

SPRING 2023 •

CSUS.EDU/COB

Business Futures



COB's New Leader:
Meet Jean-Francois Coget

PAGE 4



SACRAMENTO STATE
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

MESSAGE FROM DEAN JEAN-FRANCOIS COGET

NEW BEGINNINGS



As the new Dean, I am honored to lead such a dynamic and multicultural community of faculty, staff, students, and alums. Since joining the College in January, I have spent a significant amount of time meeting with various stakeholders to understand their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. As a result, I have developed a keen understanding of the Sacramento region and the industries we serve, which is critical because 60 percent of our students remain in the area after graduation.

Coming from the School of Business and Economics at Sonoma State University, I have experienced challenging times, including the pandemic, wildfires, and declining enrollment and budgets. This has taught me to adapt to

changing circumstances. While Sac State is currently in great shape with solid enrollments and budgets, I am committed to ensuring that we remain competitive and prepare ourselves for new challenges.

One of the ways I plan to do this is by staying connected with the community and the market, meeting with CEOs and other business leaders to gather feedback about their needs. With that knowledge, we will evolve our programs to ensure we are meeting the demands of the future workforce.

I am thrilled to find that the College already offers a dynamic range of programs, including new courses in business analytics, and plans for new cybersecurity management and digital marketing programs. Sac State is the most diverse public university in the West. I am

committed to leveraging that diversity to inspire collaboration and innovation.

As we move forward, I plan to work with all stakeholders to create a shared vision for the College of Business that includes sustainability, social justice, community engagement, and using business as a force for good. Together, we can build a world-class vision that will set the standard for other colleges of business to follow. I invite everyone involved in the university or the community to join me on this exciting journey.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jean-Francois Coget
College of Business

Join the Business Alumni Chapter

The Business Alumni Chapter is looking for dedicated alumni who want to get involved. Help us plan events, communicate with alumni, network, and gain leadership experience with this fantastic opportunity!

For more information email alumni.chapters@csus.edu or submit the interest form using the QR code.



COB Highlights

- 4: COB Welcomes New Dean: Jean-Francois Coget
- 6: '93 Grad Grows Top U.S. Mortgage Lender
- 7: SIF Students Return to New York for GAME Forum and Competition
- 8: EMBA Cohorts Visit Spain, Panama and Peru

Student/Alumni News

- 10: COB Dean's Award Winner: Norma Sanchez
- 11: COB Dean's Award Finalists
- 12: Karissa Hoffman: Uniting a Love of Sports and Numbers
- 13: Lance Hastings: Becoming a Better Leader
- 14: Kristin Mills: Opening New Doors
- 15: Bianca Wittenberg: MBA Program Leads to Shark Tank Deal
- 16: Lauri Drennan: Flexibility Key to College Return
- 17: Kelly Joy: Taking a Passion for Finance to the Next Level
- 18: EMBA Alum Publishes Debut Novel

COB News

- 19: Faculty/Student Research Collaboration Leads to Multiple Publications
- 20: COB Launches Two New Student Associations
- 21: COB Welcomes New Staff
- 22: COB Welcomes New Faculty



Page 6



Page 10



Page 17



Page 19

Business Futures Magazine

COORDINATOR

Douglas Evans

WRITERS

Justine Brown

PHOTOGRAPHER

Tim Engle
Engle Photography

DESIGNER

Kevin Wilhite
University Print & Mail

COB Business Futures is published each academic year. The editorial office is in the College of Business, Sacramento State, 6000 J Street, Tahoe Hall 1010, Mail Stop 6088, Sacramento, CA 95819.

To contact the editorial office, send e-mail to: cob@csus.edu

csus.edu/COB • (916) 278-6578

College of Business

MISSION

Sacramento State's College of Business develops engaged, responsible, and inclusive business leaders who enrich our communities.

VISION

The College of Business aspires to be the educational backbone of the Sacramento business community and an active force in creating a better future.

DEAN

JF Coget

ASSOCIATE DEAN
FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Andrey Mikhailitchenko

ASSOCIATE DEAN
FOR FACULTY SUPPORT

Jaydeep Balakrishnan



COB Welcomes New Dean

The College of Business welcomed a new dean in January. Dr. Jean-Francois Coget is originally from Paris but has lived in the United States for the last 20 years. Most recently, Dr. Coget served as the Dean of the School of Business and Economics at Sonoma State University. Prior to that, he was the Associate Dean for the Orfalea College of Business at Cal Poly from 2018 to 2020. He was also a professor of management at Cal Poly for many years.

"This is my third CSU," says Coget. "One of the things that attracted me to Sac State was it's one of the most solid CSUs (California State University) in Northern California enrollment-wise. I am excited to come to a place that is on an upward trajectory."

Before moving to the United States, Dr. Coget received a bachelor's degree at Lycée Stanislas and IPESUP in Paris and a master's degree in management from the HEC School of Management in Paris. He then worked in France for a few years, first as an auditor for Ernst & Young and then as a fixed-income sales associate for Morgan Stanley. He also served in the French Navy for a year.

Dr. Coget moved to the U.S. in 1999 to pursue a Ph.D. in organizational behavior from UCLA. "I fell in love with California," he says. "I love the nature here, the open-

minded, adventurous culture, and the innovation and creativity."

During his first several months at the College of Business, Dr. Coget says he has been positively surprised by his experience. "I think both Sacramento and Sac State are undervalued, considering

how good they are," he says. "There's a lot of great stuff happening here. In some ways, my role is to be the chief storyteller of all the great things happening at Sac State and the College of Business."

Dr. Coget also enjoys the diversity of the Sacramento area and Sac State. "I've really





enjoyed meeting some of the students and seeing how diverse the students, staff, and faculty are. It's a beautiful mosaic of cultures and backgrounds, and I love how welcoming and inclusive everybody is."

He is also impressed with the quality of COB's faculty and staff. "I've got an amazing staff that does high-quality work and who are highly dedicated. And COB faculty do very high-quality research and are quite innovative in addition to being great instructors."

Dr. Coget is married and has two boys, ages five and 11. He also has an identical twin brother who works for the European Commission in Brussels. In his spare time, he likes to go mushroom hunting.

Overall, Dr. Coget says he is excited about COB's potential to make a difference and about playing a part in making that happen. "Sac State has an access mission, but it does not compromise quality," he says. "The combination of quality and access is amazing. We are here to give everyone, including the underrepresented and underprivileged, a leg up for their benefit and the benefit of the state of California. That's a beautiful mission, and I think Sac State does it very well." 



