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On Cover: (Left) Anne Altman, BS Marketing ’82
(Right) Sumeet Shrivastava, MBA ’94
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Message *from the* Dean

Dean Ajay Vinzé

> Our school is open for business… We are marching forward, equipped with five clearly defined strategic priorities.

Welcome to the School of Business

July marked my first anniversary as your dean. I want to begin with a word of thanks to all of you who supported and contributed to our success during the past year—students, faculty, staff, the business community, and the Dean's Advisory Council. I especially want to recognize and thank Anne Altman, '82 and Sumeet Shrivastava, '94, who appear on the cover of this issue, for their leadership of the external transition team that advised me prior to my arrival and for their help in getting me engaged with the local business community.

As I have often remarked, our business school is open for business. We are marching forward, equipped with five clearly defined strategic priorities: student experience and career readiness, impactful research, modular education, innovative business collaboration, and inclusive excellence and a cohesive culture. These strategic priorities are guiding our decisions and keeping us focused as we welcome students back to campus for the start of the 2023-24 academic year.

The School of Business continues to rank as the third largest among the colleges and schools at George Mason University, and our growth in student registrations for the fall 2023 semester is keeping pace with the university's growth in overall registrations. Through the first week of August, the business school's registrations for this semester are up 2.6% year-over-year—to 4,553 undergraduate and 678 graduates.

With an undergraduate admission rate of more than 90 percent, George Mason University continues to embrace an inclusive admissions policy that welcomes everyone who is academically prepared for the rigors of study at a top-ranked research university. This broad institutional commitment to inclusivity is driving our success as a university and as a business school—our graduation rates are above the national average and our business graduates have one of the highest median wages in the first three years after graduation, when compared to those from business schools at Virginia's other public universities and across the nation.

The School of Business includes more than 60 full-time, research-active faculty across the accounting, finance, information systems and operations management, management, and marketing areas. In addition to making contributions to their chosen areas of specialty, our scholars are collaborating with peers from other disciplines to address complex problems ranging from climate change and social inequality to industrial resilience, to name a few. Kudos to our scholars for the positive impact their research is having on business practice and more broadly to our society.

The demographics and expectations of incoming students and their future employers are changing. Participants on both sides of the talent equation are increasingly looking for skills that are more directed, focused, and deep. In response to these changes, we are leading the way in higher education innovation with our ongoing work to reimagine the master's of science (MSM) degree. In December, several faculty members and I published an article in *AACSB Insights*, a publication of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), on how we intend to integrate core business skills and specialized certificate programs into a modular education model, as a way of helping students enhance their skills and accelerate their careers while satisfying the market's demand for highly trained, ready-to-go talent. Recognizing these unmet needs and adapting our process and business innovation model to how higher education is delivered is a prime example of how we are working to provide a student experience that is highly valued and *All Together Different*.

We also recognize that business is international and we live in a global marketplace. Mason Korea, our campus in Songdo-dong, Incheon, is providing the kind of education Korea's aspiring business professionals and entrepreneurs are looking for. During my visit there in late May, I sat down for an interview with *Korea JoongAng Daily*, where I talked about our success in preparing Mason Korea students for careers with the Big Four accounting firms (Deloitte, EY, KPMG, and PwC) and other large multinational companies.

This past year we committed ourselves to building collaborative, cohesive relationships with the business community in the National Capital Region—we plan to redouble those efforts this coming academic year. We have actively solicited input and advice from Northern Virginia businesses and government agencies of all sizes, to ensure our programs are contributing to the growth and success of our regional economy. This has helped craft our approach and orientation, by embracing innovation in close partnership with the business community, we are propelling a much-needed shift in higher education that will move our school toward a longer-term and more rewarding relationship with our students and the organizations they serve.

Our efforts have not gone unnoticed. In November, Northern Virginia Technology Council (NVTC) Chair and Attain Partners Founder and CEO Greg Baroni and his wife, Camille, made the largest gift ever to a center within the School of Business—which resulted in the naming of the school's Center for Government Contracting as the Greg and Camille Baroni Center for Government Contracting. This transformational gift helped to raise the profile of this nonpartisan entrepreneurial center as the first-of-its-kind university center to address business, technology, policy, and regulatory issues in government contracting.

In April, I had the privilege of announcing a $50 million planned gift to George Mason University—the largest school naming gift in the 51-year history of the university—at the launch of the university's $1 billion comprehensive campaign, ***Mason Now: Power the Possible***. We are anticipating approval on the naming of our business school in honor of Donald G. Costello from the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) by late October. While becoming a named school puts us in elite company, it does not change our approach or our passion. We will continue with our focus on the five strategic priorities I mentioned earlier, as we strive to deliver a high-quality business education that prepares our students for the workforce of the future.

Opportunities abound and by working together—students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the business community—we are becoming an *All Together Different* business school. Our future looks bright!

Sincerely,
Ajay

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Leading the Way

Meet Exemplary Volunteers Anne Altman, '82 and Sumeet Shrivastava, '94



The George Mason University School of Business continues to implement innovative curricula, forge enduring partnerships, and provide opportunity for ambitious students thanks to the dedication of our volunteer leaders. Two of the most instrumental supporters and leaders of the School of Business are **Anne Altman**, BS Marketing ’82, and **Sumeet Shrivastava**, MBA ’94. We recently spoke with Anne and Sumeet about why the school is important to them, how they got involved as volunteers, and what excites them about the future.

Tell me about when you were deciding where to go to college, what was it about Mason that stood out to you?



AA: My college experience actually began at a liberal arts college with a concentration in English. Like many, my college experience was centered on attending classes and working on weekends. It was soon into my freshman year I realized I had a stronger interest in studying business and my English concentration was not for me. In high school I had been active and excelled in a variety of organizations. One organization that helped shape my business curiosity was Junior Achievement. It was there that I developed my passion for business.

It was in my sophomore year that a change in institutions would forever change my life. George Mason University presented a curriculum in business, professors who took interest in my ambition, and a flexible class schedule that allowed me to continue to work. An added bonus was living on campus with my friend whom I met freshman year and like me was looking for a change.

SS: Early in my career, I worked for my father at his government contracting firm. It was clear that if I were to grow in his company, I needed to get an MBA to increase my business acumen. Because we were a smaller business, we weren’t in a position to have me just take two years off to get the MBA. My boss recommended looking into Executive MBA programs and Mason had just started a program the year before (1991).

The combination of having grown up around the university, seeing a little bit of the growth that was occurring, and the proximity made it an obvious choice. Even more so, when I engaged Mason and shared some struggles I'd had with my unfinished undergraduate degree and how I had moved forward in my life—they looked at the “whole” me and made it clear that I was still welcome to join the program. That acceptance changed my life.

What brought you back to Mason as a volunteer leader and a major supporter of the School of Business?

AA: Following graduation, I focused on my career, family, and all the challenges of work-life balance. It was during Governor Kaine’s second term that I received a call inviting me to serve on the Mason Board of Visitors. President Merten and I had a great conversation about the advancements of the university and the university’s importance to the commonwealth and beyond. I felt a strong calling to get involved. I was hooked on Mason!

SS: One of my classmates from my Executive MBA cohort had been elected as president of the School of Business Alumni Chapter. He reached out and recommended I get engaged and discover how much the school had evolved since we had graduated almost 20 years earlier. I was amazed at what I saw—and was hooked!

Among other roles you have at Mason, you are currently serving as the co-chair of the Dean’s Advisory Council’s Advancement Committee. What do you hope to achieve in this role?

SS: This committee is a natural outgrowth of the previous capital campaign committee that was focused on a building for the school. I love that in the new role, we have an ability to holistically address all the strategies that Dean Vinzé has laid out for the school–student experience and career readiness; impactful research; innovative business collaboration; inclusive excellence and cohesive culture; and modular education, lifelong learning, and global education.

AA: It’s about making a difference for the School of Business and Mason, for the community and the students. Dean Vinzé has a vision that most certainly will be realized through his initiatives, the centers, and the talent in faculty and research. We have the opportunity to convene, collaborate, and partner with the community to advance the university’s strategic priorities.

What are some of the recent initiatives or programs at the School of Business that you’ve felt strongly about supporting?



SS: The initiative to support Refugee and Immigrant Success through Entrepreneurship (RISE) that we launched this summer brings together things we, as a family, have already been supporting at the university, both at the business school level, but also with the university as a whole. The RISE Program is a targeted training, mentoring, and networking program supporting aspiring entrepreneurs from refugee and immigrant backgrounds who have difficulty accessing social and financial resources and opportunities. It is part of a larger initiative organized by the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) at the School of Business, which aims to facilitate the transformation of individuals, families, and local economies and enable them to thrive.

Last fall, Greg and Camille Baroni made a significant gift to the School of Business to name the Center for Government Contracting. Could you describe the role you played introducing them to the school and subsequently helping to secure this tremendous gift to the school?

AA: Greg Baroni is a respected leader and has long been known for his success and commitment to the public sector. In our professional careers we overlapped frequently. We partnered, competed, and became good friends. Naming the center seemed like a natural opportunity for Greg and Camille. Their legacy and commitment for government contract programming, education, and engagement is a

perfect reminder of Greg's leadership. Greg and Camille's gift will be a lasting recognition of their contributions made to the government and the GovCon community.

What inspires you to stay involved as a volunteer and major supporter?



AA: Making a difference for others is very important to me. In fact, we named our company—Everyone Matters—as a reflection of that commitment. I'm honored to work with so many talented individuals associated with Mason. It's exciting to see the students who graduate career ready and are able to make an immediate impact in our community. I believe the School of Business is a leader in designing curriculum and experiences for the development of the workforce of the future. In fact, the collaboration between schools across the university allows for the integration of the disciplines of business; creating the thought: The Business of…

SS: There's nothing more exciting than talking to folks who might just be out of high school and starting their higher ed journey or to those who are coming in to do a mid-career transition and being able to be a part of that journey—whether it's advice, speaking in the classroom, or connecting them to someone in my network for an internship or a job. I also started realizing that as I was interacting with my network in industry or the community—there is a growing recognition of the capabilities at Mason and people are wanting to engage. That has also been a major driver—as alumni, we are all proud of the Mason story and it is so exciting to be able to connect new people into that story.

Beyond providing financial resources, what are your favorite ways to support School of Business students and programs?

AA: It's exciting to see the leadership and commitment of President Washington and Dean Vinzé to the university. I enjoy participating on the Dean's Council and on a variety of committees as well as the opportunity to speak with students in the classroom and at recognition events.

SS: The exposure I've had to our faculty and students and the work they do have exposed me to so many new ideas that have helped me in my career and community engagement activities. Anything I can do to connect with more students or faculty—speaking in the classroom, attending events on campus or online, etc—all of these activities always generate some new learning for me.

