

# Black execs share wisdom with students

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD  
THE CHRONICLE

Amanda Poinsette, like many college students around the country, is thinking about life after graduation. The Winston-Salem State University senior recently missed class in order to attend a job fair in Greensboro because she realizes that time is of the essence where her career is concerned.

Poinsette had the chance to rub elbows with four black executives on Tuesday during the Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP). The WSSU Office of Career Services, School of Business and Economics and the MBA Club sponsor this three-day career planning workshop, which invites black businessmen and -women into classrooms to meet with students who are on the cusp of entering the real world.

Poinsette stayed afterward to ask more questions and just shake hands with the seasoned corporate workers. She wants to make the most of her time between now and when she walks across the stage to receive her diploma. Faced with an unfriendly job market after graduation, she knows that networking is a vital part of getting her foot in the door of a company.

"We are a small university, and there's not a great opportunity for large companies that



Kelli Franklin-Joyner (pictured left), Manuel Keita and Jeff Woods spoke to an Organizational Behavior class at WSSU about their experiences in corporate America on Tuesday.

we may be inspired to work for to actually come to our school," said Poinsette, who is a business management major. "(Large companies) are not coming to the Winston area. It's great to have (executives) come into our class setting."

Poinsette says she does feel she may be at a slight disadvantage when she graduates from WSSU because of the

school's size. Although the school has seen its student body explode in recent years, it is still relatively small compared with other state universities. She wonders if that will work against her come interview time.

"A lot of times on our résumés they do immediately look at the school that you come from. Two times I've

been in an interview with a company and they've asked me why (WSSU) and not another (school). It was shocking and surprising at first, but that let me know that maybe there is some disadvantage of being at a smaller university," Poinsette said.

Companies are paying close attention to school size, and they are paying attention to

how long or short amount of time recent graduates are spending at their first jobs.

Just ask Anthony Price, who started working for Verizon when he graduated from high school. Fast forward 30 years and he is now the vice president of sales for the wireless telephone company in Reston, Va.

But Price's tenure with the company is rare by today's standards where many college grads change jobs like coats - moving from company to company after just a matter of years. He encouraged the students to find a company where they can lay down professional roots.

"A lot of kids take their first job out of school and find out a year or so later that they're not happy with it," said Price. "We in corporate America have to go get some of those bright, young minds in those small schools that ordinarily wouldn't have the opportunity. I do think it is a disadvantage coming from a small school, but that just means you have to work a little harder to find a job."

Manuel Keita was rejected from 59 jobs before he was finally hired at UPS 20 years ago. He and Kelli Franklin-Joyner, also with UPS, told the students to remember to remain humble and hardworking no matter how small or large the job description may

be. Keita started out loading packages on UPS trucks, and Franklin-Joyner took a clerical position in the department she was interested in so that she could work her way up the company ladder. Today she is the regional industrial engineering manager with UPS and Keita is a process engineer with the company.

"I have two degrees but I was not able to find a job. The decision had to be made - do I persevere with 60 more applications, or do I just get my foot in the door somewhere," said Keita, who is originally from Africa. "You have college degrees but you (can't be) above the work."

BEEP brings some of the country's top executives to HBCUs to give students an up-close and personal view on the dos and don'ts of surviving corporate America.

Jeff Woods believes a program like BEEP is invaluable to college students, particularly at a predominantly black college like WSSU. Woods, who is a sales manager with Verizon, is a first-time BEEP speaker.

"I remember being a freshman in school. I didn't have this opportunity. So I can imagine how it makes them feel to talk with some of the VPs (vice presidents) who were here today and have hope (of starting their careers)," said Woods.

## Simpson

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"You get this picture that victims are white and suspects are black," she said.

Gordon provided an explanation for why that may be. He said stories involving white victims, especially white female victims, are more appealing to white editors and station managers.

"Laci (Peterson) looks like their daughter... like their wife," he said. "They are going to put that on quicker than (a black woman) getting killed."

The issue of race was one that hung heavily over the Simpson saga. Darden said the DA's office was on pins and needles over the question of race.

"The white prosecutors in this case were all scared as hell about this race issue," he



Wickham

said. Gascon said there were similar concerns at the Police Department, especially since the LAPD was dealing with its own public relations problem with the black community stemming from the Rodney King case two years earlier. Gascon hinted that Simpson's famous slow-speed chase was allowed to go on because the police did not want to stop the white Ford Bronco and possi-

bly trigger another King-like incident.

"The department was paralyzed initially," he said.

Darden and CBS' Whitaker provided some of the most heated moments of the discussion. Darden said making money is the ultimate goal of the media, not seeking and reporting the truth.

"The media is there to sell tickets," Darden said. "CBS wants you to watch them instead of NBC."

Whitaker took offense to the statement, saying that Darden was painting network news, newspapers, cable news and magazines all with one big brush.

"We are not monolithic," he said.

Last week's conference was organized by DeWayne Wickham, a USA Today columnist who now heads A&T's Institute for Advanced Journalism Studies.



Ed Gordon makes a point.

Photos by Jason Pitt

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