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Parents and alums offer career advice

This past Saturday, a group of approximately 80 students, mostly seniors, started their day off by attending the first ever Wesleyan Career Conference. The day-long conference, which covered topics ranging from personal finance to various career options was held in the Exley Science Center.

About 30 alumni and parents volunteered advice and shared their knowledge of the career paths they had chosen. The day was divided into three Breakout Sessions consisting of panels, titled: Careers for the Common Good; Health, Science, and Technology Careers; Graduate and Professional Schools; Business and Finance Careers; Arts and Performing Arts Careers; Communications and Media Careers; and Careers in Education. In addition, two Real World Seminars were held, giving advice about renting an apartment after college and on personal finance.

"I think this was a great idea," said Christos Kaimakliotis '03, who currently attends Yale Medical School and was a panel member for the session on health careers.

"Kids who want to attend medical school really need advice about it. It's a long process."

Mike Sciola, the director of the Career Resource Center (CRC) and Senior Class Dean Louise Brown, along with the senior class officers, organized the event. According to Sciola, for the past three years he and Brown have held a lunch for seniors in the spring, but both felt that something more comprehensive was needed. In his view, the purpose of the conference was to allow students to see firsthand what others had done once they graduated from Wesleyan and how to discover one's passion.

Rafael Pichardo '04 said that he came mostly for general information. "I just want a job," he said. "I wanted to check out the speakers and workshops in general."

Rosalind Hoffa, Dean and Director of Career Services at Amherst College and parent of Nick Hoffa '97, kicked off the proceedings as the keynote speaker. Her main message, that students don't need to know exactly what they want to do for the rest of their lives upon the moment of graduation, became the theme for the day.

Hoffa joked about her memories of Wesleyan and discussed the art of networking, finding one's passion, coping with interview disasters and stressing the importance of being prepared at all times.

"If you are prepared at every opportunity, you will indeed find the opportunity that's right for you," she said.

Hoffa shared several anecdotes during her speech to emphasize different lessons about the job application process. Her story about a woman who, after a successful interview, stood up to leave, but placed her foot into her open purse and fell face first onto the table got a roused response from the audience. Hoffa said that despite the mishaps she described in her anecdotes, the applicants were offered a job.

"Things can go wrong, but you can correct them," she said. "If you're poised and confident you can turn things around."

Hoffa summed up her lecture with the mantra: "do what you are," "do it if you love it," "take risks," and "be prepared," before closing with a rap. Attendees provided the refrain "Go Wes."

Sciola said he was pleased with the turnout and with the level of interaction in the panels. He said he plans upon publicizing more next year and encouraging more first and second year students to attend. Alumni speakers praised the CRC for taking a more proactive role in reaching out towards students and letting them know about the resources available to them.

"I feel sad for the people who signed up and didn't show up," Sciola said.

Though few left feeling as though they had found the job for them, students appreciated the advice.

"I thought that [the conference] was really important and helpful in terms of narrowing my focus," said Julia Goldstein '04, who attended the seminar "Careers for the Common Good." "A lot of it's about the experience."

Despite the uncertainty, most students said they felt comforted after leaving the event. "I still don't know what I want to do, but I know that I don't have to know by the end of the semester," said Maisy Card '04.