Foreword by Gbolahan Shyllon:

Hope you guys had an amazing Christmas break! This newsletter is the culmination of events and activities of Duke MEMers during the fall 2009 semester and I am so proud to present this to you on behalf of the MEMPDC Communications Committee. I hope you find this issue very entertaining and educative.

I would also like to acknowledge committee members: Arjun Reddy, Asha Sunil, Elana Bobo, Reza Parang, Vaishnavi Kareddy, Shaun Lehman and Anitha Veerapaan for their invaluable contribution to this newsletter.

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We know why we love being in MEM. Ever wondered what our faculty and staff love most about the program?

Stop wondering and start reading!

Dr. Bradley Fox:
He enjoys seeing the growth and development of the students over time and how they mature through the programmatic efforts.

“Be passionate in everything you do!”

Dr. LaTondra Murray:
She feels excited to be in an environment where people are passionate about what they do, value inputs of people with industrial experience and are willing to share their ideas. She believes that this energizes her and stretches her energy to new levels.

“Luck is when preparation and opportunity meet. MEMers can make their own luck and drive their own destiny!”

Bridget Fletcher:
She realizes her dream of travelling around the world, everyday, by being a part of MEM. She loves getting to know the mix of cultures and backgrounds of the students and watches with pride as they move from orientation to graduation - learning so much along the way.

“Dress to impress and always be on time. Try to take the time to get to know someone new as often as you can, you’ll never know what they’d bring to your life!”

Ashley Ward:
She draws her energy from having people pop into her office at all times of the day and feels pretty lonely during summer when the students are not around! She can’t wait for each Fall when there’s a new batch of students pouring in to say Hi!

“Make the most of your time in MEM. Get to know your classmates and keep challenging yourself!”

Susan Brown:
She loves to work with young people who are enthusiastic, full of life and have big dreams. It makes her feel younger and makes her love her job and her life more everyday!

“Life is going to pass quickly- always take the time to enjoy the stage you are in!”

Erin Degerman:
Erin is new to MEM and works with Susan. Do drop by her office and make her feel welcome! She looks forward to learning more about the MEM family and says she’s sure we’re all wonderful!

“Think about why you are doing what you are doing!”

HEARD ON CAMPUS...
As the Newsletter Editor, I would like to thank everyone in the Communications Committee for their contributions in form of articles or endless support!

“Has a semester gone by already??” That was my first thought as I started to write this piece. The smartest decision I made last year was opting to attend Duke to do an MEM! My decision was followed by a lot of my friends going totally gaga over the fact that I would soon be a Blue Devil. Being a Dukie certainly has its advantages. The only question I got during my visa interview was whether I was a fan of Basketball! Duke’s reputation precedes it all over the world – at the Frankfurt security check, I was allowed to bypass a HUGE line when I told them that I was a student attending Duke!

I was definitely a bit intimidated coming here, but hey, who doesn’t like to be treated like royalty? Duke has this reputation of being warm, fun and one of the best schools to be in and I was NOT disappointed. I’ve been in love with Duke from Day One!

One of the great things about being a Dukie is that I’ve never felt like I’m missing out on something – in fact, we have so many opportunities to choose from, that the hardest thing to do is to prioritize. It’s like choosing fun over fun, and I never end up choosing something I wouldn’t enjoy!

I was so overwhelmed by the variety of subjects we have on offer. The magnitude of freedom offered to choose whatever I wanted, ranging from nanotechnology to modern dance, was simply amazing. I spent almost a whole month mulling over the various options, but at the end just went ahead and picked whatever I fancied at that moment (and they all turned out to be great choices by the way!) I love how challenging each of my courses are, and I never have to worry about getting stressed out – there’s always a party around the corner to loosen me up!

My first encounter with the absolutely smashing party scene at Duke was the Block Party that’s traditionally thrown to kick off the First Day of Class. A great mix of music, people, games and food – it left me craving more! MEM also organizes several get-togethers like Campout and house parties. Other days, when all I want is some simple activity to rejuvenate, I can watch a late evening movie at the Griffith Theatre, browse through the latest bestsellers at Perkins, or just grab a bite to eat from one of the many interesting outlets on the Plaza.

