

Taking Stock in Women's Finance Futures: Third Annual Women's Stock Pitch Competition

By Leslie McCullough, 24 March 2018

Excitement filled Alan B. Miller Hall on a Saturday morning in March as more than 50 women from 16 top universities prepared to compete in the Mason School's third annual Women's Stock Pitch. For the undergraduate women who came to compete, the event provided the direct, hands-on experience that will help them launch a career in an industry that is typically dominated by men.

"The community of women who work in finance is fantastic and powerful," said stock pitch judge Lisa Petrelli, managing director at UBS Securities. "It is so inspiring to see this younger generation of women develop the skills and confidence to build a successful career."

Across the globe, women are slowly paving a path to parity in the finance industry as more and more women are standing out as leaders—and many are reaching out to help guide other women into the field. Events like the Women's Stock Pitch help to bridge the divide.

"Going into finance is hard and there are a lot of talented women out there who need mentorship and support," said Abby Just, '01, portfolio manager at West Financial Services. "As an alumna, I am proud of William & Mary for recognizing the need to help women over the hurdle. They saw a huge interest and opportunity. The stock pitch gives students the ability to do something similar to what they would do working in the industry."

Back in Miller Hall, each two- to four-person team took a turn to convince a panel of three judges that their stock was a winner. After untold hours of preparation, the teams had ten minutes to formally present and meticulously explain the dozens of charts and indices used to arrive at their recommendation. Then the floor was opened to ten minutes of questions and feedback from the judges.

"We were most nervous about the Q&A after the

pitch. You have to know your stock inside and out," said Erin North who represented New York University and pitched the Salesforce stock. "It took us a lot of time to get prepared and we had big shoes to fill since our school won the past two years."

The teams chose stocks from a wide array of industries ranging from healthcare and banking to pet insurance and cloud computing. This year's competition also included the first international team from the University of Sydney.



The winning team from University of Sydney

"At the University of Sydney, we have many talented female finance majors but find that women tend to be under-represented in some key parts of the finance industry," said Susan Thorp, professor of finance at the University of Sydney who helped facilitate the team's participation. "The stock pitch competition offers a truly exceptional opportunity for a few of the women from our school to participate, compete and meet leaders in finance."

The Sydney team members agreed noting that the competition offered a great opportunity to network and see how other teams learned about finance. The students were impressed with the judges who they felt really listened and asked good, thoughtful and challenging questions. The feeling was certainly mutual.



“I was really impressed by the students,” said Just who helped judge the event. “The level of analysis each team presented was much deeper than I anticipated. They all did an incredible job of knowing the company and the industry and hitting on all the things we look for in finance.”

For the student participants, the experience provided much more than how to apply financial knowledge. Many commented on William & Mary’s welcoming and nurturing environment as a great place to practice their their presentation and networking skills. The teams were also grateful for the generous support from more than a dozen sponsors, including founding sponsors Todd ’96 and Katie ’95 Boehly and Alice Davison P ’16, who helped to underwrite student travel and participation costs.



The stock pitch team from West Point

“Investing can be a phenomenal career choice for women – and we’re good at it,” said Davison, vice president in the Central Services Division at Capital Group Companies. “The event does a great job of making sure more female undergrads know this, and can begin to develop the tools they need to be successful.”

The competition was part of a two-day event which opened Friday night with a powerful keynote address from Ursula Burns, the former CEO of Xerox and the first female African American CEO of a Fortune 500 company. During her address, Burns said, “Figure out

where you want to go from a life perspective and what brings you joy. Define this clearly and don’t make a lot of trade-offs. If you do this, you will end up making more money than you can possibly imagine because you will find joy in your work.”

The stock pitch competition was followed by a Women’s Leadership Summit which brought together 125 undergraduate students with more than 60 finance industry professionals to participate in panel discussions and coaching sessions.

“We are proud that William & Mary is connecting undergraduate women to world-class opportunities like this,” said Todd Boehly, Chairman and CEO of Eldridge Industries. “Every year we are impressed with the caliber of students who attend and how much the event has grown in just three years.” After the preliminary stock pitch round, four teams, University of Notre Dame, University of Texas at Austin, Brown University and the University of Sydney, advanced to the finals. In the end, it was the University of Sydney’s Starbucks pitch that took home the top \$2,500 award.

Although only a few could walk away with a prize, everyone benefited from the event’s message of empowerment and support.

“Look around,” said Dean Larry Pulley to the group. “You will see many of these people as you progress in your career in leading positions around the world. It’s ok to take names.”

Second-time judge Elizabeth Cabell Jennings ’85 echoed Pulley’s remarks in her lunchtime keynote address, “My advice to you is to be fearless. The world of finance needs to change and you are the people who will do it. There are lots of us who look forward to your success.”

