

# CARLSON

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

SPRING 2023

## Eyes to the Skies

Shannon Gregory,  
'18 MBA, leads flight  
operations at NASA's  
Kennedy Space Center



THE MAGAZINE  
FOR ALUMNI  
AND FRIENDS



# *Jamie Prenkert* named next dean of the Carlson School

**He begins his tenure July 3, 2023**

Prenkert comes to the University of Minnesota following a 20-year run at Indiana University, Bloomington, where he has experience in academic administrative leadership from the department to the campus level. Before embarking on an academic career, he was a senior trial attorney for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Prenkert holds a JD from Harvard University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana.



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THE CARLSON SCHOOL  
OF MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE  
FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

Opposite: P.J. Fleck, head coach of the Golden Gophers football team, co-teaches MGMT 3061: Leadership in Practice: Everyday Moments of Leadership alongside Professor Theresa Glomb. In this February 2023 session, he talked about the fragility of leadership. Scan here for more:



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

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



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**With Gratitude**



For the last 4,300+ days, I've had the privilege of being dean of the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management. It's a job I never sought out, in a career I didn't plan for, but it's been the most rewarding role of my life.

Why? Our community of students, faculty, staff, and you—our alumni and friends. As I prepare to return to the faculty about two months from now, I'm using my final letter in these pages to offer a heartfelt thank you for everything you've given me and the school over the years.

To our students—thank you for your energy, enthusiasm, and excitement. A highlight every year was welcoming our newest students, packed into the atrium, full of hope for their futures. It's because of you that I chose this profession. Each time I learned of your accomplishments, and there were tens of thousands, I was filled with pride.

To our faculty—thank you for your intellectual curiosity, care, and embrace of Aka and me. You gave us a home that challenged us, supported us, and nurtured us. Your ability to teach, research, and serve is a shining example of what a business school faculty should be.

To our staff—thank you for your deep commitment to the school. From advising students to supporting faculty to ensuring we have the technology to meet our needs, we'd be wholly unsuccessful without your contributions.

To our alumni and friends—thank you for opening your homes and hearts to me. I've said often that engaging with you will be what I will miss the most. I love seeing how you are using your business education as a force for good. Sharing your stories and achievements never gets old. I'm grateful for all 60,000 of you, a global network that transcends the classroom to transform the world.

To my family—thank you for supporting me, guiding me, and yes, putting up with my schedule! Leading this school is not a 9-to-5 job; there are early mornings, late nights, and long trips. It's a commitment. Without you, I wouldn't have been able to make it all work. I'm looking forward to a bit more downtime and expecting to say "yes" to more grandchild babysitting requests.

Our future is bright. I'm hopeful and optimistic for what lies ahead. Jamie Prenkert, who begins July 3, is the right person to lead us forward. From the interview process to our many conversations as he transitions, I am convinced he will build on our foundation of success and open new doors for our community.

I'm not going to be a stranger, and I look forward to lots of hellos when our paths cross. Until then, I wish you all the very best!

Warmest regards,

Sri Zaheer,  
Dean, Carlson School of Management

# DISCOVER



*A group of Master of Science in Business Analytics students toured the Amazon Spheres in Seattle during a career trek in January.*

## Class of 2022 Sees 'Tremendous' Career Outcomes

### Career Treks Return

**Full-Time MBA Program**

**98%** of graduates receive job offers within three months after graduation.

**Offers were received by:**

**97.4%** undergraduates

**100%** MSBA graduates

**96%** MHRIR graduates

**91%** Master of Marketing program graduates

The numbers are in: Carlson School graduates, across all programs, in the Class of 2022, saw high job placement rates and an increase in salaries.

The Full-Time MBA program had its highest placement stats in a decade with 98 percent of its graduates receiving job offers within three months after graduation. Offers were received by 97.4 percent of undergraduates, 100 percent of Master of Science in Business Analytics (MSBA) graduates, 96 percent of Master of Human Resources and Industrial Relations (MHRIR) graduates, and 91 percent from the first graduating class of the Master of Marketing program.

"We are extremely proud of the strong employment numbers across the school," says Maggie Tomas,

executive director of the Carlson Business Career Center (CBCC). "Our ultimate goal is to help students land jobs in careers and industries where they can succeed. We're seeing our graduates go on to have tremendous success and we're so happy about that."

Many of the programs also saw significant increases in salaries received after graduation. The Full-Time MBA (\$121,822) and MSBA (\$100,421) programs saw 8 percent increases in the mean salary, while the Undergraduate program had a 6 percent increase to \$66,498.

These salary gains are also being seen in early data for the Class of 2023, according to Tomas.

The CBCC utilizes numerous ways to prepare students for their job search,

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

including career coaching, on-campus interviews, resumé coaching, and various company information and visit sessions.

**HEADING WEST FOR CAREER TREK**

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

"At the Carlson School, we are able to go out and meet companies, meet representatives of companies, and people who are alums of the Carlson School who are working there and watching them in their element," says Aakriti Aneja, '23 MSBA, who participated in the trip. "I think that's the best part. Coming out to the West Coast, it's a glimpse into what our future could be, which is really exciting."

The Carlson School has hosted West Coast trips since 2014, first for the MBA program, and then for the MSBA program. The CBCC is also rebooting its New York City trek for those interested in finance from the Undergraduate program.

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

## Carlson School Staff Member Runs Every Day For Three Years



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

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

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

“She explained what it was and I thought, ‘Huh, that sounds just crazy and dumb enough to do,’” she says.

Bahr began her journey on Jan. 1, 2020. Most of her runs were on dirt or snow-covered trails where she could be out in nature.

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

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

Bahr reached her 1,000-day goal on Sept. 27, 2022. From there, she says it just made sense to finish out 2022 and make it three straight years. With that milestone made, the question remains: How long will Bahr continue running every day?

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

## Remembering Steve Spruth

*Longtime Instructor Dies at 65*

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

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

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

In addition to teaching innovation courses in SME, Spruth had a longstanding relationship with the Carlson Global Institute (CGI). It started in May 2007, with a graduate program in ethics that he led to Brussels and London. From there, he developed IBUS 3010 in China, which he led eight times from 2008 to 2015. In 2016, he transitioned that course

to Cuba, leading four trips. In addition, he developed and led IBUS 4050 to Brazil, which ran nine times. His final program, IBUS 3055, in partnership with Associate Professor Soumya Sen, went to China in May 2019. Spruth even once brought a class of students down the Mississippi River—in canoes—to learn about the entrepreneurial development of the Twin Cities. In all, Spruth led 23 programs for CGI.

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

On LinkedIn, colleagues and former students reflected on Spruth’s passing. Alumni credited Spruth for igniting their career passions, with many admitting they still use his lessons in their current work.

Simply stated, as one alum shared, Spruth was in a “league of his own.”



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

DEAN SRI ZAHHEER



## 2023 Brings Commencement Changes

This spring’s commencement ceremony will look much different than previous years.

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

To allow students to be recognized individually while their guests have a front-row viewing experience to cheer and take photos and video, graduates have the opportunity for individual stage crossings from

May 11-13. After choosing a specific day and time, graduates will have their name announced, cross the stage, and be congratulated by a University of Minnesota leader. PhD candidates can invite their advisors and arrange to be hooded too. Professional photographers will take photos as well.

Receptions specifically for Carlson School graduating students and guests are planned as well.

The week of commencement, help celebrate the Carlson School’s Class of 2023 graduates by using **#CongratsCarlson2023** on social media.



## Research Roundup

Here’s a snapshot of several recently published papers:

### Science is Becoming Less Disruptive

Research from Michael Park, ’23 PhD, and Associate Professor Russell Funk made the cover of *Nature* this year. After analyzing 45 million papers and 3.9 million patents across six decades, the researchers determined science and technology are becoming less disruptive over time as increasingly narrower slices of knowledge are used to develop new work. Their findings received worldwide media attention in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Economist*, *El País*, *ChosunBiz*, *Le Monde*, and more.

### How Divorce Impacts Work

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

### Digital Nudges Encourage More Exercise

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

For more research updates, visit:



Courses at the Carlson School cover a wide range of topics. Here's a 60-second breakdown of one of the many classes leaving an impact on students.



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

**“It’s important to me that the course presents key alternative perspectives on power and justice, including those that are critical of how business exerts its power in society.”**  
—PROFESSOR JOHN BUDD

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

### 5 TAKEAWAYS

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

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

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

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

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

### 3 PEOPLE, 3 QUESTIONS



**Dayton Steele**  
Assistant Professor of Supply Chain and Operations

#### 1. What are you reading?

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



**Brynn Nguyen**  
'24 BSB

Though usually I stick to young adult fantasy novels in order to experience the adventurous, wonderful worlds that one’s imagination can conjure, I’m currently diverging from my defaults. Today I am reading **The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry** by Gabrielle Zevin, a realistic fiction novel.



**Brittany Horn**  
'22 MKTG,  
Channel Marketing Associate, Cambria

**The Energy Bus** by Jon Gordon because it is critical to continue to learn how to approach life and work with positive and forward-thinking.

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

I love **stackoverflow.com**. Undoubtedly, my programming skills would be dismal without a community to answer all kinds of programming questions. I mainly program in R, and the website is a great starting point for new programmers, such as those in the course I teach: BA 2551, Business Statistics in R.

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

My favorite website is **Pinterest** because the inspiration is endless. I can easily find content that is inspiring for work, such as interior design and kitchens, while also seeing new art ideas to try in my free time.

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

My dream job is one that is personally challenging and allows for intellectual curiosity while providing a support system to be successful. My current job as an **assistant professor** satisfies all of these things, and the Supply Chain and Operations Department at the Carlson School has been amazing.

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

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

## Cultivating a Welcoming Culture

BY WADE RUPARD

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

**“Inclusive Excellence has five pillars, and we are trying to build a thoughtful, deliberate approach to our DEI initiatives around those pillars.”**

Visit [z.umn.edu/IEPillars](https://z.umn.edu/IEPillars)



A lifelong Southerner, Angela Spranger is embracing a new (and very Minnesotan) phrase. “There’s no bad weather, just bad gear,” she says, reflecting on the state’s famously frigid winters. She’s proud to say that she, and her husband, Keith, have now survived their first Minnesota winter. As spring arrives, Spranger is hitting the one-year mark in her role as the Carlson School’s inaugural senior diversity officer and founding director

of the Center for Inclusive Excellence. It’s been 12 months full of transition: new knowledge, new relationships, and new experiences—yes, she fell in love with Minneapolis’ Chain of Lakes, ate her first Jucy Lucy, and even received her first cabin invitation!

