Eyes to the Skies

Shannon Gregory, '18 MBA, leads flight operations at NASA's Kennedy Space Center
Prenkert comes to the University of Minnesota following a 20-year run at Indiana University, Bloomington, where he has experience in academic administrative leadership from the department to the campus level. Before embarking on an academic career, he was a senior trial attorney for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Prenkert holds a JD from Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana.
Opposite: P.J. Fleck, head coach of the Golden Gophers football team, co-teaches MGMT 3061: Leadership in Practice: Everyday Moments of Leadership alongside Professor Theresa Glomb. In this February 2023 session, he talked about the fragility of leadership. Scan here for more:

Above: Shannon Gregory is helping usher in a new Space Age as the chief of flight operations at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center. Photo above, and on cover: Don Gunterson.

Right: Brianna Hughes, ’22 MBA, was ready to switch gears on her career. See how she and others got help from the Carlson School to pivot their careers, starting on page 16. Illustration by Nigel Buchanan.

SPRING 2023 | THE CARLSON SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

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SPRING 2023 | CARLSON SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

For the last 4,300+ days, I’ve had the privilege of being dean of the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management. It’s a job I never sought out, in a career I didn’t plan for, but it’s been the most rewarding role of my life.
Why? Our community of students, faculty, staff, and you—our alumni and friends. As I prepare to return to the faculty about two months from now, I’m using my final letter in these pages to offer a heartfelt thank you for everything you’ve given me and the school over the years.
To our students—thank you for your energy, enthusiasm, and excitement. A highlight every year was welcoming our newest students, packed into the atrium, full of hope for their futures. It’s because of you that I chose this profession. Each time I learned what a business school faculty should be.
To our faculty—thank you for your intellectual curiosity, care, and embrace of Aks and me. You gave us a home that challenged us, supported our research, and serve is a shining example of our community of students, faculty, research, and serve is a shining example of our community of students, faculty, and service.
To our staff—thank you for your deep love and care, and support of our students, faculty, and staff.
To our alumni and friends—thank you for your deep love and care, and support of our students, faculty, and staff.
We are extremely proud of the strong employment numbers across all programs, in the Class of 2022, saw high job placement rates and an increase in salaries. The Full-Time MBA program had its highest placement stats in a decade with 98 percent of its graduates receiving job offers within three months after graduation. Offers were received by 97.4 percent of under-graduates, 100 percent of Master of Science in Business Analytics (MSBA) graduates, 96 percent of Master of Human Resources and Industrial Relations (MHRIR) graduates, and 91 percent from the first graduating class of the Master of Marketing program.
Career Treks Return
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Class of 2022 Sees ‘Tremendous’ Career Outcomes
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We are extremely proud of the strong employment numbers across the school,” says Maggie Tomas, executive director of the Carlson Business Career Center (CBCC). “Our ultimate goal is to help students land jobs in careers and industries where they can succeed. We’re seeing our graduates go on to have tremendous success and we’re so happy about that.”
Many of the programs also saw significant increases in salaries received after graduation. The Full-Time MBA ($121,822) and MSBA ($100,421) programs saw 8 percent increases in the mean salary, while the Undergraduate program had a 6 percent increase to $66,498. These salary gains are also being seen in early data for the Class of 2023, according to Tomas.
The CBCC utilizes numerous ways to prepare students for their job search,

FROM THE DEAN
With Gratitude

The CBCC held more than 941 employer meetings, sent out more than 480 tailored résumé books, and organized 243 events across 10 programs during the past year. Coaches managed 4,117 coaching appointments and delivered dozens of workshops.

HEADING WEST FOR CAREER TREK
Another way the CBCC prepares students for a career is by on-site visits at possible employers. More than 30 MSBA students visited Seattle in early January, the first trek since the pandemic pause. Stops included Amazon, BCGamma, Expedia, Google, and Microsoft for tours and networking.

At the Carlson School, we are able to go out and meet companies, meet representatives of companies, and people who are alumni of the Carlson School who are working there and watching them in their element,” says Aakriti Anjala, ’23 MSBA, who participated in the trip. “I think that’s the best part. Coming out to the West Coast, it’s a glimpse into what our future could be, which is really exciting.”
The Carlson School has hosted West Coast trips since 2014, first for the MBA program, and then for the MSBA program. The CBCC is also rebooting its New York City trek for those interested in finance from the Undergraduate program.

“These treks are a great way for our students to see how they could fit at certain companies,” Tomas says. “We love to engage with our alumni and prepare our students to be competitive in job searches on either coast.”

SPRING 2023 | CARLSON SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

A group of Master of Science in Business Analytics students toured the Amazon Spheres in Seattle during a career trek in January.
Carlson School Staff Member Runs Every Day For Three Years

Day after day, Mindy Bahr runs. No matter the weather, location, or what she has going on, she laces up her shoes and hits the running trails.

For more than 1,000 days and three straight years, Bahr, a program specialist in the Department of Work and Organizations, has run at least two miles.

Her goal of running every day began when a friend of hers mentioned a goal of “running your comma,” meaning the comma in 1,000.

“She explained what it was and I thought, ‘Huh, that sounds just crazy and dumb enough to do,’” she says. Bahr began her journey on Jan. 1, 2020. Most of her runs were on dirt or snow-covered trails where she could be out in nature.

Her most memorable run was just that, running rim to rim at the Grand Canyon, a trek that lasted 26 miles. Along the journey for 1,000 straight days, she ran in temperatures that varied from -32 degrees to 101, with a longest run of 46 miles.

For more than 1,000 days and three straight years, Bahr has run at least two miles.

Remembering Steve Spruth
Longtime Instructor Dies at 65

Steve Spruth died March 9 after living with lung cancer. He was 65.

A senior lecturer in the Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship Department (SME) for nearly 20 years, Spruth made a lasting impact on students and the school.

“He was a kind, gentle, very thoughtful, and dedicated teacher who really got students thinking deeply about their projects and coursework,” says Dean Sri Zaheer. “He personified the curiosity, humility, and optimism that every teacher strives to instill in their students.”

In addition to teaching innovation courses in SME, Spruth had a longstanding relationship with the Carlson Global Institute (CGI). It started in May 2007, with a graduate program in ethics that he led to Brussels and London. From there, he developed IBUS 3010 in China, which he led eight times from 2008 to 2015. In 2016, he transitioned that course to Cuba, leading four trips. In addition, he developed and led IBUS 4050 to Brazil, which ran nine times. His final program, IBUS 3055, in partnership with Associate Professor Sounya San, went to China in May 2019. Spruth even once brought a class of students down the Mississippi River—in canoes—to learn about the entrepreneurial development of the Twin Cities. In all, Spruth led 33 programs for CGI.

His efforts earned him the university’s inaugural Entrepreneurship Teacher of the Year Award in 2014.

On LinkedIn, colleagues and former students reflected on Spruth’s passing. Alumni credited Spruth for igniting lessons in their current work.

“He personified the curiosity, humility, and optimism that every teacher strives to instill in their students.”

DEAN SRI ZAHEER

This year, Carlson School graduates will have the option of attending campuswide conferral ceremonies and signing up for individual stage crossings. This spring’s commencement ceremony will look much different than previous years.

Due to renovations ongoing at the 3M Arena at Mariucci, commencement will take place in two campuswide conferral ceremonies at Huntington Bank Stadium: 5 p.m. on Friday, May 12, for graduate students; and 1 p.m. on Saturday, May 13, for undergraduate students.

To allow students to be recognized individually while their guests have a front-row viewing experience to cheer and take photos and video, graduates have the opportunity for individual stage crossings from May 11-13. After choosing a specific day and time, graduates will have their name announced, cross the stage, and be congratulated by a University of Minnesota leader. PhD candidates can invite their advisors and arrange to be hooded too. Professional photographers will take photos as well. Receptions specifically for Carlson School graduating students and guests are planned as well.

The week of commencement, help celebrate the Carlson School’s Class of 2023 graduates by using #CongratulationsCarlson2023 on social media.

2023 Brings Commencement Changes

Day after day, Mindy Bahr runs. No matter the weather, location, or what she has going on, she laces up her shoes and hits the running trails.

For more than 1,000 days and three straight years, Bahr has run at least two miles.

Bahr reached her 1,000-day goal on Sept. 27, 2022. From there, she says it just made sense to finish out 2022 and make it three straight years. With that milestone made, Spruth continued running every day?

“The first day it’s no longer convenient will probably be the day I stop,” she says. “It definitely be a weird feeling not to go for a run that day.”

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“How Divorce Impacts Work

Until now, little research had examined how the effects of divorce may spill over at work. Professors Connie Warberg and Michelle Duffy, along with alum Borbala Csillag, ’21 PhD, published their findings from two studies in Personnel Psychology. On average, divorcing people reported lower health, poorer job performance, and a more negative mood at work, but the researchers also found some gained renewed career motivation.

Digital Nudges Encourage More Exercise

Test messages and app alerts could help increase participation in corporate wellness programs. Published in the Journal of Association of Information Systems, research from Professors Shawn Curley and De Liu examined how these digital nudges impacted reported physical activity in such a program. They found both motivational test messages and “nudges” (similar to Facebook likes) led to increases in self-reported exercise. While the impact of motivational messages increased over time, the effect of “kudos” didn’t last long term.

