

WINTER 2014

insight

INTEGRATIVE THINKING | EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING | GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING

EXPERIENCES THAT MATTER



**OAKLAND
UNIVERSITY**
School of Business
Administration



inside this issue

- Meet Dean Mazzeo
- Creating business professionals
- International trips change lives
- A focus on big data



MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

I'm impressed.

Since joining Oakland University's School of Business Administration in August, I've met many alumni, students, faculty, employers and friends of the school. After each meeting, I am left with a greater sense of the tremendous impact OU's business school has on so many lives. Each meeting further intensifies our motivation to elevate our school from its "hidden gem" status to a school recognized for its strengths, and the success and contributions of its graduates.



Each person I've spoken with has taken time to tell me what makes OU special to them and why they choose to stay connected to us. Alumni have shared personal stories about how their Oakland experience has contributed to their career success — what they learned here, the experiences they had, the individual attention they received, and the support and genuine caring they were given in tough personal times. Students say the opportunities here extend far beyond those their friends have at other institutions. Employers tell me they seek out our graduates because of their business knowledge, skills and the fact they're ready and willing to work hard.

No matter who I'm talking with, though, another message consistently comes out: Not enough people know about the great things happening here and the opportunities available.

As we enter 2014, I'm looking forward to connecting with more alumni and friends, to hear your stories and your vision of what OU's business school can be. With your input and support, we can work together to raise its profile so our school will be widely recognized as the high-caliber business school that it is.

I believe strongly Oakland's business school is a launching pad for career success. It's not about students getting their first job out of college — but starting graduates on the path to a satisfying and successful career.

Michael A. Mazzeo
Dean, School of Business Administration
Oakland University

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Dean Michael A. Mazzeo says OU's business school is focused on graduating skilled, knowledgeable business professionals.

Michael A. Mazzeo means business

Michael A. Mazzeo, Ph.D., joined Oakland University's School of Business Administration as dean in mid-August. Mazzeo comes to OU from the Michigan State University Eli Broad College of Business. A veteran university administrator, published researcher, and an expert in finance, corporate restructuring, and mergers and acquisitions, he brings more than 30 years of experience to Oakland University.

An award-winning teacher with a strong record of championing professional skills programs to increase the value of graduates to employers, Mazzeo's achievements include strengthening alumni relationships, cultivating business partnerships, developing executive education programs, and advancing study abroad and outreach opportunities. In his 23 years at MSU, Mazzeo served in various roles, including associate dean for Undergraduate Programs and Finance, acting associate dean for Undergraduate Programs, interim chairperson of the Department of Finance, and associate professor. Prior to MSU, Mazzeo was an assistant professor at Indiana University.

Mazzeo earned a Bachelor of Arts in economics from the State University College at Buffalo, and a Master of Arts in economics and a Ph.D. in finance from the State University of New York at Buffalo. He lives in Okemos, Mich., with his wife, Kathleen, who serves as associate director of finance and operations at MSU's Student Health Services. He has two adult daughters who are graduates of the Eli Broad College of Business: One works for The Hershey Company, while the other works for the electric and gas company Constellation Energy.

What are the strengths of Oakland University's business school?

OU's School of Business Administration holds dual accreditation from AACSB-International for its business and accounting programs, and its faculty is top-notch. It draws talented students, has an involved and engaged Board of Visitors and is

surrounded by a business community that offers great opportunities for students. The accreditation means the business school was externally evaluated, and the curriculum is current, relevant and diverse.

It has passed muster. The caliber of our faculty is also excellent. Because of those factors, employers want to hire our graduates. In addition, the school offers its students unparalleled experiences, including a low student-to-faculty ratio, which allows for high human touch interactions, individualized support and attention, and exposure to high-caliber academics, programs and experiences.

What do employers look for in business school graduates?

Employers have told me they want proficient professionals who can get the job done. Half of the student experience at a business school involves developing that proficiency in the classroom — we have that covered here. The other half occurs through the professional experiences students have while they are here. This includes career internships, consultancies and career-professional preparedness programs. I'd like to expand the high-quality programs already in place to ensure business students in all disciplines can take advantage of a wealth of professional development activities and experiences.

What is your vision for the school?

We can't go wrong if we look at providing more opportunities to keep our students engaged on campus, build more robust professional development programs, enhance support services and provide more hands-on experiences for students.

We are preparing students for careers — not just their first job after graduation. Our focus is on graduating skilled, knowledgeable business professionals with the same precision a medical school prepares specialized doctors. From the curriculum to the hands-on experiences and from internships to career placement, we are intensely

focused on giving Oakland business students the tools to succeed. I want our students to know from the time they are admitted to OU's business school through to graduation, they will evolve from a college student to a professional ready to launch a successful career.