Spranger came to the Carlson School from Christopher Newport University (CNU) in Virginia where she served for two years as the chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer. There,

she worked to cultivate a welcoming culture on campus, recruit and retain top talent, expand community engagement, and effectively communicate the university’s efforts for inclusive excellence. Prior to that, she was an assistant professor at CNU’s Luter School of Business, where she taught management and marketing courses, facilitated two study abroad experiences, and offered external consulting services to regional corporate and nonprofit clients. Those experiences provided her with the foundations of a roadmap for getting up to speed in her new role. Spranger reflected on the past year, its highlights, and how she sees DEI and her role expanding at the Carlson School.

### **As you look back, what surprised you the most?**

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

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

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

Through the Center for Inclusive Excellence, we’re serving as a resource hub within the Carlson School for both internal and external stakeholders. This involves efforts to increase equity-mindedness among

workplace leaders and equipping and supporting faculty and staff who interact with our Carlson School students, our future business leaders.

### **What are some of the accomplishments that you’re most proud of in your first year?**

One of the highlights was “Live Into It: The Carlson School DEI Conference,” hosted in October 2022. More than 200 people from the community came together and talked about ideas of inclusive excellence and promoting equity. I’m proud of our growing DEI Community of Practice, which hosts monthly workshops for faculty and staff. Also, to see increased scholarship support for students who come from diverse backgrounds while we’re working hard to ensure that these students can thrive here too. DEI is embedded into the MBA and Undergraduate Program curricula, and we’re partnering with businesses throughout the community to explore DEI best practices. Inclusion is often about small steps and small efforts that lead to transformative change. While this takes time, I appreciate that sometimes the most impactful and rewarding moments are those in which one person tells you they feel seen, safe, and valued where previously they didn’t.

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

I aim to be the first learner, the first stumbler, the first questioner—so others can learn, stumble in safety, ask, and challenge. In promoting inclusion, trust is key. We have to trust no one intends to hurt, that feedback given is received.

My work requires meeting people on an individual level, acknowledging their intent, and then opening their eyes to the impact of their words, policies, and actions. These are crucial conversations. And yes, they can be exhausting! But, it’s tremendously fulfilling. I’m proud of the people here and the work we’ve already done, and I’m committed to growing with this amazing organization. **C**



# EYES TO THE SKIES

How a Carlson School grad is stepping up at an organization known for giant leaps.

BY ROSE SEMENOV

Inspiration can come from surprising places. Just ask **Shannon Gregory, '18 MBA**.

In the mid-90s, Gregory found himself on the movie set of *The Jackal*, an action-thriller starring Bruce Willis, Richard Gere, and Sidney Poitier. The movie needed trained military members to complete some stunts in the film and Gregory, then active in the Marines, signed up.





Noting Gregory had the same height and build as Poitier, the movie crew quickly identified him as a stunt double for the legendary actor. In a blink-and-you-miss-it scene, Gregory made his Hollywood debut by jumping out of a helicopter and sliding down a rope onto a rooftop. Behind the scenes, the young Marine found himself face-to-face with an icon.

“[Poitier] asked me how my military service was, and at the time, I wasn’t a pilot,” remembers Gregory. “I said, ‘It’s OK, but it’d be better if I had this flying opportunity.’ He said to me, ‘Before the week’s over, I need you to take the first two steps in making sure that happens.’”

Poitier’s profound directive became the final nudge Gregory needed to put in motion his childhood dreams of becoming a pilot. “It was something that was a great impact on me, and rightfully so. I took those first couple of steps that turned into, finally, this step today.”

That step? Working at NASA—an organization known for its giant leaps.

More than two decades after that fateful conversation with Poitier, Gregory is now the chief of flight operations at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Florida. In his role, he manages operations of the center’s helicopters and unmanned aerial systems and provides support with space launches and recoveries—most notably with the Artemis program.

Named after the Greek goddess of the moon and the twin sister of the god Apollo, the Artemis program marks NASA’s return to the moon. The program entails a series of missions that will send the first woman and person of color to the moon and eventually establish a lunar base camp for astronauts.

Having a small part in the historic program is “mind-blowing” to Gregory, but at other times feels as though he’s been preparing for an opportunity like this all along.

Left: Shannon Gregory poses with iconic actor Sidney Poitier on the set of *The Jackal* in 1996. Photo: Courtesy of Shannon Gregory

Above: NASA’s Space Launch System rocket carrying the Orion spacecraft launches on the Artemis I flight test on Nov. 16, 2022, at the Kennedy Space Center. Photo: NASA/Joel Kowsky

Opposite: Shannon Gregory conducts a pre-flight check of a NASA helicopter at the Kennedy Space Center in Merritt Island, Florida.

For bonus video content, scan here:



“There are days where you do have to pinch yourself because [NASA] is an amazing place to work ... but there are professors out there who basically told us to get ready,” says Gregory. “Because it’s going to happen.”

**FROM PILOT TO MBA**

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

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

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

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

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

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

“At NASA, I’m never going to know everything. I’m never going to know *half* of everything because it’s a heavily technical organization,” he explains with a smile. “I’m not

an aerospace engineer, but there are times when those engineers are very helpful to me to be able to make the decisions necessary to get the job done. So, as a manager, as a leader, it’s my job to listen to individuals to guide our decisions in a way that the whole entire organization can be successful.”

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

**A NEW SPACE AGE**

NASA’s new age of space exploration began in November with the Artemis I launch at the Kennedy Space Center. The mission sent an uncrewed Orion spacecraft beyond the moon and back to properly test the new Space Launch System rocket and the Orion, which will carry astronauts in future Artemis missions. As chief of flight operations, Gregory worked to help ensure a safe liftoff and landing.

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

— SHANNON GREGORY, ’18 MBA





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

Leading up to the launch, Gregory coordinated with mission control as his helicopter team conducted surveillance to secure clear airspace. In addition, the helicopters, outfitted with powerful cameras, provided mission control with high-resolution imagery to complete final launch inspections and to survey takeoff from various angles in real time.

Alongside Gregory in the cockpit for the final preparations was Stephen Lee, the Kennedy Space Center’s chief of aircraft maintenance.

“It was a monumental task for him as a leader,” Lee says, describing Gregory’s tasks as encompassing “all the pre-planning, the pre-thought, and ensuring that everyone was able to be where they’re supposed to be and on time.”

Hovering from a safe position out of the blast zone, they listened to the countdown and watched Artemis I roar to life as it lit up the night sky and soared to the heavens. The Orion spacecraft spent nearly a month in space, traveling 1.4 million miles on a path that extended about 270,000

miles away from Earth—shattering the record set by the Apollo 13 for the farthest distance from the planet by a spacecraft designed to carry humans.

While NASA scientists tracked Orion’s two lunar flybys, Gregory’s focus turned toward preparations for the spacecraft’s journey home. Re-entry into the Earth’s atmosphere would be another gigantic test to ensure astronauts’ safety in the next Artemis missions. For Gregory and his team, the pressure was on to “do it right and down to the number.”

On December 11, 2022, Gregory watched from the control tower of the USS Portland in the Pacific Ocean west of Baja California, Mexico, near the splashdown site. Coordinating with Navy helicopter pilots to provide the imagery, he and his team waited with bated breath in the tower for the first sign on the chopper’s video feeds of Orion breaking through the Earth’s atmosphere.

“The minute that our pilots said the word ‘capture,’ we all cheered,” Gregory recalls. “It was like the biggest cheer that could happen ... to hear that we had actually a capture of an image as [the Orion’s] coming over the horizon was pretty exciting for us.”

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

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

**INSPIRATION IS A SUPERPOWER**

A safe return of Orion paves the way for more scientific progress. Back at the Kennedy Space Center, technicians and engineers will

*Opposite: The Orion looks back on Earth on the first day of the Artemis I mission. Photo: NASA*

*Below: The Orion splashed down on Dec. 11, 2022. Gregory surveyed the re-entry from the USS Portland, seen in the distance. Photo: NASA/ Josh Valcarcel*

evaluate the spacecraft’s systems and heatshield to guide their work for the upcoming crewed Artemis missions. In addition, scientists will analyze Orion’s onboard experiments, including a pair of manikins that tested the effectiveness of wearing a radiation vest to reduce exposure.

The lessons from Artemis I will inform Artemis II, tentatively scheduled to launch in 2024. The 10-day mission will include a lunar flyby and critical systems tests in preparation for Artemis III, during which NASA intends to launch crews once a year. Those missions will focus on putting the Gateway space station in the moon’s orbit and establishing a long-term presence on the moon’s surface.

Gregory says it’s an honor to be part of such a historic space program.

“I’m so glad that the thing I first fell in love with—helicopters—translates

into an opportunity to be able to lead in a great, dynamic organization,” he says.

To his friends, it’s no surprise to see him thrive.

