

# THE EDGE

FALL 2022

## ECBU DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER



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# FROM MY DESK



These are times of change, many of which are reflected in this issue of *The Edge*—our ninth issue in six years. Our first issue (in 2017) was a portrait of VMI life in a popular and productive department. After a half decade (that included the COVID pandemic and global and domestic discord) we are not the same. VMI has new senior leadership that is engaged in a comprehensive strategic review to better position the Institute for its bicentennial in 2039. Of course, we are still teaching the core principles of Economics and Business with a rigorous and challenging curriculum accredited by AACSB. Our mission is to develop effective leaders with the knowledge and skills to solve the challenges of a diverse and dynamic business environment.

In the pages of *The Edge* to follow, you will read of the many and various activities of students, alumni, and faculty of the department highlighted in pursuit of that mission. Read, for instance, about the exciting work that Col. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl is doing in the new Building BRIDGES program. This club provides opportunities for cadets to engage in our world through community service, and to promote diversity and inclusivity by raising awareness of societal issues and facilitating discussions on diverse topics. It is exciting, challenging, and valuable. Col. Jennifer Gerow continues her very effective program of inviting cadets to take part in internships for credit—under a rigorous and demanding routine of close company-cadet involvement.

And most recently, our first New York City trip for the CIG (Cadet Investment Group) since 2018, and it was a busy time in the city that never sleeps! Cadets visited and learned from four investment firms and one notable news organization, plus enjoyed an evening mixer with local alums.

And, of course, we continue teaching and launching such programs and trips from our new, modern space. You will realize that it's not just bricks and mortar—it's finding and learning about new points of view in an expanding and colorful world.

Read on, and enjoy.

—Col. Clifford West, Department Head, ECBU

## THE EDGE

ECBU DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

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*The Edge* is the newsletter of the **Economics and Business Department** (ECBU) of The Virginia Military Institute (VMI) located in Lexington, Virginia. As a registered institute of higher learning and an accredited member of the AACSB, our mission is to educate the young men and women enrolled in this institution. Our courses specialize in all aspects of economics and business with an ongoing effort to provide enlightenment and focus of the world in which our students will emerge after graduation. We welcome readership involvement and are interested in your opinion. We are strongest with your involvement. We encourage students, faculty, alumni, and interested friends of VMI to submit articles and article ideas. Send them to [macdonaldbn10@vmi.edu](mailto:macdonaldbn10@vmi.edu).

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# AN INSIDE LOOK AT RENOVATED SCOTT SHIPP

**M**onday the 31st of January 2021 was move-in day, even though the official ribbon cutting ceremony (attended by Scott Shipp's great granddaughter, Julia Littlefield) had been the previous Saturday. We were ready.

We were naturally curious and anxious to get inside, to see what our new quarters would be like. We had been told that we will enjoy and be able to teach in greatly improved physical space: a projected 28,000 feet of additional useable space throughout the building (an additional 5,000 square feet of each floor), larger classrooms, and interactive areas called "Collaboration Spaces."

After more than two years of working out of makeshift space, with as many as eight professors sitting shoulder to shoulder in the as-yet-

**unrenovated** part of Scott Shipp Hall, **we were ready**. To sum up the experience succinctly: it is lovely! The Economics and Business Department is now on the second floor, but with easy access to the elevator, stairwells, and entrances. The professors' offices surround a central cadet meeting area, with most having windows looking to the outside of the building or into the sunny interior courtyard. There is a fully equipped kitchen, a well-equipped printer/copier and files, and a sizable office for the department's secretary, Donna Potter.

The project includes a 28,000-square-foot expansion and complete renovation of the previously existing 68,000-square-foot space. Progress was signified by a giant crane, which went up in the fall of 2019 and remained almost a full year.

Today the new Scott Shipp Hall is the home to multiple departments' classrooms and offices, including history; economics; international studies; and English, rhetoric, and humanistic studies. The building even has a photography lab, an art studio, a 70-seat auditorium, and courtyards for outdoor study. In addition, it now holds a 36,000-square-foot space for the John A. Adams '71 Center for Military History and Strategic Analysis.