I'm also focused on working to find more ways to support to our talented faculty in their scholarly activities. A strong, active faculty is the backbone of a successful business school.

How do you see the school evolving?

To complement our student-centric mission, I would love for us to offer more physical places for students to gain experience in Elliott Hall — spaces for programs that tie into the curriculum, like a trading floor or supply chain center. I also would like to expand the international experiences available to our students. Business is global, and it is imperative for business students to have international experience and be able to lead in a global environment.

From a graduate school perspective, it is important to continue to offer MBAs as well as other career enhancement opportunities. We are moving toward a more custom education environment for graduate students and professionals.

Where do we go from here?

OU's School of Business Administration is a bit of a hidden gem. My goals are to enhance student-centered activities, research intensity, partnerships with external communities and the visibility of the school. I view my role as the chief marketing officer. I get to share our faculty and students' good news. I am also the chief supporter. I am here to help faculty members achieve their goals by encouraging their scholarship and connecting the dots between their scholarship, their expertise, student experiences and the needs of the business community. ■

Programs and experiences transform students to business professionals



Management information systems senior Lauren Wolf is well-prepared for her career thanks to the programs available at OU's School of Business Administration.

Learning doesn't end in the classroom for management information systems senior Lauren Wolf. Since enrolling at Oakland University in 2010, she has discovered opportunities to complement her business education throughout Oakland University's School of Business Administration.

From faculty and alumni mentorship, to cocurricular and extracurricular programs, punctuated with first-rate advising and support services, Wolf is charting a path to success. As a recipient of OU's prestigious Presidential Scholarship, a four-year, full-tuition award, she wasted no time getting involved.

She has held a number of internships, most recently as an analyst intern at Improvement Path Systems in Bingham Farms, Mich., where she analyzes data for the health care industry. It's a position one of her business professors steered her toward. She's also on staff at OU's Kresge Library, providing user support services on its 300 computers.

CHARTING A CAREER

Wolf is committed to making her résumé stand out. She admits to attending every career fair Oakland's Career Services team has hosted. "I figured it was good experience to learn how to interview," she explains.

It helped. Her impressive work history also includes a stint at Ford Motor Co. as an IT analyst intern, a position she acquired through a campus career fair. She also worked at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan as a corporate marketing and customer experience intern, for the City of Rochester as a local government management internship, and at OU's School of Education and Human Services as a grant writing intern.

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

When comparing her college experience with that of her friends enrolled at other universities, Wolf observes that the business education and experiences she's getting at Oakland University are definitely more personal, active, involved and focused.

"I am well-prepared. Not just for my first position after graduation," she says, "but for my career.

"I truly believe that Oakland University's business school provides so many professional development opportunities because it wants its students to succeed in their careers, not just go to class and graduate," Wolf adds.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

When asked about her most meaningful student experiences, Wolf doesn't hesitate. Her top two are the business school's required ACHIEVE (Accomplish Career Hopes Including Excellent Valued Employment) professional development program and her involvement in the student organization TALK (Technology and Leadership Keys).

ACHIEVE is a three-class, zero-credit, mandatory career preparation and exploration curriculum for OU business students. It provides opportunities for students to get individual feedback from mentors, assistance with résumé building, mock interview sessions, financial literacy lessons, networking opportunities and work experience stories shared by guest speakers.

"The program is geared toward helping students reach their competitive advantage," explains Sherril Kerby, ACHIEVE education coordinator.

"It's important because there is more to getting a job after graduation than completing all the required course work," Kerby continues. "There is professional development, personal growth and

expanding your horizons. ACHIEVE tries to help students learn those things and provide building blocks to achieve their goals."

Wolf's involvement and leadership as president of TALK complements the skills she's building in ACHIEVE. "I've definitely improved my leadership skills and discovered how to plan a meeting and persuade a guest speaker to attend," she says.

NECESSARY NETWORKING

Recent graduate Casey Korzen, Management '12, emphasizes the positive impact of Oakland University's ACHIEVE program.

"Without ACHIEVE, I wouldn't be in my current position," she says. Korzen is a resourcer at Talascend LLC in Troy, Mich., where she helps recruiters mine candidates for jobs.

"I got the job through networking, which is something the ACHIEVE program at OU's business school repeatedly drilled into our heads — the importance of networking," she says.

She goes on to explain. While working at her college position as an assistant manager at Abercrombie & Fitch, Korzen, a human resources management minor, established a network that connected her to a vice president of sales at Talascend. That connection landed her the interview; her professionalism got her the position.

PITCH PERFECT

Korzen was prepared for that encounter because ACHIEVE helped her polish her answer to a ubiquitous interview question, "Tell me about yourself." Developing and perfecting a 90-second pitch about herself was an important drill in one of her ACHIEVE courses.