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

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

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



# PIVOTAL MOMENTS

## Six Carlson School students and alums chart new courses with their hard-won careers

BY BRIDGET BURNHAM



**Lauren Nakamura, '20 MBA**

### Career #1:

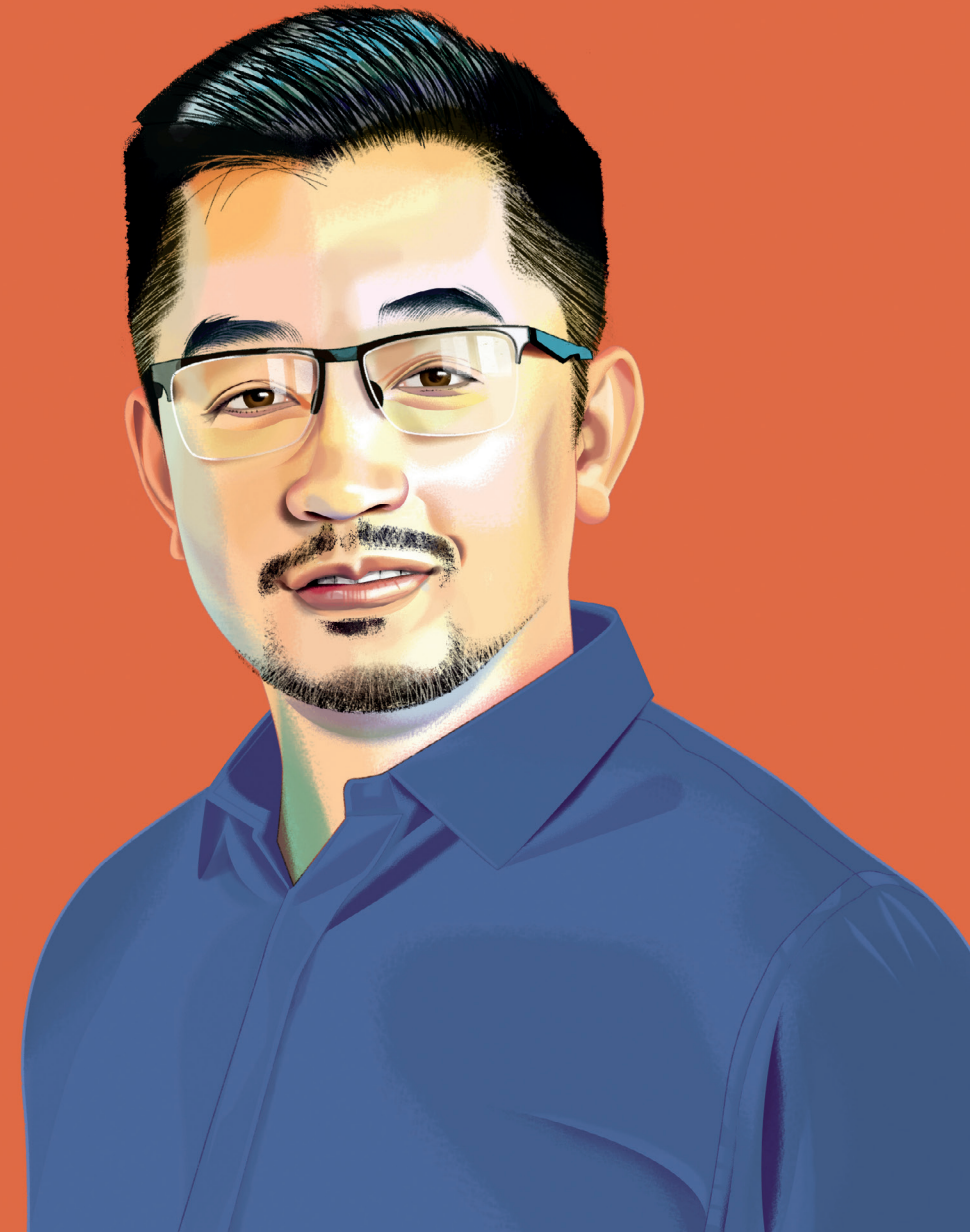
Leading teams and developing programs in the nonprofit sector. "I wanted to continue to impact people's lives, but there were skills and experiences I needed to gain by pushing beyond my comfort zone," says Nakamura about her decision to enroll at the Carlson School.

### Pivotal moment:

Interning at a *Fortune* 500 company. "I got to work with amazing people committed to improving patients' lives," says Nakamura. "Interning with Boston Scientific gave me a unique perspective on what it looks like to be successful at a large corporation, while still having autonomy and purpose in your job."

### Now:

After graduation, Nakamura joined Boston Scientific as a marketing strategy manager, empowered by the connections and confidence she built during her career transition. "I was able to start a new career, have my first child, and temporarily relocate to Hawaii to be closer to family—all during a global pandemic," says Nakamura. Her advice? "Don't be afraid to ask questions and seek clarity on paths that may seem unfamiliar. Do what makes you feel alive and inspired—you are capable of more than you think."



**Peter Dinh, '22 MHRIR**

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

systems many of his clients could only partially access or benefit from.

So, after eight years—instead of pursuing a master's degree in counseling or social work—Dinh charted a new path into human resources. He'd been drawn to the field before but was unable to secure a role. With additional years of experience forming and leading teams of mental health practitioners at CUHCC, Dinh's attempt at a career switch looked a little different. Rather than focusing on the knowledge he had yet to develop, Dinh used the experiences and insights he gained working with people to clarify his purpose and perspective.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Brianna Hughes, '22 MBA**

As a West Point graduate who spent five years as a U.S. Army field artillery officer, Brianna Hughes, '22 MBA, knew how to manage mission-critical details amid chaos and constant change. She leveraged those lessons and the confidence gained through her military career as she prepared to transition her family into civilian life. Though many



uncertainties lay ahead, Hughes trusted her instinct to pursue an MBA degree from the Carlson School as the first step on this new path. “When we decided we wanted to move back to Minnesota, I knew the Carlson School would be the ideal place to establish the connections that could support my career switch,” says Hughes. So, while her husband was serving on active duty, Hughes started as an online student, ready to explore new opportunities while also caring full-time for her two young children. Hughes appreciated the flexibility of the program and the ownership she had in shaping her path and goals. After learning, networking with people with a wide variety of experiences and backgrounds, and having her third child while going through the program, Hughes had a clearer picture of the kind of work she wanted to do and the type of company she wanted to work for. “I knew I wanted to work on small teams solving tough problems. And I knew I wanted to work for a values-driven organization that would support me in creating a thriving career and personal life,” says Hughes. “So it was important for me to get to know a company’s culture before accepting an offer.” Hughes turned to the Carlson School network and its Business Career Center to help her find a role with a consulting firm with a strong Minnesota presence and a culture that supports young families. She accepted her position with Slalom Consulting last fall while pregnant with her fourth child and is grateful for the guidance she got from the Carlson School during that time. “My [career] coach helped me ask the right questions and provided me with incredible support along the way,” states Hughes. With military experiences to give her the skills to venture confidently into the unknown, Hughes encourages others considering a significant transition to take the first step, even if they’re unsure exactly where it will lead. “Firm up the things you know and move forward,” says Hughes. “Explore with others, seek out support, and ask questions. The details become clearer the closer you get.”

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

— BRIANNA HUGHES, '22 MBA



**Sarah Adams, '23 MBA**

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

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

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



**Mike Rallis, '12 BSB**

Former Minnesota Golden Gophers football player and Carlson School graduate Mike Rallis, '12 BSB, never expected to become a professional wrestler. But a decade after graduation, he’s rising through the ranks of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) as Madcap Moss—a star in the making. Rallis double-majored in Marketing and Entrepreneurship, gaining hands-on experience in running a business. “The classes that went beyond textbooks and allowed us to create and run a business showed me it’s not just about having an idea you think is cool; you have to understand everything that goes into making it successful,” says Rallis. A 2013 tryout with the Miami Dolphins ended after minicamp, forcing Rallis to give up his NFL dreams. In turn, he was realistic about the risks and rewards of pursuing a career as a professional wrestler. Despite not knowing anyone who had done what he was about to do, he had a vision for where the business could go and was ready to do the work and learn from the people around him to make it happen.

After several years in the minor league development system, studying everything from the physical safety aspects to the ins and outs of building a personal brand within wrestling, Rallis is officially part of the WWE, performing under the ring name Madcap Moss. At what he estimates to be the midpoint of his wrestling career, Rallis says he has an even greater appreciation for the business sense he developed while at the Carlson School. “Many athletes get into their sport thinking they’re going to do it forever,” says Rallis. “But that’s not realistic. It’s important to have a business plan to transition towards in the future.” Rallis experienced his first evolution in professional wrestling in 2021 when he transformed from Riddick Moss to Madcap Moss upon returning to the ring after a torn ACL. Going from performing as Riddick, who Rallis describes as an arrogant elite athlete, to Madcap, who wears suspenders and dress pants and was known for telling horrible puns, was a challenge. But the change is paying off, and Rallis says taking on Madcap’s persona helped him grow his brand more successfully and authentically. “I like to joke around, even at my own expense,” says Rallis. “Becoming Madcap, I saw how much fans feed off the energy from positive people who enjoy entertaining them. It’s the most fun I’ve had with the WWE.” Rallis plans to maximize his time as a professional wrestler, using every opportunity to grow both inside and outside the ring. From traveling the world with athletes from diverse cultures and backgrounds to experimenting with new skills and pushing his physical limits, Rallis says the WWE provides him the platform and support to build himself, his brand, and his future beyond what he thought possible. But while he’s excited about what’s next, he’s focused on enjoying every step as it happens. “There’s no magical point where you get to stop and say, ‘Now I’m here,’” says Rallis. “It’s good to have goals, but if you’re not going to enjoy the process now, you’re never going to enjoy it.”



**Saul Schwartz, '24 MBA, MHRIR**

**Career #1:** Anthropology lecturer at the University of Florida.

**Pivotal moment:** It was December 2020, five years after getting his PhD from Princeton, that Saul Schwartz had a realization: “The number of anthropology majors is stagnating. We had the same staff meetings, attempting to address the problem with the same tools and ideas. It felt like everyone was doing their best, but we lacked the business and management perspective to see a new solution.” Schwartz headed north to Minnesota to learn how to tackle similar challenges.

**Now:** Schwartz is pursuing dual degrees: an MBA and a Master of Human Resources and Industrial Relations (MHRIR). “Learning alongside classmates with significant work experience brings another dimension to the classroom,” says Schwartz, who is active inside and outside the classroom. He serves as a student ambassador for MHRIR and is part of the Carlson Consulting Club, Graduate Volunteer Consultants, and Graduate Society of Human Resources Leaders. He plans to go into consulting upon graduation, hoping to help organizations create shared success by tuning into the human factor of their work.



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

How John Stavig, '86 BSB, has helped to transform the Holmes Center into an entrepreneurship powerhouse for students and the state of Minnesota.

BY ADAM OVERLAND

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

He had experience, after all. In just a 15-year career, Stavig had invested in, and led, multiple startups—from a communications network construction firm to what would eventually become apartments.com. In 2000, Verizon paid more than \$300 million to acquire OnePoint Communications, a business he helped build, which was an early pioneer of the then-revolutionary Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology.

At 38, he retired and moved to Minnesota with his wife to start a family.

It wasn't unfamiliar territory. Stavig graduated from the University of Minnesota School of Business in 1986 (followed by an MBA at The Wharton School in Philadelphia). He spent time building his family and spending as much time with them as possible, which was fulfilling. "But I got restless pretty quick, and none of my friends were retired, so there was nobody else to really play with."

So he responded to the ad. He chatted with Roy Wetterstrom and confirmed his hunch: It would be fun to come back to the University for a couple of years and try something different. "Eighteen years later, I'm still here," he says.

### TAKING ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Wetterstrom, '86 BSB, founder of Revo Brands, was leading what was then known as the Carlson School's Center for Entrepreneurial Studies. He knew firsthand what someone like Stavig could do full time.

In the 18 years since, Stavig has been the director of the Carlson School's Holmes Center for Entrepreneurship—named after a 2007 gift from real estate developer Gary Holmes—which offers numerous

courses for students, but also programming open to any entrepreneurial Minnesotan (see sidebar), mentorship opportunities, startup internships, and more. The center is self-sustaining, with more than \$25 million in gifts from alums, businesses, and others.

