

BuildingBridges

Volume 28 | Issue No. 1

Fall 2022



Learning on the job

Community Engaged
Fellowships benefit students,
local nonprofits

BuildingBridges

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse



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Vol. 28, No. 1 | *Building Bridges* is published biannually for UWL-La Crosse College of Business Administration alumni, friends, students, faculty and staff.

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On the cover:

UWL students Avery Frankl, Gretta Kraus and Samantha Meister share how fellowships are transforming their college experience.



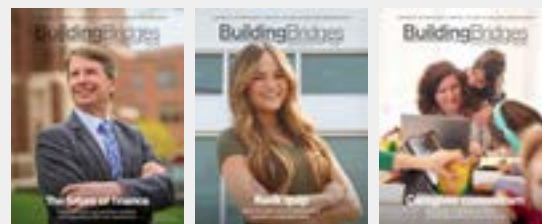
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EXCITED ABOUT ECONOMICS

James Murray wins 2022 Eagle Teaching Excellence Award

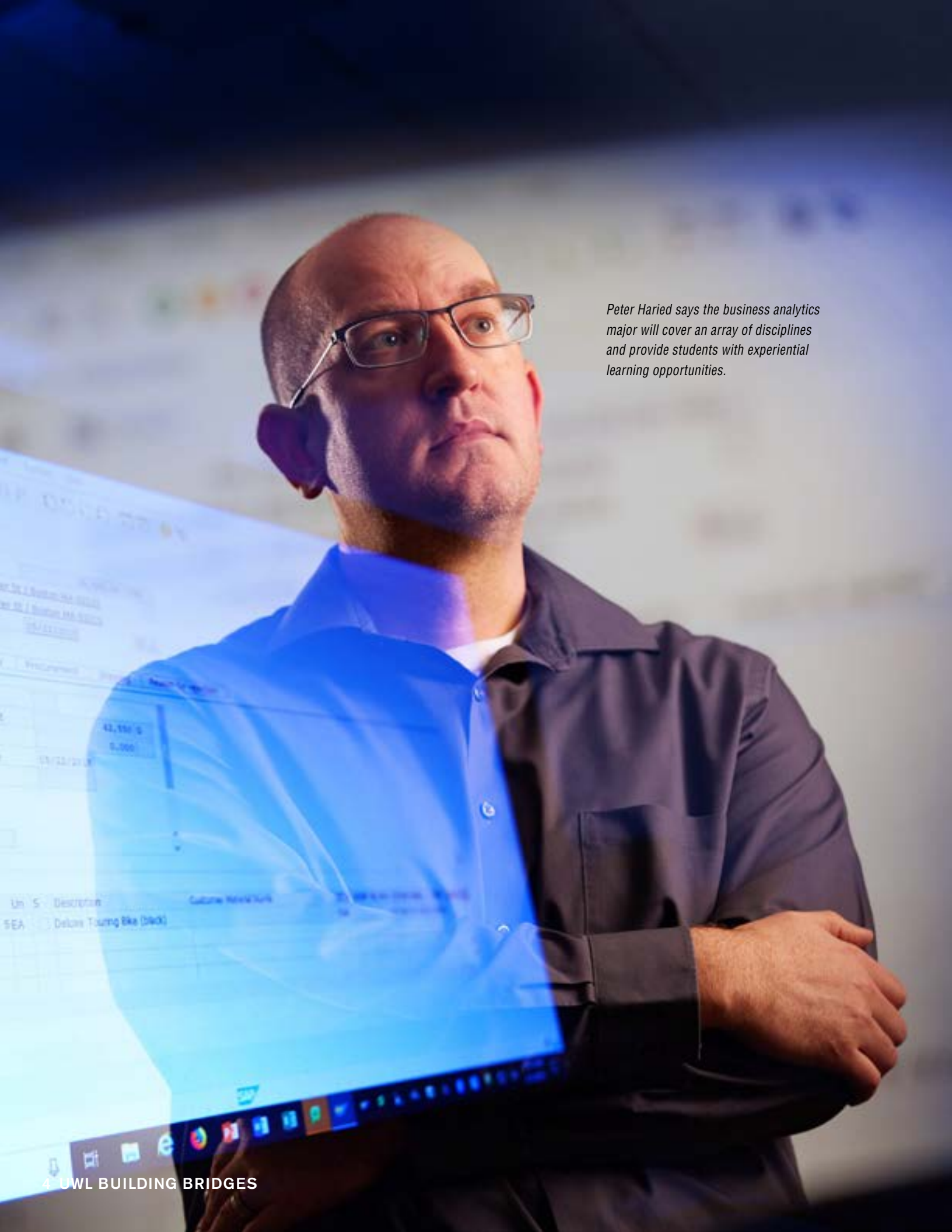
Started at UWL: 2009 (2000 UWL alum)