For more research updates, visit:
Courses at the Carlson School cover a wide range of topics. Here’s a 60-second breakdown of one of the many classes leaving an impact on students.

**BA 3001 Race, Power, and Justice in Business**

The United States is a diverse nation founded on the principle of equality, and yet has roots in slavery, Indigenous genocide, colonialism, and dispossession. These roots shaped economic relations and business practices that continue today. Rather than seeing business as ahistorical organization, this course considers the socially embedded nature of business in which racial and other structural inequalities are inherent in the development and contemporary practice of business.

**5 TAKEAWAYS**

The course is a new, required course for undergraduate students. The course was developed as part of the Undergraduate Program’s redesign, which launched in Fall 2022.

This deeper understanding is intended to provide students with a rich lens to critically examine business practices while considering ways to address power hierarchies and promote social justice in the context of business.

One of first things students do is take two Implicit Association Tests (IAT) from Project Implicit, including the race IAT.

The course is also focused on personal development. Students write weekly journal entries, considering differences in social identities, personal biases, and how to advance justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion. This culminates with personal development plans for being a stronger ally.

“Personally, I have learned so much about my privileges and biases, and I think that every student will benefit from learning more about themselves.” — Zach Soule, ’25 BSB.

“IT’s important to me that the course presents key alternative perspectives on power and justice, including those that are critical of how business exerts its power in society.” — Professor John Budd

**1. What are you reading?**

Right now, I’m reading Malcolm Gladwell’s most recent book, The Bomber Mafia. I have read all of his previous books, and after recently receiving this book as a gift, I am excited to complete the collection. I recommend him to anyone looking for a stimulating book that is easy to read.

**2. What is your favorite website?**

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My favorite website that has withstand the test of time is Poptropica. Though it’s slightly childish (fitting since I played it as a child), it’s an engaging brain game. Poptropica is just like puzzles, but with a storyline attached! You need to put together different pieces of a mystery in order to solve the major goal of the world. All in all, a fun way to pass time and get your noggin running.

**3. What is your dream job?**

My dream job is to manage a family restaurant. My father has always dreamed of opening up his own restaurant in Vietnam and scaling it to turn it into a chain. He’s always been such a hard worker so I could focus my own efforts on myself. Now, I dream about the day that I have the capacity and skills to be a valuable asset in helping him achieve his dreams.

My dream job is to be an event planner for Make-A-Wish. Being able to coordinate all the details for kids facing critical illnesses, show that anything is possible, and give them a spark to keep fighting—it doesn’t get much better than that.
FOCUS

Cultivating a Welcoming Culture

BY WADE RUPARD

One year in, Senior Diversity Officer Angela Spranger reflects on the work that’s done and what lies ahead.

“As you look back, what surprised you the most?”

I was amazed, when I first got here, at both the breadth and depth of the DEI ecosystem at the Carlson School, throughout the University of Minnesota, and the Twin Cities as a whole. There was so much work already being done here and it was exciting to see all of it. Honestly, it was almost overwhelming. You didn’t need to sell anyone on the importance of DEI or the importance of starting a Center for Inclusive Excellence. Having worked in this field for two years as the chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer at CNU’s Luter School of Business, I was so much work already being done there and it was exciting to see all of it.

What is Inclusive Excellence and how is it driving change at the Carlson School?

Inclusive Excellence is a nationally recognized framework for organizational change. It is providing the foundation for our cohesive strategy to unify our DEI efforts across departments, units, and programs. Inclusive Excellence has five pillars and we are trying to build a thoughtful, deliberate approach to our DEI initiatives around those pillars.

“Throughout the Center for Inclusive Excellence, we’re serving as a resource hub within the Carlson School for both internal and external stakeholders. This involves efforts to increase equity-mindedness among workplace leaders and equipping and supporting faculty and staff who interact with our Carlson School students, our future business leaders.

As you look ahead, how do you see your role at the Carlson School?

I aim to be the first learner, the first stumbler, the first questioner—so others can learn, stumble in safety, ask, and challenge. In promoting inclusion, trust is key. We have to trust no one intends to hurt, that feedback given is received. My work requires meeting people on an individual level, acknowledging their intent, and then opening their eyes to the impact of their words, policies, and actions. These are crucial conversations. And yes, they can be exhausting! But, it’s tremendously fulfilling. I’m proud of the people here and the work we’ve already done, and I’m committed to growing with this amazing organization.
Inspiration can come from surprising places. Just ask Shannon Gregory, ’18 MBA.

In the mid-90s, Gregory found himself on the movie set of The Jackal, an action-thriller starring Bruce Willis, Richard Gere, and Sidney Poitier. The movie needed trained military members to complete some stunts in the film and Gregory, then active in the Marines, signed up.
“There are days where you do have to pinch yourself because [NASA] is an amazing place to work... but there are professors out there who basically told us to get ready,” says Gregory. “Because it’s going to happen.”

FROM PILOT TO MBA

After six years in the Marines, Gregory joined the Minnesota Army National Guard, where he became a helicopter pilot. He flew during deployments in Kuwait and the Persian Gulf; led aviation teams, and when stateside, managed search-and-rescue efforts in Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin.

By the mid-2010s, he was looking to bridge his 25 years of military experience with a business background. David Wagner, ’18 MBA, a fellow guardsman at the time, encouraged Gregory to enroll in the Carlson Executive MBA program. He says Gregory’s magnetic personality and drive made him stand out in the classroom.

“[Gregory’s] always been a real outgoing guy, very personable,” describes Wagner, a longtime friend. “He has a very good presence. I’d say probably one of his greatest attributes is that he can captivate people.”

At the Carlson School, Gregory honed his leadership skills, gaining a better understanding of organizational behavior and learning what it takes to guide teams through adversity.

“Military leaders aren’t always great at asking for help,” admits Gregory. “I think the Carlson School helped me to be the kind of leader that understands that needing help or asking for help was OK.”

It’s a lesson he applies on a regular basis.

“At NASA, I’m never going to know everything. I’m never going to know half of everything because it’s a heavily technical organization,” he explains with a smile. “I’m not an aerospace engineer, but there are times when those engineers are very helpful to me to be able to make the decisions necessary to get the job done. So, as a manager, as a leader, it’s my job to listen to individuals to guide our decisions in a way that the whole entire organization can be successful.”

But, unlike most jobs, decisions at NASA happen with the whole world watching.

“As a manager, as a leader, it’s my job to listen to individuals to guide our decisions in a way that the whole entire organization can be successful.”

— SHANNON GREGORY, ’18 MBA
Leading up to the launch, Gregory coordinated with mission control as his helicopter team conducted surveillance to secure airspace. In addition, the helicopters, outfitted with powerful cameras, provided mission control with high-resolution imagery to complete final launch inspections and to survey takeoff from various angles in real time. Alongside Gregory in the cockpit for the final preparations was Stephen Lee, the Kennedy Space Center’s chief of aircraft maintenance. "It was a monumental task for him as a leader," Lee says, describing Gregory’s tasks as encompassing “all the pre-planning, the pre-thought, and ensuring that everyone was able to be where they’re supposed to be and on time.”

Hovering from a safe position out of the blast zone, they listened to the countdown and watched Artemis I roar to life as it lit up the night sky and soared to the heavens. The Orion spacecraft spent nearly a month in space, traveling 1.4 million miles on a path that extended about 270,000 miles away from Earth—shattering the record set by the Apollo 13 for the farthest distance from the planet by a spacecraft designed to carry humans. While NASA scientists tracked Orion’s two lunar flybys, Gregory’s focus turned toward preparations for the spacecraft’s journey home. Re-entry into the Earth’s atmosphere would be another gigantic test to ensure astronauts’ safety in the next Artemis missions. For Gregory and his team, the pressure was on to “do it right and down to the number.”

On December 11, 2022, Gregory watched from the control tower of the USS Portland in the Pacific Ocean west of Baja California, Mexico, near the splashdown site. Coordinating with Navy helicopter pilots to provide the imagery, he and his team waited with bated breath in the tower for the first sign on the chopper’s video feeds of Orion breaking through the Earth’s atmosphere. “The minute that our pilots said the word ‘capture,’ we all cheered,” Gregory recalls. “It was like the biggest cheer that could happen…to hear that we had actually a capture of an image as [the Orion] coming over the horizon was pretty exciting for us.”

With the visuals, the control center could monitor Orion’s descent and assess potential heat damage from re-entry. Under Gregory’s leadership, the crew meticulously tracked the re-entry timing “down to the second” through the scheduled blackouts to the deploying of the chutes. In the span of about 20 minutes, the Orion slowed from nearly 25,000 mph to 20 mph for a successful splashdown.

“It was like the biggest relief and [felt like] being a part of something bigger than yourself, which was just really heartwarming,” Gregory says.