"I had to imagine being on an elevator with a potential employer and I had 90 seconds to convince that person I was right for the job," Korzen recalls.

ACHIEVE's mock interview sessions taught Korzen how to parlay her school projects into examples of real-life work experience.

"I never realized I could use my school experience in a job interview," she says. "ACHIEVE opened my eyes on how to jump-start my career."

"ACHIEVE teaches you the lessons you don't learn in class. You learn how to behave and act as a young professional so you don't mess up in your first couple of years," Wolf says. "Oakland University's business school programs help transform you into a professional and pave a pathway to future success." ■

By Rene Wisely

Mentorship, scholarship and hands-on experience creates environment for success



OU senior William Gross has fully immersed himself in the wealth of experiences OU has to offer.

OU senior William Gross is very clear about the kind of business professional he plans to be. "Whatever I do, I want to be a good leader," Gross says. "I want to be a person who people can look up to and trust."

Gross, who grew up in Sterling Heights, Mich., believes he is evolving into that kind of leader thanks to the education, hands-on opportunities and professional development programs available at Oakland University's School of Business Administration (SBA).

"I love Oakland University because it gives me an opportunity to be in an environment where I can succeed," Gross says.

RICH EXPERIENCES

The oldest of four children, Gross is the first member of his immediate family to attend college. He takes the charge seriously, refusing to waste any opportunity.

Gross, who is preparing to graduate in December 2014 with a major in finance and a minor in applied technology in business, has fully immersed himself in the wealth of experiences OU has to offer.

"Looking back, beyond taking classes, my involvement in student organizations has been one of my most worthwhile activities," Gross says. "The responsibility of being president of the SBA's Society for Applied Investing and Financial Education (SAIFE) student chapter really helped me mature."

His additional activities included the Golden Key International Honour Society and Alpha Lambda Delta, the national honor society for first-year students.

Living on campus was also valuable. "You learn to be your own person when you live on campus," says Gross. "That's when you discover who you are."

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Gross also recognizes the value of the many professional development opportunities available through the SBA and has taken advantage of many, including the business school's required ACHIEVE professional development program and its selective Scholars program.

That's where he met Chris Valmassoi, SBA '09, who has served as Gross' mentor since 2012.

"William is obviously an up-and-coming student," says Valmassoi, a senior treasury analyst at La-Z-Boy. "He's come a long way in his confidence and his willingness to approach business professionals."

Gross knows the guidance of an experienced business professional is invaluable.

"Chris' mentorship means a lot to me," Gross says. "As I progress through my career, I will make many mistakes and have many questions. Since Chris has already 'been there, done that,' so to speak, I have complete confidence he will be able to guide me."

HELP ALONG THE WAY

While Gross is starting to see the results of his hard work and drive, he says he never will forget the support that is making his successes possible.

Gross earned two OU scholarships — the SBA Tower Scholarship and the OU Sharf Scholarship — and holds a product analysis internship with Chrysler.

"I will be forever grateful for the scholarships," says Gross. "They helped so much."

Thanks to the Chrysler internship, Gross observes this was the first semester he hasn't had to ask his family for financial support to make ends meet. "Money is tight, though," he adds. "When gas and food prices go up, I feel it."

STILL DRIVEN

Gross is still fine tuning his career goals, but plans to eventually start his own company. "I want to find something I'm passionate about and build a business around it," he says.

He'll tackle those goals the same way he approached his college education — with drive, enthusiasm and a plan of action.

"It's important to think about what you want in life and then do whatever you can to achieve it," Gross says. ■

By Flori Meeks

"I love Oakland University because it gives me an opportunity to be in an environment where I can succeed."

— William Gross



A finance major, Gross values the guidance of mentor Chris Valmassoi, SBA '09, senior treasury analyst at La-Z-Boy (right).

International education equips students for global economy

"Life-changing." That's how Jim Deakin, MIS '87, MBA '13, describes the trip to Europe he took as part of an Oakland University international business course last spring. "There's no way to teach someone the experiences we had."

Deakin was among a group of undergraduate and graduate business students who visited the Czech Republic, France, Germany and Poland with Joy Jiang, assistant professor, international business, and Frank Cardimen, special instructor.

"It's so critically important for students to be exposed to other cultures," says Jiang. "Many of our students come to Oakland University from within a 60-mile radius. They were born here and grew up here. Even if they never work outside of Oakland County, they will work with people from China or England or somewhere else in the world. The sooner they have international exposure, the better."

GAINING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Doing business with other countries is different than doing business in the United States, and it requires a different mindset, Cardimen emphasizes.

"It's a difference of culture, language, currency, history, geography. It's a difference you can't teach through books," he adds. "You have to feel it. You have to see it. You have to hear it through other people. You have to experience the culture and learn about the history."