What advice would you give to individuals who have an interest in engaging more deeply with the School of Business or the university as a whole?

SS: Just take a first step to call, email, or attend an event. We have incredible resources at the School of Business, whether it's through the alumni network, the staff, or faculty—people are always ready to help. No matter what your interest is, whether it's supporting students, supporting faculty research, or interest in a legacy that you want for you or your family—there's a way to engage.

AA: My advice is to get engaged! I'm sure you will be pleasantly surprised with the depth of commitment and follow-through that Mason brings to its students and those who engage. Like me, I think you will get hooked!

If you had one wish for the future of the School of Business, what would that be and why?



SS: I can't wait for the day we walk into a building and know that this is our business school building. To me, that means that we've shown alumni, the community, business leaders, faculty, staff and students that this Business school is having impact in people's lives and our community—and that it is worth investing in!

AA: It's my wish for Mason that the School of Business leads as the connective tissue for the entire university. Students across the university take courses from the School of Business today. As we see the world and how it's evolving, every discipline requires a business connection. Mason as a vibrant, innovative research institution has the opportunity to lead the way in the future of higher education. My wish is that Mason's School of Business becomes the integrator of the benefits of business across all disciplines.

School of Business to Be Named in Honor of Donald G. Costello



From left, George Mason University Foundation president Trishana Bowden; Mason Board of Visitors rector Horace Blackman; School of Business dean Ajay Vinzé; Mason president Gregory Washington; Joe Contrucci, trustee of the Donald G. Costello Trust; Sarah Costello, daughter of Donald Costello; Peg Contrucci; Mason Board of Visitors member Jimmy Hazel

A $50 million planned gift to George Mason University, the largest school naming gift in the 51-year history of the Northern Virginia-based university, will name its business school in honor of **Donald G. Costello**. School of Business Dean **Ajay Vinzé** announced the gift at the launch of ***Mason Now: Power the Possible***, the university's $1 billion comprehensive campaign.

"It is fitting that we announce this transformational gift at the launch of the Mason Now campaign," said Mason President **Gregory Washington**. "As the most innovative university in Virginia, Mason leads the way in creating new academic programs to meet the evolving needs of the 21st-century economy. Mr. Costello's success is a testament to his hard work, tenacity, and steadfastness—the same qualities we seek to instill in our students."

The gift, which will establish the Donald G. Costello School of Business, reflects Mason Now's fundraising priorities: student success, research, innovation, community, and sustainability. The School of Business is taking steps to begin its transition and expects to officially adopt the new name later this year.

The planned gift establishes an endowment that will provide scholarships to undergraduate and graduate School of Business students to help prepare them for successful careers as entrepreneurs.

"This gift is a game-changer for the business school and the region," Vinzé said. "We are deeply grateful to **Joseph Contrucci**, trustee of the Donald G. Costello Trust, and Mr. Costello's daughter, **Sara Costello**, for their confidence in our ability to extend the legacy of a forward-thinking entrepreneur whose creativity, hard work, and determination changed the lives of people around him."

Donald G. Costello was born May 31, 1942, in Leesburg, Virginia. He graduated from Loudoun County High School in 1960 and trained as a forward observer in the U.S. Army. In 1976, he and a partner founded Century Stair Company, which grew to become the largest stair manufacturer on the East Coast. He died on July 21, 2017.

"Don and I have always seen George Mason University and its School of Business as a catalyst in fueling the Northern Virginia economy," Joseph Contrucci said. "This gift will further that impact by creating career opportunities and new businesses for decades to come."

Entrepreneurship and innovation at Mason are at the center of the School of Business strategic plan. The school's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship works with area entrepreneurs, city and civic leaders, businesses, and other colleges and universities to explore business partnerships and entrepreneurial training opportunities to benefit underserved youth.

The School of Business was founded in 1977 and currently enrolls more than 4,500 undergraduate and 650 graduate students, making it the second largest business school among public universities in Virginia.

With a growing physical presence that includes three campuses in Northern Virginia, Mason continues to drive economic growth in a region that extends beyond its host counties of Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William to the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Mason Now campaign will support that growth and enhance the university's ongoing commitment to educational access, innovative research, and impactful community engagement.



From left, Mason president Gregory Washington; School of Business dean Ajay Vinzé; Joe Contrucci, trustee of the Donald G. Costello Trust; and Patrick Soleymani, associate dean for outreach and strategic engagement at the School of Business

Patriot Pitch Competition Showcases Ideas and Early-Stage Business Ventures That Have the Potential to Change the World

BY JENNIFER BRAUN ANZALDI


Photo by John Boal Photography

Move over *Shark Tank*, Mason's Patriots have arrived.

Fifteen teams competed for $40,000 in prizes at the Patriot Pitch Competition led by the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. With the Patriot mascot handing out checks to the top winners of the day, nine teams of Mason entrepreneurs walked away a step closer to realizing their dreams of launching or growing their own startup businesses.

"We take great pride in being ranked as Virginia's most innovative university," says **Patrick Soleymani**, associate dean for outreach and strategic engagement at the School of Business. "The Patriot Pitch Competition is just one example of the business school's investment in the next wave of regional entrepreneurs and our commitment to growing this ecosystem nationwide." It's another way that Mason delivers opportunities that are *All Together Different* to our students, offering them valuable hands-on experiences to ensure their growth and success.

Now in its 22nd year, the competition (formerly the Dean's Business Plan Competition) brought nearly 50 teams of students and alumni from all fields of study. In the first round, a committee of faculty and local entrepreneurs reviewed the applications, inviting four teams from each track to the final round to pitch their ideas before an audience of nearly 200 students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members.

In welcoming students to the event, School of Business Dean **Ajay Vinzé** emphasized Mason's rich ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship that includes the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Mason Innovation Exchange (MIX), Mason Enterprise Center, National Science Foundation's I-Corps Hub site, and the Accelerate Investor Conference 2023.

In her keynote address, **Nicole Washington**, founder and CEO of Boralogix, encouraged entrepreneurs to know their customer, know their pitch, and to remember to create diverse teams. She closed her inspirational talk by addressing the importance of a strong community of supportive family and friends and of always giving back. She reminded students that we are facing unprecedented global challenges that can disrupt or even eliminate our way of life, and we should be looking at new ideas and business ventures that can truly change the world.

The student teams answered with a wide range of new ideas and early-stage business ventures that delivered on her challenge—in a big way. Judges for the event evaluated the presentations, selecting a first and second place team in four tracks, and audience members voted for their favorite pitch in the Mason's Choice Award prize for each track.

For the Public Engagement track, taking first place was By Easy AI, a no-code tool that brings the full potential of machine learning and artificial intelligence to low-tech enterprises, allowing them to mine data for actionable insights and to optimize their business analytics. For the STEM track, first place was awarded to Designer Contrast Agent Platform, an economic, size-tunable, and biofriendly contrast agent platform that targets deep tumor tissue to create high-contrast, high-resolution images of cancerous tumors. For the Social Impact track, the first place prize went to Legal Language Simplified (LLS), which provides accurate, human-certified translations for non-English-fluent, at-risk newcomers to the United States through a proprietary deep learning technology. For the General Entrepreneurship track, first place went to UKIE Candles, maker of hand-poured pillar candles made of organic-sustainable soy wax. "Ukie" is a colloquial term for Ukrainians living in America and 25 percent of all sales revenues are donated to Ukrainian families impacted by the ongoing war.

Powering the success of the student and alumni pitch teams were 13 mentors, who are CEOs, consultants, entrepreneurs, startup coaches, faculty members, and alumni. Mentors were valuable to the pitch teams, providing real-world experience starting and managing startups. The judging panels were comprised of 16 local business leaders whose professional experience includes consulting, derivatives exchange, energy consulting, food technology, nonprofits, and venture capital.

Additionally, **Kuzeyhan Ozdemir**, I-Corps program manager; **George Siragusa**, mentor in residence at the MIX; and **Lisa Shapiro**, assistant director of entrepreneurship programs in the Office of Research, Innovation, and Economic Impact, organized two intensive ICAP/I-Corps training sessions, in person and via Zoom, along with weekly pitch practices in the MIX to help the finalists prepare for the big day. W

Responding to the Spotify-ization of Education*

BY AJAY VINZÉ, BRETT W. JOSEPHSON, CHRISTINE LANDOLL, JK AIER, BENJAMIN KESSLER

With Spotify and similar music streaming platforms, we can group our favorite songs into playlists, curating a custom soundtrack for our lives and changing it as often as we like.

There are clear signs that something similar is at work in higher education. We are seeing a larger trend in the modularization, or unbundling, of higher education. Within this model, students might choose to earn technical certifications, complete skills-based short courses such as coding bootcamps, or take massive open online courses instead of enrolling in traditional degree programs.

At Mason's School of Business, we believe that business schools, in collaboration with our stakeholders, can and should be trailblazers in demonstrating the legitimacy of this new model. In the process, we can realize the full potential of modularization across the higher-ed ecosystem.

Our starting point is always the individual learner. Whether their ultimate aspiration is to become an entrepreneur, manage small operations, or climb the corporate ladder, they will need knowledge of certain disciplines such as accounting, finance, and marketing to get there.

Integrating core business skills into modular, stackable education helps learners of all types achieve their ambitions. Business schools can help learners navigate their options by acting as central hubs within the unbundled university.

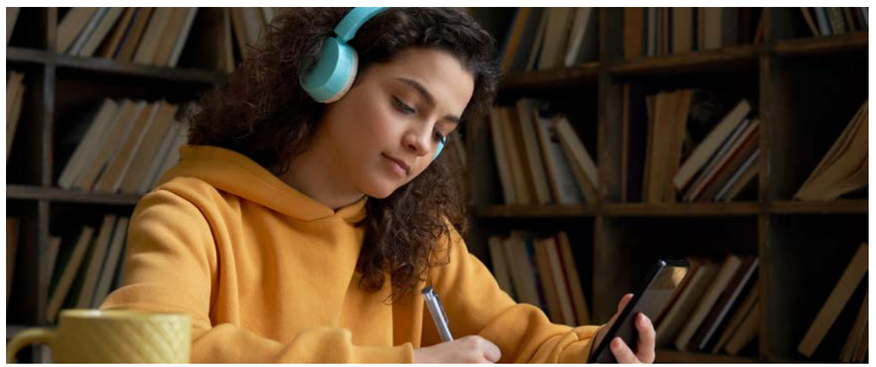
Consider, for example, a health care management credential combining courses in public health with business-school pedagogy, or a forensic accounting certificate matched with journalism classes to create a concentrated credential in forensic journalism. Once completed, such co-created courses could count as credits toward a master's degree from the business school, the partnering unit, or in some cases both.

