Letter from the Director

Welcome back MBA students! I also would like to welcome our new students. I, too, am new to the program – as the director. I have been teaching economics on campus since fall 2003, and I’m excited for the opportunity to work with you.

I would like to thank Dr. Steve Henson, the former MBA director, for his innumerable contributions to the program. He restructured the entire curriculum to meet the unique needs facing this region. Our community is dominated by small and midsize businesses. Leaders of small and midsize organizations should understand the integration of business operations and be able to make executive decisions in various areas. Our program has been redesigned to achieve these goals more effectively.

I have had an opportunity to individually talk to more than 30 MBA students over the past month. If you were not one of them, please contact me immediately. I want to meet each of you. Based on the conversations that I have had so far, I determined two areas that I should urgently focus on this year: (1) communication (networking) and (2) career services.

We know that one of the most important aspects of a successful relationship is effective communication. This is particularly true in business. In the 21st century, we can communicate in many different ways, and that is a plus. However, we can’t be good communicators by simply having smartphones. I’ve heard a lot of complaints about a lack of communication in the program. Communication should be two-way. I will do my share, and I ask you to do your share. More than 100 MBA students are taking at least one course this semester. How many people do you know in the program? How many of you have talked to a professor individually about anything other than course work? Take a few minutes to do so.

Career services will be more emphasized in the program. It is true that the majority of MBA students have a job, but the real question is whether you’re satisfied in your current position. Each semester, a number of our students are in the job market. Most MBA students enter our program with an expectation of either a promotion in their current workplace or a career change. I will be proactive to help students find jobs. We should work together as a team to achieve this objective.

Finally, I warmly welcome Kelly McIntyre as the new Office Manager for the program. She will be working closely with me to meet your needs. I hope that you will have a wonderful and meaningful experience in the program this year.

Dr. Steve Ha
MBA Director
The Reems Creek Golf Club in Weaverville hosted the first-ever MBA student golf outing May 13. Seventeen players in five groups took part in the scramble-style tournament. Organized by Matt Leech and Ryan Jaskot, the day included a complimentary preround practice, courtesy of Reems Creek Golf Club, and 18 holes of golf followed by a luncheon provided by Reems Creek. Groups teed off between 10:06 and 10:42 a.m., with the day concluding around 4 p.m. Hamburgers, barbecue, potato salad, coleslaw and a variety of drink selections set the stage for a social mixer following the round. Students and their guests who did not take part in the tournament were able to participate by riding along to watch the groups play, mingling in the clubhouse and enjoying the luncheon following the round.

Awards for the day included the MBA Golf Outing top 3:

#1 Jason Markey: Closest to the Pin. On hole 6, Markey dropped the ball two feet from the pin on the 155-yard, par-3 hole.

#2 Alyn Janis: Most Enjoyable and Endless Course Design Commentary. With a master’s degree in golf course design from Harvard, Janis’ commentary could be heard echoing the course throughout the day. His extensive knowledge proved to be an advantage for his foursome!

#3 Dr. Tilt Thompkins: Home Course Advantage. As a resident at the Reems Creek course, Thompkins has whittled his handicap to an impressive 8. His low handicap and course knowledge proved to be the ultimate advantage, leading his team to post the lowest score of the day at 7 under par.

Leech extended his thanks to all who participated and invites everyone to join in at the next event. “If you aren’t a golfer, don’t feel like you can’t join in the fun,” Leech said. “You can always stop by for the catered lunch to socialize or volunteer to help out with the event!”

MBA Students Win Big at College of Business Golf Classic

By Ann W. Thompson

On Aug. 28, the College of Business held its 11th annual golf tournament at Rock Barn Golf and Spa in Hickory. There was outstanding participation from the MBA program, with 12 student players, two faculty players, three student volunteers, and one faculty volunteer. Jason Markey, Bekah Mumm and Levi Grindstaff, along with WCU alum Matthew Cook, finished first in the tournament, as their foursome closed the day at an impressive 19 under par.

In addition to many players, the WCU MBA program also served as the goodie bag sponsor of the tournament. In total, more than 150 students, alumni and community leaders took part in the affair, which boasted a catered lunch, networking opportunities, door prizes and hole-in-one challenges, including the chance to win vacations and a new car. We would like to extend a special thanks to Matthew Leech for his work integrating the MBA program students and faculty into the College of Business event.