The trips made available to Oakland's business students expose them to these differences and give them the experiences and insights they'll need to thrive in today's increasingly global business environment.

INTENTIONAL TOURISTS

Every stop the students made during their travels was designed to illustrate a different nuance of international business and culture.

The Europe trip included visits with European companies and government agencies, as well as U.S. companies that operate abroad. Organizations included Cisco Systems, Eli Lilly & Co., Institut Pasteur, Kelly Services, Faurecia, GE's European research center, United Airlines and more. Students also met with business and government leaders.



Oakland University students visited Old Town Prague, Czech Republic (above), and Place du Trocadero, Paris (below).

"We were exposed to the subtleties of the different plants, how they operated," Deakin says. "We were also exposed culturally and socially."

Despite the varying perspectives and business approaches she observed, senior operations management major Paula Tomkiel discovered the business leaders she encountered abroad shared a number of common priorities with those in the U.S.

"The international leaders we met talked about many of the same things we discuss in class at Oakland University, such as lean operations and efficiency," she says. "I was very impressed with how forward and innovative the companies were."

Tomkiel knows the international experiences she and her fellow SBA students shared will give them a distinct advantage in the job market.

"Thanks to this trip, I'm confident I'm better prepared to launch a career in operations management," Tomkiel says. "Experience overseas is critical to being a global leader."

"The experience opens eyes," says Cardimen. "The students gain valuable knowledge, which can translate into job opportunities."

VALUABLE INVESTMENT

As beneficial as international travel is, there is a significant financial investment required, which can put it out of reach for Oakland students who juggle work and school commitments.

Contributions from a small group of local business professionals have helped offset the cost of trips for students over the years. These supporters understand the value of international travel for business students and want to help make it affordable.

The students appreciate the assistance.

"It helped a lot with the costs for hotels and plane tickets," Tomkiel says. "What I spent was 100 percent worth it. It will help me meet the demands of global industry. It gave me the ability to function in a multicultural setting."

Deakin, who also traveled to China with Jiang in 2012, feels the same way.

"I can't imagine a better use of my time or money," he says. "Wherever I work, there will be international interactions. Now, I'll have a better idea of who the people are and how the businesses function." ■

By Flori Meeks



Global Business Brigades | Empowering lives through economic development

This summer, 16 Oakland University students and faculty members joined together to help workers in a rural Panama community gain the business skills necessary to grow their coffee business, all the while learning firsthand about economic development.

Economics major Daniel Ellis and Master of Accounting student Rebecca Braga, ACC '13, co-led the university's first Global Business Brigade. They focused on creating business education workshops and doling out advice on how to improve buying power despite living in an under-resourced community with deep cultural roots.

The Global Business Brigades is the fourth Global Brigades program at Oakland University. OU students have also participated in Global Brigade initiatives in the medical, public health and architecture arenas.

"This experience is a life-changing opportunity for students of all majors," says Laura Collier, an OU graduate and representative for Global Brigades. "Not only are students able to apply their classroom knowledge to real world challenges, but they're also making a difference directly in these communities."

LESSONS OF A LIFETIME

"It was absolutely one of the best experiences of my life," says Braga. "I learned so much in seven days."

As the business brigade leaders, Braga and Ellis recruited OU students to help the workers in Guacuco Guna, a village three hours outside of Panama City. While the rural town — complete with thatched-roof huts — recently received legal status for its credit and savings cooperative, the students taught them accounting, marketing and leadership.

Much of the preparation took place before the group even set foot in Panama. The team held monthly meetings to learn more about Panama and prepare for their brigade jobs, even hosting a car wash fundraiser to buy teaching materials. "We packed 50 pencil boxes filled with an accounting ledger and a notebook, tools they could use while we were teaching them, and it sent a signal that we were there to help," Ellis explains.



Oakland University students and faculty members traveled to Guacuco Guna, a village three hours outside of Panama City, to teach business skills to local workers.



The Global Brigades program provided the most valuable tool — translators. One translated English to Spanish, and a villager translated the Spanish to the workers' native tongue, Kuna.

CHANGING LIVES, GAINING SKILLS

Oakland University business students changed lives while also gaining the global knowledge and experience coveted by employers in today's international marketplace.

Braga improved how to think on her feet and adjust her message based on feedback, often based on her ability to read body language since she had to communicate through translators.

"I grew immensely as a leader," she says. "I learned to delegate. I learned how to persuade. I learned how to get the best out of a group of different people." She also gained skills in event planning, recruiting and more.

So did Ellis, who has a long history of jumping in to help. He is a senior airman in Michigan's Air National Guard, a Salvation Army tutor and a Habitat for Humanity volunteer. He excelled at earning the trust of the community. His management skills impressed the elders, who presented him with a straw hat at the end of the week signifying his distinguished place in the community.