The reason I feel at home in Duke and in MEM is that I am accepted for who I am, complete with eccentricities et al. Everywhere I turn, I know I will bump into someone who will brighten my day with a smile. Even when I am bogged down by stress, I know I can expect something fun to come along my way. Every time I open the door of the MEM suite, I can expect a “Hi”, a friendly nod or the humming of someone lost in their iPod. Even years later, when I visit, opening the doors of the suite would just mean... I’m home!

Asha Sunil
The “alumni talk” section, is a new feature in our Newsletter and it aims to answer some of the most common questions asked in any networking event/information session. We have two alumni Dalila Dragnic-Cindric and Vidhan Srivastava sharing their thoughts about work and life post MEM.

DALIA DRAGNIC-CINDRIC, is a Global Commodity Manager at Lenovo within the Research Triangle Park area. On Monday, October 5, 2009, Gbolahan Shyllon conducted a phone interview with her.

Dragnic-Cindric is originally from Sarajevo, Bosnia. She came to the US in 1995 and completed her undergraduate degree in Physics (with a minor in Mathematics) at North Carolina Central University. She then started her career working at the Department of Radiation Oncology in the Duke University Medical Center. Here, she performed research in medical physics investigating treatments for sub-tissue cancer. During her work at Duke, she found out about the MEM program which was just starting out at the time. After networking with the director of the MEM program, Hadley Cocks, she decided to apply and was accepted into the program.

On classes she took in the MEM program:

When selecting her electives, Dragnic-Cindric focused on taking coursework that would serve her well in her current job at the radiation oncology department. She said “I particularly remember the product safety class which I think was very helpful to me”. She also took biomedical engineering classes along with the required core courses.

After talking to various people in the industry, she had offers from IBM and DELL. She wanted to stay in the research triangle park area with her husband (who also subsequently graduated from the MEM program) and so she decided to accept the IBM offer.

She said “The MEM program was really critical to restructuring our careers in life and it was definitely a big change for both of us. We both finally ended up in procurement and it was really great because the classes we took in the MEM program gave us a good base to build upon in terms of our knowledge of contracts, legal and business issues involved with both our jobs”

On her job as Global Commodity Manager at Lenovo:

Her job at Lenovo involves dealing with suppliers of the company by handling the front end contract negotiation and also monitoring supplier adherence to contractual terms all through Lenovo’s procurement processes. Dragnic-Cindric says “Procurement is now changing into a sort of supply chain management discipline and a lot of the issues I deal with on the job are not repetitive issues; these tricky issues have no precedents, and so you need to have a good approach to problem solving and also have a certain level of confidence that you can be decisive because sometimes not making a decision is more costly than making a wrong decision”.

According to Dragnic-Cindric, the jobs in today’s environment are more complex than before and in most organizations, you don’t stay confined to your discipline but will have to work across various disciplines (with different people) to achieve results. For her, it keeps the job interesting but can be very challenging at the same time.

On experiences in the MEM program:

During the MEM program she had a very busy agenda, combining work with the MEM coursework but the experience which has really stayed with her after the program is the emphasis on daily reading of the Wall Street Journal. “We were taught how to quickly scan through the Wall Street Journal for the most important information and we did this
throughout the program on a daily basis. To this day, that has stayed as quite an important habit for me, when I meet people socially I have so many topics I can talk about intelligently with the latest information”

She said this MEM experience has developed her ability to extract information which is important to her from most publications and business journals which she reads in her work life.

**On entry requirements of the technology industry:**

Dragnic-Cindric says that when she entered the workforce in 2001, it was one of the best times to join the industry as a new graduate; the base salaries were very high, many companies were offering signing bonuses and also stock options. She said “Today, the industry has shrunk with many layoffs, for example Lenovo has been hit with several rounds of layoffs and companies have learnt how to do a lot more with a lot less people. They have become very lean and new openings are happening a lot more rarely except for experienced candidates”

She says that it’s a lot harder now to get into the industry than when she entered. But according to her, it’s very helpful to target a company where you have a strong alumni network. She cited an example; when she first joined IBM, she noticed that many employees were from Michigan State University and she realized that Duke did not have a strong alumni network in employees around her age group. She recommends that MEM students focus their job search on companies with a strong Duke Alumni network because it gives an indication of the culture of the company regarding new hires.