Dean JF Coget, students Sondra Sulli & Norma Sanchez

'93 Grad Grows Top U.S. Mortgage Lender

Todd Scrima

Todd Scrima has come a long way from living on a farm in Redding to founding one of the largest mortgage companies in America. He credits his education at Sac State's College of Business for providing the foundation he needed to build a successful enterprise.

Scrima moved from Redding to Sacramento in 1989 to attend Sac State for two reasons: it was a highly-rated business school, and it was affordable. He studied finance with minors in both economics and insurance.


Following graduation in 1993, Scrima went to work as a loan officer for a local mortgage bank. But with an entrepreneur father as a role model, it did not take long before he started looking to open his own business. Two and a half years after graduation, he took a risk and started Summit Funding, a Sacramento-based mortgage company. Since then, he has steadily grown the organization. Today, Summit Funding is one of the top 35 mortgage lenders in the U.S. "There wasn't a magic moment that took us to the top 35," he says. "It was just a lot of hard work and organic growth."

Summit Funding is also one of the few large mortgage companies that is still privately owned. "I think that's encouraging because some people think they can't build a successful private mortgage company. Many companies our size are either hedge-funded or private equity owned," he says. "It may take longer to do it privately, but it can be done."

Since launching Summit Funding, Scrima has also started or invested in several other ventures, including a successful business coaching company, a land development organization, and a manufactured home building business.



Scrima says his time at Sac State helped him understand how business concepts work in the real world. But most notably, Sac State helped him set a precedent within his family. "I was only the second person in my family to get a college degree," he says. "Since then, five other family members have obtained college degrees. Going to Sac State allowed me to break the mold and make getting a higher-level education the norm rather than the exception."

Scrima also believes in giving back. He leveraged his success to set up college funds for all his nieces and nephews. "If it wasn't for what Sac State prepared me to do, I couldn't have done that," he says. 

SIF Students Return to New York for GAME Forum and Competition

It's been a few years since students in COB's Student Investment Fund (SIF) program could attend Quinnipiac's Global Asset Management Education (GAME) Forum live. This year marked the return of the in-person event. In April, 10 COB students, as well as Professor of Finance and SIF faculty advisor Dr. David J. Moore, traveled to New York City to attend the largest student-run financial conference in the world.

The GAME Forum enables students to discuss and debate financial best practices with world-renowned industry leaders. Approximately 1,500 students from 120 different universities attended this year.

"The conference was inspiring," says finance major Alexis Newhall. "I learned about opportunities to grow my career and the different certifications you can receive in finance. I was able to network with people and hear what they offer opportunity-wise. I think it will help me with my career, and it's different than just attending a class at school. It was a lot more hands-on and real-world."

The GAME Forum is also where the GAME Global Portfolio Competition results are revealed. The GAME Global Portfolio Competition invites universities from around the world that have student investment funds to submit their account statements. Winners are selected based solely on risk-adjusted return performance. Last year, Sac State's SIF team placed second in the Graduate Overall category. This year the team did not place, but Dr. Moore says the competition gave him an opportunity to learn about other universities' investment strategies, which confirmed for him that Sac State's SIF strategies are very solid.



(R-L) Dr. Moore, Malon Hughes and Ryan Popat




Finance major Chris Moore agreed. "From talking to others at the forum, I realized what we do in Sac State's SIF is leaps and bounds beyond what some of the other schools do," he says, "It's also quite similar to what actual portfolio managers do."

SIF was launched in the Fall of 2010 with a \$250,000 investment fund allocated to COB by University Enterprises Incorporated. Since then, the fund has grown significantly and now holds a balance of nearly \$1 million. The program allows COB students, with faculty oversight,

the opportunity to analyze and manage an investment portfolio, research, and recommend portfolio holdings, analyze economic conditions, maintain accounts and records necessary for an investment portfolio, and perform these functions in the context of a unique educational opportunity that helps them better understand financial markets.

Newhall says SIF was the most rewarding and exciting class she has taken in her college career. "I think anybody that's interested in investing should take this course," she says. "You learn such great strategies."

For Chris Moore, attending the GAME Forum further confirmed the relevancy of the SIF curriculum. "Attending the conference, I felt like I could keep up with the experts," he says. "When talking with industry veterans, I understood what they were saying. If I hadn't been part of SIF, I would not have been able to keep up." 

To learn more about SIF, visit www.csus.edu/college/business-administration/centers-programs/student-investment-fund.html



EMBA Cohort COB2 in Panama

EMBA Cohorts Visit Spain, Panama and Peru

The Executive MBA (EMBA) program hosts an international trip for each cohort. The trip weaves all the class subjects together on an international level, adding a valuable facet to the entire learning experience. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, trips were postponed for several years. This academic year, EMBA students were able to make up for that with trips to Spain, Peru and Panama.

Spain

The EMBA trip to Spain took place in June 2022. The cohort visited Madrid and participated in several business and cultural events, including

a visit to the Olympic Committee of Spain and football league LaLiga.

"We learned a lot from different speakers who talked about their community, their way of life and their thought process when it comes to business," says EMBA student Anju Singh. "I returned feeling enriched by a part of the world outside of what we know. Living and working in Sacramento narrows our perspectives, but when you hear from others, you realize there's a whole other world out there."

Peru

In September 2022, attendees from several different EMBA cohorts who completed the



program during COVID headed to Peru. The group visited Lima and Cusco, including a day trip to Machu Picchu. The group of 14 also visited the American Chamber of Commerce in Peru, where they learned about trade and industry in the country.


"Visiting an ancient culture just after we finished an EMBA program focused on modern business practices was an interesting juxtaposition," says EMBA graduate David Feniger. "Even with so many years between the two, we could still draw links between how

things were done in an ancient culture and how they are done today."

Panama

The EMBA trip to Panama took place in November 2022. The cohort visited Panama City, including the Panama Canal, where they learned about the canal and its impact on global commerce from a former engineer at the Panama Canal Authority. The cohort also visited a local brewery, the American Chamber of Commerce for an economic and political overview of the country, and Emberá Village, a protected indigenous region in Eastern Panama.

"The trip covered various aspects of international business operations and how to expand a local business into the global market," says EMBA student John Kozitza. "The trip activities were woven together well and complemented the entire EMBA academic education in many ways. This trip expanded the depth of our in-class learning beyond the limitations of book knowledge, giving us a practical understanding of business operations."

Claire Goldsby, admissions coordinator for the EMBA program and travel coordinator, says the current EMBA cohort plans to visit the Netherlands in June. 

