RUTGERS

MASTER OF SUPPLY CHAIN ANALYTICS (MSCA) NEWSLETTER

PROF. GILANI'S PROFESSIONAL LIFE, CAREER & ADVICE

We interviewed Professor Wajahat Gilani who is one of the most popular professors at Rutgers Business School and is known for his well-structured courses, Analytics for Business Intelligence and Python Programming in the MSCA department. His knowledge of the financial world paired with his tech-savvy nature makes him a favourite among his students at RBS!

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND EARLY CAREER

He completed his BS (Computer Science) in 2001, Masters in Quantitative Finance (2004) and PhD in Analytics and Real Options (2016) all from Rutgers. He thinks that Rutgers being one of the oldest and most competitive schools in the nation kept him coming back to further his education and he is proud to be still associated with the name.

His experience in each one of these were very different however he draws similarities between the Masters in Quantitative Finance to MS Supply Chain Analytics (our course). At the time, the former was a relatively new program and it did not take into account part time students. Despite few of the classes being extremely challenging, Professor Gilani was one of the few part time students that were able to graduate from it. His experience was slightly different from most of us. He was able to go back to his firm to have productive discussions with other quants and portfolio managers and apply the things that he learnt both theoretically and practically in his full-time role, a role that he started after his under graduation. Due to this, he recalls that there was a lot of positive reinforcements between his Master's program and his work.

His experience in the PhD program was completely different or in his words "brutal". After the first two years of classes, students had to take a qualifying exam which could either be a written or an oral exam (which could go on for 2 hours) depending on the department. Professor Gilani had a written one which lasted for about a day and a half. Once you qualified, only then would you become a designated PhD candidate who would eventually have to finish their dissertation and research.

Reflecting on the MS Supply Chain Analytics course, he feels current students have a fleshed-out program from the education point of view to the professional career. He also feels that current students are privileged to have a career service as back in his day, students were completely on their own in terms of finding a job. A lot of his peers relied on networking. Professor Gilani referred a lot of them to his employer. The Rutgers Supply Chain Program is also very prestigious and has a lot of connections with the professional industry which he feels is a huge differentiator.

TEACHING AS A CAREER

Fun Fact: Professor could not think of a worse experience than teaching!!

The problem was he had to teach one or two classes as a PhD student. However, back then, he had experience training his juniors like analysts and interns from work. He recalls his PhD mentor's advice which was to teach in one's own style. So, he found what was comfortable for him and he taught his class like he would teach an intern, focusing on application.

His approach, that he applies to this day, was providing data, a problem and working it out. Unsurprisingly for a lot of our current students who have taken lectures with him, the first undergraduate class he taught as a PhD student loved his style and he shockingly had a good time with the students. His professors provided him feedback that he was really good at it and gave him more classes to teach and eventually started paying him to keep taking classes. Further, his then students figured out his background and were interested in learning some of the things that he did in the world of finance. It was then when after discussion with his advisor at RBS, he designed the class Investment Modelling in R. He would get real financial data; stock data and he would show students how one can apply different financial ratios etc. using R. When he graduated from his PhD program, he was given a position of Assistant Professor of Professional Practice which is not tenure tracked and allowed him to have one foot in the industry and the other in academia. Rutgers recommended him to take this position to continue teaching Investment Modelling in R and a then exploring MITA and MBA program. He also redesigned ABI (Analytics for Business Intelligence) and the BAP (Business Analytics Programming) courses to be data centric eventually getting a lot of positive feedback. From there on, he laughs that he is stuck teaching students. He loves it and finds it rewarding when he sees students reach that eureka moment on how to apply the things learned in class to business or how to make some money out of it.

CURRENT PROFESSION & OPINIONS ON FINANCIAL WORLD

He currently works as a consultant to institutional funds or hedge funds that apply analytics to different investment spaces specifically in the field of data as an asset or investment using data to further their investments or using data as an asset itself to generate income for the company. For example, there could be a database of data where a portion could be free and accessible for all but a monthly subscription could be applied to access the rest of the datasets. Professor Gilani often works as an advisor to institutional investors on how to quantify or value such a business.

When Professor first got into Merrill Lynch (now Merill), he started learning here and there about economics and finance but he really learnt a lot when he first got into the trading desk, involved with asset backed securities (ABS) and collateralized debt obligations (CDO). He also realized how much the Federal government moves the markets. While working with asset backed securities, he realized a lot of people investing in such instruments knew that the market was going to fall apart. However, they simply wanted to ensure that they were investing in instruments based on home loans that were backed by the government as eventually when the crisis hit, the US government were going to bail them out. He also talks about how a lot of big sharks in Bitcoin provide a lot of money to the political parties in order to regulate Bitcoin when cryptocurrency itself was meant to be deregulated. These Big Sharks see that there is a chance that the value of Bitcoin could drop to zero and if the government regulates the cryptocurrency, they would bail them out.