The elders and women of the village also honored Braga with a religious symbol showing their appreciation and respect for her leadership role in the brigade.

"The real world is often the best classroom."

— Daniel Ellis, economics major

A SOLID FOUNDATION

The duo began cultivating these skills through their Oakland University business education, particularly the experiential learning opportunities they have enjoyed. Both are SBA Scholars, a three-part program that teaches leadership and analytical skills to undergraduates and pairs them with a mentor. Both have also completed multiple internships.

The Panama trip was Ellis' second brigade. He traveled to Honduras last year with the OU Architecture Brigade, where he moved dirt and bricks.

"The Panama trip was more impactful for me because it challenged my mind," Ellis says. "I got to see community members using what we taught them. When we got there, they had 98 members in their co-op. When we left, they had 102 members because of our marketing lessons."

The villagers weren't the only winners, adds Dr. Mark Simon, professor of management and entrepreneurship, and the adviser on the Business Brigade. "The growth I saw in the students was incredible. The job they did in a week in a totally different culture where they didn't even speak the language — they were able to make both a short-term and a major long-term impact on that village. It was amazing."

Ellis agrees, "The real world is often the best classroom there is. I'm all about experiential learning." ■

By Rene Wisely

At press time, a small group of OU business students are continuing to partner with village residents by helping them cultivate, market and export the coffee grown in the village. Learn more at facebook.com/cafedekuna.



Big data offers big opportunities for students in innovative master's program



Ali Bahreman (right) graduated from OU's MSITM/BA first class in June 2013. Dr. Mohammad Dadashzadeh (left), chair, OU's Department of Decision and Information Sciences, runs the innovative program.

Knowledge is power. And in today's competitive marketplace, understanding how to gather and interpret knowledge is even more powerful.

C-suite leaders across the globe recognize the profit potential when they hire employees skilled in one of today's fastest growing fields: business analytics (BA). No longer satisfied with simply collecting data, companies are seeking professionals who harness every available data point to improve processes, save costs or enhance revenues.

Oakland University has taken a proactive approach to preparing the next generation of experts. In 2012, OU's School of Business Administration added the Business Analytics track to its Master of Science in Information Technology Management program. The MSITM/BA track offers business professionals — and recent undergraduates — the opportunity to attain these in-demand skills through a specialized program.

The job market appears fertile. A 2011 study by the McKinsey Global Institute predicts that by 2018, the United States will face a shortage of more than 1.5 million managers, analysts and other workers steeped in analytics.

FOCUSED, CONVENIENT, ACCELERATED

The beauty of OU's cutting-edge, business analytics-focused program is that it takes only one year to complete 10 specific courses. Half the classes are online, the other half are taught in a traditional classroom setting, explains Dr. Mohammad Dadashzadeh, chair, Department of Decision and

Information Sciences at Oakland University.

The in-state tuition for all students — including international — is another distinct advantage. Students worldwide have taken note. The program is attracting applicants from India, Pakistan and Nigeria, as well as across Michigan and the United States.

All are drawn to the rigorous curriculum focusing on data warehousing, business intelligence, big data management, predictive and prescriptive analytics, and application systems analysis and design.

"We also have an excellent faculty to deliver this expertise," Dadashzadeh says.

EXPERIENCE COUNTS

Oakland's MISTM/BA students get hands-on experience thanks to a unique partnership with MSX International of Warren, Mich. They complete a capstone project through an MSXI internship where they are charged with solving an analytics problem for a real-world client.

"By providing internships for Oakland University's business analytics students, we're helping the next generation of workers build critical skills while providing sound data and analysis to help our clients innovate and make solid business decisions," says Brendan Walsh, vice president and chief information officer, MSX International.

Ali Bahreman is one of those next generation workers. He graduated from OU's MSITM/BA inaugural class in June 2013. He completed the

online courses from home in Las Vegas, and traveled from Nevada for the on-campus courses. Through his capstone project for MSXI, he assisted with exploratory data analysis to develop a predictive model for extended warranty maintenance plan termination forecasting in car dealerships. MSXI's Walsh was so impressed, he promptly offered Bahreman a consulting job.

"They saw a value in what I produced and know I am a hard worker," Bahreman says.

IN DEMAND

MSXI's patience is further proof that business analyst skills are high on an employer's wish list.

Although Bahreman declined the job offer due to a scheduled extended vacation across the United States and Puerto Rico, MSXI left the door open for him. "They said they are willing to wait for me," he says.

Michael McClure, director of West Consulting Services for QlikTech, a global data analysis firm, is currently an OU MSITM/BA student. Already employed in the field at an organization listed by Forbes as one of the top three fastest-growing tech firms in 2012, McClure's reason for enrolling is two-fold: evaluate potential employees, while also learning about new tools in the data analysis industry.