Dean's Award Winner

Norma Sanchez: Overcoming the Odds

Norma Sanchez was an immigrant with no formal education. Today, she's the COB Dean's Award winner. Her story is both impressive and inspiring.

Sanchez was born and raised in Mexico. She immigrated to the United States at age 16 and went straight to work, at first packing apricots at night, then dehydrating tomatoes. She wanted to attend school, but it was not an option for her. "Some of my cousins signed up for high school, so I asked my mom, but we couldn't afford to be without my paycheck," she says.

When Sanchez was 21, she gave birth to a daughter. Unfortunately, the father was abusive. Sanchez escaped and promised her baby daughter she would work hard to provide for her. "I didn't have anything, not even diapers," she says. "My focus was to give her food, shelter, clothes, and whatever she needed."

Sanchez struggled for several years but worked hard, sometimes juggling two jobs. She also looked for every opportunity to learn new skills and took English classes at night. She eventually earned several high-level food safety certifications and worked up to a quality and food safety manager position.

In 2016, Sanchez gave birth to a son. Two years later, she decided to leave her job and take the General Educational Development Test (GED). "That wasn't an easy decision because I already had a good job and insurance, so I got a lot of pushback from my family for giving that up to go to school," she says.



Sanchez received her GED in just four months. She did not plan to continue her education, but her counselor pushed her to press on. She signed up at Gavilan College and earned her associate degree in business management. Again, her counselor encouraged her to continue and pointed Sanchez to scholarships she could apply for to attend a four-year university. She eventually applied to eight universities, including Sac State, and was accepted to seven. She chose Sac State when she was admitted into the Business Honors program. "It was the opportunity of a lifetime to be in a cohort of 22 students," she says. "I thought that would be a very special way to earn my degree."


Sanchez has a concentration in international business with an emphasis in supply chain. She was recently awarded the COB Dean's Award for her exemplary GPA and work ethic.

"It has been an amazing journey, and everyone has been so positive and

supportive," she says. "Sac State has given me a path and opened doors."

Sanchez will graduate in spring 2023 and has several options in mind post-graduation, including working in food safety or for an international company like PepsiCo or Nestle.

No matter where she ends up, Sanchez hopes her story will encourage and empower both her children, now aged 16 and 7, as well as those who face obstacles in their pursuit of an education.

"I'm an immigrant, English is my second language, I have dyslexia, I'm a domestic violence survivor, and I'm a single mother," she says. "If I can overcome all that and finish college, anyone can. If you are determined and passionate about learning and you stay open to opportunities, the rewards will come." 


COB Dean's Award Finalists



Maanvee Mehrotra

Maanvee Mehrotra moved to California from India to attend Sac State in 2019. Adjusting to a new country where she knew no one was a big challenge for the then-18-year-old. "It was very hard for me to navigate, find accommodations, and just figure out the basic necessities all alone," she says. "I had to move three times my first semester to find accommodations that would work."

But as she got involved at Sac State and the College of Business, things began to change. Today, people on campus recognize Mehrotra and she has made new connections and formed many friendships. "I've been able to transform my life," she says. "I'm proud of myself for just being able to figure everything out."


Mehrotra's concentration is business analytics, and she plans to graduate in May 2023. As of March 2023, she had already accepted an offer to become an analyst for a Big Four consulting firm. She also plans to investigate graduate programs and potentially continue her education. 



Zaid Darwish

Zaid Darwish was born in Kentucky and moved to Folsom in 2007. The second oldest of four children, he attended an academically competitive high school and felt the pressure to apply to big-name colleges. But with his siblings to consider and the cost of higher education in mind, Darwish chose to stay local and attend Sac State instead. "I immediately fell in love with the school," he says.

In 2022, Darwish founded the Stinger Expo, Sac State's first and only student-led market. The Stinger Expo provides space for student entrepreneurs to sell a wide variety of goods during a one-day market on campus each year. "I had a small business at the time and I was looking for an affordable venue to sell my goods," says Darwish. "But paying for a booth in the broader community often costs \$300 or more per day, which is a lot for students who are paying tuition. I wanted to help the Sac State community."

Following graduation, Darwish hopes to work in marketing and eventually open a sustainability-related business using the knowledge and entrepreneurship skills he's learned at Sac State. "I owe everything to the mentors I've had these four years," he says. "I wouldn't be here if it weren't for my mentors." 




Sondra Sulli

Sondra Sulli never expected she would attend college. As a 16-year-old, Sulli started a family and dropped out of high school. Years later, she longed to return to school, but as a single mom with three kids, work was more critical. "I was led to believe that education was not for me," she says.

But Sulli persisted and studied landscape design and horticulture at American River College. She eventually obtained the transfer credits needed to enroll at Sac State's College of Business and was accepted into the Business Honors (BHON) program. Sulli graduated in December 2022 with a concentration in General Management. Her GPA earned her Cum Laude honors as well as an invitation to the Beta Gamma Sigma Honor Society.

While attending school full-time, Sulli landed a job as a Budget Analyst for the Army Corps of Engineers, a career ladder position that requires her to obtain Department of Defense Financial Management Certification.

"As a trauma survivor, I spent most of my life in survival mode without a voice of my own or faith in my abilities," she says. "Becoming a member of the Hornet family flipped the script. My time spent here has been the most pivotal part of my growth from survivor to thrive." 

Karissa Hoffman: Uniting a Love of Sports and Numbers



Analytics is a huge part of sports today. The sports industry uses data analytics to accomplish a wide variety of tasks, such as improving player or team performance, preventing injuries, and optimizing administrative processes. And there's enormous demand for people that can put analytics to work to help sports teams accomplish those goals. For Karissa Hoffman, Sac State's master's in business Analytics (MSBA) program is the key to combining her love of sports with the skills she will need to start a career in the exciting and quickly evolving world of sports analytics.

An Arizona native, Hoffman received a scholarship to join Sac State's gymnastics team as a high school junior. But when



injuries and the pandemic prevented her from competing until the last few meets of her senior year, she became a campus leader instead, serving on the Big Sky Conference's Student-Athlete Advisory and Intercollegiate Athletics Advisory committees.

After graduating with a kinesiology degree with an emphasis in clinical exercise and rehabilitation and a minor in history, Hoffman enrolled in the MSBA program. This completely online program trains students to mine and analyze vast quantities of data to drive business decisions.


