Hello MEMers!

Thanksgiving season is upon us, and I hope you are all excited to spend time with family or friends. This month’s issue is perhaps one of our biggest, covering topics from all angles, including an interview with Brad Fox, Diwali at Duke, Faculty Lunches, Alumni interviews, and a lot more!

I would like to personally thank my team in the Communications Committee for all their efforts, we hope you have as much fun reading this issue as we did creating it!

Thanks, and enjoy!

Chibulu (Lulu) Luo
Director, PDC Communications Committee

THANKSGIVING, as the name implies, is an American holiday dedicated to expressing thankfulness for those things which we are most grateful. Americans celebrate the holiday by spending the day cooking a delectable dinner with close family and friends. Dinners traditionally consist of an array of favorite dishes, including turkey, ham, stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, rolls, yams, and not to mention an assortment of pies and other desserts. Before partaking in the meal, it is common for each person to name those things for which they are most thankful. So if you are invited to a Thanksgiving feast, be sure not to miss out on this delicious occasion!

Editors of this issue: Chibulu Luo, Brady Spenrath and Jessica Liu
A DISCUSSION WITH MEMP’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR BRAD FOX

How did you get involved with MEM Program?

I started working at Duke in 2003. After working with General Electric for several years, I got an opportunity to learn more about the program through Dr. Jeff Glass. Working in industry for so long made me understand the value of an MEM degree to an engineer. Being able to understand the business process and manage projects at the early stages of one’s career is highly valuable.

Do you have any advice for students as they think about which courses to take?

We have kept the MEM program flexible and students should take up courses of interest to them, develop analytical skills that are broadly acceptable to solve complex problems, understand current situations and optimize solutions. Also, working in a diverse environment enhances their people skills and leadership qualities.

With a number of years in industry how did you decide to do transition to the academic world?

I had an interest in teaching and influencing people in their learning process. The Duke MEM Program was something that I believed in, and I also appreciated the quality of education at Duke in general.

What is your dream or goal for MEM program in the next 5 years?

To make MEMP more well-known within academic institutions and industries, so that we no longer have to explain who we are. It would be great to see some of our alumni to reach senior positions in visible companies (both start-ups and large organizations). This is one of the ways to demonstrate the value added by MEM.

When compared to an MBA, MEM is not a well-known professional degree. How should students deal with challenge?

I think MEM gives students the right amount of skills and knowledge to position themselves well. We have kept the program flexible for the benefit of students. Students should take advantage of this by structuring their courses to be relevant to their field interest. Duke has also been involved in building this program through its association with the MEM Consortium, a group some of the nation’s top schools offering MEM programs. Though overall, students might face problems in their job search due to the computerized HR Recruitment processes. I suggest that students use networking to talk about the benefits of the program to recruiters.

By Monica Gavirangaswamy
“The state of North Carolina first became known to me when I saw artist Thomas Kinkade’s beautiful paintings of the Smoky Mountain in the sunset and cottages in Christmas snowfalls.”

Being originally from China, the prospect of receiving my graduate education from one of the top schools in the U.S. excited me! After a long 16-hour flight from Shanghai, I finally arrived at Duke on August 11th. From the moment I set foot on the Duke Campus, I loved it! The historic, yet modern buildings, the tall trees whose yellow fall leaves scattered the pavements and the rush of students getting to class, put me at ease. Instantly, the sadness I felt from leaving my family in China disappeared. While I knew that adapting to the American culture would be difficult, it was comforting to know that I would not be alone as an international MEM student.

Now that I am three months into the MEM program, I thought it would be interesting to talk to other international students about their experiences in the U.S. so far. Personally, understanding American “Pop Culture” was most difficult. When I sit in the MEM Suite and casually listen to the conversations among other students, I am unable to relate to the TV shows or celebrities they talk about with enthusiasm. For students I talked to, most difficult is the challenge of keeping up with coursework due to the language barrier. Yiran Zhou, a software engineer who worked for one year in Japan, thought that the program would be less intense than his former engineering training. But he admitted that he was wrong, “I thought the MEM program would be easy, but I often find myself staying up late at night to do assignments,” he says. Zhou was also pleasantly surprised by the number of girls enrolled in the program, “In China, engineering programs are often male dominated.”

