

# INSIGHT

Winter 2018

## Community Connections

BENEFIT STUDENTS,  
EMPLOYERS

Business  
Analytics  
programs  
*create  
opportunities*

# TEACHING EXCELLENCE

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS HONOR

# DONNA FREE

ALUMS ACHIEVE SUCCESS,  
RECOGNITION

## MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN



### Power of Partnerships

A strong curriculum and expert faculty are vital to a well-rounded business education. We perform at our peak when our faculty and students are engaged with the business community. There's no question, our strong relationship with industry and business benefits our faculty members and students as well as our partners. This issue showcases the power of our partnerships through articles on research, teaching, programs and careers.

Whether you're reading about the collaboration between Oakland's Southeastern Michigan Economic Data Center and Flagstar Bank (page 4), the B-school's ACHIEVE program (page 8), Donna Free's teaching excellence award (page 10) or our new business analytics certificate program (page 14), they all lead back to strong community connections.

Our premier location presents us with the opportunity make these connections. The strength of our alumni at work in the business world provides the proof that partnering with the Oakland School of Business leads to success. ➤

**Michael A. Mazzeo, Ph.D.**  
Dean and Professor of Finance  
Oakland School of Business Administration

## INSIDE INSIGHT

### ON THE COVER

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# FOUR INDUSTRY LEADERS JOIN BUSINESS SCHOOL BOARD OF VISITORS



Jeff Klei



Craig Tonti



Brian Edgar



Kenneth Janke

The Oakland University School of Business Administration welcomes four industry leaders to the school's Board of Visitors. Brian Edgar, senior vice president, investments, UBS Financial Services, Kenneth Janke, MBA '85, senior advisor, Aflac; Jeff Klei, MBA '81, president, North American Automotive Division, Continental; and Craig Tonti, MIS '85, retired vice president and general manager, Lear Leather Division (formerly Eagle Ottawa), joined the Board of Visitors this fall.

Edgar, Janke, Klei and Tonti join an active board of business leaders who support the school in developing transformational programs that integrate education with real-world application and skills.

*"The business school benefits greatly from the input, counsel and support our board members share. We are fortunate to have these business leaders involved in the school, serving on our board."*

Michael A. Mazzeo, Ph.D., dean and professor of finance, Oakland's School of Business Administration

An active member of the Oakland business school community, Edgar also serves on the advisory board for the school's student managed investment fund. A leader in the finance industry for more than 30 years, Edgar joined UBS in 2008. Prior to this he spent more than 20 years with J.P. Morgan in various roles including bank investments, currencies and private banking. Over the last 20 years, Edgar has specialized in the ultrahigh net worth client segment. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan.

Janke brings a wealth of insight and expertise from a career in the investment and insurance industry. His leadership roles at Aflac have included president, deputy chief financial officer, treasurer, head of corporate and financial development and senior vice president of investor relations. Prior to joining Aflac in 1985, he served as director of corporate services of the National Association of Investors Corporation.

Klei was appointed president of Continental North America in 2008. In this role, he is responsible for customer, governmental and other external relationships in the region. Prior to this, Klei served as vice president of sales and marketing for all Continental business units in North America. He is a member of the board of directors for Crime Stoppers of Michigan and a member of the Society of Automotive Engineers.

Prior to his most recent role at Lear Leather Division, Tonti served as chief operating officer and as president of the Americas and Europe for Eagle Ottawa. Before joining Eagle Ottawa, he was vice president of sales and program management at United Technologies Automotive. Lear's Leather Division provides leather products and design solutions for automotive interiors, and its research-and-development facility is located in Rochester Hills.

Members of the Oakland business school Board of Visitors advise and assist in implementing the school's strategic vision, help identify and raise resources for the school and its programs, and advocate for the school in the community. ➤

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*"This information is invaluable to businesses, auto manufacturers as well as the supply chain, when making decisions on location, expansion, hiring and pay." Tom Kuslits, Executive Vice President and Chief Lending Officer of Commercial Banking, Flagstar*

## Banking on New Opportunities PARTNERSHIP WITH FLAGSTAR BANK EXPANDS ECONOMIC DATA CENTER INSIGHTS, REACH

By Rene Wisely



Silberman

Economics professor Jonathan Silberman, Ph.D., is banking on opening more eyes to Michigan's fertile business landscape.

As director of Oakland University's Southeastern Michigan Economic Data Center (SEMEDC), Dr. Silberman and his team deliver up-to-date statistics on the regional economy, offering insights and analysis on everything from the labor market and employment to consumer prices and earnings.

The value of the SEMEDC team's ability to distill economic data efficiently and thoroughly captured the attention of Flagstar Bank. The state's largest savings bank, with corporate headquarters in Troy, Michigan, is partnering with OU's School of Business Administration as the presenting sponsor of SEMEDC.

"Flagstar Bank sponsors this good work because we understand how sound economic, demographic and business information helps advance the conversation about the Southeast Michigan region and can aid many interested parties in making better decisions based on sound data," says Tom Kuslits, executive vice president and chief lending officer for commercial banking at Flagstar.



## DISRUPTION OF HISTORIC LINK BETWEEN AUTO SALES AND JOB GROWTH IN DETROIT

**-2.3%** Auto sales  
year over year

**+2%** Job growth

Despite a drop in U.S. auto sales, Metro Detroit is experiencing steady job growth, pointing to reduced reliance on the auto industry and economic diversification.

## GROWTH OF AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE RESEARCH IN DETROIT

Metro Detroit has an opportunity to lead the nation in the development of autonomous vehicle technology. Innovation in autonomous and connected vehicles can cross into other industries, accelerating and diversifying economic growth in the region.

