

## ICPF “In their words” – Kelsea Potthast

My name is Kelsea Potthast, and I recently graduated from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration, with a major in Marketing and a Minor in Packaging Science. I am pleased to share with you a brief history on the beginning of my ongoing success story with the corrugated packaging & displays industry.

As a result of my sewing hobby interest, I first connected with packaging in high school while taking an International Baccalaureate class in Design Technology. When I entered the University of Florida, I quickly became even more enamored by packaging science. My first and favorite packaging class at UF was Principals of Packaging, taught by Dr. William Pelletier. Despite being one of two students who were not engineers, Dr. Pelletier encouraged my interest and participation in the subject. I then discovered the University of Florida Packaging Club. I joined immediately and pursued any type of club competition, event, or leadership opportunity. It was around this time during my junior year when I realized all my friends had already accepted an internship position. Due to my late realization of this requirement, I began trying to get interviews and attend career fairs in search of any type of internship opportunity. I tried to demonstrate my passion for combining the business principles of marketing with the engineering sciences of packaging in my elevator speech to anyone that would listen. However, company HR representatives would repeatedly respond with, "so do you want to be on the technical or business side? We don't have a need for that type of blend."

Despite this challenge to find this fit in the packaging industry, the packaging club continued offering support by encouraging me to take on other leadership positions and participate in packaging-related events. I was informed of an opportunity to apply for an International Corrugated Packaging Foundation (ICPF) travel grant to Michigan to attend ICPF's 2020 Student Dialogue Dinner and its Teleconference on the Business of Corrugated Packaging & Displays. While I was struggling to redesign my future career plans, I decided to apply on a whim. Once more, I wrote in my application to ICPF about my dreams of combining marketing or business with packaging. After sending in this application, I decided I better also start applying to established internship programs even if they weren't exactly what I wanted to do.

Within a week or so in applying to the ICPF travel grant, I received a phone call from Richard Flaherty saying that he had reviewed my travel grant application. Although I was preparing myself for him to explain that my unique passion of blending my marketing interests with packaging was not what the industry is seeking, he sounded excited and optimistic. He continued to say that what I believed to be my unique passion in combining marketing & sales with packaging is precisely what the corrugated packaging industry is often seeking for packaging sales representatives and future managers. For once, someone not only reciprocated my enthusiasm but validated what I had been seeking in my elevator speech. I had a purpose, and it began with this one phone call.

I was awarded the ICPF travel grant and a month later in late February I was flying to Michigan on my way to the Dialogue Dinner and Teleconference. While on the way there, I received a call from a consulting firm, which earlier interviewed me, offering a summer 2020 internship. I was thrilled. It might not have been my dream internship, but it was the required internship needed on my resume and transcript.

I arrived in East Lansing and excitedly joined the 35 talented students from across the country and the dozen industry executives who were participating in ICPF's Dialogue Dinner. After introductions, I sat at one of the half dozen or so round tables with about seven students and two corrugated packaging executives. At first, the students, who reintroduced themselves, seemed a bit nervous and quiet. Due to my confidence from the consulting internship offer, I convinced myself that I had nothing to lose by jumping into the dialogue. The room's atmosphere quickly shifted as I learned that the students and executives were genuinely intrigued and supportive of not only my own packaging interests and questions, but of each other's. From design, to business, to packaging and chemical engineering, everyone's backgrounds and perspectives were vastly different. But all collided in an inspirational way around our shared interest in corrugated packaging. This nurturing and expressive environment was the opposite of the many career fairs and interrogation-like interviews from my past.

The next day we all attended ICPF's Teleconference broadcasted live from WKAR PBS studios that included an additional 500 students from across the nation. A panel of executives, that included Bryan Hollenbach (Green Bay Packaging) and Rich Ford (PCA), spoke and answered questions to help students learn about the business side of corrugated, its unique sustainability, new developments, and its career opportunities. I learned that over 90% of products in North America are delivered or displayed in corrugated packaging at some point in their life cycle. It is the most frequently used shipping material because it is cost-effective, lightweight, functional, innovative, versatile, and sustainable. With over 1153 corrugated manufacturing and design facilities worldwide, there are endless locations to pursue a career. I felt like these people, that this industry was exactly where I was supposed to be. It was like I found a career path that seemed to be a no-brainer.