This vision aligns with the needs of business leaders who have had to redirect resources from employee training to other concerns, such as research and development, to keep pace with an increasingly uncertain climate. Therefore, one of their top priorities is finding talent that can create value from day one on the job. They want employees who are intimately familiar with their fields, as well as those who already know how to apply their domain knowledge to the core business.

Historically, higher education has followed a loosely Fordist model of mass production, consisting solely of dispensing uniform degrees. As Henry Ford famously stated, "Any customer can have a car painted any color he wants, so long as it's black." But as we shift to a business-driven modular education, we will diversify the higher education portfolio to emphasize mass customization. Under this model, the product is professional talent, and the customers range from aspiring learners to employers looking to hire.

These stakeholders are facing increasingly competitive pressures in their markets. Without compromising academic integrity, universities could position themselves as the entities best equipped to satisfy their mounting demand for highly trained, ready-to-go talent. W

"At Mason's School of Business, we believe that business schools, in collaboration with our stakeholders, can and should be trailblazers in demonstrating the legitimacy of this new model."



*This article was originally published in *AACSB Insights*, a publication of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), on December 19, 2022. Scan the QR code to read the full version on the AACSB website.

W Visit business.gmu.edu/ImpactFall23 for more content.

Northern Virginia Technology Council Chair Greg Baroni and Wife, Camille, Make Critical Investment in George Mason University's Center for Government Contracting

> "The name, Baroni, symbolizes innovation, commitment, and leadership across a host of industries and sectors.
>
> — Dean Ajay Vinzé

George Mason University announced the largest gift to a center within the School of Business from Attain Partners founder and CEO **Greg Baroni** and his wife, **Camille**. The first-of-its-kind university center to address business, technology, policy, and regulatory issues in government contracting, the Center for Government Contracting will change its name to the Greg and Camille Baroni Center for Government Contracting in honor of the new donors. The nonpartisan entrepreneurial center will be the first donor-named center within Mason's School of Business.

"We are grateful to the Baronis for their gift, which will help transform the center and build tomorrow's workforce for both government and industry," said Mason President **Gregory Washington**. "Recognizing that the nation's future success depends on a thriving and diverse education workforce, and through partnerships across industry and government, Mason sets itself apart and is focused on solutions to our biggest challenges as a nation and within the Commonwealth of Virginia."

The investment by the Baronis in Mason is spurred by their desire to promote a new level of innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration between government and industry to work together toward mutually beneficial outcomes. The Baroni gift will allow the expansion of center research activities and student fellowships and contribute to a new space for convening as part of Mason's School of Business building.

"We are excited to partner with Mason to support and advance the government contracting industry," said Greg Baroni. "Higher education is key to growing the industry and building diverse talent for tomorrow's workforce. George Mason University is well positioned to drive innovation and collaboration and we're proud to be a part of this next chapter."

Baroni, a "GovCon" industry leader recognized for providing business and technology solutions for the public sector markets, is the founder, chairman, and chief executive officer of Attain Partners, a professional services company focused on delivering asset-powered, tech-enabled solutions for education, government, health care, and nonprofit organizations.



Greg and Camille Baroni

He also is founder and managing partner of Attain Capital Partners and Attain Sports and Entertainment. In addition, Baroni serves as chair of the Northern Virginia Technology Council (NVTC) and serves on the Board of Directors of the Professional Services Council (PSC).

Baroni recently received Washington Exec's Lifetime Achievement Award at the Pinnacle Awards, an annual program highlighting successful executives and businesses fostering innovation for their federal government clients across the region.

Leveraging its proximity to the federal government and the center of the Northern Virginia business corridor, Mason's Greg and Camille Baroni Center for Government Contracting, established in 2019, conducts impactful research on the broad array of critical issues facing the $500-plus billion government contracting community.

The center also serves as a convener of industry discussions and conferences on topics such as Department of Defense budget reform, small business innovation, intellectual property policy, and defense acquisition best practices.

"The name, Baroni, symbolizes innovation, commitment, and leadership across a host of industries and sectors," said **Ajay Vinzé**, dean of the School of Business. "George Mason's School of Business embraces these same qualities, which is evident in our research and our students. It is an honor to have our center named after a benefactor and industry leader who shares our goals."

Jerry McGinn, the center's executive director, said, "This gift will propel the center onto the national scene as the preeminent leader for research, innovation, and impact in government contracting."

Dear Alumni,



Pam Maple
MBA '09
School of Business
Alumni Chapter President

The School of Business is the embodiment of resilience. The resounding message is that we are back in person and stronger than ever. Coupled with this, the school, students, staff, and alumni, are invigorated by the new Dean, Ajay Vinzé, and the just announced $50 million planned gift to George Mason University in honor of Donald G. Costello, the largest school naming gift in the 51-year history of the Northern Virginia-based university. It's an exciting time to be a part of the action at Mason.

The university is entering into an unprecedented time of growth. Everywhere I look, I see George Mason University ads on billboards and buses. It makes me proud to see the university thriving and making its achievements known. The students and faculty often thought of the university as the "best kept secret." Well, it's no longer a secret. Mason is a great value and is a vital and important aspect of continuing education for the Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia area, and beyond. In the metro area, employment increased by 74,700 year-over-year with a job gain rate of 2.3 percent. As a result, the demand for educated job candidates and for continuing education among working individuals parallels these gains with the need for a high-quality university education. Mason leverages its ideal geographic location, close to the largest regional employer—the federal government—and provides a wide range of relevant degree and certificate programs.

The School of Business is not just a convenient selection for education, it carries prestige and a large active alumni community. Part of our role as the School of Business Alumni Chapter is to be an ambassador for the university and make the variety and excellence of the programs known. We are examples of how the university contributed to our individual and collective successes. The student and alumni news out of the School of Business demonstrates these principles. Just this year, some examples of the School of Business achievements are a sixth win for the Master's in Real Estate Development (MRED) students, who took home the top prize at the Capital Challenge; routine faculty media mentions in publications such as *Forbes*, where School of Business management professor Matthew Cronin was quoted about the importance of research in business schools; and MRED program director C. Kat Grimsley's appointment by the U.S. Department of State. Success at the school and amongst alumni is far reaching and impactful.

Our School of Business alumni—36,000+ strong—are as diverse in backgrounds as they are in industry. When you graduate from the school, you become an alum and have an immense community available to you. With your diploma you get the added feature of "future-proofing" your career. When you become engaged in the Alumni Chapter, you continue to have learning opportunities, networking, socializing, volunteerism, and so much more. Two capstone events to keep in mind that are open to all are the Annual Business Celebration in February and the spring Women in Business Wine Tasting events. Come join us for networking at one of these events!

Best,



Pam Maple, MBA '09
School of Business Alumni Chapter President

LOOKING BACK:
Alumni Chapter Presidents

2022–Present:
Pam Maple, MBA '09
President-Elect:
David Roe '89, MBA '96
2019–2022:
Scott Hine, '85
2018–19:
Becky Forbush, '10 (formerly Anderson)
2017–18:
Jason Howell, '97
2016–17:
Sumeet Shrivastava, '94
2015 - 16:
E. Ryan Najjar, '13
2014–15:
Mark Cummings, '94
2013–14:
Polina Zhuravlev, '05
2010–13:
Michael Gallagher, '94
2009–10:
Erika Spalding, '07
2008–09:
Daniel Aldis, '03
2007–08:
Thomas Donohue, Jr., '93
2006–07:
John Blair, '04
2005–06:
Nancy Sydnor, '99
2004–05:
Bryan Felder, '98
2003–04:
Michael Hamrick, '96

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ALUMNI CHAPTER BOARD 2023–2024

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Immediate Past President
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Historian
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Lisbeth Guerrero-Vasquez, '00
Gina Healy, '93
Christopher Jenkins, '13 '18
Joanie Newhart, '91
Chassidy Reese, '22
Brad Stein, '94

Leave a Legacy

For more than 45 years, the School of Business has prepared alumni and allowed faculty to make a difference in the world. A legacy gift allows you to make a lasting impact that is appreciated by future generations.

How It Works

You can remember the School of Business in your estate plan in a variety of ways:

- ☐ Give a specific dollar amount or percentage of your estate through your will or trust.
- ☐ Leave a specific asset, such as artwork, jewelry, or real estate.
- ☐ Name the School of Business as a residual beneficiary of your estate so that the school receives the remainder after all other bequests have been satisfied.
- ☐ Designate the School of Business as a sole or partial beneficiary of a retirement plan, such as a 401(k) or IRA.
- ☐ Recommend that the School of Business be considered as a successor beneficiary of your donor-advised fund.
- ☐ Consider an income-retained arrangement that would benefit you now and the School of Business later.

Let's Work Together

The Advancement and Alumni Relations Office can help you craft a gift that fulfills your financial and philanthropic goals. To learn more, contact Christina Spring, director of advancement, at cspring4@gmu.edu or 703-993-5297.

The Jason M. Chesky Endowed Scholarship Aids Students in Building Foundations of Success

BY GREG JOHNSON, '13



Jason M. Chesky, BS Finance '12

"The foundation for the success that I'm experiencing today came from my Mason education," says **Jason Chesky**, BS Finance '12. To help current George Mason University finance students build foundations of their own, he established the Jason M. Chesky Endowed Scholarship. Knowing full well how challenging the cost of higher education can be to some, and the barriers it can create, Chesky wanted to make things a little easier for students and allow them the opportunity to focus on their education.

Recently promoted to chief financial officer, Chesky began working at Logenix International following his graduation from Mason. The global logistics provider employed only eight people when he started, but has grown to more than 150 worldwide. "I love every aspect of my job because I get to dabble in all the intricacies from insurance and planning to the international aspect," he says. It's gratifying for him to use the knowledge from his background at Mason and to build upon it.

Finance wasn't Chesky's initial interest. He first studied sports medicine at another university. "It just didn't interest me and it's also when I realized that everything is business oriented," he says. "Finance did interest me and every company has transactions and growth, making it absolutely essential." Chesky has come to view his business background as his "Swiss Army Knife of life" in that it prepared him to solve a range of problems that come his way, whether they are professional or personal. He established the scholarship so that other Patriots, regardless of their financial situation, could build similar skillsets.

The recently retired **Anthony Sanders**, distinguished professor of finance, stands out in Chesky's mind as someone responsible for where he is today. "Professor Sanders took me under his wing and showed me how to apply what I learned and take total advantage of my education," he says. Among the areas where Sanders guided Chesky was in building a network, understanding the finance industry, and developing an overall understanding of life outside the classroom. Many of these are lessons that Chesky now passes along to business students and recent graduates, emphasizing that they don't have to know everything, but they do need to know how to acquire the information.