Patent class 701 number of patents

DETROIT  
**522**  
(+24.3%)

SAN JOSE  
**208**  
(+54.1%)

SAN FRANCISCO  
**125**  
(+56.2%)

ANN ARBOR  
**110**  
(+13.4%)

% of total patents: 21.5% Detroit | 8.6% San Jose | 5.1% San Francisco

## METRO DETROIT MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME GROWS FASTER THAN U.S.

**+4.7%**  
2015 to 2016

**+3.2%**  
higher than U.S.  
growth rate

Metro Detroit has shown considerable economic progress since the low point in real median household income in 2013. The pace of improvement quickened in 2016. Yet, real median household income locally remains below the pre-recession peak of 2005, and continues to be lower than the U.S.

Get more analysis from Oakland's SEMEDC at [oakland.edu/semedc](http://oakland.edu/semedc).

## DEEPER ANALYSIS, INSIGHT

The partnership allows Oakland's SEMEDC to complete more data crunching, including deeper analysis of key industries, especially home sales, mortgage markets and commercial real estate transactions.

Kuslits was impressed with Dr. Silberman's autonomous patent analysis, which focuses on autonomous vehicles. It shows the number of patents issued for vehicle control, guidance and navigation in metro Detroit and Ann Arbor, revealing the area leads all other U.S. regions in those categories, including those on the West Coast.

"This type of information is invaluable to businesses, auto manufacturers as well as the supply chain, when making decisions on location, expansion, hiring and pay," he says. "It's all about insight."

Not only does the association with OU's SEMEDC provide value to current and future Flagstar clients, Kuslits also believes the partnership casts Flagstar Bank in a new light.

"We are a nationally recognized leader in the mortgage industry, and we've become a very powerful competitor in the

commercial space. While our customers and our competitors recognize this, the broader population probably doesn't perceive Flagstar as a business bank," he says. "Sponsoring Oakland's Economic Data Center is a meaningful way to demonstrate Flagstar's commitment to the health and prosperity of Southeastern Michigan."

## INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES

The undergraduate students who work at SEMEDC are another winner in this partnership, Dr. Silberman points out. Oakland business students now have more opportunities to get hands-on experience as a result of Flagstar's involvement.

"They are exposed to different data, data they've never encountered, and are learning how to process it," Dr. Silberman says.

Furthermore, students boost their resumes by using SEMEDC's secret weapon: cutting-edge technology and advanced software. This technology empowers the SEMEDC to continuously update data and conduct real-time analysis, offering the most accurate picture of the local economy, Dr. Silberman says.

## EXPANDING REACH

Flagstar is leveraging its marketing reach, sharing these economic insights with key audiences, spreading awareness of the valuable data available through Oakland's SEMEDC.

As part of the partnership, Flagstar is repackaging the information and adding compelling graphics to share with its various audiences on its powerful social media channels, explains Dr. Silberman.

This helps build awareness and identity. "Oakland University's name will be on every social media message that goes out," Dr. Silberman notes. "That helps the University with its mission to increase its community engagement."

Dr. Silberman finds the Flagstar partnership personally rewarding.

"I'm learning a lot. The partnership is helping me think about things I normally wouldn't have thought about," he says, citing everything from social media metrics to designing a homebuyer's index that can be easily updated and packaged for readers.

Dr. Silberman is confident the new partnership is one he can bank on. ➤



## BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS FOCUS ON EARLY CONNECTIONS

By Susan Thwing

It's all about who you know. That's especially true when it comes to launching a career. Thanks to strong partnerships with Michigan's largest employers, Oakland University School of Business Administration students benefit from networking and internship opportunities as early as their freshman and sophomore years. That head start makes a very real difference for students and employers.

"We are building a community that allows students to connect with business leadership in a new way," says Ian Caullay, director of career services for Oakland's B-school. "It's different from the traditional internship where students looked to work with a company in their junior or senior year. Now we start early, with freshmen, helping them to connect and learn, exposing them to the diverse paths in their field."

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) has evolved into one of OU's most active partners in engaging students in real-world business activities. It is no coincidence that it also has become one of the top employers of OU business graduates.

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*photo above:* OU business alums Cheuck Lee, FIN '14, rating analyst at BCBSM (right) meets with Nineetha Turaka, MSITM '14, senior analyst, BCBSM.

### Connect your organization with Oakland business students

Post internship and career  
positions on Handshake at  
[oakland.joinhandshake.com](http://oakland.joinhandshake.com)

Attend career events  
(fairs, mixers, etc.)

Host a meet-and-greet table or  
information session

Arrange on-campus interviews

Speak at student  
organization events

---

Contact Ian Caullay at (248) 370-4311  
or [caullay@oakland.edu](mailto:caullay@oakland.edu)

"Summer internships can move into year-round experiences, which can lead to careers," says Jody Guastella Jones, BCBSM human resources recruiter. Jones says about 200 students from colleges around the state participate in the summer program. An increasing number come from Oakland University.

### WELL-PREPARED

"BCBSM managers feel very positive about Oakland University students," she says. "They come to BCBSM very prepared and tend to do well in internships and beyond. They are also always ready and willing to go the next step and participate in our community outreach initiatives — a strong focus at Blue Cross."

To meet and get to know OU business students, BCBSM sends employees, many of whom are OU alumni, to campus to speak with students about different careers and areas of opportunity that exist with the firm. "It gives students a solid idea of what a career at BCBSM would look like," Caullay says. "It's one way students engage on multiple levels with partner employers."





© Kyle Wills

*"It's the quality of Oakland students that keeps us coming back."* Jody Guastella Jones, BCBSM Human Resources Recruiter

Other businesses throughout Southeast Michigan take part in similar experiences, meeting prospective employees at a time in their educations when they are refining their career intentions and ambitions.

Employers agree the opportunities Oakland business students have to network with business professionals and gain real-world experience sets them apart, says Caullay.

## LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

"In addition to the online tools like Handshake, where businesses can post internship or job openings, we have meet-and-greet events, career fairs and mock interviews, often hosted by a business partner," he says. "It's important today for our business students to experience this

ongoing relationship. They are no longer just looking for a job, but the right fit culturally within an organization."

The number and variety of activities available through Oakland's business school also benefit prospective employers. "The school has so many well-established events that we can attend," says Jones. "As a recruiter, it makes my job easier."

