

A man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a blue blazer over a light pink shirt, stands with his arms crossed. He is positioned in front of a modern building with large glass panels and a dark frame. The background is filled with lush green trees, creating a blurred effect. The overall scene is bright and professional.

DR. JASON REESE APPOINTED
DEAN OF RUSCHE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

INTERVIEW FROM THE C-SUITE:
JIM DROTMAN OF HYUNDAI CAPITAL

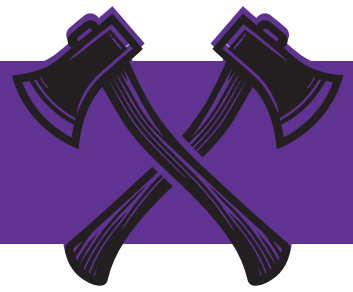
RUSCHE LAUNCHES STUDENT
AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

RUSCHE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS ★ STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY ★ THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM

RUSCHE REVIEW

SUMMER 2026

FALL 2026 EVENTS



AUG 6

SUMMER COMMENCEMENT



AUG 24

FALL CLASSES BEGIN



OCT 24

HOMECOMING

V. SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA



NOV 5

BUSINESS ALUMNI SOCIAL

EL FENIX - DOWNTOWN DALLAS

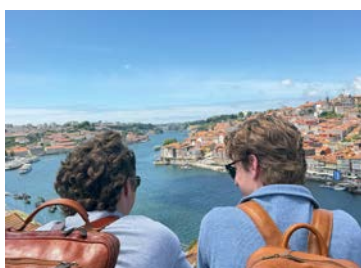


DEC 17-18

FALL COMMENCEMENT

(TENTATIVE)





CONTENTS

12 DENNIS QUAID HEADLINES RUSCHE DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

20 STUDY ABROAD: SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

24 INTERVIEW FROM THE C-SUITE: JIM DROTMAN

34 ACE HOSTS LUMBERJACK ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETITION

37 STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS EXCEL IN COMPETITIONS

46 WHERE CONNECTIONS BECOME CAREERS: COLLEGE TO CAREER CONFERENCE



DR. JASON REESE Dean, Rusche College of Business

This issue of Rusche Review reflects an exciting season for the Nelson Rusche College of Business. As I begin this new chapter as dean, I am grateful for the opportunity to continue serving our students, faculty, staff, alumni and partners while helping lead the college into its next phase of growth.

Throughout these pages, you will see our mission to Learn, Launch and Lead come to life through experiences that strengthen student engagement and career readiness. The launch of the Rusche Ambassadors Program is one example of students stepping into leadership while helping us share the Rusche story with prospective students, families and external partners. You will also read about the College to Career Conference, where students connected with alumni, employers and industry professionals as they prepared for the next step in their careers.

This issue also highlights the power of applied learning in and beyond the classroom. MBA students partnered with the Nacogdoches Farmers Market to develop a comprehensive marketing plan with

real community impact. Students also practiced professional skills through opportunities such as the Fastenal-sponsored etiquette dinner, reinforcing the importance of confidence, communication and preparation.

We are proud to feature several stories that connect our students and alumni to new opportunities. The Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship launched SFA One Hundred to recognize the fastest-growing Lumberjack-led businesses and celebrate the impact of SFA alumni in the business world. This kind of connection between students, alumni and industry continues to strengthen the future of the college.

You will also find stories that show the reach of a Rusche education. Dennis Quaid's visit through the Nelson Rusche Distinguished Lecture Series brought students into a timely conversation about the Texas film industry and entrepreneurship. In this issue's "Interview From the C-Suite", Jim Drotman of Hyundai Capital America shares leadership lessons shaped by adaptability, curiosity and his SFA experience. You will also read about students expanding their perspective through study abroad in Spain and Portugal, along with student organization success, faculty and staff achievements, and spring 2026 graduate highlights.

I hope this issue reminds you of the momentum happening across the college and the many ways our students, alumni, faculty, staff and partners continue to move Rusche forward.

Your Involvement Matters

As always, we invite our alumni to stay connected and engaged with the Rusche College of Business — whether through giving, guest speaking or simply sharing this issue of Rusche Review. We're building something remarkable here, and we'd love for you to be a part of it. Here's to a strong and exciting fall semester ahead!



RUSCHE REVIEW

RUSCHE REVIEW IS THE PUBLICATION OF THE RUSCHE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AT STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY INTENDED FOR ALUMNI, STUDENTS AND FRIENDS.

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STAY IN TOUCH!

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Beta Gamma Sigma Faculty and Staff Awards

MARLIN C. YOUNG TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

Mr. Dave Kaiser | Economics and Finance

TEACHING INNOVATION AWARD

Dr. Amy Mehaffey | Management and Marketing

OUTSTANDING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Dr. Matthew Jaramillo | Economics and Finance

OUTSTANDING SERVICE-LEARNING

Dr. Marice Kelly and Dr. Kristen Waddell | Business Communication and Legal Studies

OUTSTANDING RESEARCH AWARD

Dr. Suhyung Lee | Business Communication and Legal Studies

OUTSTANDING INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTION

Dr. Hannah Wich | Economics and Finance

FACULTY UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH MENTOR

Dr. Pam Rogers and Dr. Wenjing Li | Management and Marketing

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Dr. Derek Walton | Management and Marketing

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AWARD

Dr. Stephen Shrewsbury | Business Communication and Legal Studies

STAFF RECOGNITION AWARD

Ms. Emily Keller | Office of Student Services

RUSCHE FACULTY SCHOLARS (TOP RESEARCHERS)

Dr. Carol Wright

Dr. Hannah Wich

Dr. Drew Thornley

Dr. Suhyung Lee

Dr. Justin Blount

Dr. Rob McDermand

Dr. Brandon Ater

Dr. Jay Vega

Dr. Kristen Waddell

Dr. Derek Walton

YEARS OF SERVICE

Ms. Kristi Howard | 10 Years of Service

Dr. Robert Culpepper | 30 Years of Service

RETIREMENTS

Dr. Gina Harden | Management and Marketing

Ms. Sherry Tucker | Business Communication and Legal Studies

Dr. Stephen Shrewsbury | Business Communication and Legal Studies



Jim Drotman Shares Leadership Lessons in Interview From the C-Suite

Learn more on page 24

Leadership, Flexibility and the Road Ahead

SFA alumnus **Jim Drotman**, president and CEO of **Hyundai Capital America**, is featured in this issue's Interview from the C-Suite. With a career shaped by adaptability, curiosity and a willingness to embrace unexpected opportunities, Drotman shares how his SFA experience helped prepare him for leadership in the fast-changing world of business and automotive finance.

In the interview, Drotman encourages students to broaden their experiences, explore classes and industries outside their comfort zones, and remain flexible as their careers unfold. His story highlights the importance of lifelong learning, strong communication and being prepared when new opportunities arise.





Rusche Ambassadors

The Nelson Rusche College of Business at Stephen F. Austin State University has launched the Rusche Ambassadors Program, a student leadership initiative designed to enhance recruitment efforts, elevate the visitor experience and strengthen student engagement within the college.

"The Rusche Ambassadors Program exemplifies how the Rusche College of Business advances its mission of 'learn, launch, lead,'" said **Dr. Jason Reese**, dean of the college. "Through this experiential learning initiative, students develop meaningful leadership skills while gaining practical experience. The program not only supports students in launching their own careers but also strengthens the college's ability to tell its story to prospective students and external partners throughout the region."

Rusche Ambassadors serve as representatives of the college at recruitment events, including college tours, high school visits, college fairs and other outreach activities. During these events, they provide prospective students and their families with a firsthand look at the academic programs, facilities, culture and opportunities available in the Rusche College of Business.

"After three years of being an RCOB student, I feel like I truly know this community and what makes it special," said **Rory Price**, a senior entrepreneurship major from Edgewood who was selected for the program. "I had people who showed me how impactful this place could be for me, and I want to be that same supportive presence for prospective and future students who are exploring what Rusche can do for them."

In addition to Price, the following 10 students representing a variety of business disciplines and backgrounds were selected for the program:

- Annie Johnston, junior economics major from Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Brandon Joest, sophomore international business major from Houston
- Bre Stephenson, junior accounting major from La Porte
- Erin Lewis, sophomore finance major from Houston
- Kai Hudson, sophomore accounting major from Canton
- Kainen Leon, sophomore general business major from Fort Worth
- Kendall Kindred, sophomore marketing major from Dallas
- Reed O'Grady, senior management major from Weatherford
- Sofia Ramirez, junior finance major from Baytown
- Zala Ule, business graduate student from Koper, Slovenia

Ambassadors participate in comprehensive training at the beginning of each semester, including a full-day retreat focused on professionalism, communication and public speaking. The retreat also features an in-depth overview of the college's majors, minors, certificates, experiential learning opportunities and student support services. This training ensures ambassadors are well prepared to represent the college accurately and confidently.

"The Rusche Ambassadors serve as the first point of contact for many prospective students and families," said **John Chambers**, program advisor and recruiting and marketing specialist for the Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship. "By equipping students with the knowledge to confidently share information about our programs and resources, we are creating a more engaging and informative recruitment experience while also investing in the development of our current students."

Beyond recruitment, Rusche Ambassadors support student retention and success. They also represent the college at events with corporate partners, donors, alumni and community stakeholders. In these settings, ambassadors serve as professional representatives of the college and help strengthen relationships with external partners.

The program also emphasizes leadership development and professional growth. Through their involvement, ambassadors gain hands-on experience in communication, customer service and university representation, all of which translate directly to future careers in business and leadership roles beyond graduation.

For more information about the Rusche College of Business, visit sfasu.edu/cob. To schedule a tour of the college, visit gosfa.com/RuscheTour.

adors



You're Invited

Join fellow Rusche College of Business
alumni for a Rusche Alumni Social

El Fenix Dallas Downtown

1601 McKinney Ave.
Dallas, TX 75202

**Thursday, Nov. 5
5:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

Enjoy a laid-back evening of networking and
connection at an alumni-owned business. Register
to receive a complimentary Rusche College of
Business pint glass.

**RSVP
HERE**





From Classroom to Community: MBA Students Develop Farmers Market Marketing Plan

This spring, more than 30 graduate students in **Dr. Derek Walton's** "Marketing Management" course partnered with the Nacogdoches Farmers Market to develop a comprehensive marketing plan aimed at strengthening the market's visibility, community engagement and long-term growth. Acting as a professional marketing consulting firm, students applied the G-STIC strategic marketing framework throughout the semester to evaluate current operations, conduct market research and identify opportunities for improvement. Working in teams, students analyzed the market's strengths, challenges and competitive landscape while examining customer engagement, promotional efforts and partnership opportunities. Their recommendations focused on branding, website enhancements, social media strategy, community partnerships, special events, vendor development and customer outreach. The project culminated in a presentation to the Nacogdoches Farmers Market Board of Directors, which students shared key findings and strategic recommendations developed throughout the semester.

Since the presentation, the board has begun implementing several of the students' recommendations, demonstrating the real-world impact of the project. Planned initiatives include a brand refresh, website redesign, expanded social media efforts, email marketing and customer relationship management tools, new community partnerships and enhanced engagement with Stephen F. Austin State University. The board is also exploring additional recommendations related to themed market events, family-friendly activities, vendor development and expanded food and entertainment offerings. The collaboration exemplifies the Rusche College of Business' commitment to experiential learning, allowing students to apply classroom concepts to real-world challenges while creating meaningful impact within the local community.

Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship Launches SFA One Hundred to Honor Businesses

Stephen F. Austin State University's Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship has debuted SFA One Hundred, a new initiative designed to identify and celebrate the 100 fastest-growing Lumberjack-led businesses in the world. Nominations and applications for the 2027 rankings are currently open and will be accepted through Nov. 1, 2026.