Similarly, Chinese student Ben Leung says that the courses are intense because he was initially unfamiliar with the American style of teaching. In contrast to China, being involved and contributing in class is the most important aspect of learning in the U.S. After graduation Leung worked in Hong Kong for a few years as a manager trainee. He came to Duke because he hopes to develop himself academically and improve on his communication skills. “I hardly speak English China,” he says, “During group study with other MEM students, I often find it difficult to understand and follow the discussion. But when thinking about my future career, being able to communicate effectively definitely helps; I develop the skill every day in MEMP.”

Another issue is the inability to visit Durham’s shopping malls and restaurants due to insufficient public transportation. Originally from big cites, Leung and Zhou didn’t expect that not having a car would be a problem in Durham. But for those who have cars like Wenhao Liu, driving in North Carolina is fun. “I like that I am able to visit places outside of Durham” he says.

But all in all, students agree that studying and living in the US has been a great experience so far. What makes the MEM program most unique and fascinating is the diversity of students within it. Interacting with individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds is a rare opportunity that allows us to build a network of friends from different continents.

By Xin Hong
Diwali is one of the important festivals in India. It is the festival of lights, a time to get together with family and share great moments. Diwali translates to “Deepavali” in Sanskrit which means “row of lamps”. In India, people clean their houses, decorate it with lamps and colorful rangoli’s (similar to the one we had during the Friday seminar on Indian Cultural presentation).

Staying away from home during Diwali is hard for many Indian students, and the celebrations at Duke helps them feel like they are a part of the festivities happening at home. It is not only about great food, but also about connecting with friends and family members and celebrating with fire crackers, colorful rangoli, and cultural events.

Thanks to the student bodies and the administration at Duke, there were many events organized for students who wanted to feel the essence of Diwali.
Thursday, November 10th —

“Quite honestly, the only reason I enjoyed corporate work was because I could wear fashionable clothes everyday”

This semester, CDAR hosted a Faculty Lunch with C.J. Skender— one of MEMP’s most interesting and entertaining professors. The discussion was informal, and C.J. shared several personal stories and career highlights. As many of you already know, C.J. worked for three years as a full-time accountant in the early stages of his career. “Quite honestly, the only reason I enjoyed corporate work was because I could wear fashionable clothes everyday”, he says jokingly. C.J. admits that he owns an astounding 700 ties and bowties! “I have kept all the ties I have ever worn, including the ones I wore to my first job” he says.

Shortly after getting married, C.J. returned to the academic world and enrolled as a full-time student with the Duke MBA program in 1978. “At the time, Fuqua was only known as the School of Business; this of course was before Mr. Fuqua came and donated a lot of money to the school,” C.J. recalls with a laugh. During his second year at Duke, C.J. began preparations to return to a career as an accountant and interviewed with several accounting firms. Twelve hours prior to accepting an offer with a top firm, the Business School Dean approached C.J. with a job. A senior faculty member was leaving for a year to teach at another university, and a replacement was required for this period. “I accepted the offer in an instant.” he says, “Actually, I did not tell the Dean at the time, but I would have done the job for free.”

C.J.’s strong passion for teaching is the reason why he has stayed at Duke for over three decades. He has also taught students at UNC, Meredith Women’s College and North Carolina State.

In his free time, C.J. enjoys listening to music and watching movies. When asked how he is able to recite excerpts from different movies and songs at the beginning of each of his classes, C.J. admits that he can watch the same movie over 600 times! “I usually play a movie over and over in my office as I do work, and before you know it, you can recite the entire movie verbatim” he says.

Most enjoyable were the stories C.J. shared about his wife, three children and pet Jardine - an African parrot that he bought for his daughter in lieu of a puppy. “I told her if she kept her room clean for a year, I would get her a puppy. Funny thing is she did keep her room clean for the year, but I did not get her the puppy. I got her a bird instead!” he laughs.

Faculty lunches are a great way to converse with professors informally. Over the next couple weeks, CDAR is planning future lunches with Brad Fox and John Nicholson

By Chibulu Luo
MEMers showed up in style to celebrate the Halloween weekend!
FALL FORMAL

Held in Von Canon Hall in the Bryan Center on November 5th. There was plenty of great food and alcoholic beverages for everyone. Guests enjoyed the DJ’s dance beats and casino games, including craps, blackjack, and poker. Those who did well at the tables had a better chance to win prizes in a raffle held by the SAC.
Anne Ryan is an MEM '08 graduate who works as a Support Team Lead/Support Engineer within Palantir Technologies, a company which provides data analysis software packages to other organizations. She graduated with a bachelor’s in Computer and Systems Engineering/Computer Science from RPI and worked for four years at IBM before joining the MEMP. Anne agreed to be questioned as part of the series of interviews with MEM alums. In the following Q&A, Anne provides some useful insight as to what it means to be an MEM alum and a unique career path available to program graduates.

What are the daily duties of someone with your position? Long term responsibilities?

As a Support Engineer, I am a product expert who acts as a resource for our customers, partners, and internal business development team. As the Support Team Lead, I get to serve my team and help them do their daily jobs, but also help shape an environment around them that highlights their strengths, increases their productivity and job satisfaction, and helps each individual, the team, and the organization grow.

What are your favorite aspects of your job?

I love helping our customers solve their problems through the use of our software. I also love helping my team build their skills and get satisfaction out of their job. I am also really excited to help build something great with Palantir by providing a lifeline back to the development team and skilled QA team back in our home office.

How has your MEM degree helped you in your career path?

The most important thing I learned in MEM was actually from the workshops and seminars, not classes. Here are a few points:
1. Always continue to learn from all sorts of different people.
2. Networking is incredibly important and valuable. Put more into a relationship than you expect to get out of it.
3. Always remember the validity of soft skills; practice them constantly.
4. Always ask friends to proofread your resume!

What is your advice for someone looking to leverage their MEM degree to break into your field?

You have an opportunity with your MEM degree to learn from an incredible group of people. Don’t miss an opportunity to meet different people and learn! Keep in touch with your classmates. Honestly, I don’t think my MEM degree specifically helped me in my field – it was everything I learned from earning the degree that helped.

How did you find your current position?

I found it through networking. I met a fellow IBM intern one summer while working in IBM’s RTP office, and we kept in touch over the years. He called me one day to let me know that he’d left Microsoft for a startup, and asked for my resume. I interviewed, got an offer, and moved out to Palo Alto, CA after MEM graduation in 2008.

By Trevor Clizer
Ankit graduated from MEMP in 2008 with an area of focus in healthcare. Prior to entering the program, he attended medical school at the M.S University of Baroda in India and served as an Observing Physician at the Duke University Medical Center. He is currently a Healthcare Consultant at Children’s Hospital Boston-Harvard Medical School.

Why did you choose to pursue a MEM degree after graduating from medical school?

During my final few years of medical school in India, I realized the severe lack of process efficiency in hospitals. Medical education isn’t streamlined in colleges in India, and I wanted to experience better medical performance. In MEM, I did not take any engineering courses. Instead I chose all healthcare electives in Fuqua and BME. Once I finished these courses, I had a better idea of performance improvement in the US.

What does your typical work day consist of, and what are your primary roles and responsibilities?

As a Healthcare Consultant, I primarily work with physicians and examine the procedures they perform on patients, the prescriptions they write out, and other forms of treatment they engage in. I create a database of this qualitative data and compare the information with the rest of the US and the world and ultimately make recommendations on how doctors can improve their clinical practices. I have several meetings throughout the day that require working on cross functional teams (physicians, executives at Children’s Hospital, data coordinators). We work together to determine what resources are needed to make the changes suggested and what is feasible cost wise. Along with quality improvement, I am also involved with clinical research and usually handle around four to twelve projects at a time.

How has MEM coursework helped you in your job?

When I was in MEM, I took Dr. Glass’s Management of High Tech Industries and Dr. Fox’s Project Management classes. I also worked on three different projects in Fuqua and MEM-Parsons, Biodume, and Affinergy. These were real time projects that worked with real-time data and required me to utilize project management tools with respect to quality, scope, time, and budgeting. These concepts are applicable to what I do as a Healthcare Consultant, and I apply them every day. I also regularly use marketing exercises such as cost benefit analysis, 6 Sigma, and value stream mapping.

How did you find your current job?

I graduated from MEM in December 2008. September 2008 had one of the biggest recessions in the US, and it took me six months to find a job. I applied mostly through eRecruiting and contacts. I had many friends that obtained jobs from the Career Center/eRecruiting, but as a physician there weren’t many choices for me. I eventually ended up getting a job through one of the contacts through MEM. Four months into job searching I was getting desperate and wanted to talk to more people. I sent a message through LinkedIn and Facebook stating my qualifications and that I was actively seeking a job. One of my classmates whom I barely conversed with but was friends on Facebook/LinkedIn replied back with a job opportunity. After three interviews, I got the job.

What is next for you in the future?

In the next few years, I would like to apply to become a Senior Healthcare Consultant within a larger hospital. I would also like to transition more into management consulting. Five to ten years down the line I might consider starting a company with a few entrepreneurial friends.

What advice would you give to current MEM students?

One of my biggest assets during MEM was doing real time cases i.e. practicums. There were opportunities to work with real companies and solve real problems. Another thing that is very important is going back to the class lectures/slides/handouts. It’s been three years since I’ve graduated, but I still look at those notes. Taking notes in seminar has also helped. Regarding the current job situation and market, I would say that your biggest assets are the people around you. It is important to stay in touch with classmates.

By Jessica Liu
ALUMNI PROFILE: KEDDY CHANDRAN (ARPA-E)

Keddy Chandran (MEM ‘09) did his undergrad from Duke (BME ’07) and founded the Synthetic Biology club. During his MEM, he worked with Stanford Technology Ventures Program and went on to work for the Dept. of Energy for 2yr. He currently works as a commercialization adviser in the Advanced Research Projects Agency—Energy (ARPA-E) in Washington D.C.

Where are you originally from and where did you do your undergrad?

I grew up in Canada and went to Duke for my undergrad. I majored in BME and founded the Synthetic Biology club at Duke.

Why did you choose MEM and how do you think those courses help in your current job?

I wanted to grow more beyond my core major and work more on the interface between technical skills and business. Although it’s rare for any of the courses to be directly used in the job, my current job profile at ARPAe involves researching several new technologies created out of the DoD and finding ways to commercialize the innovations (exactly what MEM hopes to offer!)

Tell us briefly about your career path after MEM and how did you land the job e.g. eRecruiting, career fair, networking etc.?

During my time at Duke, I worked in a project with Christina Johnson (ex-Dean of the Pratt School) who helped me with getting the job at DoE. Another time which changed my perspective was when I attended a lecture by Tom Friedman. I had landed up interviews with St. Jude Medical visa career fair but this talk inspired me to change my trajectory into clean-tech. During the MEM, Prof Fox sent out a mail regarding a program at Stanford called Stanford Technology Ventures Program (STVP) which focuses on global sustainability and fulfilling unmet needs. The program was to think of issues regarding food and come up with solutions to solve the problems. I worked with an international team and did this project concurrently with MEM and flew down to California to attend few conferences. This was a great experience and one of the best opportunities in the MEM program and I would definitely recommend this to anyone.

Give us a brief description of your daily routine and job profile? When do you wake up and got to bed?

I currently work as a commercialization advisor with the Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy (ARPA-E) and lot of the work involves finding out new ways to fund risky technologies which may have potential value. It also involved building relationships with institutional clients like Ingersoll Rand and Johnson Controls. It also involves organizing several conferences (past speakers include Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bill Gates) for the ARPA-E innovation summit.

Finally, do you have any tips for the current MEM batch?

Try to branch out as much as possible and look for new avenues in careers. Have really strong self-confidence and networking matters the most.

By Vaibhav Gajulapalli
HAVE A WONDERFUL THANKSGIVING BREAK

For more information on any of the stories shared in this issue of MEMorandum, contact us at mempdc.duke@gmail.com

Also visit our website at mempdc.pratt.duke.edu

Thank you