

Congratulations Spring 2010 Graduates

The following MBA students will graduate in May:

- George Anderson
- Katie Abbott
- Gregory Jones
- Matthew Godfrey
- Heather Serre
- James Schosser
- Neal Piwowarski
- Jennifer Nickel
- James Wynn



Letter from the Director

Welcome to the first MBA newsletter. This newsletter is brought to you by Ann Whitaker, who has taken on the responsibility for creating an MBA community. If you know Ann, you'll agree that she is the perfect person for this role.

This has been a very eventful year for the MBA program. We introduced a brand-new curriculum, brought in new faculty and students, and lost our longtime administrator, Faye Deitz, to retirement. The new program and faculty have been very well received, and admissions this past year were up by well more than 30 percent. This is great news for the program.

We're not through changing yet. Next year we will focus on career services, global opportunities and quality enhancement. Career services haven't been an issue with our program historically, but with unemployment and underemployment now at more than 20 percent in our region, that has to change. We're developing internship opportunities and expanding networking opportunities to address this need.

We're also offering a global travel opportunity to MBA students for the first time. In June, I will be traveling with about a dozen WCU students to Shanghai and Beijing, China. China is a great place to

visit and provides an incredible experience that isn't available anywhere else in the world. China's combination of culture and economics makes it a most interesting and most important country for us to understand.

Our students and alumni are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of networking in our area. Traditional jobs are declining, but opportunities remain for talented, skilled workers. In the developing world, the model has always been getting a job, a second job, starting a business, then a second business, and always looking for new opportunities. I see successful young people using this approach at home now. It sounds like a contradiction, but global competitiveness starts with a strong local base.

Finally, I'd like to shout out a big thanks to all of our graduate assistants. State budget cuts have forced us to delay replacing our administrator, and I had to ask the GAs to step up their support for the program. If you've been able to register and attend classes, and if your professors are still professing, you can bet there is a GA working in the background to make things happen.

Dr. Steve Henson
MBA director

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WCU-Junaluska Service-Learning Partnership Yields Results

By Meghan Adams

In the past year, students at the undergraduate and graduate level have had the opportunity to work with a variety of organizations as part of a universitywide service-learning initiative. These projects are designed to provide students a meaningful learning experience while stimulating economic growth in the Western North Carolina region.

Lake Junaluska is a Christian conference and retreat center located in Lake Junaluska, N.C., just outside Waynesville. The organization provides a unique location for Christian training and hospitality. Among its many offerings are a golf course, meeting space, banquet halls and lodging.

Lake Junaluska has benefited from this partnership with the university. Each year, the organization hosts numerous Christian-themed conferences. Traditionally enrollment has been high; however, in response to the recent economic downturn, Lake Junaluska has faced challenges in attracting conference attendees and out-of-town guests. Student teams in undergraduate and graduate marketing courses are working with the organization to address these issues and propose ways to create a sustainable future. Projects that have been completed include the creation of several marketing plans, each focusing on a specific area of the business.

Last summer, a student intern working with Lake Junaluska presented a marketing plan intended to improve the process of conference planning. Suggestions included

the formation of a ministry advisory board to guide decisions in scheduling programs, the creation of a style manual to build and maintain consistency with the organization's internal and external communications, and the creation of a customer evaluation tool to monitor customer satisfaction levels.

During the fall semester, student groups worked on two different projects. One group focused on the creation of a best practices recommendation document designed to guide the organization in developing a ministry advisory board. This group also created a guest survey assessing the level of satisfaction with the overall experience. The second student group created a marketing plan designed to increase the number of out-of-town guests coming to Lake Junaluska for a vacation or short stay.

This semester, students continue to work with the organization, creating a marketing plan to increase the number of groups scheduling events at Lake Junaluska and developing a media strategy to attract both individuals and groups to its location.

Working hands-on with a business and applying classroom knowledge to a real-world experience is critical to student development and preparation in entering the work environment. Lake Junaluska has begun to implement some of the student recommendations and has thus far seen success in its efforts. Students will continue to work with this organization and others as the university maintains its close relationship with the community.

Student Uses Education to Help Family Business

By Ann Whitaker

Jason Wilde is a full-time MBA student who is quickly making use of the knowledge he learns in the classroom. Wilde works for Mountain Home Care (www.mountainhomecare.com), a local business founded by his family in 2003 that provides in-home care to seniors throughout Western North Carolina. The counties served include Buncombe, Henderson, Transylvania, Madison, Haywood, McDowell and Polk. Mountain Home Care employs approximately 100 individuals, including caregivers, registered nurses, care managers, scheduling and office coordinators, and sales and operations staff. Clients include private and long-term care insured seniors who desire to remain at home for as long as possible.