Cheuck Lee, FIN '14, rating analyst, says his progression from intern to career was seamless thanks to the strong relationship between Oakland's B-school and BCBSM.

"These partnerships allow students to gain knowledge of the workplace and open the door for opportunities," he says. "In the beginning, it was tough deciding what type of career I wanted. After attending campus and business events, I obtained

a better perspective and narrowed down what I wanted to do, and how I could be successful. It was a positive learning experience."

For Jones, OU will always be a place to connect with prospective employees who are qualified, engaged and eager to contribute to the company's success. "It's the quality of Oakland students that keeps us coming back," she says. "They come in well-prepared, purposeful and focused. We get wonderful students from OU. It's a partnership that's truly paying off." ➤

photo above: Oakland business interns at BCBSM summer 2017.

## High ACHIEVErs

# BUSINESS STUDENTS SUCCESSFULLY TRANSITION TO CAREERS WITH ACHIEVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Susan Thwing

Few things are as valuable to an employer as a new recruit who can jump in and make a difference from day one. The ACHIEVE career and professional development program provides Oakland University business students with the skills, confidence and savvy to do just that.

Since the launch of ACHIEVE in 2008, undergraduate business students have completed more than 10,000 courses that foster professional skills, such as networking, interviewing, resume writing and etiquette. The ACHIEVE courses, which are offered free of charge, are required for graduation. Students leave the program marketable and ready for the professional world — a fact that does not go unnoticed among employers.

“Employers tell us that the Oakland business students who have completed the ACHIEVE program are better prepared for interviews as well as their first professional jobs,” says Sherri Kerby, ACHIEVE program manager. “Employers are also attracted to our volunteer engagement program, which provides them an opportunity to meet with our students in a smaller setting.”

Buddy Henika, university relationship manager at Quicken Loans, has hired more

than 60 interns from Oakland after working with them as an ACHIEVE volunteer. “I wish other schools offered similar access to students like the ACHIEVE program does,” he says. “Not only does it allow me to provide professional guidance, but it also lets me give students advice on what we are looking for in candidates at Quicken Loans.”

Having completed all of her ACHIEVE coursework, MIS senior Ann Mansour cites the program as a key factor in helping her land a Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) internship. After meeting a BCBSM recruiter at an ACHIEVE event, Mansour called upon the interviewing skills she learned in the program to secure the position.

Hearing from business leaders first-hand ensures ACHIEVE students have access to the most up-to-date and actionable information on hiring available. “It’s amazing how much information I learned about networking and interviewing,” she says. “Everything fell into place after that, as I was offered the internship, all thanks to the ACHIEVE program.”

Oakland business alumni are among the most active ACHIEVE volunteers, participating in workshops, mock

### ACHIEVE by the numbers

10,000+

courses completed by OU  
business students

130+

business volunteers

1,836

mock interviews

86%

of employers say OU B-school  
ACHIEVE students are better  
prepared professionally than  
students from other universities.

87%

of students say they feel better  
prepared for professional  
interviews after taking part in  
ACHIEVE sessions.

Sherri Kerby (right) conducts mock interviews for ACHIEVE.



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Ann Mansour (far left) with fellow OU business interns at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.



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### Alumni volunteers fuel ACHIEVE program

*“ACHIEVE is an effective way to introduce business students to the scenarios they will face immediately after graduation.”*

Tommie De Riemaeker, MBA '09,  
CVS Pharmacy District Manager

© Kyle Wills



interviews, critiques of student presentations and meet-and-greet events.

CVS Pharmacy district manager Tommie De Riemaeker, MBA '09, believes firmly in the benefits of ACHIEVE. “It is an effective way to introduce business students to the scenarios they will face immediately after graduation, when seeking their first professional position — as well as situations they will encounter as their careers progress,” he says. It is a great way, he adds, “to test their mettle in low-pressure situations when hiring and promotions aren’t on the line.”

Networking with De Riemaeker and other alumni volunteers has led to more than a few offers of employment for OU business students. De Riemaeker has hired several OU business graduates. “They are more prepared for the realities of the workplace,” he says.

Students such as Mansour are grateful for the real-world opportunities afforded them through ACHIEVE and its dedicated team of mentors and volunteers. Says Mansour, “Everything that is done in ACHIEVE has a primary purpose — to help students throughout their journey at OU and beyond.” ➤

Alumni are among the most valuable assets of the ACHIEVE program. “Students benefit from their interactions with experienced business professionals,” says Sherri Kerby, ACHIEVE program manager. “We are especially grateful to OU alumni who give their time so that current students can benefit from their relevant experience in the workplace.”

Alumni can get involved in any number of ways. Volunteers can lead workshops and project critiques, helping students better understand real-world business processes. Taking part in mock interviews with alumni gives students experience in the most intimidating aspect of job hunting. Participation in meet-and-greet events makes it possible for students to talk with business leaders first hand. Sponsorship opportunities are also available.

To volunteer your time and talents, please contact Sherri Kerby at (248) 370-3273 or at [kerby@oakland.edu](mailto:kerby@oakland.edu).



## Mentoring the next generation

### SPECIAL INSTRUCTOR

### DONNA FREE RECEIVES

### MICPA 2017 ACCOUNTING

### TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

By Robert Guttersohn

Donna Free has been an educator for nearly three decades. In the classroom, her instruction is guided by her experiences working in public accounting and a desire to give her students the same kind of supportive learning environment she experienced as an accounting student.

"When I was a student and very active in accounting organizations, I had excellent faculty advisers who definitely spent time with me," says Free, who received her master's degree in accountancy from the University of Missouri–St. Louis. "I make a lot of time for students. Being present and giving students the opportunity to reach out to me for consultation, whether about a class or about a career path, is important to me."

In her 17 years at Oakland University, Free has focused on students while in roles such as special instructor of accounting; coordinator of graduate business programs; faculty coordinator, Masters of Accounting Program; and interim faculty director, Executive MBA Program.