After ICPF's 2020 Teleconference, I communicated to Mr. Flaherty how much I learned and was inspired by my experiences that week. I transparently explained how I had an internship offer that I was prepared to accept before attending this event. However, I expressed that I would much rather pursue internship opportunities in the corrugated industry that made me feel excited and motivated all week. Mr. Flaherty assured me that ICPF had many resources to help make that happen.

The excitement, support, and confidence ICPF showed in me that winter was contagious. I was astonished that ICPF not only wanted me to consider a corrugated packaging career, but believed in abilities I did not even know I had. This organization, the Dialogue Dinner, Teleconference, and especially its president, contributed to a huge turning point for me personally and professionally. Personally, ICPF has dramatically impacted the projection of my career path by introducing me to opportunities, scholarships, executives, and students that have aided my understanding of the corrugated packaging and display industry and packaging in general. I wanted to get more involved with ICPF to help further their mission to spread awareness, provide resources, and connect students with opportunities "to generate a stream of increasingly qualified individuals to enter the corrugated packaging industry, now and into the future".

The following year after the Teleconference, I sought out and moved up through various leadership roles with both UF's Packaging Club and ICPF. I was elected president of the UF Packaging Club and worked toward expanding our diversity and inclusivity of students from other majors and backgrounds. During this time, I also became an ICPF Student UF Campus Representative, which allowed me to expose students around me to ICPF events and resources. I later became an ICPF Student Advisory Board Member and ICPF's Student Program Manager Intern. These ICPF positions allowed me to take on more

significant roles, such as helping plan ICPF's first virtual Dialogue Dinner and its first virtual Teleconference, contributing new ideas to ICPF programs, and connecting personally with students across the country who seek to get more involved in learning about corrugated packaging careers. It was incredible to help guide these students to having the same eye-opening experience as I had at my first ICPF event.

I was honored to be given the opportunity to moderate ICPF's 2021 Teleconference on the Business of Corrugated Packaging & Displays. Despite the difficulties of planning and producing an impactful Teleconference during a pandemic, the unique layout we organized for the virtual Teleconference was a complete success. Not only were students able to virtually attend to hear from industry leaders such as Brain McPheely, Global CEO Pratt industries in the USA, and VISY in Australia, but they were individually placed into smaller breakout rooms according to their industry interests where they asked questions and networked with executives and students from across the country. The 15 participating executives represented corrugated companies that had active career, internship, and co-op openings posted on ICPF's Career Portal. Speaking to 400 talented students from diverse educational backgrounds about career opportunities in the corrugated packaging industry truly made me feel as though I had come full circle.

There are many other resources ICPF has to offer, from helping to organize guest speakers in the classroom to mentor-mentee programs to scholarship information and more. However, one of the most valuable resources for me was the ICPF Career Portal. I made a profile online at [careers.icpfbox.org](https://careers.icpfbox.org), searched through available jobs and internship positions from leading companies within the industry, and applied easily. I began using this tool right after my first Teleconference and was offered and accepted a special internship opportunity with Hood Container for the summer of 2020.

My internship with [Hood Container](#) exposed me to so many corrugated facilities and caring people who wanted to help me learn about the industry. I traveled to seven Hood facilities in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Illinois. Actually seeing the large equipment I had learned about in my college lecture hall allowed me to develop a much deeper understanding of the overall processes. During the internship I worked on numerous projects that ranged from sales and marketing research, to CAD table design, to providing input on further developing Hood's internship program.

During the fall of my senior year, I once again returned to the ICPF Career Portal to explore career opportunities for new graduates. I applied to and was honored to be offered a Commercial Sales Trainee position with [WestRock](#). Through this program, I would have the chance to again use my voice in working with the company in further developing a program that would appeal to new hires and best prepare them for a successful path into the future.

After graduating in May 2021, I have been enjoying every moment and the mentors who are supporting me in my role with WestRock. I could not have asked for a position that is more down my alley. I look forward to pursuing my career in the corrugated industry with WestRock for years to come. I also plan to continue connecting students with the corrugated industry by spreading awareness of ICPF and its corrugated packaging and display industry resources.

Learn more about Hood Container by [clicking here](#).

Learn more about WestRock by [clicking here](#).



Kelsea Potthast graduated this past May from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration, with a major in Marketing and a Minor in Packaging Science.



Kelsea served as ICPF's student moderator for ICPF's first "virtual" Teleconference on the Business of Corrugated Packaging & Displays and the Career Opportunities. On April 1, 2021, Fifteen executives from ICPF Corporate Partner companies participated in the interactive Teleconference with 400 students from 17 universities across the nation.