NIU Business
2018

Crossing Boundaries
See learning and business differently

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
College of Business
Chenfang Su  
Finance

My school in China offered a scholarship for study abroad. At NIU, I’ve experienced success and I see successful people around me.

Jenée Carlson  
Management

I encounter people who inspire me every day. I love hearing their stories and learning how they got to where they are.

Louis Zmich  
Marketing

I want to make a positive impact in the world. There are so many ways for students here to be involved.

Learn more about the NIU Business peers pictured here (pages 24-27).
Crossing Boundaries

Greetings from the Dean

Steve Jobs once famously remarked that challenges at the height of his professional life replaced the “heaviness of success” with the “...lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything.” He soon realized that this freed him “...to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.” Jobs’ insights on achievement and perspective are equally valuable for us. Even colleges like ours with a long history of success must intentionally create opportunities to re-ignite a beginner’s mind in order to nurture innovation throughout the organization.

I am delighted to welcome you into the spring 2018 issue of NIU Business. The stories here exemplify both our efforts as well as the impact associated with building a Culture of Innovation, one of the college’s five newly articulated strategic themes. Championed by the college’s longstanding Strategic Planning Council, the strategic themes also reflect ideas generated in ongoing conversations with college stakeholders, both internal and external.

In this issue, you’ll read about your fellow inspired colleagues who crossed a variety of boundaries only to view the world and themselves differently. The stories reveal surprising pathways to innovation, leading to experiences, programs and courses re-imagined for a rapidly changing world. These leave us with little doubt that our graduates are not only ready for the future but inspired to shape it.

Stay tuned for more exciting journeys as we cross new boundaries and discover new innovations together.

Warm Regards,

Balaji Rajagopalan, PhD
Dean
Northern Illinois University College of Business
New Programs

2017 Launch

Data Analytics in Accounting — Graduate Level
An existing graduate-level course is being reformatted to incorporate the concepts of data analytics and its value to the decision making process. The course was offered in its revised format for the first time in summer 2017 and is a required course in both the Master of Accounting Science (MAS) and the Master of Accountancy (MAC) graduate programs. For more information, contact accountancy academic advisor Steve Kispert (skispert@niu.edu).

New Master of Accountancy Program — at NIU Naperville
NIU Accountancy is excited to offer a graduate degree program, launched in fall 2017, for those with an undergraduate degree in a discipline other than accounting. Evening courses will be held at the NIU Naperville campus to accommodate working professionals. At least two courses will be offered each semester (fall, spring, summer) so that students may complete the program in two years. The Master of Accountancy (MAC) program will prepare students for a career in the accounting field and qualify them to sit for the Certified Public Accountant examination in Illinois. For more information, contact accountancy academic advisor Steve Kispert (skispert@niu.edu).

New Master of Information Systems Specializations (OM&IS)
The NIU Board of Trustees approved two new specialization areas for the MIS program offered out of the Department of OM&IS. Both specializations — Data Analytics, and SAP and Enterprise Computing Systems — are in high demand in the marketplace. For more information, contact OM&IS academic advisor Russ Devereaux (rdevereaux2@niu.edu).

SAS Joint Certificate Program (OM&IS)
In spring 2017, the Department of OM&IS launched a joint business analytics certification program with SAS, the leader in business analytics application software. The certificate, which was approved by the SAS Global Academic Program, is designed for all majors to prepare students to work in a data-rich environment. For more information, contact OM&IS academic advisor Russ Devereaux (rdevereaux2@niu.edu).

2018 Launch

Global Programs and MBA
NIU Business has established academic relationships with a number of universities in 21 countries around the world. The most recently developed partnership includes a January 2018 target launch of a new graduate-level, four-country program between NIU, SRH Berlin, SWUFE Chengdu China and Sapienza University in Rome, Italy. Developed as a four-semester program, participating students will study one semester at each university. Upon completion of the program, students will earn an MBA from NIU Business; a Master of International Management from SRH Berlin, Germany; a certificate in business from SWUFE Chengdu China; and a certificate in business from Sapienza University in Rome, Italy. For more information, contact Global Programs director Anthony Preston (apreston@niu.edu).

Recent Launches and Program Updates

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration — NIU Hoffman Estates
Targeted to the adult learner or place-bound/time-bound students, this recently launched program combines evening and online instruction at NIU’s Hoffman Estates location. Students gain a well-rounded business education and the valuable critical thinking skills needed for professional success. And all closer to where they live and work.
For more information contact BSBA program advisor Lori Marcellus (lorimarcellus@niu.edu).

**Bachelor of Science in Marketing - Online**

This upper-level program provides students with the opportunity to complete their marketing degree around their busy schedules. Business faculty implement focused and relevant strategies to complement the online environment and utilize the latest technology for role plays and course interaction. “It’s the same degree, same faculty, same support and resources all of our students receive. Students now have the chance to finish their degree without the commute,” said Geoff Gordon, NIU Department of Marketing Chair. For more information, contact marketing academic advisor Emily Cronauer (ecronauer@niu.edu).

**Bloomberg Terminal (Finance)**

With the help of generous private donations, the Department of Finance acquired a Bloomberg terminal for use by finance majors. The Bloomberg terminal is one of the most popular tools for real-time financial information. Used by more than 320,000 market professionals, Bloomberg terminals provide real-time data, news and analytics for making smarter and faster business decisions. “In addition to enhancing the educational experience, having Bloomberg terminal proficiency makes our students more marketable to potential employers,” said Gina Nicolosi, NIU Department of Finance Chair. For more information, contact finance academic advisor Christine Cunningham (ccunningham@niu.edu).

