2017 REPORT to the COMMUNITY
FIRSTPERSON MBA BOARD FELLOWS PROGRAM
The 2017 Report to the Community highlights the present accomplishments and future goals of the Butler FirstPerson MBA Board Fellows Program.

Insights and observations from those closest to the program, including sponsors, faculty, and fellows.

To share and celebrate the program’s impact on the participants, Butler University, the Indianapolis nonprofit community—and beyond.
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Four years ago, Butler University and FirstPerson teamed up to provide a more in-depth, connected experience for the MBA Board Fellows Program. Because Butler and FirstPerson have always been aligned in their beliefs about the importance of individual engagement, volunteerism, and community leadership, it was a natural partnership.

“When this opportunity arose, I knew we could help with the program’s sustainability and expansion,” explains Bryan Brenner, FirstPerson CEO. “Students were being connected with organizations, but the connections weren’t necessarily deep enough. Instituting the Mentor piece of the program created more consistency and accessibility. The Mentor mindset we’ve established ensures a more personal, one-on-one connection between our Mentors and our Fellows. It helps Fellows clarify their goals so they can create a strong personal understanding of what they want to accomplish professionally and personally—without having to do it by trial and error.”

The partnership ensures that students, the community, and the University all benefit from the program’s overarching goals. Students are provided a mind-expanding opportunity so they can better align their individual purpose with their ultimate destiny—including their family, career, and community-service choices.

The community benefits because the program helps put more people into the nonprofit pipeline at an earlier age. “The MBA Fellows Program really helps with engagement and diversity at the community level,” says Brenner. “We get passionate people involved with the right nonprofit organizations earlier in their lives.”

Butler is known as a place where students aren’t singularly focused on getting a great job after graduation, but are also invested in leaving their community better than they found it. “Butler and its students believe in giving back. This program enhances the Butler brand by preparing its graduates to make meaningful community contributions. In fact, many of the Butler MBA applicants cite the Fellows program as a key differentiator when considering their graduate-level options.”

As the program continues to flourish, Brenner sets his sights on potentially enhancing the undergraduate experience with a complementary offering. “I’d love to see the kind of education and awareness our Fellows experience expand to Butler undergrads. Giving undergraduate students earlier insight into how the nonprofit world works—and how they can contribute—only strengthens the individual/university/community connection.”
INSIGHT

BRYAN K. BRENNER
FirstPerson, CEO

The MBA Fellows Program really helps with engagement and diversity at the community level. We get passionate people involved with the right nonprofit organizations earlier in their lives.

BRYAN K. BRENNER
FirstPerson, CEO
“The goal for our Fellows is to provide them with the skills they need to be effective board members,” explains Mike Simmons, MBA Board Fellows Faculty and Co-Founder. “We want them to have the full experience of sitting on a board, and we don’t want them to navigate it alone. That’s where our Mentors come in.”

The Butler MBA Fellows Program pairs each Fellow with a Mentor who is there to answer questions, provide resources, and ensure Fellows have the exposure and access they need to effectively learn how nonprofit organizations operate. Fellows work with Mentors on creating, managing, and executing a project—which can range from establishing board assessment strategies to identifying fundraising streams.

“The Mentor/Fellow relationship typically extends beyond the classroom parameters,” says Simmons. “Fellows often go on to serve on the boards of their Mentors. The relationship that develops during the program is a deeply connected one.”

Simmons explains that a key differentiator in the MBA Board Fellows Program is the self-reflection and leadership development component. “One thing that’s instrumental to our program is our self-reflection exercises. We provide our Fellows with ample time to think about how they want to serve, as well as various opportunities to discuss the pros and cons. It’s a safe space for students to grow.”

Linda Freije, VP of Legal Counsel at Christian Theological Seminary and an ordained Methodist minister, leads the self-reflection portion of the program. “Having someone with a faith-based perspective adds a deeper dimension,” says Simmons. “The reflective exercises themselves aren’t faith-based, but Fellows are encouraged to dig deeply into who and why they want to serve. These introspections often reveal very personal insights into specific moments that helped guide a Fellow’s decision to serve. It’s a powerful way to help our Fellows determine where their greatest passions reside.”

