When you hear the word tourism, you might picture autumn foliage, a corn maze, or perhaps a hot beach and a cold drink. Dr. Chantell LaPan, Assistant Professor in the Bryan School’s Department of Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Hospitality and Tourism, doesn’t quite see it that way. Or, at least, she has dedicated her career to painting a fuller picture of a complex industry.

“It’s not really whether tourism is inherently positive or negative on a region or place,” she says. “But you begin to see the pressure it puts on residents if too high a percentage of the economic activity relies on tourism.”

LaPan earned her PhD from NC State in 2014. For close to a decade, she has covered a variety of topics, from the sociocultural sustainability of gender and tourism to the economic sustainability of rural and agricultural tourism. LaPan’s latest work examines the realities of tourism and human trafficking in a book chapter she is cowriting with MEHT Department Head Dr. Merlyn Griffiths and Dr. Channelle James, lecturer and Dean’s Fellow for School Climate.

“It’s a little bit more critical of structures that keep women in oppressive areas such as human trafficking,” she says. Regarding her more feminist research, she explains: “It’s bad for women in other places, but rural communities tend to have more traditional values and what we’ve learned is traditional values don’t empower women in ways that make their lives better.”

When it comes to things that seem picturesque or traditional – there is such a thing as selling the ideal in tourism, LaPan says. For example, every moment the farmer spends setting up a corn maze is fewer hours spent farming. The notion of getting away from it all is also tied to the reality that vacatiioning is inherently a pleasure-seeking activity. In some cases, like at the Super Bowl or World Cup, there is a darker, hedonistic bent going on behind the scenes.

LaPan is excited about the directions her tourism research could take her, but with it comes disheartening topics to tackle, such as assaults and unsanctioned digital surveillance through platforms like Uber and Airbnb. A theme she continues to return to is sustainability – not in the environmental sense but economic and sociocultural. “When things are good for people, when people have sustainable development goals, there is more access to equitable work and people can work with dignity,” LaPan said.

LaPan encourages people to do their research before booking their next getaway. Who owns what you are doing? Travel agents, LaPan jokes, still exist and can even help with this. “Put your money where your heart is,” she says.
CONSUMER, APPAREL, AND RETAIL STUDIES

Growth Opportunities

Morgan Weeks ‘13 (Consumer, Apparel, & Retail Studies) is always looking forward. For example, she always knew she wanted to work in the apparel and fashion industry.

“The CARS program in combination with it being local to the area where I grew up made the UNCG Bryan School an easy choice,” she said. “The program allowed me to get a variety of courses and training within the industry and help me decide which area within the field I wanted to focus in.”

This kind of thinking has remained true throughout her career. In her former position, she assisted in the launch of a kids’ apparel line called Generation Joy, earning her a write up from Charlotte’s WRAL. The line itself sounds futuristic, with WRAL describing its “grow with me” technology, cooling fabrics, cover stitching, and reversible construction.

In the months since, she’s transitioned into a more digital marketing-centric role with Champion Activewear where she oversees social media channels and digital content creation.

“The most challenging thing, which is also rewarding in a way, is to know that perfection isn’t the goal – progress is and there’s always something new to learn in this industry,” she said. When she takes a moment to look back, Weeks credits her CARS background for giving her the skills she’s needed to remain nimble in her time as a professional, from studying abroad to visiting New York City as an undergrad to get a behind-the-scenes look at different facets of her industry.

“Seek out everything you have access to in college,” she said. “Being able to take the core and elective CARS classes helped me get a variety of insights into roles across the industry.”

Morgan Weeks
13 (Consumer, Apparel, & Retail Studies)

The program allowed me to get a variety of courses and training within the industry and help me decide which area within the field I wanted to focus in.”

Information Systems and Supply Chain Management

Finding a Second Home

After getting married and moving from India to North Carolina in 2017, Sridevi Kesavarapu ‘19 MS made the decision to pursue her M.S. in IT and Management. Through her research, she discovered that the Bryan School was known for its diversity, which prompted her to enroll.

“It was the best decision I have ever made,” she said. Not only did Kesavarapu feel as though she belonged at Bryan, she also found the school’s faculty and staff to be top-notch in helping her on her journey. “I liked all of my professors. They were very friendly and encouraging. Out of everyone, my program director Ms. Aparvaa Patipati Ramesh was my favorite. She encouraged me to participate in a Data Dive Challenge in which our team won second prize, and that challenge helped me to apply my analytical knowledge.”