INSPIRATION IS A SUPERPOWER
A safe return of Orion paves the way for more scientific progress. Back at the Kennedy Space Center, technicians and engineers will evaluate the spacecraft’s systems and heatshield to guide their work for the upcoming crewed Artemis missions. In addition, scientists will analyze Orion’s onboard experiments, including a pair of manikins that tested the effectiveness of wearing a radiation vest to reduce exposure. The lessons from Artemis I will inform Artemis II, tentatively scheduled to launch in 2024. The 10-day mission will include a lunar flyby and critical systems tests in preparation for Artemis III, during which NASA intends to launch crews once a year. Those missions will focus on putting the Gateway space station in the moon’s orbit and establishing a long-term presence on the moon’s surface. Gregory says it’s an honor to be part of such a historic space program. “I’m so glad that the thing I first fell in love with—helicopters—translates into an opportunity to be able to lead in a great, dynamic organization,” he says. To his friends, it’s no surprise to see him thrive.

“Gregory has the drive and he is not scared to put himself out there to try something different and might be a little out of his comfort zone,” says Wagner. “He definitely has a passion for flying and leading people as well.”

It’s perhaps that same spark: Poitier saw in the young Marine. Poitier’s ability to inspire him and others to achieve is a “superpower” Gregory says he aims to share with the next generation of trailblazers.

“No opportunity is outside of your reach,” says Gregory. “I can say that this is the best job, outside of riding the rocket, at NASA. But one thing I remind myself of is that nothing is out of your reach. So continue to keep your eyes toward the sky.”

— SHANNON GREGORY

“No opportunity is outside of your reach. I can say that this is the best job, outside of riding the rocket, at NASA. But one thing I remind myself of is that nothing is out of your reach. So continue to keep your eyes toward the sky.” — SHANNON GREGORY
Peter Dinh, ’22 MHRIR

Peter Dinh has always been driven to help people. After receiving his bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Minnesota, Dinh dedicated himself to improving mental health in his community. As a mental health practitioner with Community-University Health Care Center (CUHCC), Dinh found joy and purpose in helping Vietnamese residents of South Minneapolis navigate the healthcare system and manage their mental health. But he also felt called to help improve the broader systems many of his clients could only partially access or benefit from.

“I’m grateful that through my work in mental health, I learned about the power of connection and empathy and the role community plays in supporting people in getting better,” says Dinh. “Working with community members and other mental health professionals helped me see people as people. Everyone is going through something. The level of support and connection we have helps us grow toward our full potential.”

Finding supportive learning environments where he could contribute and grow from his strengths became the first step on Dinh’s journey into HR. In 2019, Dinh started a job in the HR department at General Mills, working full days while pursuing his Master of Human Resources and Industrial Relations (MHRIR) at the Carlson School in the evenings.

In 2021, as a student, Dinh began an internship at UnitedHealth Group (UHG). He supported various areas of HR, contributing to projects with goals ranging from advancing inclusive leadership to expanding mentorships and enterprise-wide and accelerating leadership development.

One project involved creating a session with Asians United, an employee resource group at UHG, to assemble post-pandemic resources related to burnout to share with other leaders. For Dinh, this project was concrete evidence that deep relationships and courageous conversations could facilitate systemic change.

Upon graduation last year, Dinh joined UHG as a people team development associate. He sees the opportunity as a pivotal launch to improve the broader healthcare system.

“As a Vietnamese person of color, I spent years seeking the kinds of relationships I have now built through the Carlson School,” says Dinh. “Connecting with people driven to leverage business as a force for good and committed to learning from diverse perspectives could change my trajectory. I can feel all my previous experiences coming together on a path to make the impact I’ve always hoped for.”

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In 2021, as a student, Dinh began an internship at UnitedHealth Group (UHG). He supported various areas of HR, contributing to projects with goals ranging from advancing inclusive leadership to expanding mentorships and enterprise-wide and accelerating leadership development.

One project involved creating a session with Asians United, an employee resource group at UHG, to assemble post-pandemic resources related to burnout to share with other leaders. For Dinh, this project was concrete evidence that deep relationships and courageous conversations could facilitate systemic change.

Upon graduation last year, Dinh joined UHG as a people team development associate. He sees the opportunity as a pivotal launch to improve the broader healthcare system.

“As a Vietnamese person of color, I spent years seeking the kinds of relationships I have now built through the Carlson School,” says Dinh. “Connecting with people driven to leverage business as a force for good and committed to learning from diverse perspectives could change my trajectory. I can feel all my previous experiences coming together on a path to make the impact I’ve always hoped for.”

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“I knew I wanted to work on small teams solving tough problems. And I knew I wanted to work for a values-driven organization that would support me in creating a thriving career and personal life. ”

— BRIANNA HUGHES, ’22 MBA

uncertainties lay ahead, Hughes trusted her instinct to pursue an MBA degree from the Carlson School as the first step on this new path. “When we decided we wanted to move back to Minnesota, I knew the Carlson School would be the ideal place to establish the connections that could support my career switch,” says Hughes.

To, while her husband was working on active duty, Hughes started as an online student, ready to explore new opportunities while also caring full-time for her two young children.

Hughes appreciated the flexibility of the program and the ownership she had in shaping her path and goals. After learning, networking with people with a wide variety of experiences and backgrounds, and having their third child while going through the program, Hughes had a clearer picture of the kind of work she wanted to do and the type of company she wanted to work for.

“I knew I wanted to work on small teams solving tough problems. And I knew I wanted to work for a values-driven organization that would support me in creating a thriving career and personal life,” says Hughes. “So it was important for me to get to know a company’s culture before accepting an offer.”

Hughes turned to the Carlson School network and its Business Career Center to help her find a role with a consulting firm with a strong Minnesota presence and a culture that supports young families. She accepted her position with Deloitte Consulting last fall while pregnant with her fourth child and is grateful for the guidance she got from the Carlson School during that time.

“My [career] coach helped me ask the right questions and provided me with incredible support along the way,” states Hughes.

With military experiences to give her, what’s next, he’s focused on enjoying the moment. “There’s no magical point where you stop and say, ‘Now I’m here.’”

“Firm up the things you know and move forward,” says Hughes. “Explore with others, seek out support, and ask questions. The details become clearer the closer you get.”

Sarah Adams, ’23 MBA

Career #1:
Social studies and Spanish teacher. Adams also launched a Spanish language learning company, Españolix, after earning her Master in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language at the Universidad de Alcalá in Madrid, Spain. While Españolix grew, Adams knew she needed additional business education to scale in an innovative, sustainable way—so she enrolled at the Carlson School in 2021.

Pivotal moment:
As a John DePodesta Leadership Fellow, when she received an initial grant to partner Españolix with existing educational organizations that seek to improve the quality of postsecondary education.

Now:
Adams plans to continue moving Españolix forward while immersing herself in the business world as a senior consultant with Deloitte for two years upon graduation. She believes that when the new product is ready, the market will be there. “People are ready for a change that will help them communicate and connect,” says Adams. “We have diverse languages in the U.S. that are ready to be embraced and celebrated.”

Former Minnesota Golden Gophers football player and Carlson School graduate Mike Rallis, ’12 BSB, never expected to become a professional wrestler. But a decade after graduation, he’s rising through the ranks of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) as Madcap Moss—a star in the making. Rallis double-majored in Marketing and Entrepreneurship, gaining hands-on experience in running a business.

“The classes that went beyond textbooks and allowed us to create and run a business showed me it’s not just about having an idea you think is cool; you have to understand everything that goes into making it successful,” says Rallis.

2013 tryout with the Miami Dolphins ended after minicamp, forcing Rallis to give up his NFL dreams. In turn, he was realistic about the risks and rewards of pursuing a career as a professional wrestler. Despite not knowing anyone who had done what he was about to do, he had a vision for where the business could go and was ready to do the work and learn from the people around him to make it happen.

After several years in the minor league development system, studying everything from the physical safety aspects to the ins and outs of building a personal brand within wrestling, Rallis is officially part of the WWE, performing under the ring name Madcap Moss. At what he estimates to be the midpoint of his wrestling career, Rallis says he has a greater appreciation for the business sense he developed while at the Carlson School. “Many athletes get into their sport thinking they’re going to do it forever,” says Rallis. “But that’s not realistic. It’s important to have a business plan to transition towards in the future.”

Rallis experienced his first evolution in professional wrestling in 2021 when he transformed from Riddick Moss to Madcap Moss upon returning to the ring after a torn ACL. Going from performing as Riddick, who Rallis describes as an arrogant elite athlete, to Madcap, who wears suspenders and dress pants and was known for telling horrible puns, was a challenge. But the change is paying off, and Rallis says taking on Madcap’s persona helped him grow his brand more successfully and authentically.

“I like to joke around, even at my own expense,” says Rallis. “Becoming Madcap, I saw how much fans feed off the energy from positive people who enjoy entertaining them. It’s the most fun I’ve had with the WWE.”

Rallis plans to maximize his time as a professional wrestler, using every opportunity to grow both inside and outside the ring. From traveling the world with athletes from diverse cultures and backgrounds to experimenting with new skills and pushing his physical limits, Rallis says the WWE provides him the platform and support to build himself, his brand, and his future beyond what he thought possible. But while he’s excited about what’s next, he’s focused on enjoying every step as it happens.