The SFA One Hundred recognizes the success, innovation and contributions of the top 100 alumni-owned businesses that embody the legacy, values and entrepreneurial spirit of SFA and ACE. ACE established the SFA One Hundred in 2025 in collaboration with **Greg Price '80**, chief financial officer of SeatonHill Partners in Houston and an angel investor and former judge of SFA's Lumberjack Entrepreneurship Competition.

"The SFA One Hundred is a transformative milestone for the Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship and our entire university community," said **Dr. Todd Brown**, associate vice president of academic affairs. "We are incredibly excited to shine a spotlight on the visionary alumni successful entrepreneurial ventures. We are not only honoring their hard work but also inspiring the next generation of SFA students. It is a privilege to finally recognize these leaders and showcase the profound economic impact our graduates are making across the world."

The SFA One Hundred rankings will be calculated based on each applicant's compound annual growth rate in sales or revenue over a three-year period spanning 2023, 2024 and 2025.

To be eligible for the SFA One Hundred, companies must meet specific longevity, revenue and leadership criteria. For this inaugural ranking of companies, each nominee or applicant must have been in continuous operation for at least three years as of Dec. 31, 2025, and have generated revenues of at least \$200,000 every fiscal year since Jan. 1, 2023.

Furthermore, the business must be Lumberjack-founded, owned or led. Eligible leaders must hold a C-suite title, such as CEO, chair or managing partner, or own a majority stake of 50% or more. Former students who

attended SFA but did not formally complete their degrees remain eligible to apply.

The honored companies will be announced publicly at an SFA awards ceremony, increasing businesses' visibility by sharing company names, logos, Lumberjack leadership names, contact information, locations and other self-reported information.

"This initiative is more than just a ranking," said **Dr. Hollie Smith**, ACE executive director of community partnerships. "By fostering these partnerships, we are creating a powerful network of Lumberjack entrepreneurs and innovation. As an alumna, I'm so excited to connect with fellow alumni. We are eager to celebrate their resilience and success while building new opportunities for mentorship and growth that will benefit our students and the entire SFA community for years to come."

While waiting to hear back on the SFA One Hundred, alumni are encouraged to add their businesses to the Alumni-Owned Business Directory, which can be found online at sfasu.edu/ace/business-directory.

The inaugural SFA One Hundred list will be unveiled during a special awards celebration in April 2027. Honored business leaders will participate in a luncheon revealing the rankings, deliver keynote speeches, engage in class presentations and network with college deans and SFA leadership.

To ensure the utmost integrity and financial privacy, all baseline financial data is submitted directly to an independent accounting firm, Carr, Riggs & Ingram. The financial data is kept strictly confidential; neither SFA nor The University of Texas System will have access to the raw numbers, and they will receive only the final, verified rankings for the awards.

To fill out an application for your business, visit gosfa.com/SFA100 application. To nominate a business, visit gosfa.com/SFA100_nomination.

To learn more about the SFA One Hundred, visit sfasu.edu/ace/sfa-one-hundred, or contact Hollie Smith at hsmith@sfasu.edu or (936) 468-2988.

JOIN THE ALUMNI-OWNED BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Add your business to the Alumni-Owned Business Directory to showcase your business, connect with fellow Lumberjacks and grow your impact.

SCAN THE
QR CODE



Leading the Way: ACE Named Top Emerging Entrepreneurship Program in the Nation



Stephen F. Austin State University's Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurship academic program in the Nelson Rusche College of Business were collectively named the top emerging entrepreneurship program in the country by the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

According to USASBE, the award recognizes programs that are bold, innovative and comprehensive. To receive it, a program must demonstrate outstanding progress and a record of student impact within its first three years. Judges looked for national scalability as a replicable model, evidence of early success and engagement, and innovative pedagogy that fosters an entrepreneurial mindset.

"This recognition reflects the intentional work happening across our campus to advance the goals of SFA's strategic plan," said **Dr. Jordan Barkley**, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. "Entrepreneurship at SFA is a university-wide effort that brings together faculty and students from every college to foster innovation, problem-

solving and value creation. This award affirms that our collaborative, applied approach is preparing students to lead in their professions and contribute meaningfully to regional transformation."

The entrepreneurship program and ACE received the Model Emerging Program Award, which distinguishes them as the national gold standard for entrepreneurship programs established within the past three years. USASBE is considered the preeminent global organization for entrepreneurship programming, pedagogy and research, so this award places SFA at the forefront of the field, according to **Matthew Smilor**, ACE director.

"This recognition is a powerful validation of the countless hours and dedication poured into this initiative by SFA's incredible faculty and staff who have worked tirelessly to build this program from the ground up," Smilor said. "ACE has officially moved from a 'nascent' program to one that other universities across the nation will model."

For the past two years, ACE and the entrepreneurship program were in USASBE's top three emerging entrepreneurship programs, but this is the first year the center and program were awarded first place.

USASBE's recognition reflects the rapid momentum of entrepreneurship at SFA. In a short period of time, the entrepreneurship major and minor have become one of the fastest-growing programs in the Rusche College of Business, and ACE has expanded to a campuswide initiative, driven by student demand for applied, experience-based learning and real-world opportunity.

"Everything we do is rooted in our mission to empower accessible and applied entrepreneurship for regional transformation," said **Dr. Raymond Jones**, director of SFA's entrepreneurship academic program. "We want students to discover their vision and then build the skills, confidence and connections to pursue it. Whether they are pitching, building relationships, launching or buying, students are learning by doing. This award reflects the momentum our students are creating, and it challenges us to keep expanding what's possible for them and for the communities we serve."

SFA's Entrepreneurship Faculty Fellows program is just one way ACE is reaching across campus. This program engages faculty members throughout the university to embed entrepreneurial content into new and existing courses. By expanding the entrepreneurial mindset beyond business classes, the program helps more students see how innovation, value creation and problem-solving translate into diverse majors and careers.

ACE also hosts multiple entrepreneurship and pitch competitions each year, such as the Pop-up Pitch Competition, Greek Pitch Fest and the Lumberjack Entrepreneurship Competition, giving students

recurring opportunities to test ideas, strengthen presentation skills and receive feedback from entrepreneurs and judges. Complementing that pipeline is a robust monthly networking initiative, the Piney Woods Entrepreneurship Network, that connects students, alumni and community partners to strengthen mentorship and expand access to guidance, talent and resources.

Over the past year, ACE launched an accelerator program to support business founders and student teams as they move from early ideas to traction through structured milestones, coaching and hands-on support. The center also initiated an entrepreneurship-through-acquisition effort that is identifying regional businesses whose owners may be interested in selling and building the programming needed to prepare students to potentially become the buyers of those businesses. This creates a pathway to ownership while helping sustain local companies and communities.

For more information on SFA's entrepreneurial offerings, visit sfasu.edu/ace.



Passing the Torch: Purple Spikes Helps Preserve East Texas Business Legacies

East Texas businesses now have a free community resource designed to preserve the vitality of their companies through a business succession program called Purple Spikes, a new initiative from Stephen F. Austin State University's Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship.

As part of ACE's broader initiative of launching new entrepreneurial ventures, Purple Spikes aims to keep current East Texas businesses operating by connecting business owners through a business succession network. The program helps connect those who might be ready to retire or exit the business for another pursuit by connecting them with qualified buyers. This program keeps businesses open in the Lumberjack family and retains jobs in the region.

"Just within the region, nearly 200 businesses representing over 2,000 jobs are at risk of disappearing without a succession plan," said Dr. Todd Brown, associate vice president of academic affairs. "This would be a major blow to the local economy in millions of lost revenues. ACE hopes to ensure job preservation and long-term economic growth by connecting possible graduating students, alumni or qualified entrepreneurs with these business acquisition opportunities."

The succession network on the Purple Spikes webpage is organized into two groups: businesses looking to sell and qualified buyers. SFA's network of buyers includes experienced individuals and Lumberjack alumni interested in growing roots in the area as well as high-achieving recent graduates motivated and financially prepared to take over operations.

ACE's first business listing actively seeking a successor is Larry Bruce Gardens of Kennard, a hospitality getaway with guest house rentals, a restaurant and an event center.

"It was truly an honor to be the first business to participate in the Purple Spikes program at SFA," Bruce said. "Our belief is that someone will not only be able to take over Larry Bruce Gardens, but actually take it to the levels that will produce amazing results, thanks to SFA and ACE."

There are no fees for participating, and contributions are welcome from those who wish to support the program's continued success.

"ACE works closely with business owners to support their goals and the long-term interests for their venture by connecting them with a potential successor," said Dr. Raymond Jones, entrepreneurship program director. "For those interested in selling a business, the idea of Entrepreneurship-through-Acquisition and Succession hopes to provide an opportunity for keeping the business' legacy alive while ensuring that the continued success of the business gives back the community."

If you are interested in selling or owning a business, visit gosfa.com/purplespikes to complete a profile. Within seven days of reviewing the submitted form, ACE will reach out to discuss your goals and next steps.

Accepted businesses will be featured on Purple Spikes' website, and ACE will assist in promoting their opportunity to potential buyers. ACE will also help interested owners connect with businesses that align with their goals and qualifications, and ensure they are prepared for the undertaking of a business acquisition.

For more information, contact Dr. Hollie Smith, ACE executive director of community partnerships, at hsmith@sfasu.edu or (936) 468-2988.

Dennis Quaid Headlines Rusche Distinguished Lecture Series

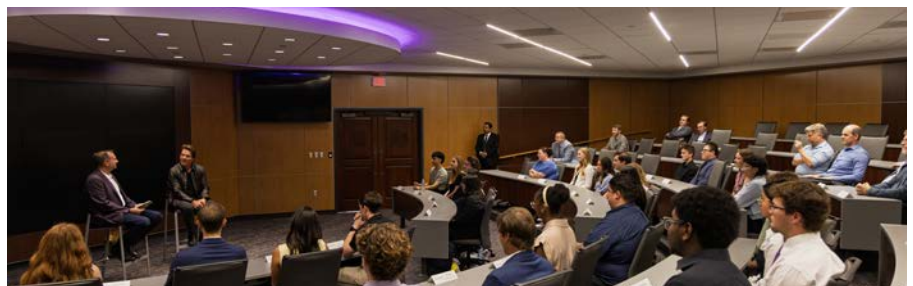


Actor **Dennis Quaid** celebrated his 72nd birthday by sharing his experiences advocating for the Texas film industry and reminiscing about his movies at the fifth installment of Stephen F. Austin State University's Nelson Rusche Distinguished Lecture Series April 9. **Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick** served as Quaid's interviewer for the event.

The series, hosted by SFA's Nelson Rusche College of Business, is designed to bring scholars and business leaders to SFA's campus to discuss timely issues and educate the next generation of business leaders while enriching the SFA and Nacogdoches communities.

"This event reflects the mission of the Nelson Rusche Distinguished Lecture Series by connecting our students with influential leaders and real-world conversations that extend beyond the classroom," said **Dr. Jason Reese**, dean of the Rusche College of Business. "Hearing firsthand about the opportunities emerging in Texas' film industry was both inspiring and educational for everyone in attendance."

Before the public portion of the evening, Quaid spoke with a select group of business students and answered their questions about the economic and



entrepreneurial sides of the Texas film industry.

"With SFA students, Dennis Quaid shared insightful, relatable experiences," said **Fred Poston**, executive director of Texas Media Production Alliance, vice chair of the Rusche College of Business Executive Advisory Board, 1992 SFA graduate and moderator for the student Q&A with Quaid. "His story of starting his career was about a young Texan's passion to pursue a dream, tenacity and determination. His enthusiasm about Texas film/TV production, following recent film incentive legislation, was highly encouraging to students looking to pursue a career in the Texas film/TV industry."

