

## MBA Leadership Fellows Provide General Counsel



Last year the MBA Program debuted its Professional Development Program, created to develop communication and leadership skills so sought after in the job market. The first-years who beta tested the program emerged as more polished second-years, and the *crème de la crème* have been recruited to mentor first-year teams as MBA Leadership Fellows.

These 14 inaugural Fellows received special training in leadership and coaching, then were assigned to work with one or two of the six-person study teams that endeavor the MBA first-year core together. The mandate is simple: assist in their professional development. The details are left to the needs of the team, which means the Leadership Fellow can play the role of coach, mentor, motivator, conflict arbitrator, even concierge.

“Everyone is going to use us in a different way: presentation skills, persuasion, leadership, communication,” says Marnie Randall, a Fellow with a background in financial services and

a penchant for leadership roles. “If some first-years are more experienced at running meetings, for example, then I can help navigate their first year with advice on internships, presentation skills, etc. I want them to know that I’m here for them.”

In their tumultuous first quarter, study teams inevitably encounter conflict. Randall introduced her teams to the notion of emotional intelligence—learning to channel anger to positive outlet—that appeals to their analytical natures. She sees it as absolutely requisite. “I’ve tried to emphasize that you might not be getting along with each other, but chances are, you’re going to meet this personality in the real world. And you’re not going to know how to deal with it,” she says. “So deal with it today. Confront it.”

Ian Scrymgeour, a former engineer turned MBA, says his biggest impact was in a different kind of problem-solving. “I tried to help them develop what, by now, seems second nature for me,” he says. “How do you analyze a

case? Can you articulate the problem in a single sentence? Helping them learn to put things into a workable framework was my biggest contribution.”

Given the 24/7 nature of the full-time MBA, what’s in it for the Leadership Fellows who have logged as many as 12 hours a week working with their teams? There’s some altruism at work, to be sure. But also their own professional development.

“I’m a firm believer that you learn most by teaching,” Randall says. “I could sit in a class all day and learn about how to manage people, but to actually try new things and use creative ways to tap into people. To be able to put those management skills into practice, working with first-years, is hugely valuable.”

In this first iteration of the program, this value was enhanced by weekly meetings where Fellows discussed issues, bounced ideas around and sought counsel from their peers—an enormous resource as they learned this description-less job in real time. “It was interesting to see that there was no best practice of interaction between the coach and team,” says Judith Kalitzki, director of professional development and author of this positive feedback loop. “It really depended on their personalities, needs of the team, interests and schedules. But it has worked beautifully.”

In ways both big and small. “I had the opportunity to help some first-years deal with a lot of issues,” Randall says. “But I also had the opportunity to help them appreciate everything they were accomplishing in the midst of this chaos. Even something as small as an A on a micro problem set—they need to recognize that as a small victory.” □