“There’s no magical point where you get to say, ‘Now I’m here.’”

“Rallis. It’s good to have goals, but you’re never going to enjoy it.”
How John Stavig, ’86 BSB, has helped to transform the Holmes Center into an entrepreneurship powerhouse for students and the state of Minnesota.

‘GATHER GREAT PEOPLE AND GET OUT OF THE WAY.’

BY ADAM OVERLAND
John Stavig wasn’t looking for work. But the business journal ad looking for someone to lead and expand entrepreneurship offerings at the Carlson School of Management was intriguing.

He had experience, after all. In just a 15-year career, Stavig had invented in, and led, multiple startups—from a communications network construction firm to what would eventually become apartments.com. In 2000, Verizon paid more than $300 million to acquire OnePoint Communications, a business he helped build, which was an early pioneer of the then-revolutionary Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology. At 38, he retired and moved to Minnesota with his wife to start a family. It wasn’t an unfamiliar territory. Stavig graduated from the University of Minnesota School of Business in 1986 (followed by an MBA at The Wharton School in Philadelphia). He spent time building his family and spending as much time with them as possible, which was fulfilling. “But I got restless pretty quick, and none of my friends were retired, so there was nobody else to really play with.”

So he responded to the ad. He chatted with Roy Wetterstrom and confirmed his hunch: It would be fun to really play with. “Occasionally [students] hit some bumps,” agrees Stavig, “but that’s where the real learning happens.”

“It’s incredible to see what John has been able to do in terms of really bringing our entrepreneurship program to an entirely new level,” says Wetterstrom. “He’s turned the Holmes Center into a phenomenal organization that is supporting entrepreneurship throughout the University and all over Minnesota.”

A PLATFORM FOR STARTUPS

Another signature program that Stavig helped grow is the Minnesota Cup (MN Cup). Founded in 2005 by University alumni Scott Litman and Dan Mallin, MN Cup is the country’s largest statewide startup competition.

Under the stewardship of Stavig and his team, the competition has grown from two to nine divisions, with more than 250 volunteer mentors and judges. More than 20,000 Minnesota entrepreneurs, including UMN students and faculty, have participated over the years—many of them receiving a share of more than $3 million in non-dilutive cash prizes. Participants also receive critical mentoring. These companies, in turn, have gone on to raise more than $1 billion.

Morgan Kerfeld, ‘21 BSB, was recently a MN Cup entrepreneur. She co-founded Telo—a startup based on the first significant design change to the rollerator walkie in decades—with three other students through the Entrepreneurship in Action course. In MN Cup 2021, Telo took second place in the student division, and after winning a share of more than $5 million in non-dilutive cash prizes, the participants also receive critical mentoring. These companies, in turn, have gone on to raise more than $1 billion.

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After graduating in 2021, Kerfeld took a year to focus on Telo and plan her next steps.

“Even though we had all graduated, he continued to be an advocate for Telo and was always willing to take a phone call,” Kerfeld says of Stavig. “He would even review our applications to other competitions that weren’t MN Cup. It blows my mind still today that he was willing to do all of this. Without him, Telo never would have happened.”

Telo has continued to evolve its products and business plan. In MN Cup 2022, they won the general division and took home $25,000.

Stavig’s dedication is inspired. Kerfeld that a year after graduating, she decided to enroll in the Carlson School’s MBA program, joining Stavig as his graduate teaching assistant.

THE KEY TO HIS SUCCESS

“The greatest phone calls or emails that I get are when students who’ve gone through classes like Entrepreneurship in Action, or through MN Cup, reach out five or 10 years after graduating and say, ‘I’m starting my own company, but I don’t feel this way is my first rodeo,’ ” Stavig says.

Starting a successful business takes more than a great idea, and it’s never the work of one person, but a network that supports you when inevitable challenges arise. Stavig has played an integral role in creating this environment at the University of Minnesota.

“I think it’s not often in life that somebody gets an opportunity to do something that is really consequential, and he’s doing that right now,” Wetterstrom says. “The things he is doing are having a huge impact on the University’s ability to develop students and entrepreneurs, and are fostering entrepreneurship across the University. That legacy is something that is going to last a long time.”

For his part, Stavig is reluctant to claim much credit, and points to the people around him as being the key to his and the Holmes Center’s success.

“I’ve been very fortunate to work alongside some incredible people throughout my career. If I had any theme across both my experiences with building companies or with the Holmes Center, I think it’s about getting a small number of great people together, giving them the resources they need, and getting out of the way.”

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Netflix. Hulu. Disney+. Amazon Prime Video. AppleTV+. HBO Max. Those are just some of the streaming options we have today. And we can’t forget social media options or “traditional” media outlets. It’s a consumer cornucopia of choice, wherein you can watch nearly anything you want, at any time, and from anywhere (as long you pay for it).

Each of these companies, and many others, have the same goal: create “persistent, engaging content,” as Tom Staggs, ‘82 BSB, co-founder of Candle Media, puts it. There are many layers and players in this space, with their own opportunities and challenges. “Everyone is competing for the time and attention of consumers,” says Staggs, a former C-suite leader at The Walt Disney Company. “The opportunities to reach consumers will continue to grow.”

The media world is transforming in surprising, exciting ways. But with new opportunities for content creators come some old worries.

BY GENE REBECK
Inclusivity is “not only the right thing to do, but an opportunity to pursue new ideas and audiences.” — MIKE MOH, ’05 BSB

null
In 2008, the Carlson School took a bold step. It became the first University of Minnesota college, and one of the first public business schools in the U.S., to integrate an international experience into its curriculum.

Why? It’s life-changing. I’ve seen that impact up close. Students navigate cultural differences, see business through a different lens, and gain exposure to different ways of learning—all transferrable experiences and skills.

In the coming pages, read about a few experiences our students have had and their long-lasting impact.

While offering an international experience to nearly 2,000 undergraduates was a new challenge 15 years ago, then-Dean Alison Davis-Blake knew a requirement would enhance the educational experience for our students and differentiate us from competitors. A task force of stakeholders agreed, and employers told us international experience was a key asset in graduates.

Since then, more than 10,000 students have completed the international experience requirement. The Carlson Global Institute (CGI) has offered programs in 44 countries, with the most recent expansions in Ghana and Morocco. In addition, our staff have conducted intercultural training to enhance self-awareness, and worked closely on efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. With dedicated advising, focusing on student identities, mental health, and scholarship support, students participate in the best-fit experience for them. All of these efforts align with evidence-based research and leading scholarship on international education, including that of UMN Professor Josef Mestenhauser, as detailed in a recent book I co-edited with colleagues.1

Reflecting on almost two decades at CGI—and a career that’s led me to Japan, Bulgaria, Romania, Egypt, and the Republic of Georgia—it’s been an absolute pleasure to guide in the creation of a truly interdisciplinary, international education for students, faculty, and staff.

Ultimately, the greatest impact of the Carlson School’s international program is yet to come as our students and future leaders keep discovering—as did I—that international experiences show us there is far more to life than we imagined.

Anne D’Angelo
Assistant Dean, Carlson Global Institute

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1 z.umn.edu/MestenhauserBook

Jennifer Lien Will, ’09 BSB
Semester at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)

With a family in the world of business, Jennifer Lien Will started college wanting something different. She loved science. But pretty quickly, she realized that the Carlson School was a fit for her. Studying Chinese language, she majored in Supply Chain Management with a minor in International Business. “I just knew I wanted an international experience,” she says, “and I wanted it to be business-based.” That led her to Hong Kong in 2008.

“It’s a beautiful campus, perched on a lush hillside overlooking the sea,” says Lien Will. She took a full load of classes that were taught in English and lived in the dormitory with students from Austria, Canada, France, New Zealand, Hong Kong—all over. Transit to the city made it easy to shop and eat out with friends. On her own, she ventured off campus to take yoga classes. “Even though the local language is Cantonese Chinese and I had been studying Mandarin, my language skills improved. I could read signs where my classmates couldn’t.”

BY GAYLA MARTY

CHANGING INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Jennifer Lien Will poses by the sundial “Circle of Time” sculpture, often called “Red Bird,” at the entrance of HKUST.
Back in Minnesota, Lien Will completed her degree and went to work at Modern Manufacturing & Engineering, Inc., in Minneapolis, an aerospace engineering company where she is now controller. “In my job, I see how everything’s connected,” she says, a perspective supported through study abroad. She also credits her international experience with fostering her independence and problem-solving skills, appreciating people’s differences, and deepening her interest in the world.

“The travel experience, exposure to different cultures and education systems and perspectives, not to mention different cultures and educational systems, was price-less,” says Lien Will. “The only thing I would have done differently is study for two semesters instead of one.”

Shayla Thacker, ’16 BSB

Short-term programs in China, Australia, Brazil, and Cuba

“Going to China was my first time out of the Central Time Zone,” says Shayla Thacker. It was May 2014, the end of her sophomore year, majoring in Finance and Entrepreneurial Management. A year later, she took another course in Australia. And in 2016, she took a January course, Management of Innovation and Change, in Brazil. Then in March of that year, just before completing her degree, she could not pass up the chance to join the first Carlson School group to study in Cuba when travel there became possible.