"The MSBA program piqued my interest because I recognized it could help me progress my career in sports and develop a lifelong skill," she says. "I also felt the program could broaden my job prospects in sports administration."

Hoffman's goal is to become an athletics administrator at a Division I institution or to work for an NFL team. "Today, business analytics touches every aspect of professional sports both on and off the field," she says. "I would love to help run stats, player analysis or in-game operations for a professional team."

In addition to gymnastics, Hoffman is a huge fan of all sports and can often be found helping faculty and staff with game-day operations as

a student assistant with Sac State's Athletics Facilities and Operations department.

Currently in her second semester, Hoffman says the online MSBA program has allowed her the time and flexibility she needs as a student-athlete, which was vital as she wrapped up her final gymnastics season in March 2023. "It allowed me to pursue my last year of NCAA eligibility and still attend school. And if a job opportunity pops up, I can move if I need to and still complete my degree," she says.

Hoffman's dedication to sports and leadership recently earned her the 2022 NCAA Accelerating Academic Success Program Career Development Award, which recognizes student-athletes pursuing careers in athletics. Hoffman is one of just two individuals nationwide to earn the award. The award allowed her to attend the Career in Sports Forum at the NCAA national office in Indianapolis last summer. She also recently won Sac State's 2022 Student-Athlete Advisory Committee Award – the second straight year she has received that honor. 

EMBA PROFILE

Lance Hastings **Becoming a Better Leader**



Lance Hastings already had a highly successful career, but Sac State's Executive MBA (EMBA) program enabled him to become a more effective leader.

Hastings graduated from Sac State with an economics degree in 1987. He then enrolled in graduate school but had to abandon that plan when his career quickly took off. He spent 15 years working in government relations for the Miller Brewing Company and its various iterations, a job that took him all over the world and gave him the opportunity to work in London for three years. In 2015, Hastings returned to the U.S. and worked


for MillerCoors' federal affairs department in Washington, D.C. In 2018, Hastings accepted his current role as president and CEO of the California Manufacturers and Technology Association (CMTA). CMTA is an advocacy organization for the manufacturing sector that works to help the state's 30,000 manufacturers prosper. The organization was established in 1918 and advocates for manufacturing in the legislature and with regulatory agencies. "Manufacturing is so important to the economy, to spurring economic growth, and providing great wages," says Hastings. "Whether it's an air regulation or recycling

legislation, we're engaged everywhere. We cover the whole ecosystem in manufacturing, and every day is different. That really motivates me."

The role at CMTA also allowed Hastings to return to Sacramento, which rekindled his interest in continuing his education. He decided an MBA program made the most sense because he works with businesses daily, and returning to Sac State for it seemed only natural. "I looked at other programs, but I have an affinity for Sac State," he says. "President Nelson has been an inspiring leader. At the end of the day, I couldn't go anywhere else. My heart wouldn't have been in it."

Hastings enrolled in the EMBA program, which began remotely because of COVID-19, but eventually transitioned to in-person learning. "That shift in dynamic was remarkable for all of us in the cohort," he says. "It created a bond that continues today."

Hastings completed his MBA in the summer of 2022 and was recognized with the faculty award as the most outstanding student. Most importantly, he feels the EMBA program helped him accomplish his goal of becoming a better leader. "Being a better leader means helping those within the organization do better, and I feel I accomplished that on every front," he says. "In particular, the organizational design and executive decision-making classes helped because they provided an underpinning for many of the things that I experience daily. Those two classes provided a lot of clarity about how and why business decisions are made."

In addition to his job at CMTA, Hastings serves as the Finance Chair for Sac State's Alumni Association board. "When I returned to Sacramento, I wanted to give back to the university," he says. "The alumni board is a great place to do that. I love the university. It's an anchor here in the city and the region, and I'm happy to be involved." 



IMBA PROFILE

Kristin Mills Opening New Doors

Sac State's iMBA program opens doors. For dressage trainer and business owner Kristin Mills, it opened not one, but two new doors.

Mills grew up in Germany and began riding horses at the age of three. She eventually became a competitive dressage rider certified by the International Federation for Equestrian Sports, competing internationally in Europe and the United States. She also attended a dressage apprenticeship program and earned a trainer's license.

At age 25, Mills moved to the United States and went to work for a highly regarded dressage stable in Vacaville. A few years later, in 2008, she founded her own facility, Kristin Mills Dressage, which she ran for more than 10 years. But during the pandemic, Mills decided to explore new career options. "That's how I came up with the idea of continuing education and found Sac State's one-year iMBA program," she says.

Sac State's AACSB-accredited online iMBA program prepares students to be business leaders in the global marketplace. Mills enrolled in the program and immediately knew it was the right move. "I loved that the professors were very inclusive," she says.

Mills also liked the community feeling of the iMBA program. For example, Dr. Eric Lin connected her with Dr. Linda Riolli and Dr. Amy Mickel to start a research project and

awaken her curiosity in inclusive leadership. The project — "Psychedelic Leadership: Expanding Consciousness, Connection and Profit" — included research about psychedelic-assisted therapy and how leaders can become more inclusive and empathetic (Mills' husband, Dr. Nathaniel Mills, is a long-time lecturer at Sac State for the department of Psychology who has conducted research in psychedelic-assisted therapy). Her work led her to enter Sac State's Grad Slam — a three-minute thesis competition — where she won the grand prize.

Mills finished the iMBA program in January 2022 and was inducted into the Phi Kappa Phi honor society for completing the program with a 4.0 GPA. "At the end of the program, I had to figure out in what direction I wanted to go because I wanted to get into a new industry. I narrowed it down to either working for a nonprofit or teaching."

When she told her professors she was interested in teaching, Dr. Jay Lee, chair of the Department of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, encouraged her to apply to be a lecturer. Mills was awarded the position and started teaching strategic management a couple of months later. The same week, she received a job offer for the nonprofit California Foundation on the Environment and the Economy.

"I couldn't decide, so I took both jobs," she says. "The iMBA program opened all these opportunities to me."

Mills now works 30 hours a week for the nonprofit in addition to her lecturer position at Sac State. She also volunteers as the chair of the nonprofit Sacramento Valley Chapter of the California Dressage Society, and she was recently selected for the 2023 Summer Teaching Institute, where she will explore content, pedagogy, and assessment practices to improve equity and accessibility in her classes.

