



Jennifer Shoffner

WHO RUNS THE

WORLD?

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.

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'94 (Business Administration), '00 MBA

View From the Top

The role of women in the business world has changed substantially over the past decades.

Shoffner, a two-time Bryan School of Business and Economics graduate, can attest to that. She was fresh off her fourth year working in human resources when she decided to head back to the Bryan School for round two of her education in 1998. But Shoffner has earned more than an MBA over the years. Since the start of her professional career in 1994, she became the first female director for Triad-based hardware manufacturer, Liberty Hardware, and in 2020 she secured the position of Chief Human Resources Officer for leading building products installer and distributor Top Build.

“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.

“I 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 wherever you go and no one can take with you.”

Forging Her Own Route

Grant opened her first business, Tiffany’s Cafe, 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.

“Instead of ‘Ready, aim, fire,’ I’ve always said ‘Ready, fire, aim,’” Grant said. “I take risks. I’ve had at least 10 careers in my adult life.”

Through each business endeavor and career journey, two things remain the same for Grant — her confidence in her decision to pursue an MBA and her commitment to making her voice heard while staying true to herself.

“All the industries and careers I’ve had have always been white male-dominated or white-dominated, so here I am as a young black female and check none of those boxes,” Grant said.

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

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 currently holds — senior director of regulatory affairs and product safety.

From science to marketing, Iliff has pulled up her seat to the proverbial table. Since starting with Merz, Iliff’s dual background in research and business has allowed her to serve as a liaison between the research and development and marketing departments. Ultimately, she credits her results-driven work strategy and willingness to advocate for herself and others as having made her the most successful.

“Sometimes, women in business feel uncomfortable making sure they get credit for the work they do, but you have to. Speak up, take credit when you deserve it and put yourself out there,” Iliff said. ■

Written by Mackenzie Francisco

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'18 MBA

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Hadley Iliff