"The fact that I had memorable mentors made me realize how valuable mentorship is in education," she says. For that reason, Free has made mentorship a focal point in her student interactions.

In recognition of her hard work and dedication, the Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants (MICPA) honored her with its 2017 Accounting Teaching Excellence Award. "It's really nice to be recognized for something I am so passionate about," says Free.

She insists mentoring the next generation is already an honor. "Preparing future accounting professionals is really meaningful," she says. "I love when students tell me they like accounting and want to be an accounting major because of what I do in the classroom. When a student gets as excited about accounting as I am, I know I've done my job." ➤

*"Donna Free is committed to the development of students and guiding them to successful professional careers. Through her tutelage, students grow from uncertain career aspirations to successful accounting professionals."*

Mohinder Parkash, Ph.D., Chair,  
Department of Accounting and  
Finance, OU

## The nominations say it all

*"Donna has an obvious love of learning and inspires her students with her contagious passion for education and accounting course material. Donna has always been available and supportive of her students. As her student, I quickly realized she was someone special and solicited her to be my role model and mentor. As her peer, it has become more obvious that she is a phenomenal educator — warm, accessible, enthusiastic, caring and approachable."*

Lori Dorko, CPA, MAcc '08, Special Instructor of Accounting, OU



© Kyle Wills

*"Professor Free's passion for accounting is contagious. Fellow classmates remark she is one of the main reasons they decided to pursue a career in accounting. Professor Free creates a teaching environment where students are not afraid to ask questions. She makes herself available to help accounting students with coursework, scheduling and career opportunities. She encouraged me early in my academic career to seek out leadership roles."*

Mary Sheena, ACC '16, MAcc '17, Assurance Associate, PwC

*"I can say in full confidence that professor Free changed my life for the better. She inspires her students, as she did with me, to push yourself to your limits whether it's doing well on an exam or working with others to complete a project. When I questioned my abilities to complete the program, given my bachelor's in physiology, her passion for the field convinced me I made the right choice."*

Shadi Fram, CPA, MAcc '15, Assurance Associate, PwC





## Taking Action

# ECONOMICS PROFESSOR FOCUSES RESEARCH ON PEOPLE AND POLICIES

By Liz Lent

For Timothy Hodge, Ph.D., economics has never been just about the numbers. It's about the people whose lives are affected by those numbers, whether a homeowner, an office worker or a politician charting the right course for his or her constituents.

An Oakland University School of Business Administration assistant professor of economics, Dr. Hodge is committed to examining economics as it relates to cities such as Detroit, with a special focus on housing and taxes.

"I wanted to focus on urban and regional Michigan cities and the problems they face," says Dr. Hodge. "My goals are to help people understand policy and make decisions, to help people recover from bad decisions and to help others not make the same mistakes."

Dr. Hodge was originally an engineering major, but an economics class changed his perspective. "I realized it was all the same math, just different applications," he says. More important, he recognized he could help people as an economist.

As an economist, professor and senior associate for Oakland's Southeastern Michigan Economic Data Center, that's exactly what he's doing.

For example, a 2013 Detroit News article highlighting one aspect of his research into property tax assessments paved the

way for Detroit leadership to authorize the reassessment of all city properties to determine a fair value on each home. "It's rewarding to know I had a part in that," Dr. Hodge says.

More recently The Washington Post and The New York Times highlighted his research exploring the ways in which Detroit homes assessed at amounts higher than allowed by the state helped spur the wave of foreclosures that struck the city when the Great Recession began in 2007.

He's committed to turning research into action. "I want to build connections in the city of Detroit, help people to make better informed decisions or change policies," he says.

That interest motivated him to research the impact of Detroit's Neighborhood Enterprise Zone (NEZ) Homestead program, which was designed to draw homebuyers into the city with significant tax incentives. Dr. Hodge found that while buyers were paying top dollar in NEZ neighborhoods, many were not getting the tax breaks they sought. "Only about two percent of the homebuyers in our sample were actually benefiting from the program," he says.

"They may never have applied for the incentives or weren't granted the benefits after the purchase," says Dr. Hodge. "Others may have misunderstood the

program." To qualify, residents had to meet a broad range of criteria, including investing in home improvements and staying current on their property taxes.

Dr. Hodge is dedicated to delving into more issues like this. With current projects investigating such topics as the reason behind property tax delinquencies, school spending and crime, and the effect of medical marijuana provisioning centers on housing values.

These projects underscore Dr. Hodge's efforts to deliver facts and data to decision-makers to improve life for residents and strengthen the overall fiscal health of neighborhoods.

As the amount of data available from municipal and state governments grows, so too do the opportunities to evaluate the impact of initiatives and programs such as NEZ. "It's a good time to be a researcher," Dr. Hodge says. "There's a chance for people to understand more fully the impact of what we're doing with different policies."

In reflecting on his work to date, Dr. Hodge recalls the best advice he ever received: Pick a few topics, do them well and become an expert. It is an idea that fuels his work today and sets the stage for future projects that put people first. ➤

*"I want to build connections in the city of Detroit, help people to make better informed decisions or change policies."*

Timothy Hodge, Ph.D., Professor, Economics, and Senior Research Associate for Oakland's Southeastern Michigan Economic Data Center



## NEW CERTIFICATE PROGRAM EXPANDS OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS ANALYTICS STUDY

By Adam DePollo

Kyle Wills

Few fields of study are expanding as rapidly as business analytics. With the potential to transform enterprises in extraordinary ways, the industry is attracting some of the business world's best and brightest minds. A new graduate certificate program launched fall 2017 enhances Oakland's portfolio of business analytics programs.

The certificate program was designed with working professionals and busy students in mind, says Mark Isken, Ph.D., associate professor of decision and information sciences at the School of Business Administration.

All the courses required to earn the certificate are offered in the evening or late afternoon. Coursework is also posted online through the Moodle learning platform, making it possible for students to complete the program even if their work schedules do not allow them to attend classes in person.

