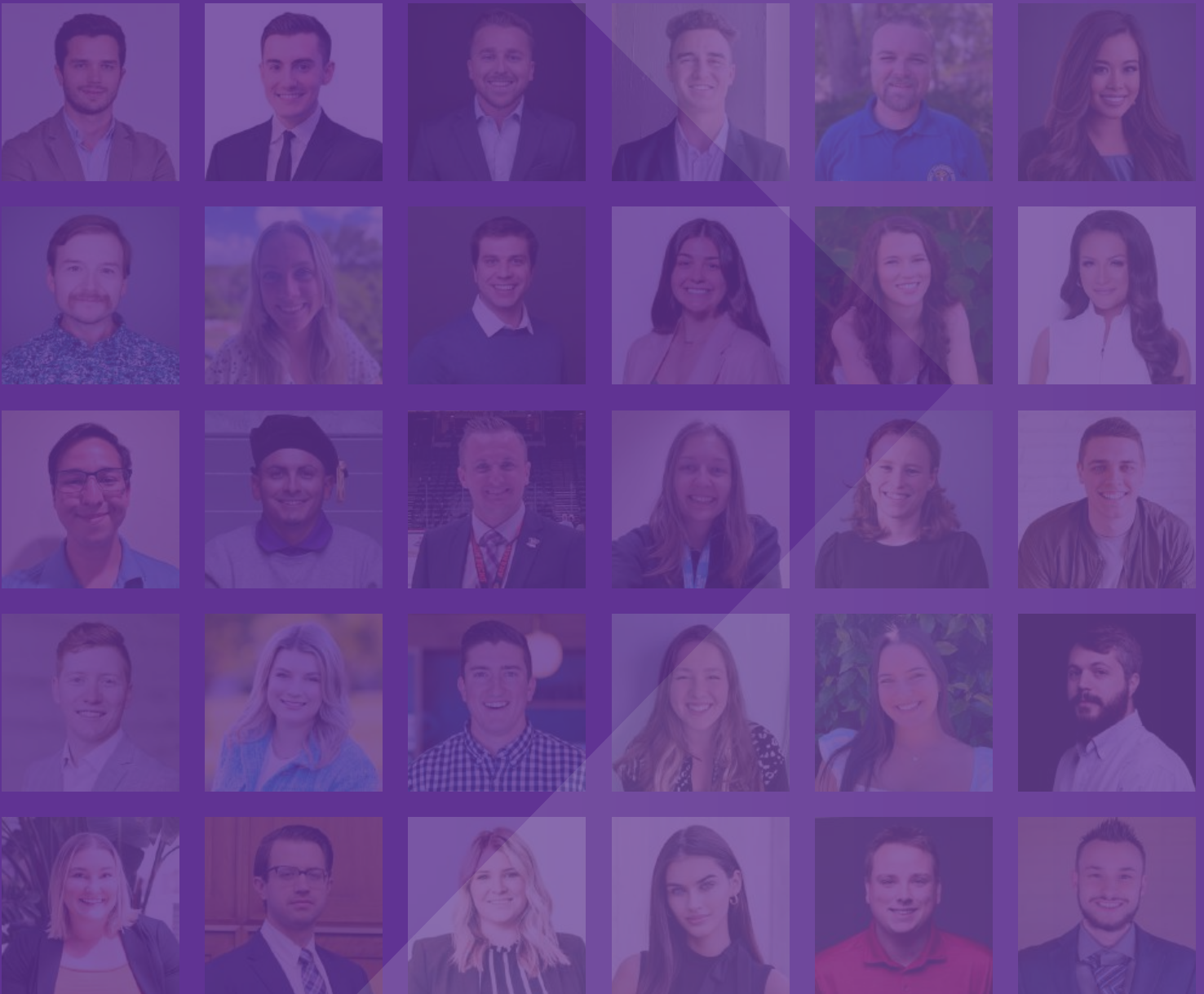


# GCU ALUMNI

2024 | 30 Under 30





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Holland Aucoin.....	3	Kyler Nixon <sup>1</sup> .....	41
Marguerite Benedict .....	5	Elizabeth Oekerman .....	43
Taylor Browne.....	7	Tyler Ostapuk.....	46
Marco Burgarello <sup>1</sup> .....	11	Salvatore Parascandola.....	48
Adrian Carrion Armas .....	13	Justin Peterson.....	49
Tim Crouson.....	15	Karina Putman .....	51
Francesca Cruz.....	17	Jorge Romero .....	53
Lucas De Jong.....	19	Bryce Schmisser.....	55
Andrew Finley .....	22	Austin Sorrels .....	56
Denisse Gonzalez <sup>1</sup> .....	25	Jacqueline Thomas <sup>1</sup> .....	58
Slate Herman .....	28	John Varkey <sup>1</sup> .....	61
Tijana Jelic <sup>1</sup> .....	31	Rebecca Wayne.....	64
Edward Lodzinski .....	34	MaKenzie Wilson .....	66
Kaitlyn Lucas .....	36	Chance Wnuck.....	69
Sam Ness .....	38	Erik Yost <sup>1</sup> .....	72

<sup>1</sup> Graduated from GCU Honors College





## Holland Aucoin

2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN COMPUTER PROGRAMMING

**CURRENT POSITION** Software Developer at BitPay

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am a software developer at BitPay, a cryptocurrency payment processor based out of Atlanta. The platform empowers businesses to seamlessly accept payments and distribute payouts of over 20 different cryptocurrencies and provides users with the flexibility to buy, swap and spend their digital assets. As a backend engineer, I leverage technologies such as Node.js and MongoDB to continuously improve core features such as invoicing, payouts, gift cards and bill payments. Beyond customer-facing products, I collaborate on cross-functional projects, developing internal tools and management systems to support the customer success and compliance teams in daily operations.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Throughout my career thus far, my most significant milestones have been marked by my growth in tackling increasingly complex projects. As an intern, I initially handled smaller tasks such as code adjustments for screening wallet addresses and monitoring transactions. However, since then I have been able to transition to more substantial contributions, taking the lead in integrating with major third-party APIs and platforms like Salesforce, Stripe, Shopify and Palantir. These integrations allowed me to develop and implement new products and tools from scratch, significantly enhancing our operations at BitPay. Through each project, I have honed my skills, expanded my expertise and made tangible impacts on the company's success.

### CAREER HISTORY

Following my graduation from GCU in April of 2021, I was hired for a three-month development internship at BitPay. Within 45 days, I was brought on as a full-time software developer, where I have spent the last three years evolving in my role and becoming an integral part of product development at BitPay, collaborating and contributing to various cross-team projects. Prior to this, I held several roles in my time at GCU including being a team lead and host for Discover GCU, acting as the director and reporting manager of the GCU Engage team and being a developer for the Student Engagement team.



## Holland Aucoin

2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN COMPUTER PROGRAMMING

### IMPACT ON FIELD

Being in the emerging field of digital currency, I am presented with daily opportunities to make an impact through new ideas and the continuous scaling of existing platforms. During my time as a software developer so far, I created an extensive merchant onboarding and reviewing system, which processed over 6,000 new applications within the first three months of its launch. This initiative provides businesses with the opportunity to quickly and easily enter into the digital currency space. I developed a Shopify payment extension that enables merchants to accept cryptocurrency as a form of payment on their online stores, accumulating over 10,000 installs within the first year and allowing customers to utilize their cryptocurrency for daily transactions. I implemented a geofencing system designed to restrict currencies or features based on customer and/or merchant location, ensuring compliance with legal regulations nationwide. Each of these tasks has helped further the expansion and adoption of cryptocurrency from all perspectives.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

“Cryptie” Quarterly Award at BitPay, March 2022; Summa Cum Laude at Grand Canyon University, April 2021; Outstanding Freshman Achievement Award on Soccer Team; High Academic Achievement at the University of Redlands, April 2018

### ORGANIZATIONS

Throughout my years in high school I attended a summer leadership program called Mt. Baker Leadership Camp, organized by the Association of Washington Student Leaders (AWSL), for students in leadership positions at their schools from all around the state. The goal of AWSL and its programs is to empower students to lead and make positive change within their schools, communities and themselves. Following my high school graduation, I joined AWSL and have served as a staff member each year to give back to the organization that has shaped me. I teach courses and give presentations in equity and inclusion, team building, group processes and evaluation techniques, self-awareness and servant leadership, in hopes of helping create some of my most impactful experiences for others.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I strongly value servant leadership, consistently trying to place the needs of others ahead of my own and offering assistance whenever and wherever possible. In a professional setting, this has been my willingness to step in and step up when necessary, taking on additional responsibilities to allow for greater success in the company as a whole. I have also been lucky enough to be able to mentor and guide interns in their growth and achievements as they begin their careers while demonstrating the importance and principles of servant leadership through my actions.

### ADVICE

My advice to current students and recent graduates is to put yourself out there and meet people. There is nothing more important than the relationships you build. Say “yes” to every new experience and opportunity you can!



## Marguerite Benedict

2016 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT,  
MINOR IN ACCOUNTING

**CURRENT POSITION** Lead Product Analyst at TriNet

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

Shortly after graduating from GCU in business management and minoring in accounting, I started my career at Zenefits (acquired by TriNet). I've successfully transferred to different teams and advanced into the role I'm in today, managing the product communications and tools for TriNet. I formulated the product communication strategy for the entire department and also worked across all parts of the organization to ensure all teams were prepared for product launches and enhancements. I excel at understanding colleagues' pain points and inventing a solution while using my previous user experience (UX) knowledge to advocate for our users. I'm a first-generation "techie" who also paved the way and encouraged others to join the tech industry across the U.S.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

One of my biggest milestones was being accepted to be a professional mentor at TechWomen. Not only was it an honor to be eligible to participate and be recognized as a leader in the technology industry, but it was also an inspiring experience to mentor women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) from Africa, Central and South Asia and the Middle East.

### CAREER HISTORY

I began my career at Zenefits shortly after graduating from GCU and returning to the Bay Area. I started in operations and moved to the product and design team as a UX writer. Through the acquisition and the team expansion, I've grown into the lead product analyst role and manage TriNet's product communication and tools. I formulated the product communication strategy for the department and also worked across all parts of the organization to ensure all teams were prepared for product launches and enhancements.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

My motivation to improve just a little every day has been my constant factor in life. This method of continuous growth has opened the doors to breaking down complex problems into attainable steps to finding solutions. I've also been blessed with the opportunity to mentor women in STEM in person and virtually, casting a bigger net to educate women and young students all over the world.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Professional and Cultural Mentor at TechWomen



## Marguerite Benedict

2016 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT,  
MINOR IN ACCOUNTING**

### **ORGANIZATIONS**

TechWomen; UX Professionals; Delta Mu Delta Honor Society; Former Member of the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA) and the IMA Accounting Honor Society

### **LEADERSHIP STYLE**

Leadership is demonstrated in many ways. It doesn't always come with a title. Leading with care and amplifying the voices of your team is far more effective than leading with control. I aim to build consensus around a shared vision and support the group along the way.

### **ADVICE**

Find your passion and improve the world. You can't boil the ocean but you can change a little at a time to make a big overall impact.





## Taylor Browne

2018 | BACHELOR OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATIONS

2020 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP

**CURRENT POSITION** Director of Business Development at AvAir

**INDUSTRY** Business

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

My name is Taylor Browne and I work as a director of business development for AvAir. I am proud to be part of a company that is a global leader in the aviation aftermarket. We provide airlines, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) organizations and stockists with a wide range of products and services, delivered with best-in-industry pricing and unrivaled customer service. With over 26 million in-stock rotatable and consumable components for Boeing, Airbus and regional aircraft, we can deliver the parts any airline needs on demand.<sup>1</sup> Our extensive inventory and efficient logistics allow us to meet the urgent requirements of our clients worldwide, ensuring their operations run smoothly and efficiently. I am deeply motivated by building intentional relationships to grow our business, and I am passionate about advancing the aviation industry. My role allows me to connect with industry leaders, understand their needs and provide solutions that drive their success. Every day, I strive to deliver exceptional value to our clients, leveraging AvAir's strengths and my commitment to excellence. At AvAir, we believe in setting high standards and continuously raising the bar. Being a part of this dynamic team, I am dedicated to contributing to our legacy of leadership and innovation in the aviation aftermarket.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Throughout my career, I've achieved significant personal milestones that align with my values and aspirations. Managing key airline accounts at AvAir has been a cornerstone of my professional growth, allowing me to leverage my expertise and passion to drive success in the aviation industry. These responsibilities have not only honed my strategic abilities but also enabled me to foster meaningful relationships with clients and stakeholders, further solidifying my impact in the field. Being part of a company that actively leaves a mark in the community, both locally and globally, resonates deeply with me. At AvAir, I've had the privilege of contributing to initiatives that positively impact society, aligning with my commitment to making a difference beyond the workplace. Carrying on the mentality and spirit of GCU in my career has been very important to me. The relationships and connections I cultivated at GCU have served as a guiding force, propelling me to foster similar connections and values in my professional endeavors. By embodying the ethos of GCU in my work, I strive to uphold a sense of community, integrity and excellence, driving positive change and making a lasting impact wherever I go. My personal milestones reflect my dedication to leveraging my skills and experiences to drive success, make a difference and uphold the values instilled in me by GCU.



## Taylor Browne

2018 | BACHELOR OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATIONS

2020 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP

### CAREER HISTORY

Over the past few years, my career journey has been one of continuous growth and opportunity. It all began at AvAir, where I spent three years putting my MSL to work and learning the ropes of the industry. Starting from the ground up, I absorbed everything I could about customer service in a global context during my first year. In my second year, I was thrilled to be promoted to the business development team. This was where I could truly shine, deploying my knowledge and passion for the industry to contribute to the company's success. I relished the chance to engage with clients, cultivate relationships and drive growth. Now, at a local fast-growing company, I manage key accounts and airlines, including esteemed clients like JSX. This role demands both strategic thinking and hands-on engagement. With annual sales exceeding \$5 million, I take pride in my contributions to the company's bottom line and the relationships I've built along the way. My career path reflects my determination to continually challenge myself and strive for excellence in everything I do. From humble beginnings to managing significant accounts, I've embraced each opportunity to learn, grow and make a tangible impact in the aviation industry.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

Transitioning from roles such as resident assistant (RA) and member of GCU's promotional marketing team to AvAir has been transformative, enabling me to leverage diverse experiences and skills to make a tangible impact in the aviation industry. During my three-year tenure as an RA, I honed my interpersonal and leadership abilities by fostering a supportive environment for students. This foundation in relationship-building translated seamlessly into my role at AvAir, where I've cultivated global partnerships and strengthened client connections. My two-year stint in GCU's promotional marketing team equipped me with strategic communication and marketing prowess, which I've utilized to enhance AvAir's brand presence and engage with stakeholders effectively. Additionally, my experience as a graduate assistant for club sports for two years instilled in me a strong work ethic and organizational skills, which have proven invaluable in managing key accounts and overseeing operations at AvAir. By integrating my academic background and work experiences from GCU into my role at AvAir, I've been able to drive positive change and contribute to the company's success. Whether it's building relationships worldwide or impacting those around me, I'm dedicated to leveraging my expertise and passion to make a meaningful difference in the aviation industry and beyond.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Throughout my career journey, I've been fortunate to witness and contribute to significant accolades that have shaped my professional trajectory. One standout moment was being part of a company that achieved remarkable recognition, such as being awarded the top spot as Parts Supplier of the Year for the fourth consecutive time by Airline Economics' Aviation 100 Awards, along with Phoenix Business Journal's 2023 Best Places to Work list and "Champions of Change" in the aviation industry. These accolades not only affirmed our commitment to excellence but also underscored our industry-leading performance and dedication to customer satisfaction. Additionally, AvAir's inclusion in the Phoenix Business Journal's Arizona Corporate Excellence Awards "Top 50 Private Companies" list was a testament to our company's growth and impact within the local business community. As a finalist in the 25 fastest-growing companies in Arizona, we were recognized for our innovation, resilience and contribution to the state's economic landscape. These milestones not only highlighted our collective achievements but also served as motivation to continue pushing boundaries and striving for excellence. Being part of a team that consistently earns industry accolades and recognition has been a source of pride and inspiration, fueling my passion for driving success and making a meaningful impact in the aviation sector.





