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Developing the next generation of leaders: How the unique relationship between the University of Hartford and its Construction Institute brings professionals and college students together - by Nancy Greenwald

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Imagine bringing students together with working professionals on a regular basis, not just at occasional career events. Imagine students having the opportunity to attend professional development workshops side by side with experienced professionals. Imagine bringing students into conversations with thought leaders in their field to discuss the future of the industry. Imagine bringing students together with their future colleagues and employers at networking events.

These are some of the benefits that are afforded to students at the University of Hartford's College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture (CETA) through their association with the Construction Institute of the University of Hartford. The Construction Institute is a professional membership organization with more than 200 corporate members. Its members are made up of everyone in the industry – owners and facility managers, architects and engineers, contractors and subcontractors, project managers, consultants, manufacturers and distributors, governmental agencies, and other stakeholders.

Founded in the belief that collaborative engagement is the breeding ground for growing knowledge, experience, and creative improvement in the industry, the Construction Institute has been a way of providing vision, leadership, problem solving skills and unique, trade-specific education for the past 40 years.

The Institute's founding members chose the University of Hartford as its home to provide a neutral setting and to establish a strong relationship with academic leadership and research as well as to connect with students who will be the future leaders of the industry.

The Construction Institute connects with the University's students in many ways:

- The Construction Institute meets regularly with the Construction Institute Student Organization, creating joint student/industry events;

- Students have special access to Construction Institute members for project site tours, office tours, and job shadowing sponsored by Construction Institute members;
- The Construction Institute has a rich program of professional education classes, including certificate programs in project management, construction management, and facilities management. These classes are free to students at the University of Hartford, giving them the opportunity to gain practical training, learning side by side with industry professionals;
- Construction Institute members value their connection with their future colleagues and actively engage with Career Services events;

Students have opportunities to attend CI's networking events, including its annual golf tournament;

- The Institute values its relationship with the students so highly that the president of the student organization sits as a member of the board of directors of the Construction Institute.

These activities are a part of the experiential learning approach being developed by the University to engage students early in their career preparation and with professionals in their field. Kate Darcy Hohenthal, assistant director, Student Engagement and Experiential Education, helped explain some of these connections. The University is introducing the Career Onboarding: Pre-1st Semester Career Readiness Prep program during the summer before students begin their college careers. This voluntary career prep approach assists students with developing basic career tools such as resumes and LinkedIn accounts, utilizing the students' preferred communication method. The goal is that students will be more confident to engage with employers earlier in their career when they are prepared with the basic career tools. Students will have an opportunity to practice these skills in their interactions with Construction Institute members. (You can read more about this initiative at bit.ly/careeronboarding.) Another program recently introduced is the Internship Satellite Offices, which are set up in several locations across the campus in order to engage students in experiential learning opportunities. Connecting employers with potential interns and future employees is taking many new forms including the recent collaboration between with Pratt & Whitney facilities to create on-campus interviews, which focused on helping students learn about potential careers and helped prepare them to be career ready. Pratt & Whitney is an active member of the Construction Institute. The Construction Institute events promote the development of professional interactions early in the students' academic careers.

The University of Hartford and the Construction Institute are partners in developing innovative programs in order to cultivate a student career-ready environment. Engagement, Innovation, and Flexibility these are key elements of the collaboration among employers, the Construction Institute, and the University of Hartford.

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