**On performance indicators as Global Commodity Manager:**

“The big focus in the job now, with the lean structure of the company, is process improvement. All our processes must be lean and the steps in all our processes must add value” she says. For her job, she tries to focus on how to achieve departmental goals more effectively with the least amount of resources utilized. She says “I need to think about what we are doing that we shouldn’t be doing, what we can do better and faster, not necessarily by dumping more man-hours into it but by being smarter about it and improving the processes to the point where they are completely optimized”

Supplier relationship management is also a big focus for her job and it involves building a strong relationship with the company’s suppliers. This is necessary to give the company a good bargaining position in negotiation with these suppliers. She says “People skills are an important aspect of my job. Learning to listen is critical when managing your suppliers, paying attention to what they are telling you and also to what is being left out, that’s how you gather your position and you can figure out what your leverage is. This is very important for us in procurement”

**On working in a male-dominated industry:**

She recognizes the fact that her industry is male dominated unlike the health care industry and recommends that women starting out in this field should try to attach themselves to mentors who could render assistance when needed. She says “look for the alumni network [in your industry], connect with people as much as possible but also realize that inherently there are certain things that could set you back in your career, for instance if you’re on a path to promotion and you have a baby, that promotion could disappear” She said this is a reality of life and she encourages women to recognize that the decisions they make regarding family life may adversely affect their careers. According to her “It helps to have a certain level of maturity about it. Recognize that there is a time in life for everything; there is a time for active pursuit of a career and a time for pursuit of family values and having children. When you make this decision it’s important to know why you made your decision and stand by it”
On what she loves the most about her job:

She enjoys procurement negotiations and readily admits that she really values this aspect of the job. However, she also says she has a love-hate relationship with negotiations because they can get quite stressful. “It gets very intense; it takes many different [interpersonal] skills, so it’s not only the business knowledge you may have, but how successfully you can identify your own position in negotiation as well as the other parties’ position and then recognize the amount of leverage each party has before you actually get going with the negotiation” said Dragnic-Cindric.

On how she relaxes:

She regularly works out in the gym during lunch breaks at work and at home she enjoys being with her two children. She says “Nothing can relax you like an off-the-wall statement of a two year old. These are the best hours of my day, interacting with my toddler and learning about the world through his eyes”

She looks forward to December when she will begin working from home. “It’s one of the advantages we have today, with the internet, that we can work from home and we don’t have to be physically present at the office to get work done” she said.

On his job as an analyst at Blackrock Inc.:

“We’re an asset management firm,” says Vidhan. “So to put it in crude terms we take people’s money and invest it in the market. And to do that, [Blackrock] needs certain tools. The guys that I work with develop those tools.

Vidhan says that his team, the technology group, needs to develop the architecture of the technological tools that portfolio managers use to effectively manage their clients money. He says that it encompasses skills such as project management and interpersonal skills required to work effectively in a team.

On courses he took in the MEM program:

During his first semester, he took up a practicum with SAS along with another practicum at the Fuqua School of Business. Other technical electives he chose were Operations Management and Corporate Finance in the spring semester.

On why he selected the practicums, Vidhan said “If you have work experience, choosing mainly hardcore conceptual courses is fine. But I felt that the practicum would give me a more hands on experience. So it’s more of a personal choice. The practicum also helped me adjust to a new culture and society”

On work experience at Blackrock so far:

“It’s definitely a mix of both team work and individual initiative in accomplishing projects. You have to talk to people who are working in the financial field to complement your technological knowledge in providing technology solutions for the business.”

On entry requirements:

Vidhan explains, “In finance you’ve got to learn the fundamentals. I know technology – I understand how it works. I know excellent talented people who couldn’t find a job last year. It’s the economy – the company is looking at their bottom line and this
won’t allow them to hire people right now. It’s a totally different picture with Blackrock this year. They’re still doing very well”.