Quaid also attended a VIP reception before being interviewed by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick for the main discussion of the evening. The two native Texans collaborated to support the passage of Senate Bill 22 during the 89th Texas Legislature in spring 2025. The legislation dramatically increased funding for the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program, allocating \$300 million every two years to attract major film and television productions to the Lone Star State.

"There's no rule that says the movie business has to be in Hollywood and New York," Quaid said. "Texas has mountains, beaches, East Texas forests, big cities — we have everything you need to shoot movies here."

Patrick added that the incentive program, which he considers a jobs program, will help make Texas the "No. 1 faith and family film center in the country."

The interview began with a fun fact about Quaid: He's **Gene Autry's** third cousin.

Quaid then told Patrick how his older brother, **Randy**, and he were inspired by their college acting professor at the University of Houston, **Cecil Pickett**.

"The first week of his class, I knew what I wanted to do with my life," Quaid said. "I didn't have anything to fall back on because acting was my

passion."

Randy found acting success first when he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role in 1974 for "The Last Detail." He blended his commercial success in the "Vacation" movies and "Independence Day" with critically lauded turns in "Midnight Express," "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Brokeback Mountain."

Dennis soon followed his brother to Los Angeles, where he landed his breakout role in the 1979 film "Breaking Away."

He advised students contemplating acting careers that they need "fortitude to outlast hearing a thousand 'no's.' You have to believe in yourself because you're selling yourself and being proactive about that every day."

Quaid also had a message for the future entrepreneurs in the audience: "Find something you love to do and figure out how to get paid for it."

He advised students that their college years are the best time to make mistakes and learn from them.

"You learn through failure," Quaid said. "That's how I learned. Don't be afraid to fail."

Patrick told students if they start in the film industry right out of college, they can make \$50,000 a year as a gopher on a film set in Texas.

"Thanks to Senate Bill 22, you don't have to move to New York or California or Georgia anymore to be on a film crew," he said.

George Lane, 2015 SFA graduate and director of government relations at the Texas Office of the Attorney General, was called out of the audience by Quaid and Patrick and drew great applause from the lecture series crowd as they watched the short film he created, "True to Texas" ([gosfa.com/youtube-true-to-texas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gosfa-com/youtube-true-to-texas)), to promote Senate Bill 22. Filmed in Dripping Springs, the short features **Quaid, Matthew McConaughey, Woody Harrelson, Billy Bob Thornton** and **Renée Zellweger**.

Patrick added that fellow native Texan **Taylor Sheridan**, creator of





"Yellowstone" and its spinoffs, has filmed seven series in the Lone Star State thanks to incentives. Sheridan also is set to create the 25-minute movie that will play in the new immersive theater as part of the Alamo's \$550 million makeover. He is producing the film on the Battle of the Alamo for free, and will be recruiting college students to work on the project so they can gain film industry experience and help build up Texas' film crews.

"SFA students need to be part of that when that happens," Patrick said.

The lecture series audience members also learned the following about Quaid's movie-filming experiences as they shouted out titles from his nearly 50-year acting career.

Quaid said one of his favorite movies he's filmed is "Parent Trap." "It gave me another career. I had been a bad guy in movies, and I just said 'yes' to 'Parent Trap' on faith."

He described "Frequency" and "The Rookie" as great father-son films. The warehouse scene in "Frequency" featured many real firefighters who died a year after the film's release while rescuing those trapped in the twin towers on 9/11.

"Day After Tomorrow" was filmed in a 70-degree studio in Montreal during winter when it was minus 40 outside. The snow was made from "trashed-up newspaper and soap flakes. It was slippery," Quaid said.

Gordon "Gordo" Cooper, the astronaut Quaid portrayed in "The Right Stuff," ended up living a few blocks from Quaid in Los Angeles. The two became friends, and Cooper inspired Quaid to become a licensed pilot. Quaid owns a Cessna Citation jet.

Quaid lost 48 pounds to play Doc Holliday, who had tuberculosis, in "Wyatt Earp." He also used the cartoon character Foghorn Leghorn to inform his voice for Holliday.

Ringo Starr was "the most fun, generous and wonderful person" on the set of "Caveman."

"Dragon Heart" was Quaid's most challenging film to make. "I'm doing a scene in the mud in Slovakia with three tennis balls on a stick portraying a dragon, and a Croatian horse is trying to kill me."

Filming "Reagan" was an honor for Quaid because "he was my favorite president." It was filmed on the Reagan Ranch, and Peaches, Quaid's English bulldog often seen with him while rushing through the airport and giving interviews on shows like "Today," portrayed Reagan's dog, Rex, in the film.

Peaches joined Quaid and Patrick on stage and signaled when it was time for the discussion to wind down. The audience serenaded Quaid with "Happy Birthday to You," and SFA leaders presented him and Patrick with axe handles.

"It's the best birthday ever!" Quaid said as the audience headed to the Baker Pattillo Grand Ballroom foyer to enjoy cupcakes in his honor.

The event kicked off the biennial Lone Star Legislative Summit and featured the following state legislators in the audience: **Sens. Robert Nichols** and **Mayes Middleton** and **Reps. Nathaniel Moran, Joanne Shofner, Trent Ashby, Gary VanDeaver, Jeff Berry** and **David Cook**.

The UT System was represented by **Regent Jodie Lee Jiles** and **Deputy Chancellor and Senior Policy Advisor Julia Rathgeber**. Quaid and Patrick also spoke at the summit's breakfast session April 10.

To learn more about SFA's Rusche College of Business, visit sfasu.edu/cob. To learn more about Texas' film incentive program, visit the Texas Film Commission website at gov.texas.gov/film.



Rusche Faculty Advance Their Expertise for Student Success



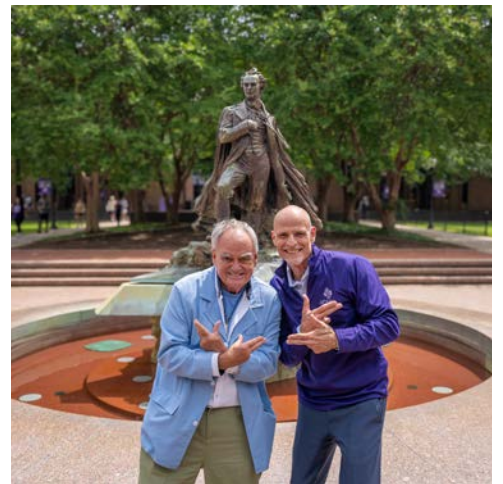
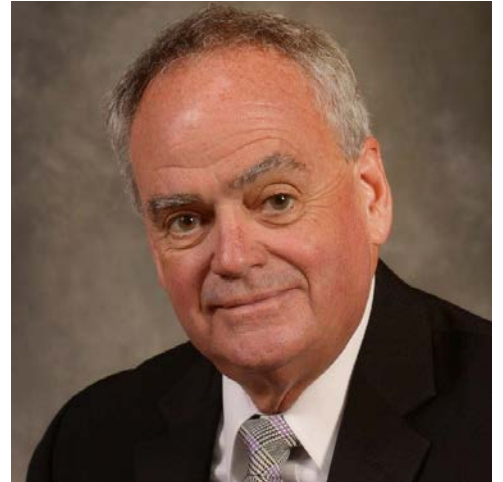
Dr. Kristen Waddell Earns SHRM-CP Credential

Dr. Kristen Waddell, assistant professor of business communication and legal studies, recently earned her Society for Human Resource Management Certified Professional credential. The SHRM-CP certification recognizes professionals who demonstrate expertise in human resource practices, workplace strategy and employee engagement. Earning this credential reflects Waddell's continued commitment to professional development and excellence in business education. Her achievement further strengthens the college's focus on providing students with industry-relevant knowledge and instruction.

Dr. Jay Vega Receives His Certified Fraud Examiner Certification

Dr. Jay Vega, director of the Schlieff School of Accountancy, earned his Certified Fraud Examiner certification, recognizing his expertise in fraud prevention, detection and investigation. This achievement brings valuable real-world insight into the classroom and gives students greater exposure to career pathways in forensic accounting, auditing and fraud examination. His certification further strengthens the school's commitment to preparing accounting students with practical, industry-relevant knowledge.





REMEMBERING DR. TIM CLIPSON

Dr. Timothy Wayne Clipson — beloved brother, uncle, teacher, mentor and friend — peacefully sailed home to heaven on Jan. 24, 2026, after a brief battle with brain cancer. He lived a full life of 75 years. Born on Sept. 8, 1950, in Kankakee, Illinois, Tim was the cherished son of Paul and Bonnie Clipson, whose love and values shaped a life devoted to faith, service and leadership.

From an early age, Tim demonstrated a natural ability to lead and encourage others. His formative years in Boy Scouts, church and community life laid the foundation for a lifetime of service grounded in strong faith and character. He achieved the highest honors in the Boy Scouts of America, including Eagle Scout and Vigil Honor of the Order of the Arrow, and served as lodge chief. These experiences instilled in him a deep commitment to the scout oath — faith in God, devotion to country and a lifelong willingness to help others — which he lived out daily. Tim was introduced to the business world as a young man by his close mentor, Sam Kruger, who owned the local jewelry store where he worked, further mapping his path.

Tim's devotion to education was built upon a strong academic foundation. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Southern Nazarene University in 1972 and received a Master of Education degree in vocational education from the University of North Texas in 1979. He completed his Doctor of Education from Oklahoma State University in 1981, specializing in business communication, training and development. Early in his career, Tim taught in Texas secondary schools, served as a graduate assistant at Oklahoma State University, and was a partner in the Leadership Development Institute. These formative experiences ignited his lifelong passion for leadership development and professional education.

Beginning in 1981, Tim devoted the majority of his academic career to Stephen F. Austin State University as a professor in the Department of Business Communication and Legal Studies. He founded and developed the Rusche College of Business Advisory Council and created the SFA 101 course in 1998 to strengthen student success. Tim was invited to deliver the SFA university commencement address as he retired in 2017. He continued serving as a beloved professor emeritus, teaching students and guest lecturing even through fall 2025. He was widely respected for his unwavering commitment to student learning, mentorship and academic excellence, earning numerous teaching awards. His influence extended far beyond the classroom, shaping generations of students and leaders by demonstrating "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," through inspirational instruction, practical insight and personal guidance.

In addition to his academic career, Tim was the president of Leadership Is For Everyone! Inc. LIFE, a professional leadership and communication consulting firm he co-founded with Ron Smith and Howard Hendrick in 1986. Bringing together key leaders from all over the U.S., "Weekend of a Lifetime" leadership retreats served more than 30,000 Kiwanis-sponsored youth throughout Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico. His consulting work also included training

for Special Olympics International, Mattress Firm, hospitals and countless conferences and keynote engagements. Through this work, Tim advanced his enduring belief that everyone can and should lead.

Tim lived fully through the relationships and communities he built and cherished. His life was enriched by meaningful circles of friends, family, colleagues and organizations, including Stephen F. Austin State University colleagues and alumni, LIFE, the K-Family, the Lake Family, ATO, sailing communities in League City and around the world, and treasured amigos in Guatemala and anywhere he traveled.

In 1994, Tim purchased a house on Lake Sam Rayburn, imagining a place where friends could gather and reconnect. Over time, fellow SFA graduates and friends built a treasured Lazy Acres community. Filled with laughter, shared meals, porch conversations, hot tub mornings and neighborhood Fourth of July and other gatherings, the lake family shaped a second generation of lake-goers enjoying "Hondo's Paradise" and Lazy Acres. Tim's beloved circle gatherings — where all ages shared gratitude, reflections and prayer — became a treasured tradition. His "lake family" grew across decades, bound by love and friendship, a family formed by choice and forever marked by Tim's generous spirit and gift for bringing people together.

A distinguished Kiwanian, Tim served for many years in leadership roles within the Texas-Oklahoma District, including as district administrator for Circle K International. He provided leadership training at both district and international levels for Kiwanis, Circle K International and Key Club International.

