Here at the Wisconsin School of Business, we’ve been opening a lot of doors lately: both figuratively and literally.

In April, WSB threw open our physical doors to the public as part of the UW 175th Anniversary Community Open House. Visitors to Grainger Hall participated in an interactive challenge across the building—exploring our contributions to Wisconsin and beyond while getting a firsthand look at how we prepare the next generation of business leaders.

Because, with our industry-driven curriculum and experiential learning opportunities, WSB truly opens doors for students. We foster connections with leading companies, showcase the limitless possibilities of business careers, and create opportunities to thrive in today’s competitive job market.

Don’t just take my word for it, however. In this issue, you’ll see how a WSB degree has opened doors for Business Badgers across a variety of industries—including Marina Bloomer (page 6), an alum using her business experience to create women-powered leadership in STEM, and this year’s impressive 8 to Watch selections (page 18), who are leading at top companies like Google, Spotify, Cisco, and EY.

You’ll also read about how our redesigned executive MBA is creating accelerated opportunities for business leaders (page 26) and how the school’s new undergraduate “pathways” model is establishing more entry points to industry (page 16).

Finally, I’d be remiss if I didn’t thank you—our loyal alumni—for opening doors for our students. You are a powerful part of our programs, and it’s inspiring to see Business Badgers create a network that truly transcends our corner of the university.

On, Wisconsin!

Vallabh “Samba” Sambamurthy
Albert O. Nicholas Dean
Wisconsin School of Business
With over 50 student organizations at WSB, there are ample opportunities for Business Badgers to apply their classroom knowledge and hold prestigious leadership positions.

Three student presidents chat about their organizations—and their proudest accomplishments so far.

Angana Nath (MBA ’24) | Tech Product Club
“The club is a community of graduate students interested in product management or product marketing roles at tech companies. By organizing a product case competition and hosting industry leader talks, my team has helped students build practical skills, develop product sense, and enhance their readiness for these roles.”

Jason Li (BBA ’25) | Wisconsin Business Review
“Our organization positions WSB and the greater university as a focal point of business journalism and insight. In our first year as an organization, we’ve published multiple articles, held a student workshop on writing and research guidelines, and sent two teams to the Wisconsin Ideas Conference.”

Lila Randall (BBA ’26) | Madison Business Mentors
“We prepare Badgers for the business world by pairing students with professional mentors to advance their professional interests. I have created positive change by expanding the program. This past recruitment year, we’ve gained an additional 30 mentors and now boast an impressive 85 mentees.”

**A PEEK AT WHAT MAKES BUSINESS BADGERS WHO THEY ARE**

**GOT A MINUTE?**

Hannah Lesko (MS ’23)
COMMODITY DATA ANALYST
WHOLE FOODS MARKET
AUSTIN, TEXAS

**What products do you work with?**
I work on the Global Commodities Team within our Exclusive Brands Team, which is the 365 brand by Whole Foods Market. I use data aggregation, data visualizations, and cost formulas to conduct risk analysis, cost avoidance, and cost savings for our current and future products. Some of the products I support are dairy, eggs, and meat.

**What’s something you’re proud of?**
My adaptability—both personally and professionally. Having lived all over the U.S. during my childhood and professional life, I am most proud of my independence and ability to step outside of my comfort zone.

**What’s your favorite WSB memory?**
Lesko pivoted from health care to business analytics in grad school. | Favorite Whole Foods products: 365 Organic Kansas City Love Barbeque Sauce and fresh garlic bread. | 6 a.m. When you’ll catch Lesko going for a run before work. | Best advice to students: “It’s never too late to discover your true passions and switch career paths.”

**Oh, and a few more things:**

Lesko pivoted from health care to business analytics in grad school. | Favorite Whole Foods products: 365 Organic Kansas City Love Barbeque Sauce and fresh garlic bread. | 6 a.m. When you’ll catch Lesko going for a run before work. | Best advice to students: “It’s never too late to discover your true passions and switch career paths.”

**Cover photo by Lexi Webster**

Photos by Paul L. Newby II
Introducing WSB’s Fully Online Master’s Program in Business Analytics

With the new Master of Science-Business: Data, Insights, and Analytics, students can now earn an in-demand, advanced graduate degree without leaving their homes or pausing their careers. Delivered 100% online, the two-year program prioritizes flexibility while providing a comprehensive analytics curriculum taught by top-ranked faculty. By mastering topics such as data visualization, cloud technologies, machine learning, and more, students learn to harness the power of data and drive expert decision-making for their organizations.

The program builds on the success of the in-person Master of Science-Business: Analytics program that launched in 2019. “We’ve honed the curriculum, we’ve honed the projects and experiences, and we took those lessons learned and applied them to the online program,” says program director Cody Baldwin. “We know how to do analytics. We know how to build analytics talent.”

Reimagined Undergraduate Curriculum Prepares Students for Dynamic Business Landscape

Reinforcing the school’s commitment to excellence and ongoing investment in its highly ranked undergraduate program, the Wisconsin School of Business has redesigned and modernized its undergraduate curriculum to prepare students for academic and industry success. The bold new curriculum will add four new courses that will gradually roll out starting in Fall 2024. The new courses—Sustainable Capitalism, Human Centered Design and Business, Cloud Based Analytics, and Integrated Strategic Leadership—will give students the technological, ethical, and innovative skills to lead in an increasingly complex business landscape.

The multi-year redesign builds on previous initiatives, like Career Forward, that help undergraduate students design their own pathways and learn key skills through certificates and Business Badger Badges.

BADGERS SUPPORT WSB STUDENTS ON DAY OF GIVING

On April 16–17, alumni, parents, and friends came together to support the Wisconsin School of Business for UW–Madison’s annual day of giving: Day of the Badger.

