

4-1-2016

Cohort MBA Program Students Forge Enduring Alumni Bond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/bx>

 Part of the [Business Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2016) "Cohort MBA Program Students Forge Enduring Alumni Bond," *Business Exchange*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 5 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/bx/vol1/iss5/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Business Exchange by an authorized editor of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

Cohort MBA Program Students Forge Enduring Alumni Bond

By Ovetta Sampson



Colleen Ekas
(MBA '13)

The power of alumni networks has been well documented. One Harvard study even found that alumni networks fueled improved stock market performance.

Although many people turn to alumni networks when seeking jobs or clients, alumni from DePaul's Kellstadt Graduate School of Business say they've gained something much more valuable from their former classmates: honest advice. This is especially true of graduates who have studied in the school's growing number of cohort MBA programs, where students take all of their classes together and get to know each other well.

Take **Colleen Ekas (MBA '13)**. After graduating from DePaul's Weekend MBA Cohort program, Ekas faced a difficult decision. Her company, AT&T, offered her a promotion, but it would mean moving from Chicago to Atlanta. Knowing she couldn't discuss her concerns with her co-workers, she called fellow DePaul alumna **Kristen Justus (MBA '13)**, a bank product manager in Los Angeles, to weigh her options.

"Whenever I call and talk to a member of my cohort, I'm talking to someone who knows me," says Ekas, who studied with a tight-knit group that included Justus, **Justin Sorto (MBA '13)** and **Jeff Balsavich (MBA '13)**.

"Co-workers may give you advice, but it often benefits them. But I can go to Justin or Jeff or Kristen and I know they will be honest with me. They're giving me impartial advice. They provide an honest voice in business from someone I trust, and that's completely rare."

Beyond normal alumni networking, graduates say cohort programs guide them to develop deep relationships that extend beyond graduation and allow them to traverse varying career challenges. They say their strong alumni network ties help them in their professional lives and careers.

“We talk about our career paths a lot,” says Justus. “We’re always consulting with each other about career challenges we face. For example, I rely on Colleen a lot for just understanding the challenges of being a woman within the corporate arena and how to manage my career.”

Scott Young, chair of DePaul’s Department of Management, says there are classes within DePaul’s cohort programs that teach more than just MBA business skills. They’re designed to help students learn to trust each other and create bonds.

Beyond normal alumni networking, graduates say cohort programs guide them to develop deep relationships that extend beyond graduation and allow them to traverse varying career challenges.

“In one course, I spend a lot of time just focusing on creating connections,” says Young. “It’s not only a course on organizational behavior—ultimately the intention is to bond them at the same time.”

Sorto says connections he made with his MBA cohort were invaluable once he graduated and sought a

job that fit his skill set and personality. Later, when Sorto wanted to switch industries, Balsavich connected him with a relative who worked in the field he was exploring.

Ultimately, Sorto decided on another position. But he emphasizes that the alumni connections play a much more meaningful part in his life than just the traditional job search.

“It’s not always about having someone to pass around your resume, which Colleen and Jeff actually did do for me,” says Sorto, who works as a commodities trader in New Jersey. “It’s about giving me advice on whether I’d like a job or whether it was a good fit for me. You can only get that kind of advice from people who actually know you.”

Through engagements, children’s birthdays, marriages and even trips abroad, Sorto, Balsavich, Ekas

and Justus remain close. “Over time the cohort helped us all get through some tough times,” says Balsavich, a marketing program manager at BP in Chicago.

“You have that bond that just won’t break. And after graduation it’s like we never missed a beat.”



Alumni connections remain strong for this group of MBA classmates, shown in a picture taken at a photo booth during a DePaul MBA Association event. Back row: Jeff Balsavich, Tim Cote and Justin Sorto. Front row: Trista Solomon, Kristen Justus and Colleen Ekas.



Want to reconnect with your former classmates?

Visit alumni.depaul.edu

to access the Alumni Directory and other alumni community links.