Another critical component of the program’s success is the FirstPerson partnership. “Besides FirstPerson’s financial sponsorship, which enables the program’s sustainability, Bryan is incredibly instrumental in helping identify potential Mentors, which was his brainchild and has become the lifeblood of our program. His ability to think strategically is both impressive and important, and he’s an integral part of everything we’ve accomplished. He is a true partner.”
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Mike Simmons
Board Fellows Faculty
A few years ago, Timothy Robinson, MBA Board Fellows Faculty and Co-Founder, served on a number of boards where he found himself to be the youngest member and the only person of color. “It opened my eyes to the fact that there are many bright, inspiring, young people willing and able to contribute to the nonprofit world, but who don’t have the contacts or access to get involved,” says Robinson. “I thought it would be great to teach these young people how to successfully serve on a board through an immersion program.” And thus, the MBA Board Fellows Program was born.

“Indianapolis and Butler are unique because there’s a culture of wanting to give back to the community,” says Robinson. “There are many individuals who serve on boards throughout the community, but the challenge is opening up those opportunities to those who might not have existing connections. Our program gets people involved earlier—people who want to have an impact. These students are creating the communities they want to live and raise their families in.”

The program’s quick success has been a welcome surprise, largely attributed to a well-honed early vision and a FirstPerson partnership. “We sat down and originally envisioned the class and how it would play out. We weren’t sure whether organizations would take students on so quickly and willingly, but we’ve been pleasantly surprised by how receptive our Mentors and participating boards have been. And Bryan’s contributions can’t be underestimated. Not only has he taken economic issues off the table for the University, but he’s been instrumental in establishing our Mentor model and serving as a staunch advocate and voice for the program.”
You can’t help someone else hone their vision without first fully understanding and vetting your own vision.

Timothy Robinson
Board Fellows Faculty
As an academic, Craig Caldwell, Butler Associate Dean, says it’s relatively easy to create a new program, put it into existence, and hope for the best. But that’s not always how it works out. In the case of the MBA Board Fellows Program, it worked out even better than expected.

“For an organization like FirstPerson to come along and say, ‘We believe in this, we think this has value, and we want to support your efforts financially’ is phenomenal,” says Caldwell. “That kind of endorsement makes it easy to go out and find highly engaged board members to partner with. We have the luxury of saying, ‘It’s not just Butler who believes in this—there’s a partner force that’s in full support of our program and the possibilities it offers our students.’”

There are a vast number of educational opportunities that exist within the United States, but an infinitesimally small percentage of them focus on training those who intend to go into nonprofit work. “Our program fills a critical space,” says Caldwell. “It’s more digestible, more efficient, and more targeted than a full undergraduate or master’s program.”

When looking into the future, Caldwell says he’d love to be able to track the number of program graduates who eventually serve on boards. He’s also eager to see a former Fellow become Chairperson of the Board for a local nonprofit. “These are our measuring sticks for long-term success,” Caldwell explains. “Expanding the program isn’t necessarily the goal. It’s currently a very specific and selective process, and we’d like it to remain that way. Our current size—typically 10-12 Fellows—enables us to identify the right board member at the right time within the right organization so we can pair him or her with the right Fellow. It’s a highly successful model that ensures students remain engaged and connected.”
OUR PROGRAM FILLS A CRITICAL SPACE. IT’S MORE DIGESTIBLE, MORE EFFICIENT, AND MORE TARGETED THAN A FULL UNDERGRADUATE OR MASTER’S PROGRAM.

CRAIG CALDWELL
Butler Associate Dean
Leadership skills and time management, these are two of the things Emily O’Neal, 2017 Fellow, cites as personal accomplishments. “As part of the MBA Board Fellows Program, I led a group of volunteers that created a young professionals group. I taught delegation skills. And I recognized people’s individual strengths and supported their growth. I also learned how to be actively involved in an organization, how to speak up and make a difference. I learned how important it is to carve out time in my schedule to enable my full board member participation.”

The program served as a perfect bridge into the community and into the business world. O’Neal was paired with Second Helpings, an Indianapolis nonprofit she had previously served by volunteering as a kitchen helper and gala fundraiser. The MBA Board Fellows Program allowed her to extend her involvement into the Second Helpings boardroom, where she experienced how a board works and how to effectively give back to her community via board involvement.