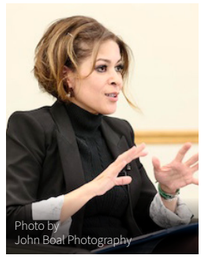
> "Alumni should stay engaged with their alma mater because they are proof of the institution's success."

"Alumni should stay engaged with their alma mater because they are proof of the institution's success," says Chesky. He points out that many students choose certain schools because of the esteemed professionals who were educated there. By establishing the Jason M. Chesky Endowed Scholarship, he is honoring his own time at Mason and making a difference in the lives of students. It is also a ringing endorsement of the quality education that Chesky received at the School of Business, a curriculum that helped him fashion his Swiss Army Knife of skills—skills that give him confidence in the face of every responsibility he is tasked with.

Business Dean Hosts Fireside Chat with Mason Alumna and Navy Assistant Secretary Alaleh Jenkins

BY GREG JOHNSON, '13

Alaleh Jenkins, BS Accounting '97, acting assistant secretary for the United States Navy for financial management and comptroller (FM&C), attributes her career successes to the rigorous education she received at George Mason University.



Alaleh Jenkins, BS Accounting '97

The impact of her Mason experience led her back to campus to share her keys for success at a fireside chat with School of Business Dean **Ajay Vinzé** on November 16. Students, faculty, staff, and community members gathered in Merten Hall on the Fairfax Campus for a lively discussion about Jenkins's career.

Jenkins detailed her journey from non-English speaking immigrant to enrolling at Mason, working in the private sector, and now to her current position with the Navy. She also offered advice, both on what she did and what she wishes she had done, to those in attendance.

As a student, Jenkins took advantage of Mason's job fairs, which led to two internships and a job at a major CPA firm after graduation. "I got a lot of tough love at my first job and I will be forever grateful to my employer for pushing me out of my comfort zone," Jenkins said in an interview before the event.

Prior to her 16 years in the federal government, Jenkins worked extensively in the private sector, and said there were valuable lessons to learn at each step in her career.

Jenkins oversees the Navy's annual budget of $200 billion and spearheads their Financial Management Transformation (FMT) project. She said she was motivated to join the Navy because of her commitment to serve those who defend the nation's freedom. She said no two days are the same, as she and her team navigate around shifting world events and crises to make decisions that impact the welfare of servicemembers. Her number one priority is the Navy's workforce.

"As I tell the FM&C workforce, if you don't change, you don't grow," she said. "It's very important that everybody learns to work in different environments, how to work with different cultures, how to be more inclusive, how to work in a very diverse organization, and how to communicate and move forward."

The Navy puts its members through continuous education and training courses to ensure their level of expertise is where it needs to be, she said.

Mason is an ideal pipeline of workforce talent for the armed forces, Jenkins said, because of its strong programs in policy, government, and international security.

Advising students in the room, she said, "This is a time to take care of yourself and to grow you. Always be in learning mode."

She also encouraged students to embrace teamwork, take on leadership roles, and engage in new learning experiences—all of which they can do at Mason through its experiential learning and research opportunities as well as study abroad or internship opportunities.



From left, Alaleh Jenkins; School of Business Dean Ajay Vinzé

Giving Back

One of the greatest things you can provide to the school is your time and knowledge.

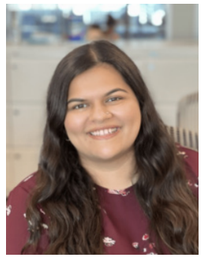
- **Share Your Expertise**
  Speak in a classroom, sponsor a student internship, mentor a student, provide career advice...the possibilities are endless. Your business experience and knowledge make a world of difference in educating Mason business students.
- **Become Active in the School of Business Alumni Chapter**
  Your School of Business Alumni Chapter provides a wide range of programs and services that benefit students and alumni.
- **Refer Exceptional Students**
  Refer the best and brightest students to our graduate and undergraduate programs to build both the quantity and quality of our student body.
- **Recruit Our Graduates**
  Hire School of Business graduates at your company by encouraging recruiting with Mason's Career Services, participating in the school's career fairs and networking events, and thinking of the School of Business first when new job and internship opportunities arise in your organization.
- **Help a Fellow Patriot**
  The Gowns for Grads Lending Program allows students who are unable to purchase their own regalia to borrow a cap and gown for graduation from the university. Our current inventory does not match the needs of our students. We are asking new alumni to donate regalia to give students the chance to walk across the stage and celebrate.

  Contact Christina Spring, director of advancement, at cspring4@gmu.edu or 703-993-5297.

Accounting Alumna Balances Family Life and Professional Development at Ernst & Young

BY GREG JOHNSON '13

Ishrah Ahmed, BS Accounting '16, had been studying pharmacy at St. John's University before she moved to Virginia and started to tag along to classes that her husband **Saad Ahmed**, BS Information Systems and Operations Management '17, was taking at the School of Business.



Ishrah Ahmed,
BS Accounting '16

"I saw how accounting is such an important function of an entity because that's how leaders understand what's happening with the business," Ahmed says. Being able to commute and take classes with her husband brought comfort and joy to the education process, but she also really appreciated the diversity in content and approaches taught within the School of Business. Beginning at Ernst & Young (EY) right after graduating from Mason, her work ethic and constant pursuit of knowledge led to immediate career success.

Though she wears many different hats at EY, Ahmed's official title is assurance manager, a role in which she's tasked with managing financial statement audits. She thoroughly enjoys the process, but it's the extracurricular opportunities at EY that help her realize her full potential. As a member of the EY Greater Washington People Advisory Board, she organizes events for employees to develop both personally and professionally. Another crucial role she plays is recruiting top accounting students to come work at EY, a task that brings her to business schools, including at Mason, to serve on panels and speak one on one with students.

EY's recruiting efforts have lead to a steady pipeline of School of Business graduates coming to work at the firm. Two other Patriots at the firm are EY Partners **Michelle Montes**, BS Accounting '95, and **Brett Rembold**, BS Accounting and Finance '08. Rembold has directly worked with Ahmed in many of the firm's recruiting efforts. "She's just been a fantastic person to work with. She really embodies a lot of what we talk about at the firm, as far as having a personal life while working hard, doing great work, and being really successful professionally as well," he says.

Many of the practices that enabled Ahmed to excel at the School of Business are also what help her at EY. Chief among them is managing the work-life balance, something she had to learn while raising her first child when she was enrolled at Mason. "Whether it's engaging with your professors or leaders on your team, it's important to tell them about yourself so they have an understanding of what you're prioritizing or what you're dealing with outside of work or school."

"At the School of Business, we understand that our students have multiple commitments and responsibilities outside the classroom," says **Long Chen**, area chair and associate professor of accounting. "By cultivating time management skills and promoting self-care practices, we empower our students to be successful not only in their careers but also in their personal lives. Our faculty members are also dedicated to providing mentorship and guidance to help students achieve their professional and personal aspirations."

Like at Mason, Ahmed is constantly learning at EY, pushing herself and her peers to succeed. But what it really boils down to is the people. "EY has a collaborative culture and our people, along with our culture, is what I most enjoy about coming into work each day," says Montes, who has been at EY for more than two decades and counting. Rembold agrees. "I would not still be here if I didn't have great people to support me, mentor me, and work alongside me over the years, and that's really what sets us apart," he says. The three Mason alumni also agree that the range of opportunities and responsibilities, which are ever evolving, make EY an exciting place to keep learning and growing, much like what they experienced at the School of Business. By prioritizing work-life balance, Ahmed and her colleagues are able to avoid burnout in pursuit of lifelong learning and professional development, benefiting themselves and the entire EY family.

> "By cultivating time management skills and promoting self-care practices, we empower our students to be successful not only in their careers but also in their personal lives."

Chief Information Officer Finds Joy in Profession by Playing to Her Strengths

BY GREG JOHNSON, '13

Through working in a variety of career fields and organizations, Dewberry CIO **Lisa Roger**, MBA '20, discovered the tasks and responsibilities that she enjoys most, leading her to the peak of her industry.



Lisa Roger,
MBA '20

Lisa Roger's career has taken a winding road on the way to becoming a preeminent and award-winning executive. From programming to being a sign language interpreter, Roger learned everything she could from seemingly unrelated jobs and in the process found the kind of work that brings her joy. Many of these lessons she has shared to readers through her published book *The Joy Factor: Escaping Job Disappointment and Finding Your Dream Career*. She believes that by identifying and leveraging personal strengths, an individual can continuously grow and have a much more fulfilling career. "If you're looking at a very specific career path when you get started, you will probably be disappointed," she says. "It's important to design your own path as you discover what brings you joy."

Roger has been at the Fairfax-based civil engineering firm Dewberry for more than five years, currently serving as the chief information officer (CIO). "CIO is a unique C-suite position because you have visibility into everything—every operational function you touch," she says. "When done right, you can be an effective partner in making the entire organization better and more prosperous." As suggested by her previous occupations, it wasn't a position she always had in mind. But by learning what she was gifted at, it was a career path that formed along the way. "What I tell audiences and mentees is articulated in *The Joy Factor*, that it's really about taking those elements of whatever you're doing in life and growing those parts that bring you joy," she says. "Whatever your next role or opportunity is, make sure you're getting more joy and less of what you don't want."

As demonstrated by her position as chairwoman-elect for the Women in Business Initiative (WIBI) at George Mason University's School of Business, Roger is an ardent supporter of women in business and STEM fields. "I'm passionate about making sure our next generation is equipped to handle the challenges and keep up with the rest of the world," she says. Through the mentorship and fundraising efforts of WIBI, Roger is directly impacting that generation of future leaders. "My hope is to leverage the wonderful work done by previous chairs to expand WIBI membership so we can increase support for our endowment, reaching more women and young professionals early in their careers when they are facing tough challenges," she says.

> "Whatever your next role or opportunity is, make sure you're getting more joy and less of what you don't want."

Having been nominated by her peers for a third year in a row, Roger received the coveted Capital CIO of the Year Orbie Award in 2022. "CIOs across the nation evaluate nominees to determine who wins, so it's a wonderful recognition," she says. In many ways, the award validates the path that Roger took to ultimately become CIO at Dewberry. While she was learning from the various jobs she held, she also continued her formal education inside the classroom, including earning her MBA from Mason in 2020. Utilizing her role as WIBI's chair-elect among her other positions, Roger is eager to help prepare business students in order to transform their own lives and strengthen the workforce for the foreseeable future.

Dean's Excellence Fund

For more than 45 years, George Mason University School of Business has prepared **innovative, critical thinking students to stay ahead of the curve** in an ever-evolving business landscape and to be the catalysts for progress. Graduates are well positioned to be leaders in the future of business, both here in the region and abroad. Keeping our programs nimble to help our students succeed demonstrates how Mason thinks ***All Together Different***.

Shape our students into the business leaders of tomorrow. Your gift to the Dean's Excellence Fund enables the school to respond to student opportunities as they arise.