**Business Analytics Minor (OM&IS)**

A 2016 ComputerWorld survey ranks business analytics as one of the 10 hottest technical areas across every industry and discipline. The Department of OM&IS launched the business analytics minor in fall 2016, making it available to students across the university. The minor brings together technology, data and strategic decision making to help students solve complex business problems. “I want to prepare students for exceptional career opportunities by helping them to develop the analytical skills necessary to compete in today’s ‘big data’ world,” said Chang Liu, NIU Department of OM&IS Chair. For more information, contact OM&IS academic advisor Russ Devereaux (rdevereaux2@niu.edu).

**Data Analytics in Accounting - Undergraduate Level**

The Department of Accountancy rolled out a new senior-level advanced accounting course in data analytics and a new graduation requirement for all accountancy majors. Participating students learn the importance of data to organizations and the critical role that accounting professionals play in the analysis and usage of that data. The course was developed by accountancy professor Ann Dzuranin, who is at the forefront of data analytics research. Dzuranin spent the last year talking to organizations about how they use data analytics and the skills they seek in new graduates.

**MBA — NIU Chicago**

Designed for the working professional, NIU’s 12-month MBA program launched in Chicago in fall 2016. The program is structured for individuals who want to learn to think more strategically, develop leadership skills and learn from a diverse group of individuals. Classes meet evenings in the NIU Chicago Loop location (105 West Madison). Program fees include all course materials and an international trip. For more information, contact MBA program advisor Burim Ramadani (mbachicago@niu.edu).

**Master of Science in Financial Risk Management — NIU Chicago**

Targeted to the working professional and international students, this STEM-designated 10-course part-time program rolled out in fall 2016 at the NIU Chicago Loop location (105 West Madison). The MS-FRM prepares students for risk management careers in banks, investment firms and corporate
Management major spreads its wings

by Sarah Marsh, NIU Department of Management Chair

The Department of Management introduced a new emphasis in the management major that enables students to study Entrepreneurship and Social Responsibility. This emphasis builds on the department’s growing expertise in entrepreneurship.

The program is designed to develop student’s abilities to think entrepreneurially and apply their talents to the creation of new ventures, whether in an existing organization or as independent entrepreneurs. Students can also focus their efforts on social entrepreneurship in which they apply their entrepreneurial skills to create revenue-generating solutions that address important social problems.

The faculty build on their own experience in innovation and new business development to create opportunities to “learn by doing.” For example, all students are required to start and run a business as part of the Business Model Design course. It’s through this experience that the very real challenges of developing a novel solution to a customer need becomes real.

The opportunity to focus on social entrepreneurship appeals to current students because it addresses their desire to “do well and do good.” Students apply their entrepreneurial perspectives through NIU’s recently created I-Lab Accelerator program, which helps them prepare to launch a venture and matches them with mentors to help develop their abilities and their new business.

The entrepreneurship and Social Responsibility emphasis adds to the long-standing and highly respected management department programs in Leadership and Management and Human Resource Management.
What you don’t know you don’t know...

half a world away

Alumnus Terry Lesyk embraces the unknown
Imagine traveling halfway around the world for an internship in Nepal only to discover you’ve landed squarely in the unknown.

That’s how spring wrapped up for NIU Business alumnus Terry Lesyk. At the time, Lesyk was a senior marketing major, pursuing an emphasis in sales and completing the social entrepreneurship minor offered out of the management department. Graduation was fast approaching, a mere handful of days away; as was the mid-July launch of his professional career in sales with Schindler Elevator, a leading global elevator and escalator provider.

But the week before commencement a particular guest lecture altered the course of Lesyk’s immediate future. His inspiration came from social entrepreneur Katie Hilbourne who spoke about the insights she gained from world travels. Insights so indelible that they gave form to her passion to help children and ultimately compelled her to found Global Orphan Prevention as one possible means to fight child trafficking in Nepal. A non-government organization (NGO), Global Orphan Prevention operates independently from government organizations and, like most NGOs, receives funding through donations and help from volunteers.

“I was so moved by what Katie was doing with families in remote parts of Asia, I had to find a way to be involved,” Lesyk says without a trace of senioritis. “Even if that meant creating the opportunity right there and then.”

Which is precisely what he did.

“Here I am in Barsema Hall with a chance to do something meaningful on the other side of the world by using what I learned in my social entrepreneurship classes,” Lesyk says. “I also had three months at my disposal to take action.”

Huddled around a classroom table and just days in front of graduation, the NIU Business senior and the social entrepreneur crystallized an opportunity and began to co-design a one-month internship.

“Before class I had no idea things would unfold
as they did. I’m incredibly grateful Katie was open to the suggestion that I intern for her. Frankly, I jumped at the chance.” After drafting the internship components, Lesyk completed final exams that week, walked the commencement ceremony that Saturday then flew to Nepal by himself the very next day.

“I was born in Ukraine and lived there until I was five years old, when my family moved to the Chicago area,” he says. “I’ve traveled alone many times, so I’m pretty open to the idea of going anywhere in the world. Particularly if I can help create positive change.”

Literally overnight he found himself deep in Southeast Asia with a fledgling organization and in the midst of a vastly different country with cultures and lifestyles, sounds and sights far removed from those he might have been familiar with in Ukraine or the United States. He hadn’t traveled to Nepal or anywhere in Asia before. And he hadn’t yet worked hands-on in the field with an NGO. To a very real degree, Lesyk had, in a matter of a few short hours, become a stranger in a strange land.