296
Number of donors who gave to WSB during the annual giving tradition

$40,000
Amount of the generous matching gifts to WSB from UW–Madison parents Jeff and Kathleen Lawrence, as well as Dean Vallabh “Samba” Sambamurthy

$118,927
Total amount raised to support experiential learning opportunities at WSB

The school also hosted a Day of the Badger student event to celebrate the power of collective giving.

“AI is transforming all business functions, promising significant leaps in human productivity and creativity.”
—NEERAJ ARORA
ARTHUR C. NIELSEN, JR. CHAIR IN MARKETING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

“‘We’re fostering a community of lifelong learners.”
—SANDRA BRADLEY (MS ’90)
DIRECTOR OF LIFELONG LEARNING

The Wisconsin School of Business is conducting a series of pilot programs to learn more about lifelong learning needs among alumni. These opportunities create spaces for lasting curiosity and creativity, provide resources for career advancement, and foster new communities of learning and growth for alumni.

In February 2024, the first pilot was launched with a focus on business analytics. Participants learned about principles of data storytelling through a series of short videos, a live Zoom discussion, and a Q&A session. “Lifelong learning is an opportunity for alumni to gain new connections and knowledge while WSB levels up its reputation. We do this by delivering trustworthy content, presenting trends and thought leadership, and fostering a community of lifelong learners,” says Sandra Bradley (MS ’90), director of the lifelong learning initiative at WSB. “We are really excited about what we’re seeing through testing and learning with alumni. These insights allow us to identify market needs and continuously improve.”
Step into a workshop at Stellar Tech Girls and you might see model rockets being shot into the air or smell the spark of electrical circuits being constructed. Whatever the activity, you’re likely to sense an underlying theme of bold experimentation—and not worrying if the result doesn’t pan out.

Which, says Marina Bloomer (MBA ’22), is exactly the point.

“Everything I do encourages girls to not be afraid,” she says. “I want them to try things early, to build prototypes, to not be afraid of failure, to keep testing and iterating because that’s what engineering is.”

As the founder and program director of the Middleton, Wisconsin-based Stellar Tech Girls, Bloomer is on a mission to get more girls and nonbinary children interested in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Through workshops and camps filled with hands-on experiments—and camaraderie—Bloomer is taking a unique approach to leveling the STEM playing field.

“Only 15% of the engineering workforce is female,” says Bloomer. “There’s a lot of work to do and I’m doing my best to change that.”

With years of experience working in rocket propulsion, degrees in mechanical and aerospace engineering, and an MBA from the Wisconsin School of Business, one thing’s for sure: There’s no one better to help girls launch their STEM careers into the stratosphere.

Continued on page 08
There was something about that first physics class that just clicked. Growing up, Bloomer enjoyed all subjects at school, but physics sparked her scholarly interest in engineering. And while she enjoyed what she was learning in the classroom, she started noticing who wasn’t there with her. “When you start taking those advanced math and science classes, you begin to see fewer women,” Bloomer says. “That’s when I was looking at commercial space, working the financials, and finalizing all the details. And as a solo entrepreneur, having that support and resources from WSB made all the difference.”

“Everything I do encourages girls to not be afraid.”

—MARINA BLOOMER (MBA ’22)

“ready to launch”
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“Actually, it IS rocket science…”

What does someone working as a rocket scientist actually do? Check out these examples from Bloomer’s time as a…

Senior flight reliability engineer at SpaceX: Worked on the chief engineering team that sent NASA astronauts to the International Space Station on a commercial spacecraft for the first time.

Design engineer at GE Aviation: Led an inlet and exhaust team for a significant engine upgrade program.

VP of program management at Ursa Major Technologies: Managed a team developing and producing liquid rocket engines.

Bloomer says, “I wanted to build out a business plan, learn a bit more about marketing and other sides of business, and see if it made sense to make the jump.” While working full time, Bloomer dug into the MBA program. Through coursework and support from WSB’s Marketing Leadership Institute and Weinert Center for Entrepreneurship, she began building the plan for what would become Stellar Tech Girls—and nearing graduation, left her engineering job to focus exclusively on bringing the business to life.

“That last semester was really my launchpad,” she says. “That’s when I was looking at commercial space, working the financials, and finalizing all the details. And as a solo entrepreneur, having that support and resources from WSB made all the difference.”

Powered by possibility
It doesn’t take an engineer to notice that the Stellar Tech Girls space doesn’t exactly resemble your traditional laboratory. With bright colors, natural light, and a playlist of music curated by girls in the program, Bloomer has designed a distinctly fun, purposeful space. “I tried to create a place where girls would want to invite their friends,” says Bloomer, who officially opened the doors of her business in May 2022. “We want girls to feel like this is a community for them—an inclusive space where they can love science and all the other things girls love at that age.”

Whether it’s the cool space or the engaging engineering activities, the business has attracted its share of attention over the past two years. Stellar Tech Girls took first place in the Business Services category at the Governor’s Business Plan contest in 2022, and Bloomer later appeared on the TV show Project Pitch It and landed a $10,000 prize for the business.

Poised for growth, Bloomer says she’s primarily focused on the here and now: getting through the busy summer camp season, expanding programming options, and reaching more kids through sponsorships and scholarships. “It means we’re doing something right.”

Through hands-on projects and experiments, Bloomer helps participants cultivate a love for STEM.
LEADING THE CHARGE

Yash Babar measures the boost to local business from electric vehicle charging stations

BY CHRIS MALINA | PHOTO BY PAUL L. NEWBY II

It’s not every day that the idea for a new research study gets hashed out over text messages while waiting for an electric car to charge. But that’s exactly what happened when Yash Babar discovered that his research colleague was killing time at a public Tesla Supercharger station.