COB

MBA PROFILE

Bianca Wittenberg MBA Program Leads to Shark Tank Deal

Fire is a serious business in California. Even the hosts of business reality show Shark Tank know that. That is why two of the “sharks” – Mark Cuban and Lori Greiner – struck a deal with Bianca Wittenberg, CEO of El Dorado Hills startup FireFighter1 and a Sac State MBA alum, when she appeared on the show in December 2022. While the nuances of that deal are still being worked out, Wittenberg saw sales of her product, FireFighter1 Hoses Systems, double following her appearance on the show.



FireFighter1 Hoses Systems allows homeowners to attach a lightweight fire hose to their pool pump using a three-way valve and adapter to hose down their property in case of a fire. The idea for FireFighter1 was born when Wittenberg was growing up in Southern California. Her father was an inventor and one of his inventions involved tapping into the family pool to extract water when wildfires got too close. While the idea was a good one, it did not go much further at that point.

After getting married and moving to Arizona with her husband, Wittenberg received a bachelor's in business marketing from Northern Arizona University. While in Yuma, she also started a synthetic lawn company. “I’ve always had a business mindset,” she says.

Wittenberg sold that company ten years ago and moved from Arizona to El Dorado Hills when her husband was transferred for work. Their new home in El Dorado Hills had a pool, which brought the idea for FireFighter1 back to life again. But at the time, Wittenberg was busy launching a real estate brokerage and raising four kids.


In 2018, Wittenberg’s love for business prompted her to enroll in Sac State’s MBA program, focusing on entrepreneurship and global leadership. When she mentioned the idea for FireFighter1 Hoses Systems in class, Professor Seung Bach encouraged her to enter the Future Four & More business entrepreneurship competition. Wittenberg got second place. She then entered another invention-based contest and got third place. “It received a

lot of positive feedback and it just kind of kept rolling from there because everybody kept asking about the product,” she says.

Success in those contests encouraged her to focus her final MBA project on bringing FireFighter1 to market. “Doing that project helped me figure out how to start the business,” she says. “I poked a lot of my professor’s brains. I really used the school resources to help me develop the business.”

Once Wittenberg graduated from the MBA program in 2019, she focused more time on FireFighter1 and participated in more shows and conventions. That eventually led her to apply for Shark Tank and her deal with Mark and Lori.

As they work through the legalities of the Shark Tank deal, Wittenberg continues to sell FireFighter1 directly to consumers and via pool vendors. She is currently working with about 60 pool vendors around the country. She eventually plans to focus full-time on FireFighter1, and credits Sac State’s MBA program for giving her the tools and connections she needed to take a great idea for a product and bring it to market.

“I loved the MBA program,” she says. “I developed a great network of classmates, got a huge amount of help and business knowledge from the professors, and further developed my business mindset.” 

MSA PROFILE

Lauri Drennan

Flexibility Key to College Return

For Lauri Drennan, flexibility was the catalyst for returning to Sac State to obtain a Master of Science in Accountancy (MSA) in just 18 months.

Drennan was born in Sacramento but grew up in a military family that lived in various locations, including Utah and Japan. She ultimately returned to Sacramento with her family and enrolled at Sac State immediately after graduating high school.

Drennan has a wide variety of interests, and she explored several majors, including criminal justice, interior design, art studio/photography, nursing and accounting. She eventually graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Art Studio and a Bachelor of Arts in Photography.

Drennan worked at a Big Four accounting firm for several years, then moved to a local accounting firm. Today, she works for the California Franchise Tax Board as a recruiter in the audit department. When her daughter was recently enrolling at Sac State, it piqued Drennan's curiosity. "I was reading all the information about the business program and thought, why don't I go back for my masters?" she says.

Drennan explored several programs but ultimately chose Sac State's 18-month accelerated MSA program because it allowed her the flexibility to work full-time, be a single mom to two daughters, and occasionally work as a wedding photographer.

"Because Sac State's MSA program was online, I could be home and do the coursework when I had downtime," she says. "It worked with my schedule. I can't take away time from my kids to go to school. But when I came across this program, I was convinced I could do it."


Drennan says she also liked that the program only covers one class at a time. "I could really get in and get some good understanding because I didn't have conflicting studies," she says. "I could focus on one topic at a time and really dive into it."

Drennan adds that all the professors were very open and always available for questions or assistance. "That's something I haven't always gotten when I was doing classes in other places," she says.

For Drennan, Sac State is also a family affair. Not only is her daughter now a student, but her sister is a long-time



Sac State employee who currently works in the Archives Department.

While she did not necessarily complete the MSA program to advance at work, Drennan says getting an MSA improved her understanding of auditing processes and will prepare her to take the CPA exam eventually. "It's an excellent program," she says. "It opens so many doors and options for people that might not have had those options before." 

MSF PROFILE

Kelly Joy

Taking a Passion for Finance to the Next Level

Sometimes the road you choose leads you to an unexpected destination.

Kelly Joy originally studied economics as an undergraduate at UC San Diego and planned to become a professor. After receiving a bachelor's degree, she received a scholarship to pursue a master's degree in applied economics at San Diego State University. She then went directly into a doctoral program to study economics at UC Davis. That is where things began to shift. "It was very challenging for me, because I started feeling that I was moving further down a career path that wasn't aligned with what I wanted to do," says Joy. "I missed doing something more applied."

Following her time at UC Davis, Joy worked in technical roles for multiple advocacy organizations before joining the public sector and working as a Senior Research Specialist for the California Debt and Investment Advisory Commission (CDIAC). That is where she found her true passion: finance. Over the past four years, Joy has conducted research and authored reports and issue briefs about various public finance topics. "The more I have learned, the more I have wanted to continue learning and growing in this field," says Joy.


As Joy progressed in her job, she realized she wanted to develop a deeper expertise in finance. That is when she discovered Sac State's new Master of Science in Finance (MSF) program and enrolled as part of the inaugural cohort. "I was excited about the program because it was in person and local, and I could finish in just one year. It checked all my boxes," she says.

Another aspect important to Joy was the program's unique schedule. "The MSF program schedule made it possible for me to learn all of this rigorous material while also balancing working full-time and being a mom to my five-year-old son," she says.

Joy says the cohort format and the instruction have been highlights of her experience in the MSF program. "I've been extremely impressed by the quality of the instruction. It has been a fast track to learning a great deal of information in a very efficient way," she says. "I also love the cohort approach. We take all our classes together, and it feels like a collective experience. Everyone in the program has a unique background with different strengths, and we leverage those differences to support one another."



Joy started the MSF program in August 2022 and will finish in August 2023. She plans to take the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Level One exam two weeks after finishing the MSF program and hopes to earn her full CFA designation in the future. "The MSF program is aligned to the CFA curriculum, which I am already actively applying in my current role, and which I also expect to prepare me for future opportunities in my career."