“That was a touching experience because I come from a low-income family,” Thacker says. “In the United States, we have public education through high school and pay for college, and in Brazil, it’s generally the opposite. I realized that if I had been born in Brazil, I probably wouldn’t have gone to college.”

Thacker’s experience was also enriched by the Carlson School’s buddy program, which pairs U.S. and international students. Some of the students she met in China became friends back in Minnesota, and she met students from Brazil in Minnesota before she traveled there herself.

Four international experiences may seem like a lot, but Thacker points out it was only eight weeks total. “I like that the Carlson Global Institute programs are different durations, so they’re flexible for people’s needs and course requirements,” she says. “The first was all in her major, three with the same faculty member, the late Steve Spruth, in Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship.”

Thacker is impressed by the rich experiences designed by the Carlson School faculty. In Brazil, for example, Spruth arranged visits to a Cargill innovation center and a multimedia giant that produces telenovelas. Her class also spent time in the town of Paraty, relaxing on the beaches, and met students she met in China become friends back in Minnesota, and she met students from Brazil in Minnesota before she traveled there herself.

After graduation, Thacker took a full-time position at U.S. Bank. In 2019, she joined SRS Acquiom and is now on the Loan Agency Relationship Management Team.

“My career has been touching loans and funding,” she says. “I’ve always been a person who looks at things from a big perspective—how does my job relate to the company as a whole? How does the company fit in the industry? Study abroad helps you in that way. There are people all over the world doing different things and having different experiences that connect.”

Quoc Vu, ’17 BSB

Semester at University of Otago in New Zealand

Medicine was on Quoc Vu’s mind. Born and raised in Minnesota, he volunteered one summer during high school with Doctors Without Borders at an orphanage in his cultural homeland of Vietnam. “My parents wanted me to understand the privileges I had growing up here,” he says. In 11th grade, he started taking classes at the University of Minnesota through the Post-Secondary Educational Options program. With a double major in Pre-Med Neuroscience and Management Information Systems, Vu kept a packed schedule full of student groups and activities, too. By the time he chose an international experience for his Carlson School major, he had already traveled to 21 countries. “Naïve” is how he describes himself then: “I was 18 and thought I knew how the world operated!”

When his sophomore spring semester ended in Minnesota, he immediately started his junior year at the University of Otago, sometimes called the Harvard of New Zealand. He readily admits his choice was influenced by his love of nature and J. R. R. Tolkien fantasy novels, plus the opportunity to reconnect with friends he’d met in earlier travels.

That summer—winter in New Zealand—Vu was the only University of Minnesota student at the University of Otago. He declared International Business as his major but took only one class in the subject. All the rest were New Zealand-specific courses that immersed Vu in other ways of seeing the world. “Their sense of community and respect for the environment—everyone cared about those two things,” says Vu. “I spent a total of 34 days living outside.”

He stayed through January, when his visa expired. And when he got home, his aspirations had shifted. “I realized medicine might not be the ceiling anymore and there was more to life than having ‘MD’ at the end of my name,” he says. “It wasn’t a healthy way to live, and I should be exploring other avenues myself.”

After graduation, Vu went to work as an analyst for UnitedHealth Group. Three years ago, he joined West Monroe in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he is a graduate consultant. He’s been admitted to medical school and hasn’t ruled it out, but he enjoys his current and challenging role of consulting. And yes, he’s continued to travel as often as he can.

“THERE ARE PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD DOING DIFFERENT THINGS AND HAVING DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES THAT CONNECT.”

– SHAYLA THACKER, ’16 BSB

“I WAS 18 AND THOUGHT I KNEW HOW THE WORLD OPERATED!”

– QUOC VU, ’17 BSB
The program was so well organized,” he remembers. “I got back and thought, ‘I have to do more of this.’”

One of the benefits of the Part-Time MBA for Drott was being able to craft it to include study abroad courses as the cornerstone of his experience at the Carlson School. “It was the opportunity to immerse myself and take advantage of the quality team at CGI to travel the world, and to apply the knowledge in my job,” he says.

For the next three years, he did exactly that. Between semesters on campus, he traveled abroad for four, two-week courses: First to Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Oman, where diversification away from oil was the focus; second to Argentina and Chile, centered on the ethos and the nuances of how things work; third to China, Hong Kong, and Shanghai to gain understanding of financial markets, banks, and the nuances of a government-led economy; and then to India.

“India is such an important country in the world and a country on the rise,” says Drott. “Our professor, Mani Subramani, was so passionate about India and had fantastic contacts in government and industry.”

In May 2019, Drott walked in his graduation ceremony, then hopped on a plane to Stockholm, Sweden, to finish up his studies with the Carlson School’s Medical Industry Leadership Institute.

It’s all helped Drott become a more well-rounded person and appreciate other cultures, he says. He got to know other Carlson School students, with whom he remains in touch. And the academic curiosity of the faculty on the programs Drott counts as incredibly rewarding.

“These were the pinnacles of my education,” he says. “They uncovered the ethos and the nuances of how things work, and perspective on this small planet we call home.”

“Being able to understand other cultures’ perspectives of how things work intrigued me.”

— STEPHEN DROTT, ’19 MBA

Callie Stevermer, ’23 BSB

Semester at Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) in Poland

Growing up on a farm in Blue Earth, Minnesota, Callie Stevermer played the violin and loved Tchaikovsky and Chopin. So when it came time for the Management Information Systems (MIS) student to choose an international experience, she picked Warsaw, Poland.

“I wanted something that would give me a different perspective,” says Stevermer. “I’ve always been a big fan of Slavic cultures and like how the languages sound.”

For fall semester 2022, she took eight classes at the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH), including project management, e-banking, and international relations. She learned how Poland is the 10th largest economy by GDP in the European Union, that 85 percent of Warsaw was demolished in World War II, and that the country is developing rapidly. She began to learn Polish, too.

“Polish language is really hard and you can’t guess what a word is—I kept accidentally buying desserts for dinner!” she laughs. “Speaking Polish is really appreciated and makes people smile.”

Stevermer also had the eye-opening experience of living on the border of war. Half the residents in her dormitory are Ukrainian refugees. “Poles are so dedicated to relief,” she says. “Unfailing effort is what I witnessed in Warsaw.”

As one of the few Americans in the city, Stevermer didn’t have a “comfort zone” to process her experiences, especially the loss points. She began to make friends from Germany, France, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and beyond. With a circle of friends, things improved.

Cultural lessons also helped. Her experience has made her appreciate even more the GLOBE student organization that connects U.S. and international students at the Carlson School.

“Now I understand more of what GLOBE does and can do,” she says. This spring, as GLOBE’s vice president for event planning on the executive board, she plans to incorporate ideas based on activities she learned in Warsaw.

Stevermer looks forward to her job after graduation as an internal auditor with Nestlé, too. “It’s 60 percent travel,” she says. “I’m really pumped!”

“To choose an international experience at the Carlson School was one of the benefits of the Part-Time MBA for Stephen Drott.”

— CALLIE STEVERMER, ’23 BSB

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Looking Forward

With spring upon us after a long Minnesota winter, now is a perfect time to reflect upon the pivots soon to come at the Carlson School and the growth that is driving the school into its next chapter.

As we have seen in the stories earlier in this edition of the Carlson School Magazine for Alumni and Friends, there are many exciting updates and innovations to our curriculum, programming, and student experiences that continue to set the Carlson School apart as a destination for business education. The commitment and critical support of alumni and donors like you make it possible for our faculty and staff to create these opportunities for our students.

Beginning this summer, the advancement team and I look forward to introducing you to our next dean, Jamie Prenkert. We are excited to welcome Jamie in the coming months. By the Numbers

By the Numbers

Together, the Carlson School community has accomplished so much. But to continue to provide the next generation of business leaders with an exceptional educational experience, we still need your help.

76

The percentage of students transferring into the Carlson School from another institution who don’t receive scholarships due to lack of available funding.

$6,000

The average out-of-pocket cost for our highest need students to complete their international experience requirement. Current available scholarship funding is only able to cover about 50 percent of the total cost of the experience.

$20,000

Cost for a proposed annual trip to bring 20 undergraduate students to New York City for career exploration and networking at finance and investment banking firms.

As we look ahead to the future, it is also important to recognize the incredible impact and foundation laid by the leaders that have come before us. The Carlson School has been privileged to have a forward-thinking leader in Dean Sri Zaheer, who joined with alumni, benefactors, and corporate partners to advance the school’s mission of shaping the next generation of business leaders. Working alongside our generous alumni and friends, Sri’s vision captured the imagination of our donors, allowing the school to more than double its endowment and to raise more than $220 million for students, faculty, and programs during her tenure.

We remain ever grateful to you for making it possible for the Carlson School to grow, innovate, and reimagine the meaning of business education.

Sincerely,

Jess Kowal, Assistant Dean
for Institutional Advancement

Update on the Bentson Scholarship Challenge

Launched just three years ago, the Bentson Scholarship Challenge has already had a major impact on the lives of 32 students at the Carlson School. Under the challenge, newly established endowed scholarship gifts benefitting Pell Grant-eligible students are matched by the Bentson Foundation, amplifying the impact of a gift, and reaching even more students.