"I have a lot of professionals who are traveling, and I have had people literally miss three or four weeks of classes due to travel, and they were still able to finish the course just fine," says Isken. He maintains a robust set of digital offerings that allow students to feel like they are in the thick of class even if they are hundreds of miles from campus.

It is no wonder so many students are interested in adding business analytics to their professional repertoire. A recent Forbes report found that worldwide business data and analytics revenues are likely to reach \$187 billion by 2019 — an increase of more than 50 percent from 2015. Amazon is perhaps the most notable business analytics success story. According to GeekWire, the company's Amazon Web Services streaming data and analytics arm has more than tripled its sales revenue since 2014, earning \$3.5 billion in the fourth quarter of 2016.

In light of those trends, Oakland University is expanding its business analytics programs to meet increasing demands from both employers and students.

The new certificate program grew from the realization that many professionals with bachelor's degrees and significant experience were seeking something more intensely focused on analytics but did not want to commit to a graduate program.

Students do not have to be experts in computer science or economics or hold a degree in either field. Rather, the Business Analytics certificate program is open to anyone with previous coursework in statistics. Even if they are missing that element from their past coursework, they only need to complete Quantitative Methods for Managers (QMM 5100) to become eligible.

As Isken explains, taking that one course is well worth the investment for students pursuing a career change or an expansion of their current responsibilities.

"We're in a time now where employers are much more open to non-traditional education pathways," he says. "What they care about really is whether or not you can do the job."

"Project success or failure is determined at the information gathering stage," says MSITM business analytics student Erik Williams, MIS '13, solutions designer at Ford who works on the connected vehicle platform. "Professionals who can successfully gather the requirements and put together and deliver on a project or business plan are definitely in demand."

### Business Analytics programs at OU

Graduate Certificate in Business Analytics

Business Analytics Concentration in MBA

Business Analytics Concentration in MS in IT Management

Business Analytics Minor available for any OU major

Business Analytics Specialization available for MIS majors

Learn more at [oakland.edu/business/undergraduate-majors-minors/business-analytics/](http://oakland.edu/business/undergraduate-majors-minors/business-analytics/).



# BUSINESS SUMMER CAMP, OUCARES STUDENT MAKES A SPLASH WITH STARTUP COMPANY

By Eric Reikowski

When 16-year-old Spencer Kelly's bicycle was stolen, his father bought him a replacement — with one caveat: He had to find a way to pay back the money. Fueled by his entrepreneurial spirit, Kelly started a journey to founding his own retail soap business, aptly named The Expedition Soap Company.

The company's mission is about much more than just selling soap, Kelly says. It's about offering top-quality products, with a focus on promoting health and sustainability.

"I design, print, cut, label, and shrink-wrap every soap bar by hand," he says. "All the soaps are made with natural ingredients, without harsh chemicals."

Kelly's soaps — almost 80 varieties — are biodegradable, with a blended base of vegan oils and organic shea butter. The ingredients are locally sourced, except for the shea butter, which comes from Africa. However, the shea butter in Kelly's soaps is "fair trade," a designation which is part of a global movement to improve economic conditions in developing countries.

## IMPAIRED TO EMPOWERED

Kelly inspires people by sharing the struggles he overcame on his way to becoming a successful entrepreneur. As a young child, he was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder that can cause social and behavioral challenges.

From an early age, Kelly had a thirst for learning. He loved reading and was fascinated by history. But he was mostly nonverbal and had difficulty communicating with others. "I was kind of like a one-way sponge," he explained. "I could take everything in, but I couldn't get anything out."

At 7, he started participating in social and recreational programs offered through the Oakland University Center for Autism Outreach Services (OUCARES). Over the next several years, these experiences



helped him improve his ability to communicate and interact with others.

As his confidence grew, he enrolled in other OU programs, including "Explore the World of Business," a weeklong summer camp that introduces high school students to a broad range of business-related topics such as accounting, finance, management and marketing. "I learned a lot of skills that are crucial for running my business," Kelly says. "Especially bookkeeping and inventory management."

OUCARES director Kristin Rohrbeck says entrepreneurship can be an optimal path to employment for individuals with autism. "It's a great avenue because they can set their own working conditions and follow their own pace," Rohrbeck explains. "A lot of people on the autism spectrum have found success through self-employment, especially when they have a strong support system to help them develop their business."

## A TEAM ENTERPRISE

Kelly's support system — in business and in life — is his family. Soon after launching his company, he expanded his product line to include lotions, body butters and, most

recently, bath bombs. His younger brother, Grant, pitches in by designing the labels and hand-packaging the lotions and body butters.

In between school and extracurricular activities, he sells his products at craft and vendor shows.

Along with the shows, Kelly's products are also available at ExpeditionSoaps.com and at two area retail outlets, Soothe Your Soul, in Oxford and Green Hippo Gifts, in his hometown of Lake Orion.

With his company thriving, Kelly added philanthropy to his business model. In honor of National Autism Awareness Month, he donated a portion of his sales to the U.S. Autism and Asperger Association, an organization close to his heart.

Above all, Kelly says his most important mission — and greatest reward — is inspiring others through his story of triumph over adversity. "I've given up on so many things in my life," Kelly says. "My business taught me not to give up. It taught me to take responsibility and see things through." ➤

## DIE-HARD OU FANS ENDOW SCHOLARSHIP FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS

By Jacquie Goetz Bluethmann

Gary and Elspeth Coats know numbers. They know profit and loss, the power of big data and just how much a scholarship can do for a hardworking student. That understanding led to the couple's generous establishment of the Gary and Elspeth Coats Student Involvement Scholarship.

"We both received scholarships during our time at OU," says Gary, ACC '95, now a senior tax analyst for American Axle & Manufacturing. For those who may be juggling financial demands with academic ambitions, scholarships can ease everyday costs, from fees to books. Says Gary, "Every little bit helps."

The scholarship is designed to encourage students who are actively involved on campus, whether that means engaging in campus clubs, playing on a sports team or working. "The emphasis is on the full college experience," says Elspeth, MIS '91, a senior business systems analyst for NetSol Technologies NA. "Grades play a part, but being involved on campus is very important."

