Concur Technologies

Inc.'s global internship lead, suggested tailoring résumés to highlight technical skills, including expertise gained by watching YouTube or online forums. "It shows you can learn in different ways," she said.

While a student, Coke took a paid internship at Concur to pay for studying abroad. She loved the company so much, she took a human resources job after graduation, and because of her global experience, was soon offered a global onboarding position. Now in her "dream job," she manages five internship programs in nine global locations.

IMPRESSING BEYOND THE RÉSUMÉ

Coke and Jen Dynes ('92 Psych.), Tableau Software's campus recruiting manager, recommended students showcase who they are as individuals—something not on their résumés. Activities such as taking a leadership role on campus or in a fraternity or sorority, playing an instrument, speaking a foreign language, playing or coaching team sports, or participating in student clubs and events like CougsFirst! may all illustrate transferable skills employers want, they said.

Shannon Flynn ('95 Bus. Adm., HR), Microsoft's senior human resource manager, and Amelia Ransom, Nordstrom's director of talent, spoke about the importance of being a constant learner and providing value to the

company. “You influence others through respectful communication, honesty, and tenacity,” said Flynn. “Being honest about your strengths will take you further than anything else.”

Flynn said her HR career started at WSU as a computing services lab monitor, when she noticed there were no written staffing processes or promotion philosophy, so she created them. “Look for opportunities, be flexible, and take risks,” she said, “but don’t oversell yourself.”

Ransom said knowing when to lead and when to follow is an important workplace skill that sets one up for success. “I wish I had known I didn’t have to have it all figured out,” she said. “I have my own personal board of directors—my truth tellers. For you, this may be your parents. At work, you have to invite people to tell you the truth that will help you become better at your job.”

Osterhout advised students to constantly think about networking and to proactively seek connections. “Introduce yourself, invite people to coffee, and connect through LinkedIn,” he said. “Perseverance will make you successful. Employers hire Cougs because they get the job done.”

NORDSTROM, TABLEAU SOFTWARE HOST STUDENT NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

As part of the CougsFirst! experience, Carson students visited Nordstrom and Tableau Software headquarters. Shandace Robertson, Nordstrom recruiting analyst, explained internships are available in many of Nordstrom’s sectors, from finance and economics to merchandising and retail. Interns are immediately immersed in learning the art and science of buying, she said.

Jason Gowans, Nordstrom vice president of marketing analytics and technology, discussed the balance between data-driven marketing and maintaining a personal connection to customers. One intern project increased beauty product sales by examining consumer purchasing

data and creating a personalized beauty email customers receive prior to when they typically buy products.

Several WSU graduates who work at Nordstrom shared their testimonies on achieving their dream jobs within the company.

“I always wanted to work at Nordstrom,” said Catherine Yates (’16 Fin.), financial analyst. “I worked in sales during holiday breaks. As a junior, I requested an informational meeting with a manager. Every month, I emailed her. When a position opened, I was hired.”

A DAY IN THE LIFE AT TABLEAU

At Tableau, a panel of WSU alumni showcased the company’s employee-friendly culture and the applicability of Tableau software to industry. Fortune 500 companies, health care organizations, nonprofits, educational organizations, and the government are examples of industries who use Tableau, but the software can serve anyone who uses data.

Host Jen Dynes said that quite a few students who intern at Tableau are hired back full-time after graduation. Panelists Zane Murfitt (’09 Comm.), Mike Crook (’94 MIS), and Trevor Hall (’03 MIS, ’15 MBA) recommended students interested in the company learn more by visiting Tableau Public, the company’s website, to watch visualization videos and live webinars, and by researching Tableau conference speakers.

“New employees in sales and development attend a two-week boot camp learning onboarding processes, then go full throttle,” said Cheyenne Jasienski (’14 MIS), a sales analyst. “I knew I wanted to work at Tableau when I was an undergraduate,” she said. “To succeed here, you need to be willing to learn and have energy and passion.”

“Going to Tableau’s and Nordstrom’s corporate offices and talking with recent graduates and WSU alumni made me realize the education you receive at WSU can really take you anywhere,” said MIS major Connor Oswald.

