

MBA Update



Reaching higher



Acting It Out—Tom Isbell on Theater in Business

Editor's Note: A frequent criticism of MBA curricula has been the emphasis on quantitative skills at the expense of interpersonal skills. As part of our attempts at continuous improvement, we offered a unique 1-credit course in Rochester this Fall called "Improvisational Theater for Business, to work on some of the "soft skills." Theater professor Tom Isbell taught this class. Here's his report.

It was a fun, invigorating, and inspiring sixteen hours of class time, with students breaking out of their shells and engaging in various "games" and team exercises where



Students admire the creativity of fellow students

they combined critical thinking skills with their newfound ability to be spontaneous. It was exciting to see a community of leaders develop so effortlessly. Here are some student comments following the class:

"Coming into this class, I was nervous about a theater class. I was nervous about getting in front of others. I was especially nervous that my classmates would judge my actions. As I continued through class, I became more comfortable with those around me, and became more comfortable taking calculated risks."

"I credit this class with bringing out my spontaneity and creativity which have spilled over into other areas of my life."

"I found the style of the course to be a refreshing change from the other courses I have taken. The active participation was great and I really enjoyed the fact that after a couple of activities we would reflect on them and make the application to business."

"I was uncomfortable at first, but by the second session I felt my inhibitions had been lowered. I gained confidence from participating in the class."

"My class experiences suggest there are considerable untapped resources that remain to be explored for both myself and others that work with me."

"I started the day thinking that I was there because I needed another one credit course. As the day progressed I became very positive and enthusiastic about the relevance of the skills needed to be successful in improvisational theater, because the skills are the same ones that make any team successful. These include being a good listener, believing in one self, trust other team members, spontaneity, adaptability, partnering with team members, helping the team succeed, letting go of the need to know the outcome in advance, and dealing with fear and uncertainty while going ahead anyway."

Twenty-one students enrolled in MBA 8995 that met over the course of two Saturdays in September. The key objectives of the class were to provide students a platform to get a better understanding of themselves and their relationship with others in order to develop some key soft skills that are important in the modern business environment. To that end, the course persuaded students to take more calculated risks, allowed them to think creatively on their feet, and encouraged them to adapt to ever-changing situations.

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Students don't expect to do this in all their MBA classes



Getting Together

Every time we get together socially, we seem to have a good time. I am now convinced that the MBA students actually *like* each other and would grab a chance to interact

socially more frequently.

This year, we had a great social at the Kitchi Gammi club in Duluth in May to honor our new graduates. We also had a great get together at Pizza Luce so alumni could meet with and network with our currently enrolled students. Over and over again, our alumni have expressed an interest in occasionally getting together to renew old friendships and forge new ones. I think such gatherings can only help build community within our program. Jim Wroblewski (jwrobles@d.umn.edu) has expressed an interest in form-

ing an MBA Association. Another idea was to have occasional MBA social gatherings hosted at the workplaces of our graduates. If you're willing to host a small gathering at your place of work, let Jim or me (rvaidyan@d.umn.edu) know. Let's have some fun!

Here are some pictures to remind you of the good times. If you haven't been to any of our gatherings, this will tell you at least some of what you missed. If you aren't on our mailing list, drop me an email at rvaidyan@d.umn.edu with your contact information.



The food and the company are always great at the MBA receptions!

In The News

- Brian Shelton ('00) was hired as VP of Commercial Banking at Republic Bank in Duluth
- Deb Bradt ('94) was hired as VP of Private banking, also at Republic Bank
- Don Stellmaker ('92) was appointed Treasurer of the Board of Directors at Allete Corporation.
- Jean Dolensek ('98) was appointed Director of Administrative Services for Iron Range Resources
- Kathleen Kolp ('02) was appointed Business Development Specialist for Itasca Development Corporation/Jobs 2020
- Jim Wroblewski ('01) was appointed Regional Administrator at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development



Some of our 2004 Graduates at the Graduate Commencement Ceremonies in Duluth

Welcome to our new program entrants!

In 2004, our MBA program continued to grow. We admitted 21 students into our programs in Duluth and Rochester in Spring, Summer, and Fall 2004. Here's a quick list of our new students. Hope I didn't miss anyone!

Rochester MBA Admits:

Jason Pitzen Jason Berg, David Brennan, Mary Begalle, Valdine Lochner, James Zhang, Pamela Allan, Laura Bruzek, Jonathan Allan, Erich Heneke, Kevin Rossow, Jason Eagle, Kevin

Chen, and Anna Sortland.

