



College of Business Administration
Commercial Banking Program

Marquette Banker

“A new generation of bankers”

Department of Finance

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Let me first apologize for the lateness of this newsletter. There have been many things going on, and “in the works” with regard to the Commercial Banking Program here at Marquette University. To begin, and many of you are already aware of this, I have decided that this would be my last year at Marquette University as the Director of the Commercial Banking Program and Professor. This has been a tremendous and exhilarating experience for me, and one that has energized me over these past ten years. I do this with some sadness, as it has been my distinct pleasure to serve the College of Business Administration, and most of all, my students. Nevertheless, I am most optimistic for the future, and a continuance of what has begun at Marquette University, and what will continue for many years to come.

This program is important for the industry, and I will continue to support and encourage the growth of this program in the future as I gain a bit more flexibility in my life. Over the past several months, since I have communicated my intentions, we have been busy actively seeking appropriate replacements to take this program to the next level. With all of your support and encouragement we have accomplished much and developed a solid foundation from whence to grow. I intend to stay involved on the advisory board, and certainly engaged with Marquette University teaching on a part-time basis, as well as working on building our executive education programs that may benefit the industry. Given the depth which has been built into this program, including developing the entire curriculum, a club, recruiting, field trips, study abroad leadership, fund raising, managing and securing internships and jobs, annual conferences, authoring textbooks and more, this program has become a robust initiative. As a result, my position will be split into a full-time director and full-time academic professor to teach the courses developed. We are well along in this process and will be in a position to make some announcements very soon, and certainly will be highlighting the incumbents in the spring newsletter, my last. This indicates the commitment Marquette University and the College of Business Administration have for this program. I am most comfortable with this direction and will continue to support its growth.



I have been most thankful for the many relationships I have developed over these years and I hope to remain in touch with you all and, of course, my students and alum in the industry. As Douglas MacArthur famously said, “old soldiers never die, they just fade away...” The same can be said for professors, only that I would leave out the “old” part. I don’t intend to stop, but wish to continue to be engaged in, and contributing to, the industry in my next phase. To that end as an Emeritus Professor I will retain my Marquette email and will continue to be accessible in the future, and I hope you remain in touch as well.

Finally, we have achieved a major milestone with this program. This year, 2026, is fully ten years since the inception of the Commercial Banking Program at Marquette University. I accepted the director position in 2015, and began establishing an advisory board and building the curriculum we now use, at that time. Our first advisory board meeting was held in late 2015. Truly a milestone, and we intend to celebrate. Invitations are about to be sent to you all for an event we have scheduled for Friday, April 17th, from 6 to 9 pm to bring students, alumni from the program, advisory board members, founders, contributors, faculty, class participants, and friends of the program to join with us to celebrate this milestone. The event will be held at the Milwaukee County Historical Society, pictured above. We hope you can find the time to join us, and celebrate what you have helped to make a reality.

Program Enrollment and Results

Over the past fall semester we added twelve students to the program, with more being interviewed this semester. This year and last has seen significant awareness and interest in the program. I am delighted with the results and continue to be excited about the enrollment in my Introduction to Commercial Banking class, which has seen approximately 60 students in the fall and approximately the same in spring. Creating awareness of the profession, each year, by teaching 100-120 students about an industry that they know very little about, bodes well for the prospects of talented and knowledgeable new hires entering the banking profession. Although not all students ultimately join the commercial banking program, this now becomes a discipline and offering that I believe all students need to be aware of. As I always say, “everyone needs a bank.” It is my hope that this course becomes a “core” business course required by all business students.

Advisory Board/Founders

Our advisory board continues to be strong. Some changes were noted during the year. John Hazod took a new position outside of Town Bank. I wish to thank John for his years of service to the program. John was one of the first CFOs brought into the classroom for guest presentations, he also was adjunct faculty for the Loan Portfolio Management course, and instrumental in a number of initiatives between the commercial banking program and Town Bank. Although John has taken on a new role I know the program, and the students, hope for his involvement once again in the future. Jay Mack, CEO of Town Bank has replaced John on the advisory board. I have known Jay since the beginning of the program, and I greatly welcome his insights and guidance as well as partnership to the program. Additionally, Mark Behrens, CFO for Johnson Financial Group, retired at the end of 2025. Mark also was most instrumental in coming to the classroom and presenting to students on a regular basis. His candor and wit were much appreciated by the students. He was instrumental in Johnson Financial becoming a Founding member of the program and on-going assistance with helping open doors with individuals where they were needed. I hope that Mark continues to remain close to the program. Finally, Callan Stapleton, Executive Vice President of the Illinois Bankers Association is stepping off the advisory board due to responsibilities at the IBA. Callan has been, and will continue to be, a great connector of banks to the program and outside contacts as panelists and speakers for the annual conferences. His assistance has been greatly welcomed over the years, as well as the partnership that he, and Randy Hultgren, CEO, have brought to the program. Callan will be replaced by Matt Imburgia, Director of Bank Relations for the IBA, whom we welcome to the Advisory Board.