In the ECBU space, our offices surround a central study area where cadets congregate, which significantly improves on the frequency and quality of cadet interactions.

There are thirteen faculty offices, each with a window either to the outside of the building (on the east side) or to one of two interior courtyards—so plenty of sunlight.



Bordering the central meeting area is a modern, well-equipped kitchen, two faculty toilets, and a sizable office for the department secretary. This is linked to an equally sizable storage area for paper, copy machines, and printers. There is a glass-walled office for the Internship Coordinator and two offices for adjunct faculty lecturers. Finally, to the north, are two large classrooms.

All is connected to the older, original Scott Shipp Hall.

Originally named Smith Shipp Hall, at an estimated cost of about \$13,000, the name was changed to Scott Shipp Hall in 1921 and was the home to all academic departments except engineering, chemistry, biology, and physics. The building was gutted in 1955 with a two-story addition, and then a three-story annex was added in

1958. Who was Scott Shipp anyway? He was a student in 1859, but born in 1839, the same year as the founding of VMI. He became a professor, the longest-serving Commandant, and then the Institute's second Superintendent.

So far—one year almost completed—the new space is, as said, exceedingly functional, well thought out, and, well, lovely. 🌸

*Top row: left to right: Main entrance opposite Crozet; Col. Sen in her roomy, sun-filled office; student reading in central conference area.  
Bottom row: a typical classroom on the first floor; a lecture hall with banked seating; and another spacious office for Maj. Tim Murray.*



## THREE NEW PROFESSORS PROFILED



### HANNAH BECKER – ENTREPRENEURSHIP WELL TAUGHT

Hannah Becker joined the ECBU department last year—teaching a well-regarded and popular course on entrepreneurship. She should know—she has lived it. In 2015, Hannah and her husband (Jeremy, a veteran) started and run Becker Digital, a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business that provides marketing and management

consulting services to government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

Her academic record is impressive. She has a Masters of Science in Information Technology from the Florida Institute of Technology (completed in 2021). Before that, Hannah earned a Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management from American Public University (2019), a Master of Business Administration in Marketing from Florida Institute of

Technology (2015), and a Bachelor of Science degree from Mississippi State University (2010).

She began teaching at the Virginia Military Institute in August of 2021 and teaches “Principles of Management” and “Entrepreneurship.” Prior to VMI, Hannah taught at Ottawa University and Neosho County Community College. Additionally, Hannah serves on the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics (AFCEA) Cyber Committee in Fairfax, Virginia, where she researches digital transformation strategies, dis/misinformation, and social media’s effects on society.)



**STEPHEN LOWE – WASHINGTON INSIDER**

Dr. Stephen Lowe joined the ECBU department in 2021. He teaches Principles of Management and Entrepreneurship. Like the best professors, he is drawing on personal experience in this course, always a valuable asset when it brings real world issues to the classroom, where students can analyze and debate them. And Lowe knows real world issues firsthand, having served two US presidents.

In the 21st century, Lowe served in the Executive Office in both the Bush and Obama Administrations, assigned to the Office of Management and Budget. In this capacity he provided ideas, innovation, and solution development and execution for many new policy programs. In addition, he has served in the capacity of public

policy and strategy implementation—an extensive list of vital and important services in the service of two US presidents.

Lowe has a PhD from the University of Glasgow, a Masters in Information Technology from the University of Virginia, an MPA in Public Administration from Virginia Tech, and a BA from James Madison University. Clearly, he has done extensive research in these subjects and is currently teaching Principles of Management and Entrepreneurship in our department.

Lowe came here from McClean, Virginia, last year, purchased a house on Jackson Avenue, and loves the town and VMI. Before joining academia he was an outward bound instructor, before working for the National Defense University.



**DAVID BEAUREGARD – CEO IN HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT**

David Beauregard commutes to Lexington twice a week in order to teach a very interesting, special subject for ECBU. This is his first experience teaching at the college level, and he is off to a good start.

The course is entitled “Healthcare Management,” and it is a unique offering. Students get to hear—from a real hospital system CEO—how and what must be considered daily, weekly, and over years in this volatile and demanding business. Hospitals are complex institutions, made up of doctors, nurses, technicians, and more.