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

### WHAT BREAKS AND WHAT WORKS: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The Entrepreneurship in Action course launched in 2005. Stavig has co-taught it with Wetterstrom ever since.

Undergraduates enrolled in the two-semester experiential course form small teams that launch and operate a real business, receiving up to \$15,000. Since its inception, the course has helped launch more than 60 companies.

"The most valuable learning students get is how to motivate other people and how to pull them out of the periods when either the team is fighting, or the vendors have let them down, and they've got to find a way to move forward," explains Stavig. "Every startup is like that."

David O'Neill and Jason Dayton, both '15 BSB, co-founders of Minneapolis Cider Company, have come a long way since taking the course almost a decade ago.

"What was unique about the course, especially in a college setting, is it's not a textbook," says O'Neill, recalling funding and distribution challenges

early on. "You see what breaks. You see what works."

"Occasionally [students] hit some bumps," agrees Stavig, "but that's where the real learning happens."

"John's very Socratic," adds O'Neill. "Sometimes you'd go to him with a problem, and you just know that he knows what he would do, but he would never just tell you the answer. He would just ask you questions, and he'd let you come to your own conclusions."

"Seeing students grow through [the course] and seeing them realize what they're capable of is really cool," says Stavig. "In my view, there's nothing else like that."

For O'Neill, the course was life-changing.

"Today I've got a multimillion-dollar business that I run. I employ over 30 people. My wife works with me. So John has been an absolutely transformational influence in my business and life."

### A PLATFORM FOR STARTUPS

Another signature program that Stavig helped grow is the Minnesota Cup (MN Cup).

Founded in 2005 by University alumni Scott Litman and Dan Mallin, MN Cup is the country's largest statewide startup competition.

Under the stewardship of Stavig and his team, the competition has grown from two to nine divisions, with more than 250 volunteer mentors and judges. More than 20,000 Minnesota entrepreneurs, including UMN students and faculty, have participated over the years—many of them receiving a share of more than \$5 million in non-dilutive cash prizes. Participants also receive critical mentoring. These companies, in turn, have gone on to raise more than \$1 billion.

Morgan Kerfeld, '21 BSB, was recently a MN Cup entrepreneur. She co-founded Telo—a startup based on the first significant design change to the rollator walker in decades—with three other students through the Entrepreneurship in Action course. In MN Cup 2021, Telo took second place in the student division, and after winning two additional awards, received \$36,000 in startup funding.



Stavig, second from left, joins Carlson School Dean Sri Zaheer (left), Judy Corson (second from right) and Wendy Lougee, retired dean of University Libraries (right), at the grand opening of The Toaster Innovation Hub, a space that sparks creativity across campus.

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

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

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

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

### THE KEY TO HIS SUCCESS

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

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

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

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

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

## SIGNATURE ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMS AT THE CARLSON SCHOOL

Visit [z.umn.edu/CSOMEntre](https://z.umn.edu/CSOMEntre) for more details on these programs and more.

### Deluxe E-ternship program

Has placed more than 550 undergraduate students in paid internships with early-stage businesses.

### MIN-Corps

Helps faculty, postdocs, and graduate students to develop the skills required to translate innovations into products and services with real-world impact.

### MN Cup

Supports the development of breakthrough business ideas across Minnesota.

### Naturally Minnesota

Launched in 2017, acts as a key entry point into Minnesota's food and agricultural entrepreneurial ecosystem.

### Sands Fellowship

The Sands Family Social Venturing Fellowship provides grants of up to \$5,000 to MBA students for new ventures that provide tangible benefits to the local community.

### The Toaster Innovation Hub

A partnership with UMN Libraries that sparks creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship among students across campus.

### Twin Cities Ascend

Provides access to capital, market opportunities, and business education for BIPOC entrepreneurs.

### Women Entrepreneurs (WE)

Founded in 2015, WE supports women-led startups and builds community around current and aspiring women entrepreneurs.

# WHAT ARE WE WATCHING?



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

BY GENE REBECK

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

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

**OPPORTUNITY OPENS**

This proliferation of publishers has been years in the making. In the early days, Staggs and Kevin Mayer, also a former Disney C-suite leader, looked closely at the rise of streaming. They noticed major platforms such as Amazon and Netflix were focused on producing their own programs and movies. “At the same time, there was this demand for significantly more content than any one producer could generate for themselves,” says Staggs, who was Disney’s chief operating officer at the time. “That opened up an opportunity for independent content creation.” It also led to creators owning their work and broadcasting it online through YouTube, Facebook Watch, and Instagram’s IGTV.

Staggs notes the “increasing access to audiences” allows independents to “create community around content and creators” while “lower[ing]

it now has 153 million subscribers, the second most of any channel on the site. “It has created a real audience around that content. And then they take that content, own it, and broaden its reach both on YouTube by going into other geographies and languages, and also by spinning off content and packaging it for streaming.”

Candle Media’s second-biggest holding is Hello Sunshine, a production company co-founded by actor Reese Witherspoon that’s focused on women creators and woman-centered stories. Across its portfolio, Candle Media is boosting production capabilities and developing ancillary revenue streams around their content. “We try to leverage our experience at Disney both in scaling an enterprise but also in building content-driven brands,” Staggs says, while also seeking “opportunities to develop synergy between the different businesses.”

was connected to Jackie Chan.”

Soon Moh was in Hong Kong to work on a stunt team in a Chan movie—and it was there that he caught the acting bug. Since 2009, he has performed in numerous movies and TV shows. This year, he’ll have a major role in *Ghosted*, a new “romantic action-adventure film” on Apple’s TV+ streaming service. Moh credits much of his success to the expansion of media that has opened up new opportunities for actors with diverse backgrounds. Moh says streaming services face “less pressure from the box office,” adding that inclusivity is “not only the right thing to do, but an opportunity to pursue new ideas and audiences.” New Carlson School research bears this out, finding that there’s a growth in “middle-tail” streaming content, meaning movies with budgets between \$100,000 and \$10 million that are attracting audiences without being blockbusters.

**A ‘DEMOCRATIZED’ MARKET?**

Musicians and writers also have been finding new ways to market their work in digital media. Joel Waldfogel, the Carlson School’s associate dean of MBA programs and a professor of strategic management and entrepreneurship, has been studying digitization of media since the early days of the internet. The movie research above is his, co-authored with Professor Mary Benner. In recent years, Waldfogel says he’s seen “an explosion of creative production.”

What’s driving that? “A lot of it is the technology of distribution and promotion. You don’t need to get a movie studio to agree or a record store to agree,” Waldfogel says. “You can just distribute your work through online platforms. It became a democratizing world where everybody could create and distribute stuff.”

Waldfogel has paid particular attention to Spotify.

“In the old world, maybe a couple hundred artists got significant airplay

on the radio,” he notes. “In this new world, we have Spotify ingesting millions of songs a year.” Getting on a Spotify-curated playlist can provide access to new audiences for artists overlooked by record companies. Musicians also have been using platforms like Bandcamp and SoundCloud to promote their work.

Waldfogel notes that Amazon’s direct-publishing program via its Kindle has proven a successful platform for many self-published authors. “Lots of people are finding success circumventing the traditional gatekeepers,” he says. “The new gatekeepers are the platforms.”

But might those platforms decide to limit access to less high-profile content creators? Waldfogel’s research suggests that that’s not the case—not yet, anyway. Spotify, for instance, does use algorithms and human-created lists that promote some music more than others, but it doesn’t seem to be biased. “But it’s also true that the platforms have an enormous amount of power to affect which things become very successful,” he notes.

Tech does have a history of winnowing competition: Microsoft’s dominance of computer operating software, for example. Social media platforms have become highly competitive—and highly concentrated. (Instagram is owned by Facebook parent Meta, after all.) Meanwhile, Twitter remains the dominant microblogging site, and despite its long-predicted demise and current turbulence, it’s still considered the best place for writers to promote their work, whether that appears in print or their own pay-to-read newsletters on platforms such as Substack.

**FROM FINANCE TO FASHION**

It’s not just traditional forms of media that are finding new, profitable ground. As an undergraduate at the Carlson School 16 years ago, Maria Vizquete, ’07 BSB, couldn’t have specialized in her current field. It simply didn’t exist yet.

Vizquete was working as a stock analyst in Los Angeles covering retail for Minneapolis-based investment firm Piper Jaffray (now Piper Sandler) in the early 2010s.

“I heard a lot of CEOs talk about how important fashion bloggers were becoming,” Vizquete says. “They were placing an emphasis on partnering with influencers—in many instances because [influencers] were giving [fashion brands] free press.”

As someone who’d always loved fashion as well as finance, Vizquete was intrigued. She began to look into how

Vizquete says she’s built up her following largely through her use of street-style fashion photographs shot in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Minnesota’s capital city, in particular, can project a global sophistication thanks to its older downtown buildings. “A lot of people thought I was based in New York or Europe,” she says. This international flavor helped spread her images widely. “I attracted a lot of fashion accounts who had millions of followers, so I’d gain followers through their audiences,” Vizquete says.



**Joel Waldfogel,**  
associate dean,  
Carlson School  
MBA programs

“Lots of people are finding success circumventing the traditional gatekeepers.”

— JOEL WALDFOGEL

blogging and influencing could be monetized. She soon saw that it was potentially remunerative, as fashion retailers looked to connect their brands and garments with online fashionistas. So Vizquete left her financial services career in 2016 to become a full-time fashion blogger and influencer via her online brand, Mia Mia Mine.

Retailers have found influencers, such as Vizquete, offer a more targeted way to reach customers than traditional advertising. Her revenue comes chiefly from two buckets: affiliate commissions (where retailers pay her commission on the sales she drives to their website) and brand collaboration (where retailers pay her to shoot campaigns to promote their brands on her social media and website). She’s attracted a number of big-name brands, including Nordstrom, Express, and Abercrombie & Fitch.

With millions of online followers, she’s developed a business that allows her to make more money than she did at Piper, and she’s making it work in the Twin Cities.

**THE ONLY CONSTANT IS CHANGE**

In many ways, Vizquete’s story reflects not solely the changes in how retailers reach consumers—it’s evidence of how digitization is changing the broader media landscape. Those changes have created new commercial opportunities for creators of content, whether that content is music, books, video, film, or even journalism. And they don’t have to operate in major media capitals: These creators are building communities around their often-global followers and making a living from them.

And the only constant, of course, is change—and the media landscape is no exception to that rule.

