

FIRED UP

Firefighters are often the ones people call when they need problems solved – whether it’s putting out a blaze, saving a cardiac arrest victim, extricating someone from a car crash or even rescuing the proverbial cat in the tree. So it’s no coincidence that Greensboro Fire Captain Nick Loflin ‘01 (Physics, Mathematics) chose to continue his education at an institution that prides itself on “developing exceptional problem solvers.”

Loflin hopes to merge the resources and opportunities he’s found at the Bryan School of Business and Economics with what the fire department has taught him to make a significant impact on those around him.

“My goal is to take what have I learned and use it to improve things for folks around me, whether that’s my family, my workplace or my community,” he says.

Applying Economics

As part of his research toward his master’s degree in applied economics, Loflin has created a practical economics model that will help fire service administrators and government officials determine when and where to build new fire stations. Using principles of cost-benefit analysis, Loflin’s goal was to provide citizens with the best, most equitable services while ensuring the highest return on public investment. It’s a formula he hopes will be used by city and county governments on a broad scale.

“It’s always been a passion of mine to use data to help explain things and then rely on that to bring about change,” Loflin says. “So

when you’re speaking to stakeholders and they’re spending tax dollars for a fire station, I wanted to translate the impact of those dollars in terms of improved quality of life.” Loflin’s research first examined how reducing response times through expanded fire services could save lives threatened by cardiac arrest or overdose and also reduce structural losses due to fire. Then, he modeled where those savings could have the most impact, showing sites where the return on investment would exceed expenditures.

The research has been invaluable, says Greensboro Deputy Fire Chief Alex Gossett. “We want to expand our services in the areas of highest need first because there are only enough tax dollars to go around,” Gossett says. “Our goal is to use the tools Nick developed to illustrate the need and help educate government officials about expanding services.”

Off and Running

Loflin, who expects to earn his master’s in December, brought a unique skill set to the work. After receiving his undergraduate degree in math and physics from UNC Greensboro in 2001, he taught high school before pursuing his lifelong dream of fighting fires. “I decided that burning buildings was easier than teaching,” he says with a laugh. Today, he also wears some other hats. He has used his data analysis skills to advocate for improved benefits as an executive board member of the local firefighters’ union. A husband and father of three, he finds time to run two digital marketing and analytics businesses, both of which grew out of early efforts to promote charity fundraisers and events. One of his best-known accomplishments is Greensboro’s annual Running of the Balls 5K. Loflin co-founded this race in 2011 and has seen it grow to more than 5,000 participants during the winter holidays. The run raises money for Second Harvest Food Bank and to date has provided more than 7 million meals.

As a Graduate Student Ambassador, Loflin says he appreciates how the Bryan School allows students to further projects they are already working on and expand their real-world experience. That is a hallmark of Bryan School programs, says Dr. Jeremy Bray, an economics professor and Loflin’s adviser. “Our goal in applied economics goes well beyond crunching numbers or running statistics,” Bray says. “It’s about seeing a need and understanding that what you are learning can help solve the problem. Nick just took that to heart. He’s a great example of how a master’s degree can help you make an impact in your workplace and give back to the community in such an effective way.” ■

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Greensboro Fire Captain
‘01 (Physics, Mathematics)



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