First WCU MBA Golf Outing a Success

By Matthew Leech and Sarah Withrow

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MBA student players:

Faculty players:
Steve Ha and Tilt Thompkins

MBA student volunteers:
Kitty Price, Jessica Wisniewski and Ann Thompson

Faculty volunteer:
Dr. Vittal Anantatmul, director of the master’s degree in project management

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Faculty Highlight:
Beloved “Dr. D” Has Made Career of Human Behavior
By Ann W. Thompson

Dr. Theresa Domagalski, best known as “Dr. D,” currently teaches MBA 604: “Human Resource Management.” She is a beloved professor of the students, and she has been incredibly supportive, both in and out of the classroom. While her education may appear to be somewhat disjointed, it is actually quite consistently about understanding and managing human behavior. “I have two bachelor’s degrees from Buffalo State College in Buffalo, New York,” Domagalski said. “The first is a B.A. in psychology and the second is a B.S. in social work.” She also has a doctoral degree in organizational behavior from the University of South Florida in Tampa.

She continued: “My teaching areas have generally been consistent with my two graduate degrees – courses in human resource management and organizational behavior at the graduate and undergraduate levels, employment law (which examines discrimination, affirmative action, privacy regulations and employee benefits laws), negotiation and conflict resolution, and collective bargaining/labor law (which examines the legal aspects of unionized work environments).”

Domagalski has no shortage of interests outside of her classes at Western Carolina.

“I have a tendency to enjoy activities that are somewhat solitary,” she said. “I am an introvert and really enjoy time with others on one on one. I have several friendships that are 25 or more years long, which I take pride in. I love to read, but believe it or not, I avoid reading books unless I think I have sufficient time. Once I begin a book, I become totally consumed by it and stay up late and wake up early until I finish. I just can’t seem to put a book down.”

Dr. D also is an avid animal lover. She partakes in volunteer work with animal organizations, and she enjoys spending time with her neighbors’ dogs. Unfortunately, she lost her 15-year-old bichon frise, Angel, in December 2009. She recently brought home a 7-week-old kitten that she named Libby Juniper, and she is still looking for a puppy to add to her family. She also enjoys gardening – she inherited a green thumb from her mother – crocheting, cross stitching and traveling abroad.

One of Domagalski’s favorite things is to really understand a person. “I like to get to know people in a deeply personal way. I believe that most of us wear a public mask that lets us protect our self-esteem,” she said. “I find that when I get to know someone beneath the surface, I have a higher regard, respect and affection for the person. So I really enjoy learning about and listening to other people and getting to know them in a personal way. I don’t know that you could call this a hobby, but it is something that is part of who I am.”

Prior to coming to WCU, Domagalski spent 10 years at the Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne, Fla. Although she was – and still is – unsure about living in the mountains, she was so impressed with WCU’s department head and faculty in the management department that she knew instinctively during her campus visit that this is where she belongs. “With two years behind me at WCU, I have absolutely no misgivings about my decision,” she said. “There is no better group to work with than those in the management department at Western Carolina. I also have met some really terrific faculty and administrators from my service on the university’s Graduate Council and as Faculty Fellow for Service Learning. I will confess that I still don’t love the mountains (central Florida is home for sure), but there is no better group of colleagues anywhere than WCU.”

When asked about what she enjoys the most about teaching at WCU, Domagalski was quick to answer. “Hands down, my favorite aspect of teaching here is the quality of the graduate students who are pursuing their MBA degrees,” she said. “The intellect, ambition, work ethic and high quality of work are the most gratifying aspects of being here. You have raised the bar from what I have been accustomed to. In terms of undergraduate students, I like to say that they are no different than those of my previous institution except that the accents are different. But the students are as earnest and pleasant as any I have had.”

Alumni Highlight:
Sentil Prakish Stresses Networking and Socializing
By Ann W. Thompson

Sentil Prakish graduated from the WCU MBA program in 2008. He came to Cullowhee from India and thoroughly enjoyed his experience as an international student. “The Western Carolina University MBA program was a cross-cultural learning experience for me,” Prakish said. “Not only did I learn business concepts, I also gained knowledge about different cultures, work ethics, behavioral science and strategies for innovation from the other students.”

Prakish understands the importance of having a good education to be successful in today’s world. In his opinion, “Education should be perceived as a platform that enhances oneself as a person beyond monetary, hierarchical benefits. My education at WCU strengthened and broadened my perceptions of approaching business issues, hence fueling my career. I feel very grateful to all of the teachers at the College of Business for sharing their wisdom.”