Vizquete, for one, believes she’ll be ready for whatever evolves. She credits her business education and finance career with helping her succeed as an influencer. “The business will definitely transform over the next decade,” Vizquete says. “But having that background will help me navigate that.” **C**



**Maria Vizquete,**  
’07 BSB,  
founder, Mia Mia  
Mine fashion brand

**Tom Staggs,**  
’82 BSB, co-founder  
of Candle Media



Inclusivity is “not only the right thing to do, but an opportunity to pursue new ideas and audiences.”

— MIKE MOH, ’05 BSB

barriers to creating commerce opportunities from that community.” These trends, he adds, “felt like a very good opportunity to develop premium intellectual property that reaches audiences, serves the needs of streamers, and creates ancillary revenue streams.”

In July 2021, he and Mayer launched Candle Media, which has majority ownership in 10 streaming content companies and a minority stake in another. The largest of these companies is children’s entertainment producer Moonbug, whose best-known program, *Cocomelon*, features animated nursery rhymes and kids’ songs. Moonbug is “digital first,” explains Staggs, noting that the franchise was launched on YouTube, where

(Yes, a *Cocomelon* version of a Reese Witherspoon children’s book is in the works). To be a content-driven brand, talented people are needed both in front of, and behind, the camera.

**NEW NICHES GROW**

Mike Moh, ’05 BSB, is another Carlson School grad who has found success in the evolving media landscape. As a student, he found his calling during a corporate internship gone awry. “I was not fit for an office environment,” recalls Moh. So, he began exploring the possibility of turning his love of martial arts into an entrepreneurial opportunity. Through his participation in martial arts competitions he “was discovered by someone who



**Mike Moh,**  
’05 BSB, actor  
and martial artist



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

Why? It's life-changing. I've seen that impact up close. Students navigate cultural differences, see business through a different lens, and gain exposure to different ways of learning—all transferable experiences and skills. In the coming pages, read about a few experiences our students have had and their long-lasting impact.

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

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

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

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

**Anne D'Angelo**  
Assistant Dean, Carlson Global Institute

<sup>1</sup> [z.umn.edu/MestenhauerBook](http://z.umn.edu/MestenhauerBook)

## INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

# LIFE- CHANGING



BY GAYLA MARTY

**Jennifer Lien Will,**  
**'09 BSB**

**Semester at Hong Kong University  
of Science and Technology (HKUST)**



With a family in the world of business, Jennifer Lien Will started college wanting something different. She loved science. But pretty quickly, she realized that the Carlson School was a fit for her. Studying Chinese language, she majored in Supply Chain Management with a minor in International Business.

"I just knew I wanted an international experience," she says, "and I wanted it to be business-based." That led her to Hong Kong in 2008.

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

*Jennifer Lien Will poses by the sundial "Circle of Time" sculpture, often called "Red Bird," at the entrance of HKUST.*

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

“The travel experience, exposure to different cultures and education systems and perspectives, not to mention the lifelong friends I met, were priceless,” says Lien Will. “The only thing I would have done differently is study for two semesters instead of one.”

Right: While in Cuba, Shayla Thacker saw classic American cars still on the roads.

Below: A favela, or shanty town, in Brazil.

## Shayla Thacker, '16 BSB

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

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



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

Thacker’s experience was also enriched by the Carlson School’s buddy program, which pairs U.S. and

## “There are people all over the world doing different things and having different experiences that connect.”

— SHAYLA THACKER, '16 BSB

Four international experiences may seem like a lot, but Thacker points out it was only eight weeks total.

“I like that the Carlson Global Institute programs are different durations, so they’re flexible for people’s needs and course requirements,” she says. Hers were all in her major, three with the same faculty member, the late Steve Spruth, in Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship.

Thacker is impressed by the rich experiences designed by the Carlson School faculty. In Brazil, for example, Spruth arranged visits to a Cargill innovation center and a multimedia giant that produces telenovelas. Her class also spent time in the town of Paraty, once a location for manual cassava processing and slave trading, as well as in a vast shanty town, or *favela*, witnessing the reality of Brazil’s wealth gap—one of the largest in the world.

international students. Some of the students she met in China became friends back in Minnesota, and she met students from Brazil in Minnesota before she traveled there herself.

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

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

Did you have a life-changing international experience as a student?

Tell us at [carlsonschool.umn.edu/Share](https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/Share)

## Quoc Vu, '17 BSB

### Semester at University of Otago in New Zealand

Medicine was on Quoc Vu’s mind. Born and raised in Minnesota, he volunteered one summer during high school with Doctors Without Borders at an orphanage in his cultural homeland of Vietnam. “My parents wanted me to understand the privileges I had growing up here,” he says. In 11th grade, he started taking classes at the University of Minnesota through the



Quoc Vu lives out his Tolkien dreams by visiting the Hobbiton movie set in New Zealand where The Lord of the Rings was filmed.

Post-Secondary Educational Options program. He aimed to start medical school by the time he was 20.

With a double major in Pre-Med Neuroscience and Management Information Systems, Vu kept a packed

## “I was 18 and thought I knew how the world operated!”

— QUOC VU, '17 BSB

schedule full of student groups and activities, too. By the time he chose an international experience for his Carlson School major, he had already traveled to 21 countries. “Naïve” is how he describes himself then: “I was 18 and thought I knew how the world operated!” When his sophomore spring semester ended in Minnesota, he immediately started his junior year at the University of Otago, sometimes called the Harvard of New Zealand. He readily admits his choice was influenced by his love of nature and J. R. R. Tolkien fantasy novels, plus the opportunity to reconnect with friends he’d met in earlier travels.

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

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

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





Above: Stephen Drott smiles while touring the Taj Mahal in Agra, India.

Right: Drott takes in the sights of Patagonia during his international experience to Argentina and Chile.

## Stephen Drott, '19 MBA

### Master's level programs in Europe, the Middle East, South America, and Asia

As a dual citizen of the U.K. and U.S., Stephen Drott had plenty of cross-cultural exposure when he came to the Carlson School for an MBA in 2015. That background led him to create a unique international experience at the Carlson School.

“Starting the MBA, very quickly I knew I wanted to do at least one study abroad program,” says Drott. “Being able to understand other cultures’ perspectives of how things work intrigued me.”

Drott enrolled in a program that took him to Poland, Austria, and parts

of Eastern Europe in the summer of 2016. He loved it.

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

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

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

— STEPHEN DROTT, '19 MBA

For the next three years, he did exactly that. Between semesters on campus, he traveled abroad for four, two-week courses: First to Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Oman, where diversification away from oil was the focus; second to Argentina and Chile, centered on reliance on natural resources and how to think differently in chaotic economic environments; third to China, Hong Kong, and Shanghai to gain understanding of financial markets, banks,



and the nuances of a government-led economy; and then to India.

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

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

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

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

## Callie Stevermer, '23 BSB

### Semester at Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) in Poland



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

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

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

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

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

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

## “I wanted something that would give me a different perspective.”

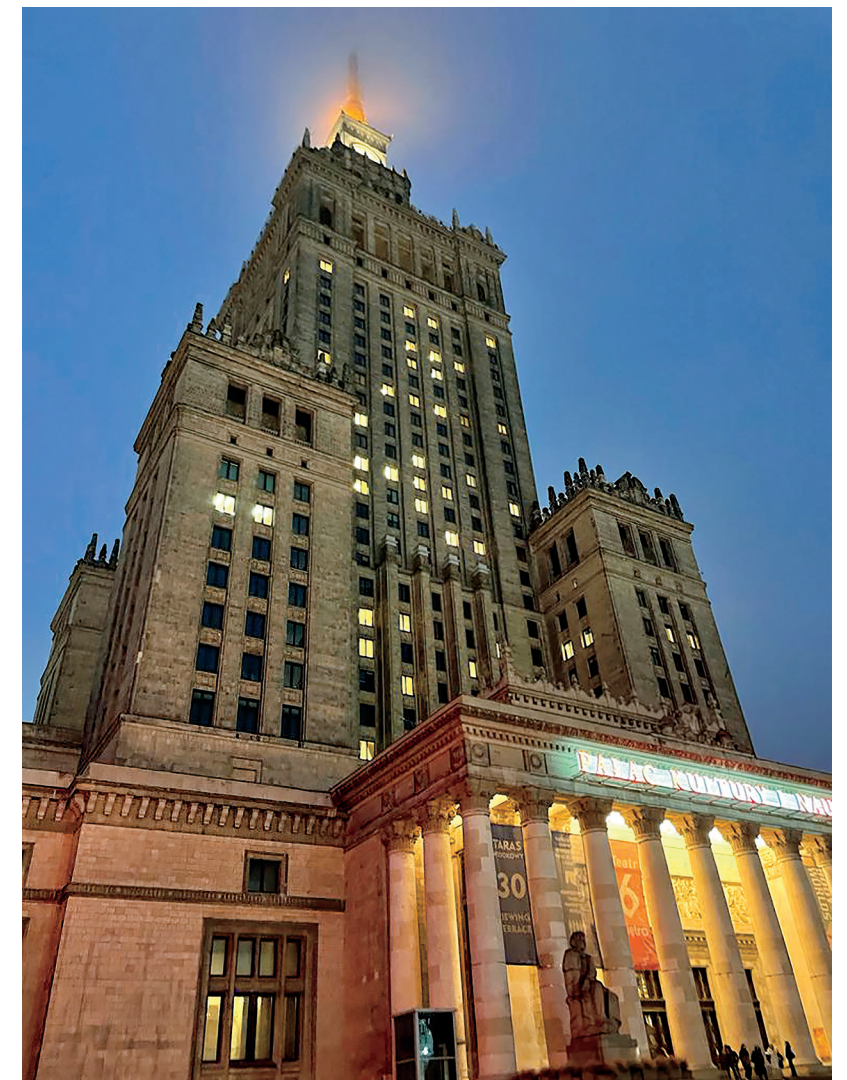
— CALLIE STEVERMER, '23 BSB



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

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

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



Right, top: Callie Stevermer shares a thank-you note on her phone while taking in Old Town Market Place in Warsaw.

Right: The Palace of Culture and Science, a notable landmark in Warsaw, is the second-tallest building in the country.

## Looking Forward



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

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

Beginning this summer, the advancement team and I look forward to introducing to you our next dean, Jamie Prenkert. We are excited to connect Jamie with alumni and friends across the country as he gets to experience firsthand what makes the Carlson School so special: its incredible community of alumni and friends. We hope you will join us in welcoming Jamie in the coming months.