DONATE TODAY: advancement.gmu.edu/23SB7

Visit business.gmu.edu/ImpactFall23 for more content.

Celebrating the

Spirit of ’77

Once a Patriot...*always* a Patriot.

Today’s George Mason University School of Business was established on July 1, 1977. Now as we approach our 50th anniversary, it is our time to remember the importance of community.

In 2027, we will celebrate five decades as a school. Our alumni network has surpassed 36,000 alumni, with 70% living in the Northern Virginia region. While everyone has their own personal and professional network, what we all have in common is our connection to the George Mason University School of Business. “Included in our school’s network are many people you may have never met, who nonetheless touched your lives here at Mason through scholarship donations, competition or event sponsorships, research grants, student mentoring sessions or internships, and advisory roles to the dean and faculty,” said Dean **Ajay Vinzé** to the graduating class of 2023.

“To further promote and grow our alumni network, along with the School of Business community of faculty, staff, board members and friends of the school, the School of Business is initiating the ‘Spirit of ’77’ campaign to build a tighter connection between our students and alumni,” said Dean Vinzé. “By working together, we foster student success, recruit and retain top faculty, support innovative research and programming, and build and maintain state of the art facilities.”

“Pay it forward to the students who follow after you,” said School of Business Alumni Chapter president **Pam Maple**, MBA ’09. “Serve as an ambassador for Mason, come back for events, help students secure internships, or give back in another way that is meaningful to you. The Spirit of ’77 Initiative is your invitation to inspire others.”



Chi Omega Business School Contribution

Plan to come back to campus in 2027 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our School of Business.



George Mason University; Original North Campus Building

Keep an eye out for more information about this exciting initiative!

The first step in getting involved is updating your contact info and sharing your email address so that we can stay in touch.

Scan to update your information
go.gmu.edu/bizalumupdate

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY | School of Business

PROMINENT PATRIOTS IN BUSINESS

2022 DISTINGUISHED PATRIOTS Alumni Awardees

Alumni Service Award



Chris Preston
BS Business Management '96



Distinguished Alumna Award

Elaine Marion
BS Accounting '95



Lezran Aksoy
MBA '97



Elena Angell
MBA '17



Fred Costa
BS Decision Sciences and Management Information Systems '98



Lisbeth Guerrero-Vasquez
BS Decision Sciences and Management Information Systems '00



John Hall
BS Accounting '93



Ali Kahil
BS Finance '19



Charles Kapur
BS Management '00



Adnan Karimi
MBA '18



Mohamed Omar
BS Accounting '05



Chris Osborne
BS Business '74



Lisa Roger
MBA '20



Cassie Schupp
MS Real Estate Development '15



Sameet Singh
BS Information Systems and Operations Management '20



Effie Ypsilantis
BS Business Administration and Management '86

Stay tuned for the next issue of *Impact* magazine where our 2023 Distinguished Patriot awardees will be recognized at the Annual Business Celebration in February.

business.gmu.edu

Gift to School of Business Building Initiative Honors George Havenner's Legacy

BY GREG JOHNSON, '13

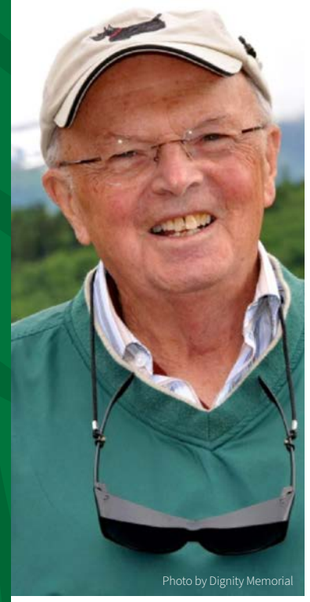


Photo by Dignity Memorial

> "The personal touch of speaking to someone face-to-face is so important in having meaningful discussion."
>
> — Craig Havenner

Personal responsibility, integrity, citizenship, family relationships, and a passion for reading and travel were closely held values for **George Havenner**, BIS '78. On February 25, 2022, Havenner passed away at the age of 88, surrounded by his loving family. His legacy carries on through the values he shared with his many friends and family members. Expanding his father's legacy further among the community, **Craig Havenner** joined his wife, **Kim** (BS Psychology '98), and the rest of their family to make an impactful gift to support a future building for the George Mason University School of Business.

George Havenner's college education began at Davis and Elkins University and was interrupted by the Korean War, where he served in the army and continued in the army reserves after the war's conclusion. Following his military service, he held various federal government positions on Capitol Hill. It was there where one of his employers encouraged him to enroll at Mason to complete the degree he had left on hold. Mason was a young university at the time with a burgeoning reputation and he enjoyed the convenience it offered, even taking classes in the same building where he attended high school—the old Fairfax High School.

"This gift to the School of Business is a testimony to my dad," says Craig. "He always encouraged his children and grandchildren to find what they were passionate about and try their very best." Lessons in leadership, community, and duty have stayed with Craig as he has gone above and beyond with his engagement, serving on many advisory boards, including the Center for Real Estate Entrepreneurship Advisory Board and the Advancement Committee, raising philanthropic support for a building at the School of Business. A retired president of the Christopher Companies, Craig remains partner of the residential and commercial building and development company. Even though Craig never attended a class at Mason, he understands the magnitude of the school's influence on the region and on his family. "Mason has all the pieces," he says, "but to carry out the world-class mission, we need the infrastructure updated and [made] adaptable to new technologies."

The Havenners' gift and his service on the building campaign advisory board underscore his belief in how essential a building is for the School of Business. In an era when tuning in virtually has become a permanent option for many students and employees, the in-person interaction has become even more highly coveted. "The personal touch of speaking to someone face-to-face is so important in having meaningful discussion," says Craig. And when it's not possible to convene in person, it has become necessary to establish a home base to house and adapt the latest technologies to teach students across the commonwealth and around the world. After all, Mason is inclusive in offering everyone a first-rate education.

The Havenner family has donated their resources—time, treasure, and talent—to the school because they see within it many of their own family values. The gift will contribute to the school's strengthening its capabilities and broadening its scope as an engine of opportunity. George Havenner and his beloved wife **Rosalie** were among the first homeowners in their tight-knit Annandale, Virginia, community back in 1963, and since then, Craig has seen how much the region has grown and the role Mason continues to play in it. And, of course, Mason itself continues to grow. "They have done so well in drawing from all the resources that are available in this community, which are among the best you can find anywhere in the world, when you think about the seat of government and all the industries and think tanks," he says.

Throughout Mason's brief history, remarkable leaders have shaped the institution into one that is constantly grabbing headlines and staying ahead of the curve. The initiative to build a home for the School of Business represents the future of the school and the university, and a future that would not be possible without the support of people like the Havenners. Business and technology continue to evolve, but the future will be built on the foundational principles that have guided Patriots thus far. A high-quality education was of immense importance to George Havenner, as he always encouraged his family and friends to embrace the lifelong learning experience. At the School of Business, the Havenner gift will help change more lives as part of George's legacy.

School of Business Board Member Mentors Aspiring Female Entrepreneurs

BY GREG JOHNSON, '13



Through several ventures, including the SheEO Academy and the Women in Business Initiative (WIBI) at the School of Business, **DeShawn Robinson-Chew** puts her passion into practice by educating and empowering young women interested in entrepreneurship.

As the founder and owner of SheEO Academy, DeShawn Robinson-Chew has dedicated her career to mentoring and inspiring girls to pursue entrepreneurship. Throughout her childhood, she recognized that many of her family members owned businesses. It wasn't until she enrolled in college that she learned it was called entrepreneurship, and that she had similar interests and personality traits. In addition to founding and owning SheEO Academy, Robinson-Chew is a public speaker, adjunct professor, workshop facilitator, published author, and member at large for the George Mason University School of Business's Women in Business Initiative (WIBI).

Prior to founding SheEO Academy, Robinson-Chew served as the director of the Women's Business Center at the Community Business Partnership, where she would hear from countless women about their struggles regarding entrepreneurship and how they weren't always able to pursue their passions because of seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their lives. Inspired and determined, she founded SheEO Academy in 2003. "I realized that we need to introduce entrepreneurship to girls instead of just women, to plant that seed early and have it normalized," she says. Since the birth of the academy, she has witnessed many of those mentees blossom. Young entrepreneurs have experienced business success and have been recognized in the media and national publications.

It was through her networks that Robinson-Chew learned about WIBI. "I saw WIBI as an extension of my mission at SheEO Academy," she says. "I learned how they are trying to empower business students, who would be the same kind of students who would go through the academy." Given her experience and talents, she has taken on leadership of the WIBI mentorship committee, providing her a more direct connection to the students. It has also helped her connect with faculty, as they discuss plans of bringing her and other business women into the classroom to impart real-world experience and advice to entrepreneurial-minded students.

> "I realized that we need to introduce entrepreneurship to girls instead of just women, to plant that seed early and have it normalized."

Much of the advice that Robinson-Chew shares is centered around personal choices and when to make them, especially since many women delay career pursuits due to getting married and raising families. She advises them to travel, internationally if possible, because business is an international initiative. And because a business is an asset, they should own something first, whether it be a home or car, so that they understand how to manage assets of high value and importance. "Don't start a business until you have some funding," she emphasizes. "It is not impossible, but it makes life much more difficult if you try to start a business without your finances in order."

Encouraged by recent trends, Robinson-Chew is as energized as ever in helping girls and young women reach their entrepreneurship dreams, and she has involved herself in the proper organizations to drive further progress. "Mason having WIBI is an important recognition and acknowledgment that young women often have different hurdles than their male counterparts in business," she says. "Along with Mason's culturally diverse student population, Mason has to recognize its gender diversity too." Robinson-Chew is excited to continue her work with WIBI and Mason in exploring more opportunities for mentorship and overall support for the female entrepreneur.

Scan for more information on the Women in Business Initiative (WIBI)

School of Business Donors Spread Universal Love through Prema Endowed Scholarship

BY GREG JOHNSON, '13



Always helping underserved communities both near and far, **Venkat Kodumudi**, MBA '10, and his wife, Dr. **Mysore Maitri,** have founded the Prema Endowed Scholarship to support School of Business students at the institution that they greatly value.

Prema, a Sanskrit word meaning universal love, was chosen by Venkat Kodumudi, MBA '10, and his wife, Mysore Maitri, as the name of their new scholarship in support of George Mason University School of Business students interested in entering the fields of health care, sustainability, or diversity and inclusion. It's a fitting name since love for humanity has guided the lives and careers of the couple. Growing up in India, Kodumudi recalls witnessing the selfless charity of his father, traveling great distances to provide underserved communities with medical resources, despite it being unrelated to his profession. Now Kodumudi and Maitri answer the call themselves by serving communities both near and far, including organizing medical camps for the underprivileged close to home and cleaning glass for developing countries in Africa and South America. The Prema Endowed Scholarship at the School of Business is yet another way that they are spreading the love and supporting people who are in financial need.