That is until he reflected on an earlier message from Hilbourne:

“Terry, all possibilities and opportunities exist if we know they are meant for us. Know that you will always be progressing forward as long as you evolve, find your passions and utilize them to make our world a better place. Keep learning and be curious about everything.”

With that advice as a mental compass, he waded more deeply into the unknown. He discovered not only ways to contribute to Global Orphan Prevention … he also began to learn a great deal about himself.

“It was challenging,” Lesyk laughs in retrospect, “I was forced to sort through rapidly changing circumstances — much of which happens because of the nature of the country itself. In the West, we take a great deal for granted. We benefit enormously from solid infrastructure and systems and numerous examples of best practices. By contrast, in Nepal that type of formal structure, that type of shared learning isn’t readily in place. Random change is the norm in Nepal.”

Working through an abstract problem in a constantly shifting environment challenged Lesyk, but at the same time, doing so also informed his thinking. It was through the lens of a chaotic landscape that he saw the need for a solid business framework to guide Hilbourne’s passion with Global Orphan Prevention. The questions in his mind then became: How best to go about building structure in the midst of chaos? Where and how to begin? Lesyk followed his immediate impulse and dove in even further with the NGO in an effort to better understand its services and its clients. In order to wrap his mind around the overall environment, he began to look for lessons and inspiration in the community itself as well as in nearby towns.

The village of Bharat Pokhari, home to Global Orphan Prevention, sits on the remote outskirts of Pokhara, which is Nepal’s second largest city located 128 miles away from Kathmandu. Opportunities to generate income in Bharat Pokhari are few and far between. That’s where Global Orphan Prevention comes in. The organization’s broad goal for combating child trafficking is to foster education and social entrepreneurship opportunities. Together these increase the possibility for income generation for villagers so that families can stay together.
“When families have the financial means to send children to school, they become literate and they start to see opportunities open up,” Lesyk shares. “This can help break the cycle of poverty and powerlessness that many families face, particularly single mothers who were abandoned by their husbands, widowed or divorced.”

In Nepal’s social stratification, single mothers fall into the lowest caste. Viewed as ‘untouchables,’ they are treated with disdain by the higher castes, and because of their gender, they are regarded as inferior in their own community.

“If we can help single mothers create financial stability and give them access to education for their children,” Lesyk continues, “they stand a better chance of not losing their children. Because of their circumstances, these women often fall prey to child and sex traffickers, which is a huge industry here. It really exploits the weak, the poor and the illiterate.”

Currently, Global Orphan Prevention’s education services involve partnerships with two low-caste governmental schools on the outskirts of Pokhara. Lesyk traveled the back roads to Pokhara — about 1½ hours away from Bharat Pokhari — on a regular basis throughout his internship. Intent upon learning more about Nepal’s education system, he soon taught in one of the partnering schools. He also made a point of visiting other government schools and private schools in the area. At the same time, he kept an eye open for any other NGOs or private organizations whose goals might align with those of Global Orphan Prevention.

During one of his walks through the streets of Pokhara, Lesyk ran into a number of foreign nationals from around the world. Among them: doctors, NGO founders, business professionals, university students and casual travelers who came to Nepal with hopes of making a positive difference. Fairly rapidly, this collection of volunteers morphed into an informal network of support.

“I met a Hungarian who taught kids at the Maya Universe Academy, a private school located in Pokhara. Maya Universe has a setup similar to Katie’s operation with Global Orphan Prevention. It dawned on me that these two organizations would be a great fit together. From what I saw, the government school system could be improved but lacks the resources to bring about any meaningful change. Global Orphan and Maya Universe could support and learn from each other.”

This became the central idea to the business plan that Lesyk developed as part of his internship. “I came to Nepal to contribute. It’s the Wild West...”
Found in translation: China and a new perspective

by Amanda Mapes, accountancy major, International Business Seminars participant, recipient of the Crocker Emerging Leader Scholarship Award

Growing up, I dreamt about being the first in my family to graduate college.

Getting there meant holding down multiple jobs as a young person. Even though the “real world” knocked the wind out of me, I managed to complete my associate’s degree and build a thin support system of friends who had an equally difficult time...
adjusting to adulthood. I soon found a meaningful job that I loved managing an animal shelter and continued working additional jobs to make financial ends meet. This path satisfied me until I started thinking about my future. When would my salary be adequate to quit my second and third jobs? When would I have a savings account for emergencies instead of living paycheck to paycheck? When would I have a retirement plan? A decade after high school, I realized it was time to earn my bachelor’s degree.

I transferred to Northern Illinois University’s College of Business for an accountancy degree after completing business prerequisites at a local community college. I felt well prepared to make good grades and confident that I had the tools I needed to learn accounting and ultimately pass the CPA. Yet, a piece of me still felt I had not fully grown into the young business professional I wanted to be. I trusted NIU to make that exact difference, and soon enough, an overwhelming opportunity presented itself seemingly out of nowhere. In a class presentation, a fellow student enthusiastically described a trip he had taken to Europe through NIU and International Business Seminars (IBS). Previously, I hadn’t considered visiting Europe, but I couldn’t forget the student’s enthusiasm when he spoke about his experience abroad or about additional opportunities to visit other places including Asia.

Then, seeing the word “China” on the projector screen transported me to another place, specifically my grandparent’s living room floor, where as a 10-year-old I watched the Disney movie about a Chinese folk tale called “Mulan.” At that time, I connected China with other places — like the moon or the Lost City of Atlantis — that I thought were beyond my reach.