The financial demand can be intense, as David explained to me over lunch in October. Briefly stated, the management of a busy hospital involves General Management of approximately eight disciplines, including Utilities Costs, Marketing Costs, Leadership Issues, Technology Costs and Needs, and Organizational Behavior, along with the overall management of personalities and ambitions. Hospital managers have to have many skills, often think (and decide) on the spot, and hopefully find solutions to fast-developing problems. This requires a broad education, in order to manage in a high-pressure environment. And to add to that, technology with its demands—and a plethora of growing, developing, and demanding data.

Beauregard grew up in Attleboro, Massachusetts, and went into the Air Force with the Medical Corps after high school. It was here, as assigned to the 354th Fighter Wing (a MASH Unit—shades of Alan Alda!) that he developed an interest in medicine. With the US Air Force, he served in Germany, Thailand, and even with an army hospital in Alaska. After four years he mustered out, graduated from Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, and then earned a Masters in Accountancy at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. He is a family man, lives in Richmond, and, as said, commutes here twice a week.

His career is impressive. He worked for the Charter Medical Corporation, becoming a Senior Manager at Arthur Young (Ernst & Young) and General Partner at The Piedmont Group, before eventually bringing these skills to service as the CEO of ConsiCare, a subsidiary of NCRI: a public company. He worked there until 2006 when he turned them around financially and sold to the Health Systems of the state of New York. Today he is Founder and Managing Director of Monument Square Advisors, again in the complex world of healthcare management. ❄️

# REUNIONS ON THE PARADE GROUND

**T**wo former cadets from my advertising class returned to post last year, and this year I met a successful alumnus celebrating his 25th reunion.

## HENRY MEREDITH '15

Henry graduated in 2015. Early on showed a keen interest in the video game business, and it remained his sole goal, post-college. He spent a productive summer in his junior year interning with a TV production company in Los Angeles, but after graduation he began working for an independent game company in Norfolk, Virginia, for a few years, organized a video convention for several years, and ultimately became Project Manager/Producer for Epic Films, Inc., out of Cary, North Carolina.

Now he was in the Big Time, creating “Serious Games” for one of the biggest firms in the business, as well as working as Chief Film Product Manager (Producer) for a popular game called **Fortnite**. Fortnite is a free-to-play battle royale game that was released in 2017. Fortnite is updated with content seasonally and players download new versions of the

game regularly to get new content to play. The game’s income is earned by selling cosmetic content within the game, for example, outfits for a player’s character. This is one of the firm’s most popular and most profitable long-lasting games. And they make money! “Epic Games is projected to generate approximately 6.27 billion US dollars in gross revenues for 2022, up from 5.1 billion US dollars in 2020” (www.statista.com). Henry is in the right place, working on and managing the kind of video game (as he describes it) “that I would have played growing up.” In a recent telephone interview, Henry acknowledged that managing Fortnite, the lifeblood of the firm, is a dream come true. Another dream came true when Henry met Meaghan at a VMI dance. They married in November of 2019 and now live in Raleigh, North Carolina.

## SAM HUNTER '15

Also at the reunion was another favorite from my class of 2015, Sam Hunter. Sam has worked five years now for the Bohler firm, a large civil engineering company that designs and builds projects all along the eastern United States. Sam is assigned to the mid-Atlantic area, and typical projects are large data centers, apartment buildings, office blocks, and even fast food structures. Bohler has 28 offices from Maine to Florida and approximately 700 employees. Sam is in the Richmond office and came aboard as that branch was just being created. He is in business development and covers much of the Virginia and North Carolina area, developing new projects for the firm. He is a newly married man and tied the knot as recently as October of this year. Henry Meredith was at the wedding, along with an estimated fifteen other VMI cadets. His bride is the former Patricia Lynch, whom he met in DC, from a dating app.

Come back often, guys!