Kodumudi, chief technology officer at Unissant, and Maitri, a physician at Inova, are leaders in the Northern Virginia community. When it came to deciding on the institution they would trust with their endowed scholarship, George Mason University was the right fit. "Being local, Mason is my community," says Kodumudi, "and of all the institutions I attended, I somehow felt closest to Mason." Shortly after School of Business dean **Ajay Vinzé** began his term, Kodumudi had an opportunity to meet him and was impressed with the dean's vision of partnering with the community and surrounding industry. With community on her mind as well, it didn't take much convincing from her husband to get Maitri on board to establish the scholarship at Mason.

Receiving more than a high-quality education at Mason, Kodumudi has memories that will last a lifetime. "Not a day passes by that I don't think about my global residency program in the United Arab Emirates," he says. Another part of the MBA program that sticks with him is the relationships he formed. "Over the years, we don't always talk that often, but we're always there," he says. "Even if it's been two or three years, we'll hit it off immediately once we see each other again."

> "Spread the love, don't keep it to yourself."

It is Kodumudi's and Maitri's sincere wish that recipients of the Prema Endowed Scholarship build upon their act of good will. "Spread the love, don't keep it to yourself," the couple repeats. With their own daughter deciding what she wants to study in college, they understand the challenges and anxieties that come with choosing a path. "The guidance we give our daughter is what we would tell any student trying to decide on a career field," says Maitri. "Don't rush, don't choose a path because your family chose a path. Choose a path that fits your value system and your aspirations."

Truly caring alumni and donors like Kodumudi and Maitri offer support to students during formative years of their lives. It is the couple's intention that the scholarship assists students who share their values and continue the tradition of universal love.

Donate to the Prema Endowed Scholarship

Elevating Impact through Innovative Research Partnerships

BY BENJAMIN KESSLER

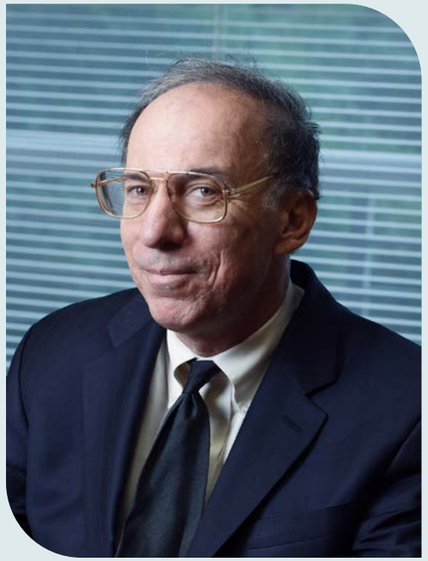
The George Mason University School of Business boasts more than 60 full-time, research-active faculty across the accounting, finance, information systems and operations management, management, and marketing areas. In addition to pursuing research questions within their area of specialty, many School of Business scholars team up with peers from other disciplines to tackle complex societal problems.

These include so-called "wicked problems" such as climate change and inequality that require coordinated interventions because of their multifaceted nature.

Richard Klimoski, School of Business associate dean for research, says, "Business schools do in fact have multidisciplinary roots and are often composed of faculty that can apply expertise from diverse areas of study, including economics, mathematics, statistics, psychology, sociology, law, and others."

"Moreover, because big societal and economic challenges and opportunities are multidisciplinary in nature, business schools are uniquely prepared to contribute to understanding and solving these problems via research."

Here are just a few examples of how School of Business professors are elevating their real-world impact through multidisciplinary collaboration.



J. P. Auffret

PhD, Physics; Director, Center for Assurance Research and Engineering

J. P. Auffret directs research partnerships for the School of Business and the Center for Assurance Research and Engineering (CARE), housed in the College of Engineering and Computing. He and computer science professor Amarda Shehu will lead the future Center for Excellence in Government Cybersecurity Risk Management and Resilience, which was founded with significant support from U.S. Representative Gerry Connolly, whose congressional district includes Fairfax, Virginia.

The new center, which will be headquartered in Mason Square, will support and advance cybersecurity leadership and governance across the U.S. federal government by educating executives and middle managers, acting as a strategic partner in cybersecurity and IT modernization efforts, translating state-of-the-art research into federal government practice, collating and disseminating best practices for cybersecurity, and fostering cybersecurity organizational capacity.

Additionally, Auffret is furthering his longstanding local government cybersecurity partnership initiative which originally started as a National Science Foundation project with Virginia Tech professor Angelos Stavrou. As Auffret explains, "Many local governments are quite small, and have limited budgets and resources while facing many of the same cybersecurity technology and organizational challenges as larger local governments. Partnering between local governments and with the states provides a means for enhancing cybersecurity capabilities."

Lei Gao

PhD, Finance; Associate Professor, Finance



Lei Gao contributes to several multidisciplinary research projects at various funding stages. One proposal, aimed at curbing gun violence, has Gao working alongside researchers from the fields of computer science, statistics, and criminology. The team intends to use machine learning and other advanced technologies to discover leading indicators of mass shootings. Gao's role relates to the economic piece of the puzzle, exploring questions such as whether localized or national economic downturns may be a precursor to mass shootings. "We might be able to provide some insights or early warnings for law enforcement to detect or forecast so that they can go there earlier and try to prevent these tragedies," Gao says. He is also interested in what happens after mass shootings occur. "When gun violence occurs in a particular area, it can significantly decrease the attractiveness of the area to new businesses and talented individuals, leading to reduced tax revenues and economic consequences. By quantifying these costs, the public can better understand the costs of inaction on gun violence," Gao says.



Abhishek Ray

PhD, Information Systems and Operations Management; Assistant Professor, Information Systems and Operations Management

Abhishek Ray has teamed up with a Mason economics professor on a project investigating the online news market. The proposal jumps off from the idea that while democracy depends upon a well-informed citizenry, the internet is known for shunting users into "echo chambers" that reinforce pre-existing political biases. Using innovative techniques from "complex systems science for investigating economic activities and cognition in markets", Ray aims to show how competition within the news industry drives the political polarization of journalism, and how these shifting levels of bias affect reader engagement. "Digital news has impacted consumers' political involvement and information-seeking more profoundly than other media," Ray explains. "This project will design mitigating regulatory frameworks using economics and computational and cognitive science."

Sarah Wittman

PhD, Philosophy; Assistant Professor, Management



Sarah Wittman and faculty from Mason's Volgenau School of Engineering are developing wearable technologies to empower people with various types of neurodiversity, which can sometimes include Autism spectrum disorders or ADHD, to thrive at work. The project focuses on the retail and hospitality industries, where employment opportunities for neurodiverse people abound. Yet aspects of working life, such as the need to interact with others and complete tasks in a specific order, can present difficulties for some people. Wearables provide real-time biometric monitoring and simple interventions—like encouraging the wearer to take a five-minute break when their heart rate rises and may indicate frustration or agitation. By helping remove obstacles to gainful employment, these devices would create greater financial and emotional independence for neurodiverse individuals.

While not a complete list, these examples help illustrate how School of Business scholars are breaking siloes to address problems of national, if not global, import. As Klimoski states, "I am absolutely convinced that the kinds of research that will have the greatest likelihood of making an impact upon the world will require the coordination and collaboration of multiple teams made up of researchers from many different disciplines."

Mason Researcher Helps the SEC Walk the Talk

BY BENJAMIN KESSLER



To its credit, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is just as committed to promoting fairness and transparency in-house as it is to ambitious industry reforms. The agency even invites accounting academics to research its inner workings via the SEC Academic Fellowship Program.

Mason accounting professor and former SEC staff accountant **Bret Johnson** was selected for the year-long program starting in August 2020.

Johnson says, "My role was to be a liaison between the SEC and the academic community. Often, my research uncovers some problem or something they can improve on, some inefficiencies. And I found they are very open to embrace this type of research."

For example, Johnson's recent paper in *Review of Accounting Studies* finds that while the SEC's monitoring arm—the Division of Corporation Finance (DCF), where he worked for six years—seems to focus less on firms with a high percentage of retail ownership, the Division of Enforcement (DOE) appears to take a harder line with these firms. In other words, irregularities are less likely to be spotted early, and addressed through non-punitive means, when the firm in question has a larger proportion of retail investors.

This approach means that "Main Street" investors who hold disproportionate stock in the target company will lose out when the share price falls because of the publicized enforcement action. This runs counter to the SEC's stated mission to protect mom and pop investors.

Are Our Brains Wired to Work From Home?

BY BENJAMIN KESSLER



Catherine Cramton, professor emeritus of management at Mason's School of Business, says that if managers aren't careful, team communication and cohesion may be lost in the transition to hybrid and remote working.

Cramton's widely cited 2001 *Organization Science* paper matched George Mason University students with peers at other universities. Using the communication tools that existed at the time, the teams were assigned to create a concept, business plan, and marketing strategy for a new venture. The remote collaborations were far from harmonious. Seven of the 13 teams developed warring cliques. After the fact, email and chat logs allowed Cramton to follow the fireworks and trace how dust-ups got started.

Cramton explains that when we can't share physical space with a colleague, we know a lot less about their situation—which often determines why they do what they do (or don't do). So a cognitive tic called "attribution bias" kicks in to fill in the knowledge gap, causing us to draw conclusions about their character. When misunderstandings occur between physically distanced colleagues, "The tendency is to leap to a negative assumption, and those are mostly wrong," Cramton says.

"Our technology gives us so much information that we think we can see the truth in what it's giving us. And often we do, but now and then we don't," Cramton says. Thanks to the digital revolution, "the pace at which we're doing something is radically different. It's easy for us to forget that not everyone is on the group text."

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Building a "Digital Twin" of the Real World

BY BENJAMIN KESSLER



Jingyuan Yang, assistant professor of information systems and operations management at Mason, is at the forefront of AI research that aims to crack the codes of the physical world.

Several of her papers investigate urban bike sharing, which is a "last mile" extension of public transport systems designed to coax commuters out of their cars. With a team of six other researchers, Yang developed a data-driven model for predicting traffic flows within dockless bike-sharing systems based on a dataset provided by leading provider Mobike.

The research team extracted flow patterns from the data by partitioning the city and "smoothing out" areas with the lowest levels of activity. They then constructed base matrices that provided broader, deeper points of reference for prediction than temporal or geographic cues alone. Using the base matrix, for example, the algorithm could identify emergent patterns in a certain area as those associated with central business districts on a rainy holiday morning, and forecast bike traffic in that area over the next few hours accordingly.

