Faculty Research Spotlight

Lei Zhou
Jones, Diedrich, Mennie Endowed Professor

Lei Zhou has come a long way. Born in China, he came to the US in 1993 as an MBA student at the University of Alabama. "I was not sure what language people in Alabama spoke when I first arrived at Tuscaloosa," said Dr. Zhou. He never looked back, though. In 2002, he joined Miami University as an assistant professor after receiving his PhD from the University of Florida.

Three years later, he came to NIU. In his 11-year NIU tenure, Dr. Zhou has achieved excellence in research and teaching. He has published 11 articles in premier finance and economics journals. His undergraduate and graduate classes are well-received and are consistently highly rated. In addition, Dr. Zhou has been a CFA charterholder since 2011. In recognition of his contributions and success, Dr. Zhou was named the Jones, Diedrich, Mennie Professor of Finance in 2015.

NIU Finance Students Storm Wall Street

Stay Connected
Send your email address and any physical address changes to gnicolos@niu.edu. Please include your full name and year(s) and NIU degree(s) earned.

http://www.cob.niu.edu/departments/finance/
FSAB Corner

The Finance Student Advisory Board (FSAB) is a student organization which serves in an advisory capacity to the department and acts as the voice of the Finance student body. This semester, the FSAB surveyed finance majors, gathering a total of 74 responses. Expected to be completed by the end of the semester, the report will provide student feedback to the department and promote overall transparency. Later this month, we are hosting a Recent Finance Alumni Night in which three finance graduates will return to campus to discuss what to look for in a career as well as interview tips and tricks. Lastly, the FSAB has organized a softball tournament for the entire College of Business, set to take place behind Barss Hall on April 28 & 29. The winner will receive a trophy and, of course, bragging rights.

Meet Our Alumni

Matt Gerdes is responsible for structuring, syndicating and managing middle-market debt investments for the Freeport loan funds. Prior to joining Freeport in 2006, Mr. Gerdes was a Director of Dymas Capital Management Company where he originated, underwrote and managed investments in private equity sponsored transactions. Prior to his role at Dymas, Mr. Gerdes was a Vice President at GE Capital’s Merchant Banking Syndications Team where he structured and placed senior and subordinated financings. Mr. Gerdes graduated cum laude with a B.S. in Finance from Northern Illinois University and holds an M.B.A. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Bloomberg Terminal

In February, the Finance Department received its first Bloomberg terminal. Bloomberg is one of the most popular professional tools for accessing real-time and historic trading data, analytics and research, and news for global financial markets. The markets include but are not limited to government securities, corporate securities, mortgage, money-market, indices, currency, commodities and equities. Finance majors, minors, and certificates can receive service at the terminal in order to complete Bloomberg’s self-paced and free certification modules (Bloomberg Market Concepts and Bloomberg Essentials), an achievement which can be featured on their resumes. The terminal will be integrated into several finance courses, including the student managed portfolio where data will be accessed seamlessly through its Excel API. The two-year purchase was financed through a combination of generous private donations.

Excel Workshops

During the second semester of its new Excel Workshop Series, the Finance Department hosted three hands-on workshops covering a variety of topics.

The first presentation focused on Excel basics such as filters, Goal Seek, Solver and data tables. The second session introduced functionalities like pivot tables, charts, and statements such as IF, AND, OR, INDEX, and MATCH. The third presentation advanced to macros and VBA. These presentations helped students to understand the importance of Excel in their academic and future careers. While organized by Dr. Nicolosi and Dr. Docking, the workshops were presented by Graduate Assistant Abdul S. Mohammed.

FMA Corner

The Financial Management Association is a professional student organization that bridges the gap between college education and the business world. To meet this goal, the FMA arranges networking events and invites guest speakers to present valuable information. This semester, the FMA hosted a Meet the Faculty event where students and professors had the unique opportunity to get to know each other over dinner. Another large scale event was the FMA Mock Cocktail Party, where students learned proper etiquette in a social interview setting by conversing with business professionals over drinks and hors d‘oeuvres. The FMA has also had many guest speakers attend meetings where they informed students about important subjects such as wealth management, treasury, and financial data analytics. Members also attended the FMA Leadership Conference. This has been a successful semester as the business world has gotten much closer to students at NIU.

Excel Workshops

Each Tuesday night, the NIU Investment Association meets to help bring the financial markets to those curious, enterprising students who want to deepen their understandings of the world of finance. Meetings are discussion-based and informal, and no question is too trivial! We begin each meeting with a discussion of recent financial news and a recap of the week’s action in our semester-long portfolio simulation - with cash prizes at stake for the top performers! Following the news and simulation discussion, two presentations are given by volunteer members. The presentations, one about a general topic and the other about a specific company, are voted on by the entire membership the previous week. Recent topics and companies include JP Morgan, Goldman Sachs, options, and even Buffalo Wild Wings! Want to know more? Check us out at www.niua.org. Happy Investing!

Chicago Tour

A group of thirteen business undergraduates accompanied Dr. Nicolosi on an annual tour of several Chicago financial institutions during April’s Money Smart Week. The outing began with a floor tour of the Chicago Board of Options Exchange (CBOE) led by Kevin Davitt. After visiting the exchange’s busiest pit, the S&P 500, the group headed across the street through the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME) to view the former Continental Illinois Bank, now owned by Wintrust. From there, the group visited the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. Following an informative Q&A session and short video, the students perused the Bank’s Money Museum, photographing themselves with a suitcase containing one million dollars.

Meet Our Students

Franz Varga

Finance/Economics Senior

After placing in the top 5 in the Americas on the Bloomberg Aptitude Test (BAT) in business and finance in 2014, double major and graduating senior Franz Varga scored best in the world in September 2015. The BAT covers 8 topics ranging from math to analytical reasoning to economics. With participants from more than 3,500 universities, Varga’s score beat students from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the National University of Singapore. Heavily involved on campus (e.g., Investment Association, Student Managed Portfolio, among others), Varga will join Epic Systems in WI upon graduation.

Matt Benning

FMA Executive Vice President
Finance Junior

While organized by Dr. Nicolosi and Dr. Docking, the workshops were presented by Graduate Assistant Abdul S. Mohammed. Abdul is a Masters in Electronics Engineering student who is presently pursuing a Masters in Management of Information Systems. His experience has helped him connect well with students and provide them with helpful guidance on effectively using Excel.

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