## Taylor Browne

2018 | BACHELOR OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATIONS

2020 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP

### ORGANIZATIONS

In my role, I have the privilege of actively collaborating with esteemed organizations in the aviation industry, including Southwest Airlines, American Airlines, JSX, Envoy and various other airlines seeking vendor partnerships. Working alongside these industry giants allows me to leverage my expertise and resources to provide tailored solutions that meet their specific needs and challenges. My engagement with American Airlines, a global leader in air travel, has afforded me the opportunity to contribute to innovative initiatives that shape the future of aviation. By aligning our efforts and resources, we aim to drive sustainable growth, improve service quality and strengthen the airline's competitive position in the market. Additionally, my involvement with JSX, a forward-thinking regional carrier, underscores my dedication to supporting emerging players in the industry. Together, we explore innovative solutions to meet travelers' evolving needs while maintaining a focus on safety, convenience and customer satisfaction. Overall, my partnerships with these organizations reflect my commitment to delivering exceptional service, driving innovation and making a positive impact in the aviation industry. By working closely with industry leaders and emerging players alike, I am dedicated to driving continuous improvement and shaping the future of air travel.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

My master's degree in leadership, coupled with my experience as an RA on campus and working alongside students, has profoundly influenced my approach to leadership in the workplace. The combination of academic knowledge and hands-on experience has equipped me with a unique skill set that I leverage to mentor new employees, motivate teams and cultivate a positive work environment. Drawing from my academic background, I apply theories and principles of leadership to effectively guide and inspire others. My understanding of leadership styles, communication strategies and organizational dynamics allows me to adapt my approach to different situations and individuals, fostering collaboration and maximizing team performance. As an RA, working with students who have a variety of backgrounds, cultures and personalities, I learned the importance of active listening, empathy and understanding in building trust and fostering a sense of belonging. I strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment where every member feels valued and empowered to succeed. I've been able to recognize the importance of providing guidance and support and to help foster a culture of continuous learning and mentorship. Overall, my background in leadership and my experience as an RA has shaped my leadership philosophy and approach in the workplace. I am committed to leading by example, fostering a positive and inclusive environment, and empowering others to thrive and succeed.



## Taylor Browne

2018 | BACHELOR OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATIONS

2020 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP

### ADVICE

To the current or recent graduates of GCU, as you take on the professional world, I encourage you to embrace the exhilarating prospect of exploring new industries, regardless of whether they align with your degree or not. Taking a risk and venturing into uncharted territory can lead to unexpected discoveries and opportunities for personal and professional growth. While it may seem scary to step outside your comfort zone, remember that every great adventure begins with a leap of faith. Embrace the unknown with curiosity and enthusiasm and allow yourself to be guided by a spirit of exploration and discovery. You never know what hidden passions and talents you may uncover along the way. Open yourself up to a world of possibilities and experiences that can enrich your life in ways you never imagined. Whether it's trying your hand at a new industry, exploring a different career path, or pursuing a passion project, allow yourself the freedom to follow your curiosity and intuition. Remember, it's okay to pivot and explore different avenues until you find what truly resonates with you. The journey of self-discovery is not always clear right off the bat and it's okay to veer off in search of your true calling. So, I encourage you to take that leap of faith, embrace the unknown and trust in your ability to adapt and thrive in new environments. Who knows? The risk you take today could lead to a newfound passion and a fulfilling career tomorrow.

<sup>1</sup> AvAir. (2024). What We Do. AvAir. Retrieved from [avair.aero/what/#:~:text=With%20over%2026%20million%20in,comes%20with%20the%20AvAir%20Advantage](https://www.avair.aero/what/#:~:text=With%20over%2026%20million%20in,comes%20with%20the%20AvAir%20Advantage) on June 27, 2024.



## Marco Burgarello

2018 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN FINANCE AND ECONOMICS

**CURRENT POSITION** Marketing Principal at Nextiva

**INDUSTRY** Business

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

As a seasoned leader of revenue teams, I am currently serving as a marketing principal at Nextiva, where I am leading a multi-million-dollar project to rebrand the company. I built my career leading high-growth venture-backed companies in Silicon Valley and Charlotte, North Carolina. Notably, I have led sales and marketing teams under three times annual growth, co-founded a fintech software company and launched 30 startups out of an accelerator. Beyond my professional activities, I have a heart for helping formerly incarcerated individuals get back on their feet. For the last eight years, I have mentored current and formerly incarcerated individuals and am currently an instructor with Inmates to Entrepreneurs.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Significant milestones in my career include being accepted into Venture for America's selective fellowship program, which provided a foundational launchpad. Additionally, I established the Revenue Operations and other departments at the Y Combinator-backed startup Pulley, driving the early growth of Bundle from \$0 to over \$1 million in revenue. I am currently leading a company rebrand project at Nextiva, which is a key achievement that has shaped my professional journey.

### CAREER HISTORY

Through Venture for America, I was relocated to Charlotte, North Carolina to join their emerging startup scene. My journey has involved leading a fintech accelerator program that launched 30 startups, co-founding a software company that secured two rounds of venture capital, building two revenue teams at a Silicon Valley startup and now leading strategic marketing initiatives at a multi-billion-dollar software company in Arizona.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

In high-growth companies where the emphasis is often solely on speed and results, I prioritize the importance of valuing people above all. This people-first approach not only shapes how I lead but also deeply influences how I appreciate and interact with my teammates. By maintaining this focus amidst rapid changes and challenges, I've been able to make a lasting impact on every organization I've been part of. This approach has proven to enhance team cohesion and business success, demonstrating that caring for people leads to substantial and sustainable growth.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Charlotte 25 Under 25, 2020; Venture for America Fellow, 2018



## Marco Burgarello

2018 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN FINANCE AND ECONOMICS

### ORGANIZATIONS

As an instructor for the nonprofit Inmates to Entrepreneurs, I teach weekly courses as part of eight-week programs on how to start a business. Through my involvement in this program, I have helped more than 400 formerly incarcerated individuals start their own businesses.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

As a leader, my top priority is to foster an environment of encouragement and motivation. I am a firm believer that the highest-performing teams have the highest praise-to-criticism ratio. As a leader, my number one focus is the mentality of my team. By focusing on celebrating wins and sharing constructive feedback, I strive to create an atmosphere that nurtures my team's success for the long term.

### ADVICE

God will never waste your talents. Trust that he has you exactly where you are for a reason. I have always prayed Isaiah 6:8 over my career and would encourage you to do the same. If you do this, you will be amazed at where God places you.



## Adrian Carrion Armas

2018 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Director of Marketing and International Business Development at Marca

**INDUSTRY** Marketing

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

Born in Seville, Spain, I moved to the U.S. in 2014 to attend Grand Canyon University so I could study business management and play on the men's basketball team. During my time at GCU, I made the President's List every single year and graduated summa cum laude. I was also named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) Honors Court.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

I believe my first milestone was when I decided to leave my home country, looking for a better education and the possibility of playing basketball. It was very difficult for a kid to leave his homeland, culture and language and move to a new reality. However, GCU felt like home, and all my classmates and teammates felt like family. Another career milestone was working for the NBA. It was a challenging start since I was based in India, but I found a fantastic country full of unbelievable people. Adapting to their culture and building relationships was tough, but it really helped me on my later path working for the NBA in Europe and the Middle East. The most recent milestone I experienced was leaving the NBA. It was not an easy decision to leave the company and colleagues who had been part of my life for seven years. However, Marca offered me an opportunity to step up in my career and lead a department in one of the largest media companies in the world.

### CAREER HISTORY

I started my professional career with the NBA in India. During my time in India between Mumbai and New Delhi, I helped the NBA grow the presence of basketball in the country. After a year and a half, the NBA offered me the possibility to move to London and work for the basketball operations team in Europe and the Middle East. During this time, I worked with different key stakeholders in the region including national federations, private companies and NBA players throughout the whole region. After two years in London, I was offered the opportunity to transition to the NBA Madrid office to work under the Basketball Business Operations team. After almost seven years working for the NBA, I got the opportunity to join Marca, one of the largest media sports outlets in the world, as its director of marketing and international business development.



## Adrian Carrion Armas

2018 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN MARKETING

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I have always tried to positively impact the people I have worked with. During my time at the NBA, we were able to grow the game of basketball to millions of participants. In addition, we launched many initiatives that adapted to society's new needs and trends (social media, on-court to online, etc.). We expanded to new territories where basketball had no presence. In addition, with Marca, I am working to make an impact on the type of content that we are delivering, as well as how we can use the power of sports to change society. We just launched our new program called Ganamos Juntos, where we try to make a positive impact in society. These values also represent what GCU is about.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Summa Cum Laude from the Colangelo College of Business; Awarded President's List Three Years in a Row; Named to the 2016-17 National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC), Men's Basketball Player at GCU; GPA of 3.94; European Central Bank Competition Winner by the Economic European Commission, 2014

### ORGANIZATIONS

As Marca's director of marketing, I oversee working experiences with over 100 organizations, including large sports properties such as LaLiga, LIV Golf, UFC, FIFA and more.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

Treat everyone with respect. Listen to your team. Ask people on your team how they are doing, what they think and for their opinion. This sounds basic, but many forget to implement this simple step. I always try to provide constructive feedback to someone in private, but I always value their work publicly.

### ADVICE

Build your network. Try to go out into the world and meet as many people as you can, preferably from different cultures, backgrounds and countries. You will learn from each of the people you meet. Always remember your values.





## Tim Crouson

2023 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ANALYTICS

**OTHER DEGREES** Bachelor of Science in Sports Management, Bachelor of Science in Communication, Eastern Michigan University, 2016

**CURRENT POSITION** Director of Research at Destination Ann Arbor

**INDUSTRY** Public Service

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am an accomplished professional in the hospitality and tourism industry, currently serving as the director of research at Destination Ann Arbor. With over seven years of experience, I have demonstrated expertise in business analysis, CRM system administration and tourism management. Since joining Destination Ann Arbor in 2016, I've held various roles, including CRM administrator and convention and event services manager. My responsibilities have encompassed optimizing CRM systems, managing stakeholder training and executing major events. My dedication to excellence is reflected in my meticulous approach to data management and my ability to streamline processes for enhanced efficiency. I hold a master's in business analytics from GCU, graduating with a 4.0 GPA and a bachelor's degree in sport management and communication from Eastern Michigan University, where I graduated magna cum laude. My professional certifications include a Certification in Hotel Industry Analytics (CHIA), a Professional in Destination Management (PDM) and a Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA).

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My most significant career milestones, I'd like to believe, are still ahead of me. I've been fortunate enough in my role to blaze a trail and have had two different positions at our organization created for me, one of which I believe was the first in the state of Michigan at a destination marketing organization (DMO). To me, that is a huge milestone to be able to do something, prove the importance of it and gain the trust of leadership within your organization to actually invest in it. In my professional career, I've been named a Destinations International 30 Under 30 and served on a couple of industry boards and groups, which have been a great learning opportunity and allowed me to become more confident in my own professional ability.

### CAREER HISTORY

I've been with Destination Ann Arbor my entire professional, post-college career. Prior to this, I worked at a few tennis facilities and other service-based positions, so I've always been in the business of people. I started at Destination Ann Arbor doing a capstone sports facility project and was asked to stay on as an intern. From there, I took a position doing membership and services for different events coming to town and our local businesses for a little while. During this time, I mastered our CRM system and was promoted to become our CRM administrator to oversee the operation. As my interests and skills continued to evolve, I was promoted to our director of research in July 2023 to oversee all of our different data sources and how we can use our insights.



## Tim Crouson

2023 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ANALYTICS

### IMPACT ON FIELD

Research positions appear to be a growing trend in the DMO space. In our organization, I'm the first one to have this position and there are not many in non-state offices. Having researchers at local DMOs is critical for finding data, making sense of it and, most importantly, making it actionable. DMOs have a significant ability to be economic drivers for local businesses, and I've enjoyed getting to share insights with our local stakeholders to help them understand the value of tourism. I've recently started a webinar series in our office talking about the impacts of tourism and always try to tailor it down to actionable insights to help our local businesses, hotels and other stakeholders have the resources they may not have elsewhere.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2023, I was named a Destinations International 30 Under 30. I completed my master's with GCU in November 2023. I've attained multiple certifications, including the Certification in Hotel Industry Analytics (CHIA), Professional in Destination Management (PDM) and Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA). I am currently finishing the Certification in Advanced Hospitality and Tourism Analytics.

### ORGANIZATIONS

Professionally, I serve on the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) CenStates Board of Directors. I've also served on the User Group for Simpleview, which is an industry-leading CRM platform in the travel and tourism space. Outside of my career, I currently serve as the President of the Southeastern Michigan Tennis Association, which is a district within the U.S. Tennis Association's Midwest Section. I also serve on committees at both the Midwest section and national levels. Additionally, I serve as a small group leader in student ministry at my church.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I like to believe my approach to leadership is very service-based. In our organization, I've taken on multiple positions that didn't previously exist. Being able to demonstrate the value of my team's work to those we serve has been very important to me. It goes along with me being very people-oriented and recognizing the unique talents, abilities and needs of the people I'm surrounded by. Taking intentional time to step back from the work and getting to know the people behind the work, those the work is actually benefitting and how we can truly have an impact is what drives me. To me, leadership involves a willingness to be inconvenienced. Often, I feel the most inconvenienced when I've learned the most about myself and others and it has forced me to shift my own perspective to be more intentional in incorporating the perspectives of others. Leadership requires being authentic, honest and most importantly being willing to be in the weeds.

### ADVICE

I would suggest to not limit yourself to your current interests. Don't be the one who boxes yourself in. I did my undergraduate degree in sport management and really wanted to do something that involved sports, which limited my initial job search. I was very fortunate to land in the organization I have because I would have never looked for positions in travel and tourism. Additionally, I didn't ever anticipate that I would end up in a research and data role, but being willing to learn new things and see the importance of the work made me open my eyes to something I enjoy doing.



## Francesca Cruz

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN CYBERSECURITY

**CURRENT POSITION** Cybersecurity Risk Analyst at McDonald's

**INDUSTRY** Business

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

Throughout my time at GCU, I was successful in enhancing productivity when spending time in a group setting. I enjoyed fixing and solving issues as I am a quick learner and take pride in my leadership abilities. I learned that I am eager to grow with technology so that I can become the best cybersecurity professional I can be. This all transformed into the working world. In October 2023, I accepted my first professional role at McDonald's HQ in Chicago as a cybersecurity risk analyst. So far, my time at McDonald's has been amazing. I continue to learn every day. Knowing that I am securing the McDonald's environment is a fantastic task and opportunity. Every day, I am able to use my problem-solving skills to make McDonald's a more secure place.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My biggest career milestone thus far has been getting my first job at one of the most recognizable companies in the world, only five months after graduation!

### CAREER HISTORY

My career history started in high school when I began working as a hostess at a local breakfast restaurant. I then left for college and began to work a lot to pay the bills that came with being a college student. I started working as a dental assistant intern since I originally aspired to be a dentist and was majoring in pre-medicine. I eventually changed my major to cybersecurity and completed my internship. Shortly after, I started working at Life Time Fitness, serving members in the cafe. At the same time, I began working for GCU as a study hall monitor. I worked with student-athletes to ensure they stayed on task during study hall so they could maintain their eligibility to play. During my time at school, I was a student leader; my role was an intramural sports supervisor. I had so much fun overseeing the intramural sports that went on at GCU. Finally, once I graduated, I moved back to Illinois to enjoy one last summer before I started working forever. I worked as a camp counselor to serve the kids in my town and teach them important life lessons while having fun in the sun.



## Francesca Cruz

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN CYBERSECURITY

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I am a woman in STEM. When I started with McDonald's, I was one of two women hired onto my team. This truly showcased equal capability in cybersecurity; women belong at the table and in technological conversations. As women, we need to never underestimate the power of our voices and vision because they do belong. Together, we are slowly impacting the industry one female mind at a time. I take pride in the speed and accuracy of my work, and it truly is raising the bar on how work is conducted on my team. We are making our processes more efficient each day. I'm a volunteer coach at my local high school. I have spoken at the school and worked with the athletes every day; I am able to showcase how cool and important STEM is to the next generation. Teaching the future about cybersecurity is so important because it inspires them. I was once sitting in their seats and now I can express that if I can be in a STEM field, they can too. I also support McDonald's recruiting efforts. I was honored to attend the WiCyS Conference in Nashville this past April and was able to recruit the future. This was another time when I shared with the next generation how important they are to the future of cybersecurity.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

I am working hard to receive future accolades and am applying to DePaul University to start a Master of Business Administration program.

### ORGANIZATIONS

McDonald's Corporation; Ronald McDonald House Charities; Cary Grove High School

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I am a servant leader. I prioritize the needs of my peers and create an environment where others can grow and develop. I grew up playing sports and working is much like a game. We must all work together and uplift one another to be successful. At McDonald's, I am able to support my team by being accountable for my work and leading when I need to lead. I demonstrate leadership by supporting my team, I am always willing to learn and do more. My peers know they can come to me when they need support or advice and they know I will always help and take on more.

### ADVICE

My biggest piece of advice is to never think of challenges as your enemy. There are going to be countless challenges thrown your way and you're going to have to face them and conquer them. It will not be easy, but it is possible. In STEM, and really all fields, you need to be able to fail fast and learn faster. There will be challenges that ultimately end in failure, the most important part of that is what you learn from failures and challenges.