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

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

Sincerely,

Jess Kowal, Assistant Dean  
for Institutional Advancement

## By the Numbers

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

**76**

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

**\$6,000**

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

**\$20,000**

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

# ENGAGE

## Update on the Bentson Scholarship Challenge

### BENTSON SCHOLARSHIP BENEFACTORS

Anonymous  
John\* and Janet Bohan  
Thia Breen and Laurie Dowley  
William J. Caldwell  
Steven H. Eklund  
Jody Gunderson  
Philip and Carole Hildebrandt  
Marilyn S. Hughes  
Todd Johns  
David Katkov and Patricia Wyffels  
Catherine Mathis and Robert Burchell  
Peter and Denise McCormick  
Judd T. and Melinda Nystrom  
Thomas G. and Meredith D. Olson  
Joan Prairie and Thomas Geisen  
Ty R. and Susan J. Silberhorn  
C. William and Karen J. Snedeker  
Esta Eiger Stecher  
Ms. Lynda J. Swenson  
Darla Tufto and Dale\* O'Donnell  
James M. and MaryEllen Weber  
Katherine Wilson and Neil Sell

\*deceased

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

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

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

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

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

## Scholarship Gifts Celebrate Jennifer Houle's Legacy



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

By personally matching every gift made on Give to the Max Day, John and Diane inspired more than 60 donors, raising an additional \$25,116 for this fund. As the fund grows, the amount of each scholarship award grows, ensuring that the Houle Scholars receive an elite education on their way to becoming the business leaders of tomorrow with a lower financial burden.

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

## At The Center of It All

BY WADE RUPARD

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

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

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

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

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

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

These gifts help Naturally Minnesota provide the education, resources, and connections needed to accelerate the natural products industry in Minnesota. They help fund several monthly and yearly events, resource databases and tools created to support aspiring entrepreneurs, among many other



**"We want to strengthen Minnesota's natural and organic businesses to drive equitable prosperity for people and the planet."**

— ALLISON HOHN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NATURALLY MINNESOTA

initiatives. The newest and most unique of these is the Bold Growth Program, which is done in partnership with the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) through the MBOLD coalition. The program is a small, but highly customized, accelerator for late-stage companies to help advance their goals through access to pro bono project teams and advisors over a 12- to 18-month period.

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

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

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

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

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

## Taking Action Through Teamwork

BY WADE RUPARD

Judd Nystrom, '96 BSB, is a Gopher through and through.



The Minnesotan, who now serves as the CFO at Caliber Collision, is an alum, serves on the Carlson School's

Board of Advisors, and closely follows the Gophers Spirit Squad, where his daughter, Lindsay, '26 BSB, is a Minnesota Golden Gophers cheerleader.

Nystrom has previously held a variety of senior financial roles at major companies, including At Home, Advance Auto Parts, and Best Buy and Carlson Companies.

He spoke to the Carlson School about his career and what advice he would give to students about to enter the workforce.

### Judd Nystrom '96 BSB

**OFFICIAL TITLE**  
Chief Financial Officer

**HOMETOWN**  
Allen, Texas

**INTERESTS  
OUTSIDE OF WORK**  
Family, travel, and fitness

### What drives you in your work?

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

### You're on the Carlson School's Board of Advisors. Why was that something you wanted to do?

The Carlson School helped position me to get to where I am today, so I wanted to make a positive impact on the next generation of students. My family and I have created two scholarships for the Carlson School to make sure that young, aspiring future executives have the same opportunities that I did.

### What advice would you give Carlson School students who are about to graduate?

First, start building a network. Second, do some research on what type of companies you want to work for. Then, leverage the network that you're starting to build and identify opportunities to get in front of those companies, whether it be an internship or volunteering. Meet with the company in any way you can so that you can really target those companies that you're interested in that match the skillset of where you want to be in the long term. **C**

## Supporting Women at Every Turn

BY WADE RUPARD

Throughout her career, Catherine Wright, '87 BSB, has been a trailblazer.



As the first woman to hold leadership positions at several large companies, Wright broke through the glass ceiling. Now, she wants to inspire female students pursuing careers in male-dominated fields to do the same.

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

Wright recently established a scholarship to support female students pursuing degrees such as Accounting, Finance, or Management Information Systems (MIS).

Wright was a first-generation college student when she started her studies at the then-College of Business Administration. Coming from a large family, she had to pay for her own tuition.

While in college, Wright excelled in the Accounting program, graduating with honors, while working 20-25 hours a week.

Following graduation, she worked at Honeywell International, where she rose to become the CFO and vice president of finance in the building services business. During her time at Honeywell, Wright spent three years in London, becoming the company's first female CFO in Northern Europe.

"That was my first global role, and it forced me out of my comfort zone," she says. "You had to listen, be humble, and quickly learn how things worked and adapt to the culture."

After 15 years at Honeywell, she worked at Thomson Reuters for 11 years, where she became the first woman on the leadership team.

She followed that up by joining Medtronic for seven years as the CFO and vice president of finance for the neuroscience group.

Along the way, Wright helped mentor many women who were looking to advance in their careers. At Thomson Reuters, she started a development program, which is still being used at the company.

"At times, it's been difficult being a woman in a male-dominated field," she says. "I was probably naïve going into it. Looking back, there were many times when I was the only woman in the room. I had to earn a seat at the table and my worth with my competence, decisiveness, and results orientation. I had to show my worth early on and gain respect so that I wasn't seen as the token female on the team."

Those experiences led Wright to give back to the Carlson School through a scholarship.

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

Now, Wright has formed Wright Consulting, LLC where she is partnering with *Fortune* 200 global companies to develop strategies to grow revenue and improve efficiency. She has also gone back to school to pursue an interior design degree. Her hope is to start an interior design business renovating homes in the Bahamas.

Wright sees the gift as a way to give back to the next generation in a way that helped shape her career.

"[My education] prepared me so well," she says.

"The curriculum, the competitiveness, the quality of the students, the instructors, everything. Even being around the international students

"I want to help younger women who might not have the confidence and encourage them to achieve their dreams."

— CATHERINE WRIGHT, '87 BSB



in my program helped me later on in my career when I worked overseas. I wouldn't be where I'm at today without my education from the University of Minnesota."

That's a passion of mine," she says. "We've been fortunate to spend a lot of time in the Bahamas, and there is definitely a market for home renovation. No matter where in the world she is, Wright is lending a hand to help. C

in my program helped me later on in my career when I worked overseas. I wouldn't be where I'm at today without my education from the University of Minnesota."

No matter where in the world she is, Wright is lending a hand to help. C

ILLUSTRATION: TRACI DABERKO

## Alumni Come Together for Finch Fellowship

BY WADE RUPARD

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

That faculty member is Mike Finch, the long-time Medical Industry Leadership Institute's (MILI) Valuation Lab Faculty Director. Since 2009, Finch has invited a small group of outstanding students to participate as a Valuation Lab Fellow. Now, "Finch Fellows" will always be part of the Lab.

On Give to the Max Day in November 2022, nearly 60 donors took part, raising more than \$50,000. The donations allow the program to endow a fund that will live in perpetuity.

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

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

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

Alumni of the fellowship program have gone on to work across the country in more than 65 local, national, and global companies; and have careers in higher education, medical device, startups, health systems, and financial institutions.

Finch Fellow Chris Hanson, '23 MBA, made a gift in Finch's honor. Hanson credits Finch with being a large influence on his decision to attend the Carlson School.

"I'll never forget shadowing the Valuation Lab as a prospective student while debating whether or not to pursue my MBA, and hearing Mike ask a group why their product's target market couldn't be dogs instead of people," says Hanson. "I realized I had so much to learn and just had to be in the Valuation Lab."

The campaign to raise money for the fellowship program was spearheaded by Professor Steve Parente and Tom Gunderson, an executive-in-residence at MILI. C

"This is a great way to honor Mike and make sure the fellowship continues after he retires."

— JESSICA HAUPT,  
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MILI

Medical Industry Leadership Lab faculty, staff, volunteers, and students pose for a picture at the 2016 Business School Alliance for Health Management Case Competition after a Carlson School team took first place. (Back row from left: Jessica Haupt, Mark Mulvahill, Nick Milliron, Dane Stimart, Steve Parente, and Josh Sopeth. Front row from left: Mike Finch, Nick Alexandrov, Cortney Carlson.)



Every event brings new insights, experiences, and connections for alumni and friends of the Carlson School. Here are some highlights:

## 1st Tuesday with Dean Sri Zaheer

Dean Sri Zaheer headlined 1st Tuesday in December 2022 to commemorate her return to faculty after this academic year. The lively crowd at McNamara Alumni Center included former University of Minnesota president Bob Bruininks, Regent Doug Huebsch, Alumni Association

President and CEO Lisa Lewis, and more. Wendy Nelson, chairwoman of the Carlson Family Foundation, sat down in a fireside chat with Zaheer to discuss her path through industry to academia and leadership, highlights of her tenure as dean, and what's next for her career and her family.



## Women's Leadership Conference

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

Save the date for the Women's Leadership Conference: Friday, March 1, 2024.

## Regional Events around the U.S.

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



Recent graduates reunited at the Chicago Dean's Reception, hosted by John Hartmann, '84 BSB, in September.

## 7th Annual Military and Veterans Celebration

More than 100 veteran alumni, family, and friends of the Carlson School's Military and Veteran community came together on November 10, 2022, for the 7th Annual Military and Veterans Celebration. Guests enjoyed a formal dinner and program, including a keynote speech from

Anthony Gagliardo, a former U.S. Air Force special operations flight engineer, who is currently the area vice president of enterprise, nuclear and technical training for Xcel Energy, and serves on the Carlson School's Executive Education Board. Each year, we are thrilled

to recognize the contributions of these exceptional students to our country and our Carlson School community. Connect with your fellow veteran alumni through the Carlson Veteran Alumni Network. **Learn more at [z.umn.edu/CVAN](https://z.umn.edu/CVAN).**



## MBA Students & Alumni of Color Networking Night

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



## Carlson School Day at Gophers Football Tailgate

October 1, 2022 was Carlson School Day at Gophers Football! Carlson School alumni and football fans celebrated with a huge tent party before the game outside Huntington Bank Stadium. While Minnesota fell to Purdue, the team spirit was loud and proud. Ski-U-Mah!

## Ovative Group

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



Scholarships help provide opportunities for students to attend a leading business school and gain skills, leadership experience, and connections to help them use business as a force for good. Philanthropy from alumni and friends of the Carlson School makes a positive impact, extending far beyond the campus.



**Alyssa Arnold**

'23 BSB

I never thought I'd be able to study abroad or intern at *Fortune* 500 companies. However, through the Carlson School, I've experienced so many meaningful opportunities.

Studying abroad in Singapore was a big highlight of my educational experience. I felt a deeper comprehension of topics I'd already learned

**“Studying abroad in Singapore was a big highlight of my educational experience.”**

— ALYSSA ARNOLD, '23 BSB

in the U.S. when I learned how they applied in Asia. It was also a great personal journey for me, pushing me out of my comfort zone to explore a beautiful part of the world with amazing people I met along the way.