## SHANNON FERGUSON, '97

Shannon Ferguson loved his time at VMI (1992–97) and learned attitude and skills from the experience. He was an eager ECU major, and his favorite professor was Floyd Duncan. While at VMI he was a wrestler and football player. After graduation his first job was as an Accountant with Motorola, then a Supervisor for Flowserve, and finally Cost Accounting and Operations Controller for Swimways—until along came DroneUp. Shannon joined the firm in 2017, and is the Senior Director of Finance and Director of Financial Planning and Analysis for the company. He reports directly to the CEO and is (as he put it) at the “pinnacle of my Career.” Shannon had some valuable advice to pass on, aids for aspiring cadets:

- Relationships matter. **Networking** is a way to develop them, through peers and places of business.
- Pay your dues! **Invest** the time and energy to learn what works and what doesn’t.
- **Future Education!** If you intend to pursue a higher degree, do it early in your career. 🍷



# A UNIQUE METHOD FOR ACHIEVING ON-TIME DELIVERY



When Shannon Ferguson joined **DroneUp** in 2017, the product and the company was smaller, profitable but looking for a big score. Drones were just beginning to find their role, for the military, for hospitals but not yet for the commercial world. Swift, low cost, and accurate delivery-ordered items in the retail sector is a critical component to standing out from other retailers and gaining an advantage. Walmart took an important step to gain this valuable advantage last year when they partner with a fast-growing firm in Virginia called DroneUp. DroneUp is a nationwide drone services and was selected as a partner to launch trial deliveries of at-home COVID-19 self-collection/testing kits. The trial demonstrated proof that Walmart and DroneUp could offer customers delivery in minutes versus hours. Now, after safely completing hundreds of drone deliveries, from Walmart stores in Arkansas, they made an investment in DroneUp to continue the work towards developing a scalable last-mile delivery solution. Shannon Ferguson—VMI class of 1997, and Senior Director of Finance, Head of Financial Planning & Analysis and Field Accounting with DroneUp—was a key player in this endeavor.

Walmart already had a significant part of the infrastructure in place—4,700 stores stocked with more than 100,000 of the most-purchased

items, located within ten miles of 90 percent of the US population. This put them in a unique position to execute drone deliveries, so after discussions and some research, they made an investment in DroneUp. In the early months they began their first delivery operation at a Walmart store in Bentonville, Arkansas. It proved efficient, dependable, and promising.

Here is how their Walmart's communications department put it: "DroneUp's expertise, combined with our retail footprint and proven history of logistics innovation, puts us right where we want to be. Because when it comes to the future of drone delivery, we know the sky's the limit."

## ABOUT THE COMPANY

**DroneUp** is a startup drone service company offering services to companies and organizations, arial photography, videography, inspection, construction project tracking, and so much more. They plan to have as many as 10,000 FAA approved pilots by 2022/23. They are the first operator to use the FAA 107.39 waiver allowing delivery flights to be conducted over people and moving vehicles. DroneUp operates commercially throughout the US and is an authorized drone services provider for eleven US states service public sector organizations. They call their services "Missions," and their customers are service industries, construction companies, insurance companies, and of course, now, Walmart. Walmart refers to this drone delivery service as "Final Mile," allowing the big store to deliver to their customers within one mile, from thirty-one hubs.

"Do they have any competition?" I asked Ferguson.

"Yes, Amazon."

## CADETS START A DRONE CLUB

It is an interesting, and pleasing coincidence that VMI formed a drone club just this Fall. The **Drones and Internet of Things** club aims to stimulate cadets to enhance and stimulate their academic and military proficiency through numerous hands-on activities and projects. More specifically, they have two goals. One means learning all about Drones: how to assemble, repair, fly, and program drones. Their other goal is to study and learn about the cutting-edge hardware and software products that are driving the development of innovative engineering and with that, the artificial intelligence (solutions) being developed to solve real-world problems. The founding cadets are Kolby Quigg '24, Charles Male '24, and Stone Summers '24. The faculty member in charge is Dr. Sherif Abdelhamid. They had just acquired a new drone and were learning how to use it. They also have a simulator, which allows the user to see what the drone sees. The purpose for drones on Post is broad and interesting. First of all, they can learn to fly one. Long term, there is the educational aspect of simply expanding a student's knowledge of a developing tool with wide application. Clearly the interests of the new Drone Club and the firm DroneUp are linked and we (*The Edge*) plan to get DroneUp and this new club connected. 🚁