## Lucas De Jong

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SPORTS MANAGEMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Senior Manager of West Region Sales at NASCAR

**INDUSTRY** Business

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

As an employee of NASCAR for seven years, I have been a part of Phoenix Raceway since I graduated from GCU with my degree in sports management in 2017. I drive revenue for NASCAR's western region by selling dynamic sponsorships and high-end hospitality experiences. Whether it's bringing to life new and creative partnerships with local and national companies or creating lifelong experiences for hospitality guests, I use the sport of NASCAR to connect with people by building valuable relationships and results. When not at various racetracks around the country, I can be found spending time with my wife Brenna (whom I met at GCU) and son Davis.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Most of my significant career milestones center around achievements made together through the work of a great team. From unveiling almost an entirely new venue in 2018 after our \$178 million renovation project to hosting the first NASCAR championship weekend at Phoenix Raceway in 2020, all my achievements have been accomplished alongside my team. Another major career milestone for me was working my first Daytona 500 in Daytona Beach, Florida. Being at the epicenter of NASCAR and being a part of the biggest day in our sport is a moment I won't forget. Additionally, a personal milestone was bringing my newborn son to Phoenix Raceway for the first time. So much time and effort go into what we do to build fulfilling careers, but it means that much more when you get to experience lifelong dreams with your family.

### CAREER HISTORY

The story of my career is easy to follow, as it's been a steady climb ever since I left GCU. My first job post-graduation was with Phoenix Raceway, where I sold tickets part-time. I quickly fell in love with the industry and the track and knew I wanted to be here long-term. From there I went into a full-time position in the group sales department, focused on selling tickets and experiences to companies hosting larger groups of people. This allowed me to build and refine my business-to-business sales skills and served as a great introduction to working with larger businesses. From there, I moved into a corporate sales role, where my primary responsibility was selling sponsorships and hospitality for Phoenix Raceway. This position pushed me into the corporate world by working with blue-chip brands known around the world. From there, my next step was moving into a regional role, where I was not only responsible for managing and selling assets here in Phoenix but at other tracks in California, Kansas and Iowa (NASCAR's west region). This is the role I am currently in, where I get to drive revenue for NASCAR and manage partners on the regional level.



## Lucas De Jong

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SPORTS MANAGEMENT

### IMPACT ON FIELD

In the sales world, making an impact can come in many different ways. From creating experiences that last a lifetime to developing programs that drive value for businesses, I have had many opportunities to make an impact. This past year, through a partnership I formed with Western Maricopa Education Center (West-MEC), we were able to provide high school students with real-world work opportunities during race weekends. This consisted of having West-MEC students volunteer in various Phoenix Raceway departments, where they got firsthand experience of what it is like to operate a racetrack during some of NASCAR's biggest events. This specific impact is something I'm particularly proud of, as it has nothing to do with a company's bottom line and everything to do with making a difference in a student's life and preparing them for the future.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Along with selling, renewing and managing successful relationships with brands like ESPN Bet, Interstate Batteries, Toyota, Anheuser-Busch and more, one success that has left a mark was the "Sponsor a Veteran" program I built in partnership with Navy Federal Credit Union. Together, we built a program to recognize local veterans during our NASCAR race weekend and raise money to bring veterans to the racetrack for once-in-a-lifetime experiences. This was all centered around Veterans Day weekend, which led to unforgettable memories for the veterans and incredible PR and brand awareness for Navy Federal Credit Union. Because of that, this program has been re-created and used in other areas of the business. Another achievement that comes to mind is the sheer amount of dollars generated for the company over my time with NASCAR. From starting with \$30 tickets to six-figure deals, I have brought millions of dollars to an organization I'm proud to work for.

### ORGANIZATIONS

I'm extremely proud to work with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and the Boys and Girls Club of the Valley (B&GC). I sit on the board of FCA and help provide support for coaches, funding for the organization and leadership within the board. Being a part of FCA while at GCU helped fuel me to support the organization's goal of introducing students to Jesus Christ through sports. With the B&GC, I manage the Avondale Championship Open Golf Tournament, which provides necessary fundraising dollars each year for the Bob Bove Branch location in Avondale. Through Phoenix Raceways' support of the B&GC, we help put on a successful NASCAR-themed golf tournament going on five years now. My involvement allows me to play an essential role in generating sponsors, foursomes and commitments that all go towards the B&GC.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

While leadership can be found in many forms, there are a handful of things I try to do consistently that are outside the scope of my daily work expectations. A few examples are coming back to GCU to speak at sports management classes over the years, participating in podcasts from local business owners and leaders, as well as doing speaking engagements in the local community. Another example of leaning into leadership would be my commitment to being a high school student coach at Christ's Church of the Valley. There, I had the opportunity to lead a group of high school boys through mentorship, and I have been doing so for the past three years.





## Lucas De Jong

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SPORTS MANAGEMENT

### ADVICE

The biggest piece of advice I give to current students is this: your job hunt doesn't start when you graduate; it starts your freshman year. This was true for me as I had many opportunities to further my skills and connect with industry leaders while still studying at GCU. You want enough experience to help you stand out when applying for jobs. For recent graduates, I advise finding an organization you admire and respect and trying to get your foot in the door. Don't worry about finding the perfect role immediately but be willing to start somewhere that makes you uncomfortable and work towards where you want to be. This will keep you passionate about your work since you are intrinsically motivated because of your love for the company or industry.



## Andrew Finley

2018 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN MARKETING

**OTHER DEGREE** Master of Marketing in Marketing Analytics and Insight, Penn State University, 2022

**CURRENT POSITION** Strategic Offshore Marketing Manager at American Bureau of Shipping

**INDUSTRY** Marketing

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

My name is Andrew Finley, and I am a strategic marketing professional with a robust background in corporate and agency environments. I earned a Bachelor of Science in Marketing from Grand Canyon University in 2018 and a Master of Marketing in Marketing Analytics and Insights from Penn State University in 2022. My career began at Penn State University's main campus marketing department. I then transitioned to the advertising industry, spending four years working at small to large-scale full-service agencies, including Fig Industries, Barkley and DECODE. My portfolio includes a diverse range of brands, from small regional B2B businesses to large multinational consumer brands. My experience encompasses developing marketing and advertising campaigns, managing large-scale conference promotions and exhibitions and handling various brand marketing deliverables at different scales. Currently, I serve as the strategic marketing manager for offshore at the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS), where I develop and execute comprehensive marketing strategies, deliverables and initiatives at a global scale. This role allows me to leverage my expertise to drive growth and increase brand visibility while collaborating with colleagues across the global offshore industry and within ABS. I am passionate about mentorship and actively support emerging talent in marketing and advertising. My collaborative approach and versatility have consistently allowed me to deliver results that exceed expectations, making a meaningful impact in every role I undertake.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

First Internship at Lancaster Barnstormers, 2016; Undergraduate Graduation from Grand Canyon University, 2018; First Full-Time Position at Penn State University, 2019; First Agency Position at Fig Industries, 2020; Master's Graduation from Penn State University, 2022; First Managerial Corporate Position from American Bureau of Shipping (ABS), 2023

### CAREER HISTORY

During my undergraduate studies, I gained valuable experience through full-time internships each summer. These internships included positions with the Lancaster Barnstormers (Atlantic League of Professional Baseball), Brunner (advertising agency) and Hyland (software). These roles allowed me to explore different industries and disciplines within the broader scope of marketing. After graduating from GCU, I began my career at Penn State University's main campus in State College, PA. From there, I joined Fig Industries, a small branding and marketing agency in Lancaster, PA. My next position was at Barkley, one of the largest independent agencies in the U.S. Due to unforeseen and unfortunate challenges arising from the pandemic, I lost my job at Barkley and took a career break to complete my master's degree at Penn State. Soon after completing my graduate degree program, I joined DECODE, a full-service advertising agency based in Houston, TX. Following DECODE's acquisition by a larger conglomerate, I transitioned to my current role as a strategic marketing manager at ABS, focusing on the offshore sector.



## Andrew Finley

2018 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN MARKETING

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I have made a significant impact through my diverse experiences in various industries and with various types of clients. My internships provided me with a broad foundation that I have built upon throughout my career, allowing me to bring a unique perspective to each role I've undertaken. At Penn State University, I contributed to the marketing efforts on the main campus, helping to elevate the university's brand and campus outreach strategies. In my various agency roles at Fig Industries, Barkley and DECODE, I worked on branding and marketing initiatives that drove results for clients and advanced their business goals. My time at ABS has allowed me to focus on strategic marketing at a global scale, particularly in the offshore sector. My ability to adapt to new challenges and industries has enabled me to deliver impactful marketing strategies that align with business objectives and drive growth. Overall, my career trajectory reflects my commitment to making a positive impact through innovative marketing, diligent project management and strategic planning.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

I have had the privilege of being part of award-winning teams at both Barkley and DECODE. My professional journey has been marked by providing strategic marketing support and executing campaigns for a diverse portfolio of clients across the U.S., ranging from mid-level regional service companies to large-scale multinational consumer brands and class societies.

### ORGANIZATIONS

American Marketing Association, Houston Chapter; Penn State Alumni Association; Houston Chapter; GCU Alumni Association

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I demonstrate leadership through active listening, proactive collaboration, respectfulness in communications and consistently giving my best while supporting those around me. Working with a large team, I prioritize recognition, collaboration and appreciation for everyone I have the privilege of working with, regardless of rank, role or experience. I strive to lead by example and keep Christ at the center of my life, guided by Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."



## Andrew Finley

2018 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN MARKETING

### ADVICE

Here's some advice for current students and recent graduates: focus on learning, both in the classroom and through experiences that help develop social and professional skills. Make the most of your time by staying engaged in industry-related clubs and organizations, seeking out internship opportunities and finding mentors who can guide you through your educational and early career journey. Embrace the mentality that no job or task is beneath you and strive to give 110% in everything you do. Use your network to gain visibility in your field and stay updated on the latest requirements and certifications that will help you acquire useful skills, even beyond the classroom. Spend more time on LinkedIn and less on Instagram and TikTok. If you're serious about a prosperous career, consider deleting personal social media accounts apart from LinkedIn. Follow people you admire in your field, particularly those who hold the roles you aim for in the next five, 10, 15 and 20 years. Pay attention to what they share: it can provide valuable insights and inspiration for your own journey.



## Denisse Gonzalez

2019 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

2021 | MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP

**CURRENT POSITION** Electrical Engineer at Salt River Project

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I was born in the Philippines and graduated from GCU with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, a master's in business administration and a master's in leadership. Making history as GCU's first Filipino engineering graduate with an outstanding GPA of 3.99, I consistently excelled. Acknowledged for academic prowess, I received the "Academic Excellence Award" at GCU's Honors Banquet and the "Servant Leadership Award" in 2019. Beyond academia, I've been with SRP for over six years as an intern, technician, rotational engineer and now as an electrical engineer in meter engineering services in Mesa, Arizona. I earned the Customer Service Excellence Award at SRP in 2019 and the President's Volunteer Spirit Award in 2023. My influence spans professional spheres, featured among SRP's inspiring women for Women's History Month in 2021 and recognized as a leader in the Filipino community in the state. Noteworthy moments include giving a TED Talk for the Better Business Bureau in 2021, graduating from the SHE Leads! Program with the Arizona Foundation for Women in 2023 and being awarded the 2023 Outstanding Alumni Award for GCU's Honors College. I am also one of the founding council members of Women's Executive Network USA, solidifying me as a multifaceted and inspiring individual. Recently, I became part of the Go Red for Women campaign as a nominee for Women of Impact for the American Heart Association.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My most significant career milestones include graduating with my electrical engineering degree, obtaining two master's degrees and representing women minorities in a male-dominated industry. These achievements underscore my dedication, perseverance and capacity to overcome challenges in my profession. I am the first GCU engineering graduate to be an engineer at SRP, one of the country's largest utility providers. I have represented minorities in STEM through interviews, presentations, commercials and billboards across the U.S. I take on not only engineering roles but also project management roles. I've hosted several events at work focused on corporate goals and the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion.



## Denisse Gonzalez

**2019 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING**

**2021 | MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP**

### CAREER HISTORY

My career history started off as a lead in GCU's Learning Lounge, currently known as the ACE Center. I was assisting online and on-campus students with assignments for their writing and engineering courses. Then, I landed an engineering internship with Salt River Project in the meter engineering services department. A year later, I became a full-time engineering technician in the same department for two years while waiting for the ABET accreditation for GCU's engineering program. After the ABET accreditation was received, I became part of SRP's Rotational Engineering Program as an associate engineer for nearly two years, rotating through four engineering departments and working alongside engineers, operators, managers and other professionals in the field. Currently, I am an engineer in the same department I was an intern for, meter engineering services.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I've made a significant impact in my professional field by leveraging my expertise to pioneer innovative solutions, internally and externally supporting community partnerships, mentoring aspiring engineers and advocating for diversity and inclusion.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Valedictorian of 8th Grade and High School Classes; First Filipino Engineering Graduate at GCU with a GPA of 3.99; Summa Cum Laude in the GCU Honors College; Academic Excellence Award at GCU's Honors Banquet, 2016; Awarded the Servant Leadership Award at GCU's Honors Banquet, 2019; Honors Symposium Scholarship, 2019; Delta Mu Delta International Honor Society in Business; National Society of Collegiate Scholars; Customer Service Excellence Award at SRP, 2019; Recognized as one of SRP's inspiring women for Women History Month, 2021; TED Talk Speaker at the Industrious Women's Collective for the Better Business Bureau, 2021; Recognized in Filipino American Journal as an Inspiring leader in the Filipino community, 2021; Graduated from the SHE Leads Program by the Arizona Foundation for Women, Sponsored by SRP, 2023; President's Volunteer Spirit Award at SRP, 2023; Outstanding Alumni Award for GCU Honors College, 2024; Nominated as Woman of Impact by the American Heart Association for the Go Red for Women Campaign 2024; Nominated to be Part of Marquis' Who's Who in America, 2024; Panelist for International Women's Day Celebration at SRP, 2024

### ORGANIZATIONS

Board Member of the Arizona Asian Chamber of Commerce (AACC); Asian Corporate and Entrepreneur Leaders (ACEL) Committee Member, Arizona Lions Without Borders; Steering Committee Member of Employee Resource Groups: Females in Technology (FIT), Asian Interest Network (AIN) and the Women Interest Network (WIN); Board Member of Boosters FY2025; Ambassador for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at SRP; Founding Member of Women Executive Network in Arizona





## Denisse Gonzalez

2019 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

2021 | MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

As a woman minority engineer, I demonstrate leadership by actively promoting diversity and inclusion within my field. I lead by example, consistently striving for excellence in my work and inspiring others to do the same regardless of background or identity. Additionally, I mentor and support fellow women and minorities, providing guidance and opportunities for professional growth. Through my advocacy and actions, I aim to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes and create a more equitable and supportive environment for underrepresented groups in engineering.

### ADVICE

For current college students or recent graduates, my advice would be to stay resilient, stay curious and stay connected. Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth and never stop learning. Seek out mentors and build a strong network of support within your field. Be proactive in pursuing internships, projects and experiences that align with your passions and career goals. And remember, success is not always linear, so be open to exploring different paths and adapting to change along the way. Most importantly, believe in yourself and your abilities: you have the potential to make a meaningful impact in your chosen field. Remember: Women are not just contributors; they are catalysts of innovation, agents of positive change and architects of a diverse and dynamic future. We don't just break barriers, we shatter expectations.



## Slate Herman

2017 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION WITH AN EMPHASIS IN BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE**

**OTHER DEGREE** Juris Doctor, University of Colorado School of Law, 2020

**CURRENT POSITION** Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers Energy and Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

**INDUSTRY** Public Service

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

As counsel for the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, I see legislation develop firsthand and actively participate in the process of lawmaking. By engaging with key stakeholders, conducting congressional hearings and drafting legislation, the subcommittee confronts the field of communications policy by conducting oversight of agencies within its jurisdiction and directing the course of the communications industry conversation in the U.S. In this role, I handle the areas of wireline and satellite communications policy. Though these two jurisdictions seem far apart, wires in the ground and satellites in space, both require an in-depth knowledge of the technical and economic nature of their respective industries. After consulting with stakeholders, both public and private, it is my job to develop policies that benefit the American people.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Getting a bill signed into law will forever be a crowning achievement. H.R. 7521, the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, requires TikTok to divest from its parent company ByteDance or face a ban in the U.S. The process of drafting this legislation took over a year and resulted in several late nights and long weekends negotiating the draft language. After this legislation passed the U.S. House of Representatives, it remained in the Senate until it was swept into the Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan Aid package and signed into law by the president on April 24, 2024. The legislative process is a fascinating thing to witness firsthand. I cannot describe the feeling of seeing a bill you poured hours of labor into in order to receive the required votes for passage. Standing on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives and watching those votes come in is a moment I'll never forget, and will always remember the individuals who worked together to make this possible. From members of Congress, our sister subcommittees and the staff on other committees, this was truly a herculean effort that would not have been possible without each individual rowing in the same direction and putting the American people before themselves.