She adds, "There are so many opportunities to be involved on campus, but unless you're out there looking for them, you may miss them. My campus activities gave me as much education as my classes did."

As an OU business student, Elspeth worked in the residence halls at the reception desk. During two summers on campus, she was in charge of checking in all residential students for OU camps and even the Detroit Lions players who came to Oakland for training camp. She did all this while pursuing her degree and participating in the Management Information Systems (MIS) Club and Student Programming Board.

For his part, Gary was active in OU intramural sports and held tutoring jobs



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on campus. In his senior year he served as secretary for the Oakland Accounting Students Information Society and was a member of the MIS Club.

Despite their active schedules and shared interests at OU, the pair never crossed paths there. Instead, they met while working together at O/E Systems. Their first date was an OU basketball game, where they discovered a shared love for their alma mater. As a married couple, the Coatses remain active with the Oakland University Alumni Association and are annual contributors to the University's scholarship fund.

At the annual OU Scholarship Dinner, hosted by the Alumni Association, the Coatses were introduced to some of the ways in which alumni can help support current students.

"We have done well," Gary says. "Both of us enjoy good careers, and we knew we could do this financially."

The couple worked with the School of Business Administration to set up the scholarship, which was awarded for the first time during the 2016-17 school year. The couple is funding the \$25,000 endowed scholarship over three years, after which it will be awarded in perpetuity as an annual \$1,000 scholarship.

True to form, the Coatses are also active volunteers in their Rochester Hills community. Elspeth and Gary have both served as president of the Rochester Area Jaycees at different times, and both volunteer with the OU Alumni Association and are active at their church.

"We've always considered volunteering to be important," Gary says. "When we learned about the scholarship opportunity, we knew we should do this as another way to give back." ➤



*"There's already so much to worry about as a college student — academic performance, social life, and healthy living to name a few. Decreasing the burden of financial struggles really helps."*

Avery Ragatzki

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## SCHOLARSHIP HELPS FULFILL SWEET DREAMS

By Jacquie Goetz Bluethmann

Finance major Avery Ragatzki plans to open a bakery selling cake pops, truffles and countless other treats when she graduates. This year, after receiving the Gary and Elspeth Coats Student Involvement Scholarship, she's a semester closer to realizing those sweet dreams.

The scholarship was established to assist School of Business Administration students who take active roles in extracurricular activities in addition to their academic efforts. A description that fits Ragatzki perfectly.

Her involvement spans the campus. She serves as treasurer of Oakland's Financial Management Association and is involved with the OU chapter of Active Minds, a national mental illness awareness advocacy

group. She also belongs to the University's Alpha Lambda Delta and Golden Key Honor societies. These experiences not only helped her earn the scholarship, they also add new layers of insight and opportunity to her OU experience.

For example, "Golden Key is international," she says. "So, if I wish to do business in other parts of the world, I always have some sort of network to connect with."

Being named the Coats scholarship recipient has made a lasting impression on her. First, it helped relieve some financial stress, allowing her to stay focused on her education.

"There's already so much to worry about as a college student — academic

performance, social life, and healthy living to name a few," she says. "Decreasing the burden of financial struggles really helps in the grand scheme of things."

It also inspired her to get more involved in helping her fellow students. This past fall, Ragatzki added business school peer-to-peer tutor to her list of activities. She now works with students seeking help in statistics, accounting and economics.

"Those have been some of my favorite classes," she says. "As a tutor, I'm able to help take some weight off of students' shoulders just as the Coats scholarship has done for me." ➤



## MBA HELPS ZOOLOGIST LEAP TO FINANCE

By Robert Guttersohn



Not many investor analysts can boast of an undergraduate degree in zoology. For Kevin Pratt, MBA '14, though, the leap from endangered amphibians to the world of finance was a positive one, thanks to the MBA program at the OU School of Business Administration.

Growing up, Pratt always wanted to work with animals. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in zoology, he joined the Detroit Zoo as a research and enrichment technician for rare frogs, toads, salamanders and newts. "There are only so many zookeeper jobs in the world and somehow, I lucked out and got one of them," he says.

As much as he loved animals, Pratt discovered he loved numbers even more. On his days off, he would go to the library and read every book he could find on personal finance and economics. His fascination with these subjects continued to grow and before long, Pratt was ready to explore a career change.

To prepare, he returned to school, enrolling in Oakland's MBA program and earning his degree while he worked.

*"The reality is that I had professors ... who recognized I was making a very dramatic change in my career and who were willing to go the extra mile to make sure I was successful."*

Kevin Pratt

"Being that 25-year-old zookeeper going to business school was nerve-racking, but it was an essential step," Pratt says.

Oakland's MBA program proved to be the right fit. The intimacy of the program gave him the opportunity to create relationships with classmates and professors he would not have had in a larger program, he says.

The transition was not always easy. Early on he was concerned that taking courses alongside classmates already working in some of the region's largest industries would put him at a disadvantage.

"The reality is that I had professors, who I still keep in touch with, who recognized I was making a very dramatic change in my career and who were willing to go the extra

mile to make sure I was successful," Pratt says.

The move to finance was rewarding personally and professionally. Shortly after earning his MBA, Pratt landed a job as an investor reporting analyst for Quicken Loans in Detroit. Six months later, he was promoted to senior investor analyst. Shortly after that, he was named captain of the Fannie Mae reporting team.

"The bottom line is, after presenting to business leaders in my classes and feeling confident, I knew Oakland University had prepared me to take on any challenges I would have in my new career," he says. ➤

## EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAM PUTS PHYSICIAN ON NEW MEDICAL PATH

By Robert Guttersohn



Kyle Wills

*"Oakland's Executive MBA program offers an opportunity to gain additional knowledge and to understand the direction health care is moving."*

Tonya Corbin, M.D., EMBA '17

Physicians spend their days in a state of urgency, treating patients, strategizing with colleagues, keeping informed on the latest breakthroughs. When Tonya Corbin, M.D., decided to transition into health care administration after 10 years as a clinical research physician, she needed a program that would allow her to keep that strenuous pace, while still challenging her academically and professionally.