Courses: I teach frameworks for analyzing economic questions like the following: Why are some countries rich and others relatively poor? Why do some economies grow quickly, and others grow slowly? Why do we sometimes experience episodes of unemployment or inflation? Is there anything we can do to solve these problems?

Background: I earned a master's degree in economics from the University of Notre Dame in 2002, then a Ph.D. in Economics

from Indiana University in 2008. I taught economics and statistics classes at Indiana University and Indiana University—Purdue University at Columbus while working on my Ph.D. I was then an assistant professor at Viterbo University in La Crosse for a year before coming to UWL.

Favorite part of teaching: Using the purple whiteboard marker. When analyzing economic issues with graphical models, I use color to emphasize meaning and I always progress in the order: blue to red to purple. When I break out the purple marker, something really exciting is about to happen!



Peter Haried says the business analytics major will cover an array of disciplines and provide students with experiential learning opportunities.

New major meets big need

Business analytics major set to launch in January

UW-La Crosse launched its business analytics minor at the worst possible time: the fall of 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But thanks to students and faculty who embraced the new minor — even in an online setting — the program thrived.

It has done so well, in fact, that the College of Business Administration is going a step further. In January 2023, the CBA will begin offering a business analytics major, allowing students to explore this multidisciplinary field in greater depth. The major was approved by the UW System Board of Regents in late September.

“We all know that fall 2020 might not have been the best timing to start a brand-new minor,” notes Professor Peter Haried, lead faculty member for the business analytics program — part of the Information Systems Department. “But the minor experienced tremendous growth over these past two years. It gave us proof of the need and overall interest in the business analytics area. The decision to pursue the major was the next logical step.”

To complete the program, students must earn 24 credits in the business analytics major, in addition to general studies and CBA core coursework.

The major includes courses in data visualization and communication, analytics in enterprise systems, business forecasting, performance analysis, management of business analytics, and more.

Because business analytics intersects with a variety of disciplines, students can take supplementary courses from inside and outside the CBA: accountancy, economics, finance, information systems, management, marketing, statistics, computer science and geography.

Additionally, students will gain experience with the analytics languages and applications used by industry leaders. Faculty will meet regularly with alumni and business partners to ensure the curriculum aligns with industry standards.

“This program demonstrates UWL’s and the CBA’s commitment to developing programs that align with the needs in the ever-changing business environment,” says Haried, noting that there will be plenty of hands-on, experiential learning opportunities.

“There are many ways we are going to be able to make an impact with the business community through projects, case completions and our overall engagement with the community,” he says. “Businesses need graduates with business analytics skills to make better business decisions, and our graduates are going to be able to provide this skill set and make an impact.”

Students who earn a bachelor’s degree in business analytics will be well-positioned for high-earning careers. Operational research analysts, market research analysts and management analysts are positions in high demand, and they offer salaries far above the national median.

Haried says he has heard from a number of local employers hoping to connect with students and get involved with the program. This will allow the CBA to bolster undergraduate research, internships, group collaboration and real-world learning opportunities.

Businesses have access to more data than ever before, Haried says. And yet, there are some that do not take full advantage of available data when making strategic decisions.

Through the new major, he says, students will gain data-driven insights that can help businesses and organizations prosper.

And while the program is launching with a strong foundation, Haried says it will maintain the flexibility to respond to emerging needs in the business community.