“I asked him what he does when he’s there, and he said he usually finds a Starbucks or grabs something to eat,” Babar says. “I thought, somebody should write a paper about this and find out just how much of this business is happening.”

As an assistant professor of operations and information management at WSB, Babar studies the social and economic impacts of technology—especially as it relates to digital platforms and the sharing economy. “I like to study big questions which matter to people’s lives,” says Babar, who joined WSB in 2020. As the John and Anne Oros Term Professor, his research explores everything from the impact of ride-sharing services on public transportation to how food-delivery platforms change our eating and cooking habits. With a growing number of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations popping up across the country, Babar saw an area ripe for research.

To that end, Babar and his co-author set out to explore how the placement of Tesla Supercharger stations—which promise a full battery charge in under 30 minutes—impacts the volume of consumer foot traffic received by nearby retail establishments. That’s important, because retailers like big-box stores and supermarkets are increasingly partnering with the automaker to have the stations installed in their parking lots—and with Tesla promising them a business boost, while also covering the installation bill, it’s easy to see why.

“For retailers, it seems like a win-win,” Babar says. “Part of Tesla’s promise is that by installing the Supercharger, you’ll attract a wealthier customer who probably wouldn’t have otherwise casually walked into your store.”

By analyzing cellular geolocation data and credit card records to assess both range and spending, Babar found merit to Tesla’s claims. Following the installation of a Tesla Supercharger, nearby retail establishments experienced a 4% average increase in monthly visits, with a 0% increase in monthly spending. Perhaps unsurprisingly, only the businesses closest to the charger received benefits. Nearby retailers had to be less than 150 meters away—or about 500 feet—to experience any spillover traffic, and not every type of retailer benefited equally. Quick stops like grocery and convenience stores fared better than establishments requiring lengthier visits, like full-service restaurants and department stores.

“It’s good news for retailers looking to bring in new revenue streams—but beyond that, Babar says the research also has implications for public policymakers. Through a 2021 federal infrastructure bill, Congress has earmarked billions of dollars to build new EV charging stations, with the Biden administration pushing to have at least 500,000 publicly available chargers by 2030.

With EV companies and charging networks scrambling to take advantage of the money on the table and find new locations for charging stations, Babar hopes the results he’s found can be used to make their placement more equitable.

“Tech doesn’t have to be just about making money or things like that,” Babar says. “We’re showing students how tech can empower people throughout the world.”

“I like to study big questions which matter to people’s lives.”

—YASH BABAR

Time to get moving

Workplace wellness programs have proliferated in recent years—but besides offering a cash incentive for exercise, are they truly effective in getting employees moving? In a separate research study, Babar recently examined the effects of two digitally delivered “nudges” through an online wellness program, including light social support (likes and kudos) and motivational messages.

While both types of nudges moved the needle, Babar found that motivational messages were more effective over the entire program.

For instance, if policymakers can present businesses with data that show installing a charger in their parking lot will boost their bottom line, businesses might then agree to help offset the installation and charging costs.

“Then, you can take these precious funds that you have from the federal government and use them to subsidize the placement of an EV charging station elsewhere,” Babar says. “Because if you don’t have a lot of charging stations in neighborhoods where people live, you’re not creating any incentives for them to transition to an EV.”

Going forward, whether it’s his work on EVs or the various case studies he’s developed for his classes, Babar says he continues to show his students the real-world applications of information systems—and the positive impact those applications can create.

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“Tech doesn’t have to be just about making money or things like that,” Babar says. “We’re showing students how tech can empower people throughout the world.”

“I like to study big questions which matter to people’s lives.”

—YASH BABAR
Failure Museum founder Sean Jacobsohn finds insights from business flops

BY CHRIS MALINA
PHOTOS BY BORIS ZHARKOV

It all started with a bobblehead. When Sean Jacobsohn (BBA ’94) attended a Golden State Warriors game in 2022, he received a well-intentioned promotional item with an untimely sponsorship. The item: a nine-inch-tall replica of starting guard Jordan Poole. The sponsor: FTX, described on the bobblehead’s box as the team’s “official crypto platform and NFT marketplace.”

“This was right around the time FTX was imploding,” Jacobsohn says. “I realized right away I had something here.”

As a lifelong collector, the unique nature of the item appealed to him, but as a successful executive and venture capitalist, it spoke to him in a different way—and the idea for a new project, aimed at helping entrepreneurs, was born.

Enter Jacobsohn’s Failure Museum: a personal collection of artifacts showcasing a wide range of failed companies, products, and ideas. As the museum’s founder and chief historian, his collection began with the bobblehead and now includes everything from cans of New Coke to Blockbuster membership cards.

It’s a cheeky hobby with a deeper purpose.

Continued on next page
In addition to showcasing each item online, Jacobsohn shares his thoughts about failure on his blog and personal LinkedIn page, and what business leaders can learn from each unique misfire. Because as good as success is, Jacobsohn says it’s the failures that are frequently more revealing—and common.

“Not a lot of people like to talk about failure and lessons from failure, but really, most companies fail at some point,” he says. “Even the most successful companies have had to pivot, and many of the most successful entrepreneurs have had a failed startup before. I’ve found that you really need to learn from failure—and learn quickly.”

From Mequon to Silicon Valley

These days, Jacobsohn sits on 13 separate boards, using his expertise and position to help entrepreneurs and their companies build successful teams, find new opportunities, and raise funds. He’s come a long way since his first taste of entrepreneurship, which came as a teenager and combined his lifelong interests in sports, collecting, and business.

“I bought entire memorabilia collections from other students and sold the pieces for a lot more in aggregate,” Jacobsohn says. “That helped me pay my way through college.”