“Journeying in China taught me a great deal about Chinese business and culture, but I had no idea it would teach me so much about myself.”
Yet, each day at NIU the idea of going to China never left my thoughts — even though I still hesitated. I felt guilty for wanting to study abroad when I was so lucky to be the first person in my family to earn a college degree. I felt uncertain about whether or not traveling would help my career plans, or if it would only be more student debt to face when I walked across the stage in my cap and gown. I felt self-doubt because I hadn’t before encountered opportunities to do amazing things like travel the world. But all of the doubt evaporated when IBS faculty advisor and accountancy professor Chih-Chen Lee put my concerns into perspective before enthusiastically saying, “Of course, you are going to China!”

From the onset, I was prepared for the “smaller bubble” the Chinese have: the stares from the locals and strangers taking a photo of me now and then. I learned this was due to increased globalism and various political events in recent history. In China, a new middle class is rising from the lower class and because of this, many Chinese citizens are traveling for the first time to see historical attractions such as Tiananmen Square and The Forbidden City. Our paths crossed numerous times with the native tourists; many seemed more fascinated by our student group than the historical sites. They often integrated themselves with us and were even bold enough to take photos or to study our skin and hair. While this culture gap might create discomfort for some, I felt the opposite. That they were as fascinated by our visit to their country as we were was a delight! I realized I had just traveled an 18-hour flight not only to study Chinese culture but to be studied myself!

Journeying in China taught me a great deal about Chinese business and culture, but I had no idea it would teach me so much about myself. Citizens there often expressed a desire for an American education, and I realized how fortunate I am to be born in the United States and to live in the U.S. I also gained a greater patience for life’s challenges and valuable business knowledge that I’ll carry forward.

Perhaps more profoundly, what I most gained is what I lost: the guilt, uncertainty and self-doubt. They’ve been replaced with a greater awareness of and curiosity for the world, built on a solid foundation of confidence that anything is possible if I continue to work hard.

No dream is impossible for a hard-working Huskie!
Inspire and empower to drive business innovation, change lives and make a difference in the world.
The college’s newly updated strategic vision (on page 12) -- articulated under Dean Balaji Rajagopalan’s leadership -- embraces innovation as the pathway for impacting individual lives and the world. The following stories convey how we and NIU Business stakeholders and students combine vision with passion and bring both to life.
Alumnus’ innovative idea lands him on “Shark Tank”

By Lia Gillet, NIU Business Office of Advancement

NIU College of Business accountancy alumnus Joe Parisi was going to be an accountant. The 2011 graduate passed his CPA exam, worked in public accounting and never dreamed of owning his own business—or having a big enough idea to be selected out of 40,000 applicants for a shot to pitch his venture to investors on ABC’s entrepreneur pitch show “Shark Tank.”

Parisi’s company, Guard Llama, offers a mobile personal security system that includes a keychain remote, an app and a subscription service for police to be deployed immediately after the push of a button. It sends police the user’s location, photo and medical history.

On April 14, 2017, Parisi and his business partner, Adam Havey (also an NIU alumnus), swam with the sharks (what “Shark Tank” calls the investors looking for their next business venture) on the Emmy Award-winning show.

Guard Llama secured an offer from Barbara Corcoran while on the show, which ultimately did not monetize due to differing interests, yet the personal security service valued her time discussing and consulting on partnership options.

Defying the Odds

Culture of Innovation
Entrepreneurial Spirit

Dean Rajagopalan with Joe Parisi.
The Guard Llama team will continue to vet future partners very heavily until the right one is found. Parisi says the first step in entrepreneurship is to “bet on yourself.” He says by “focusing on the few reasons why your business will work - instead of the million ideas why it may not work - is the only way to move forward. You have to be willing to risk everything and lose everything. In return, you get only the possibility of success.”

Shortly after beginning to build his Guard Llama business, Parisi quit his accounting job. “If you split your attention, both things will suffer,” he remarks. “A business requires everything you’ve got. If you aren’t willing to give it your full attention, investors won’t give you their money. They know how challenging building and growing a business is.”

“Starting Guard Llama has awarded me with the tremendous satisfaction that we have created a business that is making the world a better place. In doing what we do, people live and work more comfortably and with less fear,” Parisi comments. “When you are in trouble there often isn’t the luxury of time,” he explains. “Our device solves the problem when you can’t find your phone in your purse, or you can’t dial 911 in time or without an intruder hearing you, or when you can’t state your location and emergency. Furthermore, people often think if you dial from a cell phone that 911 dispatchers can locate you. This can often take 20 minutes or more, if at all.”

Guard Llama has customers across the United States and offers three different purchase options that can be found at guardllama.com.

“A business requires everything you’ve got.”

Joe Parisi presenting to a Chicago-based startup venture fund.
Wrangling Disruption

Amit Patel, Syndeo Networks CEO and 2010 Outstanding OM&IS Alumnus, on enabling innovation

by Michelle De Jean, NIU Business Director of Marketing

“Make sure to push your dreams forward.”

Syndeo Networks founder and CEO Amit Patel didn’t allow lack of resources to discourage him from pursuing his dreams. Not even after thousands of positions were eliminated, including his, because of an industry in the throes of major disruption. In the face of chaos, Patel took action and enrolled in NIU’s Master of Information Systems graduate program.

By the end of his first year of studies, he founded Syndeo Networks, a telecom consulting business. Patel launched the company on a bootstrap of $500 of his own money, a well-vetted business strategy, a financial plan to keep the company viable and eight clients at the onset — all industry relationships he had maintained and nurtured. He completed his last year of MIS coursework while simultaneously investing time and energy into the business. He graduated with flying colors, and his business grew significantly. Within 3-4 years, Syndeo acquired other companies, primarily in the Midwest and in California.

