

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

By Marti Gillespie

Mark Sptel '10 was in the hot seat. The junior from Whitefish Bay, Wis., attending a seminar on commercial banking through the Lawrence Scholars in Business program, had volunteered to participate in a mock job interview. As two dozen of his Lawrence peers quietly looked on, Sptel settled into a chair, took a deep breath, and began fielding questions posed by business executives **Hugh McLean '80** and **David Blowers '82**. When the mock interview was over, the consensus throughout the room was unanimous — Sptel was confident, unflappable, and extremely well prepared — words synonymous with the goals of the Lawrence Scholars in Business program.

Now in its first year, Lawrence Scholars in Business (LSB) was created to give students the tools they need to compete for “some of the most interesting entry-level positions in business,” said LSB alumni coordinator **Bob Perille '80**, managing partner with Shamrock Capital Advisors in Burbank, Calif. “Lawrence students are bright, capable, talented, and just as qualified for a career in business as students from other colleges, but they’re not prepared. So we designed a program that can give them a working knowledge of the industry and, more specifically, raise their awareness of a particular career in business that might be a good fit for them.”

The one-day seminar Sptel attended was about commercial banking. Other events this year include presentations on investment banking, management consulting, investment management, alternative investments, entrepreneurial ventures, and business ethics. Leading each seminar are Lawrence alumni willing to share their real-world experiences gained throughout their successful business careers.

McLean, former vice chairman, PrivateBank and Trust Company of Chicago, said, “Lawrence does such a wonderful job preparing people academically. Our goal is to arm them with just a few bits of information they can use if they’re transitioning into a business career. We all started in the same spot. Now we’re sharing some things that we’ve experienced in hopes that it may open their horizons a bit. Lawrence students, who are as bright as anybody, will be inspired by that.”

Can a graduate with a liberal arts degree really compete head-to-head with a student from a top business school? All signs say absolutely. A recent survey conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that two-thirds of business leaders



Left: David Blowers '82 (center) conducts a mock interview with Mark Sprtel '10 as Hugh McLean '80 looks on.

rated the skills gained through a liberal arts education as “very important.” Blowers, executive vice president of Northern Trust in Chicago, agreed. “We want people who are articulate, who can write effectively, communicate, who can think on their feet, operate in high-pressure situations. Those are the things that students at Lawrence are going through each and every day to be successful in all of the things that they have going on in their academic and outside lives.”

Dena Skran, associate professor of government and Edwin and Ruth West Professor of Economics and Social Science and member of the LSB committee, agreed. “All these jobs require that people be fast learners, and it’s not a matter of learning set

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accounting procedures or marketing mantras, which is just more of what you would learn at an average business school. Someone who has gotten their head around philosophical problems, economics, biology, art, theatre, is obviously better prepared.”

For Lawrence students, the seminars also provide them with something they’ll never find in a textbook or by undertaking an independent study project — the ability to network with alumni who have transformed their liberal arts education into a successful career in business. “I like the personal approach,” said Eduard Romanenko, a one-year exchange student from Vladivostok, Russia. “You can see what real people did in their career, and see what they have done in business.”

“Listening to people who graduated from Lawrence and are professionals in the business and who have achieved such a high status is really inspirational,” said **Thomas Gering '11** from Wausau, Wis. “To be able to sit down and talk to them gives you hope and confidence.”

For some, hearing the words “business” and “Lawrence” in the same sentence might seem a little out of place. However, everyone involved in the program is emphatic that LSB enhances the educational experience the college offers its students, and it is a program that was long overdue.

“This is not undermining the liberal arts philosophy in any way; it’s just complementing it,” said Adam Galambos, assistant professor of economics and LSB faculty coordinator. “I think we would be doing a disservice to our students if we weren’t able to help them

LAWRENCE SCHOLARS IN BUSINESS 2008-09 EVENTS

- Investment banking seminar
- Mock interviews
- Management consulting seminar
- Commercial banking seminar
- Investment management seminar
- Entrepreneurial ventures seminar
- Private equity and alternative investments seminar
- Banking and consulting careers seminar
- Business ethics seminar

www.lawrence.edu/dept/economics/lbsb

realize their goals.” Added McLean, “This is definitely not at the displacement of the academic traditions and brand that Lawrence has developed — this improves it. If in some way we can help students prepare for internships through direct counseling, then we’re a better school for that.”

Said Blowers, “Never apologize for your liberal arts education. It is something that will make you successful in business and in life.”

John Brandenberger, Alice G. Chapman Professor Emeritus of Physics, believes Lawrence Scholars in Business will lead students into a wide range of internships and apprenticeships — invaluable experiences much like those enjoyed by science students he has shepherded through research programs and other pre-professional opportunities. “If the LSB program can help Lawrence students increase, strengthen, and deliver these sorts of extracurricular opportunities and pre-professional engagements, I believe the impact on Lawrence will be very significant.”

Besides the seminars and networking, LSB also offers up to five \$5,000 scholarships a year to students expressing an interest in a career in business. This year, two scholarships were awarded.

Jackie Bean '09, River Falls, Wis., said she’s thinking about becoming an actuary and has used a portion of her scholarship to pay for her first actuarial exam. “It’s a great program,” she said. “I like learning about different business tracks. Even though I already have a job after I graduate, everything I’ve learned about different careers in business is going to help me.” LSB’s second scholarship recipient, **Adam Ferguson '10**, Nova Scotia, believes the earlier he starts thinking about a career — especially if it’s one in business — the better. And he has a bit of advice for his classmates. “If you’re looking for one of those competitive jobs, they’re being given out in October and November of your senior year. And with today’s difficult job market, you just can’t afford to wait. The competition is just that much greater.”

Confident after his mock interview, Sprtel said he’s energized by the opportunities the LSB program presents. “It was a boost to my evaluation of my Lawrence education to see two alums go out in a field like commercial banking and do very well for themselves. When you’re going through the day to day routine of studying, it’s easy to lose sight of that big picture, that what you’re learning here is important to the real world.”

Said Perille, “As a student you don’t need to spend every day knowing what you want to do and thinking about your career. But you need to dedicate some time to the thought process of what you might want to do, and how you can explore that, starting in your sophomore year. It’s not about choosing your life’s profession; this is about getting an entry level position that is a great springboard to do whatever you want to do in life.” ■