Prakish believes in the importance of networking and socializing. When asked for words of wisdom to give to the current MBA students, he suggests that students “connect, collaborate and innovate.” “Aware as you may be, the concepts and techniques we learn from the MBA classroom constitute only the foundation,” he said. “I personally believe that ‘management’ should be practiced in addition to being taught and learned. I suggest that the MBA students reach out to the corporate world. Students should utilize the power of social media. The small business consulting course at WCU is a good start.”
Students Head Out to the Ball Game

On April 30, students and faculty met at McCormick Field to watch the Asheville Tourists. It was a great evening filled with hot dogs, beer and baseball. Everyone that attended also received an Asheville Tourist T-shirt with the WCU MBA logo printed on the back. Please take advantage of these social events to get to know your classmates and professors.

MBA Student Orientation a Success

By Sarah Withrow

On Aug. 19, new graduate students enrolled in Western Carolina’s business, accounting and public affairs programs gathered for a reception and orientation program in Karpen Hall on the UNC Asheville campus.

Featured speakers included WCU MBA alumni Sarah Merrill, director of marketing for Diamond Brand Outdoors; and Ron Sanga, associate for Blueprints for Business, a strategic consulting firm; and current MBA student Sarah Withrow.

The program began with opening comments by Dr. Scott Higgins, dean of the Graduate School, and Dr. Louis Buck, interim dean of the College of Business. After an overview of resources and services available to Western Carolina graduate students on both the WCU and UNCA campuses, students separated into individual program sessions.

About 25 new MBA students listened to guest speakers discuss how their MBA from Western Carolina University prepared them for their current business positions. Sanga found a solid foundation in operations, finance and marketing upon which he has built a successful consulting career. Merrill discovered her strength in marketing research so much that she has implemented an MBA internship program that she oversees at Diamond Brand Outdoors.

New MBA students were treated to a variety of advice from current MBA students; the advice will be featured in each newsletter edition under the heading “The Corner Counsel.” They also were given an overview of standout projects done for MBA courses 601-608 during the 2009-10 academic year. In addition, attendees heard from professors of operations management, finance and research and development regarding the program and were encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities to partner with local companies for team projects throughout the semester.

Student Highlight:

Student and Professor Joey Long Aims to Add to His Knowledge

By Ann W. Thompson

Joey Long is a professor in the College of Business who also is a current part-time MBA student. Long has completed his first 9 hours within the program, and he plans to continue to take between 9 and 12 hours a semester until he completes the requirements. He happily refers to this as the “snail track.”

Long completed his undergraduate degree from Wingate University in 1999 and received his law degree from Mississippi State University in 2004. When asked why he is pursuing an MBA, Long responded, “I want to gain a better working knowledge of business concepts and business thought processes.” He already is using the knowledge he has gained. He has been able to “analyze and adjust my leadership abilities, if any existed before taking MBA 601,” he said. After he completes the program, Long plans to continue working within a university setting or possibly pursue an independent business opportunity.

The Corner Counsel:

You’re Closer to the Dream, but a Lot of Work is Still Ahead

Congratulations, you’re officially an MBA student! The GMAT is behind you, and the world is your oyster – dreams of trading and leading and consulting dance in your head. You can feel it – bonuses and staff are at your fingertips. But wait! There are still 42 semester hours and more team projects than you ever fathomed to complete before the dream is yours.

As you find yourself knee-deep in a pool of linear programming, thru-put and marketing presentations, don’t worry. We are here to help. Each edition of this newsletter will feature words of wisdom from fellow MBA students to help get you through the semester. While funny, odd or oddly insightful, all the tips are yours for the taking and come to you from those who have gone before.

Best of luck!

September Counsel:

Take the time to get to know the professors, and not just by googling their names.

Printing in Karpen Hall is free. Print all articles for the semester and have them bound at OfficeMax or Staples. Seriously.

Get comfortable speaking in front of a group.

Professors did not come from one of the rings of hell; they are not here to torment you. They will listen if you have problems.

When using a study room at the UNCA library, remember to renew or turn in the key by the time it’s due to avoid fines.

Reading for comprehension is best not done in bed at 2 a.m.

In ITV classrooms, always assume the mics are on.

Do not wear shorts for a presentation in ITV classrooms because Steve will make sure everyone knows.

You have less time than you think.

Some people will piggyback off your hard work. Don’t let this happen.