"There are a number of surprising factors we can discover that cannot be covered by traditional model analysis. As an example, we find that there is a slight increase in bike traffic near subway stations during rain, because people want a shorter commute," Yang says. She suggests that building a chessboard-like "digital twin" of the real world can help business and society predict—and thus prevent—harmful losses.

The Distress Anomaly: Where Finance Theory Breaks Down

BY BENJAMIN KESSLER



Exceptions may prove the rule, but they must first be explained. That's why finance researchers are drawn to the distress anomaly—a well-documented phenomenon challenging the general rule of "high risk, high returns." Recent studies have shown that high-credit-risk securities for companies in distress—i.e., when their already low credit rating is being downgraded—realize abnormally low returns compared to non-distressed securities of the same or lower risk.

Mason's finance area chair **Alexander Philipov** recently published a paper in *Review of Finance* that is the first to show that the distress anomaly extends to corporate bonds. The researchers documented this by comparing the stock and bond portfolios of distressed firms with those of other portfolios.

The study shows that existing rationales for the distress anomaly are inconsistent with the return patterns of corporate bonds. Specifically, rationales involving value transfers from bondholders to stockholders are inconsistent with the data showing that both bonds and stocks of distressed firms are similarly overpriced.

The study also finds the distress anomaly implies real distortions in the real economy because corporate decisions are undertaken based on incorrect asset prices. These suboptimal decisions may include excess investments and overissuance of debt and equity. "We provide suggestive evidence that real distortions are not only economically significant but also severely understated if measured based on equity mispricing alone (as in previous studies). Adding bonds brings new light to the magnitude of these distortions," says Philipov.

Why Flexible Franchises Win in Financial Markets

BY CONNER ROY



If you've stayed at a brand-name hotel or eaten at a fast food restaurant recently, it's more likely than not that you've supported a franchised company. Franchising is a distribution strategy where a larger company, the franchisor, licenses the rights to its brand, products, and procedures to a smaller establishment, the franchisee, in return for an initial fee and ongoing share of sales revenues.

Stores change ownership from company-owned to franchised through a process called refranchising, and franchised stores are put back into company hands through buybacks. In a recent paper for the *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Mason's School of Business professor **Saurabh Mishra** is the first to connect refranchising and buyback decisions to stock market outcomes.

Mishra's analysis found that as a whole, the stock benefits of both were almost exactly equal. Refranchising and buybacks produced median share-price gains of $8 million and $8.1 million respectively on the day of announcement. Shareholder rewards were even greater for companies whose refranchising/buyback decisions aligned with their dealmaking leverage with franchisees.

Mishra's research tells us that the processes of refranchising and buybacks are not a one-way street, but instead tools of management a franchised business can use to maximize growth and shareholder value. "You need to keep balancing that mix based on changing market conditions and based on your own market conditions," Mishra says. "If you do that, it shows that you're agile, your distribution strategy is agile and the stock market rewards you for that."

Top Ten

The top ten most-cited Mason School of Business scholars have more than 55,000 citations in all.

Mason faculty demonstrate how we work ***All Together Different*** by leading research and creating partnerships to expand opportunities for the broader community.



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Understanding the Resistance to Remote Working

BY BENJAMIN KESSLER



Kevin Rockmann
Professor, Management

> Implementing remote work means rethinking and more importantly, defining, what it means for each and every person to be at work.

The recent rise of remote working is perhaps the biggest shake-up to professional work in generations, with its explosive effect amplified by the fact that it struck so suddenly. While the technology needed to work from most anywhere was widely available since the mid-2000s, the hold of physical offices persisted until the pandemic forced the issue.

Kevin Rockmann, professor of management at George Mason University School of Business, says, "From about 1997 or '98, until the pandemic, we see a very steady increase in the amount of telework and remote work. Every year during this time, data shows roughly a one-percent increase in terms of folks that were working at least some of the time from home. We know this from U.S. Census data and EU data."

He elaborates, "I think what we saw with this slow linear creep is that remote work is not really anchored to the technology. It was a slow diffusion, first among employees that wanted to work from various locations and were granted that autonomy by their employers, then secondarily amongst their coworkers who had less reason to work onsite. We also saw organizations going partially or fully virtual in order to save on real estate costs. Even with this, pre-pandemic numbers stayed relatively modest, despite easy access to technologies that facilitate remote work."

Now that the peak COVID-19 seems to be behind us, the resistance to remote work has re-emerged. According to LinkedIn data, the percentage of remote employees fell almost 20 points between January 2021 and January 2023. Advertisements for remote work positions on the platform decreased from 20 percent to 14 percent between February and September of 2022.

One defining theme of Rockmann's research career—dating back to his 2004 PhD dissertation—has been understanding this mysterious resistance. In his 2015 paper, "Contagious Offsite Work and the Lonely Office: The Unintended Consequences of Distributed Work" (co-written by Michael G. Pratt of Boston College), Rockmann found that for workers at a Silicon Valley tech firm, social pressures, not convenience, were driving the decision to work remotely. As the office became a lonelier place to work, employees opted to stay home when they otherwise would have preferred colocation with their colleagues.

Rockmann says, "What many are failing to understand is the point of that 2015 paper, which is, 'Okay, maybe you can do your job from home, but connecting with others is part of your job.' A lot of the unwritten part of someone's job is either helping somebody else do their task or actually providing some sort of support to somebody else. That is part of being in an organizational community."

That doesn't mean remote work resisters are necessarily correct. Rather, it indicates the need for managers to find creative solutions for keeping workers socially engaged. As Rockmann puts it, "Implementing remote work means rethinking and more importantly, defining, what it means for each and every person to be at work," whether a given employee is fully remote, on-site, or hybrid. This could be done, for example, by building social expectations into job descriptions.

Currently, Rockmann and a team of researchers are launching company-based field studies designed to discover how remote working arrangements are impacting employee well-being, and performance.

It's too soon to know what this ongoing research will reveal, but Rockmann has his hypotheses. "At Microsoft, they found that for the folks that were fully remote, after the pandemic their strong ties were just as strong, but their weak ties were far weaker. They weren't able to cultivate new ties, new acquaintances, new collaborations," he says.

For Rockmann, the Microsoft study seems to suggest that the impersonal nature of all-digital communication is at odds with social cohesion. On a day-to-day basis, employees may not need plentiful connections with colleagues to get their core tasks done. But the danger of a diminished social network is that "when you run into trouble, you're not going to have strong relationships to fall back on." While helpful, this only scratches the surface of describing what actually happens when individuals are remote or face to face with their coworkers, and, more importantly, how organizations might craft policies going forward.

Rockmann's research–both published and in progress–works toward helping companies analyze and address this challenge, so that they can successfully manage the best remote work environment for them.

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"An Examination of the Dynamics of Crowdsourcing Contests"
Information Systems Research

Experiential Learning Program Receives Second CCI Grant in Cybersecurity

BY GREG JOHNSON, '13

> It's more than a class project. It's real-world experience that you can put on your resume which will set you apart from your peers.
>
> — Brian Ngac

In a region teeming with industry giants and businesses of all sizes, the School of Business offers experiential learning (EXL) opportunities that give students hands-on training with real projects at real organizations. In the spring 2021 semester, the information systems and operations management (ISOM) area at the School of Business began its Experiential Learning: Solving Business Challenges with Technology Solutions course, giving students the ability to work on technology and data analytics projects with industry practitioners (often referred to as clients) in search of solutions for their business challenges. This course, developed and taught by ISOM instructor **Brian Ngac**, PMP, C|CISO, CISSP, focuses on business process improvement, data analytics, and cybersecurity projects. "It's more than a group project," Ngac says. "It's more than a class project. It's real-world experience that you can put on your resume that will set you apart from your peers."

The three-credit elective course is currently being offered as MIS 491, and is open to students in the management information systems (MIS) and business analytics (BA) concentrations within the undergraduate business degree. To participate in this course, students must be recommended by a professor of one of ISOM's technical courses and receive a B or higher in their Systems Analysis & Design course—a class focused on business process improvement through technology solution integration. When participating in this course, students will spend 10 weeks working with their clients to understand their specific business challenges, architect a solution for those challenges, show how and why their recommended solution will solve their client's business challenges and by how much, as well as provide an implementation roadmap for their recommended solution. The remaining five weeks are set aside for introductions at the beginning of the semester, as well as client and internal school presentations of the EXL effort and lessons learned. Through weekly meetings with their clients and instructors, the pedagogy allows the students to quickly provide tangible progress and receive feedback periodically, which allows them to adjust to their client's changing requirements.

The success of the elective course in terms of clients' interests and satisfaction and students' interests led to the establishment of the ISOM Experiential Learning Program. The core principle of tangible weekly progress and periodic feedback grounds the EXL Program to keep it agile, challenging, and relevant for both the students and the industry participants.

The EXL Program is now available not only to





Brian Ngac and Nirup Menon

Mason students, but also to students at other institutions in the commonwealth, made possible by a grant from Commonwealth Cyber Initiative (CCI). Back in June 2022, Ngac and one of his academic-career mentors, **Nirup Menon**, an ISOM professor, were awarded the CCI Cybersecurity Experiential Learning Grant worth $100,000, which was used to fund cybersecurity internships with multiple industry participants in the spring 2023 semester. In May 2023, a second $100,000 grant award from CCI helps provide an additional 24 cybersecurity-interested students (12 in the fall 2023 semester and 12 in the spring 2024 semester) with the opportunity to work directly with the CCI community and cyber industry partners through a paid 12-week part-time internship—allowing for a real-world, hands-on, and agile learning environment.

To participate in the cybersecurity internship, students will apply as if they are applying for any other internship. The students' resumes are then reviewed by Ngac and Menon before being further reviewed by the industry participants. The industry participants will then hold interviews for those students who pass the resume screening stage. Finally, students who pass the interview stages will be offered the cybersecurity internship with the industry participant who interviewed them. Those who are accepted as a cybersecurity intern through the EXL program will receive a $2,500 stipend from the grant, and the industry participants are required to match or exceed that financial support.

Unlike the elective ISOM course, the cybersecurity internship requires the students to work with the clients for 20 hours per week during their 12-week part-time internship. This allows the students to truly experience an internship setting, which results in even more benefits for the students and their industry participants. At the end of their internship, each intern team (grouped by industry participant) will create and give a presentation on their internship activities, experiences, and lessons learned to a group of academics and industry professionals. Moreover, specific to the cybersecurity internship program funded by the CCI grant, an event will be held in April 2024 where the cybersecurity interns, their industry participants, and other cyber professionals invited by Ngac, will get together at Top Golf to network, eat, and play golf.