“In the information systems field, we say, ‘The only constant is change,’” he says. “We definitely plan to continue to change, adapt and evolve the program to align with the needs of our students and business organizations.”

REAL PROBLEMS, REAL SOLUTIONS

Students get hands-on experience through Kwik Trip Integrated Core Program

Solving real-world problems for one of Wisconsin's most recognizable companies — that kind of work is typically left to seasoned professionals.

However, thanks to the Kwik Trip Integrated Corps Program at UW-La Crosse, business students are gaining those experiences, too.

During the spring semester, students worked in groups to research and address two issues currently facing the La Crosse-based convenience store company. Half the students explored strategies to design a work environment for the attraction and retention of new employees. The other half studied ways to maintain culture and retain workers in a hybrid environment.

In early May, they presented their findings to representatives from Kwik Trip.

Senior Jack Murphy — who worked with Alissa St. Louis, Teagan Hammen, Jackson Lescamela and Claire Mistele to tackle the first research topic — says the group put considerable effort into crafting the presentation.

“This report was conducted by analyzing and researching various information to gain insight on what Kwik Trip can put in place to create and support a work environment that enhances employment brands and leads to more in-person work,” explains Murphy, a finance major. “This project was made primarily for the Kwik Trip team but could be used in almost any business practice.”

“This project was made primarily for the Kwik Trip team but could be used in almost any business practice.”

Jack Murphy



UWL student Jackson Lescamela discusses his group's findings.

Murphy notes that, in large part due to COVID-19, many employers are reevaluating the traditional workplace. In that way, the pandemic provided businesses an opportunity to explore new ideas benefitting both the organization and its employees.

“We are in a fast-changing world where traditional aspects of the office may not be attractive for employees entering the workforce,” Murphy says. “Especially with the recent pandemic forcing people to work from home, the possibilities of workplace environments have expanded. Employees also want an employer that cares for their needs and wants.”

Job satisfaction and employee well-being were constant factors throughout the students' project.



From left to right: UWL students Alissa St. Louis, Teagan Hammen and Jack Murphy share their research findings with representatives from Kwik Trip. Recommendations included increased benefits and resources, such as employer-sponsored childcare, and more flexible scheduling policies.

Recommendations for employers included:

- Benefits and resources such as employer-sponsored childcare, on-site gyms and mental health resources
- More flexible scheduling policies and social events designed to improve employee cohesion
- Potential changes to the physical workplace, including open vs. closed workspaces.

St. Louis, a junior majoring in accounting, says the project — and the Kwik Trip Integrated Core Program in general — has provided an invaluable opportunity to gain experience in the business world. More than a conventional class, the program has also sparked close and collaborative relationships among students.

“This program is preparing me for my career because it offers many real-world problems that my team must solve,” St. Louis notes. “In many classes, it is hard to connect the content with how it would be applied in the workplace. In this

program, the problems that we were asked to solve connected the course work and what people are trying to solve every day at work.”

All this work results in much more than a grade on a transcript.

Kwik Trip representatives who attended the presentations say they went in with open minds, eager to hear and consider the students’ ideas.

They see today’s business students — and their thoughts on how businesses can adapt and improve — as key to the future.

“The Kwik Trip Integrated Core students’ efforts and dedication were irrefutable,” says Megan Harcey, director of recruiting and coworker experience at Kwik Trip. “Their ability to take complex abstract concepts, research legitimate recommendations and simulate it into professional business presentations was truly impressive. We admire their passion and dedication, and there is no doubt this rigorous program has better prepared them for their bright futures.”



Avery Frankl



Gretta Kraus



Samantha Meister

Fantastic fellows

Community Engaged Fellowships a win-win for students, nonprofits

“This summer has been an absolute dream working alongside all of my fantastic colleagues and supervisors.”

Samantha Meister

As a senior management major, Avery Frankl is getting a solid education at UW-La Crosse.

However, Frankl knows that not everything can be learned in the classroom.

That’s why she jumped at the chance to participate in UWL’s new Community Engaged Fellowship program, which provides students with high-impact learning opportunities at local nonprofit organizations.