Another highlight of my Carlson School experience has been my internships, including this past summer with Procter and Gamble as a sales intern. Working on the Target account, I worked to solve real-world business problems using Nielsen data and the persuasive selling format to guide my presentation skills. After I graduate in May of 2023, I will be returning to P&G as an account executive.

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



**Anjali Donthi**

'25 BSB

As a volunteer at the Mayo Clinic in 2019, I noticed the challenges faced by pediatric patients when it came to understanding their surgeries. With the guidance of my mentors and past colleagues, I led the development of Operation Serenity, an app designed to provide educational and emotional support resources for pediatric patients and their families. My participation in MN Cup exposed me to the art of business planning, the relationship between healthcare and technology, and the process of establishing a business. The success of Operation Serenity in positively impacting patients and their families solidified my belief in the power of technology and entrepreneurship to bring about change and make a difference in people's lives.

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

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**CLASS NOTES**

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

**1970s**

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

**1980s**

**Tim LaLonde**, '86 BSB, was promoted to chief financial officer at Evercore.

**Karen Olson**, '86 BSB, was elected as partner for Spencer Fane LLP.

**Louis Berezovsky**, '89 BSB, was appointed as a board of director for Ascent Solar Technologies.



**Denise Schornack**, '79 BSB, is retiring and closing her clothing store, Nadine's, after 44 successful years in business in Perham, Minn. Known for its variety of brand-quality women's clothing

and lake life fashion, Nadine's became a staple in the community and beyond. Schornack reflects fondly on the fun of running the shop and says she has "enormous gratitude" for her customers for choosing Nadine's to be part of their lives for so long. She plans to continue Nadine's as a vendor booth at the nearby P.S. I Love You boutique. Following retirement this spring, Schornack says she's looking forward to spending more time with her family, including her seven grandchildren.

**1990s**

**Peter Ahn**, '91 MBA, was appointed as a board director for Canterbury Park.

**Jeff Seacrist**, '93 MBA, is now senior vice president, product & product marketing at Lytics.

**Liam Shay**, '93 BSB, is now underwriting counsel at Alliant National Title Insurance Company.

**Michael Sullivan**, '93 MBA, was appointed as a member of the advisory board at Waytek.

**Renee Peterson**, '94 MBA, was appointed as a non-executive director of the board at James Hardie Industries. She is also currently vice president and chief financial officer for The Toro Company.

**Wayne Roen**, '95 MBA, retired from 3M after a 38-year career in business management and engineering. He lives with his wife, Kris, in River Falls, Wisc.

**Matthew Carrier**, '96 BSB, received the 2023 Five Star Wealth Manager Award from Five Star Professionals for the second year in a row.

**Judd Nystrom**, '96 BSB, was appointed as chief financial officer at Caliber Collision.

**Leslie Jones Arroyo**, '97 BSB, was appointed deputy city manager in South San Francisco, Calif.

**Lynn Blake**, '97 MBA, was appointed chief financial officer at Nuwellis.

**Andrew Flaherty**, '97 BSB, '03 MBA, started a new role as global director of automotive aftermarkets and abrasives business at 3M.

**Dominic Louwagie**, '97 MBA, started a new role as senior global product line manager at Reels Automotive Business.

**Paul Reppenhagen**, '97 MBA, is now chief marketing officer at Chief Outsiders.

**Jennifer Jorgensen**, '99 MBA, started a new role as president and chief executive officer of Back to Nature.

**David Ruhland**, '99 MBA, started a new position as vice chancellor for finance and administration at University of Wisconsin-River Falls.



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

**2000s**

**Ann Senne**, '00 MBA, is now U.S. chief administrative and integration officer at RBC.

**Richard Rodgers**, '02 MBA, was appointed as an independent director at Novavax.

**Kim Snow**, '02 MBA, started a new role as executive director at Franklin Center.

**Micki (Dennison) Turner**, '02 MHRIR, is now chief human resources officer at CSafe.

**Laura Rehfeld**, '03 MBA, has a new role as senior director of treasury at Kaiser Permanente.

**Gabriel Garcia**, '04 MBA, was promoted to senior manager of information technology as a business partner at Molson Coors Beverage Company.

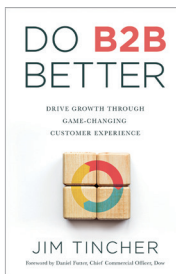
**Henry Chang**, '05 MBA, started a new role as senior vice president and general manager for MKS Instruments Inc.

**Stacey Churchwell**, '05 MBA, is now vice president and general manager, procedure innovations at Medtronic.

**Brian Durmaskin**, '05 BSB, is now vice president of sales at Ecolab Healthcare.

**KC Glaser**, '05 BSB, '16 MBA, was recognized as Brand Innovators' 40 under 40 for 2022 representing the Midwest. He is the senior manager, brand experience—loyalty and rewards for General Mills.





**Jim Tincher**, '06 MBA, was recently named a board member for the Customer Experience Professionals Association. He also recently published a new book, *Do B2B Better: Drive Growth Through Game-Changing Customer Experience*.



**Peter Hansen**, '08 BSB, and **Mandy Schueller Hansen**, '08 BSB, met after their time at the Carlson School, despite graduating in the same year. Peter and Mandy have built a career around franchises. They started with owning Liberty Tax franchises. That led

to their first Club Pilates franchise, which has since grown to 18 across the country and counting. Peter and Mandy also founded Franchise Ramp, a digital marketing agency specifically for franchises, which in 2022, was on the *Inc.* 5000 list in spot #49.

*Note: While we welcome alumni news, the Carlson School does not verify Class Note submissions and is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in Class Notes.*

**Gina Hawley**, '05 MHA-MBA, was appointed chief operating officer at the University of Utah Health Hospitals and Clinics.

**Charlie Schaller**, '05 BSB, is now chief of staff to the chief medical officer—clinical policy at UnitedHealth Group, a promotion from senior director of business planning.

**Tiffany Beitler**, '06 BSB, co-founded a new boutique creative marketing and advertising agency, Plaid Moose Creative.

**Carl Denys**, '06 MBA, started a new role as president of ChemImage Corporation.

**Navneet Narula**, '06 MBA, started a new position as managing director and global vertical head BFSI at Brillio.

**Ryan French**, '07 MBA, is now chief operations officer at the Children's Theatre Company.

**Benjamin Grabski**, '07 BSB, '12 MBA, was appointed as chief financial officer at Lumeris.

**J Michael Edwards-Toepel**, '08 BSB, was promoted to director of business development at RevUnit.

**Frederik Eliason**, '08 MBA, started a new position as key account manager at Neogen Corporation.

**Terry Haider**, '08 MBA, started a new position as finance director at Foley Public Schools.

**Patrick Barrett**, '09 MBA, was elected as a partner lawyer for Morrison Foerster.

**Ryan Kromminga**, '09 BSB, '14 MBA, was recently promoted from associate to vice president at Northborne Partners.

**Scott Laroque**, '09 BSB, was promoted to director at Proviti.

**Sam Tashima**, '09 BSB, '17 MBA, is now head of cyber risk consulting and analytics at Aon North America.

**Donna Wong**, '09 MBA, is now senior director of product management at Optum, a promotion from director of strategy and program management.

**Kevin Yu**, '09 BSB, started a new position as principal at Neos Partners.

## 2010s

**Robert Ed**, '10 MBA, was appointed to director of marketing strategy at Darcy Solutions.

**Joshua Edgar**, '10 BSB, '17 MBA, started a new position as senior principal at Slalom.

**Ashley Johnson**, '10 BSB, started a new position as an accounting supervisor at Perforce Software.

**Mitch Nasset**, '10 BSB, is now finance manager, AWS Infrastructure at Amazon Web Services.

**Michelle Roemer**, '10 MBA, received a 2022 Twin Cities CIO of the Year ORBIE Award from the *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal*. Michelle is the senior vice president of information technology at Cirrus Aircraft.

**Adrine Chung**, '11 MBA, was appointed executive director of clinical operations at TORL Biotherapeutics and 1200 Pharma.

**Adrian Cook**, '11 MBA, is now strategy and business development director at 3M Health Care Business Group.

**Archana Desai**, '11 MBA, started a new position as director of strategy, Image Guided Therapy Devices at Philips.

**Mike Ingebrand**, '11 MBA, started a new position as director of global services at WorldCare Clinical.

**Prachi Mishra**, '11 BSB, is now product marketing director at Docusign, a promotion from senior product marketing manager.

**Jessie Morsching**, '11 MBA, started a new position as chief financial officer at Accanto Health.

**Jesse Ng**, '11 BSB, passed the Society of Actuaries (SOA) Investments & Financial Markets exam as part of the SOA's associateship credentialing pathway.

**Christian Zimprich**, '11 BSB, started a new role as global IBP & strategy leader at Sherwin-Williams.

**Bradford Brennan**, '12 BSB, is now finance manager at Optum.

**Elizabeth Guest Kibler**, '12 BSB, started a new position as associate manager OMNI shopper marketing Blue Buffalo at General Mills.

**Kentale Morris Sr.**, '12 MBA, started a new position as director of commercial sales at Land O'Lakes, Inc.

**Kristen Kranzler Steigauf**, '12 BSB, '18 MBA, started a new position as director of global sourcing at MTS Systems Corporation.

**Katie (Vogel) Twelves**, '12 BSB, is now director of client experience and marketing programs at Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC.

**Donald Hunter**, '13 MBA, is now branch manager at Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC.

**Hollies Winston**, '13 MBA, was elected mayor of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.



**Robert Shields**, '10 BSB, associate marketing manager at AbbVie Pharmaceuticals, was awarded the 2022 AbbVie Chairman's Award, the company's most prestigious employee award, for his contributions to a product launch within the U.S. Dermatology franchise.