Patel’s journey to company founder began when he converted his undergraduate chemical engineering degree from U of I into full-time employment in the telecom industry. From 1999-2002, his responsibilities included supporting regional and international markets for Lucent Technologies, a company then enjoying more shareholders (5.3 million) than any organization. But soon the telecom bubble burst and Lucent began losing market share. The company missed earnings targets and, worse, overstated quarterly revenues, becoming embroiled in a scandal. Lucent responded by shedding thousands of employees before being absorbed by other organizations, most recently Nokia.

While most industry professionals fell back onto their heels, Patel dug in and

“We believe in driving innovation down through the organization to the customer level and reinvesting in individuals and markets.”

See Wrangling on page 30.
NIU alumnus Mike Roper, now president and CEO of Taco Bueno, appeared undercover and in disguise on an episode on a CBS reality series with employees.

Undercover Boss
Management alumnus appears on reality show

by Colleen Leonard, NIU Alumni Association

Michael Roper (’86) president and CEO of the Tex-Mex chain Taco Bueno, said he got very emotional while filming the CBS reality series “Undercover Boss,” but the experience was humbling.

“Sometimes you lose sight of the fact that some individuals are having difficult times in their personal lives, yet manage to come into work every day with a smile on their face and do a great job,” said Roper, who grew up in Lansing, Illinois, and earned his B.S. in general management from NIU’s College of Business.

Filming the Emmy Award-winning show made him appreciate the great group of people that make his life easier, Roper said, but he didn’t realize that he’d cry so much during the show.

His favorite part of the show was the chance to go undercover and interact with different people as he learned about them and the details of the business.

“I sweat the details, so hearing and experiencing the various issues are a tremendous help in running the company,” Roper said.

Taco Bueno closes its offices several times per year to put staff out in the field to work the restaurants, he said, but being part of the show allowed him to delve deeper into the business.

“Interacting with our teams on a more personal level, learning hands-on the various positions and interacting with customers are all reasons why I was excited with ‘Undercover Boss,’” he said.

In the episode, Roper shadows an assistant general manager and is put to the test to fill large orders while attempting to keep the customer

See Undercover on page 29.
I first learned about the triple bottom line — people, profits, planet — when I transferred to NIU two years ago and enrolled in the social entrepreneurship certificate program at NIU Business. From the course, I grew to understand that social entrepreneurs endeavor to solve issues ranging from poverty, hunger, climate change to pollution and more. These issues are so great that at the beginning of 2016, the United Nations created 17 Sustainable Development Goals to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all” over the next 15 years.

While I felt invigorated, I also felt immediately overwhelmed. I wondered how I could possibly make a difference ... especially as one individual in a world of 7.5 billion.

Then I traveled to South America with my student peers in a global social venture consulting class taught by Christine Mooney, the Bill and Paula LeRoy Professor of Entrepreneurship in the Department of Management. Professor Mooney accompanied us and facilitated our fieldwork, which involved researching, consulting and making recommendations to area companies. Our travels also included volunteering at a non-for-profit called Entreamigos, which is located in the small town of Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico.

One in 7.5 Billion: how can one person positively impact the world?

NIU student reflects on recent travels to Mexico
of San Pancho, Mexico. Entreamigos facilitates communal learning for local residents and provides them with the skills and information needed to be contributing members of the community. Almost immediately, the phrase “applied learning” and “making an impact” took on real meaning for me.

Nicole Swedlow, the founder and CEO of Entreamigos, believes that everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach. To illustrate the point, she spoke of a man who had just been offered $100,000 dollars for his property, which was located near the water’s edge in a section of San Pancho known for its rich culture and enormous building potential. The money was more than the man had ever seen in his entire life, so he took the deal — a mistake of catastrophic proportions for his family. To those who grow up without education, land becomes the essential asset for generating income. Without land, family income disappears.

Believing the deal to be solid, the man made the sale, then purchased a new house and a vehicle and quickly spent all $100,000. But without land, he also lost the ability to generate income. Luckily, he was able to learn how to create new opportunities because of Entreamigos. There, he immersed himself in the guidance shared by his successful peers. He gained new skill sets that ultimately empowered him to find new ways to make a living again.

Before this trip, I judged my happiness based on the title in front of my name or the amount of nice things I had. Then soon into this journey, I realized that the people of San Pancho possess a deeper connection to happiness even though they don’t have nearly the amount of resources. For them, happiness seems to boil down to this: the only way you can love others and live a more full...
Alumni Award Winners

Distinguished Alumnus

Steve Hajdukovic has been with KPMG since 1990, when he started his audit career in the Oak Brook, Illinois office. Currently, he is a partner in the Chicago office, where he leads the Consumer and Industrial (C+I) Products audit practice and is the Partner Champion for Alumni Relations in Chicago. Steve has also served as the Partner in Charge of Campus Recruiting for the midwest area and the Chicago office, as Human Resource Partner for C+I and as a National Instructor. Today, Steve is actively involved at his alma mater, particularly at the NIU College of Business. He serves on the Accountancy Executive Advisory Council of Northern Illinois University, which advises faculty on the development of academic programs for the department. He also serves on, and is a founding member of, the advisory board for the BELIEF program, which is charged with promoting ethics within the college and its programs. Steve also has been a frequent presenter in undergraduate and graduate level classes.

