In conjunction with the Donelan Office for Community-Based Learning, the Center for Career Development helped to host the 11th annual Non-Profit Careers Conference in January. Thirty-three students across all class years considering careers with non-profit and community-based organizations participated. The program introduces students to the range of viable and diverse career options in the non-profit sector, engages students in reflection upon how they might utilize their unique skills in service to the broader society, and prepares students to enter public service by providing experiences and skills helpful to them and their future organizations. Additionally, for the duration of the week, students broke into teams to work with a local non-profit on a case study. These case studies are actual challenges the non-profits are facing. The students visited their respective sites and prepared presentations of their recommendations on the last day of the conference. This program is taught by Holy Cross alumni, faculty, and staff working within a non-profit or public service setting at the international, national, regional, and local levels.

The conference included two alumni events. During the First Year Out Panel, four alumni (Oriola Arapi, Mike Cole, Amina Gomez, Sarah Valente) from the class of 2016 working in social services, education, higher education and development and community relations candidly answered questions about their first non-profit job search and their personal and professional lives post Holy Cross. For instance, Sarah Valente ’16, spoke about balancing her teaching responsibilities at the Nativity School with MBA classes at Assumption while also maintaining her volunteer commitments to the Worcester Community. Following the panel, students’ enthusiasm and engagement continued during the alumni dinner. Students actively engaged in meaningful conversations and sought the advice of alumni within a variety of non-profit and public service careers ranging from education, social services, government, administration, consulting, development, and ministry. This dinner allowed students to learn about career paths, graduate school options, and post-graduation service programs. Among the many insightful conversations that occurred that evening, Brianna O’Brien ’15, a past conference participant herself and Development Assistant at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute discussed her year of service with the Episcopal Service Corps and Scott Schaffer-Duffy ’80 shared stories of his overseas travels. Other alumni attending the networking dinner included: Paul Carey ’70, Nikki Clemente ’96, Eve Gilmore ’76, Fr. James Hayes ’72, Debbie McCarthy ’87, Drew Rapa ’14, Janet Rivard ’84, Lynne Sullivan ’94, Yachira Torres ’10 and Terry Waite ‘81. A student commented a strength of the conference was: “meeting all the alumni and learning about their career journeys.”

Alumni, faculty, and staff presented sessions throughout the week introducing students to the range of viable and diverse career paths and necessary skillsets. One student noted: “I think the ‘Professional Development: Tips for Standing Out in a Candidate Pool’ by Erin Reedy ’92 was very helpful and applicable to any career path I took.” Ann-Margaret Caljouw ’87, Assistant Director, Corporate and Foundation Relations, Communications and Proposal Development at Boston College spoke about grant proposal writing. Director of the Montserrat Program and Professor of History, Stephanie Yuhl had students out of their seats and dancing as she facilitated an exercise to enhance students’ comfort with public speaking. Elizabeth Wambui ‘09, Director of Advancement at Nativity School of Worcester showed students the importance of passion for a non-profit’s mission when working in fundraising. To introduce students to government and public sector careers, State Representative for Worcester’s 16th District, Dan Donahue ’09 shared his experience working in local government and advised how students can start and sustain a career in the public sector and Director of Government and Community Relations at the College of the Holy Cross, Jamie Hoag ’98 emphasized the importance of networking and building relationships. While co-presenting the ‘Business Side of Non-Profits,’ with Professor David Chu, Schone Malliet ’74 reassured and emphasized to students, "Do what you love and the money will follow." A student commented: “The Speakers were great! The fact that they were alumni reassured me how many connections I have in the non-profit sector.” Other alumni, staff and guest presenters included: Tim Barrett, Tyler Buckhout ‘16, Bridget Campolettano ’10, Dr. Tony Cashman, Megan Chester, Isabelle Jenkins ’10, Frank Kartheiser ‘72, Karla Keppel, Mike Perron ’01, Margaret Post ’96, and Michelle Sterk Barrett.

The students broke into seven case study teams to address a real problem currently faced by a non-profit. During the week, case study teams visited a non-profit and met with members of the staff who elaborated on the problem being addressed through the case study. Case study teams then formally presented their proposed solutions to the problem on the concluding day of the conference.

Adult Learning Center (Worcester Public Schools), AVID (Worcester Public Schools), College of the Holy Cross, Office of Government and Community Relations, Community Harvest Project, St. Mary Health Care Center, The Student Empowerment Program (StEP) and Worcester Tree Initiative served as case study sites. The Adult Learning Center team provided a fresh perspective and proposed a new organizational structure in order for the Center to meet new educational mandates and offer new programs and classes requested by Worcester public schools. The AVID team presented innovative ways to market AVID as a volunteer opportunity to college students, as well as a plan to retain and sustain volunteers. The Office of Government and Community Relations asked students to develop an ambassador program to continue to build relationships between Worcester County residents and Holy Cross students. The Community Harvest Project team proposed ways to maintain sustainable funding as well as agencies to partner with for food distribution. St. Mary Health Care Center tasked students with creating a survey that will both assess staff satisfaction and help to determine what sort of ways the administration can make the Nursing Department’s workloads lighter and/or easier/more efficient. StEP, a student run non-profit organization that develops community partnerships to bridge the education technology gap requested a needs and resources assessment to better understand the technology needs of organizations in Worcester. Lastly, the Worcester Tree Initiative team created a marketing strategy and media plan to support the organization’s rebranding process.

Of the case studies, Sharon Leary from AVID reported and exclaimed on her team’s presentation: “That was FANTASTIC! Wealth of ideas! You are ALL the BEST! Janet and I were very moved by all the dedication of EVERYONE!” A student said of their experience: “… My experience with the case study was positive and fun. Each member of the team was engaged and committed to the work towards a solution.” Overall, the case studies provided the participants with the opportunity to get a taste of what it is like to address some of the challenges non-profits face.

At the end of the week, students expressed their gratitude for the weeklong program, noting that they learned a great deal from their peers, case study sites and the presentations. In many of the evaluations, students reported that the Non-Profit Careers Conference was one of their best and most informative experiences at Holy Cross. The Non-Profit Careers Conference is one of many signature programs through the College that support students’ career discernment.

Megan Chester

Assistant Director

Center for Career Development

Isabelle Jenkins

Associate Director

Donelan Office of Community-Based Learning

Michelle Sterk Barrett

Director

Donelan Office of Community-Based Learning