With the School of Business Administration's Executive MBA program, she found a program that does exactly that, catering to professionals who are seeking to balance work and life with the demands of graduate-level courses.

"At Oakland University, they were very user-friendly and understanding that these are seasoned people in class," Dr. Corbin says. "They were focused on delivering exactly what you need."

In addition to having a medical doctorate degree, Dr. Corbin has a master's degree in clinical research design and statistical analysis.

"I've always concentrated more on the cutting-edge aspect of health care, beyond treatment and being a practitioner," says Corbin. "Oakland University's Executive MBA program offers an opportunity to gain additional knowledge and to understand the direction health care is moving. I was very pleased with all of the professors who taught the courses."

Her education, experience and commitment help her leverage her deep scientific acumen and pharmaceutical relationships to drive medical excellence in health care in the Midwest as a medical liaison for Lilly Pharmaceuticals. Her work focuses on communicating new treatment trends to physicians. Her experience allows her to speak their language and relate to their work. "The conversations are insightful and you can really get into some robust discussions on safety and advocacy," she says.

With her career going smoothly, Dr. Corbin says the key to making this kind of professional leap is mentally committing to success.

"It requires a lot of self-discipline," Dr. Corbin says. "You've got to have that already resolved in your mind that you are going to prioritize things differently in your life. When you make that commitment to yourself, the rest really falls into place." ➤



## OAKLAND UNIVERSITY NAMED A BEST B-SCHOOL BY TWO NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

U.S. News & World Report and The Princeton Review recently recognized the Oakland University School of Business Administration for the quality of its business programs. U.S. News listed the Oakland B-school on its 2018 list of Best Undergraduate Business Programs, while The Princeton Review heralded Oakland University as one of the best schools to earn an MBA on its 2018 list of Best Business Schools.



"We chose the 267 on-campus MBA program schools on this list based on our high regard for their academics and our assessment of institutional data we collect from the schools," says Robert Franek, Princeton Review senior vice president-publisher.

For The Princeton Review B-school rankings, the organization analyzed data from surveys of 23,000 students attending the schools and of administrators at the schools. The Review does not rank the business schools in the book on a single hierarchical list. The U.S. News ranking is based solely on reputation surveys of deans and senior faculty members at AACSB-accredited business programs.

"This recognition continues to reinforce the high quality education OU business students gain from expert faculty and top-notch curriculum. Our program integrates theory, research and experience with solid academic preparation and practical skills that help our students launch successful careers," says Michael A. Mazzeo, dean and professor of finance at Oakland's School of Business Administration. ➤

### Here's a sampling of what Oakland MBA students told The Princeton Review

OU provides a **"challenging and rewarding"** academic experience to ambitious students for a relatively low tuition with **"classes held at convenient times for business professionals."**

This program **"can fit anyone and enhance their life and career prospects,"** and **"is set to work really seamlessly for working professionals."**

The administration **"act as student advocates,"** and **"go above and beyond their duties in order to assist"** students.

Class sizes are **"small enough for you to really connect with the professor, yet big enough to inspire meaningful dialogue."** Every professor takes **"great pride in providing each class a fresh perspective of the subject matter,"** making it not only interesting to hear the academic material but also the real-world stories **"which tie valuable credibility to the educational experience."**

International learning opportunities are available and **"add significantly to the MBA program."**

AACSB-International  
Accreditation in  
Business and  
Accounting

Payscale: Best Value  
College for Business  
Majors

CEO Magazine:  
North America  
MBA rankings and  
Global Executive  
MBA rankings

Value Colleges  
recognized  
Oakland University's  
Project Management  
Principles certificate  
program among the  
top 50 in the nation

Zippia named  
Oakland University  
among top colleges  
in Michigan for  
accounting, business  
and economics majors.



## Faculty Briefs

### BUSINESS EXPERTISE



Crain's Detroit Business highlights the work of OU's Southeastern Economic Data Center and **Jonathan Silberman, Ph.D.**, center director and economics professor, in its article "A new thing for metro Detroit: Jobs rising even as auto sales start falling," October 25, 2017.



The Wall Street Journal connected with **Janell Townsend, Ph.D.**, professor, marketing, in its article on why a \$1,400 iPhone may make sense. July 30, 2017.



National Geographic highlights research by **Kim Serota, Ph.D.**, professor, marketing, in the article "Why we lie: The science behind our deceptive ways," from the June 2017 edition.



A July 2017 MSN Money article prominently featured the findings of a paper co-authored by **Sha Zhao, Ph.D.**, finance professor, on the connection between the CEO-to-worker pay gap and company performance.

### NEW FACULTY

This year, the Oakland B-school welcomed the following new faculty members.

**Osman Aydas**, assistant professor, operations management, received his Ph.D. in management science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His research interests include supply chain management, modeling of health care systems, stochastic optimization, scheduling and simulation. His research has involved collaborations with corporations, nonprofits and health care facilities.

**Brandon Gustafson**, assistant professor, marketing, received his Ph.D. in marketing at Washington State University. His areas of expertise include sales management, business-to-business marketing and digital marketing. His research centers on the relationship outcomes from third-party sales agents' engagement with customers.

**Michelle Hammond**, assistant professor, management, received her Ph.D. in industrial and organizational psychology at Penn State University. She worked as a senior lecturer in organizational behavior at the University of Limerick, Ireland, for the past nine years. Her research focuses on leadership development.

**Yuhong Li**, visiting professor, operations management, received her Ph.D. in business information technology from Virginia Tech. Her expertise includes supply chain risk management and network analysis. She focuses on topics such as supply chain resilience, supply chain network structure, risk mitigation methods, social media usage and big data analytics.

**Qunfeng Liao**, assistant professor, accounting, has a Ph.D. in accounting from the University of Texas at Arlington. Her interests include financial accounting and capital markets, corporate governance, international accounting and corporate social responsibility.