Activities and Plans

The spring semester is always busy, this one in particular as it is my last. We do have a number of things planned which I will articulate below.

Zurich Switzerland Trip

This is our fifth trip to Switzerland. We are leaving on March 6th, and returning on March 15th. I have a total of fourteen students with me in addition to myself and my back-up Meghann Polivka. In general, our itinerary is similar to last year, however we have a few new items. We will again visit the Swiss National Bank (the central bank of Switzerland) and have an interactive discussion about foreign exchange and how it is managed by the Swiss National Bank. We have added a visit to the Stehler Luxury Watch company, very high-end and an opportunity to meet the owner. Again, we will have a presentation in Zurich from UBS and a visit to their vault. Victorinox will guide us on a tour of their Swiss army knife plant, always a great experience, and wrapping up with a visit to one of their regional banks, among other excursions.



Chicago Field Trip

During the fall semester we visited three financial institutions and the Federal Reserve. Included in the trip were Capital One, PNC, and Wintrust Bank (pictured left). This semester we have a bit of a different field trip. We again will visit BMO at the Chicago BMO tower, and the Federal Reserve Bank, as we have done before. In addition, we have been invited to the Union League Club for a luncheon and presentations from John Madden, CEO of FNBCBT LaGrange, and Mick O'Rourke, CEO of Signature Bank in Chicago. We are really excited about this networking opportunity, and hope to have a good number of students attending this, from thirty-five to forty students. This will occur on April 9th.

Washington DC Trip

Unfortunately, our Washington DC trip was cancelled this year due to the government shutdown. We had planned visits to the FBI, the Capitol and Congress, FDIC, ABA, etc. Many of these closed as a result of lack of funding which was most disappointing. Hopefully, we will have better luck next year.

American Bankers Annual Convention

In October, I participated in the American Bankers Annual Convention, providing a presentation at the BankU Symposium. The topic of my talk was "Helping Students to Gain Career Clarity." Pictured left is the booth at the convention which is used for the ABA Academic Partner group.



Ten-Year Celebration of the Commercial Banking Program

As mentioned earlier, 2026 is the ten-year mark for the program. We are developing a celebratory event on April 17th, Friday, from 6 to 9 pm for this event. This will replace our annual conference this year, given the landmark ten-year anniversary. We hope to see you at this event and celebrate with us. The event will be held at the Milwaukee County Historical Society, a unique and elegant venue, fitting for the occasion as it was a former bank. Guests will enjoy heavy appetizers, an open bar, and much networking and celebration with students, alumni from the program, advisory board members, program founders, College of Business and university leaders and supporters and friends of the program. Invitations are being sent this week. Please watch for these and register to attend. More detail, registration, and sponsoring opportunities, can be found by clicking on the link below.

<https://www.marquette.edu/business/banking/celebration.php>

Next Semester Plans

Next semester will obviously see new individuals in the program. As previously indicated I will introduce the new individuals more formally, with background information in my spring newsletter. However, we anticipate being in a position to introduce them at our Ten-Year Celebration as well. I plan to consult to both the new academic professor and the director in the fall semester, to ensure a seamless transition.

Executive Education and Collaboration

We continue to make overtures for advancing the knowledge and educational materials developed over the years to our industry partners. I have conducted simulation exercises with a few banks in the past, most recently this past summer with Johnson Financial Group, pictured to the right. There is strong interest in this, as well as for scaling some of the courses I have developed for executive education within banks. We are working with our internal Executive Education area and are optimistic for the future. Ideally these courses would lead to a certificate with the potential for graduate credit. I plan to stay involved in the development of this initiative in the future.



Support

I am most thankful to all of you for your continued support of this important program. As a self-funded program your contributions make this program possible and allow me to develop exceptional materials, and experiences for our students, and exceptional talent for the industry. Please feel free to circulate this newsletter to others that you feel would be interested. As always, please use the link below to provide support to the program.

Operations Fund

Wrap Up

I apologize for the shortness of this newsletter. I can assure you the program remains strong, with growing interest, quality graduates, and outstanding support from you all. With over 33 banks participating in both internships and jobs, I couldn't be happier with the end results. Although this is not my last newsletter, the end of the semester will come before I know it. All I can say is that it has been my sincere honor to serve you all. Much of what we have accomplished could not have been done without you and I will be forever grateful for this. I hope you join us at the celebration, I can assure you it will be memorable. I look forward to that and to keeping in touch in the future. For now, I will close, with my final newsletter to come in May.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly at kent.belasco@marquette.edu or visit our website at <https://www.marquette.edu/business/banking/>

Stay warm and thank you for your continued support! I look forward to hearing from you soon.

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