Growing up in Mequon, Wisconsin, Jacobsohn knew he wanted to attend one university and one university only: UW-Madison. Seeking a well-rounded business education, he declared majors in finance and marketing at WSB while minoring in international business. Along the way, he founded a student-based sports club, got involved with school entrepreneurship programs, and over the course of four years, watched the Badgers go from a one-win football team to Rose Bowl champions.

Then, nearing graduation, Jacobsohn’s interest was piqued by a job ad in The Badger Herald for a position at Prudential Financial, which became the launchpad for his business career. Held then earn an MBA at Harvard Business School, join three early-stage companies that would eventually go public, and become involved in angel investing.

About 10 years ago, he was recruited to Norwest Venture Partners, a global venture capital and growth equity investment firm. Headquartered in Menlo Park, California—deep within the heart of Silicon Valley—the firm manages more than $12.5 billion in capital and has investments in more than 700 companies.

“I continue to network with entrepreneurs and product leaders to see what opportunities they’re looking to start,” says Jacobsohn, a partner at Norwest. “I’m always looking for companies in spaces that I think are ripe for disruption.”

In other words, he helps businesses successfully launch, operate, scale…and not become fodder for the Failure Museum.

Turning lemons into lemonade

Businesses and products fail for any number of reasons. Maybe a product was ahead of its time or entered a saturated market. Maybe a business ignored customer feedback or had the wrong team in place.

While Jacobsohn has identified primary reasons for failure—he frames them as the “Six Forces”—what’s universal is that no business leader sets out to fail.

As such, Jacobsohn’s blogging doesn’t mock or point fingers—and his open-minded approach has earned him fans, including some executives who’ve directly experienced failure themselves.

When he first blogged about Juicero—a tech-infused juicer that hit the market viewed online—has grown significantly. Through donations and his own forays into elbay, he’s up to over 500 artifacts and counting. Products, companies, toys, sports memorabilia: It’s all there, and even Wisconsin Badgers go to launch, operate, scale…and not become fodder for the Failure Museum.

Meanwhile, Jacobsohn keeps a list of items he’s hoping to add to the collection—everything from Colgate frozen meals to an ESPN-branded flip phone. Each new item provides another opportunity to generate more insights into failure, and Jacobsohn says the public response to his work on the topic has been overwhelmingly positive. At the end of the day, Jacobsohn wants his readers to come away from the Failure Museum feeling optimistic. After all, if a company like Apple can have a few flops in their closet, and still see wild success, there’s no reason you can’t either.

“You shouldn’t fear failure and shouldn’t be afraid to take risks,” he says. “Failure can be your springboard to success.”

“You shouldn’t fear failure and shouldn’t be afraid to take risks.”

—SEAN JACOBSOHN (BBA ’94)
Bennett Cole delivers specialized know-how through WSB’s new career pathways model

PHOTO BY PAUL L. NEWBY II

Setting students up for career success is what gets Bennett Cole out of bed in the morning. After decades in the private sector, Cole pivoted to higher education in 2023. He now serves as finance program director at WSB, where he’s leading the charge for a new model of career preparation at the school: one centered on more than 40 career pathways, including seven in finance. His job mixes teaching, pathway development, and external relationship building with alumni and industry. It’s a three-pronged approach that gives students the knowledge, practical skills, and experiential learning opportunities to land their dream jobs.

WSB: How would you describe the pathways model?
BC: Bennett Cole: I look at it as melding the academic and theoretical sides of business with an applied perspective. As part of WSB’s Career Forward initiative, we’re developing the infrastructure to focus students on what we refer to as “industry pathways” to better prepare them for their future careers.

When students arrive at WSB, we ask them to declare a major within business or be “business exploring” and take a year to decide. We then want to expose students to the various pathways as early as possible and have them understand what these industries are, who the companies are that participate in them, how they compete and make money, and what opportunities exist for people entering these fields. In finance, we’ve developed seven pathways, from corporate finance to investment banking and global markets. I work with three specialists to develop an overarching vision and strategy for each pathway that incorporates academics, experiential and applied learning, and relationship development.

WSB: What are the benefits of this approach?
BC: The recruiting timelines in business, and especially finance, have accelerated dramatically. Let’s fake investment banking as an example. You really need to know your freshman year that this is a road you want to go down.

With the pathways model, our hope is that students will be able to visualize their career path more quickly, build focus, and become much more mature, savvy job applicants when it comes time for recruiting. I’m really obsessed with getting students the education they need to understand what these industries are all about and helping them develop a very intentional roadmap to get there.

WSB: Where do students go with questions?
BC: Our pathways specialists work side-by-side with the school’s career coaches. As part of the team, the career coaches help students with writing résumés, developing interview skills, and preparing them for the recruiting process. Pathways specialists, on the other hand, complement this work through their teaching, industry experience, and insights. They’re a great resource when students have very industry-specific questions, and we have a seamless handoff between career coaches and pathways specialists when students get to that level.

WSB: How are you bringing industry insights to students?
BC: We know students learn by osmosis. If you look at what peer institutions on the East Coast are doing, they’re bringing in dozens of financial companies every week to talk to students. Since we don’t have the same geographical advantage and proximity to financial hubs, I focus on how we can create a similar experience here in Wisconsin, and we’ve unleashed some programs that are phenomenal at leveling that playing field. For example, we created podcast series for each pathway that are conversations with executives and recent graduates. These are probing dialogues about what students should be asking in job interviews, what daily life is like inside their organizations, and more macro-level topics. Not only do they serve as an immediate mechanism for student exploration, but they can also be revisited when preparing for interviews down the road. We found that students in Finance 200—our required industry fundamentals course that introduces the seven pathways—were rapidly consuming these podcasts, and so we’re hard at work making more. Because at the end of the day, students can hear this information from a professor or a pathways specialist, but it’s different when they’re hearing it from peers or an executive at the company they’re interested in.

“I’m really obsessed with getting students the education they need to understand what these industries are all about.”