Duluth MBA Admits:

Tiffany Stoeke, Sharee Johnson, Claudia Martin, Steven Sharkey, Chris Tokvam, Ellen Meyer, Joseph Gardepy.

These incoming students ably replace our distinguished graduating class in 2004. As you recall, we graduated our first batch of MBA students from Rochester. In order to stay a strong and vibrant program, we must ensure that we

admit the best of the students into our program. All the students have met high standards and should be a pleasure to have in your classes. Make sure you take advantage of their expertise.

As I have repeatedly stated (and will continue to do so every chance I get), the long term viability and quality of our program depends on the quality of our students. We're proud to have all of you in the program. Welcome!

Where Are They Now?

Updates from our Graduates—*Chis La Victoire Mahai (Class of '83)*

A few years back I was called “an enigma.” It was during an executive development process through the Center for Creative Leadership. I thought about that word and wondered if being called an enigma was good or bad.

Webster’s definition of enigma is, “one that is puzzling, ambiguous, or inexplicable.” I decided that was a good thing – to not being easily definable.

Today I am a co-owner and principal of Aveus. Our company name is derived from the Latin word *avius*, meaning ‘out of the ordinary.’ How perfect for an enigma like me?! We are a six-year old consulting firm that helps businesses create and achieve marketplace change. Our clients stretch from New York to San Francisco, large to small, for profit and not, in nearly every kind of business you can name.

In addition to my leadership role at Aveus, I am an active investor in women-owned and led businesses. I have served on a number of corporate, advisory and non-profit boards and am currently a board member of Open Book, the Minnesota Private Colleges Council, and Graywolf Press.

My career started in Duluth when I graduated from UWS in 1976. My professional leadership and management life blossomed following completion of my MBA at UMD in 1983. I often look back at my decision to get an MBA as one of my life’s key career-changing experiences. Another change occurred when I completed a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies at Hamline University in 1996.

My background now includes more than twenty years’ experience in developing, and imple-

menting business and marketplace strategies. I have been an executive in financial services (First Bank System, now US Bank) and publishing (Cowles Media/Star Tribune) as well as an entrepreneur and consultant. I often say I’ve had a fairytale career, feel extremely fortunate for the experiences I have had, and treasure the friends and colleagues I’ve met along the way. One of my dear friends today is someone I met the first night of my first prerequisite MBA class at UMD, now some 25 years ago!

By night I am a struggling playwright and writer, and by day I love working with others to tackle new adventures in business. I read voraciously and enjoy any kind of contemporary art and music. My husband, Dan, and I share a passion for travel, always trying to land near water.



Chris La Victoire Mahai is co-owner and CEO of Aveus

Tell us YOUR story ... Where are you now? How did the MBA Program change your life and career (hopefully for the better)? Send Rajiv a brief write-up at rvaidyan@umn.edu

Looking Forward *By Rajiv Vaidyanathan (MBA Director)*

I am always a little skeptical of these profound-sounding “quotes” that are supposed to mean so much. Mike Tice uses quaint country language to proclaim “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it!” On the other hand, another entrepreneurial sound bite urges business owners to never stand still and accept the status quo. Constant change is the only hope for survival. How can both these be right? While I hate changing just for the sake of change, I also believe we must constantly be seeking out opportunities for development and improvement to maintain our

quality and reputation . That’s what has driven a lot of changes within the MBA program over the last year or so. This year, for the first time, we conducted exit interviews with many of our MBA graduates to identify areas of improvement. This led to some immediate changes such as a brief “orientation session” for new students to acclimatize them to the environment of our graduate program. We also created an MBA Student Handbook with a variety of pieces of information essential to incoming students. We are also constantly looking at opportunities

for new, innovative, timely, and relevant electives to offer at the MBA level. The “Improvisational Theater in Business” class is detailed in this newsletter. Additionally, we will be offering new electives in the Management of Information Technology, Leading and Managing Change, and Global and International Economic Issues. Most of these changes were based on student input. So, I am always looking for feedback. Drop me a line if you have ideas you think can enhance your MBA experience or those of others in the program.

“we must constantly be seeking out opportunities for development and improvement to maintain our quality and reputation”

Meet Your Fellow Students

Introductions from our current students—Brian Janzig (MBA—Duluth)

When I graduated from engineering school in 1984, I said “That’s it, I’m done, and I’m never doing that again.” Never turned out to be 18 years, as I started my MBA in 2003.