## Slate Herman

2017 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION WITH AN EMPHASIS IN BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE**

### CAREER HISTORY

After receiving my bachelor's degree at GCU in 2017, I attended the University of Colorado School of Law. In September 2018, during my second year of law school, I was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia. After taking a year off from school to pursue full-time treatment, I returned to school Monday through Thursday and received chemotherapy on Friday. My final treatment came three years later, just a few months after taking the Colorado bar exam, which I still can't believe I passed. Those years brought many things: a pandemic, the love of my life (Abbie) and the opportunity to pursue a lifelong dream of moving to Washington D.C. Upon graduation from the University of Colorado, I started a job at the Department of Commerce working at the National Telecommunication and Information Administration (NTIA), where I had interned during law school. As an attorney advisor, I had the opportunity to provide counsel on several federal grant programs. Those programs include the \$1 billion Middle Mile Grant Program and the \$42.45 billion Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment Program. In 2021, I received a call from my former intern coordinator at NTIA with the opportunity of a lifetime, a committee counsel position on Capitol Hill. While the position at its start would not provide its own portfolio, it would provide an opportunity to join a fantastic team and learn the ins and outs of the legislative branch. After 10 months, I was given a portfolio of wireline and satellite communications.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

Congressional oversight and legislative hearings are an excellent opportunity to impact the communications industry. The process leading up to a hearing requires interviewing potential witnesses, drafting a memo summarizing and detailing the boundaries of discussion and creating questions for members of Congress who rely on committee expertise to dig at the heart of nascent issues in the field. Unearthing strange subjects and highlighting unsatisfactory agency endeavors can pave the way for meaningful conversation, the result of which can be further inquiry or even legislative action. Conducting these hearings is a primary piece of my role as counsel and seeing the fruits of that labor on CSPAN is certainly a perk of the job. Outside of the congressional process, the field of communications law and policy, especially in Washington D.C., feels a lot like a family. This tight-knit community raised me through law school and provided me with the opportunity that became my first job. Providing that same opportunity to other law students has been a great joy. D.C. thrives on quick coffee or happy hour meetups. Opening spaces for unfamiliar students to meet some of the titans of the tech industry is an absolute joy. My success has come from someone who practiced the "Pay It Forward" way of life and I've thoroughly enjoyed doing the same whenever I can.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

As a student at GCU, I was heavily involved in student government, ultimately being elected student body president my senior year. During this time, I was also selected for the National Campus Leadership Council and the Henry Clay Center for Statesmanship Program. During my time at the University of Colorado School of Law, I was a member of the Colorado Technology Law Journal as the Managing Editor, publishing a paper in the 19th version of the journal titled, "Cybersecurity and the U.N. Charter: A Square Peg in a Round Hole." I was also invited to the Blackstone Legal Fellowship, received the Pay It Forward and J.J. Witt Memorial Scholarship and took third place in the Silicon Flatirons Interdisciplinary Ethics Tech Competition. In my professional career, I was awarded a Bronze Medal for government service by the Department of Commerce and, in my current role, participated in the Wilson Center's Foreign Policy Fellowship Program."



## Slate Herman

2017 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION WITH AN EMPHASIS IN BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE**

### ORGANIZATIONS

As a member of the Federal Communications Bar Association (FCBA), I get to be a part of a small but mighty community of telecom lawyers and policymakers. Last year, I had the opportunity to be on the planning committee for the 34th Annual FCBA Charity Auction. It was an honor to coordinate this event that has raised over \$2.1 million for philanthropic organizations in the D.C. metro area over the past 33 years. I am also involved with the House of Hope Orphanage located in Guatemala City, Guatemala. My parents started this organization in 2011 and opened the orphanage soon after. My small role in helping run this orphanage has shifted over the years from holding babies to making spreadsheets. This past November, we hosted The Living Hope Campaign, which raised funds for the typical costs associated with running an orphanage, baby food, diapers and staff. This campaign, lasting roughly six weeks, raised \$147,768.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

The older I get, the more I realize that leadership looks different in every role you take. In some roles, like student body president, it is important for a leader to be the vocal center of every decision and to be the first to seek feedback from surrounding team members. Now, in my role as counsel, I see that leadership takes many forms. Spending time with several members of Congress has shown me the one characteristic that all great leaders have: kindness. Treating every person around you, from those perceived most important to the least, with the same level of kindness shows humility and humanity. This characteristic is more infectious and apparent than any other. It may seem more important for a leader to work on their public speaking proficiency, their network or their education, but I believe kindness is available to everyone. The world and your workplace can be radically changed with the presence of a kind leader.

### ADVICE

My advice to current students or recent graduates would be this simple truth: you never “figure it out.” While initially a terrifying realization, confronting this truth was actually quite freeing. In the transitory time between college and my the next phase, I found myself waiting for the day I would figure it out. This led to severe resistance to change and the unknown. Uncertainty led me to hesitate to make a decision unless I felt like I had “figured it out.” The wheels of life are ever-turning and ever-changing. I have discovered in my seven years since graduation that uncertain action is often better than certain inaction. The Lord is the director of our paths. The sooner we start walking, the easier it is for him to direct our next step. As we realize that we are figuring it out instead of needing to have it figured out before taking a leap of faith forward, stress begins to fade away and the resolve of confident action takes its place. Embrace the uncertainty of the ride before you. No one enjoys a rollercoaster if they wince at every jolt and turn.



## Tijana Jelic

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN CYBERSECURITY

2027 (PROJECTED) | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN IT MANAGEMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Cybersecurity Analyst at 360SOC

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

As an IT support mentor with two years of experience at GCU Technical Support, I've been integral in assisting students with technical challenges and providing guidance to new team members. Simultaneously, I pursued a degree in cybersecurity at GCU, graduating a semester early with a perfect 4.0 GPA, a testament to my dedication to academic excellence. In February 2023, I transitioned to an internship as a cybersecurity analyst at 360SOC, where I furthered my expertise in cybersecurity while balancing my academic pursuits. Following my graduation in December 2023, I seamlessly transitioned into a full-time position within the same company, honing my skills and knowledge in the cybersecurity domain. Throughout my academic journey, I actively contributed to extracurricular activities, including serving on the Student Advisory Board (SAB) as the vice president of public relations and marketing for both SAB and STEM majors. Additionally, I participated in technology and cyber clubs and volunteered at the Cyber Center of Excellence, enriching my understanding of cybersecurity practices and fostering community engagement. My commitment to academic and extracurricular excellence led to my membership in prestigious organizations such as The National Society of Collegiate Scholars and the Alpha Chi National College Honor Society, further demonstrating my dedication to personal and professional growth. As I prepare to transition into my upcoming role as a cybersecurity sales engineer, I'm excited to leverage my diverse experiences and expertise to drive innovation and provide tailored cybersecurity solutions to our clients.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

One of my most significant career milestones was receiving an almost full-ride scholarship to attend GCU, which was a monumental achievement for both me and my parents as an international student. GCU became the perfect choice for me, not only because of the financial support but also because it provided me with the opportunity to pursue cybersecurity while deepening my relationship with God, which is an essential aspect of my life. Being part of the Honors College at GCU was another milestone that significantly impacted my career trajectory. It allowed me to work closely with exceptional individuals who opened doors to numerous connections and introduced me to amazing people who helped shape my professional journey. Graduating with a degree in cybersecurity and maintaining a perfect 4.0 GPA, all without accumulating any debt, stands out as a major milestone in my career. This accomplishment not only reflects my dedication to academic excellence but also ensures a solid foundation for my future endeavors in the cybersecurity field. Furthermore, working in the cybersecurity field while still in college was a significant achievement, considering the competitive nature of the market. It provided me with invaluable real-world experience and insights that complemented my academic studies, preparing me for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in my career.



## Tijana Jelic

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN CYBERSECURITY

2027 (PROJECTED) | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN IT MANAGEMENT

### CAREER HISTORY

My career history encompasses roles in IT support, cybersecurity and mentorship. I began as an IT support mentor at GCU Technical Support, assisting students with technical issues and training new hires. Transitioning to an internship as a cybersecurity analyst at 360SOC, I gained hands-on experience in cybersecurity while pursuing my degree. After graduating early with a degree in cybersecurity from GCU, I continued as a full-time cybersecurity analyst at 360SOC, honing my skills. Currently, I'm transitioning to a role as a cybersecurity sales engineer, leveraging my diverse experiences to drive innovation and provide tailored solutions. Throughout my journey, I've been dedicated to academic excellence, community involvement and continuous growth in the cybersecurity field.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

In my professional domain, I've left a meaningful imprint through various channels. Initially, by adeptly addressing technical hurdles and furnishing swift IT support to students, I've notably bolstered operational efficiency within educational settings. Simultaneously, in my role as a cybersecurity analyst, I've been instrumental in identifying and neutralizing potential security risks, fortifying data integrity and system resilience. Moreover, my involvement in mentorship endeavors, guiding new recruits in both IT support and cybersecurity realms, has cultivated a culture of ongoing learning and advancement within teams. Engaging with extracurricular activities like the Student Advisory Board and cyber clubs, alongside volunteering at the Cyber Center of Excellence, has not only fostered community connectivity but also nurtured collaborative spirit among peers. Additionally, my academic pursuit, culminating in a flawless 4.0 GPA in cybersecurity, underscores my unwavering dedication to excellence, serving as a beacon of inspiration for others within the field. Collectively, these contributions have significantly elevated professional standards and fostered positive growth in the cybersecurity sphere.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Being inducted into esteemed organizations such as The National Society of Collegiate Scholars and the Alpha Chi National College Honor Society recognized my academic achievements and contributions to the collegiate community.

### ORGANIZATIONS

Member, National Society of Collegiate Scholars; Member, Alpha Chi National College Honor Society





## Tijana Jelic

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN CYBERSECURITY

2027 (PROJECTED) | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN IT MANAGEMENT

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

For me, leadership involves fostering an environment where individuals feel empowered and valued, facilitating their personal and professional growth. Reflecting on my own experiences as a newcomer in a company, I recognize the significance of empathy and guidance in supporting others through unfamiliar situations. I exemplify leadership by applying these principles in my interactions with team members. I prioritize establishing a culture characterized by openness and trust, where individuals feel encouraged to ask questions and seek assistance without fear of criticism. Through sharing my own experiences and vulnerabilities, I aim to cultivate an atmosphere that embraces learning and collaboration. As a mentor, I offer tailored guidance and support, acknowledging the uniqueness of each individual's journey. While encouraging autonomy and initiative, I provide direction and resources to aid in their professional development. Through attentive listening and constructive feedback, I empower team members to surmount obstacles and realize their full potential. Additionally, I lead by setting a positive example, demonstrating integrity, accountability and a steadfast commitment to excellence in all endeavors. I foster teamwork and camaraderie, nurturing a sense of belonging within the team. By promoting a culture of continuous learning and growth, I inspire others to aspire to greatness and contribute to the collective success of the team.

### ADVICE

Seize every opportunity that comes your way and don't let fear hold you back. Remember, if you weren't prepared, God wouldn't send opportunities your way. Persevere and give your best effort; this mindset will propel you further than being overly selective. Additionally, take advantage of the events and networking opportunities offered by institutions like GCU. Creating connections can open doors you never thought possible. Embrace every chance to learn, grow and connect, and you'll find yourself on a path to success beyond your wildest dreams.



## Edward Lodzinski

2019 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS INFORMATION SYSTEMS,  
MINOR IN MARKETING**

**CURRENT POSITION** Vice President of Threat Detection and Response at MUFG Bank, Ltd.

**INDUSTRY** Finance

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

After graduating from GCU in 2019, I have dedicated the last five years to various roles within a leading global financial group. Currently, I am the vice president of threat detection and response, where I am passionate about helping address complex issues and helping mitigate organizational risks related to information security.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

One of my most significant career milestones is being one of the recipients of my organization's 2024 MUFG Excellence Award. This recognition was bestowed on those within the enterprise whose impact over the past fiscal year contributed to advancing our organization's goals and purpose. Having helped drive initiatives that empowered a brighter future for our clients, colleagues and communities, I am proud of my achievement and the role I have played in my organization's commitment to excellence.

### CAREER HISTORY

My IT security foundation began its formation during the four years I spent working for Grand Canyon Education as a student worker at the IT Help Desk, Network Operation Center (NOC) and the IT Security teams. Without being provided with these key opportunities to be exposed to these specialized technical positions, I would not be blessed with the opportunities and experiences I enjoy today. I am grateful and thankful for the investment of countless GCE leaders who, to this day, inspire me to continue to grow and understand this ever-changing industry we are all part of. The summer before my senior year at GCU, I was a summer intern in the project management office for Insight Enterprises, one of Arizona's Fortune 500 companies. While in the role of an IT project management intern, a highlight of my experience was creating and managing a structured and repeatable internship program that would eventually be presented to their human resources department at the end of my internship. As a result of networking while in these roles at GCE, I was referred to a mutual connection that resulted in what has evolved into my current career. My journey so far is a living and breathing use case of the results of winning the trust and respect of my teammates. At the end of the day, it is all about showing up for people – especially for those you are responsible for.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

My enthusiasm has been described as being contagious and has been greatly helping the overall progress of our goals. This has positively impacted the culture of my department, which spills over to all the people we work with across many different industries. This is a continuous drop in the ocean of this professional field. I look more so with a future-state mindset and to the future opportunities I am going to be entrusted with as my career continues to unfold. I look forward to looking for ways to help others along my own journey.



## Edward Lodzinski

2019 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS INFORMATION SYSTEMS,  
MINOR IN MARKETING**

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

I am a recipient of the 2024 MUFG Excellence Award. My achievements in the past fiscal year significantly impacted my organization's goals and purpose: to empower a brighter future for our clients, colleagues and communities.

### ORGANIZATIONS

InfraGard National Members Alliance; International Information System Security Certification Consortium (IS2); Hurling Club of Phoenix; Grace Baptist Church of Scottsdale

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I tend to "write my own algorithms," as described by my high school teachers while graduating and this playful analogy holds true when it comes to how I choose to lead by example in many different subject matters. When working alongside like-minded colleagues during all stages of my career, I was able to achieve more meaningful solutions that resulted in protecting our clients and continuing to safeguard their trust. To this point, I am passionate about improving the overall state of operations by being persistent in collaborating with teams globally in a manner (or algorithm, you could say) that has a proven track record of success that has led to the resolution of long-standing challenges. At the end of the day, it is about people and specifically protecting them to the best of my abilities and skills. With this purpose, it is the driver that allows me to stand alongside my colleagues and work together to resolve tomorrow's emerging threats. Ultimately, at the root of leading by example is the faith I have in Jesus Christ. I believe there is no better role model. I am on a lifelong journey to pursue the example of Christ, who leads by example. It is not without blemishes and human oversight, but how I respond to these challenging times is what ultimately wins the respect of my colleagues when they see the example illustrated through the work ethic that I promote every day.

### ADVICE

Do all of the side missions that you possibly can do without sacrificing your overall goals and purpose in your career and life. The value of people is priceless – so much so that my career story so far is only possible with the network of people I respect and am honored to be connected with. It is all about people, and treating your neighbor (and colleagues) how you want to be treated. So even if you have shy moments like me or are introverted, remember to treat everyone with respect, and it is true when they say the world is small so you never know who you will be working with (or be your boss) in five, ten, fifteen or twenty years from now. This means you are going to also have a lot of rewarding adventures and will be faced with tomorrow's challenges. There is no time like the present and as my college roommate and now trusted advisor says, "It is either some day or day one." You might as well call today day one. It is our due stewardship to make the most of today while helping those alongside us, ultimately helping us achieve our goals.



## Kaitlyn Lucas

2020 | BACHELOR OF ARTS IN GOVERNMENT WITH AN EMPHASIS IN LEGAL STUDIES

**OTHER DEGREE** Juris Doctor from Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, 2023

**CURRENT POSITION** Associate Attorney at Howard, Lewis & Petersen, PC

**INDUSTRY** Law

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am currently working as an associate attorney at Howard, Lewis & Petersen, PC. I was recently sworn in as an attorney in Utah this past May. I previously graduated from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. While there, I focused primarily on criminal defense. I was able to intern for the City of Phoenix Public Defenders Office, the Legal Advocates Office and the Maricopa County Public Defender's Office. During these different experiences, I gained a great understanding of the justice system. I also interned for the City of Phoenix Prosecutors office so that I could get a broader understanding of criminal law and see both sides of it. After law school and passing the bar, I wanted a new experience, so I moved to Provo, Utah, where I am currently working.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My most significant career milestone was graduating from law school. This was a pivotal moment in my life. Without the support from different professors at GCU, I would not have been able to get into my dream law school. It was a great experience where I learned what area of the law I wanted to pursue and was given the tools to do so.

### CAREER HISTORY

Most of my experience up to this point has been participating in different Internships during law school. I did several public defender internships and one prosecutor internship. All of these internships allowed me to get real in-court experience through the law school practice rule. I was able to participate in several bench trials and even one jury trial. Most importantly, these internships prepared me well for my current position as an associate attorney.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

The most important part of what I do is seen in the clients that I help. As an attorney, every time I go to court, I am an advocate. I am helping those who do not understand the complex processes of the legal system. Attorneys are meant to be zealous advocates and the impact that we have on the clients by doing that is tremendous. Most importantly my impact is ongoing. I am in the profession of helping people through some of the hardest days of their lives and that will continue for over 30 years.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

I graduated from Grand Canyon University Summa Cum Laude. I also graduated from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law with a distinction for the number of pro bono hours I completed during my time there.