Outstanding Young Alumnus

Zach Fiegel is a self-proclaimed “sports junkie” who began living boldly while at NIU. As he navigated his time at NIU, the 2014 marketing alumnus found inspiration and energy in various mantras. Some, such as, “Live each day with heart, hustle and muscle,” and “Do WORK,” became quite familiar to his peers. Fiegel says following these mantras led him to be proactive, take that first step and explore. Along with earning minors in finance and social entrepreneurship while at NIU, Fiegel was president and co-founder of the Collegiate Association of Unreasonable Social Entrepreneurs (CAUSE). Over its first two years of existence, the first social enterprise-focused student organization at NIU raised over $17,000, which was used to provide educational and experiential learning opportunities around social entrepreneurship, fund a scholarship, launch an annual conference and make investments in impact organizations.

Honorary Alumna

Kristina McGrath is not just the name behind McGrath Automotive Group and McGrath Lexus. Kristina and her husband, Mike, are the owners of six Chicago area car dealerships and two of the Midwest’s biggest Lexus dealerships — and Kristina serves as director of customer service and public relations for the company. Kristina helped McGrath Lexus earn a No. 1 customer service index ranking. The Chicago Lexus store is No. 1 out of 240 dealerships for sales satisfaction. Her career began shortly after meeting Mike, when he convinced Kristina to move to Chicago from her hometown of Lake of the Ozarks to work at his newly opened Acura dealership. There she became McGrath’s top saleswoman, as well as passionate about cars and the customer service experience. The McGraths have been active supporters of the NIU College of Business for years.
Inspired Colleagues

NIU Business alumni, corporate partners, visiting business professionals (more than 200 a year), students, friends, faculty and staff members all share a common goal: to inspire, nurture and create an exceptional learning experience to help NIU Business graduates transform their lives and advance in their professional careers.

On the following pages, we’re delighted to showcase just a few of the many talented Inspired Peers of NIU Business.

Executives in Residence

Abe Andrzejewski (B.A. English 1994), Chief Executive Officer, HomePages/CloseBy/OPTIMA. Andrzejewski launched a series of paid-purchase coupon books as an undergraduate student and then began publishing one-town telephone books for small towns in rural Illinois. That small business continued to grow through graduate school and eventually expanded to include student and faculty directories for prominent MBA programs and law schools, including Stanford, Harvard and Columbia. Since then, he has been closely involved in developing innovative and effective sets of products — such as CloseBy Text Marketing and OPTIMA Visibility & Reputation Management Services — to serve family owned businesses. Passionately committed to innovation and employee development, Andrzejewski is a regular attendee and presenter at the company’s all-voluntary Saturday Leadership Development program.

Sean Erwin (B.S. accountancy and finance 1972), Retired CEO Kimberly Clark. Erwin began his career with Motorola as an auditor. He then transitioned to Kimberly Clark where he worked his way up through the company by taking on various roles, including international leadership roles, before he was tapped to lead Neenah Paper, a spinoff of Kimberly Clark. During his executive lectures at NIU, Erwin counsels students to have integrity. “You gain credibility with analysts and investors when you don’t overplay the good news and provide them with a consistent factual tone — good or bad.”
Mary T. Frantz (B.S. OM&IS, Spanish translation and business, international politics 1991), Managing Partner/Founder, Enterprise Knowledge Partners, L.L.C. Frantz possesses more than 25 years’ experience as a technology executive and expert in the fields of IT strategy, eDiscovery, compliance, enterprise risk, information security and enterprise architecture. Frantz has written about technology strategy, the ROI of compliance and RM, common sense architecture, eDiscovery, among other topics, including a parody of corporate culture in “Whoever Dies with the Most Toys Wins!” Frantz shares her extensive expertise as a keynote speaker and panelist.

Kevin Hovorka (B.S. accountancy 1988), Partner, Crowe Horwath. Hovorka oversees the delivery of transaction, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring and bankruptcy insolvency, valuation, and forensic services. For more than 18 years, he has assisted organizations with corporate finance and assurance services, specializing in areas that range from due diligence investigations to integration planning.

John Larson (B.S. finance 1984), CEO, Bestop, Inc. Larson’s long history of innovation in the automotive market includes a number of senior management positions at General Motors before he was named CEO of Bestop, the market-leading manufacturer of soft tops and fabric accessories for Jeep vehicles and the sole supplier of OEM soft tops for Jeep Wranglers since 1986. Larson’s additional activities include keynoting at the National Leadership Education and Development Program, receiving the Honorary Lifetime Member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home and being recognized for his work with the VFW Home for Children and the Million Thanks Foundation.

Wendy Simpson (B.S. accountancy 1972), Chairman, CEO, and President, LTC Properties. Simpson has been LTC’s CEO and president since 2007 and was appointed chairman of the board in 2013. She joined the company in 2000 as vice chairman and has also served as treasurer, chief financial officer and chief operating officer. Prior to joining LTC, Simpson held executive positions in public companies that owned acute care hospitals, LTACHs, psychiatric hospitals and home health services. She began her career in public accounting and has more than 25 years in health-care-related businesses.

Tim Suter (MBA 1997), President and CEO of The Suter Company, Inc. Suter has guided the Illinois-based food processor through dynamic changes, resulting in an innovative, customer-focused, state-of-the-art organization that utilizes lean philosophies to deliver value. Suter co-founded Make a Difference DKC, a non-profit organization that hosts a MobilePack event for Feed My Starving Children each November.
Alumni in Africa

Alex Cummings (B.S. finance 1978)
Liberia Presidential Candidate
“I want my life and success to be an example to Liberians, especially the youth, of what is possible with hard work, tenacity, focus and determination.”
— Alex Cummings in an interview with Front Page Africa.