―BENNETT COLE

Interview conducted and edited by Chris Malina
Kevin Pickett
BBA ’14
Strategy and Operations Manager | Google

Location: Chicago
Previous jobs: Analytical lead for Travel, Google; various roles in operations/supply chain management, AbbVie

Why he’s among the 8 to Watch: Pickett’s diverse business background has made him a rapid riser at Google. He previously helped grow the company’s travel division, driving partnerships with global hospitality and entertainment firms, and now develops market strategies for some of Google’s most well-known products, including the popular Chrome browser.

The winning formula: The Onalaska, Wisconsin, native initially pursued premed and business paths at UW–Madison. While organic chemistry and operations management classes might seem anything but similar, Pickett saw an overlap. “Both felt like big puzzles to solve with patterns to discover.”

Impact of a WSB degree: Coursework infused with real-life scenarios—including a supply-chain exercise focused on placing a new warehouse—prepared Pickett for nearly identical situations at AbbVie, where he launched his career and later worked as a global warehouse analyst. His international business experience through WSB also came in handy when he took on a yearlong stint for the company in Sligo, Ireland.

Race to the top: When he’s not running strategy meetings, you’ll find Pickett doing a different kind of running. He’s competing in his ninth marathon later this year and is already eyeing number 10.

I’m feeling lucky: Pickett says achieving career success and getting to Google required a combination of hard work and luck—but stresses that the former frequently begets the latter. “Adding that extra 10% of work and taking on everything from seemingly mundane tasks to complex projects can put you in a position to be luckier in many situations. When you work hard and create opportunities for yourself, you’re going to go a long way.”

Charlotte Du
MBA ’19
Senior Associate, Alternative and Strategic Transactions | Nuveen

Location: New York
Previous jobs: Development associate, Hudson Capital Properties; corporate revenue and sales analyst, Marcus Hotels and Resorts

Why she’s among the 8 to Watch: At Nuveen, Du oversees investments in alternative real estate sectors such as manufactured housing. She played a key role in creating a partnership between Nuveen—an investment subsidiary of TIAA—and a prominent real estate investment trust. The joint venture builds high-quality, affordable housing for families across the country, while generating investment returns for fund investors and TIAA participants.

A global mindset: Du grew up and attended college in China, where she studied hospitality management. Her American dream took her to Wisconsin in 2016, and since then, she’s traveled to over half of the United States and has lived in eight of them. “My experiences have sharpened my skills as an investor, enabling me to connect with diverse groups of people and understand their perspectives.”

From passion to profession: Working on acquisition deals at Marcus Hotels and Resorts sparked Du’s scholarly interest in real estate investment. After researching business schools and MBA programs, she discovered WSB’s nationally renowned real estate program—just 80 miles west from where she was living in Milwaukee.

Impact of a WSB degree: Participating in three case competitions built analytical skills that Du has carried into her career. She also made strong industry connections at WSB, thanks to the vast network of real estate Badgers and the relationships fostered by Sharon McCabe, who served as the associate director of the James A. Graaskamp Center for Real Estate.
Kelly Goldthorpe
MBA ’15
Lead Product Manager | Peloton

Why she’s among the 8 to Watch: As a leader in product management for the company’s app strategy, Goldthorpe champions growth at Peloton by introducing new features and product offerings. Her work with Peloton Corporate Wellness, a program that allows businesses to offer Peloton services to their employees at a discounted rate, has resulted in immense growth for the company—yielding over 100,000 new members.

“Bike ride, anyone?: Outside of her day job, Goldthorpe uses the biking and fitness spaces to positively impact her community. She’s a coach for Girls on the Run—a program that teaches life and running skills to girls in elementary school—and has served on transportation advocacy boards to make streets safer for cyclists and pedestrians. By partnering with adult learn-to-ride programs, she’s also on a mission to teach 1,000 people how to ride a bike.

Impact of a WSB degree: Goldthorpe says the powerful network she honed during her MBA program empowered her to make successful career changes—like pivoting from consulting to marketing, and now product management. “Every time I’ve made a change, I’ve had someone from my MBA program who I could call and ask questions. The relationships we built extend far beyond our graduation ceremony.”

‘Relishing’ the opportunity: Before driving product innovation at Peloton, Goldthorpe found herself driving something else: Oscar Mayer’s Wienermobile. During her tenure as an official “Hotdogger,” she visited 22 states, appeared on news outlets like The Weather Channel, and even drove the 27-foot-long vehicle through an unforgiving blizzard.

Advice to students: “Close your books and start talking to people. The benefit of school isn’t just what you learn in the classroom, it’s the people in the classroom.”

—KELLY GOLDFORHE (MBA ’15)

Location: Minneapolis
Previous jobs: Various roles in product management, Peloton; bike and scooter marketing positions, Lyft

Marcus Alston
MBA ’19
Leader, Senior People Partner | Cisco

Why he’s among the 8 to Watch: With HR leaders like Alston, it’s no wonder why Fortune consistently ranks Cisco as one of the top workplaces in the U.S. Leveraging his unique background and experiences, he empowers individuals to bring their complete selves to work. “My strength is accelerating team performance through building thriving cultures of belonging—with business growth as the outcome.”

Low and high notes: A classically trained clarinet player, Alston studied music in college before pausing his studies. After moving back home and detouring into banking, he battled feelings of shame for not graduating. But while working full time at Chase, he began putting in long, grueling days to finish his music degree while playing in an orchestra at night—and couldn’t figure out why his employer was being so supportive. “They understood that when their people thrive, the business thrives. That’s when the synapses in my brain fired and I realized HR can be transformative.”

Impact of a WSB degree: Alston came to WSB with a new career goal of becoming a chief HR officer. Attracted by the specialization in strategic human resources management, he threw himself into the coursework. “Wisconsin put rocket boosters on the vision I had for myself.”