## Kaitlyn Lucas

2020 | BACHELOR OF ARTS IN GOVERNMENT WITH AN EMPHASIS IN  
LEGAL STUDIES

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I demonstrate my leadership by showing up every day and giving 100%. It is important to be consistent and continue to show up day in and day out. This consistency has led those whom I have worked with to be comfortable when counting on me for a project or when they need advice on something.

### ADVICE

My advice to current students or recent graduates is to follow your passions. Going into law school during the height of COVID-19 made me nervous. It was difficult, but eventually, I found a career that makes me excited to go to work every day, which makes it all worth it. Remember the verse, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me,” (Psalm 23:4).



## Sam Ness

2018 | **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN HISTORY WITH AN EMPHASIS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**CURRENT POSITIONS** Certified Social Studies Teacher at Tolleson Union High School District #214;  
Civics Literacy Site Coordinator at Copper Canyon High School

**INDUSTRY** Education

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am a sixth-year social science teacher in the West Valley of Phoenix, a National History Day Sacrifice for Freedom teacher, a two-time Gilder Lehrman awardee, a two-time National Endowment for the Humanities awardee, a National World War I Museum and Memorial fellow and a fellow with the University of Michigan. After graduating from Grand Canyon University in 2018 and relocating from Southern California, I became a curriculum writer for the district within my first year. I also launched the inaugural Advanced Placement Human Geography program a year into my teaching career while building an AP mentorship on campus. Likewise, I am the main world history teacher for ELL students, manage a civics literacy program that provides students with state diploma seals and am the world history content lead. I am passionate about helping students acknowledge their abilities and grow to their full potential. Another passion of mine is aiding other students through the state with the Arizona History Day program as a state judge. When not teaching, you can find me serving in church, hanging out with friends, adventuring with my pets, curling up with a good book, hiking or exploring local coffee shops.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

I am grateful to have experienced many career milestones already in such a short career span. In my six years, I have been fortunate to be awarded two National Endowment of the Humanities grants from the U.S. Department of Education focusing on World War I, the Middle East, Indian assimilation and boarding schools. Along with these, I am a fellow with the National World War I Museum and Memorial and the University of Michigan Center for Middle Eastern, North African and South East Asian Studies program. Part of my favorite memories in my career have come from traveling and being able to learn around the nation. From Hawaii to Washington D.C., being able to see the places of my dreams, learn and be compensated at the same time has been a dream come true and one I am grateful for. Along with these larger programs, I am proud to be one of three women in my social studies department. I am the youngest on my teaching content team and also the team lead. Creating programs such as the AP Mentorship and Civics Literacy Program on my campus are my greatest school achievements because both provide students with awards, leadership skills and recognition of effort toward their studies.





## Sam Ness

2018 | **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN HISTORY WITH AN EMPHASIS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

### CAREER HISTORY

My career history began as a freelance journalist in high school, in my small town of Rosamond, CA, who wanted to have her voice heard on the smaller stories no one else wanted to pick up. I realized I have a gift and passion for the written word in that job, and it helped to set up my future career path. In college, I worked for Run to Fight Children Cancer, a 5K/10K, 501c3 race benefitting the Children's Cancer Network in Arizona as well as Phoenix Children's Hospital. I loved planning an event with over two thousand people but felt called to the heart of the matter: helping children receive the care they deserve. In college, I also worked with a 501c3 literacy program in Phoenix called Read Better Be Better. This is where my confidence in the classroom originates. I was given the incredible task of helping students with literacy and mentor relationships. It was in this position that I knew I was ready to take on the career of teaching. During the summer of my junior year at GCU, I worked at United Christian Youth Camps in the high school and middle school sections. After working with younger and older students, I knew teaching was absolutely for me. I was hired at my current position during the spring break of my student teaching semester after having to solo teach AP U.S. History three days in. I have taught the same content and grade level all six years of my career and am so grateful for the position I have.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

One of the ways I am proudest to have impacted my professional field is through networking and the creation of a Character Education Program in compliance with the Arizona Seal of Civics Literacy. Through my travels in the country to various conferences, fellowships and trainings I have been able to develop a professional network that is truly national and statewide. Having this in place I have been able to create lessons for nationwide schools and connect with students. This has also allowed me to connect my students with their peers around the country. The Character Education Program for Civics Literacy is my latest contribution. This is a program that students complete over a series of months and, by the end of it, have a greater understanding of themselves and how they serve their school and are leaders in the classroom. It comes from a holistic approach to character education in the school setting. By learning about themselves as individuals and how they serve their communities and lead, students are going to be leaving traditional schooling with a deeper understanding of who they are and how they can effectively contribute to the needs of societal flourishing.

With this program, students become eligible for the Arizona Civics Literacy Seal. Four students in my school's first year of the program qualified. This is no small feat, as zero students qualified in 2022 and only 39 students in 2021.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Two-Time Gilder Lehrman History Recipient; Two-Time National Endowment for the Humanities Scholar; National History Day Sacrifice for Freedom Team Arizona, 2022; National World War I Museum and Memorial Fellow; University of Michigan Center for Middle Eastern, North African and South East Asian Studies Fellow; GCU College of Education Advisory Board Member; TUHSD "Gem" for CivicsMatters Arizona with the Arizona Cardinals; GCU College of Education "Wall of Honor" Teacher



## Sam Ness

2018 | **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN HISTORY WITH AN EMPHASIS IN  
SECONDARY EDUCATION**

### ORGANIZATIONS

National Council for Geographic Education; National World War I Museum and Memorial; National Endowment for the Humanities; Gilder Lehrman History; National Education Association; Read Better Be Better; National History Day; National History Day Arizona; Civics Matters Arizona with the Arizona Cardinals; Close Up Organization; United Christian Youth Camp; College Board Advanced Placement

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I approach everything as a human first. Leadership doesn't come only in the form of words; leadership is also in the actions of a leader. If I am asking my team to do something, it will not be something I wouldn't be willing to do myself. Being a leader means bringing yourself lower so that your team can be brought higher. Much of my leadership style is based around holding space for my peers and team so that we approach situations with a growth mindset to find solutions and success. A leadership rule I was taught as a college senior was "never complain side-to-side," and this is still a rule I hold within my team. We don't want to simply gossip. We want to take real issues and find solutions, which can, most of the time, only be done through higher leadership. This is a delicate balance as there may be an emotional moment, and a leader can handle that to then help address the situation. A leader isn't the person who always has the best skills, the most knowledge or the most experience. From my own experience, a leader is someone who is teachable, will advocate for the needs and desires of their team and can admit when they are wrong. They don't use their reputation or position as power over anyone but collaborate with people to create greater success for the whole.

### ADVICE

What I wish I was told: 1. You are a human first and everything else second. You are always enough. 2. No one out of college, in their 30s or in their 60s has it "all figured out." We are all out here doing the best we can with the cards we hold. You learn by asking questions. Don't be afraid to do so. Ask as many questions as you can because people are more willing to help than you may think. 3. Put yourself out there and ask to get involved in your field as much as you can. Go to as many different settings as you can for your potential job field. Firstly, it helps you network and create those relationships that can help secure jobs. Secondly, you will be exposed to all the potential places you want to work and do not want to work. 4. It's okay not to know. Get comfortable saying, "I don't know." The more you admit this, the more you can begin to grow as a human. 5. Your time and talent are valuable. Do not sell yourself short. Your boss and how they treat their employees are equally important to the number on your paycheck. 6. Start to develop healthy work/life/relationship boundaries early. The earlier you start, the easier they become and you will more than likely be ahead of your coworkers. 7. People aren't thinking about you as much as you think they are.



## Kyler Nixon

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Chief Revenue Officer at Gemplers Inc.

**INDUSTRY** Business

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I'm Kyler Nixon, an entrepreneur, business growth strategist and proud Grand Canyon University alum. During my time at GCU, I founded Kyler Creative, a marketing agency that partners with digital course creators. While running my own business, I focused on practical, effective marketing solutions, which helped us reach \$2.5 million in total revenue and assisted our clients in generating over \$100 million in revenue of their own. In 2023, I transitioned to a new opportunity and joined Gemplers, an 85-year-old B2B e-commerce company, as chief revenue officer. At Gemplers, I oversee a revenue operations team of about 20 employees in marketing, sales, customer service and product. Together, we work together to grow the business and provide products for outdoor professionals across the country.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of working with incredible brands and people, achieving significant milestones that have shaped my professional journey. In 2018, six months after I graduated from GCU, I became a StoryBrand Certified Guide, earning an exclusive marketing certification that has greatly enhanced my strategic view of marketing and business. That same year, I was selected to serve with Creative Missions, a mission trip dedicated to supporting under-resourced churches across the U.S. This experience deepened my commitment to using my skills for meaningful impact. In 2020, I achieved one of my favorite milestones by growing a client's revenue from \$10,000 annually to over \$1 million. Additionally, my agency, Kyler Creative, surpassed \$1 million in total revenue, marking a significant achievement in our growth trajectory. By 2021, my team's collective efforts led our clients to generate over \$40 million in annual revenue. This success was more than doubled in 2022, with clients earning close to \$100 million annually, showcasing the sustained impact of our marketing strategies. In 2023, I joined Gemplers, an 85-year-old B2B e-commerce company, as its chief revenue officer. In this role, I lead a dynamic team of 20 professionals across marketing, sales, customer service and product divisions, working collaboratively to drive business growth and support outdoor professionals nationwide.

### CAREER HISTORY

I founded my marketing agency, Kyler Creative, in 2017 while in school at GCU. I ran the agency for six years and then joined Gemplers as the chief revenue officer in 2023. I have been in that role since.



## Kyler Nixon

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### IMPACT ON FIELD

At my agency, I had the opportunity to work with digital course creators in the parenting space. These clients were experts in things like sleep in babies, toddler behavior, speech, feeding, parenting, occupational therapy, reading and more. Our agency was one of the first to focus on this industry, and we were able to make parenting advice highly accessible for millions of parents and families across the world. Today, those clients do well over \$100 million per year and continue to reach hundreds of millions of families each year with their courses and resources. In my current role as chief revenue officer at Gemplers, I aim to replicate this impact in a different industry. Along with my team, I'm aiming to get quality tools into the hands of hard-working outdoor professionals to help them do their jobs faster, more efficiently and safer. Ultimately, my goal is to steward the gifts and opportunities God has given me to help others no matter my role.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

I was honored to graduate summa cum laude from GCU, along with receiving honors from the Colangelo College of Business. In 2018, I achieved the distinction of becoming a StoryBrand Certified Guide, an exclusive marketing certification that has significantly enhanced my strategic capabilities.

### ORGANIZATIONS

My wife and I lead Love Your First Year, a ministry dedicated to helping engaged Christian couples prepare for marriage. We are also involved in our local church, Doxa Church, in Madison, WI.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I vividly remember my business professors at GCU teaching, and more importantly, demonstrating servant leadership. This is a principle I strive to embody in the marketplace every day. I aim to lead like Jesus, with kindness and directness, confidence and humility, hard work and rest. Each interaction with my team and others in my industry is an opportunity to serve and love them unconditionally. In a business environment that often prioritizes profit over people, I am committed to fostering a culture of servant leadership. This approach, inspired by my professors, allows me to create a positive and supportive work environment where my team feels valued and empowered. I am deeply grateful for the values and leadership style instilled in me during my time at GCU, and I am dedicated to carrying these principles forward in my career.

### ADVICE

Always. Be. Learning. I can't emphasize this enough. If you want a successful career, especially in business, getting your degree is just the first step to becoming a lifelong learner. Ask questions, be curious and readily accept feedback.



## Elizabeth Oekerman

**2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN COUNSELING WITH AN EMPHASIS IN ADDICTION, CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE, MINOR IN SPANISH**

**OTHER DEGREE** Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Liberty University, 2024

**CURRENT POSITION** Licensed Professional Counselor Associate Candidate

**INDUSTRY** Public Service

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am a 2024 graduate of Liberty University's Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-approved clinical mental health counseling program. Prior to graduate school, I earned my bachelor's degree as part of GCU's class of 2021 undergraduate counseling program, earning a Spanish minor at the same time. As a practicum student, I served women and children escaping domestic violence and substance abuse at Phoenix Rescue Mission's Changing Lives Center. Upon graduation, I moved across the country to start my master's program in Virginia. I took courses year-round to complete the accelerated program. During my time at Liberty University, I was employed as a graduate student assistant in the school of education. For the clinical portion of my program, I completed hundreds of hours serving underprivileged individuals in need of counseling services at no cost. My clientele ranged from teachers, local community members, the elderly, couples, high school students and children and adolescents in and out of the foster system. As I was finishing my graduate program, I discovered my interest in expressive arts therapy from a psychodynamic theoretical orientation. As I start my licensure in Texas, I hope to continue with expressive arts and return to school to begin a PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision. By continuing my education, I hope to teach future generations of counselors, continue to serve underprivileged populations and help those who otherwise could not receive counseling services due to internal and external obstacles.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My most significant career milestone has been receiving a graduate student assistant scholarship, which gave me the blessing to graduate from graduate school completely debt-free. Since I was 12 years old, I knew I wanted to be a counselor, which required a master's degree. I was responsible for getting myself through graduate school and contemplated whether or not it was worth the financial strain for my ultimate life calling. I applied for a couple of GSA positions on a whim and was filled with doubt about getting an acceptance, yet God's hand orchestrated everything. Having the opportunity to work in a job that was flexible with my courses and studies allowed me the freedom to primarily focus on my classes and clinical hours. Without this job, I don't know if I would have applied for my master's, had the opportunity to graduate early and be in the position I'm in now.





## Elizabeth Oekerman

**2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN COUNSELING WITH AN EMPHASIS IN ADDICTION, CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE, MINOR IN SPANISH**

### CAREER HISTORY

While at GCU, I was a peer academic mentor in the Office of Student-Athlete Development. I met with student-athletes on a weekly basis to review their homework, teach study habits, assist with time management, organize a calendar, conduct grade checks and report progress to athletic directors to ensure eligibility. When I didn't see student-athletes, I oversaw study hall hours and welcomed coaches and prospective recruits into the office. Prior to graduating, I completed practicum hours at Phoenix Rescue Mission's Changing Lives Center to provide case management services to women and children escaping domestic violence and substance abuse. I conducted initial intakes, collaborated to develop treatment plans, wrote case notes, had weekly supervision and observed individual counseling sessions. At Liberty University, I was a graduate student assistant in the school of education. In this role, I placed students in their teaching practicums, communicated with students, graded assignments and completed projects assigned by professors and deans. As a student intern at Patrick Henry Family Services, I conducted initial intakes, created treatment plans and goals, saw clients in person and via telehealth, led psychoeducational groups, collaborated with colleagues, and had clinical and faculty supervision to review cases, ensure confidentiality and ethical responsibilities, and gain clinical knowledge. As a licensed professional counselor associate candidate, I conducted initial intakes, created treatment plans and goals, saw clients in person, via telehealth, cofacilitated psychoeducational groups, maintained progress notes and updated treatment plans.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I have impacted my professional field by serving those who wouldn't seek help on their own. There are so many obstacles that keep people from coming to counseling: finances, cultural stigmas, lack of transportation, language barriers, stereotypes and assumptions of counseling, scheduling and so many more. We live in a broken world. As a counselor, I want my clients to feel heard and human. Life is tough as it is and the obstacles keeping them from counseling make it even more difficult to get the help they need. It's a risk to go to counseling, and moving all the obstacles from these underprivileged communities makes the risk less intimidating. Jesus is described as a wonderful counselor. He sat with those hurting, embarrassed, shunned and let them be human. I feel called by God to be a counselor and serve others. It is such a blessing to play a role in someone's life, even for a brief period of time, and see them grow from counseling.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

GCU Dean Scholarship, 2017 - 2018; GCU Provost Scholarship, 2019 - 2021; GCU Counseling Club Secretary, 2019 - 2020; Liberty University Graduate Student Assistant Scholarship Recipient, 2021 - 2023; GCU 30 Under 30 Nomination, 2024

### ORGANIZATIONS

American Counseling Association





## Elizabeth Oekerman

2021 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN COUNSELING WITH AN EMPHASIS IN ADDICTION, CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE, MINOR IN SPANISH**

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I personally demonstrate leadership by taking risks. I have learned as a student, counselor in training, young professional and even as an individual that growth doesn't happen in your comfort zone. Coming to GCU was a risk since I only knew a handful of people. At GCU, I took a risk by applying for a job I thought I wouldn't get, but did. Another big risk was revamping the Canyon Counselors Club and kept it running during the pandemic. In the fall of 2020, I took a risk and applied for practicum and doubled the hours required. After graduating from GCU, I took a risk and applied to Liberty University's clinical mental health counseling program, and had no idea how I'd afford it, but I took a risk and essentially got a full ride. Risks don't go unnoticed. As a young leader, I want to be recognized as someone who takes risks. I've had professors, teachers, colleagues and friends who doubted me, and their doubt motivated me to take the challenge and risk the opportunity. Looking back, if I hadn't taken risks over the last couple of years, I would be a completely different person, and wouldn't have grown so much as an individual, student, professional and counselor in training.