“Whereas topics learned in the classroom seem to be an overview, during my fellowship I have been able to get hands-on experience with different processes, forms of communication and more,” says Frankl, who started her internship with WisCorps this summer. “I now have a better understanding of how to apply and implement what I have learned in a more hypothetical setting to real-world situations and scenarios.”

Frankl is one of three UWL students selected as Community Engaged Fellows. Marketing major Samantha Meister is also interning with WisCorps, while psychology and Spanish major Gretta Kraus is interning with the La Crosse Community Foundation.

While the fellowships differ in focus, each student worked at least 30 hours a

week throughout the summer, and they will work about 10 hours a week this fall and next spring. They each receive a \$12,000 stipend.

As part of her work with WisCorps, Meister is creating an alumni foundation for WisCorps members, helping assemble a grant information website and reviving the WisCorps newsletter.

So far, she says, the experience has taught her many valuable lessons — and not just about marketing.

“This summer has been an absolute dream working alongside all of my fantastic colleagues and supervisors,” Meister says. “They have provided me with great insights not only professionally but also on how to navigate life after college. I’m immensely grateful for every moment that I have been able to work with WisCorps and their staff.”

At the La Crosse Community Foundation, Kraus has been working with the other two fellows to create a local funder directory for La Crosse County. The directory will be housed on the foundation’s website, aiming to increase transparency between funders and fund-seekers while helping nonprofits apply for grants that align with their mission.

Kraus says it has been an illuminating experience.

“I love to learn new things, and this opportunity has taught me so much,” Kraus

says. “I did not know that La Crosse had so many generous donors giving back to the city to make it a better place. I also never knew that there were so many nonprofits around the area all giving so much time and energy into benefiting people’s lives in so many unique ways. It is so uplifting and heartwarming to know there are so many people in the community who want to see La Crosse be the best it can be for everyone who lives here.”

The Community Engaged Fellowship program is funded by Ron and Jane Rada, two longtime La Crosse educators and supporters of UWL.

Their vision is to give students a paid-internship-style experience, while giving nonprofits much-needed staffing support.

“We established the Community Engaged Fellowships as a philanthropic, pilot initiative to capitalize on the strengths of both UWL and organizations within the region,” the Radas explain. “Our goal is that this initiative will serve as a catalyst for greater philanthropic support of experiential learning and will expand to other public and private sectors going forward.”

Less than one year in, that goal is becoming a reality.

Mike, ’82, and Kathi McGinley have joined the Radas in helping fund the program — which aligns closely with the couple’s service-learning mindset. Although they live

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Frankl, Kraus and Meister all say they've enjoyed the chance to work in a professional setting and have learned lessons they can carry into their careers.

in Colorado, the McGinleys maintain close ties to UWL and support several student scholarships.

“We both grew up in Wisconsin and had a love for the natural world and service to our community instilled in us from a very young age,” Mike explains, noting that the couple’s two grown sons participated in WisCorps-style programming when they were young.

“Kathi and I saw the profound positive effect it had on our sons and are thrilled to see similar programs in place at WisCorps,” he says. “We want to support WisCorps efforts to grow their field operations throughout the state. If we can help fund fellowships that accomplish just that, while benefiting

the larger community and UWL students at the same time, it’s something we want to do.”

The feeling is mutual.

Matthew Brantner, '05, executive director of WisCorps, says the Community Engaged Fellowship program is a major boost to the organization. He hopes to grow the partnership with UWL and create more opportunities for students.

“We’ve had a great relationship with UWL over the years and have had students help us in various roles,” he says. “Having these fellowships allows us to build our departments and intentionally give those students skills that will help them in the next step of their careers. It’s a forward-thinking idea,

and we hope this will be a catalyst for other Community Engaged Fellowship opportunities with other agencies in the community.”



Jane Rada



Ron Rada

Keenan and Katina Shelton had very different paths to successful careers.

Keenan quickly discovered a passion for learning and leadership development, while Katina spent two decades as a human resources professional before finding her calling in human resources information systems implementation.