# IMPROVING INTERVIEWS—CREATING A FUTURE

Colonel Jennifer Gerow, professor of Economics and Business (ECBU), came to VMI in 2011 with a keen interest in helping young people find their own path to success and life. It was a perfect fit, in that the ECBU department's mission is to prepare tomorrow's leaders for careers in finance, management, marketing, and the military. Some students also gain a solid foundation for prospective graduate studies in disciplines such as economics, business, health and public administration, and law. Either category fits the situation at ECBU, and Jennifer's work with the Internship for Credit program is a big (and positive) factor.

Jen is busy, teaching four popular courses, which include: Management Information Systems, Web 2.0 for Business, Principles of Management, and Developing Business Leadership. Despite her facility for understanding

and working with the internet and researching new information systems, her most visible and tangible activity is running the "Internship for Credit" program. Working with firms in the southeast (primarily) she sets up opportunities for cadets to intern in the summer and then awards the cadet with academic credits for his or her experience at the said firm. Each cadet must prepare a weekly status report to Jennifer (during the summer internship), write a paper, read a book on a subject recommended by the managing officer in the company and then make a presentation to the ECBU department and other interns for credit cadets. It takes a lot of work to set these programs up, talking to and interviewing the firms, and then overseeing the report each cadet must make at the end of the term of (internship) employment. I have attended some of these cadet reports, and they range from a cyber

security firm (e.g. Ironet), to a soccer franchise.

Her alma mater is Clemson (1999), from which university she ultimately earned all her degrees: her Phd in Management in 2011, preceded by her MBA in 2007, and in 1999, a BS in Biological Sciences, an early interest. Clearly her pride in this university is prodigious. Other than her alma mater, her commitment and keen interest clearly lies in the role of computer research and development, and she is working on yet another paper entitled, "Extending the Boundary of Computer Self-Efficacy Research." Her other studies include Assessing the Connections Among top Management Support, IT Assimilation and Business Value of IT, and most recently, "Connecting the Role of the Information Systems Function to its Contribution to the Organization," published in the *Journal of Management Information Systems*. 

*Left: Col. Jennifer Gerow. Middle and Right: Two students presenting their internship experiences.*



# BUILDING BRIDGES

The concept and indeed the mission of “Building BRIDGES” began eight years ago with a Women’s Build project with the Rockbridge Area Habitat for Humanity. After that event, a participating cadet approached Col. Dimitrova-Grajzl and Col. Sen, the organizers of the event, and suggested that they form a cadet club to focus on service. The Building BRIDGES VMI Service Club was formed shortly after. The club’s mission is to build bridges between VMI cadets, faculty, staff, and the community. Over the past eight years, the club has grown substantially with annual membership between thirty and fifty cadets from majors across Post. Col. Dimitrova-Grajzl (ECBU), Lt. Col. Whipple (Psychology) and Dr. Laroussi (Modern Languages and Culture) are the current advisors of the club.

The club provides opportunities for cadets to engage in society through community service, to connect with the local community, and to promote diversity and inclusivity by raising awareness of societal issues and facilitating discussions on a range of topics. The activities of the club have expanded significantly over the past two years. There has been more emphasis on educational activities as well as a shift toward more creative ways to engage with the community during the pandemic.

One of the club’s new initiatives during the 2021–22 academic year was the launch of a College Debate Series. The initiative is a collaboration with the VMI Center for Leadership and Ethics and is facilitated by Braver Angels, a nonprofit organization that seeks to bridge the partisan divide. The first college debate event took place in the winter of 2022 in the Hall of Valor where as many as twenty cadets and five faculty and staff members debated a topic. The subject of the first debate was entitled “Should Women be Assigned to Combat Roles?” All participants, including the moderator from Braver Angels, sat in a circle and were guided in the debate. One person would present uninterrupted the arguments **For** the proposition; the next volunteer would have to present arguments **Against**; this pattern continued until the end of the debate. All questions and comments were directed to the moderator (a “Braver Angels” representative). In this way the participants tackled the issue, not the person. The club plans to organize one debate per semester and expand participation to the other colleges and eventually to the community. A topic that is currently discussed for the Fall 2022 debate is “Personal Freedom vs. Public Responsibility.”

