



Empower

Alumna share wisdom with undergraduates in career mentoring event

Monday, June 6, 2022



VIVIAN PHAM '14 (LEFT) IS AMONG THE ALUMNA WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE INAUGURAL NETWORKING EVENT, EMPOWER.

“Mentorship is one of the most valuable ways alumni can give back to COLA,” says Jon Constable, director of COLA Career and Professional Success.

He’s seen the power firsthand. Earlier this semester, Constable, the Liberal Arts Dean’s Office and the COLA Advancement office teamed up for a pilot program to connect high-achieving women graduates with stellar women undergraduates in a networking and

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mentorship event titled Empower.

Speed-dating was the format, even down to the smooth jazz permeating Hamilton Smith's Great Hall, where four powerhouse alumna, each claiming a table, conversed with teams of two students who rotated among the tables every few minutes.

Constable provided thoughtful prompts to help the discussions along, such as "How did you get to where you are in your career?" and "What are your values and how are they reflected in your work?"

Mandy Merrill '74, who majored in [psychology](#) at UNH, traced her years in New Hampshire politics — many as a representative and then senator — back to her high school social studies teachers who encouraged her to get involved politically.



EMILY CLEGG '22 AND MANDY MERRILL '74 DISCUSS HOW TO PURSUE A CAREER IN POLITICS.

"I remember going to the New Hampshire legislature and testifying on why the voting age should be lowered to 18," Merrill said, "... and I ended up being the NH chair for Youth for [Eugene] McCarthy."

Merrill's career trajectory resonated with Emily Clegg '22, [political science](#) and [justice studies](#) majors, who says she is interested in homeland security and anti-terrorism, and helped run a mock election at UNH. Another, Beth Newton '22, a [history/law](#) major, says she will follow up with Merrill because she thinks serving as a state representative would be an exciting route to pursue.

COLA has highly successful graduates in nearly every career field. Connecting them to undergraduates who may not yet have a

sense of how to get from point A to point B in their career goals can be extremely helpful for students to begin to understand the pathways.

“As somebody who has hired people, liberal arts graduates have better communication skills — human skills.”

Laura Favinger '82

Stevens '89 ([political science](#)), CEO of a medical technology company; and Laura Favinger '82 ([political science](#)), chief of staff of the Insurance Information Institute, a nonprofit think tank.

The student participants represented seven majors within the College. As is often the case for liberal arts majors, it isn't the major itself that is paramount when it comes to employment, but the skills students learn in liberal arts: heightened critical thinking, complex problem solving, statistical analysis and communication.

“As somebody who has hired people, liberal arts graduates have better communication skills — human skills. It makes you very attractive to employers,” shared Favinger during one of the rounds.

Newton says the most valuable piece of information she took away from the entire event is that those communication skills come into play at the outset, in the job interview, where people skills can make or break the impression you make.

Reflecting on the impact of this pilot program, Constable says that “given the buzz in

Empower's four mentors represented disparate fields and phases in their careers, giving students a sampling of what building a successful professional life can look like. In addition to Merrill, the participants were Vivian Pham '14 ([psychology](#) and [family studies](#)), chief of staff at a Massachusetts state agency that serves people with disabilities; Stacy

the room and the feedback I received, I'd say this event is here to stay." While this instance served relatively few people, the hope is to hold larger and multiple



SARA DONATELLO '22 AND STACY STEVENS '89.

events, for both men and women. But Constable wants to remind students that there is a great source for reaching alumni right now: [Wildcat Connections](#), a networking platform for UNH alumni and students. "It is an effective and efficient way to get the inside scoop and to build a network," he says.

One of Constable's event prompts was undoubtedly meant to illustrate the potential value that alumni connections can have for the students: "Have you ever had a mentor and what impact did they have on you?"

Stevens was quick to expound on the many important mentors she has had at every stage of her career who, she said, were fundamental to her success. She's still in touch with many of them today. "I cannot recommend strongly enough seeking mentors out," she said to the students with conviction, but added, "I know it's a lot and you don't have to feel like you have it all figured out."

Are you an alum who wants to share your career wisdom? Sign up for [Wildcat Connections](#)!

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