

TJ Partnership Fund Hosts Virtual Alumni Meetings

The TJ Partnership Fund (TJPF) Student Ambassador Program allows TJ students to serve as advocates for their school. Student Ambassadors work with the TJPF in various ways, such as giving tours to alumni and organizing STEM outreach opportunities.

This year, the TJPF had Student Ambassador trips planned for students to spend their spring break in various cities throughout the country visiting alumni and touring different companies and organizations.

The purpose of the Student Ambassador trips is to allow students to gain insight into life after TJ, learn about various career paths, and make valuable connections within the TJ alumni community. In return, alumni receive the opportunity to give back to their alma mater, meet students, and learn how the school has changed over the years.

As the COVID-19 outbreak evolved, TJPF cancelled this year's trips. Instead, the TJPF launched a new virtual opportunity for TJ alumni and current students to connect in a focused and small group setting. Meetings are allotted one hour, the first 15 to 30 minutes of which the alumni generally use to introduce themselves, followed by the chance for each student to ask at least one question.

Each meeting has so far allowed for eight students to sign up to retain the small engaged-group feel. Both students and alumni express that an advantage of having a virtual meeting rather than the typical in-person trips conducted near the end of the year involves being able to speak from the comfort of their own home.

“I like that the virtual experience is more accessible to students who may not be able to travel,” 2010 Alumnus Nihaar Sinha said.

Another strength presented by the virtual chats includes the ability to host a much greater number of alumni chats than would have been possible to do in-person, as well as allow students

not part of the TJPF Student Ambassador Program to join in on these meetings; in total, they received 98 student interest forms and have scheduled over 80 alumni chats.

“We only got to go to six [alumni companies] on the in-person trip, but [the TJPF] did a really good job in getting so many for the virtual tours,” junior Raunak Daga said.

However, one thing missing from the meeting that could also be agreed upon between both members of the chat is the atmosphere you would find by being able to visit the alumni’s workplace and catch a glimpse into their daily life.

“If we had the chance to go visit them in person, in San Francisco where the field trip was supposed to happen during Spring Break, it would have been really cool to have been able to see some of the places where they work; the actual atmosphere of San Francisco and their companies and how it functions,” junior Srilakshmi Medarametla said.

Additionally, because only one person could speak at a time, some of the virtual meetings felt more like a question and answer rather than an immersive conversation.

In terms of physical obstacles faced during the virtual chats, while not many, there was the expected occasional difficulty of lagging and audio cutting off.

Overall, the alumni and the students found the experience to be beneficial, appreciative that they were given the opportunity to meet even in the current situation.

The alumni enjoyed speaking to the students and learning about them and the changes made to Jefferson in the years since they have graduated.

“Every person took their turn to ask me something, and they all ask really really good questions. I thought it was useful... most of them followed up afterwards, and either sent me an email or LinkedIn with me,” 2001 Alumnus Ricky Mixon said.

The students emphasized their gratitude towards being able to gain insightful advice from these alumni and ask questions to address any concerns they have.

“The most helpful advice I got was from Jen Michaels ‘00. She told us that choosing a career path should not be about following your passion; rather, it should be about ensuring you have the ability to exert creativity, control, and impact... people that are the happiest with their work lives can do these three things,” junior Gurleen Kaur said, “This was very enlightening for me as I’ve always subscribed to the ‘follow your dreams’ mentality.”

While there was a general consensus that an in-person meeting would result in a more inclusive conversation with a more engaging environment, the virtual chats provided students what would otherwise be a missed opportunity to learn from the experienced Alumni.

These student-alumnus virtual meetings are the first step the TJPF is taking to support TJ students during these challenging and unprecedented times. The world is changing, and the TJPF is playing an important role in helping students, especially our seniors, redefine the end of their academic year. The TJPF is committed to recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of TJ seniors as they transition to become alumni.