Jennifer Shoffner ’94 (Business Administration), ’00 MBA, Tiffany Grant ’18 MBA, and Hadley Iliff ’16 MBA all come from completely different backgrounds and enrolled in the UNC Greensboro MBA program for completely different reasons. Shoffner wanted a way to round out the skills she obtained working in human resources for four years. Grant originally enrolled to put herself on the track to her PhD. Iliff was at a crossroads in her life and decided to try her hand at business. Though their paths differ, these women do have things in common. They have all used their advanced degrees to unlock new doors and blaze their own trails in a traditionally male-dominated business world. And they all graduated from an MBA program that boasts an above-average majority of women students.

WHO RUNS THE WORLD?

It’s so crazy to think about how much things have changed, but it’s also been really rewarding to see so many more women have a seat at the table and have their voices heard and listened to,” she said.

Women in MBA programs is an oft-reported on topic, with CNBC, Fortune, Time, and The Wall Street Journal all writing on the subject in recent years. Each has cited a survey from the Forté Foundation, a nonprofit that aims to launch women into fulfilling careers through access to business education. That survey put the national average of women in MBA programs at 39 percent in 2020, climbing slightly to 41 percent in 2021.

This spring at the Bryan School, 54 percent of students pursuing their UNCG MBA were women, which is not dissimilar to the more than 52 percent of women that comprise the Bryan School’s overall student population.

“It tell people all the time that education is something that never loses its value,” Shoffner said. “Whether it’s a degree, a class, a certification — education is something you can take with you whenever you go and no one can take with you.”

Forging Her Own Route

Grant opened her first business, Tiffany’s Café, as a little girl. Each night, she asked what her family was having for dinner, typed up a menu and took everyone’s order. After dinner, she’d break out her piggy bank and collect quarters, nickels and dimes. It came as no surprise that she’d pursue business as a career — first as a corporate human resources specialist, and most recently as a full-time entrepreneur. Grant, who initially enrolled in the UNCG MBA as a stepping stone to earning her PhD, made the leap into full-time self-employment through her own financial literacy firm, Money Talk with Tiff.

“I dismissed the idea,” Iliff said. “I thought I knew what an MBA was until he started listing all of the things it entails. They were all things I love — supply chain, management philosophies, accounting — all of it.”

Iliff enrolled as soon as she could and within a year, she’d secured an internship with Merz Therapeutics. That role turned into a full-time position and eventually, a spot at the top she secured an internship with Merz Therapeutics. That role turned into a full-time position and eventually, a spot at the top she

From Beakers to Briefcases

With bachelor’s and master’s degrees in biochemistry under her belt, Iliff was working as a research assistant in UNCG’s biochemistry department — as well as part-time at a bakery — when she decided to switch gears in 2013.

“My boss at the bakery once worked as the VP of sales at a pharmaceutical company and suggested I go for my MBA, and I dismissed the idea,” Iliff said. “I thought I knew what an MBA was until he started listing all of the things it entails. They were all things I love — supply chain, management philosophies, accounting — all of it.”

Iliff enrolled as soon as she could and within a year, she’d secured an internship with Merz Therapeutics. That role turned into a full-time position and eventually, a spot at the top she

“I show up how I am in all spaces regardless of who’s in the room and who isn’t.”

Written by Mackenzie Francisco