The Bentson awards are designed to bridge the gap between what a Pell Grant covers and what qualifying students can afford—costs that may include tuition and fees, textbooks, and housing. These awards amount to between $3,750 to $10,000 a year, substantially decreasing students’ potential debt load after graduation.

With around 300 undergraduate students qualifying for Pell Grant-funding annually in recent years, there is still an unmet need in this area, but also an opportunity to help. A current recipient of a Bentson scholarship, a first-year student who long dreamed of being part of the Maroon and Gold family, called the award life-changing for their academic experience.

“Through high school, I worked 25 hours a week on top of schooling and participating in extracurricular activities. This was all in an effort to be able to afford college and even then, it wasn’t guaranteed that I could afford it. As a first-generation college student, I am eager to provide for my family and pass down the ability to go to college for future generations.”

Matching funds from the Bentson Foundation are still available if you are interested in supporting these promising students with great financial need. The Carlson School extends great thanks to the 22 benefactors who have taken advantage of the Bentson Scholarship Challenge.

Scholarship Gifts Celebrate Jennifer Houle’s Legacy

To celebrate their daughter Jennifer’s 30th birthday on November 11, 2022, John and Diane Houle made a special appeal for the Jennifer Houle Memorial Undergraduate Scholarship at the Carlson School during Give to the Max Day 2022. The scholarship benefits talented female students and honors Jennifer, who passed away in 2015 while a student, and her love of the University of Minnesota and the Carlson School.

By personally matching every gift made on Give to the Max Day, John and Diane inspired more than 60 donors, raising an additional $26,116 for this fund. As the fund grows, the amount of each scholarship award grows, ensuring that the Houle Scholars receive an elite education on their way to becoming the business leaders of tomorrow with a lower financial burden.

The Houles share: “We are thrilled that the success of this appeal means Jennifer continues to make an impact not only on the eight women who have already been Houle Scholars, but on all of those who will carry on her legacy far into the future.”

* deceased

NEWS & NOTES
At The Center of It All

BY WADE RUPARD

Thanks to corporate giving, Naturally Minnesota helps food entrepreneurs make their dreams a reality.

For more than a century, the state of Minnesota has been at the center of food and agriculture innovation. The state has several Fortune 500 food companies and is home to one of the highest number of food scientists in the country.

Naturally Minnesota, formerly known as Grow North, at the Carlson School’s Gary S. Holmes Center for Entrepreneurship is becoming a go-to leader for small- and medium-sized food and agriculture businesses to grow and add to that legacy.

“We are here to help any business that needs help,” says Allison Hohn, executive director of Naturally Minnesota. “We make introductions and connections and give them the tools to build their business. We want to strengthen Minnesota’s natural and organic businesses to drive equitable prosperity for people and the planet.”

Naturally Minnesota works to create an interconnected, sophisticated, and invested ecosystem for entrepreneurs and innovators to accelerate business growth. The organization is the front door and starting point for those who want to be a part of, engage with, or know more about Minnesota’s growing entrepreneurial ecosystem in food and agriculture.

To power that mission, Naturally Minnesota partners with a variety of food and agriculture businesses across the state for financial support. Some of those partners include General Mills, Compeer Financial, and Hormel Foods, among many others.

These gifts help Naturally Minnesota provide the education, resources, and connections needed to accelerate the natural products industry in Minnesota. They help fund several monthly and yearly events, resource databases and tools created to support aspiring entrepreneurs, among many other initiatives. The newest and most unique of these is the Bold Growth Program, which is done in partnership with the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) through the MBOLD coalition. The program is a small, but highly customized, accelerator for late-stage companies to help advance their goals through access to pro bono project teams and advisors over a 12- to 18-month period.

“We want to strengthen Minnesota’s natural and organic businesses to drive equitable prosperity for people and the planet.”

— ALLISON HOHN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NATURALLY MINNESOTA

“We are thrilled to continue to support Naturally Minnesota and its initiatives,” says Bryan Keske of Hormel Foods. “We want the state and the region to continue to be leaders in the food and agriculture space. What Naturally Minnesota is doing through the Carlson School is vital to making that happen.”

Members from Hormel Foods and Compeer also serve on Naturally Minnesota’s board.

“Naturally Minnesota is a vital part of the food and agriculture ecosystem throughout the state of Minnesota,” says Jason Goux, Naturally Minnesota board member and senior innovation strategy consultant at Compeer Financial. “[Hohn] and the rest of the Naturally Minnesota team are tremendous partners to us in helping find the next generation of agribusiness entrepreneurs.”

By encouraging an inclusive atmosphere, Hohn says Naturally Minnesota aims to be a hub of innovation for food entrepreneurs.

“We meet with hundreds of entrepreneurs a year and are connected with major companies across the state,” she says. “This space is a team sport. We’re always looking for collaboration.”

What drives you in your work? We are a high-growth company that has grown from approximately 150 locations 10 years ago to almost 1,700 locations today. I get tremendous energy from growing our company and developing our talented teammates. I am always focused on identifying the opportunities for our teammates to reach their long-term goals and building action plans to ensure they have the right development opportunities so they can reach their full potential.

You’re on the Carlson School’s Board of Advisors. Why was that something you wanted to do? The Carlson School helped position me to get to where I am today, so I wanted to make a positive impact on the next generation of students. My family and I have created two scholarships for the Carlson School to make sure that young, aspiring future executives have the same opportunities that I did.

What advice would you give Carlson School students who are about to graduate? First, start building a network. Second, do some research on what type of companies you want to work for. Then, leverage the network that you’re starting to build and identify opportunities to get in front of those companies, whether it be an internship or volunteering. Meet with the company in any way you can so that you can really target those companies that you’re interested in that match the skillset of where you want to be in the long term.
“I want to help younger women who might not have the confidence and encourage them to achieve their dreams.”
— CATHERINE WRIGHT, ’87 BSB

Supporting Women at Every Turn
BY WADE RUPARD

Throughout her career, Catherine Wright, ’87 BSB, has been a trailblazer. As the first woman to hold leadership positions at several large companies, Wright broke through the glass ceiling. Now, she wants to inspire female students pursuing careers in male-dominated fields to do the same.

“I want to help younger women who might not have the confidence and encourage them to achieve their dreams,” she says.

Wright recently established a scholarship to support female students pursuing degrees such as Accounting, Finance, or Management. ‘Women are often not aware that scholarships are available,” she says. “This is an opportunity for female students who might not have the confidence to do the same.

Those experiences led Wright to give back to the Carlson School through a scholarship. “I came from a humble beginning, and I wanted to help out others with a gift so they didn’t have to work as hard as I did,” she says. “I want to continue to encourage and support women. I’ve always done my best to be a cheerleader for women and be supportive. A scholarship or gift is a way to continue my support. There were women mentors that helped shape my career, and I want to continue to do that for the next generation.”

Wright sees the gift as a way to give back to the next generation in a way that helped shape her career. “My education prepared me so well,” she says. “The curriculum, the competitiveness, the quality of the students, the instructors, everything. Even being around the international students in my program helped me later on in my career when I worked overseas. I wouldn’t be where I’m at today without my education from the University of Minnesota.”

Now, Wright has formed Wright Consulting, LLC where she is partnering with Fortune 200 global companies to develop strategies to grow revenue and improve efficiency. She has also gone back to school to pursue an interior design degree. “That’s a passion of mine,” she says. “We’ve been fortunate to spend a lot of time in the Bahamas, and there is definitely a market for home renovation. No matter where in the world she is, Wright is lending a hand to help.”

Alumni Come Together for Finch Fellowship
BY WADE RUPARD

A great faculty member can make a world of a difference in a student’s education. To honor one retiring Carlson School faculty member, alumni came together to raise money for a fellowship named in his honor.

That faculty member is Mike Finch, the long-time Medical Industry Leadership Institute (MILI) Valuation Lab Faculty Director. Since 2009, Finch has invited a small group of outstanding students to participate as a Valuation Lab Fellow. Now, “Finch Fellows” will always be part of the Lab. On this year’s May Day in November 2022, nearly 60 donors took part, raising more than $50,000. The donations allow the program to endow a fund that will live in perpetuity.

“We have so many dedicated and engaged alumni who have such great memories of Mike,” says Jessica Haupt, the managing director of MILI. “This is a great way to honor Mike and make sure the fellowship continues after he retires.”

“This is such an unbelievable honor,” Finch says. “To see the impact the program had on students and alumni is truly remarkable.”

Throughout the years, nearly 100 Valuation Lab alumni have participated in the program, earning the opportunity to work with the Medical Device Fellows, Children’s Hospital investment group, and conduct independent research. Many of these opportunities wouldn’t have been possible without Finch’s leadership and mentorship.