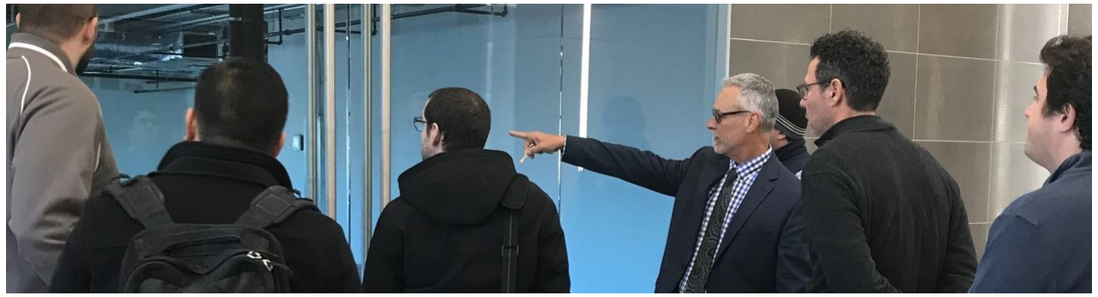
The EXL Program has seen tremendous results since its inception in spring of 2021. So far there have been 20 industry participants, which range in size and come from sectors including real estate, defense contracting, nonprofit, government agencies, and more. And from those participants there have been 24 projects, enabling students to offer real solutions, while being mentored in the process. This second consecutive grant focusing on cybersecurity will bring in more participants. "Many students have had job offers immediately following the experiential learning program from their industry partners or clients," says Ngac. "For others, it's a great resume booster. Everyone who I've seen graduate from the program has put it on their resume and has easily gotten a job."

"I am very proud to see the Experiential Learning Program impact over 70 of our students' early careers. And I am very honored to have organizations like the Commonwealth Cyber Initiative recognize our hard work through the multiple grant awards, which fund our student's labor effort and very important networking events. I have big dreams of what this program can grow into in the coming years, and how much impact it can have not only in our students' lives but also on the industries we serve," Ngac says.

If you are interested in supporting the Experiential Learning Program, please contact Brian Ngac at bngac@gmu.edu.

Learning by Experience: Students Raise $1.25 Million for Student-Managed Real Estate Fund

BY ERIC MARIBOJOC



While most students were taking the summer break from their studies in 2022, the student managers of Patriot Real Estate Funds raised $1.25 million for the second student-managed real estate investment fund at George Mason University. Mason's student real estate fund is one of only a few similar programs offered at universities across the country.

The Center for Real Estate Entrepreneurship (CREE) at the School of Business established the student-managed real estate investment fund program in 2018 to provide students of the Master's in Real Estate Development (MRED) Program with a unique experiential learning opportunity. With real money raised from outside investors, the students study, recommend, and manage investments in commercial real estate properties in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area.

"The class is an education on the wide variety of risks and returns from different commercial real estate property types," says **Eric Maribojoc**, the executive director of CREE. "The students have looked at apartment, office, retail, self-storage, and industrial deals. They learn investment and asset management skills. They have professional interactions with industry executives and professionals."

The first fund, Patriot Real Estate Fund I, raised $750,000 in 2018. By 2022, the 40 students who went through the program had fully invested the funds in ten properties, among them a medical office property in Gainesville, Virginia; an apartment building under construction in Washington, D.C.; and an established shopping center in suburban Baltimore, Maryland. In June 2022, the current student managers raised $1.25 million for a new fund, Patriot Real Estate Fund II, which will extend this experiential learning opportunity for new generations of real estate students at Mason.

"The student fund has been one of my favorite experiences in the MRED program. Its real-world application is invaluable. It is an amazing educational tool and resume booster," says **Hanna Picardi**, MS Real Estate Development '22. "I learned how to analyze a potential investment from A to Z, how to manage that investment over time, and how to determine if we're getting paid for the risks we may take on. I learned not only from the professor, but also through my peers, through interviews with sponsors, through committee board members, and through visits to investment sites."

Rod Alemi, MS Real Estate Development '20, agrees on the program's educational benefits and impact on students' careers. "The student fund plays a vital role in cultivating up-and-coming real estate professionals going through the MRED program," says Alemi. "It enhances the value of the MRED program by providing real-world investment opportunities for students interested in pursuing the real estate investments and acquisitions career path." After graduating from the MRED program, Alemi successfully moved from his job at a construction firm to a real estate investment company.

Tyler Kasak, MS Real Estate Development '18, values the experiential learning opportunity. "The fact that we were dealing with real capital really forced us to be extremely thoughtful and thorough when looking at potential investment opportunities," says Kasak. "Pitching a potential deal to the highly experienced investment committee taught me how to prepare and answer important questions. That experience was tough and a little nerve-wracking, but extremely rewarding. The experience had such a positive effect on me. I was pleased to hear about the second fund, which will continue to offer more students the amazing experience I was granted."

Since the start of the second fund in the summer of 2022, the student fund managers have invested in an affordable rental townhouse project in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Beginning with the spring 2023 semester, this unique experiential learning opportunity is now available to senior undergraduates who are taking real estate elective classes or who are taking the minor in real estate to serve as fund associates for the second fund.

For more information about the student-managed real estate investment fund, please contact Eric Maribojoc at rmariboj@gmu.edu.

School of Business Confers More Than 1,100 Degrees

BY JENNIFER BRAUN ANZALDI

The School of Business celebrated 1,157 graduates, which included 832 undergraduate students, 219 graduate students, and 106 students earning certificates, at a ceremony on May 20 at EagleBank Arena. These new graduates join a School of Business network of more than 36,000 alumni, 70% of whom live in the Northern Virginia region. At Mason, we welcome students from all backgrounds and take pride in graduation rates that exceed the national average. Part of what makes us *All Together Different* is that there are no disparities in academic success rates among the differing ethnic groups or socioeconomic statuses of our students.

Most undergraduate students in this graduating class began their degree in person, pivoted to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and then many returned to hybrid learning. Graduating students had to learn the meaning of resilience, and accept change throughout the course of their education. "You all have weathered some incredibly challenging times and through hard work and determination you have succeeded," said Dean **Ajay Vinzé**.

"I often say 'Everything is business,' and as business school graduates these words have a special meaning for you. Regardless of where your career aspirations and choices may lead, you will be in the business of something," said Dean Vinzé. "I have every confidence that the education you have received here at George Mason University will enable you to lead anywhere. You are prepared, you are ready, and as the class of 2023, you will make us proud."

Featured speakers at the degree celebration included **Amy Gilliland**, president of General Dynamics Information Technology (GDIT), graduating MBA student **Alexis Anyang-Kusi**, and president of the School of Business Alumni Chapter, **Pam Maple**, MBA '09.

Gilliland, a recognized innovative leader in the aerospace and defense industry and former member of the U.S. Navy, is currently the vice chair of the Northern Virginia Technology Council and recognized as one of *Virginia Business* magazine's 50 Most Influential Virginians, a Washington Tech Titan, and is a five-time Wash100 award winner. GDIT employs more than 500 Mason alumni.



Photo by John Boal Photography



Photo by John Boal Photography

Gilliland told graduates not to let a predetermined career path or timeline prevent them from pursuing a career they love, and to recognize that everyone is struggling with something. "It's okay to not know exactly what your plan or purpose is now, next year, or even five years from now," she said. "Be open to unconventional or unplanned opportunities even if you do not feel fully qualified."

Graduate student Alexis Anyang-Kusi, a first-generation African American student, dedicated her degree to her father, who came to Mason in 1982 from Ghana on a student visa. She said, "I was always very aware of my privilege and the amazing opportunities I had in this country. I feel blessed to gain this education but to also share it with the world." She implored her fellow graduates to remember their shared responsibility. "We must use our skills and knowledge to make a positive impact on the world, to create opportunities for others, and to drive change."

School of Business Alumni Chapter president Pam Maple, welcomed the new graduates into the Alumni Association. A dedicated Mason Patriot and the founder and president of Zero Energy, Maple is an accomplished entrepreneur and leader in the field of sustainable and renewable energy.

"Inspiration is intangible as it means something different to each of us and its value is unique to the individual. But inspiration is the harbinger of motivation," said Maple. "It's because of my mother that inspiring others through higher education is so important to me. This is also why I choose to be active in the Alumni Chapter, to learn from others and give something back to the institution that gave so much to me. Continue to keep your eyes and minds open to new sources of inspiration."

W Visit business.gmu.edu/ImpactFall23 for more content.

opening the doors to SUCCESS

Career Services/Alumni Partnership

BY KERRY WILLIGAN, ASSISTANT DEAN, CAREER SERVICES

The School of Business Office of Career Services is a perfect place for alumni to get involved and support our students as they navigate their professional and career development.

MasonMentors

Career Services continues to expand our online mentorship program, MasonMentors. Over the past year we've seen our alumni participant number rise to over 300 active alumni members who help our 630 student mentees. MasonMentors continues to offer students the chance to build relationships with professionals who can offer insight into career-related topics. This program supports students and alumni as they collaborate and grow professionally through an array of dynamic connections.

- MasonMentors had a 59% response rate with 50% of the alumni having a mentorship connection
- Powered by PeopleGrove, an online platform similar to LinkedIn
- Program expansion planned to include graduate programs starting in fall 2023
- To sign up or for additional information, go to masonmentors.gmu.edu

Events and Internships

Our students gain experience and understanding in the global business environment not only through academic courses, but also through experiential learning and participation in our employer-related programs and events.

- ProfessionalQuest is our event series where students interact with employers across multiple industry sectors while building their professional network. Students get information about employment opportunities and attend a panel discussion where panelists share insights and answer questions. Contact Kerry Willigan at kwilliga@gmu.edu for the schedule or to sign up as a panelist.
- Employer in Residence: We invite employers to have a table outside the School of Business Career Services suite. We'll let students know you'll be visiting! Employers are welcome to use our Employer in Residence office for one-on-one interactions, resume critiques, or mock interviews.
- Internship for Credit: The Internship for Credit Class (BUS 492) is a 3-credit course designed to give students the opportunity to gain practical, professional experience in conjunction with their academic endeavors. Employers interested in providing an internship should reach out to School of Business Career Services for details.

Hiring Our Students

Career Services focuses on student career success in a global business environment, whether they want to work for a Fortune 500 company, a government agency or start an entrepreneurial venture. Alumni seeking a top-level executive or a summer intern should contact the School of Business Office of Career Services. We can help you interact with students and alumni who are bright, resourceful, and prepared to make immediate contributions to your organization's mission. The Career Services team will work with individual organizations to create the best recruiting strategy to meet your hiring needs.

- Post your internship or full-time position on the Business Buzz Blog. Career Services can send targeted emails to faculty and students to alert them to your post.

Handshake continues to be the university-wide job and internship listing site. Employers are encouraged to create an account and post jobs and internships. Go to business.gmu.edu/career-resources/ and click on the Handshake link to get started.

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