Tim was also a devoted supporter of the Stephen F. Austin State University chapter of ATO, serving as a member and board chair from 1995 to 2013. He later had the honor of serving as national vice president and president of the ATO board from 2012 to 2018.

Tim's love of sailing began on Lake Sam Rayburn and led to an annual sailing trip literally around the world with friends known as the Boat Boyz for 37 years. In 2009, he took captain lessons in the Caribbean and thereafter sailed annually with an international group to Vancouver, Croatia, Greece, Thailand and beyond. His sailboat, Matau, symbolized safe passage and abundance — values also reflected in the Matau necklace he wore, representing his five guiding principles: faith, family, friends (and fun), food and fearless living.

A registered officiant, Tim joyfully presided over weddings around the world, often wearing his colorful Guatemalan stoles. He treasured friendships, traditions and music, delighting in concerts and gatherings inspired by Jimmy Buffett, Jerry Jeff Walker, Larry Joe Taylor, Luckenbach concerts and island tours.

He was deeply loved as a brother, uncle, mentor, colleague and friend, and will be remembered for his intellect, generosity of spirit and steadfast belief in the potential of others.

Though he has sailed beyond our sight to a distant shore, those who went before him have welcomed him home joyfully proclaiming, "There he comes." Tim's legacy lives on through the thousands of lives he touched, the students and leaders he inspired, and the institutions strengthened by his unwavering service.

"I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again." (unattributed)



Expanding Horizons Through Global Experiences

Klingman explores Rwanda, Africa.

For Linda Klingman, travel has always been more than a leisure activity.

Study abroad is a powerful tool for learning, connection and personal growth. For Klingman, who earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in marketing and management in 1985 from SFA, global exploration has long been an important part of her life. Although she did not have the opportunity to study abroad during college, her passion for experiencing the world was shaped early through family travel. Her father's career as a chemical engineer took him around the globe, exposing Klingman to different cultures, perspectives and ways of life. Those experiences instilled in her a belief that it is important to look beyond one's immediate community and beyond the borders of the United States to better understand the broader world.

That belief was reinforced as she watched the transformative impact of study abroad experiences on her two nieces. Through their travels, she saw firsthand how immersion in another culture can broaden perspectives, create new opportunities and foster greater understanding of people from different backgrounds. According to Klingman, travel has a unique way of connecting people and reminding us of our shared humanity. "Whether through interactions with local communities, exposure to different political and social systems, or even observing wildlife in unfamiliar environments, every experience offers a chance to see the world through a wider lens," Klingman said.

Today, Klingman continues to embrace a spirit of exploration. After recently returning from a monthlong stay in the Florida Keys, she is preparing for upcoming journeys to South Korea, Antarctica, the Galápagos Islands and Egypt. With those destinations, she will have visited every continent except Australia. Her travels have only strengthened her conviction that global experiences can be life-changing. Through her generous support of study abroad initiatives, Klingman hopes to provide students in the Rusche College of Business with opportunities to explore the world, gain new perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of the people and cultures that make it such a diverse and interconnected place.



Germany



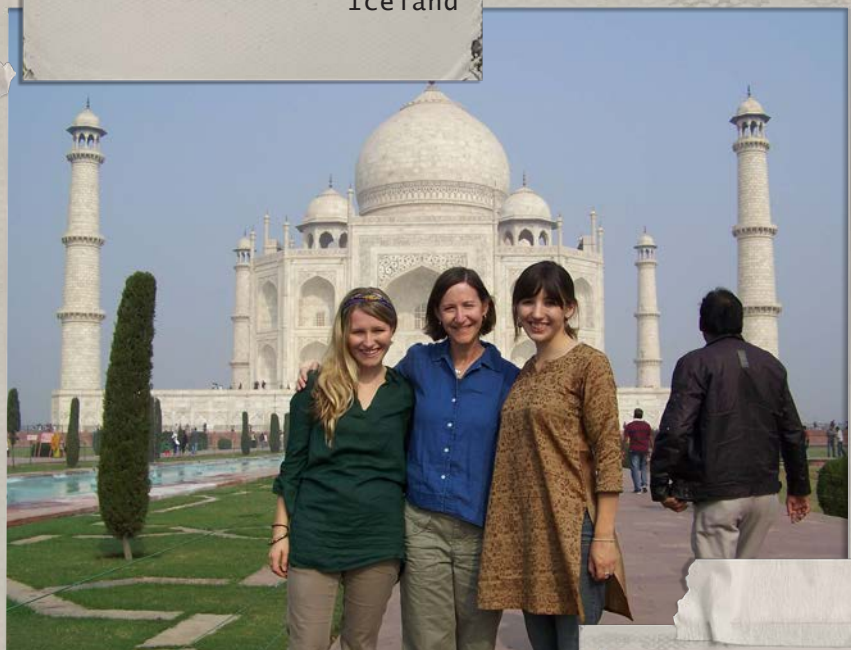
Iceland



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Vietnam



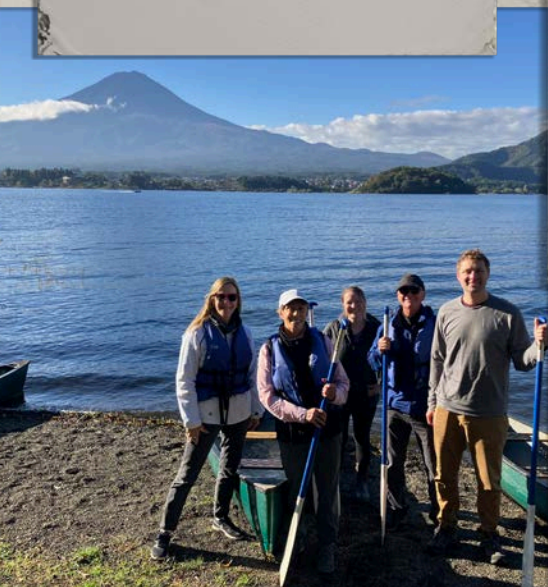
India



Portugal



Mexico



Japan

STUDY ABROAD: SPAIN AND PORTUGAL





Nearly 50 students from Stephen F. Austin State University's Nelson Rusche College of Business participated in an intensive, faculty-led study abroad program in Spain and Portugal May 10-21.

Led by **Dr. Matthew Lindsey**, chair of the Department of Management and Marketing, and **Dr. Mikhail Kouliavtsev**, chair of the Department of Economics and Finance, the experiential learning trip bridged classroom business theory with real-world international operations across the Iberian Peninsula.

"Programs like this are vital because they push our students to apply academic frameworks in entirely unfamiliar environments," Lindsey said. "Watching them move past their comfort zones to engage directly with global executives and evaluate complex, historic business models is incredibly fulfilling. They return to Nacogdoches with an elevated level of self-reliance and a global mindset that will give them a distinct competitive edge in the job market."

The journey took students from the grand boulevards of Madrid and the sandstone streets of Salamanca to the historic coastal hubs of Porto and Lisbon. Throughout the tour, students engaged in a rigorous itinerary that combined high-level corporate site visits, historic trade exploration and hands-on cultural immersion workshops.

Students received an exclusive guided facility tour and participated in a mentorship session at the Amazon España corporate headquarters in Madrid with SFA alumna **Ana Romero '16**, who works at the international corporate center.

"With the Amazon visit, it was very motivating to see what your corporate life can look like if you really apply yourself in college and in

the early years of your career," said Gavin Bock, sophomore management major from Wimberley. "It was cool seeing how an SFA alumna was able to be successful."

Ashley Hale, senior finance major from Orange, noted how the corporate encounter reshaped her career ambitions.

"We had the opportunity to speak with a former SFA student who now works at Amazon in Madrid, and hearing her experiences was very inspiring," she said. "It was motivating to see someone from our university successfully working internationally and adapting to a global business environment. Personally and professionally, this trip encouraged me to think more globally about my future."

In addition to modern e-commerce giants, the curriculum emphasized how historic firms leverage heritage as a competitive advantage. Academic site visits included a production and curing analysis at the Tienda Julián Martín Iberian ham factory in Guijuelo, a deep dive into centuries-old bilateral trade agreements at the Burmester winery in Vila Nova de Gaia, and a study of traditional, quality-driven manufacturing at the centennial Conservas Pinhais & Cia sardine cannery in Matosinhos.

The structural contrast between fast-paced American commercialism and the deeply relational, intentional Iberian business paradigm challenged students to shift their perspectives on global management.



"Before this trip, most of my understanding of international business came from textbooks and classroom discussions," said **Colby Feece**, senior management major from Sachse.

"Actually experiencing it in person gave me a much clearer perspective. The trip helped me realize that successful business internationally is not only about numbers or efficiency but also about understanding cultural expectations

and communication styles. In many European markets, tradition and authenticity can be just as important as efficiency and scale."

The profound personal growth that stems from navigating international environments was a recurring theme among the participants, many of whom were traveling outside the United States for the first time. From analyzing tile painting at the historic Fábrica Sant'Anna in Lisbon to navigating complex metropolitan transit systems, the trip served as a laboratory for building professional agility.

"Seeing businesses and institutions in Spain and Portugal showed me that business is global," said **Travis Gilliland**, junior entrepreneurship major from Spring. "Personally, I learned that I can handle being outside my comfort zone better than I thought. Professionally, I learned that I need to think bigger. To be successful internationally, I would need to listen first, learn the culture and adapt my strategy instead of assuming the American way is always best."

By directly connecting East Texas students with global markets and thriving alumni abroad, the Rusche College of Business continues to fulfill its mission of creating world-ready professionals.

"Overall, this study abroad experience gave me memories and lessons that I will carry with me for the rest of my life," said **Makenna Burkhalter**, senior international business major from Rusk. "I loved sharing this experience with such a great group of people, and it made me proud to be a Lumberjack."

For more information on upcoming study abroad opportunities and global business programs at SFA, visit sfasu.edu/business.



INTERVIEW FROM THE C-SUITE



Jim Drotman, president and CEO of Hyundai Capital America, credits his time at Stephen F. Austin State University with helping shape the way he thinks about leadership, people and opportunity. From the classroom to campus organizations, Drotman learned that business success depends not only on technical knowledge but also on communication, influence and the ability to bring people together. With more than three decades of global experience in automotive finance, including leadership roles in the U.S., Europe and China, he has guided organizations through significant growth, transformation and industry change. In this interview from the C-suite, Drotman shares how SFA prepared him for a career in finance, the evolving role of technology and customer experience in automotive finance, and the leadership lessons that continue to guide him today.

JIM DROTMAN

PRESIDENT AND CEO, HYUNDAI CAPITAL AMERICA

What led you to a career in finance, and how did your educational experiences help shape your leadership approach?

Drotman: I've always had an interest in business, more so finance. When I went to SFA, I knew I wanted to be in business, and your freshman and sophomore years are general classes. Then you really get into the business classes, and I really liked finance, specifically corporate finance. I saw multiple aspects of business through cohorts where other viewpoints were shaping where I wanted to go in finance. I was very involved as the Zeta Beta Tau president and involved in student government. Getting involved and seeing influence in different student organizations gave me perspective on how other people think.

The automotive and financial services industries are evolving rapidly. What major trends do you believe will have the greatest impact on consumers and businesses over the next decade?

Drotman: You have to put artificial intelligence right at the top. I think it's not just AI, it's technology and digital experiences as well. Data management for companies is super important, knowing your customer. Being able to offer the right interactions, the right offers and the right experience to each customer, tailored to their needs, is very, very important. I mentioned it a couple of times, but the experience for the customer has to be right.

One of the biggest trends we're seeing is the continued blending of the

online and offline customer experience. Consumers want the convenience of being able to research, shop and, in some cases, even purchase a vehicle online. At the same time, a vehicle is often the second-largest purchase most people will make in their lifetime, so there is still a real need for the in-person experience.