2008 RECESSION & HOUSING MARKET

We got an interesting perspective when we asked Professor Gilani for his thoughts on the role of the insurance firms in the 2008 crisis. AIG was holding majority of the Credit Default Swaps (CDOs). What they would have to pay was so much more than what the company was worth. The government should have taken over and nationalized the normal insurance divisions of AIG for pennies on the dollar and left the CDOs aside. As the investment banks failed, the government should not have intervened. So only the conservative banks at the time would be the last men standing and there was a good chance JP Morgan would be one of them. As home prices fell as more and more people defaulted and more homes than buyers were on the market, the government should have bought all the CDOs and ABS, which they were smart enough actually doing but got ripped off doing so and renegotiated the underlying loans factoring in the current prices of the homes. As an example, if a person had taken a $700k loan for a home whose price was now $100k and they had already paid $300k towards the loan, the government should have renegotiated the loan terms to reimburse some amount paid towards the loan.

As professor Gilani says, "Failing is part of a capitalist society. USA is a capitalist society as well as a socialist society so that as businesses fail there is supposed to be a safety net of landing for people so that they can try again. This cycle of trying and failing makes the economy stronger and more productive".

MARKET SITUATION & ADVICE

We also had the privilege of speaking about the current job market with Professor Gilani. In his opinion, the Feds raising interest rates is highly related to this shrinking job market. Contrary to popular opinion where a lot of people think that the Feds did not raise interest rates early enough to battle inflation, Professor believes Fed messed up when COVID hit. They printed about $6 trillion and gave it to the corporations and a small amount trickled down to the people. He also believes that about 50% of the inflation is directly related to corporate profits.

Raising interest rates just caused more problems for everybody: now we still have high inflation, we have people losing jobs and we have banks on the brink of collapse.

He believes that, sometimes, basic economic algorithms cannot be applied to real life complex problems due to the non-linearity of the systems affected. Right now, raising interest rates will not solve the problem. However, Professor believes that if current students wait for the next quarter around June, corporations may open up their books again in terms of internships or job offerings. Corporations may try to replace the laid off workers with interns. Despite the shaky job market, his message to students is to hold on and have more faith.

Looking back on the things he could have done differently during his days as a graduate student, he advises his students to invest or get involved in passive investing and do dollar cost averaging every month to let the investments grow over time.

We had a great time talking to Professor Wajahat Gilani and we thank him for his contributions and time.

*Professor Wajahat Gillani can be reached out at waj@business.rutgers.edu to learn more about the courses he teaches at RBS for Supply Chain Analytics students. He also teaches courses such as Investment Modelling in R and Web based Dashboard Programming besides Analytics courses for Supply Chain students.

(By Maharghya Basu & Habibah Aftab)

CENTER FOR SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT (CSCM)

The Center for Supply Chain Management, established in 2000, is home to a distinguished faculty and a talented group of Ph.D., MBA, and master students. Functioning as an anchor institute, CSCP has a close relationship with the New Jersey government and receives support from a senior faculty advisory board, as well as industry advisory boards consisting of senior executives from prominent corporations in New Jersey, such as American Water, BD, Bristol Myers Squibb, Campbell's, Hackensack Meridian Health, Johnson&Johnson, Merck, PSEG, Prudential, RWJBarnabas Health, Verizon, and others. These boards work with the center to conduct joint research, promote recruitment initiatives, and encourage the education of future SCM professionals. The center's goal is to establish the leading SCM program in the country.

GRADUATE FELLOWS SHARING

Shangyu (Shawn) Zhang, an MBA student, and Prachi Thorawade, an MSCA alumnus, are both graduate fellows in CSCM who have kindly shared their experiences working in the center. Their responsibilities entail a broad range of tasks, such as analyzing company data, establishing project milestones, generating company scorecards, and promoting supplier matchmaking. The opportunity to work at CSCM has equipped them with the essential competencies required for success in their future careers, including project management, data analysis (using tools such as Excel and Tableau), and adeptly communicating with diverse stakeholders and senior executives.

In addition, Shawn provided insight into his involvement in event coordination, including the Digital Supply Chain and Supplier Diversity Conference and the Helpful Executives-In-Reach (HEIR) program. He strongly recommends that students participate in these events to acquire knowledge and establish connections with industry experts. Similarly, Prachi encourages students to actively pursue opportunities both on and off campus, enabling them to put the knowledge acquired in the classroom into practice.

In Photo (Right):

Shawn [Right] with **Len DeCandia** [Center] (founding chair of RBS' Center for Supply Chain Management) & **Prof. Anthony Taitt** [Left] (Assistant Professor of Professional Practice, SCM Dept)

2023 MSCA LEADERSHIP SCHOLARSHIP

The CSCM recognizes MSCA students each spring by presenting them with a scholarship for their outstanding academic performance and leadership qualities. As one of the finalists for the scholarship, I had the honor of presenting my accomplishments and professional aspirations to a distinguished panel of professors and corporate executives. I ensured that my presentation was well-organized and effectively communicated my accomplishments within the MSCA program and my intended use of the scholarship to further my career objectives. With great enthusiasm, I announce that I was awarded the scholarship and will leverage my expertise to benefit the center, the university, and the MSCA program. I sincerely congratulate Chirag Jian and Sahand Barazesh, the other two scholarship recipients.

Attending the quarterly meeting of CSCM proved to be an enlightening experience that enabled us to establish meaningful connections with experienced professionals and esteemed faculty members. I was impressed by the center's commitment to providing practical, hands-on experience for students and fostering mutually beneficial relationships between students and enterprises. Expressing gratitude, the opportunity to participate in this event has provided me with valuable insights into the field of supply chain management.

(By Pang Yuan Lin 'Helen')