Wilde has many reasons for choosing to pursue his MBA at WCU. First, he wanted to maximize his contributions to Mountain Home Care. Daily responsibilities include human resources, finance and use of IT systems. "I wanted to learn how to do these tasks accurately and efficiently, and ultimately I wanted to learn how to best lead others to do them," Wilde said. Secondly, Wilde recognized the WCU MBA program as effective at preparing students for leadership positions. "I knew there were areas in which I needed to be, and could be, a more effective leader, and I knew that this program would provide me the tools and insight to get there," he said. Finally, he was aware that the program is challenging. He wanted to begin a new career within his company, and by furthering his education, he was able to be recharged and refreshed to tackle new projects.

Wilde already is utilizing his education. Wilde and his father have successfully formed a new company, JWilde Associates, that will provide executive search and HR consulting services. Wilde has found that through the structure of the WCU MBA program, "It has been easy to connect theory and best practice with real life application." He also has gained many new contacts and networks, including professors, student colleagues and local businesses within the area. Without a doubt, Wilde is happy to be a part of the WCU MBA program.

Thompkins' Varied Career an Example for MBA Students

By Matt Leach

Originally from Lumberton, N.C., Dr. William "Tilt" Thompkins' impressive academic and professional achievements are numerous. As an undergraduate studying aeronautical engineering at N.C. State University, Thompkins worked his way through school as a programmer for IBM. His interest in aeronautics stemmed from the fact that it was the era of the "race to the moon and the development of the first large-scale aircraft," he said.

Upon graduation he began to work full time for Pratt & Whitney, an aircraft engine manufacturer in Hartford, Conn. After a few years of working for Pratt & Whitney, Thompkins attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and earned a doctorate in mechanical engineering. Upon graduation, Thompkins became an MIT faculty member in the aeronautics department, teaching rocket propulsion, gas turbine propulsion and computational fluid dynamics.

Thompkins' next move was to the West Coast. In Los Angeles, Thompkins founded the computer science laboratory at the Northrop Research and Technology Center, a research lab focused in a variety of software engineering and large-scale computing projects. During his time in L.A., Thompkins earned his MBA from the University of Southern California.

After a stretch in California, Thompkins decided it was time to move back to the East Coast. He accepted a job with United Technologies Research Center in Hartford, Conn., where he was the associate director for IT and mechatronics. After his time at UTRC, Thompkins served at the University of Illinois as the associate director for industrial technologies and at Purdue as the associate vice president for infrastructure.

His desire to move to the mountains brought him to Western North Carolina, and now settled in Asheville, he plans to teach at Western Carolina University for the

remainder of his career. Although he has little free time this semester, Thompkins enjoys golfing and listening to and playing bluegrass music. His interest in bluegrass stemmed from the thriving bluegrass scene that he experienced in New England. He loves the bluegrass music that is prevalent in Western North Carolina and can be found golfing at Reems Creek Golf Course in Weaverville, N.C.

Thompkins' mathematical background and extensive experience in research and development have led to his role as professor of MBA 606: "Managing Research and Development Activities" and MBA 608: "Portfolio Management." The MBA program is very fortunate to have an individual with such a rich career and in-depth real-world experience. "There are no lifetime careers," is Thompkins' sendoff advice to MBA students. Examining the numerous careers that Thompkins has had, one can see he has truly lived this advice to the fullest.

COB Offering Travel Abroad to China for Credit

By Meghan Adams

This summer the College of Business is providing students an exciting opportunity to travel abroad to China for a three-week cultural immersion program and earn course credit. While in the country, students will visit the cities of Shanghai and Beijing.

While in Shanghai, students will participate in 36 hours of Chinese culture and language training at Fudan University. Classes will be taken in the morning, allowing students ample free time to be enjoyed in the afternoons and evenings.

Students will be provided housing at an apartment complex near Fudan University. Each apartment has a common living area and two to three private bedrooms. Activities planned for the Shanghai portion of the trip include shopping in the many Chinese street markets, karaoke, Chinese opera

and a visit to Tea City. Specific activities may vary depending on student interest.

During the second week of the trip, students will travel by train from Shanghai to Beijing, where they will visit the Great Wall of China, Tiananmen Square and other major cultural landmarks.