When you're making that kind of decision, you may want to test-drive the vehicle, compare different trims and make sure you fully understand what you're purchasing or leasing. A lease may last three years, but if you're purchasing a vehicle, you may own it for five, six or even 10 years. That makes the experience very personal and very important.

The companies that will be most successful over the next decade are the ones that can blend new technology with a strong understanding of their customers. It's not just about offering an online option or an in-person option; it's about creating a seamless experience that meets customers where they are and makes the process feel personal.

Companies that do that well will be positioned for success. Those that miss the mark may struggle to grow their business and build the kind of repeat customers and brand loyalty that are so important in the automotive industry. For Hyundai Capital America, when a customer purchases or leases a Hyundai, Kia or Genesis, the goal is for their next vehicle to also be one of those brands and the one after that as well.

That kind of loyalty matters in almost every industry. Once you have a customer, it is much easier to keep them in the family than it is to go out and find a new one. The businesses that understand that and use technology to strengthen, not replace, the customer relationship will have the greatest opportunity moving forward.

During your career, you have led organizations through significant growth and transformation. Which are you most proud of and why?

Drotman: I have been fortunate to be part of several meaningful growth and transformation efforts throughout my career, and a few stand out for different reasons.

During my 32 years with Ford Credit, I had the opportunity to work in the U.S., Europe and China, which gave me a great deal of global experience. One transformation that still stands out happened in the U.S. just before the Great Recession. Around 2006 and 2007, we were evaluating our field structure and had approximately 100 branch offices across the country. As technology was becoming more advanced, we knew we needed to rethink the right number of locations and create a structure that would be sustainable for the future.

Through that process, we ultimately moved from those branch offices to five large business centers in the U.S. At the time, we did not know the Great Recession was coming, but the timing proved to be very important. When the industry collapsed and vehicle sales dropped significantly, the old branch structure would have been difficult to sustain. By moving to larger business centers, each with 500 to 800 people, we created a model that could support the business through a very challenging period and continue carrying it forward. Those business centers are still in place today, and I look back on that as a transformation that positioned the company

well for the future.

Another experience I am very proud of was leading Ford Credit in China. Around 2010 and 2011, Ford was making significant investments in new products for the Chinese market, and sales volume grew from about 350,000 vehicles to more than 1 million over just a few years. That created a tremendous opportunity to grow the auto finance business alongside the brand.

We were able to add new dealers, develop new processes, create new products and services and build the foundation for a finance company in a market where automotive financing was still developing. That experience was incredibly meaningful professionally, but also personally. My family moved with me. My children went to school there and learned the language, and it became a unique and rewarding experience for all of us.

Now, with Hyundai Capital America, I am proud of the work we are doing to build on the momentum of Hyundai, Genesis and Kia in the U.S. I joined the company about a year ago, and it has been exciting to learn the culture, work with the leadership team and help define where we want to go. We are focused on creating a shared vision, strengthening our values and making sure we show up consistently as a team every day.

Our goal is to be one of the leading captives in the U.S. five and 10 years from now. That means building alignment across the organization, communicating effectively and managing change in a way that brings

Jim Drotman is the president and CEO of Hyundai Capital America, where he leads strategic partnerships with Hyundai Motor America, Kia America, and Genesis Motor America, supporting approximately 2,000 dealers and overseeing more than \$80 billion in retail, lease, wholesale and commercial lending receivables. He has over three decades of experience in the global financial services and automotive finance industries, having held senior leadership roles at Ford Motor Credit Company across the U.S., Europe and Asia, including executive vice president of U.S., Canada and international operations and president of Ford Automotive Finance China.

In addition to his executive responsibilities, he serves in active industry and community leadership roles, including board positions with the American Financial Services

Association and nonprofit organizations such as Hyundai Hope on Wheels and the Boys & Girls Club of Central Orange Coast.

He holds a Master of Business Administration in Finance from the SMU Cox School of Business and a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance from Stephen F. Austin State University.

people along with us. I am proud of the journey we are on because it is about positioning Hyundai Capital America to support Hyundai, Genesis and Kia even better in the future than we do today.

What is a common misconception people have about automotive finance and the role it plays in the customer experience?

Drotman: A common misconception is that automotive finance is simply the part of the process where a customer borrows money to purchase a vehicle. In reality, it plays a much larger role in the overall customer experience.

Most people begin the vehicle-buying process by thinking about the car itself with the features, the design, the technology and how it feels to drive. That is the exciting part. But there are also important decisions around how to pay for that vehicle. Do they want to lease so they can drive something new every few years? Do they want to purchase and own the vehicle for a longer period of time? Do they need additional protection, such as a warranty? Those financial decisions are a major part of the overall transaction, even if customers do not always think about them first.

From a captive finance perspective, automotive finance is about more than completing a loan or lease. At Hyundai Capital America, our focus is on creating a great experience, helping customers feel connected to the brand and supporting long-term loyalty. If a customer finances through another lender, that lender may simply want the loan in its portfolio. They may not be focused on what vehicle the customer purchases next. For us, the customer is part of the Hyundai, Kia or Genesis family, and we want the

finance experience to reflect that.

That means the way customers interact with us, whether through an app, a website or another channel, should feel connected to the vehicle and the brand they chose. The experience should be simple, consistent and personal. We know customers who finance through a captive tend to stay more loyal to the brand, and that is something we take seriously.

At the same time, loyalty has to be earned every day. We have to build trust, create strong experiences, deliver the right message at the right time and provide support when customers need it including during times of financial hardship or when they have questions about their loan or lease.

So, automotive finance is not just about borrowing money. It is about creating a relationship, supporting the customer throughout the ownership experience and, hopefully, earning their loyalty for years to come.

Technology continues to reshape how consumers purchase vehicles. How do you foster innovation while maintaining a strong focus on customer service?

Drotman: Innovation has to start with the customer, but in financial services, it also has to start with doing business the right way. We operate in a highly regulated industry, with federal and state requirements that are foundational to everything we do. Compliance and responsible business practices have to be built into the process before we layer technology on top.

From there, technology becomes a way to improve the experience we create for customers. When I was growing up, customer service usually meant calling an 800 number and speaking directly with a representative.



Today, more customers want digital interactions. They want to be able to go to a website or mobile app, make a payment, find answers to their questions or resolve an issue without necessarily having to call.

That does not mean personal service goes away. It means we have to be more thoughtful about when and how we provide it. If a customer does need to call, especially for a more complex situation, we should use data and technology to better understand who they are, what they may need and how we can help resolve the issue on the first contact.

That is where data, artificial intelligence and strong data management become increasingly important. If we understand how customers are interacting with our digital tools, we can surface the right information earlier, answer questions more effectively and create a smoother experience across channels.

It is easy to describe, but much harder to execute. Customers interact with companies through many different platforms and touchpoints. In automotive, the dealer experience is also instrumental in building trust and delivering exceptional experiences that reflect our shared commitment to customers. A customer may have a question about the vehicle, something they purchased at the dealership or a finance-related issue that brings them back to us later.

Because of that, we spend a lot of time thinking through intentional customer journeys and how each interaction should feel. The experience continues to evolve, and we are making investments to advance our technology and modernize legacy systems so we can provide the right information, offer or service to the right customer at the right time.

Every company is on this journey. Some technology companies were digital from day 1, but most organizations are continuing to evolve. The key is to invest in innovation in a way that creates meaningful returns for customers, shareholders and everyone involved, while keeping the

What leadership qualities do you believe are most important when managing large teams and navigating change?

Drotman: To me, two of the most important leadership qualities are communication and listening. When you are trying to move a large organization through significant change, you have to be very thoughtful about how you bring people along.

Every individual who hears a message about change is going to process it through the lens of, "What does this mean for me?" It may not resonate with everyone in the same way. People think about how change will impact their role, their family, their future opportunities and their daily work. As a leader, you have to recognize that and be intentional about how much you communicate, when you communicate it and how you listen to the feedback that comes afterward.

Often, when change is first announced, people may nod their heads and say they understand. But then they step back and begin to process it personally. People move through change differently. Some may feel shock, frustration or uncertainty before they reach acceptance. Others are more focused on the future and comfortable with change. A leader has to understand that not everyone is in the same place at the same time.

That is why listening is so important. You have to listen to employees,

senior leaders and people throughout the organization. Their feedback should help shape how you continue to talk about the change, where the organization is going and why it matters.

At the same time, there has to be a clear vision, a North Star, that people can understand and rally around. Even if they do not love every part of the change, they need to understand why the organization is moving in that direction. Strong communication, active listening and a clear vision are what help people move forward together.

What advice would you give business students who aspire to leadership roles in finance, banking or the automotive industry?

Drotman: My biggest advice to students is to build a solid foundation. You can certainly specialize in a specific area of business, but it is also important to understand how different parts of an organization work together. The more you understand the broader business, the better prepared you will be to lead.



I would encourage students to seek out internship opportunities and look for mentors in the industries they are interested in. That could be a family friend, an alumnus, a professor or someone they meet through the college. Ask questions, learn as much as you can and take advantage of the resources available online and through the business school.

Internships are especially valuable because they give students real exposure to how companies operate. Even if it is just observing a company for a week or two, there is value in seeing how the business runs, what different roles look like and how teams make decisions. Many businesses are very receptive to supporting students through internships, job shadowing or connections made through a career placement office or business school.

I would also encourage students to think beyond their first job. It is natural to focus on landing that first opportunity, but they should also ask themselves where they want to be five or 10 years from now. That does not mean starting a new job and immediately saying, "I want to be CEO." It means coming in ready to learn the business, understand different roles and responsibilities, and build credibility over time.

Flexibility is also important. Be open to different opportunities, different roles and, when possible, different locations. The more flexible and open you are, the more opportunities typically present themselves. For students who aspire to leadership roles in finance, banking or the automotive industry, that willingness to learn, adapt and take on new experiences can make a tremendous difference.

Looking back on your time at SFA, what experiences, professors or opportunities had the greatest impact on your professional journey?

Drotman: When I look back on my undergraduate years at SFA, I think of the experience as both classroom education and social education. The classroom is obviously important because it gives you the technical foundation and teaches you how business works. But the other part, the interactions, organizations and experiences outside the classroom, can be just as impactful.

For many students, college is the first time their world really opens up. You come from a community where many people may have similar backgrounds, perspectives or experiences. Then you arrive on campus and begin meeting people from different places, different socioeconomic backgrounds and different points of view. Learning how to interact with those individuals is a major part of the college experience.

That is why I believe involvement is so important. Whether it is through the business school, student government, a fraternity or sorority, or another campus organization, those experiences teach you how groups function. You learn what governance looks like, how policies and procedures are managed, and how decisions are made.

In the classroom, you learn the technical side of business. But in organizations, you learn how to get things done with and through other people. It is not always as simple as saying, "I want to go do this." You have to convince others that it is the right thing for the organization, the school or the group. That requires communication, influence and the

ability to bring people along.

Those experiences helped me learn how to manage people, communicate effectively, influence decisions and understand when to push forward and when to step back. Those are lessons that apply not only in business but in almost any career path.

I look back on my time at Stephen F. Austin with a lot of appreciation for both sides of that education. The school, the teams, the cohorts and the upper-level business classes were all very helpful in preparing me professionally. But the broader experience of being involved, working with people and learning how to lead in different settings had a lasting impact on my journey as well.

As a successful SFA alumnus and business leader, what opportunities do you believe today's students should take advantage of while they are still on campus?

Drotman: I would encourage students to take advantage of opportunities that broaden their perspective. Even for business students, that might mean taking a technology class, a biology class or another course connected to an industry that interests them. The broader your educational background and experiences are when you leave school, the more prepared you will be for opportunities that may come your way.

Careers do not always follow the exact path you plan. Sometimes they do, but often new opportunities present themselves along the way. That is why flexibility is so important. Students should think not only about the area where they may want to specialize but also about how they can build a broader foundation that makes them more attractive to future employers.