Alumni of the fellowship program have gone on to work across the country in more than 65 local, national, and global companies; and have careers in higher education, medical device, startups, health systems, and financial institutions.
Every event brings new insights, experiences, and connections for alumni and friends of the Carlson School. Here are some highlights:

1st Tuesday with Dean Sri Zaheer

Dean Sri Zaheer headlined 1st Tuesday in December 2022 to commemorate her return to faculty after this academic year. The lively crowd at McNamara Alumni Center included former University of Minnesota president Bob Bruininks, Regent Doug Huebsch, Alumni Association President and CEO Lisa Lewis, and more. Wendy Nelson, chairwoman of the Carlson Family Foundation, sat down in a fireside chat with Zaheer to discuss her path through industry to academia and leadership, highlights of her tenure as dean, and what’s next for her career and her family.

Women’s Leadership Conference

In March, we welcomed more than 350 alumni and local professionals to the annual Women’s Leadership Conference. Nicole Graves, ’97 MHRIR, global people leader at Apple, and Beth Kieffer Leonard, ’82 BSB, partner-in-charge of the Minnesota Office for EisnerAmper, were highlights, sharing insights from their professional journeys from the Carlson School to the boardroom. Save the date for the Women’s Leadership Conference: Friday, March 1, 2024.

Regional Events around the U.S.

The Carlson School was back on the road in 2022 to visit and connect with alumni across the country. Carlson School alumni and friends gathered in Dallas, New York City, Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco for celebration, camaraderie, and networking. If you missed us—don’t worry, we’ll be back in 2023!

7th Annual Military and Veterans Celebration

More than 100 veteran alumni, family, and friends of the Carlson School’s Military and Veteran community came together on November 10, 2022, for the 7th Annual Military and Veterans Celebration. Guests enjoyed a formal dinner and program, including a keynote speech from Anthony Gagliardo, a former U.S. Air Force special operations flight engineer, who is currently the area vice president of enterprise, nuclear and technical training for Xcel Energy, and serves on the Carlson School’s Executive Education Board. Each year, we are thrilled to recognize the contributions of these exceptional students to our country and our Carlson School community. Connect with your fellow veteran alumni through the Carlson Veteran Alumni Network. Learn more at z.umn.edu/CVAN.

MBA Students & Alumni of Color Networking Night

Prospective and current MBA students had the opportunity to meet alumni at Graze Provisions + Libations in Minneapolis to build their networks and experience camaraderie among students and alumni of color. The networking night was sponsored by Carlson 360 for Alumni of Color, a volunteer-led group that promotes inclusivity at the Carlson School and in the local business community. Learn more at z.umn.edu/CarlsonAffinity.

Ovative Group

Excited Carlson School alumni at the Ovative Group in Minneapolis hosted an event on the company’s rooftop on a beautiful late September 2022 evening. Professor Joe Redden and Ovative Group VP Jen Alcott, ’00 BSB, shared their unique perspectives on marketing analytics while guests enjoyed connecting with their fellow alumni at work.

Carlson School Day at Gophers Football Tailgate

October 1, 2022 was Carlson School Day at Gophers Football! Carlson School alumni and football fans celebrated with a huge tent party before the game outside Huntington Bank Stadium. While Minnesota fell to Purdue, the team spirit was loud and proud. Ski-U-Mah
Scholarships help provide opportunities for students to attend a leading business school and gain skills, leadership experience, and connections to help them use business as a force for good. Philanthropy from alumni and friends of the Carlson School makes a positive impact, extending far beyond the campus.

“Alyssa Arnold, ’23 BSB

In the U.S. when I learned how they applied in Asia, it was also a great personal journey for me, pushing me out of my comfort zone to explore a beautiful part of the world with amazing people I met along the way. Another highlight of my Carlson School experience has been my internship, including this past summer with Procter and Gamble as a sales intern. Working on the Target account, I worked to solve real-world business problems using Nielsen data and the persuasive selling format to guide my presentation skills. After I graduate in May of 2023, I will be returning to P&G as an account executive.

Due to the generous scholarships I’ve received, I’ll be able to graduate from college debt free, which has allowed me to focus on my academics and stay involved on campus without financial stress.

Anjali Donthi, ’26 BSB

As a volunteer at the Mayo Clinic in 2019, I noticed the challenges faced by pediatric patients when it came to understanding their surgeries. With the guidance of my mentors and past colleagues, I led the development of Operation Serenity, an app designed to provide educational and emotional support resources for pediatric patients and their families.

My participation in MN Cup exposed me to the art of business planning, the relationship between healthcare and technology, and the process of establishing a business. The success of Operation Serenity in positively impacting patients and their families solidified my belief in the power of technology and entrepreneurship to bring about change and make a difference in people’s lives.

My ultimate goal is to create a company that drives positive change and enhancement in my community through cutting-edge technological innovations. My double major in Finance and Management Information Systems, along with my work in Computer Science, provides me with a well-rounded education that strengthens both my technical abilities and business acumen. I am determined to make the most of my college experience by continuously working hard and taking advantage of opportunities. I am grateful for the scholarship aid that I have received, and I am motivated to pay it forward by giving back to my community.

Denise Schornack, ’79 BSB, is retiring and closing her clothing store, Nadine’s, after 44 successful years in business in Perham, Minn. Known for its variety of brand-quality women’s clothing and lake life fashion, Nadine’s became a staple in the community and beyond. Schornack reflects fondly on the fun of running the shop and says she has “enormous gratitude” for her customers for choosing Nadine’s to be part of their lives for so long. She plans to continue Nadine’s as a vendor booth at the nearby P.S. I Love You boutique. Following retirement this spring, Schornack says she’s looking forward to spending more time with her family, including her seven grandchildren.

Let your classmates know what you’ve been up to since graduation. Submit a Class Note for publication in the alumni magazine: carlsonschool.umn.edu/Share.

CLASS NOTES

1970s

Douglas Lanner, ’73 BSB, started a new position as manager at Deloitte.

1980s

Tim Lalonde, ’86 BSB, was promoted to chief financial officer at Ecovero.
Karen Olson, ’86 BSB, was elected as partner for Spencer Fane LLP.
Louis Berezovsky, ’89 BSB, was appointed as a board of director for Ascent Solar Technologies.

1990s

Peter Ann, ’91 MBA, was appointed as a board director for Canterbury Park.
Jeff Secacut, ’93 MBA, is now senior vice president, product & product marketing at Lyrics.
Liam Shay, ’93 BSB, is now under-writing counsel at Allied National Title Insurance Company.
Michael Sullivan, ’93 MBA, was appointed as a member of the advisory board at Wayle.
Renée Peterson, ’94 MBA, was appointed as a non-executive director of the board at James Hardie Industries. She is also currently vice president and chief financial officer for The Toro Company.
Wayne Roen, ’95 MBA, retired from 3M after a 38-year career in business management and engineering. He lives with his wife, Kris, in River Falls, Wis.
Matthew Carrier, ’96 BSB, received the 2023 Five Star Wealth Manager Award from Five Star Professionals for the second year in a row.
Judd Nystrom, ’96 BSB, was appointed as chief financial officer at Caliber Collision.
Leslie Jones Arroyo, ’97 BSB, was appointed deputy city manager in South San Francisco, Calif.
Lynn Blake, ’97 MBB, was appointed chief financial officer at Nuvelity.
Andrew Fishlery, ’97 BSB, ’03 MBA, started a new role as global director of automotive aftermarket and abrasives business at 3M.
Dominic Louwagie, ’97 MBA, started a new role as senior global product line manager at Reels Automotive Business.
Paul Reppenhaugen, ’97 MBA, is now chief marketing officer at Chief Outdoors.
Jennifer Jorgensen, ’99 MBA, started a new role as vice president and chief executive officer of Back to Nature.
David Ruhland, ’99 MBA, started a new position as vice chancellor for finance and administration at University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

2000s

Ann Senne, ’00 MBA, is now U.S. chief administrative and integration officer at RBC.
Richard Rodgers, ’02 MBA, was appointed as an independent director at Novavax.
Kim Snow, ’02 MBA, started a new role as executive director at Franklin Center.
Michi (Denisson) Turner, ’02 MHRIR, is now chief human resources officer at Cliase.
Laura Rehfeld, ’03 MBA, has a new role as senior director of treasury at Kaiser Permanente.
Gabriel Garcia, ’04 MBA, was promoted to senior manager of information technology as a business partner at Molson Coors Beverage Company.
Henry Chang, ’05 MBA, started a new role as senior vice president and general manager of MKS Instruments Inc.
Stacey Churchill, ’05 MBA, is now vice president and general manager, procedure innovations at Medtronic.
Brian Dormanski, ’05 BSB, is now vice president of sales at Ecolab Healthcare.
KC Glaser, ’05 BSB, ’16 MBA, was recognized as Brand Innovator’s 40 under 40 for 2022 representing the Midwest. He is the senior manager, brand experience—loyalty and rewards for General Mills.

2023

Chris Carlisle, ’93 BSB, ’98 MBA, started a new role as president and general manager of Calcutta Outdoors, a subsidiary of Peak Holdings LLC.