Advice

Talking on the job search process, Vidhan says that you have to know your target company. You have to do thorough research on the company and be prepared to answer any questions about that company. Also, it’s important that you try to talk to people who work there to know what it’s like. Practice interview techniques relevant to your target industry.

Finally, take the right courses that would create an easy pathway for you to be integrated into the industry of your choice.

What kind of people do well at Blackrock?

Vidhan believes that team spirit is a very important characteristic in Blackrock. Also being able to demonstrate initiative in performing your tasks goes a long way in helping you succeed in the company.

He says, “There are 10 or 20 different types of parameters for performance management review at Blackrock Inc.”

On clubs/activities he participated in during the MEM program:

“Duke is a huge university and you have a lot of clubs”, he says.

He participated in the Duke Smart home club which was a yearlong project. He joined because he was interested in new age technology.

He also participated in the Duke Startup Challenge and did some research with Dr. Glass on a Battery Electric Vehicle.

However, he feels like nine months isn’t exactly enough time to complete all these activities.

The most intriguing aspect of his job

“The most intriguing aspect is the amount of problem solving and use of analytical ability that the job requires. It definitely makes it very interesting.”

“The group I work with is the technology group. The way it works is that it is a more stretched out structure. For a company like Microsoft for example, you have a group of people working for 6-10 months on developing a patch for the software, whereas at Blackrock the software projects are usually about three-four weeks. So it’s very dynamic. There are lots of problems to solve in a short time and you get to meet a lot of interesting people.

On rest and relaxation to reduce stress:

Vidhan says that he routinely puts in 12 hour work days. To relax he says he hangs out with friends, explores new places and goes on the occasional river rafting adventure.

He strongly believes in learning outside of work and proposes taking classes at the local universities as a way to achieve this.

He plans on taking the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) exam soon.

Finally, he commented that the MEM is a great program and he had a good time even though it was very intense!
“TETE-A-TETE” is a section where we give you an experience of a dinner conversation with a very familiar person whom you’d love to get to know more about. And who wouldn’t like to know C.J. Skender better?

On Thursday, November 12, 2009, Gbolahan Shyllon conducted an interview with Charles J. Skender, an Adjunct Professor at the Fuqua School of Business and at UNC-Chapel Hill. The interview took place in his office at the Fuqua School of Business.

C.J’s background:

C.J. Skender was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1954. He captained three sports while at Susquehanna Township High School. He holds academic degrees from Lehigh University and Duke University. He attended Lehigh on a basketball scholarship, graduating magna cum laude. He worked as an auditor for Deloitte Haskins and Sells in Philadelphia for three years. He has obtained eleven professional certifications in accounting, financial planning, insurance, and management.

On his innate love for numbers he said: “As a child, I was fascinated with math problems and sports. I discovered I could compute baseball batting averages in my head while running to first base. So I decided to major in accounting and finance as an undergrad.”

On growing up in Pennsylvania:

“My father passed away when I was eleven. My mother raised me, a younger brother and a younger sister by herself. Mom is an amazing woman. At various points in my life, I’ve wanted to be a priest, deejay, coach, teacher, musician, accountant, bartender, taxi driver, actor, paperback writer, talk show host and stand-up comic. Early in my career, somebody wrote on a course evaluation that I possessed all the attributes of a great comedian, except for timing, delivery and decent material.”

On his Duke educational experience:

By the time he arrived at Duke for the MBA program, C.J. was married. “I casually brought up grad school on our wedding night. Our first child was born in August, 1979, the day before I arrived in Durham. I like to think I was pretty social here, though I was not exactly a party animal.” On his decision to go into academia, C.J. says, “During the second year of my MBA studies, I interviewed for a tax job and was within 24 hours of accepting the offer. Dean Tom Keller came to me and said another faculty member was taking a year’s leave of absence. I reckoned it would be exciting to teach full-time for a year. One year has turned into more than thirty.” Next spring, C.J. will begin his fifth different decade at Duke. He has taught more than 200 classes here. “I love being an academic. I found my calling. I have a true passion for teaching.”

On the MEM program:

“I have been working with MEM students since the program began. This is my 13th group of MEM students. Hadley Cocks’ son Josiah was in my first class during the spring of 1998. It is truly an outstanding program. The students are all committed and very interested in learning. They are fun and friendly. The program provides a great service in fulfilling the need for engineers to acquire meaningful business knowledge. It yields a mini MBA with an engineering focus in a short time frame. The program is very diverse. Students come here from all parts of the world. In the 1970s, most students I taught were from the United States. Jeff
Glass and Brad Fox and the staff do a phenomenal job.”

**On challenges teaching MEM students:**

C.J. said, “I challenge myself to try to make things interesting and at the same time relevant in every class.” He enjoys the walk over to the Pratt school for his lectures. He has always held his classes at the engineering school. “I just figured it was easier for one person to journey to Pratt instead of having more than 100 students hoof it to Fuqua.”

**On reducing the amount of content in the Finance course:**

“I believe I have trimmed the material down to a manageable amount. The truth is that I can’t possibly test students on every concept I teach. I simply want students to be exposed to all things finance and accounting related. The course provides a good balance of material. Although I know some students may not agree,” he added with a grin. C. J. also mentioned that students should focus on the meat (“or asparagus, if vegetarian”) of the subject.

**On his course in the spring semester:**

“For the advanced corporate finance course, we delve deeper into the concepts and explore more detail not covered in the fall class. We cover more working capital management, investments, capital structure, financing, mergers and acquisitions as well as international issues. There’s just more depth.”

**On distance learning:**

He mentioned that he enjoys this method since it helps students who may have to miss class. He remarked, “I have done it twice now and it is beneficial to those who are located miles from North Carolina as well as any who work during the day and can’t watch the classes until later in the evening. I have had great experiences with distance students. They send me lots of emails. They watch all the classes and do very well in the assignments and on the exams. I think distance education is a splendid idea. I’m glad it has been instituted here.”

**On his famous neckties and bowties:**

“I have been receiving neckties and bowties as gifts for more than 40 years now. I still have the ties I wore in high school. I find it hard to throw any of them away. I always wear a bow tie on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. I wear neckties the other days. I have been following this schedule for years and I simply can’t bring myself to deviate from this pattern.”

**On his job as a Disc Jockey:**

“I worked as a DJ in college. My handle was ‘CJ the DJ.’ I was also known as ‘the Cobra.’ I love music. I went to the program director and asked if I could host a show. I still have hours of tapes from those programs.” He remarked that listening to lyrics multiple times on the job made him relate to lines from different songs. “I always thought broadcasting would be a neat career to pursue, but I definitely prefer teaching.”

**Career advice for MEM students:**

“We have just gone through the deepest downturn since the great depression. I think the economy will turn around during the next 18 months, perhaps sooner if the unemployment situation gets better. In my mind, this will be the tell-tale sign that we have recovered. Students should talk to lots of people in their chosen field, especially with those who are doing what you want to do. If you’re fortunate to land your dream job, make yourself a value-added employee. Always do more than what is required.”

**Do you ever get stressed?**

“Yes, occasionally. I’m human. I have always enjoyed spending time with family. Now that my three children are grown, it’s more about sharing time with my wife. I call her ‘my bestest buddy’. I also watch ballgames, listen to music and watch movies. Every day, I try to learn something that might appeal to me or might excite my students, whether it is music or entertainment or finance & accounting.”
Students often lament that one of the biggest disadvantages of living in Durham is that there’s nothing to see or do. Never despair! Elana Bobo, has compiled a list of places you can visit and things you can do within the Triangle Area.

Go to a Museum!

Anyone who has visited the Met or the Getty might scoff at the relatively succinct collection at the North Carolina Museum of Art (2110 Blue Ridge Road, Raleigh; 919-839-6262; www.ncartmuseum.org). But the lack of tour bus crowds means unfettered access to the Old Masters and contemporary heavyweights like Anselm Kiefer. The real treat is the adjacent Museum Park, more than 164 acres of open fields and woodlands punctuated by environmental art like Cloud Chamber, a stone hut that acts as a camera obscura, with a small hole in the roof projecting inverted, otherworldly images of slowly swaying trees on the floor and walls.