Joy also aspires to serve on a corporate board in the future. She was recently promoted to manager of CDIAC's Technical Assistance Unit, where she will lead the Administration, Education and Data Units. Joy has also served in multiple leadership roles for a non-profit organization called NxtGov, which helps match job candidates to open positions and promotes collaborative opportunities in the public sector. In addition, Joy is a member in the Sacramento chapter of the CFA Society as well as the local chapter of Women in Public Finance. In recognition of her accomplishments and hard work in the MSF program, Joy was recently awarded COB's Outstanding Student Award for the MSF program. 

EMBA Alum Publishes Debut Novel



Sac State's Executive MBA (EMBA) program can generate ideas far beyond what students learn in the classroom.

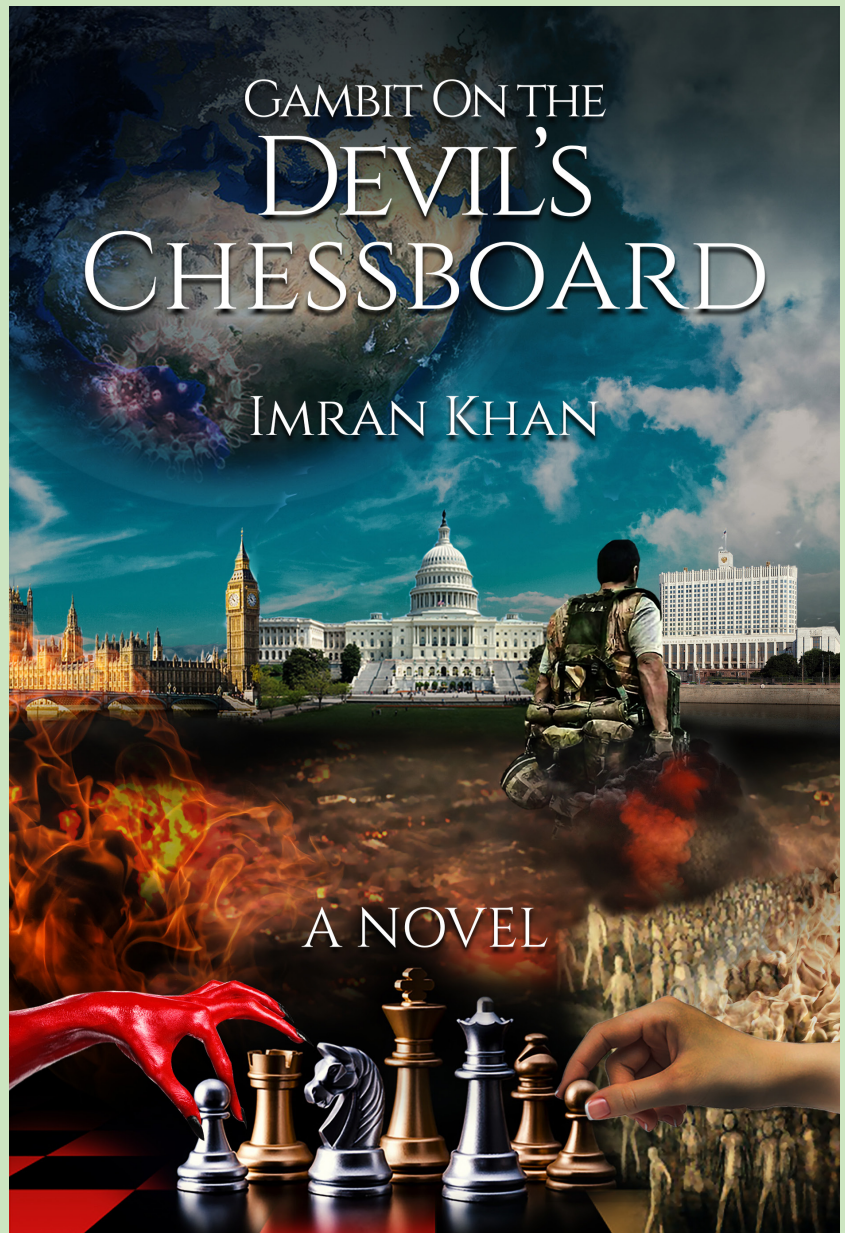
Imran H. Khan, Ph.D., is an EMBA alum who recently published a novel entitled *Gambit on the Devil's Chessboard*. The geopolitical thriller analyzes the reasons behind rampant poverty in developing countries and how superpowers conspire to keep them down.

"The novel was inspired by my MBA education at Sac State and geopolitical problems uncovered in my research on tuberculosis in poor countries," says Khan.

Khan is a professor in the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the University of California Davis Health System. In addition to instructing medical students, he also conducts extensive research. He enrolled in the EMBA program to help generate ideas about how to commercialize his research. Along the way, he became inspired to write the novel. "This novel would not have been possible if I didn't do the EMBA program because it's a very global perspective," he says. "Learning global management, international strategic management, and infrastructure development in developing countries were all critical to the themes I used in this novel."


As one Amazon reviewer said, "A thrilling book from the get-go. Hard to put it down once you start reading it. Makes the reader appreciate the geopolitical dangers of today's world and how to manage them."

Khan says in addition to inspiring him to author a novel, he also liked the cohort structure



of the EMBA program, which allowed for close interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. "Learning from their experiences was very interesting and a lot of fun," he says. "It also brings out different perspectives."

Khan also liked that he could complete the EMBA program in 15 months rather than the three years other MBA programs require. Finally, the program taught him to think on his feet.

"In some classes you had 15 minutes to read a case, get your group together, and do a presentation," he says. "It was stressful initially, but once you got the hang of it you learned how to get your thoughts together, analyze the data, and put together a list of recommendations and an implementation plan. That's a great skill to have." 

Gambit on the Devil's Chessboard is available on Amazon Kindle at: www.amazon.com/Gambit-Devils-Chessboard-Imran-Khan-ebook/dp/B0BBPDXQT1

Faculty/Student Research Collaboration Leads to Multiple Publications



Adam Taylor, Prabhjyot Shinh, & Dr. Sadaf Ashtari

Assistant Professor of Information Systems and Business Analytics Sadaf Ashtari is actively working to create a culture of faculty/student collaboration within COB by getting more students involved in research. Her most recent efforts led to the publication of "The Internet Knows More Than My Physician: Qualitative Interview Study of People with Rare Diseases and How They Use Online Support Groups" in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

Ashtari co-wrote her latest research paper with MBA student Adam Daniel Taylor with support from undergraduate student Prabhjyot Shinh. It is the latest of several journal and conference papers she has completed in collaboration with both undergraduate and graduate students over the last few years.

The idea for Ashtari's current research came about when she was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder in 2017. After talking with her geneticist, she found very few informational resources available to people with her condition.

"I was looking for information to reduce my pain, but I couldn't find any centralized resources," says Ashtari. "Most doctors know very little about genetic disorders. I wanted to educate myself, and if I could do something for this community simultaneously, that would be great."

The lack of knowledge about genetic disorders also impacts the healthcare system economically because people who suffer from chronic pain often visit doctors repeatedly. It is cheaper and more efficient to find an alternative source of assistance for such patients.


In response, Ashtari authored a research proposal titled "Patient Experience-Based Information Systems Application for Mitigation of Genetic-Disorder Pain" and was awarded \$50,000 from Genentech in 2019.

"I was so excited to get the award," she says. "It was my very first research proposal, and it was successful."

Unfortunately, COVID-19 struck soon after and delayed Ashtari's project. Once she was able to get back on track, she began interviewing patients with different genetic disorders. She recruited undergraduate student Prabhjyot Shinh to help transcribe Zoom interviews and create a Qualtrics survey. Ashtari ultimately collected data from approximately 450 patients.

Shinh says she learned a lot from listening

to Ashtari's interviews. "I learned so much from how she conducted the interviews and how she was able to get information from people who might be in so much pain yet are willing to share their experiences," says Shinh. "Being part of such an impactful project was a really good experience."

Shinh says putting her research experience on her resume and LinkedIn profile is also helpful as she prepares to graduate and look for a corporate job. "I also learned so much about quantitative and qualitative analysis," she says. "I am currently completing my master's degree, and that will be beneficial when I do my project next semester. I know how to collect data and I know how to set up survey questions." 

COB Launches Two New Student Associations



Human Resources Management Group


College of Business Instructor Todd Haines recently brought the Human Resources Management Group (HRMG) back to life after the previous club disbanded during COVID. Haines serves as faculty advisor for the student-run club.

"HRMG is a great way for students to develop their professional skills, network with industry professionals, and gain valuable experience that can help them succeed in their careers," says Haines.

HRMG offers networking opportunities, workshops, seminars and guest speakers focused on different areas and trends within HR. "There are so many areas of HR, and it changed dramatically during COVID," says Haines. "Many students don't realize how many different avenues they can pursue in HR, including recruitment, training and development, employee relations, and compensation and benefits, just to name a few."

"HR can be a misunderstood major," agrees HRMG president Tyler Chase. "Making sure people understand the full scope of what you can do with HR is important."

Chase says creating HRMG as a community for students with a shared interest in HR was also important because HR is one of the smaller concentrations within COB. "HRMG will provide a community for like-minded peers where we'll focus on things like resume building and mock interviews, and provide students support and exposure to what it's like to work in HR in the real world," he says.

HRMG will also help promote COB's collaboration with the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), which enables Sac State students to earn credits toward SHRM certification. "That's the kind of HR certification many companies are looking for," says Haines. "Obtaining SHRM certification makes students much more marketable in the employment world." 




Master of Science in Business Analytics Student Association

When the Master of Science in Business Analytics (MSBA) program was launched in 2021, Professor Min Li knew he wanted to create an association for students enrolled in the program as well as for alumni. He based the Master of Science in Business Analytics Student Association on the Business Analytics Club, which is strictly

for undergraduates. The MSBA Student Association is open to both undergraduate and graduate business analytics students. "There's overlap in the curriculum in terms of topics, methods and tools," says Li. "I wanted to start an association that would keep undergraduate and graduate business analytics students together. It's more fun, and the two groups complement each other."

Because the 18-month MSBA program is fully online, networking is another important aspect of the association. "We spend all this time together online, so it's nice to have opportunities to meet each other in person," says association president Caitlin Esgana. "It's nice to have the undergraduate students connect with the graduate students since we have common interests and similar career goals. It also gives undergraduate students the opportunity to learn about the MSBA program from the graduate students if they're curious about pursuing graduate school in the MSBA program."

The MSBA Student Association plans to host workshops, presentations, guest speakers, and in-person networking events, and offer career guidance.

After students graduate from the MSBA program, they are welcome to stay in the association and share career advice, job opportunities, current trends or tools in the industry, and more with current students. 

To find out more about the Master of Science in Business Analytics Student Association, visit csus.presence.io/organization/master-of-science-in-business-analytics-association/

To find out more about HRMG, visit csus.presence.io/organization/human-resource-management-group or <https://discord.gg/JwuvvWNY>

COB Welcomes New Staff

COB welcomed several new staff members this year. Read on to find out who they are and what they do.



Ale Reiher
Administrative
Coordinator

Ale Reiher plans COB events, including student recognition ceremonies and

scholarship award events. She also assists with commencement ceremonies. Reiher came to Sac State as a transfer student and graduated from COB in 2020 with a concentration in international business. She wanted to go into event planning but had to postpone those plans during the pandemic. During that time, she did social media for a company in Davis and worked for the Boy Scouts of America. When her current position became available in September 2022, Reiher moved to COB.

"I love that I get to work at the institution I graduated from," she says.



Sadies Gonzales
Office Coordinator

As office coordinator, Sadies Gonzales serves as the frontline for students

visiting the COB office. Gonzales answers questions about advising, scholarships, internships, events, and much more. She also connects students to the most appropriate COB resource for more complex queries.

Gonzales started in December 2022. She is new to Sac State but not new to education, having previously worked for the Sacramento City School District and a charter school in Elk Grove.

Gonzales says she enjoys the collaborative team culture at COB and the chance to engage with students.

"It's rewarding to help struggling students and put them at ease," she says. "I'm really happy to be here and excited about the many growth opportunities at Sac State."



Patsy Jimenez
Integrated Advising
Coordinator

As an integrated advising coordinator, Patsy Jimenez reports to both COB's director

of the Office of Student Engagement and the director of Sac State's Academic Advising Center. She primarily works with first- and second-year students who express interest in COB and helps them navigate the major's academic requirements. She also helps students find resources on campus or in the community, depending on their needs. Before becoming an academic advisor, Jimenez was a coordinator in Sac State's Multicultural Center.

"I have always been interested in helping students navigate higher education," she says. "I'm glad to have the opportunity to do that at Sac State. I also really enjoy our team dynamics. We support one another and we try our best to assist students."



Stephanie Serrato Neumann
Business Advisor

Stephanie Serrato Neumann moved into the Business Advisor role at

COB in June 2022. Neumann works with students to guide them through graduation requirements and helps them locate additional resources they may need either at Sac State or in the community. "We want to make sure

students get as much information as possible so they can continue through their academic journey and graduate in a timely manner," she says.

Neumann received both her bachelor's and master's degrees at Sac State and worked in the Academic Advising Center before moving to COB.

"The staff here at COB have been truly amazing," says Neumann. "The students we get to work with are wonderful as well. I'm grateful to have the support that I have with my colleagues."




Ashley Torres
Undergraduate
Academic Advisor

Ashley Torres joined COB in September 2022. As the undergraduate

academic advisor, Torres assists students with long-term planning to ensure they enroll in the right classes and are on track to graduate. She also processes paperwork for students who change their concentration (COB has 10), reviews graduation applications, assists with impaction, and processes course evaluations.

Torres is new to Sac State and previously worked as a STEM counselor for CSU San Bernardino assisting first-generation students.

"I love seeing students take the initiative and COB creating a space for them to take learning and theory and put it into practice," she says. "It's important to provide that type of support and insight so students can understand who they are and how that translates into a career setting." 

COB Welcomes New Faculty

The following new faculty members joined COB during the 2022-23 academic year. Please join us in welcoming them to the College of Business!



Franziska Renz


Assistant Professor, Department of Management & Organizations

Franziska Renz joined COB last fall. She teaches Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior.

Dr. Renz previously lived, studied, and worked in Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay. She first came to the U.S. as a first-generation, undergraduate exchange student at Fresno State University. "I loved the educational environment and the approach to higher education in the U.S. compared to Europe," she says.

Several years later, Dr. Renz returned to the U.S. for her M.B.A. at Murray State University and got her Ph.D. in Business Administration – Management at the University of Texas at El Paso. She also taught business courses while there. Later she became a visiting scholar and lecturer at San José State before accepting her position as assistant professor at Sac State.

Dr. Renz says she enjoys the spirit of activism, research and support at Sac State. "I like that diversity is truly valued here," she says. "For example, students come from all walks of life, and they appreciate each other's perspective in the classroom. It's the same with faculty and staff. It's a truly innovative place and a welcoming, inclusive community of individuals who accept and respect each other."

Dr. Renz also enjoys the campus environment. "I love the campus with all the wildlife, squirrels, rabbits, and the wonderful trees," she says. "I enjoy every day that I am on campus, engaging with students, staff, and faculty. It's always a very positive experience." 


Xiaolin Lin

Assistant Professor, Information Systems

Xiaolin Lin is COB's new assistant professor of Information Systems. He joined Sac State last fall and teaches Management Information Systems and Business Analytics. Dr. Lin received his Ph.D. in management information systems from Washington State University and was an assistant professor of computer information systems in the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business at West Texas A&M University before joining Sac State.

Dr. Lin was interested in finding a job in California and the Sacramento area was appealing because of its climate. At the same time, he found Sac State attractive because of its culture.

"I really like the working environment here," says Lin. "There are so many people with different backgrounds. They are from different countries or have different educational experiences and many students work part-time or full-time jobs. It's very diverse."

Dr. Lin is currently conducting research in several areas, including the implications of IT (Information Technology) in e-commerce and healthcare, human/AI interaction, cyber security, and gender differences in IT behavioral research. He has published papers in premier journals such as the Journal of Business Ethics, the European Journal of Information Systems, Decision Sciences, Information and Management, the International Journal of Electronic Commerce, the Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology, and the International Journal of Information Management, among others. Currently, he is a senior editor of Information Technology and People. 






Heng "John" Xie

Assistant Professor, Decision Sciences

Heng "John" Xie teaches undergraduate and graduate-level business analytics courses at COB. Dr. Xie is originally from China, where he earned a bachelor's degree in international economics and Trade from the Huazhong University of Science and Technology. Following that, Xie earned a master's degree in finance from the University of Texas at Dallas before moving on to the University of North Texas to obtain a Ph.D. degree in Business - Management Science.

Dr. Xie taught at the University of Texas Permian Basin for two years before joining Sac State, where he could focus more on business analytics. "I'm very happy that I can now use my knowledge and experience to help students better understand data, so they are prepared to meet the growing demands of the industry when it comes to business analytics," he says.

Dr. Xie likes Sac State's diversity. "I'm very impressed by the diversity here," he says. "I'm glad that we have many first-generation students. I'm also the first generation in my family to get a college degree."


Dr. Xie is excited about the opportunity to work with Sacramento-based businesses to see how they use analytics in various situations. "There are many opportunities for me to learn from local businesses," he says. "Those networking opportunities will not only benefit my research but also provide valuable insights for my students." 

Cheng Wang

Assistant Professor, Strategy and Entrepreneurship

Dr. Cheng Wang began teaching strategic management and entrepreneurship at the College of Business in August 2022. Wang's research interests center around entrepreneurship and community with collective action as the overarching concept, asking how economic considerations and social forces jointly affect individuals' actions. She conducts her research in both the U.S. and the Chinese contexts, and employs both quantitative and qualitative methods.

"I was excited to join the College of Business at Sac State. The university values the diverse communities in the greater Sacramento region which is important to my research, teaching, and service. My colleagues are very supportive of my career, and I feel this is a great place to grow as a scholar and educator, and a place where I can contribute to my students and the communities," says Wang. "I enjoy working with my students. They are ambitious, diligent, and respectful. I would love to be here for them and support them to their success."

Wang grew up in China and completed her bachelor's degree in economics and finance at Beijing Language and Culture University. She obtained her Master of Science in Finance and Master of Science in Business Administration from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. Wang attended Drexel University and obtained her doctorate in business administration, with a focus on strategic management and entrepreneurship. She worked in the finance industry prior to her Ph.D., and she is a marathon runner. 



Calling All Executive MBAs!

As a Sacramento State EMBA student or graduate, you are automatically a member of the OEMBA—the Organization of Executive MBAs.







The OEMBA community supports each other pre- and post-graduation through networking opportunities, educational events, career resources and more.

We look forward to meeting you at our next event!

OEMBASacState.com



 @qrco.de/bdQrl2 (page)
 @qrco.de/bderFF (group)
 @OEMBASacState
 @theOEMBA

OEMBA
Organization of Executive MBAs