Leadership calls: After WSB, Alston joined Cisco’s three-year HR leadership program and hit the ground running. He graduated from the program early and took an offer to become chief of staff for one of Cisco’s HR executives to better understand the company’s inner workings.

Culture add, not culture fit: Alston proudly shares his unique path into business—and encourages students and prospective employees to follow his lead. “Bring your unique gifts to the table and watch your wildest dreams become your truest reality. The world is waiting for what you have to offer.”

—MARCUS ALSTON (MBA ’19)

Location: San Jose, California
Previous jobs: Chief of staff, Cisco; underwriter, Auto-Owners Insurance; personal banker and assistant branch manager, Chase

“Wisconsin put rocket boosters on the vision I had for myself.”

—MARCUS ALSTON (MBA ’19)
Ross is partnering with the state of Wisconsin to help social security recipients manage their benefits. **Impact of a WSB degree:** For Ross, it was the soft skills she honed at WSB—like critical thinking and networking—that impacted her the most. "The interpersonal skills I developed have allowed me to carry myself in a way that is unique from my peers." Stop and smell the roses: As someone who creates floral arrangements in her free time, Ross not only takes this advice literally, but encourages others to pause and appreciate their successes as well. "Know how to celebrate your small wins. Take a look around and appreciate that you've taken thousands of steps from where you used to be."

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**Keith Agoada**

**BBA ’08**

Founder and CEO | Producers Trust

Location: Ibiza, Spain

Previous jobs: Procurement specialist, Veg-Fresh Farms and Albert’s Organics; CEO, Sky Vegetables

**Why he’s among the 8 to Watch:** Agoada is working to fundamentally reshape the global agricultural supply chain, with justice and sustainability at the forefront. At Producers Trust, he aligns diverse stakeholders—from growers to governments—to increase access to direct upstream markets, while providing farmer networks with data services and marketing tools to command better prices for their goods. "We’re in service to real human beings on the ground and we always keep their livelihoods front and center."

Sky’s the limit: Working with tropical plants and produce in a campus greenhouse near Grainger Hall initially ignited Agoada’s curiosity about food systems. Combining his interests in horticulture and business, he wrote a feasibility study on rooftop farming and developed a business plan around commercializing urban agriculture—which ultimately won WSB’s business plan competition and became his first company, Sky Vegetables. Going global: Working in agricultural jobs across Latin America, Agoada met stakeholders across the supply chain and saw both challenges and opportunities. One big win came during his time working with a small family farm in Mexico. There, he helped get the family’s avocados—and personal story—into the hands of Whole Foods shoppers in the US. That ability to boost a family’s economic situation spawned the idea for Producers Trust, which Agoada launched in 2017. The company now partners with thousands of organizations across the globe representing over 4 million farmers. **Impact of a WSB degree:** Agoada has gone all in on entrepreneurship—something the Boston native says he never saw coming when he first arrived at UW-Madison. He credits WSB for giving him direction and support along his entrepreneurial journey, as well as honing the professional communication skills needed to be the best leader possible. "I can’t speak highly enough of my Wisconsin experience and what it’s brought me."
Jenna Herr
MBA ’19
Senior Director, Risk Management and Insurance | Equity Residential

Location: Chicago
Previous jobs: Senior risk and compliance specialist, Kearney; technical services specialist, City of Waukee, Iowa

Why she’s among the 8 to Watch: Herr coordinates insurance purchases and implements risk management policies for one of the nation’s largest owners and operators of apartments—and with nearly 80,000 residential units, it’s no small task. But her most meaningful project since joining Equity Residential in 2021 was revamping the company’s crisis response program. “When you’re responsible for people in their homes, you want everybody to feel safe and secure and to have a plan.”

Mentorship matters: At her first job waiting tables in rural Iowa, Herr’s boss immersed her in the restaurant’s business operations and finances—then encouraged her to apply for scholarships and attend college. She’d go on to learn from many more mentors as a first-generation student at the University of Iowa and WSB, and now does mentoring of her own through several organizations and programs.

Impact of a WSB degree: In addition to learning from WSB professors like Joan Schmit and Tyler Leverty, Herr says working alongside other professionals in her MBA program helped develop leadership skills and had direct applications in the working world. “Every room you’re in, you have an opportunity to learn from somebody and an opportunity to teach people.”

A sense of belonging: Herr has garnered media attention for her personal story of overcoming hardship, from having an incarcerated parent to tackling college and grad school while raising her daughter. She tells her story to send a message of belonging—especially to students and young professionals who’ve faced similar life circumstances or have struggled with acceptance. “Business leaders come from all over. No matter your background, you’re allowed here and you belong here, shaping the future of business.”

“Every room you’re in, you have an opportunity to learn from somebody and an opportunity to teach people.”
—JENNA HERR (MBA ’19)

Anders Larsen
BBA ’19
Product Marketing Manager of Podcasts, Video, and Audiobooks | Spotify

Location: New York
Previous jobs: Various product marketing roles, Intuit

Why he’s among the 8 to Watch: Larsen is on the forefront of technological disruption at Spotify, leveraging his passion for product innovation and global impact to benefit both creators and consumers in the developing age of artificial intelligence (AI). During his first year on the job, he successfully scaled the company’s video podcast format to a global level—a daunting challenge for the world’s largest audio platform. Now, there’s more than 100,000 creators publishing video podcasts on the platform. Most recently, Larsen has turned his attention to Spotify’s fast-growing audiobooks business.

From boats to business: Growing up in marina-rich Door County, Wisconsin, Larsen turned his skills for boat maintenance into an entrepreneurial pursuit. As he traversed the area on his bike, cleaning people’s boats and fixing their computers, his interest in business was ignited.