### ADVICE

Be patient with yourself. Undergraduate education is just the beginning, especially in counseling. It is a long journey from the first day of college until the first day of residency. I remember many times throughout my undergraduate and graduate program wondering "When will this be done?" or "Is this worth it?" or "Why did God put me on such a long path?" Looking back, these questions gave me time to be patient and reflect on why I wanted to be a counselor and how God put me on this Earth to fulfill this calling. Professors, supervisors and others kept reminding me that God wouldn't put me on a journey that I wasn't properly equipped for. Reminding myself to be patient and lean into God's calling for me was difficult at times, but I can't see myself doing anything else, and I wouldn't change anything about the academic and professional decisions I've made thus far, and can't wait to see what the Lord has in store for me.



## Tyler Ostapuk

2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
2023 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CYBERSECURITY

**CURRENT POSITION** Incident Response Analyst at Carlisle Companies, Inc.

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

My name is Tyler Ostapuk, and I am based in the Phoenix metropolitan area. I got into cybersecurity thanks to a wonderful conference called DEFCON and mentors who gave me an opportunity to run with my cybersecurity passion. Thanks to the Grand Canyon Education (GCE) security team! I have the distinct pleasure of working in a field that doubles as a passion: optimizing and automating detective and preventive cybersecurity controls, incorporating regulatory, contractual and threat intelligence data points to take advantage of every last optimization. My career goal is to seamlessly bake cybersecurity into business processes and help teach others to do the same.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My most significant career milestones would have to be creating a custom Security Operations Center (SOC) from its out-of-box configuration and creating a comprehensive incident response dictionary of the types of attacks and their respective response actions.

### CAREER HISTORY

I started as a Help Desk analyst working for GCE and worked my way up to an incident responder for the same employer. I then wanted to try my hand at global incident response, so I transitioned to a company that conducted business around the world. As an incident response analyst for this company, I currently lead incident response efforts for attacks occurring on Asia Pacific Region (APAC), European Union region (EU) and United States Region assets. Factor in privacy laws, time zones and different cultures and it becomes quite a fun job!

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I hope to have helped students and interns realize their passion for cybersecurity and provided them with the resources they need to succeed. I also speak on how to conduct SOC and Incident Response (IR) operations at the Threat Intelligence Support Unit, which is a group that educates any who are interested in the various aspects of cybersecurity. Lastly, I continue to optimize automatic cybersecurity response procedures and frequently share any insights I obtain from this process with my community.

### ORGANIZATIONS

Threat Intelligence Support Unit (TISU); GCU; CactusCon; Arizona Cyber Threat Response Alliance (ACTRA).



## Tyler Ostapuk

2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
2023 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CYBERSECURITY

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

My definition of success is when an individual under my care or responsibility feels empowered to accomplish their dreams. As such, I strive to create an atmosphere of learning, growth and fun with whomever I interact with.

### ADVICE

My advice to current students or recent grads is to look out for others first. You can have all the success in the world and accomplish all your dreams, but if, in that process, you hurt others or step on them, it's not worth it. In the process of looking out for others, you will build skills that can provide a roof over your head and food on your table.



## Salvatore Parascandola

2022 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Software Engineering at Evoke MarTech

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I was born in Rio Rancho, New Mexico. I joined the U.S. Navy in 2013 and served four years. I started at GCU in 2019 and graduated in 2022. I now work as a software engineer at a digital marketing agency.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Finishing my four-year military contract and entering back into civilian life was my first major milestone. The next was graduating from university, and most recently, I was promoted to software engineer. Since then, I have been working to enter a more senior role.

### CAREER HISTORY

My first job out of high school was as a logs and records clerk. There, I gained exposure to computer servers and how they are maintained. After that, I joined Intel as a contractor and was introduced to programming. I applied at GCU that week, and now I work in a field I have a passion for and love.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

The team I am a part of pioneered several unique solutions to solve problems in a cloud environment. I have designed and built software that allows the generation of dynamically rendered documents which is being used in three separate client accounts.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I take responsibility for the projects that I am given. If something goes wrong, I like to be aware of it and try to help even if it is outside the scope of my role. I like to have open lines of communication to ensure that no one is out of the loop for long, and I take ownership no matter if the project is a success or a failure.

### ADVICE

I have found that the most important lessons I have learned are from failures. Sometimes you have to fail upward. Learn from what you did and get after the problem again with a new plan of attack.



## Justin Peterson

2016 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT  
MANAGEMENT, MINOR IN MARKETING**

**CURRENT POSITION** Senior Manager of Ticket Sales at the Anaheim Ducks Hockey Club, OCVIBE,  
OC Sports & Entertainment

**INDUSTRY** Business

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am the senior manager of ticket sales with the Anaheim Ducks, currently in my third season with the club. In my role, I oversee three revenue-generating departments: inside sales, business development and corporate hospitality, all focused on new sales campaigns through Orange Alliance memberships, flex partial plans and corporate group tickets. Fun fact, I have now worked for three different professional teams, all within hockey by coincidence. Prior to my role with the Ducks, I served in two leadership roles with the LA Kings: in business development and as a ticket strategy manager, where I continued to drive new sales initiatives by leveraging a comprehensive suite of tech partnerships to enhance the sales process. I began my sports career at the pro level with the Arizona Coyotes, where I was fortunate to achieve several club revenue records over the course of my seven seasons in the desert. A native of Colorado Springs, I'm thrilled to hold a bachelor's degree in sports management with an accompanying marketing minor from Grand Canyon University in Phoenix.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

I am proud to have achieved several career milestones in my six-and-a-half-year tenure with the Arizona Coyotes, some of which were franchise record revenue achievements, a few which still hold to this day. Most notably, \$2.1 Million in gross sales, countless staff promotions in which I mentored and trained those individuals and several impactful business relationships that ignited the Coyotes fan base across the greater Phoenix area. As a proud member of the ticket sales leadership group for the Los Angeles Kings franchise, my contributions stretch beyond the ticket sales department. I enjoyed the ability to be forward-thinking with process optimization and organizational effectiveness, which led to identifying new strategies to streamline efficiency across several business units. In addition, I continued to drive new sales initiatives by leveraging a comprehensive suite of technology partnerships to enhance the sales process with vendors such as Conversica, Outreach.io, FanRally, SundaySky, Sendoso, Fuse Technologies and many others. In my current role with the Anaheim Ducks, my career milestones are still a work in progress. However, there are still several noteworthy items to be proud of. In the most recent 2023-24 sales campaign, the Ducks successfully reached 96% of the goal in overall revenue while facing an 83% staff turnover rate. Leveraging my prior process and technology-driven mindset allowed us, for the first time in franchise history, to sell holiday packs directly to consumers online, which yielded an 184% growth year over year in that product segment.



## Justin Peterson

2016 | **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT  
MANAGEMENT, MINOR IN MARKETING**

### CAREER HISTORY

I have now worked for three different professional hockey teams. Prior to my role with the Ducks, I served in two leadership roles with the LA Kings as a business development manager and a ticket strategy manager. My sports career initially began with the Arizona Coyotes as a seasonal sales associate and ultimately received three promotions in my six-and-a-half-year tenure, with the final one resulting in being the senior account executive of business development.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

When I think back to my career, I am fortunate to have worked with and for some of the best individuals in the sports business industry who prioritize a “people first” mentality. It is that exact mindset that I try to emulate in my day-to-day operation by getting to know coworkers, colleagues and peers on a human level first and being diligent about the relationships that I form. In addition, I pride myself on being an extremely detail-oriented, analytically minded and process-focused sales leader, which is sometimes uncommon and thus creates opportunities to be an asset to any organization I happen to be part of.

### ORGANIZATIONS

Arizona Coyotes #OnePack Leader in Volunteer Hours, 2019 to 2021; Vice President of Membership and Organization Development for the GCU Sports Business Alumni Chapter, 2020 to 2022; Orange County Sports Commission Advisory Board President, 2023; GCU Colangelo College of Business Advisory Board President, 2024

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I believe that leadership is never perfect and even the best leaders will make mistakes. It is for that reason that leadership is a fine balance of outward confidence, humbleness, creativity and people-first focus. Leaders are looked at to set the pace and be one on the front lines supporting the individuals that work for them, but also supporting the organization that they work for.

### ADVICE

Be opportunistic! As a current student or recent graduate, the window of opportunity to make a name for yourself and build a resume is becoming more and more thin throughout the years as individuals have more resources at their disposal. I am a huge advocate of networking and being a good steward of the organization that they represent, knowing that the impression you will make in a very short amount of time will last a lifetime. A moniker that I constantly use in my current day-to-day is simply be GREAT:

G – Grateful

R – Respectful

E – Enthusiastic

A – Authentic

T – Trustworthy





## Karina Putman

2019 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING

**OTHER DEGREES** Nursing Diploma, Conemaugh School of Nursing; Master of Science in Nursing Education, Capella University, 2020; PhD in Nursing Education, Liberty University (Projected 2026)

**CURRENT POSITION** Nursing Instructor at UPMC Shadyside School of Nursing

**INDUSTRY** Healthcare

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I started as a registered nurse very early and worked in the psychiatry and medical-surgical arenas in a rural hospital. After that, I moved on to hospice, palliative care and oncology bedside nursing which I loved very much. I received my BSN from GCU and MSN-Ed from Capella University while working full-time in these specialties. I would also do some school nursing on the side, which was also very enjoyable. After this, I moved to the city and was a clinical research coordinator at one of the region's only comprehensive cancer centers in the melanoma, sarcoma, GI and GU cancer departments. This touched me deeply because of my own previous battle with cancer. Now, I have moved on to a nursing instructor position at UPMC Shadyside School of Nursing, which has allowed me to grow my instructional skills in academia while I pursue my PhD in nursing education from Liberty University. I currently am a co-chair of the Critical Care and Oncology course, and I am also the only staff member who has been trained to teach in every course from freshman to senior level. I have enjoyed every course and interaction with the students in clinical and in the classroom!

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My first significant career milestone is one that comes from a personal perspective. Moving from a rural hospital and bedside nursing to a large city in a clinical research coordinator position was beyond eye-opening. It taught me the ins and outs of the systems, protocols, ancillary staff involvement and everything else those performing bedside care do not see or know about. It also gave me time to actually emotionally connect with the clients and see the beginnings of the process and not just the bedside areas. Usually, the inpatient sector is handling older diagnoses or specific circumstances. This career put me in the office, in the chair in front of the patient with a new diagnosis, with the consent form and the pen. It was extremely rewarding but extremely hard. My most recent career milestone was being promoted to chair of the senior-level course here at UPMC Shadyside School of Nursing. I had never dreamed of being in leadership alongside so many highly educated and talented people who have experience far beyond my years, but they deemed me worthy!

### CAREER HISTORY

My first job was at Pizza Hut as a line cook and I moved through food service for my initial working years. When I was in high school, I worked as an interpreter at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, which taught me a lot about architecture, nature and art. After that, I moved into nursing. I first worked in a 40-bed medical-surgical unit with a special attention (mental health and cognitive disability) section, then moved to hospice/palliative and oncology, then to research coordination and now to academia.



## **Karina Putman**

**2019 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING**

### **IMPACT ON FIELD**

While pursuing my PhD, I began to see that change is happening in nursing, but is not happening enough. For example, through both my practice and academic endeavors, I have found that hospice and palliative care do not get enough attention. Emotional intelligence is often overlooked, so I would like to contribute heavily to that in the future. In clinical research, two drugs were passed by the FDA with help from trials I helped coordinate, and I worked on over 90 other promising ones throughout my time in clinical research services. Currently, I am working in conjunction with another university on a study that improves mental health in nursing students. I also feel I bring a positive influence into the academic arena by encouraging younger students to understand that age does not confine them to bedside nursing or a single degree. I also bring up the idea that nursing school does not need to be unpleasant. There is always someone to listen and always a chair to cry in after an exam. Academics, nurses and academic nurses are often jaded and tough. It doesn't have to be that way. I lead with compassion and God's direction, and I think that improves both the student outcomes, faculty interactions and the overall environment for all.

### **AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

Lead Clinical Coordinator; Chair of Critical Care and Oncology Senior-Level Course

### **ORGANIZATIONS**

Oncology Nurses Society, Local and National Levels; National League for Nursing; Graduate Nursing Student Association through the American Association of Colleges of Nursing

### **LEADERSHIP STYLE**

My whole job is leadership. I firmly believe in and employ servant leadership and transformational leadership. I work alongside my students and fellow faculty and inspire them to be the best they can be. I lead with emotional and social intelligence to enhance the quality of the education the students receive, and the relationships formed with fellow faculty who work under me. Everything we do is a cohesive process that requires input, revision and encouragement which a leader cannot do alone! However, when boundaries need to be drawn, there are clear and concise reasons why presented, and no one is left in the dark. Clarity and honesty are also key!

### **ADVICE**

Do not let age, background or others' words define you. Every difficult experience requires 10% intelligence and 90% persistence. You can do it if you want to; don't ever think you're not smart enough.



## Jorge Romero

2019 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION  
2022 | MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

**CURRENT POSITION** Educator at Glendale Elementary School District

**INDUSTRY** Education

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I currently hold the professional position of a middle school physical education teacher and athletic director at William C. Jack School in the Glendale Elementary School District. Moreover, I am a football coach at Moon Valley High School and a softball coach at Independence High School.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

As an educator for four years, I have been acknowledged by my school's administration team as a professional with a highly effective performance in the classroom setting. While my career is in its early stages, I credit my academic success to earning three degrees with memberships in three different honor societies as proof of my work ethic and commitment to professional growth. Overall, being the first in my family to attend higher education is an achievement I cherish above everything.

### CAREER HISTORY

My college journey started at Glendale Community College where I received an associate's degree in arts in May of 2017. Afterward, I transferred to GCU, where I earned a bachelor's in secondary education in December 2019 and a master's in educational administration in October 2022. I am currently enrolled in GCU's College of Doctoral Studies where I am pursuing a Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in K-12 Leadership. My research interests are focused on identifying strategies to support future first-generation college students in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area. My long-term purpose professionally is to make a difference in the Latino(a) community by providing mentorship and resources for high school students of diverse backgrounds interested in pursuing higher education. My educator career started in August 2020 at William C. Jack School in the Glendale Elementary School District. My first two years consisted of teaching kindergarten through third grade virtually and in person. In the last two years, our school transitioned to kindergarten through eighth grade and I acquired the position of athletic director for our middle school athletics program.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

My role as an educator has provided opportunities to advocate the importance of physical education and health in my community. I have emphasized sports and activities as a path to develop leadership, communication, collaboration and compassion on campus. Additionally, I am using my platform as an educator to introduce diverse resources and tools students could implement to maintain a healthy lifestyle at home with their family members and involvement in athletics outside of school. My passion for sports and maintaining a healthy lifestyle has influenced my community's youth to embrace physical education classes to develop physical, cognitive and social skills altogether.



## Jorge Romero

2019 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION  
2022 | MASTER OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

A personal achievement was earning my first teaching position in the same district I attended as a student and having the opportunity to teach in my community. Additionally, I earned membership to three honor societies during my college journey including Phi Theta Kappa, Kappa Delta Pi and Alpha Chi Honor Society. Moreover, I had the honor of being featured in the Lopes Legacy Wall for GCU's College of Education.

### ORGANIZATIONS

I am currently a sixth-year football coach at Moon Valley High School and a second-year softball coach at Independence High School.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I embrace my role as a leader in education to influence my community's youth to become the best version of themselves. I strive to model confidence, compassion and a strong work ethic for my students to believe in their unique strengths and set higher goals. Furthermore, I believe in continuous professional growth via feedback and suggestions from my administration team and peers to achieve individual and collective goals. Overall, I consider myself to be a reliable and trustworthy individual expected to go above and beyond for our students and families.

### ADVICE

Always set new life goals to achieve while taking time to appreciate how far you've come.



## Bryce Schmisser

2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN COMPUTER PROGRAMMING

**OTHER DEGREE** Master of Science in Software Engineering, Arizona State University

**CURRENT POSITION** Software Engineer at Viasat

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

For almost three years now I have been working for Viasat, a communication company. During these three years, I have worked on various projects as a software engineer and have had the opportunity to get involved with management-level tasks such as interviewing candidates and becoming a Scrum Master for multiple projects.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Throughout my three years, I have had two promotions, each demonstrating not only my technical knowledge in my field but also my leadership skills in order to receive both accolades.

### CAREER HISTORY

Since graduating from GCU, I have been at the same company: Viasat. My role is software engineer, where I design, architect, implement and test software solutions for satellites.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

Though I play a small role in the world of satellite communication, I would like to believe that my contributions to my company and the projects I have worked on have pushed the industry forward.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Through my three years, I have been promoted two times, making my current title, "Software Engineer III."

