

# ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Advice from the Pros

### Colleges Match Students with Mentors in Chosen Fields

By JANE YU

Orange County universities have been playing matchmaker.

As a result, business leaders throughout OC are serving as mentors to students in one-on-one relationships that ease the transition from campus to career.

**Anna Liza Garcia**, associate director of the Center for Global Leadership at **University of California, Irvine's Paul Merage School of Business**, has 200 interviews set for the next couple of weeks with students seeking mentors.

"I use an eHarmony analogy," Garcia said. "I try to figure out if this will be a good match. It's important for us to know what works and what

doesn't."

The center was established in 1998 and since then has facilitated 1,348 student-to-mentor connections.

"We paired 110 MBA students with 110 mentors last year from November to June," Garcia said. "The executive mentoring program serves all full-time MBA and fully employed MBA students. And we're launching an undergraduate counterpart this year [with] a targeted goal of



**Halford: mentors' "real-world input" helps students decide about career paths**

100 mentors."

The Paul Merage School has industry-specific resource centers that branch into various niches, including healthcare, investment and wealth management, and real estate.

"The prevailing model that works best in a business school is to have a public-private relationship, where the academic focus would be augmented by real-world input from people working in whatever industry—in my case, in real estate," said **Bill Halford**, chief executive of Irvine-based **Bixby Land Co.**, a real estate investment firm with a \$1 billion portfolio.

Halford has chaired the **UC Irvine Center for Real Estate** and served as a mentor for about six years.

He said he's seen previously ambivalent

"mentees" come to firm conclusions on their career paths after a bit of exposure to the some real-life realities.

"The whole idea is to minimize the guesswork when it comes to picking a career," Halford said. "Companies benefit from this, too. Young students probably don't understand the workings of the business yet. Some of the questions they ask can be really good ones that make you think about your business in a new way."

#### Law Mentors

**Chapman University School of Law** launched a new business-law emphasis program this year with the help of its advisory board.

"Each board member went through our existing curriculum and identified which courses were essential," said **Tom Campbell**, dean of the law school, who also counts five years of experience as dean of the **Haas School of Business at University of California, Berkeley**.

The business advisory board consists of general counsels of companies in various industries. Members include **Susan Myers** of **Hyundai Capital America Inc.** in Irvine, **Ray Weston** of Irvine-based **Taco Bell Corp.**, **David Cohen** of Anaheim-based **Angels Baseball LLP**, **Terry Theologides** of Irvine-based **CoreLogic Inc.**, and others.

"Our goal is to focus on companies that can provide advice and also let students visit and get internships," Campbell said. "These folks are in a good position to give good advice."

**Michael Baroni**, general counsel of Newport Beach-based **Palace Entertainment Holdings LLC**, is active as a mentor to Chapman students interested in entertainment law. He has provided internships in the past and continues to keep in touch with students.



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"I feel bad because I want to reach out and help a lot of students," Baroni said. "But you don't want to be in a situation of overkill. You don't want to lose focus. I don't bring in three interns at once and have them do menial work and not engage with them. It's much better to work with one and develop a strong relationship and keep the line of communication."

Palace Entertainment operates 40 amusement parks across the U.S., including Boomers and Raging Waters.

Bridging academia and business can be especially helpful to students with the ultimate goal of becoming a general counsel, Campbell said.

"I think it's fair to say that students now increasingly wish to practice law in a business world," he said. "That can be with a law firm—that's probably more common right now. But more and more, when you talk to students about what they want to do, they will often say, 'I'd like to be in the GC's office in five years.' It has a lot to do with creating opportunities in a business. And it also has to do with lifestyle, where you have one boss and you're not billing hours."

Chapman's law program also holds events to connect students and recent graduates with attorneys. It had its third annual speed-mentoring event last month, sponsored by the OC Women Lawyers Association.

#### CSUF Mentors

The Mihaylo College of Business and Economics at California State University, Fullerton provides mentoring opportunities through two separate programs—one for its undergraduates and another for MBA students.

Members of the executive council include Paul Folino, executive chairman of Emulex Corp. in Costa Mesa; Wayne Pinnell, manag-

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Ronald Kreber: the Orange County Superior Court judge talks to Chapman law students during a recent "speed mentoring" event

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ing partner of Irvine-based accounting firm Haskell & White LLP; and Joseph Cervantes, senior executive vice president at Irvine-based R.D. Olson Construction.

The school arranges for mentors in 15 business niches. Those include the Center for Insurance Studies and the Sales Leadership Center, which is headed by Christopher Kondo, interim director of Mihaylo's graduate programs.

#### Brandman Program

Brandman University in Irvine also has tapped into the pool of locally based companies for mutual support.

In December, the school launched its Premier Partnership Program, which offers scholarships to draw MBA candidates from local corporations. The program cuts per-credit costs by about half to \$285 for students from participating companies including Irvine-based Allergan Inc., Oakley Inc. in Foothill Ranch and Blizzard Entertainment Inc. in Irvine.

Brandman taps its network of corporate relationships to bring companies and students together, said Helen Eckmann, assistant professor who also serves as an executive coach.

"Premier Partner students, as well as other MBA students, are offered opportunities to go on corporate tours," Eckmann said. "Through [such] experiences, students are mentoring each other about industries and corporate issues that might not be discussed in the classroom." ■