As a Second Helpings volunteer, O’Neal had noticed the lack of younger volunteers. “The primary volunteer times were in the middle of the afternoon. Young professionals were working then, and they didn’t have the opportunity to serve.” As part of her course of study, O’Neal built a pipeline for young professionals. “I took the idea of creating a young professionals group to Second Helping’s CEO, and she loved it. She provided the resources I needed to make it happen, and launching a young professionals group then became the focus of my Fellowship.”

Within three weeks of launch, the young professionals group had four new members, and O’Neal was actively hosting meet-and-greets and trivia nights at Sun King Brewery. Her project was so successful, she was invited to serve on Second Helpings’ Advisory Council to the Board of Directors.

“I’m incredibly thankful for this program,” O’Neal says. “I had time to reflect and share in front of and with my classmates. There was an environment of openness and trust that lasted throughout the entire course. And I’m so grateful for the opportunity to sit on the Advisory Council of the Second Helpings Board of Directors. This program gave me the access and education I needed to continue moving and advancing within the organization.”
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Emily O’Neal
2017 Fellow
A strong desire to be more involved in the Indianapolis nonprofit sector motived Blaine Zimmerman, 2017 Fellow, to apply for the MBA Board Fellows Program. “As I transferred from active military duty to the workforce, I was involved with Vets Lives Matter, a veteran’s organization that had recently submitted the paperwork to obtain its 501(c)3 status. I wanted to take a crash course in nonprofit work to help my own organization.”

But Zimmerman got more than just a crash course. He was paired with Mentor John Myrland, VP of Community Outreach for Old National Bank and former President of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce. The match proved to be a perfect fit. “John and I have very similar personalities,” Zimmerman says. “He immediately helped me get involved with a number of different boards, and he gave me access to a vast number of individuals and opportunities.”

The organization Zimmerman worked with during his MBA Board Fellows Program is RightFit—an after-school program for four IPS elementary schools where participating kids receive 45 minutes of tutoring, 30 minutes of safe play, and a hot dinner. Zimmerman envisioned and developed an incentive program proposal for the participating kids. The premise: If the schools increase a certain percentage of both letter grades and attendance, kids receive participation “swag.” The school whose grade and attendance increase is the biggest receive a visit from a local Indianapolis sports team mascot (e.g., the Pacers, Colts, etc.). Zimmerman’s program will launch in the spring of 2018.

“This Fellowship has been a springboard for my Indianapolis nonprofit involvement,” says Zimmerman. “I’m able to leverage relationships I developed during the program so I can be more actively involved in community outreach. Eventually, I’d like to serve as a community relations director in Indianapolis. The MBA Board Fellows Program gave me the access and education I need to pursue that career goal.”
This fellowship has been a springboard for my Indianapolis nonprofit involvement. I’m able to leverage relationships I developed during the program so I can be more actively involved in community outreach.”

Blaine Zimmerman
2017 Fellow
2017 BUTLER LACY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS TEAM

Mike Simmons DBA
*Eli Lilly & Company*

Timothy Robinson
*Lumina Foundation*

Judith Cebula
*Lilly Endowment*

Brenda Frieje
*Christian Theological Seminary*

Tom King
*Indiana State Museum*

Karen Kennelly
*K2 Consulting*

Ellen Robinson
*INSPIRE*

Marietta Stalcup
*MBA Director*

Ashley O’Riley
*Graduate Programs Assistant*

Abby Thompson
*LSB Director of Marketing*

2017 FIRSTPERSON TEAM

Bryan Brenner
*CEO & Founder*

Paul Ashley
*Managing Director*

Dana Cooper
*Director of Strategic Engagement*

Alicia Kurtz
*VP of Marketing & Communications*

Ashley Watson
*Executive Coordinator*
There are so many bright, young people who want to contribute to their communities, but don’t have the access they need. That’s one reason why we created this program.

Timothy Robinson
Board Fellows Faculty
## Mentor / Fellow Pairings

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<td>Steve Klipsch</td>
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WE WANT OUR FELLOWS IN BOARDROOMS... AND WE DON’T WANT THEM TO NAVIGATE THAT EXPERIENCE ALONE.

MIKE SIMMONS
Board Fellows Faculty