



# THE FUTURE IS NOW

Thirteen talented, ambitious young entrepreneurs compete in Fragasso Financial Advisors' Our Futures Project. The grand prize? A full-time job.

BY KATIE MAVRICH | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN WYLIE

In pop sociologist Malcolm Gladwell's latest book, *Outliers*, he dedicates an entire chapter to "The 10,000 Hour Rule." That is, he claims a person isn't simply good at something by nature — practice does indeed make perfect. What separates Apple's Chief Executive Officer Steve Jobs from other computer programmers and Mac geeks is the amount of time that he has put into his craft. And by the same token, what separates today's students from today's high-powered executives and CEOs is time, and thus, experience. Bob Fragasso, founder and president of Fragasso Financial Advisors, and Paul Shapiro, partner at vie, LLC, a company that focuses on helping sales and marketing organizations get to the next level of excellence, co-founded the Our Futures Project to create an opportunity for students to gain valuable experience to take them to the next level. Considering the economy, the grand prize is especially sweet: The winning student is hired for a full-time job in Fragasso's portfolio management department.

Top Row: Mackenzie Farone, Jeremy Barnyak, Michanty Battle, Derek S. Faish, Keri Lauren Bitzer, Bulgan Tserennadmid, Melissa Chipangila, Andrew Rossi, Blaine Lipkin

Bottom row: David M. Johnson, Michael Hickly, Damien Gottschalk, Matthew D. Meister

The two professionals conjured up the idea when they realized that Pittsburgh employers were looking elsewhere — outside of the city, even overseas — for talent to fill jobs here. Local employers simply weren't satisfied with the way that the talent was being shaped in the absence of dialogue with the end user — the employers of our region. Yet, Fragasso says, no one was doing anything about it. "If we can get them talking and doing something about it, then good things are going to happen. We will retain people here, and you will get the products you need in your business, whether it be financial services, manufacturing, hospitality, et cetera," Fragasso says.

The case study project was open to undergraduate students from Western Pennsylvania colleges and universities, and the 13 finalists are a diverse group of highly ambitious and focused students from Chatham University, the University of Pittsburgh, Point Park University, and Duquesne University. Take for example Mackenzie Farone, a business management major at Point Park University. "My proudest accomplishment in college so far has been finding a balance," she says. "I managed to sustain an internship, a job, and an 18-credit course load for the last year and still maintain a high GPA and honors status."

Or, there is David Johnson, a finance and economics major at Pitt. "I have an extensive background in financial advising for someone my age," he says. "I have worked as a BAA for my father's financial advising firm. I have a Series 7, 63, and life, accident, and health insurance licenses, so I have been able to use these skills to prepare an outstanding financial plan in this project."

The fact of the matter is that win or lose, these students are walking away with valuable, multifaceted experience. "As a political science and cultural studies major, I didn't know much about finances, so the most challenging thing I encountered was learning in a month and a half what others have learned in four years," says Michanty Battle of Chatham University.

For Bulgan Tserennadmid, an accounting and finance major at Pitt, working on the project was an eye-opener to what lies ahead

in "the real world." "Financial planning is much more complex than I thought," he says. "It was challenging to take that number of factors into account."

It wasn't just the academic portion of the project that pushed the students' limits, either. "Between a full-time job, continuing classwork, and the project itself, time became my most precious commodity," says Damien Gottschalk, a finance and investment management major at Duquesne. "This project has certainly tried my time management and prioritization skills."

Truly, there is no better way to learn than to do. Sure, classroom education does prepare students for the basics of their field, but just participating in the project taught the students valuable lessons. "The most important thing that I have learned has been how unpredictable the real world can be, and that, as a businessman, having the ability to adapt to changes quickly is crucial," says Andrew Rossi, a finance major at Duquesne.

"What's interesting is that the way we identify talent has been through a traditional interview process," Shapiro says. "But to see somebody in action at every step of their process of what they're going to be doing — this helps us to identify top talent. They are demonstrating the professionalism that they're going to have at every step of this process. This isn't just handing in a presentation to a teacher — it's selling it to us."

While this project is sending the message that to retain talent here, we have to produce talent here, at the same time, it's telling our future leaders that they don't have to leave Pittsburgh to find a job. Melissa Chipanglia, an economics and finance major at Duquesne, says that she would love to see more young people stay here. "A lot of graduates go to bigger cities because they feel that bigger cities will cater to their career ambitions," she says.

Gregg Caliguri, owner of the Walnut Tree Restaurant Group, a sponsor of the project, says that's exactly where the idea came from. "We produce all of these brilliant individuals from all of these fantastic colleges and universities around the area and

then we ship them off to other places," he says. "But if we want to succeed, not only in our private lives, but in our businesses, we need the community to succeed. We need to keep these people here, and we need people from other cities to want to come to Pittsburgh."

With the Pittsburgh Steelers reigning as World Champions, Pittsburgh and its amenities are sure to be all over the news — allowing the world to see what those living here see. Matthew Meister, a finance, accounting, and economics major at the University of Pittsburgh, is more than happy to call our city home. "I think that we have one of the most beautiful city skylines, and we are incredibly friendly," he says.

Derek Faish, a dual finance and accounting major at Pitt, concurs that it's a great place to live and work. "I love the diversity of the neighborhoods, the spirit of the people, the culture, and the rich history," he says. And Blaine Lipkin, a finance major at Pitt who hails from Long Island, N.Y., says that "Pittsburgh is a spirited city with a lot of culture."

Economics plays a big role in retaining talent here, too. "I have three words: cost of living," says Jeremy Barnyak, a finance and accounting major at Pitt. "Pittsburgh has provided me with so many sights, attractions, and wonderful restaurants, too. It's great to be young here."

It is a testament to our city that these students from all over the globe are interested in staying here to work. In doing this project, they are putting Fragasso Financial Advisors on their list of places to start their careers, and there is no doubt that the person who wins the job will be a huge asset to the firm. "I want to have a real impact on my future place of employment and have the real ability to steer them into success," says Keri Bitzer, an accounting and finance major at Pitt.

Many students cited the amount of time that went in to the project, which essentially put them that much closer to those coveted 10,000 hours. "I invested countless hours into this project," says Michael Hickly, who graduated December 2008 with a business management and marketing major at Point Park.

So it is with eager anticipation that we await the announcement of the winner of the project, the latest addition to the portfolio management department at Fragasso Financial Advisors. ☺

For more information, see *WHIRL* Directory, page 116.



**The Our Futures Project Sponsors:**  
**Bob Fragasso of Fragasso Financial Advisors, Bob Dickey Sr., of WKQV Radio, Gregg Caliguri of the Walnut Tree Restaurant Group, Paul Shapiro of vie LLC, and Jack Tumpson of WHIRL Magazine**