I also encourage students to fully leverage the resources available on campus. I got my job at Ford Credit through the placement office at SFA, so I know firsthand how valuable those connections can be. Whether it is career services, the business school, faculty members or the alumni association, those resources can help students build relationships and discover opportunities.

As students move through their freshman, sophomore and junior years, they should look for summer experiences, internships, mentor programs or any opportunity that gives them exposure to the professional world. Those experiences can help shape how they think about business, finance, leadership or whichever industry they want to pursue.

Students should also look beyond campus and connect with family, friends or family friends who may be willing to offer mentorship or career advice. There are many people who would love to help the next generation of leaders. I have had the opportunity to speak with a few SFA students recently and offer advice on their career paths, education and areas of specialization. Those conversations can be very valuable, and students should not be afraid to seek them out.

For more information on careers at Hyundai Capital America, visit hyundaicapitalamerica.com/Careers/CorporateCareers.html.

3 PEOPLE - 3 QUESTIONS

Ever wonder what the Rusche crew is cooking, thinking of or reminiscing on?

We asked three Rusche faculty and staff members the same three questions to get a glimpse into their interests beyond the office.

1. What is one item on your bucket list?



DR. KRISTEN WADDELL

Assistant Professor, Business
Communication and Legal Studies

High on my bucket list is to visit Argentina. This actually became a dream vacation because my husband has a longtime friend who lives in Argentina and would often send him pictures of his travels throughout the country. Anytime we travel, our vacations seem to revolve around trying the local food. When we visit, I would love to do a local cooking class or food tour. I would also love to visit the Mendoza wine region and see the glaciers. Hopefully, this is a bucket list item that I can check off in the next few years.

2. What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?



STACY SMITH

Advisor III, Office of Student
Services

I would love to be able to go to the Australia Zoo with my family. I watch their informational videos online, and it looks like a really neat place to visit. Really visiting Australia in general is a bucket list item of mine. I would love to visit the Sydney Opera House. I would also love to check out the Great Barrier Reef. Taking a nature tour to see additional local wildlife would be something that my family would find very interesting. I also would like to explore areas like Melbourne to check out local artistry as well.

This wasn't something that was told directly to me, but I heard it on a podcast, and it has stuck with me: "Saying yes to something means saying no to everything else." It was in relation to focusing in and meeting your goals, and while I think it is unrealistic to say no to "everything else" in reality, it did help to shift my perspective that in order to reach certain goals, I will have to say no to extra things (even if those things are good and fun!). There truly is only so much time in a day.

3. What is your favorite way to spend a free weekend?



DR. MARK SCANLAN

Professor, Department of
Economics and Finance

I really enjoy traveling with my family to new and interesting places around the world, so many of my bucket list items relate to travel. One trip I would love to take is bringing my wife and kids to Brazil for several weeks. I have a lot of family spread all across Brazil, and I would love to spend time visiting each region and reconnecting with them. I have always found that experiencing the country through the eyes of the family who live there is completely different from a typical tourist trip. COVID-19 and political unrest in the country have gotten in the way of this trip, but I hope to make it happen someday.

In high school, I had a coach who insisted that every failure is just a starting point for future success. This resonated with me as a young adult and helped push me as an athlete and as a student. It is also a frame of mind that I follow to this day. Later in life, I found that this advice echoed the beliefs of Thomas Edison in relation to his inventing process, and I now pass his views on to my students and to my own children. It is difficult but powerful to avoid dwelling on setbacks, and to think of them as starting points for future success.

If it is the weekend, then you can probably find us at the soccer field. Life is so busy these days that on the rare occasion we don't have soccer, then I would have to admit that doing absolutely nothing is high on my favorite things to do list. However, with three young kids, there's always fun to be had. We spend a lot of time outside, and we even planted a small garden this summer. My favorite weekends are ones that I get to spend at home simply playing with the kids, working on home projects and recharging from a busy week.

I coach a 12U boys recreation soccer team during the fall and spring semesters. My free weekends are sometimes rare, but I love to spend time with my husband and son. We usually get Moody Gardens and Schlitterbahn season passes. We try to utilize the Schlitterbahn season passes as much as we can during the summer. We try to use the Moody Gardens season passes as much as we can during fall and spring. I like to collect shells with my family during each trip to keep as a token of those memories.

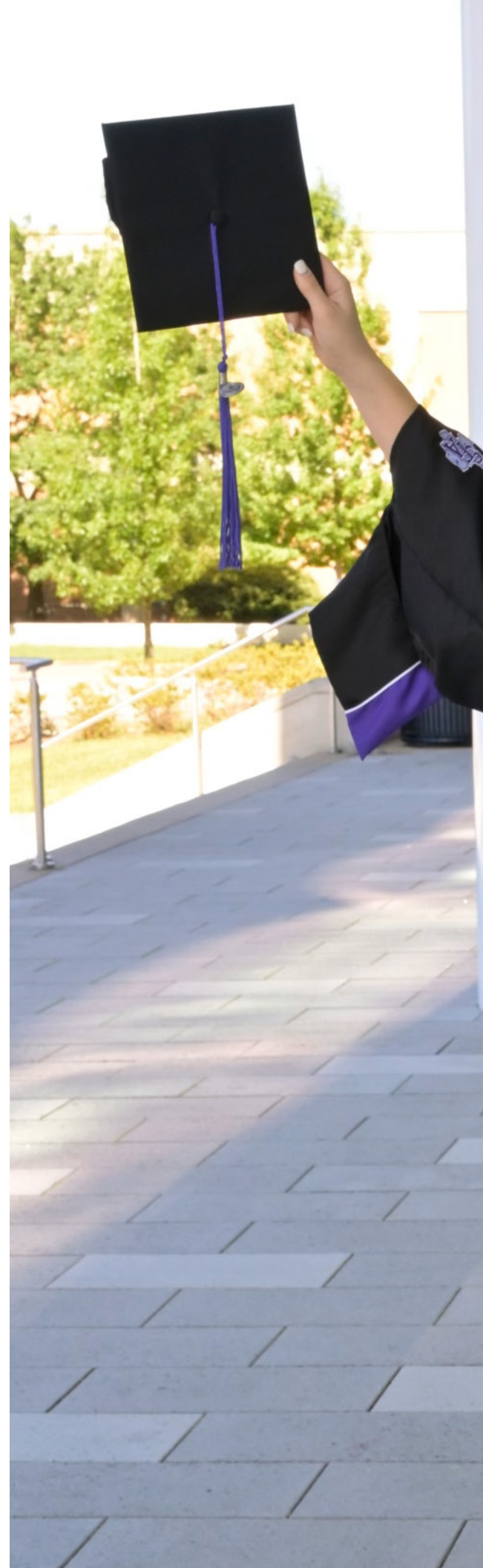
My favorite way to spend a weekend is doing activities with my family and getting outside for some physical activity. I am a big fan of older movies and enjoy dragging my kids into watching films from the '80s and '90s. Some of these movies have been life-changing for them while others turn out to be hilariously outdated. We also like to wake up early one morning and go for a walk or hike through nature. And I like to carve out some time for a long run or other outdoor activity on my own as well.

The Dream Team: Graduates Lydia Sattler and Zala Ule

Lydia Sattler and **Zala Ule** became known around the Rusche College of Business as a true “dream team.” Both former SFA student-athletes, Lydia with SFA Soccer and Zala with SFA Tennis, they brought the same dedication, teamwork and energy from competition into the classroom, student organizations and college events. As Master of Business Administration students and graduate assistants in the Department of Management and Marketing, they were always willing to lend a hand, support faculty and staff, and connect with students. If you saw one, chances were the other was close behind, ready to jump in wherever they were needed.

Both Lydia and Zala graduated in May 2026 with a Master of Business Administration after previously earning their bachelor’s degrees from SFA in 2024. Lydia, who also served as co-president of the Society for Advancement of Management and Sports Business Society, is now a quality analyst associate at Lockheed Martin Space. Zala, a founding Rusche Ambassador, Beta Gamma Sigma member, and SAM co-president and national student board member, is exploring opportunities in higher education and beyond. Their advice to students reflects the way they lived out their time at SFA: Get involved early, build relationships, take every networking opportunity and never limit yourself because a dream feels too big.

It was a fitting full-circle moment when SFA President Dr. Neal Weaver shared their story during commencement, giving a special shoutout to the duo whose friendship, leadership and willingness to serve left a lasting impression on the Rusche College of Business.





Master of Business Administration
President of sa.m. & SBS
Class of 2026

Lydia Fomelov
Stephen F. Austin State University

Zach Ute
Stephen F. Austin State University
Beta Gamma Sigma

BETA GAMMA SIGMA INDUCTION CEREMONY

The Rusche College of Business proudly welcomed its newest inductees into Beta Gamma Sigma during the spring 2026 ceremony. Membership in this prestigious international honor society is the highest recognition a business student can receive, reserved for the top 10% of undergraduate students and top 20% of graduate students. The induction celebrated academic excellence, leadership and a commitment to the values of honor and integrity that define Beta Gamma Sigma.

Beta Gamma Sigma Inductees

Braden Bass	Madison Custer	Annie Johnston	Nicholas Perez
Michaela Bickett	Colby England	Avery Kinsey	Rajkumar Pillai
Anna Bius	Isabella Ferrante	Yazdaan Khokhar	Pepper Riley
Madison Bowers	Cody Ford	Monte' Koerber-Timmons	Angelica Sandoval
Zachary Boydston	Robert Fulle	Kiley Langhart	Mir Raciv Tayamen
Avery Bryan	Elaina Glaeser	Maci McMillon	Zala Ule
Jeremy Cain	Ashley Girard	Bryan Miller	Isabella Vaught
Bridget Collier	Kaitlyn Hardy	Duyen Nguyen	Issac Velasco
Elizabeth Cook	Cara Helton	Hannah Nguyen	Naomi Waiser
Kristin Cox	Mark Henning	Logan Pantoja	Zola Westmoreland

Faculty Inductees

Dr. Beverly Mendoza

Tim Clipson Scholarship

Zachary Boydston

Dean's Excellence Scholarship

Naomi Waiser

Chapter Honoree

Scott Bowyer





Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship

Lumberjack Entrepreneurship Competition

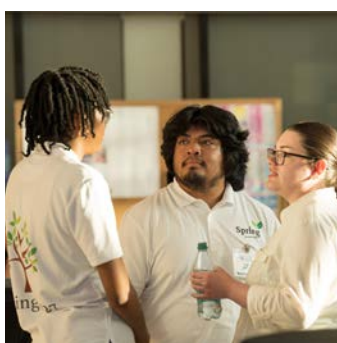


After pitching business ideas since the beginning of the school year, five SFA student teams advanced to the final round of the fifth annual Lumberjack Entrepreneurship Competition at the SFA Planetarium. The high-energy, “Shark Tank”-style showdown also featured a poster session in the Cole STEM Building Atrium.

“The 2026 Lumberjack Entrepreneurship Competition was an incredible success, and stands as our best and largest event yet with over 150 students taking part throughout the many rounds,” said **Matthew Smilor**, director of SFA’s Arnold Center for Entrepreneurship. “With our five finalist teams representing five different colleges on campus, it is clear that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and thriving at SFA.”

This year, the program was expanded to include specialized workshops and additional assistance for the finalists, Smilor said.

“Students benefited from pitch coaching at the Business Communication Hub, branding and marketing support from **Dr. Amy Mehaffey’s** ‘Principles of Marketing’ honors course, and financial guidance from our entrepreneur-in-residence, **Taylor Kovar**,” he said. “The addition of a poster session further highlighted the diverse ventures being developed by students across the university.”



