Students Discover Career Options from IPCR Alumni

By: Courtney Hess (MA/IPCR '11) / Spring 2011

NAVIGATING THE CAREER FIELD can be an intimidating prospect for students rounding out their studies in the IPCR program. The IPCR Career Planning and Exploration Workshop sought to provide soon-to-be graduates and continuing students with an opportunity to find out what sort of careers IPCR alumni have found and seek their advice on how to navigate the job hunt.

The February 24th event was hosted by the IPCR Program in conjunction with the Society for Peace and Conflict Resolution (SPCR) and the American University Career Center.

Micael Bogar, Julie Szegda, Rob Satrom, Nina Talley-Kalokoh, Marselha Gonclaves-Margerin & Jason Terry share their experiences after receiving their degrees

The United States Institute of Peace recently released a report, titled "Graduate Education and Professional Practice in International Peace and Conflict Resolution," which examined how well graduate programs are preparing students for work in peace and conflict resolution field. Nike Carstarphen, co-author of the study, spoke to what employers are looking for when they hire graduate students. She identified overseas experience and program management skills as the two major competencies that employers seek.

She also advised students to be creative in their job searches and to take advantage of the broad range of opportunities in the field, not limiting one's career options.

IPCR Program Director Ron Fisher discussed a report he had produced with two of his former graduate assistants, Sarah Beller (MA/IPCR '09) and Graig Klein (MA/IPCR '09). The report, titled "US Government Innovations in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution: Implications for the IPCR Program," outlines the various agencies in the United States Government that are engaged in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Fisher assured students that these agencies are looking for the skills and competencies that students gain from their time in the IPCR program including general conflict literacy, the ability to conduct conflict analyses and assessments, and cross-cultural communication skills.

Following the presentations of the reports, students were given an opportunity to interface directly with alumni, who, just a few years ago, were in their same position, preparing to enter the job field. Career Center Advisor John Charles advised students to take advantage of IPCR alumni

when looking for jobs and career advice. “They are people who can be instrumental in launching you in your career after AU,” Charles said.

In a modified speed-networking format, each alumnus hosted a round table where current students could not only learn about their career path but also ask particular questions that alumni from the same program were well-equipped to answer.

Charles thought the unique format was a good departure from the traditional panel discussion seen at many similar events. “The chance to have conversations in round table form allowed so much more back and forth,” he said.

Students meet with alumna Nina Talley- Kalokoh for a round table session during the workshop (photo by Rachel Lincoln)

Students also reported that they gained useful insight from the event. “It is good to hear what people are doing in their jobs and brainstorm what you are looking for, even if you don’t get there right away,” said Elli Simon (MA/IPCR ’12)

For second year student Alison Drury (MA/IPCR ’11), the event offered confirmation and assurance. “I feel better about where I am right now,” she said. “I have new directions and insights on how to get there.” First year student Johannes Langer appreciated the reminder that there is life after graduate school. “It was very helpful,” he said, “it reminded me that when reading for class to keep in mind that you need it for practice too.”

The event was also an opportunity for alumni to give back to the IPCR community. Nina Talley-Kalokoh (MA/IPCR ’09) appreciated the opportunity to return to AU to talk about her work as a Program Coordinator for EnCompass, LLC. “Some of the most influential experience I had at AU were in interacting with alumni,” she said. “It is nice to be able to contribute.”

- ✓ For more information find the USIP report here: http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr246.pdf
- ✓ To read Ron Fisher’s report here: http://www.american.edu/sis/ipcr/upload/US-Government-Innovations-in-Peacebuilding-11-29-10-with-Exec-Summary.pdf
- ✓ To visit the Career Center Website, click here: http://www.american.edu/careercenter/.