After obtaining his bachelor’s degree in finance from NIU in 1978, Alex Cummings launched a nearly four-decade professional career in international business, culminating in almost 19 years at Coca-Cola Company. There, he rose through the ranks to become president and chief operating officer of Coca-Cola Africa, and then later executive vice president and chief administrative officer, responsible for most of the company’s business functions across five groups and 200 countries globally. Currently in retirement from industry, Cummings campaigned in 2017 for the presidency of Liberia. In a Front Page Africa interview, Cummings shared his vision for helping his fellow Liberian citizens, with a much-needed focus on building a strong economy and a strong educational system. In addition to these and other challenges, Liberia currently finds itself recovering from a brutal civil war and the deadly Ebola epidemic.

Sarah Scherer (B.S. marketing 2010)
From NIU to Mozambique, Africa
“Nensa, Africa ... was in a drought last year resulting in no rice harvests. Unfortunately this year hasn’t been much better. Rain is crucial for the rice fields, which are everyone’s main food source. Hunger is prevalent here and I can only imagine what another year without a harvest will be like.”
— Sarah Scherer

Scherer helps create a world of good in the villages of Nensa and Marromeu located in the country of Mozambique, Africa — a very long way from her hometown of Decatur, Illinois, and her days as an NIU student in Barsema Hall. Yet Scherer remains as enterprising as any NIU Business student or grad who’s intent upon making a difference. She personally financed her outreach in Africa, and only lately has embarked upon fundraising to generate much needed support. When she’s not creating awareness in the West of the situation on the ground in Africa, she’s immersed in helping. Scherer works with Mercy Air and Youth with a Mission, two initiatives dedicated to improving the lives of individuals in impoverished communities. Her activities include educating children in the village schools, assisting the elderly, volunteering at a food distribution facility, and providing healthcare services that range from basic wound care to treatment for individuals medically evacuated from the Delta. With more than six years in the field, Scherer’s passion for making a difference continues unabated.
Students from all walks of life pursue their passion in Barsema Hall. On the following pages, just a few of the many outstanding individuals at NIU Business share a little bit about what motivates them.
Jinay Shah

alumnus, accountancy major and finance minor; originally from India, moved to the U.S. in 2010

NIU Business enables students to design their own future. The faculty, career programs and resources in the College of Business encourage thinking big and going beyond boundaries in life. I’m motivated to make a positive difference in the lives of others. It takes courage and a good education to help address complex problems in life. NIU provides ample opportunities for doing so along with the knowledge needed to make an impact.

Jenée Carlson

sophomore, management major with social entrepreneurship emphasis
hometown: Sycamore, Illinois

When I decided to major in business, I knew NIU was the place for me. I’m a big believer in keeping a positive attitude; it makes a large difference in how the day goes and affects the people around you. If I had to name only one hero, it would be my father. I have always looked up to him and always admire his work ethic and moral compass. Every day at NIU, I encounter people who inspire me. I love hearing their stories, how they got to where they are, and how they overcame obstacles along the way. All of this motivates me to keep reaching for my own dreams while helping others in the same way I have been helped.
Stephanie Sanchez
alumnus, operation and information management major

How is NIU Business uncommon? The college provides so many sources of inspiration. The school takes top-tier students with the focus and drive to impact their communities and gives them a place to grow professionally, all while allowing them to showcase their talents. My experiences motivated me to create a scholarship for other students who aren’t able to fund their own education. Many students know what that feels like, myself included. But I was fortunate to earn the Deutsch Family Scholarship because of an NIU Business alumnus who believes in the students here.

Cordnei Gibson
sophomore, management major
hometown: Canton, Michigan

My personal goals push me forward and remind me why it’s important to put my best foot forward in everything I do. Being a member of Pi Sigma Epsilon has been my most favorite experience in the college by far. I recently served as a project manager. I’ve developed a network of future employers and professional role models because of these and other experiences. I can confidently say that NIU’s College of Business is without a doubt unlike any other college because it offers opportunities that prepare its students for the real world.
Louis Zmich

graduate student and alumnus in marketing with social entrepreneurship minor; hometown: Schaumburg, Illinois

The real indicator of success to me is the degree to which I’m able to make a positive difference in the world. Even as a student here there are many ways to continuously be involved. I interned for the marketing director in the College of Business. I’m actively involved in Delta Sigma Pi, the business fraternity at NIU. I also hold an executive position in NIU CAUSE, the social entrepreneurship group on campus, and I provide student advice to the dean with my colleagues on the Dean’s Student Advisory Board as well as the college’s Strategic Planning Council.

Chenfang Su

alumnus, finance, honors program; hometown: Yuanping, China

My school in China, Anhui University of Finance and Economics (AUFE), offered me a scholarship to study abroad for a joint degree. I am proud to be a NIU Huskie and enjoy practicing my English, which I studied since elementary school. The more I explore NIU, the more I like it. Recently, I went to my first football game. I also went bowling for the first time and in December, I also experienced ice skating for the first time. My academic life has been abundant as well. Along with studying, I’ve started to explore my career. I drafted my first resume and cover letter with the assistance of NIU Career Services. I also joined different student organizations: I am a recruiter for Women in Business Professions and the Vice President of Chapter Relations for Financial Management Association. At NIU, I’ve experienced success and I’ve seen successful people around me. I am determined to show up in the world every day with a positive attitude, to help others, to be disciplined and well dressed and to try to make connections with other people.
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Undercover

Continued from page 17.

window wait time at 45 seconds. He also tries his hand at operating the drive-through alongside a crew member, failing to sound energetic when taking orders. Roper also struggles to operate a forklift without damaging products while aiding a first-shift leader at the tortilla manufacturer. And he encounters a general manager who strives to lead effectively, despite technical difficulties.

“Roper’s compassion and dedication for improving his company and bettering his employees were not only evident, but also inspiring,” according to CBS.