My name is Brian Janzig and, I am married with three children, ages 5, 8, and 11. I’m currently employed with airplane manufacturer Cirrus Design Corporation in Duluth, as an Avionics & Electrical Engineer.

Following graduation with a BS in Electrical Engineering from the U of M Institute of Technology, my first position involved designing new controls for plant equipment at Georgia-Pacific. While at GP, I earned my Professional Engineering License, Master Electrician’s License, and Private Pilot’s License.

A job change in 1992 led me to the construction field where I was an Estimator and Project Manager, working on a number

of local commercial and industrial construction projects.

In 1997, I started at **Cirrus Design**, with the Structures Department, operating the test equipment that applies and measures loads on the structure of the aircraft. With an extensive background in electrical engineering, the company soon transferred me to the Avionics Department just as the FAA certification of the SR20 aircraft began to ramp up. Over the years, I participated in the design and certification of the SR20 & SR22 aircraft and the numerous improvements and options added since then.

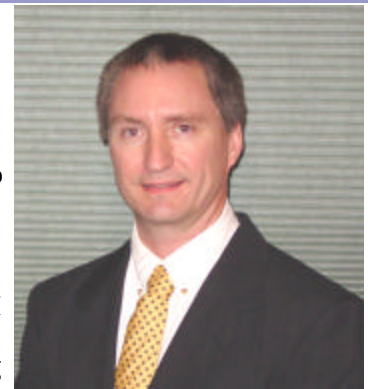
One of my proudest achievements is as the engineering lead for the addition of the Primary Flight Display, which was the first certified Glass Cockpit installation in a General Aviation (GA) aircraft. This advancement in GA cockpit technology has substantially

changed the industry. I also added an Instrument Rating to my Pilot’s License along the way.

Although my current position is enjoyable, a few years ago I realized that I wanted to do something more. Working solely as an engineer doesn’t give you the breadth of business knowledge that is needed to succeed in some business environments, so I started looking for a place to get a business education.

The Labovitz School of Business & Economics was the perfect option because of its reputation, its AACSB accreditation, and the convenient class schedules.

I joined the MBA program in Fall ’03, and hope to graduate in Spring ’06. As I have told others, “The program is tough and requires a tremendous amount of time and dedication, but it is well worth it”.



Brian Janzig started the MBA program Fall 2003

Already, information learned in the MBA program has had immediate applicability in my work environment. Such as insight as to how other departments view new projects I am involved in. Now it is easier to anticipate what is important to other team members, allowing the project to run much more smoothly.

My goal is to move into a management position or perhaps own my own company someday. Obtaining an MBA degree from UMD will give me the tools needed to be successful in whichever path I ultimately take.



I was born and grown up in Oromia, (Ethiopia). I have lived, worked, and been educated in different parts of the world. My educational career, which started in Africa has taken me to India (for my masters) and finally to Vienna, Kalamazoo for my graduate study. I completed my Ph.D. studies at Western Michigan University in August 2003.

Meet Your Faculty: Dr. Bedassa Tadesse

Fifteen days after I defended my dissertation, I joined the Labovitz School of Business and Economics at UMD.

My travel across different parts of the world has not only provided me the chance to live with and know people of different cultural and economic background, but also the opportunity to learn and speak different languages (Three different Ethiopian languages, German, Tamil, Hindi and English. As a result, I believe that I have a “comparative advantage” in understanding, tolerating, and getting along with people of different backgrounds. Not only that, but I believe that I can live comfortably in an extreme range of

temperatures. Not only have I been able to live in the frigid temperature of Duluth, but I have been enjoying it.

At UMD, I teach courses in International Trade and Finance, Econometrics, Development Economics and Micro and Macro Economics.

While my research interests cover any aspect of economics (as long as it involves an empirical evaluation of the real world phenomena), most of my published research work concentrates on international trade, foreign direct investment, development issues in emerging economies and welfare and health economics. My work has appeared in *Journal of Rural Development*, *Journal of*

Agricultural Economics, *Ethiopian Journal of Economics*, *Eastern and Southern Africa Social Science Research Review* and most recently in the *Journal of International Trade and Development Economics*. Currently I am working on the state level economic impact of NAFTA across the U.S.A.

In addition to my teaching and research work, I enjoy running (winning long distance running is considered as a special right by birth in my home country), playing chess, basketball (I am as tall as most NBA players, as you’ll see soon), watching movies and traveling to different parts of the world (I have just been to Japan, China and Vietnam on a very exciting educational trip).