

The Fogelman College of Business & Economics



... BY RICHARD J. ALLEY

In a building on the University of Memphis campus, a massive, well-lit concrete stairwell rises four floors. Amid students scurrying up and down, artists erect scaffolding and climb even higher to paint stalks of bamboo with glimmering beads of water, scattershot insects, and the images of children and women pulling wheelbarrows. This isn't the art building, or anthropology, or biology, but the Fogelman College of Business and Economics. The bamboo and water are taken from a Hindi song about water beginning as beads and turning into rivulets, which in turn become a stream leading to a tributary, a river, and finally, the ocean. The insects and figures from a third-world country represent community and the success gained from working together.

If you think this artistic expression refreshing, if not odd, for a school purportedly concerned with the bottom line of a quarterly report or the branding plan of an industry, then you haven't met Dr. Rajiv Grover, dean of FCBE.

Grover came to the university in 2007, bringing with him philosophy. Not *a* philosophy — but philosophy itself. “This is what education is,” he says, gesturing to the mural, his eyes twinkling at the very thought. “Clearly I need to know accounting, I need to know finance, I need to know marketing, I need to get a job. But is that complete education? No. This is complete education: How do I become a successful person that is useful for society?”

Grover defines success as having been reached when a student is able to “love yourself, love your colleagues, and love your planet.”

It's a holistic path to learning and one that has paid off in dividends. Though the school was decades old by the time Grover arrived, he says, “The heyday was in the past for whatever reason.” There was a “reasonable amount” of publishing and teaching going on, and without laying blame, he says the school was on the verge of losing its accreditation. “Something had happened in the environment that had resulted in some kind of malaise.”

What he did immediately was to seek out the opportunities, not just at the school, but in the Memphis business community as well. Those opportunities

took the shape of AutoZone, FedEx, International Paper, Smith & Nephew, and Medtronic, among others. These companies at the time were passing executives around, Grover says, like “musical chairs.” Memphis was wading in the shallow end of a professional talent pool.

The answer was cooperation. Grover began The Customer-Driven MBA program where various companies would fund the education of students. The school and company jointly select candidates, and the education and an assistantship is paid by the company. The graduate student works on company projects instead of a professor's project; 20 hours with the company during the school year, and 40 hours during the summer. Students are guaranteed a job after graduation, providing everything has gone smoothly during the MBA process.

The program has proven to be a win-win for students and sponsoring companies as well, as the students get a first-rate, real-world education, and the companies are guaranteed an employee already familiar with its internal workings and who has been closely monitored along the way.

Despite such professional programs at the master's level where students are arriving from the likes of New York University and Dartmouth, there was still a lack of fundamentals in students who were entering the college as undergraduates. When Grover first arrived in Memphis from Atlanta ahead of his family, he was being shown apartments by working students who appeared lackluster, unengaged, and unprofessional. A series of initiatives were soon implemented, such as the Avron B. Fogelman Center for Professional Career Development, and Fogelman Fit.

This is where the holistic portion of Grover's vision comes in. “If you don't look good, you don't feel good,” he says. “Eating right and exercising” became terms as crucial as “overhead and expenses.” Taking the stairs was encouraged, hence the mural to liven up an otherwise dead space. Employee

FCBE BY THE NUMBERS

ENROLLMENT (Fall 2014)

▶ TOTAL: **3,081**

▶ UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS: **2,437**

▶ MASTER'S STUDENTS: **579**

▶ PH.D. STUDENTS: **65**

UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS MAJORS OFFERED: **8**

MASTER'S DEGREES OFFERED: **5**

PH.D. CONCENTRATIONS OFFERED: **6**

FULL-TIME FACULTY: **97**

CHAIRS OF EXCELLENCE PROFESSORS: **11**

ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED: **\$500,000**

ALUMNI: **30,000+**



Dr. Rajiv Grover says the Customer-Driven MBA program has proven to be a win-win for students and sponsoring companies as well, as the students get a first-rate, real-world education, and the companies are guaranteed an employee already familiar with its internal workings and who has been closely monitored along the way.

wellness is a huge human resources concern these days and Grover went into the initial classes to tell students, “Your job is not to get an ‘A’ in this particular class, your job is to go out and change 10 people’s lives. That’s how we make a difference.”

This holistic approach was innovative thinking on the part of Grover and his team. It is an approach that hadn’t been taken before because it hadn’t been needed in other locales. “This problem is not anywhere else — Charlotte is not having this problem, Chattanooga is not having this problem . . . we are unique, we have unique problems, this is a unique solution.”

In addition to a new curriculum that included fitness and even guidance on dining etiquette, came instruction on resume writing and interviewing. Avron Fogelman told *Memphis* magazine last April in regards to the Center for Professional Career Development:

“YOUR JOB IS NOT TO GET AN ‘A’ IN THIS PARTICULAR CLASS, YOUR JOB IS TO GO OUT AND CHANGE 10 PEOPLE’S LIVES. THAT’S HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”

— DR. RAJIV GROVER

“I observed through my association and relationship with Dr. Grover that students were graduating but were not really equipped to enter the workplace to the extent the dean and I thought they should be. The center will give students direction in writing resumes, in making speeches, and having successful job interviews. It’s a

multilayered curriculum, all directed toward making the student better prepared for employment.”

FCBE began building professionals from the ground up on a foundation of basics that might be taken for granted elsewhere. What it’s created — the wide-ranging community support, the holistic mindset, the world-class instruction — is a complete professional program that is now being studied by schools around the country, and potential employers see “a night and day difference in students now,” Grover says.

The school has led by example, by rallying the troops in local business to turn out leaders with a new worldview. “Getting people to work together is the role of a leader,” Grover says. “A leader can manage by getting people to compete among themselves and may the best get the most fruits. That is a philosophy that is used, and I am of the opinion that that is more dysfunctional than the approach of getting people to work together. That’s extremely important . . . In any organization, in any job, what you can achieve with others is far more important than what you can do by yourself.”

We all begin as drops of water and somewhere along the way, as a young person engaging with family and society, as undergraduates at the University of Memphis, or when entering the graduate program with FCBE, those beads become rivulets and streams and rivers before finding success and fulfillment in the ocean of life. 🌊

For more information on the Fogelman College of Business and Economics and its programs, please visit MEMPHIS.EDU/FCBE.