Contestants were judged on the market opportunities for their businesses as well as their situational awareness, pitches, business models and go-to-market strategies by five judges: **Bill Elliott**, founder and CEO of Elliott Electric Supply; **Mike Karns**, owner of Local Favorite Restaurants; **Farrell Kubena**, chief development officer of Success Foods Management Group; **Loddie Naymola**, SFA alumnus and entrepreneur; and **Debbie Scoggins**, business leader and entrepreneur.

“Our judges were outstanding and helped elevate this competition into a premier event,” Smilor said.

The first-place prize of \$10,000 went to Poolboy’s Smart-Floater by **Tyler Hubbard**, entrepreneurship senior from Austin, and his younger brother, **Carter**, general business sophomore, representing the Nelson Rusche College of Business. The compact, rugged and affordable solution is the first aesthetic, intelligent pool chemical monitor that actually talks.

DendroLogic’s Palm Cruise by **Christopher Marroquin**, forestry senior from Plano, and **Raviyah Anderson**, geospatial science senior from Weatherford, representing the Arthur Temple College of Forestry and Agriculture, earned the \$5,000 second-place prize. Also the winner of the \$1,000 Crowd Favorite Award, Palm Cruise is a tree-counting device that collects forest data with

enhanced elements such as GPS and digital outputs.

The \$2,500 third-place prize went to Ama's Tortilla Dough by **Elizabeth Perales**, psychology junior from Frisco, representing the College of Liberal and Applied Arts. Other members of the Ama's Tortilla Dough team included **Emily Zavala**, nursing sophomore from Woden; **Hannah Vasser**, accounting senior from Lorena; and **Naomi Waiser**, accounting junior from Houston.

The honorable mention ideas that earned \$1,250 each were Spring: The Student Calendar by **Daniel Antonio**, computer science junior from Dallas, and **Jarae Hadley**, cyber security graduate student from Lufkin, representing the College of Sciences and Mathematics, and HomeGymBuilder.com by **Jaxen Bond**, kinesiology junior from Round Rock, and **Andy Jacobson**, English sophomore from Fulshear, representing the James I. Perkins College of Education.

"This experience was nothing short of great for both Carter and me," Tyler Hubbard said. "We walked in with a plan and walked out with funding to start something from the ground up that we truly believe in."

To learn more about the competition, center and SFA's entrepreneurship academic program, visit sfasu.edu/ace.



Banking on the Future



Students Explore the Rise of Digital Assets

Rich Perez, vice president of innovation and strategy at the Texas Bankers Association, helped local bankers and Stephen F. Austin State University students demystify digital asset terms and understand their impacts at a spring banking and wealth management career day hosted by the Nelson Rusche College of Business' Chadwick Banking Program.

"By bringing in experts like Mr. Perez, the Chadwick Banking Program helps students gain understanding of the many complex issues facing banking today and exposes them to how the industry collaborates with technology companies, legislators and industry regulators to ensure the safe and sound implementation of technological innovation in this dynamic industry," said **David Kaiser**, director of the Chadwick Banking Program.

Perez encouraged attendees to watch banking closely.

"I've never seen the industry change

so much so quickly," Perez said. "Students, you are entering the market at a really interesting time.

There's so much opportunity out there. Continue to dig into it."

During his presentation, sponsored by SFA's Chadwick Banking Program and Rusche Finance Club, Perez first explained the difference between different types of digital assets. Those used in the U.S. include tokenized deposits, which are gaining recognition among banks as a logical next step in payments modernization rather than a speculative technology.

"This is just digitizing dollars in your reserves," Perez said. "Nothing more."

Another digital asset, cryptocurrency, is decentralized and volatile. One type of cryptocurrency, bitcoin, traded as high as \$126,000 in October 2025 but had fallen to \$70,000 by mid-March.

Stablecoins are a category of digital asset designed to maintain a stable value, typically pegged 1:1 to the U.S. dollar.

"It's a dollar that moves like email," Perez said. "It's instant, borderless, 24/7

and not a commodity."

Though considered more stable than speculative cryptocurrencies, stablecoins are currently issued primarily by nonbank entities including Circle, which issues USDC, and Tether. These companies are not subject to the same regulatory standards as banks insured by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, or FDIC. This disparity contributed to the passage of the Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for U.S. Stablecoins Act, or GENIUS Act, in July 2025.

However, advocates including the Texas Bankers Association argue that the legislation contains regulatory gaps that create an uneven playing field between nonbank stablecoin issuers and FDIC-insured institutions.

For more information on the Texas Bankers Association, visit texasbankers.com. For more information on SFA's Chadwick Banking Program, visit sfasu.edu/banking.



Society for Advancement of Management at International Business Conference

The Stephen F. Austin State University chapter of the Society for Advancement of Management received several awards at the SAM International Business Conference in March in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. SFA's chapter earned first place for Campus Chapter Performance in the large division, while students competed in academic and professional competitions including case presentations, written case competition, knowledge bowl and extemporaneous speech.

SFA students earned honors across multiple divisions, including **Austin Gartzman, Helena Easey, Evelyn Maure, Will Phelps, Lydia Sattler** and **Zala Ule**. Ule also received the National Outstanding Student Award and Student Advisory Council Leadership Medal and served on the Student Leadership Panel, sharing insights on leadership and organizational impact.

In addition to the student awards, SFA alumnus **Corey Johnson** '17 and '22 received the national Phil Carroll Advancement of Management Award in Human Resource Management. **Dr. Gina Harden**, SAM faculty advisor and associate professor of management information systems, received the Silver Outstanding Advisor Award and the national Phil Carroll Advancement of Management Award in Information Systems Management, marking a meaningful milestone as she prepares to retire after nearly three decades in higher education.

For more information on SFA's management program and SAM chapter, visit sfasu.edu/mgmtmkt.

Chapter Recognitions

Invitational Division (Austin Gartzman, Will Phelps)

Third – Case Presentation Invitational Division
Third – Written Case Competition Invitational Division
Third – Overall Team Invitational

Undergraduate Division (Helena Easey, Evelyn Maure, Issac Velasco)

Second – Overall Team Undergraduate Division
Third – Extemporaneous Speech Undergraduate Division
Third – Overall Individual Undergraduate

Open Division (Lydia Sattler, Zala Ule)

Third – Case Presentation Open Division
Zala Ule also contributed beyond competition by serving on a Student Leadership Panel, sharing insights on student leadership and organizational impact at the national level. She was further recognized with National Outstanding Student Award and the Student Advisory Council Leadership Medal.

Faculty Recognition

SFA faculty member Dr. Gina Harden received national recognition as the recipient of the Phil Carroll Advancement of Management Award in Information Systems Management.

Harden's work bridges the gap between technology and real-world application, preparing students to lead in an increasingly digital business environment. Her impact through teaching, research and innovation reflects the very best of management education. She was also honored with the Silver Outstanding Advisor Award.

Chapter Achievement

SFA was awarded:
First – Campus Chapter Performance Program (Large Chapter)
This distinction reflects the collective effort, leadership, and culture of excellence demonstrated by the entire SFA SAM organization.

Alumni Recognition

SFA alumnus Corey Johnson, MBA, Senior Culture Shaping Specialist at Pilot Company, was recognized as the recipient of the Phil Carroll Advancement of Management Award in Human Resource Management.

National Bound:

Eight SFA Students Advanced to FBLA Nationals

They advanced to the collegiate FBLA National Leadership Conference in June in Las Vegas. Pictured, from left, are Dr. Marice Kelly, faculty advisor for FBLA and assistant professor of business communication and legal studies in SFA's Nelson Rusche College of Business; Ty Powers, first-year economics major from Lufkin; Breanna Stephenson, accounting junior from La Porte; Jayce Scott, first-year finance major from Conroe; Kaylie Scalf, first-year entrepreneurship major from Rosenberg; DJ Baker, human development and family studies sophomore from Nacogdoches; and Lena Taylor, general business senior from Groveton. Not pictured are E'nailey Willis, finance junior from Arlington; Gaby Nelson, social work sophomore from Katy; and Rylee Bing, marketing sophomore from Jacksonville.



Eight students from Stephen F. Austin State University's Future Business Leaders of America student chapter earned honors at the collegiate FBLA State Leadership Conference in March in Dallas. They advanced to the collegiate FBLA National Leadership Conference in June in Las Vegas.

"These students have been truly dedicated to our student FBLA chapter and have studied hard for their competitive event tests for the Texas leadership conference," said **Dr. Marice Kelly**, faculty advisor for the student FBLA chapter and assistant professor of business communication and legal studies in SFA's Nelson Rusche College of Business. "Their hard work paid off, as they placed in the top four or higher in their categories. As their advisor, I am proud that they joined and have been dedicated to the SFA FBLA chapter."

DJ Baker, human development

and family studies sophomore from Nacogdoches, earned first place in the Business Communications and Foundations of Communications categories. As a nontraditional student and parent, she said her success at the competition was a big boost to her confidence and confirmation that her return to college after a 12-year hiatus was the right next step for her career.

"I initially faced a degree of apprehension regarding my return to the academic environment, especially recalling my previous, more isolated experience during the 2012-13 academic year," Baker said. "However, I am dedicated to ensuring that this chapter of my educational journey is both meaningful and impactful. To achieve this, I have actively sought out student organizations that facilitate professional development and provide experiences directly aligned with my career

aspirations."

By connecting with Kelly through her coursework, Baker learned about SFA's FBLA chapter and joined.

"Under Dr. Kelly's guidance, I gained the confidence to move beyond my comfort zone and participate in competitive events," Baker said.

Though she was allowed to complete the state exams remotely, Baker chose to attend the FBLA State Leadership Conference in person.

"This decision proved invaluable, as the professional development workshops prepared me for the FBLA National Leadership Conference and helped me establish a strong foundation for future professional engagements," she said. "My goal is to utilize my education to establish a vital resource for our community, addressing needs that I have identified throughout my life in this region."

In addition to Baker's first-place finishes, **E'nailey Willis**, finance junior from Arlington, earned first place in Foundations of Finance and fourth place in Business Law. **Jayce Scott**, first-year finance major from Conroe, earned first place in Parliamentary Procedures and fourth place in Organizational Behavior and Leadership.

Third-place finishes went to **Breanna Stephenson**, accounting junior from La Porte, in Foundations of Finance; **Gaby Nelson**, social work sophomore from Katy, in Organizational Behavior and Leadership; **Ty Powers**, first-year economics major from Lufkin, in Foundations of Economics; **Rylee Bing**, marketing sophomore from Jacksonville, in both Foundations of Selling and Foundations of Marketing; and **Kaylie Scalf**, first-year entrepreneurship major from Rosenberg, in both Impromptu Speaking and Foundations of Entrepreneurship. **Lena Taylor**, general business senior from Groveton, also competed.

For more information on SFA's FBLA student chapter, visit sfasu.edu/enab.

FBLA Honored at Lumberjack Achievement Awards



Stephen F. Austin State University's Future Business Leaders of America chapter was recognized for the second consecutive year with the Outstanding Commitment to Educational Programming Award at the annual SFA Lumberjack Achievement Awards, hosted by the Office of Student Involvement.

The award honors a student organization that has successfully presented educational programming that positively impacts the campus community. Selected by a panel of SFA faculty and staff judges, the chapter earned the distinction through the dedication and leadership of its student officers and members, whose efforts contributed to the success of numerous educational and professional development initiatives throughout the year. In addition to the chapter's achievement, FBLA President **Jayce Scott** received individual recognition as a Top 23 Freshman and was named a finalist for Emerging Student Leader of the Year, highlighting his leadership and commitment to student engagement.



SFA Graduate's Marketing Campaign Earns Best of Category Award From AAF

Recent Stephen F. Austin State University marketing graduate Isabel Jedmeers, of Little Elm, earned a Best of Category Silver Award from American Advertising Federation East Texas for her comprehensive AT&T marketing campaign. The project previously earned third place and a Judge's Award during the 2025 AAF National Student Advertising Competition. Dr. Marlene Kahla, professor of management and marketing in SFA's Nelson Rusche College of Business, was a faculty advisor for the project.