"Oakland's MSITM/BA program really interested me because it's uniquely focused on business analytics. There aren't too many programs like that," McClure says. "Business analytics is such an area of high growth, and Oakland University's business school is right on the front line." ■

By Rene Wisely

GAINING VISIBILITY

The School of Business Administration's Master of Science in Information Technology Management/Business Analytics track is raising visibility for Oakland University.

SiliconANGLE, a news site for the technology industry, named Oakland as one of 11 universities that specialize in data science, analytics and business intelligence. It shares the list with such powerhouses as Carnegie Mellon University, Fordham University and New York University.

The Institute for Business and Information Technology named OU to its top 50 schools in its Information Sciences Job Index. The list identifies U.S. schools that have a substantial IS-centric major at the undergraduate or graduate level and stand out.

Accounting professor inspires as teacher, mentor and friend

"Somewhere along the way, Professor Dillon became more than a professor to me. He became a friend. Soon after graduation, he became 'Buck,' which is how I now know him," wrote Judy Hegelund, ACC '95, director at Deloitte and CPA, in support of her mentor's nomination for the Michigan Association of CPAs' (MACPA) 2013 Accounting Teaching Excellence Award.

A respected scholar, leader and former chair of OU's Accounting Department, professor Gadis "Buck" Dillon says his nickname stems from a letter written during World War II. Born in West Virginia in 1943, Dillon had an uncle stationed in the Pacific who wrote home, "Name him whatever you want, but call him 'Buck,'" for reasons still a mystery to Dillon.

While his current students call him "Doctor" or "Professor" Dillon, many alumni, like Hegelund, consider "Buck" an influential mentor, an exemplary role model, and their friend.

"I always felt that learning does not end when a class session ends," says Dillon, who came to OU in 1987 after teaching at the universities of Virginia, Georgia and Kentucky. "The accounting profession seeks more than just discipline-specific competence. Often, the deciding factor in receiving a desirable job is the professional demeanor of the candidate. Accordingly, I work to provide professional development and maturity experiences for my students outside the classroom."

TOOLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Eddie Stern, ACC '11, MACC '12, says without Dillon's influence, he may not have chosen public accounting. "His passion for not only the profession but for his students is obvious," says Stern, experienced associate, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC). "He wants everyone to succeed, but he doesn't give the answers. He gives students the tools and knowledge, and leaves it to his students to use them to succeed. There is no better feeling than success on one's own."

Stern stays in contact with Dillon, as does Korry Bates, ACC '09, MACC '10, who first met Dillon at the initial chapter meeting of OU's National Association of Black Accountants (OU NABA) in fall 2007. "I had no idea of the magnitude to which Dr. Dillon would shape my professional and personal life," says Bates, senior associate, risk practice, PWC.

Under Dillon's tutelage, many students move from uncertain career aspirations to successful accounting professionals, notes Department of Accounting and Finance Chair Mohinder Parkash.



Professor Gadis "Buck" Dillon

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

For Dillon, who is married with two grown children and three grandchildren, much has changed in the 47 years he's been teaching, especially when it comes to technology.

As a graduate student at West Virginia University in the late 1960s, Dillon remembers taking three months to run regression equations on data for an economics professor. Today, it takes 10 seconds on a desktop computer.

"The computer eliminated many positions in information handling and transmission. Students entering public accounting need a much higher level of skill and understanding," says Dillon, who earned his doctorate at the University of Michigan. "Still, there is a tremendous demand for accountants. The business community is increasingly complex."

AIMING FOR EXCELLENCE

Since arriving at OU, Dillon has helped students network and encourages them to get involved in extracurricular programs such as OU's Beta Alpha Psi chapter, for which Dillon was the founding

faculty adviser in 1991. From the start, Dillon challenged the members to excel by aiming to earn superior chapter ratings year after year, recalls Hegelund, who served as the organization's recording secretary.

"He has developed students into outstanding alumni and has maintained relationships with them and, therefore, the firms. This has contributed to the outstanding relationship that the Accounting Department has with alumni," she says.

Dillon is simply the go-to person, Bates adds. "If you need an answer, you ask Dr. Dillon. He is well-respected and well-connected," says Bates. "One thing he's said to me is, 'Korry, when I look out at my class, they never age. Students are always the same age, so I think I'm still young.'"

SUCCESS THROUGH HARD WORK

In many ways, he is more energized than ever by the recognition he received in 2013 from the MACPA and also from the Rochester Regional Chamber of Commerce, which honored him with the Sunrise Pinnacle Award for Educator of the Year in 2013.

"The awards I receive I owe to my students and colleagues," he says. "If students were not so receptive and hard-working, then the recognition probably would not have happened. I am reaping the rewards."