**Roz Nowosielski**, special instructor, accounting, holds an MBA from Wayne State University. Her research interests include taxation, forensic accounting and financial accounting. Her professional experience includes work in private industry on the financial staff of General Motors and public accounting as a CPA with a firm in the metro Detroit area. She was a lecturer at the University of Michigan-Flint and adjunct at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and Davenport over the last 19 years.

**Robert Conan Ryan**, visiting professor, management, obtained ABD in strategic management from the University of Pittsburgh. His interests include strategic management, entrepreneurship and business ethics.

**Ahmad Sobhani**, assistant professor, MIS, holds a Ph.D. in industrial engineering from Ryerson University. His areas of expertise range from application of operations research methods and data analytics to problems in manufacturing and health care systems. ➤

## Alumni & Student Briefs



### MBA STUDENTS LEARN IN LONDON AND PRAGUE

MBA students experienced business abroad this spring as they visited executives from companies like GE Digital in Paris, AT&T in London and Eli Lilly in Prague. The trip, led by Professor Frank Cardimen, also included cultural excursions like the EU Parliament in Brussels. ➤



Rick Williams



Rick Shounia

### RECOGNIZED ALUMNI

Crain's Detroit Business named Rick Williams, MKT '06, owner and creative director, Distinct Life, and his wife, Yolanda, ENG '05, co-director, to its 2017 40 Under 40 list. Rick Shounia, MAcc '11, chief financial officer, Austin Benefits Group, was named to Crain's 20 in their 20s list in 2017. ➤

## BUSINESS SCHOLARS PLACE SECOND IN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

After a demanding 12 weeks of competition in the two-part International Collegiate Business Strategy Competition (ICBSC), the 2016-17 OU Business Scholars placed second for overall performance in their world in Spring 2017.

In phase one, teams met at their universities to make five years of quarterly decisions for the simulated company in their assigned world, produce a strategic business plan and annual report. The teams strive to outperform each other on a number of financial and strategic measures. In phase two, the teams gathered in Anaheim, California, for the three-day intensive phase to complete the quarterly decisions and make a formal presentation to the judges, who serve as the simulated board of directors. The teams are measured by the same metrics as a publicly held business, productive marketing and strategic financial planning, as well as by the quality of their reports and presentations.

"The OU Business Scholars team really shined during the on-site phase," says Joy Jiang, Scholars adviser and professor of management. "One judge told us that if he had to hire a team to manage a company in real life it would be our team."

"We all learned a great deal about operating a business. By working together to run our simulated company, we were better able to understand how each decision — from increasing advertising to paying dividends — affects each aspect of an organization," says Megan Tack, HRM/MIS major, who held the



position of president at MCM, a simulated company. "We applied the business concepts we learned in our classes to make decisions that were best for our organization. It was a challenging experience, but incredibly rewarding."

Their work paid off. The team's stock experienced the highest growth of all 27 teams during the on-site phase, increasing from \$2.09 to \$14.04.

Dave Bork, finance and economics major, Kristine LaRue, finance major, Alex Ilovan, finance major, and Nida Ashraf, finance, also represented Oakland. ➤



## CRESTMARK SCHOLARSHIP HELPS VETERAN ACHIEVE DREAM

An Air Force veteran, entrepreneur, project manager and single father of three, Richard Morrow, HRM '17, lives the adage “it’s never too late to learn.” Morrow, who received the Crestmark Bank scholarship in winter 2017, embodies persistence in pursuing a college education.

As an inflight refueling specialist, Morrow served 27 years in the Air Force logging 6,000 flying hours as a combat crew member and living in seven different countries before retiring in 2004. Morrow made many attempts to earn his bachelor’s degree during this time. He enrolled in eight different colleges, but his frequent deployments interrupted every program he began.

Though his deployment days were over, fall 2016 found Morrow facing another delay to his long-awaited dream of earning his bachelor’s degree when he received news about the Crestmark award. “I had exhausted my Federal Pell grant and would not have had funding for the winter semester,” he says. “The Crestmark scholarship meant I could complete my degree on time, graduate with less debt and still support my family,” says Morrow. With his bachelor’s degree in hand, Morrow is now focused on launching a career in human resources management. ➤

## COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD



The OUAA honored Amanda Rymiszewski, MKT '09, marketing manager, O'Keefe, with the alumni community service award

at the 2017 Alumni Awards Banquet. As a student Rymiszewski joined a variety of organizations to pursue her philanthropic interests. She supported such organizations as Gleaner's Food Bank, Have and Habitat For Humanity. Her service was recognized with Oakland's Commuter Involvement Award, Gregory Mars Award, Volunteer Service Award and the Marvin L. Katke Scholarship as well as national recognition from Alpha Delta Pi and Alpha Phi Omega. After graduating and launching her career at O'Keefe, Rymiszewski has remained highly involved in community service including mentoring with Winning Futures and working as a choir teacher at her church.

Rymiszewski attributes her success to time spent at OU, remarking, “I am grateful that Oakland University provided me an environment to learn and grow not only academically, but personally. I always had the will, but OU showed me the way. Through my experiences at Oakland University, I was able to find a truly fulfilling path for my philanthropic goals as well as a rewarding career path.” ➤

## FINDING A VOICE

Joey Namou, MKT '15, is a natural behind the mic on Channel 955's “Mojo in the Morning” show, where he is known as “Joey Radio.” Before he found his talent on-air, he was contemplating a career as an accountant.

“It wasn't for me,” Namou admits, after changing the course of his career from accounting to marketing. The opportunity was one of many learning experiences at Oakland University that helped Namou find his voice.

“I encourage everyone to get involved in as many organizations and events as possible during their days as a student. It will pay off,” he says. “It was a life-changing experience and really molded me to become the person I am today,”

Namou says it was good to know he had the support to try new things.

“I am proud,” he says. “And Oakland University has always supported me.” ➤

*Catch Joey Radio and the rest of the “Mojo in the Morning” team on Channel 955 5-10 a.m. weekdays.*







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