2023

Peter Ann, ’91 MBA, was appointed as a board director for Canterbury Park.
Jeff Secacut, ’93 MBA, is now senior vice president, product & product marketing at Lyrics.
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David Ruhland, ’99 MBA, started a new position as vice chancellor for finance and administration at University of Wisconsin-River Falls.
Benjamin Grabski, '07 MBA, '12 MBA, was appointed chief financial officer at Lumeris.
J Michael Edwards-Toupec, '08 MBA, was promoted to director of business development at RevUnit.
Frederik Ellison, '08 MBA, started a new position as key account manager at Neogen Corporation.
Terry Haider, '08 MBA, started a new position as finance director at Foley Public Schools.
Patrick Barrett, '09 MBA, was elected as a partner lawyer for Morrison Foerster.
Ryan Krommenga, '09 MBA, '14 MBA, was recently promoted from associate to vice president at Northborne Partners.
Scott Laroque, '09 MBA, was promoted to director at ProWell.
Sam Tushima, '10 MBA, '17 MBA, is now head of cyber risk consulting and analytics at Aon North America.
Donna Wong, '09 MBA, '19 MBA, is now senior director of product management at Optum.
Kevin Yu, '09 MBA, '19 MBA, started a new position as chief financial officer at Accanto Health.
Linda Dehollander, '10 MBA, was awarded the 2022 AbbVie Chairman's Award, the company’s most prestigious employee award, for his contributions to a product launch within the U.S. Dermatology franchise.
Adrine Chung, '11 MBA, was appointed executive director of clinical operations at TDR, Biotherapeutics and 1200 Pharma.
Adrian Cook, '11 MBA, is now strategy and business development director at 3M Health Care Business Group.
Archana Dasgupta, '11 MBA, started a new position as director of strategy, Image Guided Therapy Devices at Philips.
Mike Ingberand, '11 MBA, started a new position as director of global sales at WorldCare Clinical.
Prachi Mishra, '11 MBA, is now product marketing director at Doosilgin, a promotion from senior product marketing manager.
Jesse Morsching, '11 MBA, started a new position as chief financial officer at Accent Health.
Jesse Ng, '11 MBA, passed the Society of Actuaries (SOA) Investments & Financial Markets exam as part of the SOA’s associateship credentialing pathway.
Christian Zimprich, '11 MBA, started a new role as global IBP & strategy leader at Sheerwin-Williams.
Bradford Brennan, '12 MBA, is new finance manager at Optum.
Elizabeth Guest Kibler, '12 MBA, started a new position as associate manager OMNI shopper marketing Blue Buffalo at General Mills.
Kenton Morris Sr., '12 MBA, '19 MBA, started a new position as associate director at Medtronic, Inc.
Tatiana Mironova, '13 MBA, started a new position as senior associate at Docusign.
Christian Zimprich, '13 MBA, started a new position as director of global marketing at MTS Systems Corporation.
Katie (Vogel) Twelves, '13 MBA, is now director of client experience and marketing programs at Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC.
Donald Hunter, '13 MBA, is now branch manager at Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC.
Hollies Winston, '13 MBA, was elected mayor of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.
Brandon Biegelbach, '14 MBA, '21 MSSC, is now a supply chain analytics solution architect at 3M.
Anthony Cannon, '14 MBA, was promoted to managing director at Accenture.
Blake Corson, '14 MBA, is now vice president and senior relationship manager at Land O’Lakes.
Courtney O’Donnell Finley, '14 MBA, is now planning and operations lead at Target.
Kevin Krueger, '14 MBA, is now a marketing director at Land O’Lakes, a promotion from senior marketing manager.
Ernie Lietzien, '14 MBA, started a new position as a first officer at SkyWest Airlines.
Bryan McCallum, '14 MBA, is now vice president of finance at Whirlronics, Inc.
Shawn Nelson, '14 MBA, is now senior global account manager of digital solutions at Ecolab, a promotion from corporate account manager.
Darya Antanovich, '15 MBA, started a new position as senior consultant at Launch Consulting Group.
Ally (Moeller) Braun, '15 MBA, is now a strategy and consulting senior manager at Accenture, a promotion from strategy and consulting manager.
Lauria Lee Brown, '15 MBA, was promoted to director of strategy in surgical robotics at Medronic.
Andrew Rogers, '15 MBA, was appointed as general manager for The Ritz-Carlton, Kapukia.
Drew Zinkel, '15 MD-MBA, started a new position as senior medical director of emergency medicine at the University of Minnesota Medical Center.
Karyn Dossinger, '16 MD-MBA, started a new role as an assistant professor at Loyola University Quinlan School of Business.
Nels Haugen, '16 MBA, started a new position as director of growth and regulatory technology at Optum.
Kenny Ngo, '16 MBA, started a new position as customer success manager at Elastic.
46 UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  

IN MEMORIAM

1950s
Bill Teeter, ’57 BSB, died in 2022.
Lloyd Robinson, ’59 BSB, died in November 2022.

1960s
John D. Nolan, ’61 BSB, died in April 2022.
Daniel Hassel, ’68 BSB, died in November 2022.
Coenraad Mohr, ’69 MBA, died in January 2023.

1970s
Hans Melgaard, ’71 BSB, ’78 MBA, died in October 2022.
David H. Gobeli, ’78 MBA, ’82 PhD, died in November 2022.

1980s
Ram Rajagopalan, ’80 MBA, of Rokos Advisors were honored in September 2022.
Scott Levin, ’85 BSB, died in November 2022.

1990s
Michael Stokke, ’91 MBA, died in November 2022.
Bernadette Sheats, ’92 BSB, died in August 2022.
Elliot Kass, ’94 MBA, died in December 2022.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

1. Aparna Ganamarapu, ’22 MSSCM, and Shashank Navuduri, a current Part-Time MBA student, formally registered their marriage in 2021, but finally celebrated their Indian wedding rituals in Florida on December 14, 2022.
2. Ally (Mc Coller) Braun, ’15 BSB, and JD Braun were married in May 2022.
3. Barbara Cho welcomed baby EvaChen Hu, a tiger girl born on December 11, 2022. Baby girl was even able to participate in Carlson China MBA courses before she was born!
5. Natalia (Velichenko) Kluis, ’18 BSB, and her husband, Austin, welcomed their first daughter, Elvina.
6. Alex Kurth, ’14 BSB, married his new bride, Krista, in summer 2022. Krista is a University of Wisconsin graduate, but Alex loves her anyway. The two enjoyed an amazing honeymoon in Italy.
7. Billie Pritsker and Joe Ohlin, both ’18 BSB, were married in August 2022 in Minneapolis and celebrated among many of their MBA Class of 2018 classmates. Recently married areourses.

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Akinyi Williams

A passion for real estate and finance has been with Akinyi Williams, ‘09 MBA, for a long time. In 2018, with her husband, Travis, she co-founded Western High Capital, to provide alternative real estate funding to the traditional credit market. Williams is also an adjunct instructor at the Carlson School and a board member for the Carlson Global Institute.

1. Strive to get top pay by bringing your best.
I did not understand the impact of money and power until I became a loan officer. Seeing the variance in incomes among loan applicants inspired me to push myself so that I, too, could earn top pay to support my dreams. This immediately presented new challenges as a Black woman and an immigrant with a heavy accent, but I was persistent. I learned to push past many disenchantments and endless “no’s.” I got hungry, then mad. Ultimately, I learned to silence the insecurity in my head and to advocate for myself as the strong candidate I believed I was.

2. Negotiate and ask for your worth.
As a young girl growing up in Kenya, I always wanted to help change lives through access to education. I revisited this mission in 2007 by starting Hope for the Child, a Minnesota-based nonprofit. Since then, our team has opened three schools and provided education to more than 5,000 poor and disadvantaged children in Kenya. Leveraging business as a force for good is not a cliché. Giving back my time, my earnings, and following my passion to make a difference in other people’s lives has been the greatest privilege and most fulfilling endeavor of all.

3. Take accountability for your growth.
After landing the job, I needed to expand my skills to be more effective. I threw myself into after-hours self-study to understand business requirements and solutions engineering, and got certified in project and program management. I had to be persistent and not settle. I learned that for a Black woman like me to succeed in Minnesota, I had to go the extra mile to be recognized for my work in order to earn a seat at the table and then, in time, confidently demand for what I deserved.

4. Adversity can push us to betterment.
As creatures of habit, we don’t like quick changes, sometimes even at the expense of reaching our true purpose. But when change is due, some clarion call power greater than us seemingly stirs trouble to motivate movement. Going back for my MBA was unnerving, but the lending market outlook was scarier, so I learned to fight fear, embrace change, pay the price to chart a new course, then focus on the finish line to achieve my purpose.

5. Make an impact.
As a young girl growing up in Kenya, I always wanted to help change lives through access to education. I revisited this mission in 2007 by starting Hope for the Child, a Minnesota-based nonprofit. Since then, our team has opened three schools and provided education to more than 5,000 poor and disadvantaged children in Kenya. Leveraging business as a force for good is not a cliché. Giving back my time, my earnings, and following my passion to make a difference in other people’s lives has been the greatest privilege and most fulfilling endeavor of all.

“I learned that for a Black woman like me to succeed in Minnesota, I had to go the extra mile to be recognized for my work.”
— AKNYI WILLIAMS, ‘09 MBA
MBA Reunion Weekend

MAY 5-6, 2023

All MBA alumni are invited to celebrate.

Register at z.umn.edu/MBAReunion

Milestone classes from these years will be recognized: