

## MBA Program Brings in Alumni Support with Mentorship Program

Contributed by Andrew M. Abernathy  
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OXFORD, Miss. - Making strong connections is crucial for business professionals. The University of Mississippi MBA program is making those connections early with a new mentorship program that brings MBA alumni and business graduate students together.

The program developed from an alumni board meeting last year. Although the program is optional, 100 percent of this year's entering class chose to participate, MBA Advisory Council member Charles Vianey said.

"Last fall we really decided to look into some areas in which we could make a difference for our students as well as our alumni," he said. "This allows the alumni to maintain a real connection with the MBA community, and it will show more value to the program for the students."

Vianey, who earned his MBA from Ole Miss in 1980, is a partner and supply chain leader for IBM Global Business Services in Birmingham, Ala. The council recruited mentors from the past 10 years of MBA graduates and paired them with students based on professional experience and the students' interests, he said.

"We had one guy with an engineering background, so we matched him with an alum working in the field," he said, noting that matching mentors on the basis of sex and race also is beneficial because it pairs people with similar frames of reference who may face similar challenges in the workplace.

Because of Vianey's involvement, IBM donated five laptop computers and a printer to the School of Business Administration last spring. Business students are required to have laptops, and the donation will assist students with financial needs, said Charles Noble, director of MBA programs and associate professor of marketing.

For Hunter Tubbs, who received a bachelor's degree in management from Samford University in 2006, the Ole Miss MBA program is a way to establish himself in a new business field. He spent a year interning at an Oxford marketing firm and earned a second undergraduate degree in marketing before entering the MBA program in May.

"Spending all day looking at a giant spreadsheet isn't my idea of a good time," he said referring to the year he spent working at a Birmingham real estate firm. "I would really enjoy working in the sales side of business and, with the economy the way it is right now, any connection you can make is a plus."

Tubbs, who is paired with a '92 MBA graduate working as an insurance account executive in New Orleans, said it is also good to have an outlet just for support while in graduate school, especially one as intensive as the MBA program.

"It's good to call and say, 'Hey, I'm struggling with class. Can you give me some advice?'" he said. "When you have someone with ties to Ole Miss and the program, they may not have had the same professors, but they are going to be able to guide you better."

The MBA program generally enrolls more than 40 full-time students every year, plus another 20 to the part-time program, Nobles said.

"We attract many students that have roots and connections to Ole Miss, either through having attended here themselves, through family traditions, the recommendations of friends," he said. "Our students have a variety of interests and end up taking jobs in a wide range of areas, including financial services, consulting, marketing and various management training programs."

Both students and mentors get a set of guidelines requiring the student to initiate contact with their mentor and both participants are required to contact each other at least four times and complete an evaluation in May. Students and mentors are encouraged to share their resumes and stories with each other and to meet in person at least once.

For more information about the School of Business visit <http://www.olemissbusiness.com>.