The trip is scheduled for June 21 through July 12 and is estimated to cost a total of \$3,800 per student, which includes tuition and fees. The price includes most dinners, and students are responsible for breakfast (expect to pay about \$1) and lunch (expect to pay about \$2). Many meals are served banquet-style with seven to eight courses.

Travel arrangements will be organized by the university. Students will carpool to Atlanta and fly as a group direct to Shanghai. The flight will be between 12 and 15 hours.

The course name is "Business in China" and is worth three credit hours or one course credit. Graduate students will enroll in MBA 693. Undergraduate students will enroll in BA 293.

Upon the decision to participate in the trip, students must present a valid passport and a \$500 deposit.

If you are interested in participating in this trip, please contact Dr. Steve Henson, MBA program director and faculty adviser for this trip, at mba@wcu.edu.



IT Professional with Biltmore Seeks Degree

By Ann Whitaker

The WCU MBA program does more than prepare students to work in small businesses. It also attracts and educates individuals who work in corporate America. Robert Grace is a current part-time student who is employed by the Biltmore Co. as the IT applications and business support manager. Grace leads a team of six systems analysts, and together they ensure that the myriad of systems across the company meet the needs of the end-users. In addition, the analysts operate with their assigned business areas to ensure that they work toward strategic goals through the use of technology.

Biltmore is a varied and dynamic company that uses approximately 70 applications to keep things ticking. The systems used include ticketing, food and beverage, conference services, accommodations, retail, winery, and security, in addition to the traditional “back-office” systems, such as payroll, marketing and human resources.

Grace was encouraged to work toward an MBA three years ago by the Biltmore director of IT. At that point, he was expecting the arrival of his first child and the timing was not right for him. However, in the summer of 2009, he once again raised the possibility of pursuing an MBA and was granted a place at WCU. “I compared the course against various online offerings, and found that WCU offered a more hands-on and relevant learning experience. I plan to make practical use of the MBA program within the Biltmore Company, and I have already had a chance, after just one semester, to apply the MBA material to several projects,” he said. Grace is very happy with his choice to pursue his MBA at WCU, and he looks forward to the new things he will learn as he continues through the program.

Ivy League and Golf Course Design Inform Student’s Perspective

By Michael Kimmel

Western Carolina University kicked off its revamped MBA program in the fall of 2009 with some interesting new matriculates – all manner of talents, personalities and ambitions that, when combined in a classroom setting, make for an interesting learning experience.

Alyn Janis is one of those students.

Initially known as “that guy who went to Harvard,” we gradually got to know Janis as a thoughtful person with a keen, dry wit. Janis comes from a long line of ancestors in the golf course business, and he may regale you with myths about the Janis clan designing golf courses for Zeus.

MK: What led you to WCU for your MBA?

AJ: WCU promised the sort of revamped program I was looking for. With the economy going through such an interesting time, I was happy to see a program that intended to learn from it and see what would be done differently. I hope to come out with potential solutions.

MK: How would your previous job in golf course design have benefitted from an MBA?

AJ: I could have used the concepts and experience to improve the last company I worked for. Among other things, it would have helped me describe the link to our clients between their golf course and value it brings to their customers.

MK: Is there anything you would like to share about your Harvard experience?

AJ: Harvard has two major advantages. First: the astounding resources from the library and collections to the museums. The place is filled with inspiration at every turn. Second: the wealth of bright people from all over the world. One of the best introductions to your own and foreign cultures is to work alongside them for a while. The Ivy League also builds a diverse faculty. Especially in the design field, it was valuable to get their views and opinions on your work. It was interesting to see what they assume as normal.

MK: How about your WCU MBA experience?

AJ: My experience at WCU is more as a commuter. I’m only on campus for classes or the library.

MK: Post-MBA plans?

AJ: None yet, but I will probably help some friends with small businesses in the area.

FIRST MBA SOCIAL A SUCCESS

In March, current students, alumni and faculty mingled outside the classroom. Olive or Twist, in Asheville and formerly known as Decades, provided appetizers and proved the perfect location, and AT&T made the event possible with a generous donation. **The next WCU MBA event will take place Friday, April 30,** when we watch the Asheville Tourists take on the Delmarva Shorebirds of Maryland at McCormick Field in Asheville. Show your support for the university and take advantage of these networking opportunities, designed for encouraging new friendships and having fun. For more information, please contact Ann Whitaker at annwhitaker@gmail.com.



CONTACT CORNER

If you have an article, announcement or suggestion relating to this newsletter, contact the MBA Office at mba@wcu.edu or Ann Whitaker at annwhitaker@gmail.com