AN OPEN LETTER TO RUSCHE REVIEW READERS

Dear Rusche Review readers,

When I joined Stephen F. Austin State University in 2014 as an assistant professor, I did not imagine that my path would one day lead to serving as dean of the Nelson Rusche College of Business. I came to SFA with one primary goal: to help launch a new academic program for our students. That program became what is now Sports Business, one of the top five majors in the Rusche College of Business in terms of enrollment.

I originally went into higher education because I felt called to work with students. Early in my career, that calling was lived out directly in the classroom. Today, I still get to serve students but on a different scale by working with outstanding faculty and staff to create opportunities that help all of our students succeed. Over time, I have learned that the most meaningful work in higher education happens through collaboration, shared purpose and a clear commitment to student success.

Student-Centric

As I step into this role in a permanent capacity, I want students to know what kind of dean I hope to be. I want to be approachable and available. I never want students to think that coming to the dean's office means something is wrong. My door is open because I am here to support them, just as I am here to support the faculty and staff who inspire them every day. My hope is that when students walk across the stage at graduation, they know who I am, and I know who they are. I want to shake their hand, call them by name and celebrate everything they have accomplished.

In the coming years, I want to be very intentional about student engagement. I look forward to spending time with our student organizations, getting to know their officers, supporting their faculty advisors and helping remove barriers that keep those organizations from growing and succeeding. I am also excited to work closely with our Rusche Ambassadors as they represent the college to prospective students and external partners.

More than anything, I want the Rusche College of Business to be a place where students can challenge themselves, try new ideas and take risks in a supportive environment. Learning does not happen without making mistakes, and I want our students to feel comfortable failing forward by using setbacks as opportunities to grow, learn and become better leaders.

That commitment to students is also guiding the future of the college. Over the past year, we developed a new strategic plan, continued strengthening our Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business accreditation efforts and positioned the college for long-term success. At the heart of that work is a simple purpose: helping students learn, launch their careers and lead, both during their time at SFA and long after they leave our campus.

Industry-Engaged

We are being more intentional about student retention, engagement and the overall student experience, including adding a new staff position dedicated to those efforts. We are also focused on preparing students for the future of work. Artificial intelligence is changing every industry, and we have an opportunity to thoughtfully and ethically integrate AI into our curriculum and co-curricular experiences while doubling down on the durable skills that will always matter: critical thinking, problem solving, oral communication, written communication, etc. Together, those skills will prepare our graduates to succeed in an AI-augmented workplace and lead with confidence in a changing business environment.

I also see tremendous opportunity to expand entrepreneurship across both

the college and the university. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong at SFA, and the Rusche College of Business has an important role to play in helping students develop ideas, solve problems and bring new opportunities to East Texas and beyond.

None of this work happens alone. Our alumni, Executive Advisory Board, corporate partners and community leaders will continue to play a critical role in the future of the college. Their involvement goes far beyond hiring our graduates. They help us ensure what we teach remains relevant to the future of the workforce, bring real-world business challenges into the classroom, provide internships and career opportunities, and support initiatives that strengthen the student experience.

One of the things I have appreciated most since becoming dean is that when I visit with an alumnus, corporate partner or friend of the college about a need, the response is almost always the same: "How can I help?" That generosity gives me tremendous confidence in the future of the Rusche College of Business and in what we can accomplish together.

A Look Forward

As we look ahead, one of the most exciting opportunities before us is the addition of hospitality administration to the Rusche College of Business through the academic reorganization. Hospitality is a natural fit for our college. It connects strongly with areas such as entrepreneurship, sports business, marketing and management, and the program reflects many of the values we emphasize: experiential learning, industry engagement and career readiness. We are excited to welcome hospitality administration into the college and look forward to the opportunities this will create for students and faculty.

The future of business education is changing rapidly, but one thing will remain constant: our commitment to preparing students to lead with integrity, purpose and impact. I am honored to serve as dean, grateful for the people who make this college special and excited for the next chapter ahead.

Thank you for your continued support of the Nelson Rusche College of Business, our students and the future of business education at SFA.

Axe 'em, Jacks.



Dr. Jason Reese
Dean, Nelson Rusche College of Business
Stephen F. Austin State University

Dr. Jason Reese at a Glance

- Joined SFA in 2014
- Launched the sports business program
- Former assistant department chair, associate dean for faculty and administration
- Authored more than 30 publications and 60 professional presentations in the field of marketing and sports business

Education:

- PhD - Texas A&M University
- MS - Texas A&M University
- BS - University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

Fastenal-Sponsored Business Etiquette Dinner Strengthens Career Readiness



Where Networking Meets Experiential Learning

Students in the Nelson Rusche College of Business recently participated in the Fastenal-sponsored etiquette dinner as part of the personal selling course taught by **Kathryn Blevins**, lecturer of marketing. Designed to strengthen professional confidence and career readiness, the event provided students with hands-on experience in business dining, networking and professional communication.

The evening began with a networking reception where students practiced professional mingling with faculty members and business professionals from Fastenal. Students then participated in a formal seated dinner, where they received instruction on dining etiquette,

conversation strategies and workplace professionalism.

By combining mentorship, networking and experiential learning, the event helped prepare students for future interviews, client meetings and professional engagements.

Interested in becoming a corporate partner?
To learn more, visit sfasu.edu/cob/corporate-partnerships.





Rusche Cup: Student Sales Competition

The Rusche College of Business launched the Rusche Cup: Student Sales Competition this year as a new way to engage student organizations in a friendly, hands-on sales challenge. The idea, developed by Interim Associate Dean **Dr. Justin Blount**, invited organizations to sell Rusche College of Business branded polos to students, faculty, staff, alumni and members of the community while raising funds for their respective groups. Each organization had the freedom to design its own sales strategy, whether through online promotions, in-person outreach, order forms, pop-up tables or other creative approaches.

Throughout the competition, students gained practical experience in sales, marketing, pricing strategy and customer engagement while building pride in the Rusche College of Business. The competition concluded with a celebratory dinner and announcement at Napoli's, where the Society for Advancement of Management was named the winner. The organization earned a giant trophy, campus bragging rights and the title of the student organization best at sales.





GRADUATION

SPRING 2026

CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2026!

The Nelson Rusche College of Business proudly celebrated its spring 2026 graduates during recent commencement ceremonies at Stephen F. Austin State University. The occasion recognized the dedication, perseverance and accomplishments of students as they completed an important chapter in their academic and professional journeys. Throughout their time at Rusche, graduates gained hands-on experiences, built meaningful connections and developed the skills needed to lead in today's business environment. The college congratulates its newest alumni and looks forward to the impact they will make in their careers, communities and industries.

183

TOTAL COLLEGE OF BUSINESS DEGREES CONFERRED
156 UNDERGRADUATE, 27 GRADUATE

1 in 4*

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS GRADUATES ARE
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS *APPROXIMATELY



Where Connections Become Careers: College to Career Conference

The Rusche College of Business hosted its annual College to Career Conference in April, bringing together students, alumni, faculty and industry professionals for a day centered on professional growth, networking and career exploration. Guided by this year's theme, "Where Connections Become Careers," the conference was designed to create meaningful opportunities for students to engage directly with professionals across a wide range of industries.

According to **Allison Thornton**, director of the Career Passport program, the primary goal of the conference was to foster an environment where students could build relationships and gain exposure to career opportunities beyond the classroom.

"The more connections students make, the more opportunity there is for growth, experiential learning and discovering careers they may have never considered before," Thornton said.

Approximately 465 students from the Rusche College of Business participated in this year's conference alongside 55 employers, alumni and industry professionals representing fields such as banking, finance, entrepreneurship, hospitality, human resources, marketing and sports business. Many of the professionals involved were alumni of the Rusche College of Business, reinforcing the college's commitment to maintaining strong connections between current students and graduates.

One of the most notable additions to this year's conference was the networking luncheon, which featured a casual, low-pressure environment designed to encourage conversation between students and professionals. The luncheon included an outdoor lunch, finger foods and informal networking opportunities that allowed participants to interact outside traditional panel settings. Thornton noted that



Alumni, employers and faculty came together to help students master interviews, networking and professional communication.





Continued from page 47.

the luncheon received overwhelmingly positive feedback from professionals and students alike and helped many students begin stepping outside their comfort zones in professional settings.

The conference's keynote speaker was **Megan Owen**, chief executive officer of CLS Health and a Rusche alumna. During her presentation, Owen reflected on her professional journey while emphasizing the importance of leadership, listening, teamwork and self-awareness in the workplace. She encouraged students to recognize their strengths and understand how effective teams are built around diverse skill sets and perspectives.

Several breakout sessions and panel discussions generated strong student engagement throughout the day. One of the most attended sessions featured a networking panel with professionals including **Patrick Butts**, **Juan Gonzalez**, **Britt Sudduth** and **Hannah Willis**. Students also had opportunities to connect directly with employers during the career expo, between sessions and following panel discussions. These interactions allowed students to ask questions, gain career advice and begin building professional relationships with industry leaders.

Corporate partners and alumni continued to play a significant role in the success of the conference. Organizations such as Hilltop Securities, Fastenal and CBTx contributed support, professional participation and networking opportunities for students. Additional professionals traveled from across Texas and beyond to participate in panels and mentoring opportunities throughout the event.

The conference was also supported by a dedicated group of student leaders and volunteers who assisted with event logistics, panel facilitation, check-in and hospitality throughout the day. Student volunteers included **Kaylyn Zwerneman**, **Zala Ule**, **Lydia Sattler**, **Kailey Fischer**, **Rory Price**, **Logan Pantoja** and several additional student leaders who helped ensure the conference operated smoothly.

As the Career Passport program continues to evolve, the College to Career Conference remains an important component of the Rusche College of Business mission to prepare career-ready graduates through experiential learning and professional engagement. Thornton emphasized that even small moments of growth such as introducing oneself to a professional or initiating a conversation can have a lasting impact on students' confidence and future careers.



In the Business of Championships

Rusche College of Business is proud to celebrate our business student-athletes who were part of SFA's 2026 National Championship Cheer and Dance Teams. Their hard work, school spirit and commitment to excellence helped bring home national titles from Florida.



SFA CHEER



ZACHARY BOYDSTON



TRINITY CREWS



ALEXIS DAVIS



CALEB ENCARNACION



KYNLIE FOIT



ROBERT FORD



RACHAEL HEAD



COURTNEY JONES



SYDNEY JUNEKE



REED O'GRADY



JAMIE PAULDER



JOHN PAYNE



ADDISON RAMM



LEVI STRINGHAM



SHELBY TERNES



NOVIA WESTPHAL



MYLEE WILLIAMS

SFA DANCE



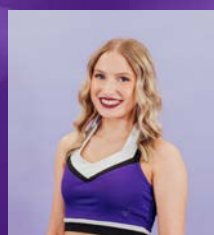
VIOLETT AMES



HANNAH PORTER



BRADLEE ROSS



AVA SIPKO



MADISON WEIR



CHARIS YIUW

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM ★ NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

Nelson Rusche College of Business

P.O. Box 13004, SFA Station

Nacogdoches, Texas 75962

GET CONNECTED WITH RUSCHE HOW TO BE INVOLVED AS AN ALUM

FOLLOW US ON OUR
SOCIAL ACCOUNTS



SCAN
HERE
TO GET
INVOLVED

REFER A HIGH-
PERFORMING STUDENT

JOIN THE LUMBERJACK
PROFESSIONAL NETWORK
ON LINKEDIN

RECRUIT OUR STUDENTS
FOR JOBS AND
INTERNSHIPS

ATTEND AN EVENT ON
CAMPUS OR IN A CITY
NEAR YOU