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

At my company, I have had many opportunities to demonstrate my leadership skills. One of these opportunities has been the ability to participate in the interview processes for many different candidates looking to join my company. Another way I demonstrate my leadership at my company is by being a certified Scrum master. Within this role, I meet with my team to ensure they have all the proper tools and access in order for them to complete their task while also aligning our processes with Scrum.

### ADVICE

When leaving college and getting into a professional position, there will be good days and bad days. I have found that having a job that I truly enjoy and where I can see the benefits makes the bad days seem inconsequential.



## Austin Sorrels

2018 | **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN GOVERNMENT WITH AN EMPHASIS IN LEGAL STUDIES, MINOR IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

**OTHER DEGREE** Juris Doctor, William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada Las Vegas

**CURRENT POSITION** Litigation Attorney at Hale Injury Law

**INDUSTRY** Law

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

My name is Austin Sorrels, and I am a litigation attorney practicing personal injury law in Las Vegas, Nevada. Every day I have the esteemed honor of fighting for the rights of the injured. From motor vehicle collisions to slip and falls in Las Vegas casinos, my practice consists of securing justice for the afflicted by standing up to multi-billion-dollar corporations. Since embarking on my legal career, I have recovered millions of dollars for injured men, women and children across the state of Nevada.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Upon my graduation from GCU in 2018, I was accepted into the William S. Boyd School of Law and began my law school career that same fall. After graduating from law school in 2021, I sat for the Nevada Bar Exam that summer, passed on my first attempt and was admitted to the bar that same year. Throughout my first three years as an attorney, I have successfully resolved thousands of personal injury claims both inside and outside of the courtroom. In 2023 alone, I recovered more than \$1 million for injured Nevadans.

### CAREER HISTORY

Upon passing the Nevada State bar exam in 2021, I began my career as an associate attorney for GGRM Law Firm, Nevada's largest workers' compensation firm. I represented injured workers navigating the intricacies of the Nevada Workers' Compensation system. In the fall of 2022, I transitioned out of workers' compensation and into personal injury and began working as an associate for Hale Injury Law. I began to focus on representing individuals injured in motor vehicle collisions and slip and falls. Specifically, my focus is on litigating complex cases that are unable to obtain resolution outside of a courtroom. I write legal briefs, take and defend depositions, as well as attend arbitrations and mediation.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

Since day one, I have strived to provide high-quality legal service that is uniquely tailored to each and every one of my clients. I am a firm believer that relationships matter. To me, clients are not merely numbers on a page. Every one of my clients has a name and a story. I believe I have impacted the Las Vegas legal community by demonstrating that our field is at its best when it is driven by establishing relationships and making every client feel like family.





## Austin Sorrels

2018 | **BACHELOR OF ARTS IN GOVERNMENT WITH AN EMPHASIS IN  
LEGAL STUDIES, MINOR IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

### **AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

In 2023 alone, I recovered more than \$1 million for injured Nevadans.

### **ORGANIZATIONS**

Nevada Bar Association; Nevada Justice Association; American Association for Justice; Board of Directors for Lake Mead Christian Ministries

### **LEADERSHIP STYLE**

I demonstrate leadership by constantly striving to do things the right way, not the easy way. I am a firm believer that if you stand by your principles and serve people well, success will come to you.

### **ADVICE**

GCU undoubtedly provides its students with the tools needed to succeed, but tools are only beneficial when they are used! My advice to GCU students is to grab hold of the tools given to us by our great university and to confidently use them to make a difference in the lives of others.



## Jacqueline Thomas

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Director at Rational 360

**INDUSTRY** Business

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

My name is Jacqueline Thomas, I'm a seasoned communication strategist with a wealth of experience across government, nonprofits and the private sector. My strengths lie in crafting compelling content, managing reputation risks and simplifying complex ideas and research into accessible language. In my most recent roles, I served as a director of public affairs at a K Street communications firm, as a communications director for the U.S. House of Representatives and as a White House political appointee for U.S. Customs and Border Protection in the capacity of deputy press secretary. I hold a bachelor of science in business management from Grand Canyon University and have earned a public policy analysis certificate from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Born and raised in Phoenix, AZ, I had the honor of representing my home state at the Miss America Competition in 2019.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My most significant career milestones include the following: preparing a Senate Judiciary Questionnaire (SCJ) for an attorney in preparation for his Senate Judiciary Confirmation Hearings to become a federal court judge. I competed for Miss Arizona six times before winning in 2019. I was honored to be recognized as one of the Most Influential Women in the Valley for my efforts with Lady Leaders, which fostered partnerships spanning nonprofits, two U.S. Senators and numerous businesses. At Miss America 2020, I was named a top five finalist for the Women in Business Award. I was appointed the youngest Deputy Press Secretary of U.S. Customs and Border Protection by the White House at 25 years old. In this role, I planned and executed a press conference along the border wall of Texas and Mexico in which the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, the Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection and the 45th President of the United States spoke. As communications director on Capitol Hill, I got my member of Congress interviews on the major networks: Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, CBS and ABC. My work and writing have appeared in national news, tier-one media networks, syndicated radio shows and on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. I entered my private sector career at the director level only four years out from my undergraduate studies. I have prepared C-suite executives from all across the country and the UK for high-visibility interviews.



## Jacqueline Thomas

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### CAREER HISTORY

After graduating from GCU, I had the pleasure of working for an attorney in the process of becoming a presidentially appointed judge. In serendipitous timing, I won the title of Miss Arizona 2019 around the same time the attorney was confirmed as a judge by the U.S. Senate. As Miss Arizona, I traveled the state representing the organization, engaging with the public at over 100 events and speaking engagements, ranging from charity functions to high-profile public gatherings and championing my social impact initiative: Lady Leaders. After serving as Miss Arizona, I moved to Washington, D.C. for political communications. I was appointed as deputy press secretary of U.S. Customs and Borders Protection (CBP) by the White House. I served in that capacity, prepping the commissioner (head of CBP) for prime-time media interviews, press conferences and visits across the country to CBP ports of entry. The highlight of that role was planning and executing a press conference along the border of Texas and Mexico that President Trump himself spoke at, as the last public appearance of his presidency. After my time at CBP, I worked for a year on Capitol Hill as the communications director for a member of Congress. I was in charge of all digital and on-the-record communications, including all press releases, statements and speeches for community events. Currently, I work in the private sector for a full-service public affairs and digital media communications firm crafting communication campaign strategies and branding for Fortune 500 companies and media training C-suite executives.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

My professional endeavors do not span across one specific field, but rather across government, nonprofits and the private sector. As I look back on my career experience thus far, I think mainly of the people I've impacted. This spans from serving as an ambassador of a century-old nonprofit and empowering young women across the state of Arizona to help them reach their next goal, to serving my country in communications roles in the government at a federal agency and on Capitol Hill. I also think of working with a variety of businesses and people on a daily basis to ensure their communication strategies can stand the test of time. In all of my roles I have focused on how I can give back to the community and also the generation after me. I am grateful to my mentors, specifically starting with those at GCU who believed in me and gave me the resources to get where I am today and I try to do those same things for the younger folks coming up after me. I've learned through my experiences thus far that age does not mean anything when standing against character, integrity, hard work and having a "solutions-oriented" mindset.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

American Legion Award Medal; Distinguished Achievement Award from GCU Honors Executive Faculty; Miss Arizona Awards: Miss Arizona 2019, Top Five Finalist for the Women in Business Awards, Talent Award, Swimsuit and Lifestyle Award, Social Media Award; Quality of Life Top Three Award, Miss America Academic Award, Top Fundraiser for Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, Top Fundraiser for the Miss Arizona Scholarship Foundation

### ORGANIZATIONS

Miss America Organization; Arizona Foundation for Women; Children's Miracle Network Hospitals; The American Diabetes Association; American Heart Association



## Jacqueline Thomas

2017 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I demonstrate leadership by striving to always act with integrity, always be truthful and in all situations wearing the “white hat.” Being a leader is a way of being and living, it’s not just a role you put on at certain parts of the day or week. I believe I have been given a lot of responsibility at a young age for a purpose, and because of that, a lot is required of me. I believe it’s important to act with integrity at all times, not just at work or when someone is watching. To me, integrity means following through on what you say you are going to do to others but also to yourself, it’s putting others first at all times and being disciplined with your words and actions. For me, integrity spans from in-person attitudes to online behavior and being mindful of the content I post and share with the world. These attributes are what I teach my Lady Leaders mentees about how to show up as leaders in their community and to be above the fray from their peer group. Some days, being a leader can be exhausting, but I am so grateful for the platforms I’ve been given to share with the world and I wouldn’t change it for anything!

### ADVICE

My advice to current students remains the same as when I was a student: get involved in everything, meet everyone, go to every event, do all the extra credit work, find friends and mentors and make the most of your time at GCU! My advice to recent graduates is to try to stress less; everything will eventually work out the way it’s supposed to, and it will be better than what you initially dreamed. In the meantime, work hard figuring out what you do and don’t like, be constantly seeking out opportunities and say yes to everything that comes your way!



## John Varkey

2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

**OTHER DEGREES** Master of Science in Electrical Engineering, University of Notre Dame, 2022;  
PhD in Electrical Engineering from Texas A&M University (Projected 2026)

**CURRENT POSITION** Intern at the Department of Defense; Research Assistant at Texas A&M University

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am a highly motivated electrical engineering doctoral student at Texas A&M University endeavoring to gain hands-on experience and leadership development during my graduate school tenure. As a highly skilled engineer with a history of designing, fabricating and implementing devices, I have worked in several different positions to take larger engineering concepts and break them down for military engineers and marketing professionals to better understand the work that I was performing. I have also worked in machine learning and computer vision to identify objects. I am also a technologically skilled individual with a history of implementing department-wide solutions to queries posed by deans, university officials, military engineers and marketing professionals to increase the quality and effectiveness of pre-existing digital systems and technologies. Throughout all of my endeavors, I have been able to thrive under pressure within constantly changing environments and effectively lead team members toward a shared goal of excellence.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

One of my significant career milestones is that I am an active researcher with publications in engineering, biology and education. This demonstrates the ability to look beyond my field and find conceptual applications in other areas. After receiving my bachelor's in electrical engineering from GCU, I received my master's in electrical engineering from the University of Notre Dame. I am a PhD student at Texas A&M University. I have also received the Science, Mathematics and Research for Transformation (SMART) scholarship from the Department of Defense (DoD), which is currently funding my research.



## John Varkey

2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

### CAREER HISTORY

I started as an undergraduate student at GCU working on my bachelor's in electrical engineering. During that time, I became the president of the Honors College student body and American Scientific Association. I also held various leadership roles in several different clubs (HOSA, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), Honors STEMists, Anatomy Club, GCU SAE) and I did research in biology and at Labelle Labs while pursuing my degree. During the summer, I interned at ON Semiconductor as a platinum block diagram engineer to translate several of the larger engineering concepts into easier-to-understand diagrams for the marketing team. I then enrolled as a master's student at the University of Notre Dame where I was able to get more experience in teaching as a teaching assistant. My degree was in device physics, as that is where I found my passion in designing and creating devices. During my time at Notre Dame, I had the opportunity to work on a research project funded by the Airforce Small Business Grant, where I led a team of three undergraduate students in design applications. After obtaining my master's degree, I worked as an intern at the Applied Research Laboratories at the University of Texas at Austin where I worked on machine learning and applications for computer vision. I then became a PhD student at Texas A&M University where I am currently working on my PhD in electrical engineering with applications in machine learning and device physics. During this time, I have received a scholarship from the DoD SMART program and am working towards my goal of a military contractor job.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I have impacted my field through research papers that show the benefits of adiabatic computing and the potential of clocking circuits to drive the system adiabatic microprocessor. This is published in two papers: "A 16-bit Adiabatic Reversible Microprocessor" (Ascend 2022 conference) and "Adiabatic Clocking Circuit" (Curate ND, 2022). Adiabatic circuits are known for being able to recycle the energy that is traditionally consumed in modern processors and technology. Moreover, I have made an impact in the field of medicine and engineering with the paper "The Mongoose Phenomenon: A New Logical Heuristic" (Galician Medical Journal, 2022). I have also made an impact in the education field with my paper "Learning or Memorization: Self-Directed Medical School Curriculum and the Dangers of Overemphasizing Student Selected Ancillary Resources," (Galician Medical Journal, 2022). I also worked to impact the medical field with two papers: "A Scoping Literature Review of Recall and Memory Psychometric Tools" (Current Medicine, 2022) and "Antibacterial Screening of Selected Plants from Southwest USA in Search of Potential Natural Alternatives for Antibacterial Application" (International Journal of Plant, Animal and Environmental Sciences, 2021). I have also worked on applications of machine learning and computer vision for several applications.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

SMART Scholarship Award Recipient; Summa Cum Laude at GCU; Qualified and Accepted for the PhD Electrical Engineering Program at Texas A&M University, in the Top 10 Universities for Electrical Engineering

### ORGANIZATIONS

I am involved with IEEE, a professional organization in the engineering field. I also partner with various government organizations for research and am a member of the Ascend 2022 conference.





## John Varkey

2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I personally lead by example. This is a method that I have found to be exceptional when being a leader in both clubs and in professional environments. I am always the first person in the office doing work and the last to leave in addition to making sure the needs of the team are met.

### ADVICE

Pursue your passion. Remember your goals and pursue them, making sure to use all your resources, such as professors and everyday connections.



## Rebecca Wayne

2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION  
2023 | MASTER OF ARTS IN READING

**CURRENT POSITION** Third Grade Teacher at Paradise Honors Elementary School

**INDUSTRY** Education

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I am currently a third-grade teacher at Paradise Honors Elementary in Surprise, AZ, where I am in my second year of teaching. I attended Grand Canyon University and completed my Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education in 2021 and my Master of Arts in Reading in 2023.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

My most significant career milestones include being able to form individual connections and lasting relationships with students past and present through building a unique classroom environment where every student feels welcome. I meet students where they are and take the time to form personal bonds with each and every one of them so they feel they can learn from someone they trust. One student in particular came into third grade deficient in her ELA and language skills. By the end of third grade, through lots of hard work, trust and taking the time to understand her and her needs, we worked together to help her surpass her academic goals, and she is now at grade level in ELA! However, I feel that my biggest career milestone is when past students come back and visit, sharing and reflecting back on the growth they made in third grade, the memories we have created and their overall love for school they developed within the four walls of our classroom.

### CAREER HISTORY

My teaching career began early while I was still pursuing my bachelor's degree. I worked as a substitute teacher and instructional assistant in schools around GCU. After graduating, I began a unique student-teaching opportunity in which I became the main classroom teacher instead of having a traditional mentor. During this time, not only did I gain practical experience in the classroom, but I also gained the skills, abilities and confidence most teachers gain in their first year of teaching. The following school year, I began my first official year of teaching at Paradise Honors in Surprise, AZ. During this year I filmed a short documentary series in which the "Life of a First-Year Teacher" was highlighted and documented showing the highs, lows and everything that goes with being a first-year teacher inside and outside of work. Since then, I have continued working in the third grade at Paradise Honors and am very excited to continue my experience in the many years to come.



## Rebecca Wayne

**2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION**  
**2023 | MASTER OF ARTS IN READING**

### IMPACT ON FIELD

As a passionate young educator, I strive every day to make my classroom a place in which students feel safe, heard and valued as soon as they walk in through the door. I not only push students to set and reach their academic goals but also encourage them every day to be the best student or individual they can be through character education. I do my best to be a role model for them and to inspire them that even though they are young, they matter and they can make a difference in this world. My students are coined as “Ms. Wayne’s World Changers” from the day they walk into our classroom and every day following. In addition, I regularly participate, lead and contribute to professional learning communities within my workplace. I also collaborate with fellow educators and maintain a network of well-rounded colleagues who continue to explore and improve the latest methods of teaching and education as a whole.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Magna Cum Laude at Grand Canyon University; Kappa Delta Pi Honors Society; Exemplary Student Teaching Candidate Award; “Life With a First Year Teacher” Documentary; College of Education Social Media Series: “Life as a First Year Teacher”; Student Speaker COE Pinning Ceremony; Honorary Student Commencement Speaker; Character Education Teacher Panelist; GCU COE Advisory Board Member

### ORGANIZATIONS

Grand Canyon University College of Education; Kappa Delta Pi Honors Society

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I strive to lead others by example and to be the type of leader I would want to follow or listen to. I set high expectations for myself and communicate my needs effectively and clearly with my colleagues. I also demonstrate leadership by being the type of leader my colleagues and peers would be inspired by. I make great efforts to be an active listener and advocate for others. I encourage them to set goals and help them reach those goals by providing the tools, resources and knowledge they need. I set out to be a role model for others and to be an approachable leader in which others know they can come to me when needed.

### ADVICE

We are all in this unpredictable journey called “life” together. In a world full of routines, planning and preparing, remember that the best things in life are often the unexpected ones. Sometimes the unexpected can wind up being some of our best accomplishments. Embrace the uncertainty, welcome the surprises and cherish the moments that catch you off guard, for these are the unscripted moments that truly make life worth living.