This juxtaposition is the focus of the couple's upcoming Benson Management Lecture Series presentation, "Make a way, find a way." The presentation will run from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 4, in Skogen Auditorium in Centennial Hall, with a networking event to follow. Those who cannot attend in person can view a recording of the event on the [CBA website](#).

"We want our audience to understand that career pathways are not always linear, and it's OK to be focused or dynamic," the Sheltons say. "Our hope is that people will see that there are different paths along the professional journey, some of which will come naturally and others which will be discovered."

Keenan, '97, and Katina, '98, had similar experiences at UW-La Crosse. Both studied business administration-human resources, and

MAKE A WAY, FIND A WAY

PRESENTATION TO EXPLORE VARIOUS PATHS TO SUCCESS

both were deeply engaged with the Black Student Union and other campus organizations.

But that's where the similarities end.

After graduation, Keenan knew precisely what he wanted to do. He began his career as a call center agent and worked his way up to a leadership role after one year with the company. He has spent the past 25 years working in learning and leadership development in both the private and public sectors.

In other words, he made a way.

Katina, meanwhile, worked in human resources across various industries: manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, technology and communications. Along her journey, she developed expertise in many general and specialized areas of human resources. But

it was only recently that she discovered her true passion: human resources information systems implementation.

In other words, she found a way.

"The one recommendation we would have is to be self-aware, know/discover what you are passionate about and do it," the Sheltons explain. "If you lose your passion, it's OK to change professions as well."

Keenan and Katina say there were many UWL staff and faculty members who helped them on their journey, including Antoiwan-na Williams, Jerome Johnson and Thomas Harris in the Office of Multicultural Student Services, as well as Susan Willey, Thomas Kuffel and William Ross in the College of Business Administration.

Whether you're in college or the workplace, the Sheltons note, it's important to learn from your experiences and keep an open mind.

"Again, know and pursue your passion and enjoy the journey. If change is needed, facilitate it and see where it takes you," they say. "At the end of the day, make sure wherever you land that your profession positions you to not only grow as an individual but also allows you to impact others in the same way."

UWL alumni Keenan and Katina Shelton will present "Make a way, find a way" from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Friday, Nov. 4.



Assistant Professors of Management Christine Ascencio and Randika Eramudugoda (left) are using a virtual learning tool called X-Culture to connect their students with peers from across the world. Together, the students share ideas and solve real-world business problems.

WORLDLY WISDOM

Graduate says X-Culture set him up for success



Ben Gocker, '22

When Ben Gocker graduated in May, the business management major had already collaborated with colleagues from around the world.

Gocker, '22, took part in the international management course MGT 360 last spring, where Assistant Professor of Management Christine Ascencio uses X-Culture, an online collaboration connecting students worldwide. The experience benefited Gocker, who is now a role estimator at Menasha Corp., where he forecasts project costs and gathers details and data to estimate production costs based on certain specifications.

"I remember having large discussions, with class members, as well as our X-Culture group," recalls Gocker. "My professor emphasized the importance of discussions and working together in groups to accomplish a common goal was key."

Gocker says X-Culture gave him the opportunity work with group members from Italy, Spain, Colombia and the Czech Republic, as well as the U.S. The project was a huge opportunity for him, even though he didn't really understand that at the time.

"Not knowing what I wanted to do in business, I think this was something that acclimated me into a real-life setting, and it was a challenge

"I thought this would be the perfect opportunity for our international management students to get a real taste of what it's like to work in a global virtual team," Ascencio says. "Students value having that real-life global business experience."



I was ready to take head on," he explains. "Being able to hear from my peers about business topics and how they vary from each country was very interesting."

Gocker says all the interactions from X-Culture helped him prepare for similar daily job interactions he's now experiencing.

"Being able to communicate with my group daily is something I am dealing with every day, and I think this was getting me ready in the best way possible," he says.

The course exercises were a great benefit, preparing him for the real world. While Gocker says college courses and exercises can't be extremely specific, these real-life simulations added to curriculum to give better general preparation.

Gocker's advice to undergraduates considering curriculum options: take part in the X-Culture exercise.