His students are also reaping the rewards. As Stern notes, he, like many of his fellow accounting students, already had jobs lined up upon graduation, and they credit Dillon for stressing the importance of communication and professionalism in securing and maintaining a career in accounting.

Dillon is satisfied knowing his students have the technical knowledge and work ethic to succeed in an accounting career. ■

By Alice Rhein

"His passion for not only the profession, but for his students is obvious. ... He gives students the tools and knowledge, and leaves it to his students to use them to succeed."

— Eddie Stern, ACC '11, MACC '12, experienced associate, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Leading the charge | MAcc alum merges life experiences, education for business success

What do leadership, psychology, fiscal responsibility and successful retrieval of a kidnapped baby have in common? Anthony Craft, MAcc '12.

Co-founder and general manager of a business consulting company in West Bloomfield, Mich., Craft has the knowledge and life experiences that make him a valuable asset.

Craft's company specializes in leadership development, coaching and mentoring, as well as negotiation training and competitive (sports) psychology for business leaders, hiring and team hiring.

He doesn't do it alone. "A successful business is never about one person," says Craft. "It's about the team."

And Craft has put together a highly effective one. The problem-solving unit covers all angles — military, medical, corporate, sales and marketing.

A medieval history buff, Craft named the company "J. Hawkwood," after military commander Sir John Hawkwood, a 14th-century Englishman who found his niche as a savvy, solutions-oriented military commander in Italy.

Likewise, Craft found his niche in the marketplace. The idea took root as Craft and one of his business partners finished conducting a free leadership development workshop, and a patent lawyer approached them.

"She'd been to a week-long leadership development conference and said she hadn't learned nearly what she did in the few hours spent with us," he says. "I thought about starting a company to assist professionals."

CHANGE AGENT

Prior to earning his accounting master's, Craft received a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University in industrial/organizational psychology and criminal justice. He also served 12 years in law enforcement, rising to the position of a Special Agent in the United States Army Criminal Investigation Command (USACIDC).

Craft received a national award from USACIDC for investigative (interview/negotiation) excellence in the recovery of a two-day-old infant kidnapped by a woman who wanted the baby but abandoned him once her description appeared on TV. The baby was recovered from a box in rainy, chilly state of Washington weather — feverish but alive.

Today, Craft puts those negotiation skills to work for his clients. "Whether interacting with employees or clients, leadership aptitude is key to business success," says Craft. "Strengthening these skills affects productivity and long-term success."



Anthony Craft, MAcc '12

Among the principles used with clients, Craft describes Simon Sinek's "Golden Circle" of human motivation. Essentially, the idea is people don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.

PLUGGED IN

Craft and his partners customize their methodology to fit the need. They also meet their clients where they are.

"We've shown up at 2 a.m. for a nurse manager's staff meeting," he says. "We go where needed."



J. HAWKWOOD
COMPANY

Although it may be human nature to avoid anxiety and shy away from one's weaknesses, a business leader can't afford to. "If you're blasting it off the tee but stink at putting, you need to focus on putting," he explains. "Otherwise, there's no overall improvement. It's the same with business."

One of his clients struggled with assertiveness; he prepared her with role-playing exercises. Another found it difficult to negotiate prices, so he took him to garage sales to practice; later, he accompanied him to negotiate with a vendor.

"Good leaders train followers and then release and trust," Craft says. "The team has to grow together."

When it comes to customer satisfaction, Craft learned valuable lessons working at Hewlett-Packard and WorldCom.

"One of the things frequently advised regarding technical support is the 'seven-second rule,'" says Craft. "Supposedly, if you answer every phone call within seven seconds, you've done a good job."

But not so fast. "That measurement doesn't address taking care of the customers," Craft explains. "Did you effectively prioritize calls? How many customers were satisfied with your service? That's what needs to be evaluated."

Craft and his partners invest time to satisfy their clients.

"After working with us, if new problems arise or they need refreshers, we're available," Craft says. "They receive unlimited follow-up."

Craft says they're satisfied when their clients are. "What matters is that call from a client who's excited to tell us about closing a deal at a negotiated price."

ACCOUNTING FOR SUCCESS

No matter how useful a product or service is, it's still about the bottom line.

"Accounting is the lifeblood of any organization," says Craft. "The business will fail if nobody's watching the money."

An SBA Dean's Scholar, Craft feels his time at Oakland University was well-spent learning the intricate finance details critical to maintaining a business. This encompasses risk and operations management; financial planning, analysis and reporting; forecasting and budgeting; fiscal accountability; regulatory compliance; and sales and marketing.

"Oakland's business professors brought real-world experiences into the classroom," Craft says. "They translated book knowledge to on-the-job realities, and that's been extremely helpful."

Craft also values networking relationships cultivated through Oakland. "Business is word-of-mouth," he says. "As students, we had an opportunity to establish a network. When others know what you do, they're your best referrals."