If you don’t have a car, try keeping it a big closer to home by heading to the Nasher Museum of Art. There, you can check out the new Andy Warhol exhibit and have lunch at the delicious café. Admission is free to students, just show your id!

Go Green(er)!

The Scrap Exchange (548 Foster Street, Durham; 919-688-6960; www.scrapexchange.org) is a “nonprofit creative reuse center” specializing in industrial discards or, for those not versed in eco-jargon, a bazaar of modestly priced former junk donated by Carolinians and scavenged from local businesses that include a hosiery mill, a zipper factory and a parachute plant. See the website for more details.

Play Outside!

One of the Triangle’s charms is that its urban trappings are so easy to escape. A 10-mile drive from downtown Durham brings you to Eno River State Park (6101 Cole Mill Road, Durham; 919-383-1686;
www.ncparks.gov). Its trails pass through swaying pines and follow the river past patches of delicate purple-and-yellow wildflowers and turtles sunning themselves on low branches in the water.

Root for the Home Team

Go to a Duke game! Even if you didn’t get tickets through the graduate student campout process, there’s always a walk-up line. Take the opportunity to go to a Duke game (try a Men’s game and a Women’s game). Visit goduke.com to get tickets.

See a Show

Nirvana played at the Cat’s Cradle (300 East Main Street, Carrboro; 919-967-9053; www.catscradle.com) for the first time in pre-“Nevermind” 1990 to about 100 people. A year later Pearl Jam played to three times as many, filling just half the standing-room-only space. This summer the Cradle, just a mile from downtown Chapel Hill, hosts acts like Akron/Family and Camera Obscura that probably won’t be playing for such small crowds for long. Ticket prices vary but $15 is about average.

Try a New Bar!

At some point, you get tired of main street. For something different, try the Raleigh Times Bar (14 East Hargett Street, Raleigh; 919-833-0999; www.raleightimesbar.com) was packed well before Barack Obama showed up the day of the state’s Democratic primary. The owner, Greg Hatem, painstakingly restored the century-old building that once housed its namesake newspaper and decorated the walls with old newspaper clippings, paperboy bags and other artifacts from the defunct daily. Mr. Obama bought a $2 Pabst Blue Ribbon (and left an $18 tip), but anyone not campaigning might choose one of the more than 100 other beers ($1 to $68), including esoteric Belgians and local brews you won’t find elsewhere.

Taco Time

Anyone not on a hunt for serious Mexican food might drive past Taqueria La Vaquita (2700 Chapel Hill Road, Durham; 919-402-0209; www.lavaquitanc.com), an unassuming freestanding structure with a plastic cow on its roof, just five minutes from Duke’s campus. But if you did, you’d miss tacos ($2.19) made with house-made corn tortillas, uncommonly delicate discs topped with
exceptional barbacoa de res (slow-cooked beef) or carnitas (braised-then-fried pork) that you eat at one of the picnic tables out front.

Try Real Southern BBQ

Small towns and back roads, not cities, have a monopoly on great barbecue. What makes the Pit (328 West Davie Street, Raleigh; 919-890-4500; www.thepit-raleigh.com) a striking exception is Ed Mitchell, the legendary master of the eastern North Carolina art form of whole hog cooking. Now instead of trekking 100 miles to porcine meccas like Ayden and Lexington, you can dig into pilgrimage-worthy chopped or pulled pork — made from pigs purchased from family farms and cooked for 10 to 14 hours over coals and hickory or oak — just a short stroll from the Capitol Building. A chopped barbecued pork plate with two sides and greaseless hush puppies costs $12.

Some of ideas were taken from http://travel.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/travel/14hours.htm
HOT SHOTS!

We survived Campout!

We dressed to impress at the Career Fair...  
... And lent a hand to Habitat for Humanity
We dressed Up, We dressed Down!