"I was skeptical at first, but it really increased my business skills," he admits. "I was able to form relationships with my team. From that, we were able to take first place as a team. It was great working with them, and I think our work reflected that."

Along with Ascencio, Assistant Professor of Management Randika Eramudugoda connects UWL students worldwide through X-Culture.

Ascencio says that discoveries through X-Culture provide great examples for students to highlight in their job interviews. She says students can compare it to real experience working in diverse groups and overcoming large challenges.

Both Ascencio and Eramudugoda plan to continue using X-Culture in their classes in the future — and with good reason.

They were each named X-Culture "Best Instructors" for the fall 2021 semester, an award based on 124 performance variables, including student performance and instructor specific factors.

A total of 47 instructors were identified as top instructors, out of more than 150 participating instructors nationwide.

In spring 2022, Eramudugoda once again received a "Best Instructor" award, while Ascencio's student, Gocker, won the "Best Team" award.

A CLASS ACT

Richter perseveres to grow award-winning digital media studio

If Jeremy Richter's career were ever captured in a movie, it would include numerous acts, plot twists and credits. Its themes: loyalty, perseverance and ingenuity.

The Zion, Illinois, native grew up in the late '80s next to a movie theater, where he and his brother would catch the latest films. Richter recalls seeing the blockbuster "Back to the Future" in eighth grade and leaving with thoughts of making movies.

He came to UWL with plans to play football and track and field while majoring in journalism. When the program pivoted to communication studies, Richter became a marketing major. After three semesters, he had a decision to make. Richter hadn't applied himself and was at risk of not achieving the minimum required GPA to remain at UWL after four semesters. He shifted and squeaked by.

But following a clerical error, Richter spent three worried weeks getting it rectified so he could return. Reinstated, his life changed. He rarely missed class, did homework and joined several campus organizations.

"This was a very radical departure from my previous behavior, which led not only to a dramatically improved GPA, but also considerable success on the sports fields as well," Richter recalls.



Jeremy Richter, '94

Within a year, he was a starter on the 1992 NCAA III champion football team, as well as a shot put and weight thrower national qualifier. He was part of the '92-'93 indoor and outdoor teams that captured three national titles. His UWL loyalty thrived.

Jeremy Richter, '94, is one of this year's Graff Distinguished Alumni Award recipients. Richter is the founder and chief executive officer of Richter Studios in Chicago.



That success set Richter up for even more. He worked for marketing firms and owned an athletic apparel company before becoming completely intrigued by the evolving digital world. He founded his own company, Richter Studios, in 1997.

Since, Richter has persevered through a dot-com bust and other challenges, building the company into a multimillion-dollar enterprise that has championed more than 4,500 productions, including TV commercials, brand films, animations and explainer videos. The studio's work has been on major networks, earning numerous honors and awards, including a regional Emmy and international honors such as the prestigious Cannes Award.

Along with his ingenuity-producing honors, Richter has been a hands-on parent and volunteer coach. Joshua Bostick, founder and president of the Hoffman Estates-based Flippen Flyers Track Club, calls Richter an outstanding leader who is a professional, mentor, teacher and coach.

"He has been a pioneer and visionary to those in the field of digital cinema for over two decades," notes Bostick. "His leadership qualities in his professional career continue to show as the numerous accolades and accomplishments continue to overflow."

The Maurice O. Graff Distinguished Alumni Award

Recognizes outstanding achievement of alumni who have brought honor and distinction to the university. Longtime administrator Maurice O. Graff instituted the honor in 1977.

Jeremy Richter, '94

- Pioneer in digital cinema; outstanding professional mentor, coach, colleague and leader
- Founder and chief executive officer of Richter Studios since 1997, Chicago; writer/director of "Discovering Deerpath" (Rated "G" by the MPAA, 2008); director of multimedia at McClier Corp., 1997-2000
- 2018 German Design Award; 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2020 Cannes Award Winner; 2019 Deauville Green Award; 2014 Upper Midwest Emmy Award; others
- Bachelor's degree in marketing, 1994

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