With Craft's busy schedule, it'd be understandable if he'd prefer to hibernate in his limited downtime. But Craft is more like his company's namesake than one may expect.

Decked out in knight's gear and wielding a sword, he occasionally participates in medieval reenactments. "You can get roughed up," Craft admittedly laughs, "but I love it." Instead of seeing life as a series of problems, Craft sees a challenging adventure filled with winnable battles. ■

By Mary Gunderson-Switzer

Executive MBA stands out for couples' career plans

Allison Brauer, BSN '07, EMBA '12, credits the Oakland University Executive MBA program with giving her the tools to rise through the ranks at Doctors' Hospital of Michigan in Pontiac, and later to launch a medical billing company.

With sights on opening his own business in the future, Allison's husband, Marc, a mechanical engineer and product lifecycle management systems manager at General Motors, enrolled in the program soon after Allison graduated.

With both in the market for an MBA program, the Brauers researched their options and charted their findings together. In a side-by-side comparison, the Oakland University Executive MBA program stood out for both.

The biggest draw? The elite AACSB-International accreditation Oakland University's business school holds in business and accounting. OU's Executive MBA also offered specific concentrations for each Brauer — health care management for Allison, and information systems leadership for Marc.

With career and family commitments — the Brauers have three children — they chose to stagger their enrollment.

At the urging of her employer, Allison enrolled first. Witnessing her leadership potential, the hospital CEO and board of directors asked her to consider an MBA program to prepare her for a senior leadership position.

IMMEDIATE PAYOFF

A nursing manager when she enrolled in OU's Executive MBA program in 2010, Allison supervised a staff of 46 and managed a \$6 million budget. Six months into the program, she was promoted to director of quality. Six months after graduating, she was promoted to chief executive of nursing.

"It catapulted me," Allison says. "I would learn something Friday and Saturday, and on Monday I was successfully using what I had just learned."

"I was able to apply the entire breadth of the classes, as a package, to the real world quickly," she adds. "The projects I worked on for class increased my visibility right away."

Classes taught her how to use data to make decisions and create strategies. She learned different ways of reading financial statements and how to put together a marketing plan.

The program's hands-on learning style, where students use real-life business cases to analyze and solve problems as a team, helped her discover and apply different approaches to leadership.



Proud OU Executive MBA participants: Allison Brauer, BSN '07, EMBA '12; and Marc Brauer, current Executive MBA student

"The ability to apply concepts helped solidify things for me," she adds. "When I talk to folks who've gone through other programs, they frequently say they did not have as much of a chance to apply things."

The program also gave her the confidence and support to take the leap and start her own business. In late 2013, she founded Reliable Billing Services, a medical billing services and regulatory compliance company, where she serves as partner, marketing and sales director, strategic planner and consultant.

"I have always wanted to be in charge of my own destiny," she says.

COHORT-STYLE PROGRAM A PLUS

A year into his Executive MBA program, Marc is also pleased with his experience.

"I really like attending school with professionals who are in a similar place in their careers as I am and who come from different companies and industries," Marc says.

Students in the program have an average of 15 years of work experience, which allows the group to have dynamic classroom discussions backed by real-world knowledge.

"I appreciate the wide range of topics, the mix of university professors, the experts who come in from different industries to teach, and the diversity of the student body," he says.

"The cohort structure is one of the program's best assets," Marc adds. Students take the program's core business classes together and later split into electives for concentrations in health care management or information systems leadership.

Allison agrees the peer group is one of the program's greatest strengths. She continues to reap the benefits of the relationships she built with her peers and faculty. "We keep in touch and help each other with opportunities," she adds.

ABOUT THE OU EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAM

OU's Executive MBA program is designed for professionals who are currently engaged in successful careers and want to build a strong business foundation while enhancing their leadership and management skills. The program offers the schedule flexibility required for a full-time executive. Concentrations in health care management and information systems leadership are available. The two-year program meets biweekly for classes and offers online support and flexibility to accommodate working professionals attending school while working. A maximum of 30 students are admitted to the 39-credit hour, 21-month program annually. ■

By Margarita Bauza Wagerson

WINTER 2014
insight



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SUPPORT THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

The business school offers many different ways alumni can help business students develop into professionals through its career development programs.

- **ACHIEVE** helps undergraduate students explore majors and prepare for a professional career in business. If you would like to volunteer to work with ACHIEVE students, contact Sherri Kerby at kerby@oakland.edu.
- If you are looking for an intern, or if your company wants to hire a solid graduate with academic and presentation skills, contact Michelle Serafino at serafino@oakland.edu.
- Consider making a gift to the business school. Help OU's SBA build a school that is advancing leadership in the business community with a gift that will transform lives. You can give online at sba.oakland.edu/give.

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