Taco Bueno has 183 locations (22 franchises) in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kansas, Missouri and Colorado and plans to open six more franchises this year.

The fast-food business, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, was noted as America’s favorite quick-service Mexican restaurant chain in 2016 by Market Force Information, which rates restaurants annually based on a large-scale consumer study.

Taco Bueno is different from competitors because it has always prepared its own products in-house, such as frying its own chips and taco shells, making its own salsas, guacamole, pico de gallo and refried beans (beans take more than 30 hours to prepare) and using fresh beef rather than frozen products, Roper said.

“The best way to think of it is we have real cooks in real kitchens,” he said, “yet you can get this quality through a drive-through.”

Roper decided Taco Bueno was his future after enjoying its sour-cream chicken chilada platter back in 2013, and he called his wife to tell her that’s where he wanted his next job.

Before joining Taco Bueno that year, Roper served as president of IMS Southern Colorado, a barter/trade association. From 2003 to 2012, he was a sandwich man at Quiznos, serving as chief operating officer and in several VP positions. From 2000 to 2007, he was a franchise owner of four Quiznos restaurants in the Chicago area.

The broad curriculum that was part of earning a general management degree at NIU Business helped prepare him for his career, Roper said.

“I loved my experience at NIU,” he said. “I think it’s the perfect mixture — a larger university, yet somehow still has the smaller school atmosphere.”
focused his energies on his dreams.

“I had a business idea in mind that involved technology. I felt compelled to develop a stronger business framework,” Patel says. “NIU’s program was the only one in the Chicago area to leverage technology and business. I took extra classes and spoke regularly with a variety of NIU Business professors — Brad McDonald, Jim Johnson and others — to learn more about business law, mechanisms for organizing companies, finances and such.”

Since that time and more than a decade later, Syndeo has grown into a regional network spanning across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin. The company spun off four different entities, all of which have been funded.

“Our entire business model is built on two core principles. One of those principles is disruption because disruption leads to innovation, which drives costs down,” Patel explains. “The other is a commitment to enabling employees — and markets — to become vested partners in the enterprise.”

As an example, the company innovated by creating a fixed mobile wireless technology, which — from an internet service provider standpoint — brings technology requirements down, makes the service very affordable and at the same time provides superior quality levels. On top of this, Syndeo also commits itself to creating social impact, personal impact and business impact — performance indicators that combined have consistently created superior market share for the organization.

“We follow a public-private partnership model,” Patel explains. “This allows us to provide superior service along every dimension. We then turn around and reinvest in the community.”

Syndeo established just such an arrangement with the town of Fairdale, Illinois, helping the community rebuild after the devastating EF4 tornado of 2015.

“I’m a firm believer in building bridges with individuals, with customers, in markets.”

Amit Patel received the 2010 OM&IS Outstanding Alumnus Award and has generously sponsored three Syndeo Network Faculty Research Fellowships in the Department of OM&IS.

Amit’s Lessons Learned:

- If you’re good at what you do and love what you do, success will follow.
- When it comes to good ideas, don’t allow lack of money to discourage you from pursuing something you believe in.
- Constantly nurture your ability to work as a team with others and to network with others.
- Build bridges between your peers. Stay in touch and make sure to have regular conversations — think of things outside of work to brainstorm about with your peers.
Impact the world

Continued from page 19.

life is by centering and calming your mind, finding out what’s truly meaningful to you and your health. Family, health and safety are what truly matter in this world. The ability to be happier with less is a powerful message that has stuck with me since this experience in Mexico.

When the trip came to an end and we reflected on how we were impacted personally, I still struggled to see how someone could make a meaningful difference in others’ lives — especially without traveling and volunteering. But then during our morning meditation, it hit me. We all have the ability to give some form of hope to others. We might decide to purchase socially responsible products that give back to people in need. Or invest in third-world independent business owners through companies like Kiva, a microfinance organization that distributes small loans (as small as twenty-five dollars) from people around the world to aspiring entrepreneurs.

We only have to be inspired enough and moved enough to create hope. And if each of us does that and helps just one person get their lives going on the same level as everyone else, those 17 United Nations development goals can be met in no time at all.

Nicole Swedlow, founder of Entreamigos, meets with NIU Social Venture students at the Entreamigos facility in Mexico.
NIU Business

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NIU Business offers students a world-class environment coupled with uncommon learning experiences that include: a unique set of college-level programs, the bachelor of science degree in a variety of majors, the master of science degree that includes two STEM-designated programs, the master of business administration, as well as a range of minors, certificates, and hands-on learning opportunities.

Our entrepreneurial spirit helps us experiment, learn, and implement initiatives that have a profound impact on our students. This has resulted in national recognition in a number of ranking surveys that collectively place NIU Business among the nation’s best for 31 years running.

Fully accredited by AACSB International since 1969, the college is home to renowned faculty who served as business professionals before earning their doctorates.

We are distinguished by our ability to narrow the gap between thinking and achieving. Our prominent alumni include entrepreneurs and leaders in Fortune and global companies.

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Cordnei Gibson
Management
Being a member of Phi Sigma Epsilon has been my most favorite experience in the college so far.

Jinay Shah
Accountancy
NIU Business enables students to design our own future.

Stephanie Sanchez
OM&IS
Experiences here motivated me to create a scholarship for students.

Learn more about the NIU Business peers pictured here (pages 24-27).
We’re one of the nation’s best for 31 years and counting.

U.S. News & World Report, Businessweek, CEO Magazine, College Choice, among others.

NIU Business rankings: go.niu.edu/rankings