## MaKenzie Wilson

2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Economic Development Project Manager at the Town of Gilbert Office of Economic Development

**INDUSTRY** Public Service

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

As an economic development project manager for the Town of Gilbert, my responsibilities encompass a wide range of activities aimed at enabling economic growth and strengthening our community's businesses. I proactively identify and pursue opportunities to attract new businesses to Gilbert by fostering relationships with developers, site selectors, businesses and commercial real estate leaders, serving as a conduit for collaboration and growth. In managing a portfolio of projects, I focus on working closely with internal and external stakeholders to facilitate progress, whether it is infrastructure development, zoning challenges or the regulatory processes ensuring timely execution and alignment with the community's vision. As an enthusiastic communicator, I regularly engage with community groups and executives to share updates on Gilbert's economic climate and highlight growth opportunities. Through these engagements, I promote Gilbert's unique value proposition, advocate for strong economic policies and strengthen regional partnerships.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

I earned my Arizona Economic Development Professional (AZED Pro) certification from the Arizona Association of Economic Development (AAED), a respected professional credential designed for professionals in Arizona's economic development field. To earn the certification, I completed six core courses and one elective covering essential industry topics like economic development in Arizona, business retention and expansion, Arizona taxation, finance and incentives, entrepreneurship and small business development, marketing and business development and Arizona workforce development. Through this program, I gained valuable insights, enhanced my expertise and forged relationships that will help support economic growth in our community. I am also working towards becoming a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD), the highest professional certification in the economic development profession, administered by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). This certification recognizes years of professional education and practical experience. Achieving the CEcD signifies the attainment of the highest level of knowledge and practical ability in the field and is a minimum four-year commitment. Additionally, I had the honor of being accepted into the Urban Land Institute's Partnership Forum, a mentorship program that connects young professionals with established industry leaders.

### CAREER HISTORY

Following my graduation with a degree in business management from the Colangelo College of Business in 2021, I began my career in the construction industry. As a subcontractor, I had the opportunity to connect with professionals and gain key learnings into the intricacies of Arizona's vital sectors. However, my career trajectory took an exciting turn when I assumed the role of economic development project manager for the Town of Gilbert. In this capacity, I actively foster lasting industry partnerships, forge essential community relationships and play a pivotal role in driving economic growth.



## MaKenzie Wilson

2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### IMPACT ON FIELD

I spearheaded the planning and hosting of the Controlling the Narrative Summit for the Arizona Association of Economic Development (AAED). During this event, we delved into critical industry and regional issues, including Arizona's water resources, community engagement and opposition to development. In my role, I played a key part in helping secure speakers for two panel discussions, facilitating coordination meetings and managing logistics alongside the AAED staff and committee chairs. The summit received widespread acclaim, attracting high-profile experts and drawing over 80 registrants. Additionally, I had the privilege of serving as co-vice chair of the AAED and Phoenix Suns Partnership Taskforce. Our mission was to bolster Arizona's workforce and we achieved this by organizing a successful career fair at the Footprint Center. Over 120 students connected with more than 20 employers across various sectors. Furthermore, I actively addressed public policy concerns related to a new aerospace/aviation MRO (maintenance, repair and overhaul) facing federal obstacles. Collaborating with Gilbert's Intergovernmental Affairs Office and the Town Managers Office, I advocated for timely resolution by engaging congressional leadership. To amplify our efforts, I sought support from the Greater Phoenix Economic Council, ensuring the issue received attention across the region.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Recently, I received the prestigious Economic Development Distinguished by Excellence (EDDE) Award for New Member of the Year from the Arizona Association for Economic Development. Consultant Connect also recognized me as one of the NEXT Emerging Leaders in Economic Development.

### ORGANIZATIONS

I am active in the Arizona Association of Economic Development, serving as co-vice chair for two committees: the Greater Phoenix Events Committee and the Sun's Partnership Taskforce Committee. I am a member of The Urban Lad Institute and am involved in their Partnership Forum. I participate in associations like NAIOP, AZCREW and CoreNet, where I frequently attend their events to learn about key industry trends and collaborate with peers across the community development spectrum.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

As a GCU Cheerleaders alum, I've always been passionate about character and leadership development. My journey through servant leadership principles began during my time as a cheerleader, and I've carried those values into my current role in the professional world. Prioritizing others, leading by example and empowering people have become integral parts of how I demonstrate leadership. I firmly believe that true leadership lies in service, empathy and encouraging others. By embracing these principles, I've always strived for a positive and supportive environment with those around me. I believe humility allows us to connect authentically with others and contribute positively to both individuals and communities alike.



## MaKenzie Wilson

2021 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### ADVICE

My biggest advice for current students or recent graduates would be to connect with your peers, engage in meaningful conversations with classmates, form study groups and actively participate in campus clubs, sports, etc. These are the individuals you'll begin your professional journey with and who you will build careers and connections within the professional world, so start early! If you are active on social media, start building your LinkedIn presence to showcase your skills, accomplishments and passions. It's not just about finding a job you love; it's about creating lasting connections. Lastly, embrace the college experience: attend the events, cheer at games and savor every moment. Those are the memories that will stay with you long after graduation!





## Chance Wnuck

2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN JUSTICE STUDIES

2023 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP WITH AN EMPHASIS IN  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

**CURRENT POSITION** Emergency Management Program Coordinator at Coconino County

**INDUSTRY** Public Service

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

As an emergency manager, my work helps to keep Coconino County a safer place and allows us to bounce back resiliently from the consequences of natural and manmade disasters. Combining my undergraduate degree in justice studies and graduate education in homeland security and emergency management, I constantly strive to bring a unique perspective to communities in crisis. Utilizing my professional skills and passion for creative writing, I found my niche in composing emergency operations plans, after-action reports and hazard mitigation plans with expressive language and innovative structure. Being able to make these plans not only informative, but also illustrative and pleasurable to read is a trait I pride myself on. Without the opportunity to expand my horizons through GCU's graduate program, I couldn't see myself in the position I am in today. I hope to continue helping communities prepare and recover from disasters as a result of my education and professional growth.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

Since joining Coconino County nearly two years ago, I've assisted and enhanced their emergency management department's ability to adapt to constantly shifting goalposts. Crises and disasters are fluid, and the effects of each emergency almost always present themselves differently. The first significant milestone of my career was writing the county's distribution management plan, a first of its kind throughout our jurisdiction. As a result of the logistical challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic, The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) introduced guidance requiring that all recipients of their grants maintain a distribution management plan. This was uncharted territory for most of the nation, as few jurisdictions had ever written a plan to prepare for a total supply-chain breakdown. Preparing this plan for the county placed us back into eligibility for grant funding and consequently made them the beneficiaries of hundreds of thousands of dollars that will be used to enhance emergency management activities. Subsequently, as an effort to continue fortifying the county's planning infrastructure, I successfully led and managed a complete revitalization of the Coconino County Emergency Operations Plan. Over the course of 2023, we revamped the plan to be more useable and readable, reducing it from over 700 pages to less than 100. This document is the cornerstone of emergency management operations, comprising roles and responsibilities for county departments and emergency operations center personnel to execute during a disaster. Bringing this document into the 21st century has and will continue to provide effective emergency management guidance for years to come.



## Chance Wnuck

**2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN JUSTICE STUDIES**

**2023 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP WITH AN EMPHASIS IN  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

### CAREER HISTORY

I didn't always think I'd end up working in emergency management, and if you had asked me in 2016 when I began my undergraduate degree, it was a field tucked far back in the corner of my mind. As a criminal justice student, my heart was set on pursuing a career in law enforcement. The process of becoming a federal agent was long and arduous, so in the meantime, I began to look into other opportunities in public safety, where I became drawn to emergency management. As a manager in the retail industry straight out of my undergraduate degree, biding my time for a career in law enforcement, I decided to re-enroll at GCU and pursue a graduate degree in leadership with an emphasis in homeland security and emergency management. Using my education as a springboard, I arrived at Coconino County in 2022, ready to put my newfound skills to work. It's in that position I remain today. With the county, I've had the honor and task of working with our local government partners and forging strong relationships with the City of Page and the Town of Tusayan to strengthen our preparedness and response efforts. Recently, I had the opportunity to assist Page in writing their own emergency operations plan, further expanding countywide resiliency. Developing relationships across the state and continuing to protect residents and visitors to northern Arizona is a calling I intend to continue for years to come.

### IMPACT ON FIELD

Plan writing in emergency management has often followed antiquated standards, producing plans that are hundreds of pages long and nearly unusable in an actual disaster. This was a phenomenon our department and I were determined to rectify, and the opportunity I had to spearhead the emergency operations plan update was the catalyst we needed to inspire definitive and long-lasting change countywide and across the field of emergency management. Plans are meant to be used and, like a good book, they are made to be read. This concept is often forgotten in plan writing, especially in emergency management. Plans in this field are often written as catch-alls and as legal protection in the case of catastrophe, rather than operational documents meant to be used by emergency personnel to respond and recover from emergencies more effectively. A plan overloaded with legal jargon and encompassing every specific scenario is a plan that will quickly bloat and consequently not be used during the actual emergencies they are intended for. By reducing Coconino County's emergency operations plan to less than 100 pages and including language that designates it as a document made for an all-hazards environment, rather than a specific disaster or emergency, we've provided an example for other jurisdictions to follow. This is the direction emergency management should be moving towards and by subscribing to these principles in my plan writing, I can help other agencies in crafting their operational documents to face 21st century threats.



## Chance Wnuck

**2020 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN JUSTICE STUDIES**  
**2023 | MASTER OF SCIENCE IN LEADERSHIP WITH AN EMPHASIS IN  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

With the Lopes Justice Society in 2019, I led the team to victory in the American Criminal Justice Association's Region 1 Competition. We won eight first-place medals across the upper and lower collegiate divisions. I myself won the top academic award, winning first place in criminal law, corrections and police management. Additionally, the team and I secured another first-place prize during the crime scene investigation component. Scoring collegiate success in this competition would serve as a foundation for my achievements in public safety. Last year, I had the opportunity to study at FEMA's Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Maryland. This experience allowed me to connect with emergency management, police and fire professionals from across the nation and apply different perspectives to my own jurisdiction. Studying through EMI also assisted me in accomplishing FEMA's Professional and Advanced Development Series, a rigorous program of courses for aspiring emergency managers. As a culmination of our department's efforts throughout the county, I was nominated for a National Public Service Award by our deputy county manager, being presented with the award in September of 2023.

### ORGANIZATIONS

Vice Chair of the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

Leaders know how to be good followers, and great leaders know that leadership is less complicated than it's often made out to be. Leadership consists of picking good people and helping them do their best. Consequently, a good leader exercises tactfulness and compassion. A good leader knows when to get out of someone's way and let them work, and they also know the correct circumstances for intervention. Many problems resolve themselves, and when they do not, a good leader intervenes and provides compassionate course correction to help people do their best. This was the mindset I manifested when I led the Lopes Justice Society to victory during the American Criminal Justice Association's Region 1 Competition in 2019, in which we bested other universities from across the southwest. You help people by letting them help themselves and when they need guidance to get better, that's when you intervene and walk with them to their goal until they're finally capable of accomplishing their objectives independently.

### ADVICE

Even if your path does not correlate exactly with the steps you thought you'd take, know that opportunity exists all around you. While I did not initially believe that I would be pursuing a career in emergency management and found myself contemplating my choices while working in the retail industry, I knew that if I dug deeper, internally and externally, I would find what I was looking for. Maintain that mindset and even if things do not go your way, you will find yourself still standing up.



## Erik Yost

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**OTHER DEGREE** Master of Business Administration, Louisiana State University (Projected 2026)

**CURRENT POSITION** Program Manager at the Quantum Photonics Group at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

**INDUSTRY** Engineering

### PROFESSIONAL BIO:

I'm Erik Yost, and I am the program manager for the Quantum Photonics and AI Group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT RLE). My role involves leading a dynamic team of over 50 scientists, focused on nanooptics, AI, quantum optics and computing. Our research is on the cutting edge of quantum, and we aim to revolutionize the field by harnessing the quantum properties of light and utilizing it in varying applications. I help oversee a complex nexus of secure partnerships and programs with various organizations in industry, public and governmental sectors, ensuring collaborative innovation and resource optimization. With a strong background in business management and project leadership, combined with my passion for cutting-edge research, I am committed to driving scientific advancements that address global challenges and improve lives. My work has been recognized with numerous awards and honors, including multiple first-place awards at research societies and a TEDx Talk at GCU. I graduated from GCU in 2023 with my degree in business management and minors in Christian studies and biological sciences. I am also excited to be pursuing my MBA this year through LSU's executive program.

### MOST SIGNIFICANT CAREER MILESTONES

One of my most significant career milestones was founding the STELLAR Research Program at Grand Canyon University and launching humanitarian research projects to the International Space Station with NASA, SpaceX, Space Tango and The Quest Institute. This research focused on the microgravity effects on microbial fuel cells and cancer cells.

### CAREER HISTORY

My career began with NASA's AMES Research Center with The Quest Institute, where I helped lead numerous research projects to the International Space Station, gaining invaluable experience in managing complex, high-stakes projects. When attending GCU, I founded STELLAR (Space Technology and Engineering for Launching Life Application Research) with some good friends, Nathan Olsen and Camden Marasco, with the goal of leading undergraduates in sending a project into space with a Gospel-centered mindset. After a successful launch with SpaceX Crew4 and my graduation, I joined MIT as the Program Manager for the Quantum Photonics and AI Group. In this role, I lead and organize seminal research in the quantum and AI field of study. I also founded GENERATE LLC, a biotechnology company focused on microbial fuel cells and humanitarian research. Through GENERATE and STELLAR, I was able to contribute to research supporting developing countries focused on providing electricity via microbial fuel cells.



## Erik Yost

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### IMPACT ON FIELD

As a Program Manager at MIT, I have significantly impacted the field of quantum photonics, quantum computing and artificial intelligence by helping lead a large research team in pioneering research in quantum optics, nanophotonics, nanotechnology and quantum computing. We are developing quantum silicon photonics for secure communication and laser research, creating advanced quantum information processing systems and exploring AI applications, such as integrating neural networks with quantum photonics to enhance machine learning and deep learning algorithms. My role involves managing strategic partnerships with industry leaders and government agencies, ensuring our research remains at the forefront of innovation. Through these collaborations, we aim to push the boundaries of what quantum photonics and AI can achieve, ultimately driving advancements that address global challenges and improve lives. Additionally, with my research with STELLAR and GENERATE, research has been done regarding microbial fuel cells, which allow individuals in developing countries to produce electricity through organic waste. Studies have ranged from Mexico to several countries in Africa. When sharing this technology with others, we maintain a missional perspective and integrate the Gospel into our dissemination of technology.

### AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Research Laboratory of Electronics Appreciation Award; TEDxGrandCanyonUniversity Speaker; Milton L and Avery G Church Award in Environmental Science; Annual Honors College CSET Research Showcase First Place Awards, American Society for Gravitational Space Research (ASGSR); First Place Awards and Keynote Speaker, International Space Station Research and Development (ISSRDC) Awards; American Astronautical Society (AAS) Werner von Braun Symposium Award; Honors and Leadership Distinction Honors at GCU; Project Management Institute (PMI PMP, DASM, DASSM and Mentor) Awards

### ORGANIZATIONS

Quantum at Harvard University; Massachusetts Institute of Technology (DARPA, DoD, MITRE, Lockheed Martin SkunkWorks, MIT ISN, MIT MTL, MIT CSAIL, MIT COE, ARO, AFRL, ARL, MIT Lincoln Labs, QuEra Computing, JPEO, DTRA, IARPA, BARDA, ARPA-H); American Society for Gravitational Space Research (ASGSR); American Astronautical Society (AAS); Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE); American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME); LaBelle Labs, NASA and OpenAI.

### LEADERSHIP STYLE

I try to demonstrate leadership by fostering a collaborative and innovative environment within my team. I prioritize clear communication and help support team members' goals. I maintain an open-door policy, welcoming feedback and ideas, which helps create a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth. When I interact with others, I strive to be a light for Christ through the way that I lead and serve.



## Erik Yost

2023 | BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### ADVICE

First off, don't underestimate networking. Go to events, join groups and chat with folks who do a variety of things. Keep a growth mindset. Moving from school to work can be tricky, but if you see challenges as chances to learn, you'll get more resilient and adaptable. Be open to learning new things, whether through classes, jobs or side projects. Find mentors. They can give you awesome advice and support as you figure out your path. Don't be shy about asking for help from people who've been around the block. Be confident in yourself and your skills. Finally, balance is key. It's easy to get lost in work, but taking care of yourself is super important for long-term success and happiness. Do things you love and stay connected with your friends and family. Remember, your career is a journey, not a race. Stay curious, be proactive and keep pushing your boundaries. Your hard work and dedication will pay off. Most importantly, trust that the Lord will lead and guide you!





Grand Canyon University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLCCommission.org), an institutional accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Approved by the Alumni Marketing & Communications Specialist on Sept. 12, 2024. ©2024 Grand Canyon University 24ALU0089