Impact of a WSB degree:
The power of Midwest nice: As he continues to cultivate meaningful relationships at Spotify, Larsen’s grateful for his Wisconsin roots. “Whether it’s watching out for people, checking in, or helping them find success, I’m a firm believer that everyone should embrace a little Midwest nice in their life.”

“I’m a firm believer that everyone should embrace a little Midwest nice in their life.”
—ANDERS LARSEN (BBA ’19)
An Executive MBA Education... Accelerated

WSB’s redesigned degree program puts executives on a fast, flexible path to the C-suite

BY CHRIS MALINA | PHOTO BY PAUL L. NEWBY II

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ver the course of two frigid days in January, nearly a dozen alumni, executives, WSB staff members, and faculty gathered in Grainger Hall to take part in a first-of-its-kind pilot program.

Through a series of lectures and group activities, the participants discussed approaches and strategies for effective communication across different business scenarios. It was an exercise with a purpose, and one aimed at shaping a key learning opportunity—all before the material debuts in a real classroom later this year.

In Fall 2024, the first cohort of students in WSB’s redesigned executive MBA (EMBA) program will embark on a path which combines a new curriculum, redesigned executive MBA (EMBA) program will

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“With WSB’s redesigned executive MBA, we’ve completed a transformation of our entire portfolio of graduate programs.”

—ENNO SIEMSEN

Four new modules that give students a comprehensive understanding of general business basics, strategy development, organizational transformation, and leadership development. Four new courses were also developed for the program: Corporate Governance and Board Membership, Growth Marketing, M&A (Mergers and Acquisitions) and Global Strategy, and Competing Through AI. Students will also participate in two weeklong residencies, which offer deep dives into topics that complement the general curriculum.

“With WSB’s redesigned executive MBA, we’ve completed a transformation of our entire portfolio of graduate programs.”

These residencies are foundational for developing their day-to-day routines, connect with classmates, and immerse themselves in the content.”

These in-person learning opportunities place an extensive emphasis on subjects like executive coaching and communication: key areas that have taken on greater importance in today’s business world. Executives need to be adept at switching communications tactics based on an increasing number of situations and expectations, from presenting to boards and investors to providing thought leadership through personal social media channels.

Of course, any good communication strategy also involves listening. As such, Sink wanted to hear from other executives and EMBA alums before finalizing the content of the residencies—hence the two-day January pilot, followed by another pilot in March.

What they found—and what will now shape the student experience when the first residency kicks off in August—is that the executive-level participants benefited not only from faculty lectures, but from their own conversations with each other.

“We saw that many of the points we wanted to cover in our lectures were already being illustrated by real-life examples from participants in small-group discussions,” says Sink. “They also really benefited from hearing about how various strategies were applied across different industries.”

“Going forward, both Siemsen and Sink are committed to keeping the listening going—and will continue to evolve the curriculum in service of leveling up today’s professionals.”

“We’re preparing a strong cohort of future executive-level leaders,” says Sink. “I’m very excited to see how this degree helps our students catapult forward in their careers, impacting not only themselves but their teams, their direct reports, and their broader community.”

Which graduate degree is right for me?

WSB’s new graduate degree comparison tool makes finding your perfect master’s program easier than ever. Just complete four easy questions using options from drop-down menus, and let the tool do the rest.

With over a dozen graduate program options at WSB—from a full-time MBA to a fully online degree in data, insights, and analytics—there’s something for every career goal and schedule.

Get started today at business.wisc.edu/graduate or scan the QR code below.
Steve Cain (BBA ’68) will soon begin celebrating his ninth anniversary of managing the Midwest office of Fairfield Capital Group, LLC.

Miccia Hutchins (BA ’58, MBA ’00) has been importing affordable, exceptional wine from France to Wisconsin for 10 years as part of her business: Miccìa’s Small French Vineyard Collection.

2024 with a great investment. The company he invested in specializes in directional genomic hybridization, which is a method that enables direct visualization of chromosomal changes in single cells.

Stephen Bye (BBA ’73, MBA ’74) published his fourth novel, The Developer: Phase III (Avenue into the Abyss), in February 2024. In this third novel of a trilogy, real estate developer Alexander (Xander) Kelligio is confronted with his murder conspiracy trial and a series of complications that threaten his legacy as an office building tycoon.

David Jewell (BBA ’80) rode his bicycle from Vancouver, Canada, to the Mexican border in August and September 2023 to raise money for multiple sclerosis (MS) and Type 1 diabetes research. His team raised just over $420,000 for the MS Society and $22,000 for Type 1 diabetes research at the Children’s Hospital of Orange County.

Terri Lynn Yanke (BBA ’83) has joined Houset, a local, family-owned property management organization with 28 different properties across the Milwaukee and Madison areas. She is the marketing strategist for Rouse and the property manager for Irish Field, the company’s newest development in Fitchburg, Wisconsin.

David LeMahieu (BBA ’77) spent over 30 years in real estate brokerage and new home construction and finished his working career in sales management. As he enjoys retirement, he splits time between the Kettle Moraine area of Wisconsin and Rosco, France.

Brett Hawkins (BBA ’86, MBA ’88) has been working in entertainment technology for two decades in the Los Angeles area. He recently launched Monad. Social, a music-focused creator platform that helps artists monetize their fanbases through virtual events. It leverages technologies like Web3, AI, and augmented/extended reality to create interactive virtual experiences.

Jon Schmieden (BBA ’81, MBA ’84) is celebrating 12 years of retirement from Alcon Laboratories. During his retirement, he’s traveled to all parts of the globe—including a visit to his seventh continent, Antarctica. When he’s not traveling internationally, Schmieden splits his time between Texas, Wisconsin, and Florida, where he enjoys lobster fishing.