Kesavarapu landed a job in her field of study at Labcorp, working as an Analytics Administrator where she dives into data every day. “I create dashboards which are used by business leaders to make key business decisions. There were many successful dashboards like Covid testing tracking, testing anomalies tracking, logistics performance dashboards which helped the management to identify problematic areas and find solutions,” she said.

Her time at Bryan, she says, has been instrumental in her career. “It helps us, as a department, provide value to an NHL team. Pinch me, right?”

Vincent Lorenz
19 MA

It’s the type of thinking the Bryan School instilled in me. It helps us, as a department, provide value to an NHL team. Pinch me, right?”

Most people don’t know how diverse UNCG is. For students with diverse cultural backgrounds, it’s like a second home.”

Sridevi Kesavarapu
19 MS

Economics

Icing on the Cake

When asked to describe what he does for a living, Vincent Lorenz ‘19 MA said his team’s mission statement is to put data and insights at the heart of decision-making while utilizing data literacy and strategic thinking to guide the future of the organization. Lorenz’s actual title? Manager, Data Ops & Business Analytics for the National Hockey League’s Carolina Hurricanes.

“It’s the type of thinking the Bryan School instilled in me,” he says of his impactful, accurate analyses. “It helps us, as a department, provide value to an NHL team. Pinch me, right?”

A Greensboro native, Lorenz considers himself lucky that he didn’t have to travel halfway across the country to get his degree. He had everything he wanted in a graduate-level economics program right here in his hometown: intimate class size, strong funding packages for students, opportunities for assistantships, and a chance to be close to friends and family.

“I think my favorite memory of the Bryan School is just the relationships that I had with my professors. I wasn’t really the type to speak with my professors or pick their brain as much as I should have as an undergraduate, so for me to turn over a new leaf and start to cultivate these relationships was incredibly fun and rewarding,” he said. “Attending pre-semester parties at a professor’s house or just talking shop was always a great time.”

Lorenz says he’s grateful to the Bryan School for equipping him with both the hard and soft skills needed to thrive in his career, despite the occasional untimely playoff exit.

“At the end of the day, we can never get too high or too low on the team as we all still have jobs to complete. For instance, after we dropped Game 4 to the Panthers (during the 2023 playoffs), we still had to come in and wrap up the season and everything was OK. One positive is that they’re able to melt the ice which allows me to wear short-sleeved shirts again,” he joked.

Vincent Lorenz
19 MA

Most people don’t know how diverse UNCG is. For students with diverse cultural backgrounds, it’s like a second home.”

Sridevi Kesavarapu
19 MS

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A Foundation for Success

Kingsley Ibeh ’15 (Business Administration) says his advice to students would be to think about an area of focus—and that doesn’t mean spending every waking minute narrowing down exactly what they plan to do after their time at the Bryan School.

“Business Administration is flexible and can be used in many different ways. My concentration was in Human Resources, and I was fortunate enough to find opportunities while at UNC Greensboro that helped me gather working experience in the field,” he said.

Ibeh’s concentration decision—and the path that followed—has culminated in his current role of Employee Relations Partner for Google, LLC, based out of the company’s Atlanta, Georgia offices. He supports Googlers across a wide variety of workplace concerns, specifically around Standards of Conduct violations.

For Ibeh, it was the Bryan School that helped lay the foundation that set him up for success in his career, whether it was attending Company Spotlight events, talking with his academic advisor, or even being chosen as class speaker for the May 2015 commencement ceremony.

“I am proud to be where I am today. I took a long path, but I am grateful for all the experiences that got me here. Looking back and reflecting on my time at Bryan— it was my professors and the undergraduate student office staff that made my experience special. The connections and lessons learned helped prepare me for life after UNCG.”

Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Hospitality & Tourism

Dreaming Big

Looking back, Casey Bright ’20 (Marketing), ’23 MBA says she would have allowed herself to dream bigger.

“Starting out as a first-generation student, I thought I would be the outlier not being a student who lived on campus experiencing the traditional student life. For example, I never thought I could achieve an MBA—I thought that wasn’t in the cards for me,” she said. “But early on I found out there was a big community of hybrid learners, just like me, who understood my experience.”

After earning a bachelor’s in marketing, Bright set her sights on a master’s in business administration, a program she found allowed her to further hone organizational skills and boundary setting. While learning to balance her life outside of school and work, Bright also got more involved on campus by becoming a graduate ambassador for the Bryan School.

“I get to work with some amazing companies who have a substantial global reach, and I absolutely believe that my UNCG experience helped open important doors for me to get where I am now.”

Casey Bright ’20 (Marketing), ’23 MBA