## RECOGNITION

The *Minneapolis St. Paul Business Journal* named the following Carlson School community members in its "200 Black Leaders in the Twin Cities You Should Know" list:

**Joffrey Wilson**, '99 BSB

**Ravi Norman**, '04 MBA

**David Edgerton Jr.**, '05 MBA

**Miquel Purvis McMoore**, '06 MBA

**Thompson Aderinkomi**, '11 MBA

**Kentalé Morris**, '12 MBA

**Simon Shannon**, '19 MBA

**Angela Spranger**, Senior Diversity Officer

**Paul Campbell**, Holmes Center for Entrepreneurship Advisory Board member

**Brandon Bigelbach**, '14 BSB, '21 MSSCM, is now a supply chain analytics solution architect at 3M.

**Anthony Cannon**, '14 MBA, was promoted to managing director at Accenture.

**Blake Corson**, '14 MBA, is now vice president and senior relationship manager at Union Bank and Trust Company.

**Courtney O'Donnell Finley**, '14 BSB, is now planning and operations lead at Target.

**Kevin Krueger**, '14 MBA, is now a marketing director at Land O'Lakes, a promotion from senior marketing manager.

**Ernie Lietzan**, '14 MBA, started a new position as a first officer at SkyWest Airlines.

**Bryan McCallum**, '14 MBA, is now vice president of finance at Whirltronics, Inc.

**Shawn Nelson**, '14 MBA, is now senior global account manager of digital solutions at Ecolab, a promotion from corporate account manager.

**Darya Antanovich**, '15 BSB, started a new position as senior consultant at Launch Consulting Group.

**Ally (Moeller) Braun**, '15 BSB, is now a strategy and consulting senior manager at Accenture, a promotion from strategy and consulting manager.

**Laura-Lee Brown**, '15 MBA, was promoted to director of strategy in surgical robotics at Medtronic.

**Andrew Rogers**, '15 MBA, was appointed as general manager for The Ritz-Carlton, Kapulua.

**Drew Zinkel**, '15 MD-MBA, started a new position as senior medical director of emergency medicine at the University of Minnesota Medical Center.

**Karyn Dossinger**, '16 MD-MBA, started a new role as an assistant professor at Loyola University Quinlan School of Business.

**Nels Haugen**, '16 BSB, started a new position as director of growth and regulatory technology at Optum.

**Kenny Ngo**, '16 BSB, started a new position as customer success manager at Elastic.

# See your name in print!

Each issue, we showcase exciting, interesting, impressive, and new things Carlson School alumni are doing. Now it's your turn to share your news and brag a little to your classmates.

Choose a prompt below, and submit your update to [carlsonschool.umn.edu/share](https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/share).



Since graduation, I have \_\_\_\_\_

Outside of work, I am involved in \_\_\_\_\_

My classmates would be interested to know that \_\_\_\_\_

I am proud of this recent accomplishment \_\_\_\_\_

*P.S. Submit a photo with your update and you may see your face in print too!*



**Lieutenant Commander Thomas Kaster**, '18 MBA, was named a specialty leader for Navy Medicine's perioperative nursing community in November 2022. He has served all over the world and is currently Naval Hospital Bremerton Main Operating Room department head.

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

**Alum leads flight ops at NASA** (pp. 10-15)  
Shannon Gregory, '18 MBA

**Career Pivots** (pp. 16-19)  
Lauren Nakamura, '20 MBA, Peter Dinh, '22 MHRIR, Brianna Hughes, '22 MBA, Mike Rallis, '12 BSB

**Entrepreneurship Support** (pp. 20-23)  
John Stavig, '86 BSB

**Changing Media** (pp. 24-27)  
Tom Staggs, '82 BSB, Mike Moh, '05 BSB, Maria Vizuete, '07 BSB

**International Experience** (pp. 28-33)  
Jennifer Lien Will, '09 BSB, Shayla Thacker, '16 BSB, Quoc Vu, '17 BSB, Stephen Drott, '19 MBA

**Douglas Paulsen**, '16 MBA, started a new role as senior director of operations at CFS Brands.

**Chris Carlson**, '17 MHRIR, started a position as manager of employee relations at Medica.

**Allison Hohn**, '17 MSSCM, of Naturally Minnesota, and **Pete Kostroski**, '17 MBA, of Rokos Advisors were honored with a *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal* 2023 40 Under 40 award.

**Doug Shane**, '17 MBA, started a new position as senior marketing manager of product and portfolio strategy at Adagio Medical.

**Jake Shoults**, '17 BSB, is now manager of business analysis at Optum, a promotion from business system analyst.

**Heather Ambre**, '18 BSB, is now a senior planner at General Mills.

**Kaia Anderson**, '18 BSB, is now digital commerce manager at Post Consumer Brands, a promotion from senior digital strategist.

**Angela Hermanson**, '18 MBA, started a new position as oral care portfolio marketing leader for the U.S. and Canada at 3M.

**Nicholas Justin**, '18 BSB, was promoted to senior analyst I at PRGX.

**Natalia (Velenchenko) Kluis**, '18 BSB, is now consulting manager, Optum Advisory Services at Optum, a promotion from senior consultant.

**Ram Rajagopalan**, '18 MBA, has been promoted to vice president in business consulting at Virtusa.

**Elizabeth Schaefer**, '18 MBA, started a new position as senior product manager at Cardiovascular Systems.

**Ashley Ver Berg Soukup**, '18 MBA, is now senior brand manager—fruit snacks at General Mills, a promotion from brand manager—cereal.

**Yunzhao (YZ) Xiao**, '18 MBA, started a new position as senior consultant at ZoomRX.

**Shannon McCormick**, '19 MBA, was promoted to chief of staff at Medtronic.

**2020s**

**Elizabeth West**, '20 BSB, started a new role as an account executive at Gartner.

**Nate Gomoll**, '21 MBA, started a new role as senior produce manager in upstream marketing at Medtronic.

**Jeffrey Juul**, '21 MBA, was promoted to senior manager of international affairs at PepsiCo.

**Crystal Osman**, '21 MBA, was promoted to senior regional development officer at the University of Minnesota Foundation.

**Danielle Sackstein**, '21 MBA, was promoted to associate director of Optum Everycare at Optum.

**Jason Butina**, '22 BSB, started a new role as an investment banking analyst at Crossree.

**Jennifer Rolfes**, '22 MBA, started a new role as senior LDRP associate at Medtronic.

**Charlie Steveken**, '22 MBA, was promoted to senior LDRP associate in business development and strategy at Medtronic.

**IN MEMORIAM**

**1950s**

**Robert Wolter**, '50 BSB, died in November 2022.

**Bill Teeter**, '57 BSB, died in 2022.

**Lloyd Robinson**, '59 BSB, died in November 2022.

**1960s**

**John D. Nolan**, '61 BSB, died in April 2022.

**Michael Wons**, '61 BSB, died in January 2023.

**Paul Westerlund**, '62 MBA, died in January 2023.

**Daniel Hessel**, '68 BSB, died in November 2022.

**Coenraad Mohr**, '69 MBA, died in January 2023.

**1970s**

**Hans Melgaard**, '71 BSB, '78 MBA, died in November 2022.

**Terry Seierstad**, '72 MBA, died in January 2023.

**John Enyart**, '77 BSB, died in September 2022.

**Joseph Porto**, '77 BSB, died in January 2023.

**David H. Gobeli**, '78 MBA, '82 PhD, died in October 2022.

**1980s**

**Scott Levin**, '85 BSB, died in November 2022.

**1990s**

**Michael Stokke**, '91 MBA, died in November 2022.

**Bernadette Sheats**, '92 BSB, died in August 2022.

**Elliott Kaas**, '94 MBA, died in December 2022.

**MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS**



**Recent baby or wedding news? Tell us about it at [carlsonschool.umn.edu/Share](https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/Share).**

**1. Aparna Gannavarapu**, '22 MSSCM, and **Shashank Navuduri**, a current Part-Time MBA student, formally registered their marriage in 2021, but finally completed their Indian wedding rituals in Florida on December 14, 2022.

**2. Ally (Moeller) Braun**, '15 BSB, and **JD Braun** were married in May 2022.

**3. Barbara Chu** welcomed baby ErCheng He, a tiger girl born on December 11, 2022. Baby girl was even able to participate in Carlson China MBA courses before she was born!

**4. Kaukab Enayet Syed**, '16 MSBA, added little one, Zain, in August 2022. Kaukab and spouse Nazia are also parents to Zoraiz.

**5. Natalia (Velenchenko) Kluis**, '18 BSB, and her husband, **Austin**, welcomed their first daughter, **Eviana Jane Kluis**, into the world in September 2022. She already has quite the start of her Gophers gear collection.

**6. Alex Kurth**, '14 BSB, married his new bride, **Krista**, in summer 2022. Krista is a University of Wisconsin graduate, but Alex loves her anyway. The two enjoyed an amazing honeymoon in Italy.

**7. Billie Pritzker** and **Joe Ohlin**, both '18 MBA, were married in August 2022 in Minneapolis and celebrated among many of their MBA Class of 2018 classmates.

*Back row (L-R): Alec Larson, Will Mooty, Alec Storms, Joe Ohlin, Brennan Earley, Patrick Farley, Fred Steiner, Matt Teasdale*  
*Front row (L-R): Thomas Cloyd, Billie Pritzker, Sarah Pritzker, '16 MBA*  
PHOTO: JOE & JEN PHOTO





## Akinyi Williams

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



### 1. Strive to get top pay by bringing your best.

I did not understand the impact of money and power until I became a loan officer. Seeing the variance in incomes among loan applicants inspired me to push myself so that I, too, could earn top pay to support my dreams. This immediately presented new challenges as a Black woman and an immigrant with a heavy accent, but I was persistent. I learned to push past many disenchantments and endless "no's." I got hungry, then mad. Ultimately, I learned cookies are for closers and indeed the rewards were amazing.

### 2. Negotiate and ask for your worth.

As I approached my MBA graduation, I had a full-time job offer from a large company. This was a big, much-needed move to stability, but something inside me told me the offer was paltry. However, I had just concluded Negotiation Strategies, a class taught by the no-nonsense maestro, Lori Abrams. I was clear on my BATNA (Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement) and asked for nearly double. I got it! I learned to silence the insecurity in my head and to advocate for myself as the strong candidate I believed I was.

"I learned that for a Black woman like me to succeed in Minnesota, I had to go the extra mile to be recognized for my work."

— AKINYI WILLIAMS, '09 MBA

### 3. Take accountability for your growth.

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

### 4. Adversity can push us to betterment.

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

### 5. Make an impact.

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



With local radio airplay and sold-out shows at First Avenue's famed 7th Street Entry under his belt, Colin Bracewell, '23 BSB, credits connections made in his Carlson School classes in helping him navigate his budding indie-pop career. Scan the QR code for more:



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**CARLSON SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT**  
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# MBA Reunion Weekend

MAY 5-6, 2023

All MBA alumni are  
invited to celebrate.

Register at [z.umn.edu/MBAReunion](https://z.umn.edu/MBAReunion)

Milestone classes from these years  
will be recognized:

1968 • 1973 • 1978 • 1983 • 1988 • 1993 •  
1998 • 2003 • 2008 • 2013 • 2018 • 2022