Steve Albert (BBA ’60, ID ’86) recently co-authored an article with professors affiliated with the National Science Foundation.

Randall Page (MS ’82) has joined Conspectus, Inc., the nation’s largest independent specification consulting firm as senior specifier. Since 1992, the company has provided industry-leading consulting services on thousands of projects for many of the country’s most prestigious design firms.

Stephen Wagner (MS ’86) recently released the second edition of his textbook, Fundamentals of Medical Practice Management.

Provided a cruise to Gibraltar, France, and has businesses in trouble get back on passed away on May 10, 2023. was the chamber of commerce president of Wisconsin for 10 years as part of her business. has earned five degrees at UW–Madison. His daughter, Grace Ow (BBA ’24), is a current Business Badger studying information systems and operations and technology management. My mother, Ruth Ow (BBA ’83), has been recognized on Forbes’ Top Women Wealth Advisors Best-In-State list for 2024.是我的妈妈，Ruth Ow（BBA ’83）被移动财富顾问最佳州名单认可了。
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Class Notes

connects and empathizes with themselves and others.

Stephanie (Reed) de Groot (BBA ’92, MAcc ’93) was promoted to Wisconsin assurance practice leader at BDO in January 2024. In this role, she oversees the assurance practice for the Madison and Milwaukee offices.

Jason Lebel (BBA ’02) launched GenomiMD, Inc. in January 2024, a clinical-grade genomics platform that predicts an individual’s genomic risk for common diseases, like cancer and diabetes.

Amy Lee (BBA ’03, MBA ’16) recently joined Stryker in a new role as a director of upstream marketing in the Medical Business unit. This leadership role drives collaboration across independent product portfolios to solve customer problems on the health care continuum.

Lance Mikus (MBA ’04) joined StatLab Medical Products as vice president of marketing and product management in January 2024. Mikus is also pleased to share that he built and operated a small e-commerce business, Flugblitze.com, in 2023. He will continue to oversee the company as president.

Noel Spinder (MBA ’06) just started a new position as executive director for BRAVO Youth Orchestras.

BRAVO offers music education to underserved youth in Portland, Oregon, and provides free instruction and instruments. BRAVO is currently celebrating 10 years of life-changing arts engagement.

Krystle Felcaro Heaps (BBA ’08) completed her master’s in sports administration from Northwestern University in March 2023. She also had the honor of representing the entire School of Professional Studies as student speaker during the June 2023 convocation.

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2010–2019

Sandy Walter (MBA ’11) was promoted to co-head of equity capital markets (ECM) at Baird in Milwaukee, and currently partners with Peter Kies (BBA ’07, MS ’09) to lead the business. Walter will perform his leadership role while continuing to actively manage his ECM coverage in the consumer, distribution, and real estate sectors.

2020–2023

Matt Billings (MBA ’13) and his family recently relocated to the Madison area after almost eight years in Seattle. He is now leading multiple data center projects as part of Microsoft’s Cloud and AI team and remains actively involved in supporting the Wisconsin School of Business through an alumni advisory board.

Jennifer Hooge (MBA ’14) is building the first Vantage Small Business Peer Advisory Group in the Madison area for leaders of organizations worth $1 million or more. Vantage is the world’s largest CEO coaching and peer advisory organization for leaders of small and midsize businesses.

Vanessa Mariscal (BBA ’16) and Jake Berger (BBA ’15) were married in Chicago on December 9, 2023. They first crossed paths in the same section of Accounting 100 and remember seeing each other often in Grainger Hall. On their wedding day, they were surrounded by Business Badgers, including both their best man and maid of honor! The couple now lives in San Francisco.

Mark Elsdon (MBA ’17) recently completed his second book, Gone for Good? Negotiating the Coming Wave of Church Property Transition, it addresses the massive change coming to communities throughout the U.S. as an estimated 100,000 church buildings and billions of dollars of church-owned property will be sold or repurposed by 2030.

Scott Maurer (MBA ’17) has been with Prime Video for the past two years, where he focuses on sports. During his tenure with Amazon, he built the Thursday Night Football discovery experience within the company’s app, has been promoted, and is now responsible for all sports discovery. He lives in Bellevue, Wisconsin, with his incredible family and a couple of amazing doodles!

Keegan Nesswacil (MBA ’20) is the co-founder and vice president of Woodland Tools Co, which provided the Badger football team with sledgemen— for ceremonial and training purposes—in September 2023.

2020–2023

Daniel Adix (BBA ’21) recently founded a startup to combat the effects of drinking. His company, LiQure, has a patent-pending formula which combines vitamins, electrolytes, and herbs into a tasty, convenient gummy. The company’s mission is to incorporate wellness into the social lives of adults.

Bridge (Wilco) Jobe (MBA ’21) left American Family Insurance in November 2023 and looks forward to what comes next. She also got married in July 2023 while on vacation. She says the wedding was spontaneous and perfect.

Cassie Lebl (BBA ’12) began her first full-time position in August 2023. Working in 3 World Trade Center, Lebl holds a media planning role for NFLside at one of the largest global ad agencies. She often runs into fellow Wisconsin graduates in New York and loves watching Badger games with them.

“I am excited to share that I have started my new role as Senior Operations Associate at Vensana Capital! I am thrilled to be a part of the Vensana team and to continue to learn and grow.”

—MAGGIE SULLIVAN (BBA ’21)
Above and Beyond

Lake Mendota. Picnic Point. The Memorial Union. These are just a few of UW-Madison’s most recognizable landmarks—perfectly captured from a helicopter flying over the isthmus. Sitting at the heart of campus is Grainger Hall: home of the next generation of business leaders. Not only do Business Badgers have access to a world-class business education—they get to study on the world’s most beautiful campus.
STEM + BFFs

Alum serves up science with a side of fun P. 06