The second new initiative of the club was the launch of Life, Culture,

and Society Film Series. The initiative is a collaboration between the club, the Spanish honor society, and the Preston Library. The goal is to show one film per semester and pair each film with a guest lecture or discussion about the topic of the film. The Fall 2021 film was *Wind River* and was followed by a presentation by Col. Dimitrova-Grajzl on the plight of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The Spring 2022 film was *Just Mercy* and was followed by a presentation and conversation with Benjamin Schaefer, a lawyer at the Equal Justice Initiative.

The club has engaged in many community engagement activities, like: building with Habitat for Humanity, walking dogs at the local SPCA, helping set up the big fundraiser event of Project Horizon, writing holiday cards for people in assisted-living facilities, helping the Meals on Wheels program during the pandemic, and helping set up vaccination clinics during the peak period. Over the past two years the club also held a CPR/first aid training-life coaching workshop, and finally, after an 18-hour training session with Project Horizon that allowed cadets to volunteer at the local domestic violence shelter. Clearly the Building BRIDGES program is growing, active, and diverse. 

*Left: Col. Dimitrova-Grajzl. Right: The first debate in process at the Hall of Valor.*



# PARENTS WEEKEND

It was a classic, sunny, autumn day that brought many parents to post for the annual Family Weekend, October 7 through 9. As expected, Scott Shipp was crowded Saturday morning, most seeing the interior of our department and the newly renovated Scott Shipp building for the first time. Families were also treated to a sumptuous lunch at Crozet, a colorful parade, and a spirited football game.

Among the families who visited we had: John Washko of Purcellville, VA, father of Shane, a First, standing with Major Landgraf; next Alexander Wichser, standing with Col. West, father of son Karl, also a First from Atlanta, GA; Theresa and Frank Azzarello, of Virginia Beach, parents of Frank, a Second; Eric and Jennifer Kennedy, daughter Helen and son John from Houston, TX; and Nathaniel and Liz Pendleton with daughter Jessica, from Avon, OH.

Finally, Darell Hagerman with his parents Darell senior and wife Melody, from Chestertown, VA.



## CIG RETURNS TO NEW YORK!

On Thursday November 10th, a group of ten cadets, members of the Cadet Investment Group (CIG), left post and made their way to New York City. The purpose? To visit financial institutions and news organizations. This is the CIG's first trip to New York City since 2018 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The trip was under the control of Maj. Tim Murray, Assistant Professor of Economics, and Col. Jeff Smith joined him. While the firms were diverse, focusing on different aspects of the investment world, they had one thing in common—a graduate of VMI was working in each firm, some as recent hires and some as established officers.

The CIG cadets visited a series of investing firms, including TM Capital Corp., Merrill Lynch, Bank of America, and AllianceBernstein. In all these meetings, the cadets were able to listen to men and women currently active in the investment and financial world and learn about the different types of jobs these companies have. They talked to traders, analysts, salespeople, brokers, researchers, and managers. They learned about the specifics of those companies compared to other companies. While visiting these companies, the cadets met with notable alumni working in the field, including Frank Dingle '96, Charlie Branch '95, Robert Browning '94, and Andrew Green '18.

The value of such a field trip is rich—to learn, of course, but also for the cadets to showcase their financial and investing knowledge to these companies and to network, sometimes making contacts for later possible internships or job opportunities. The cadets also got to meet with editors at the financial news organization Barron's and tour their newsroom. This was possible thanks to the generous donation of Barron's to VMI by Frank Dingle '96. The trip was capped off with a lively mixer hosted by the New York Alumni Chapter.



## US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT



VMI has retained its high placing among the nation's best colleges, according to the college rankings released in September by *US News and World Report*.

Among the nation's top public schools, VMI ranked fourth only behind the US Naval Academy, West Point and the Airforce Academy. Further, VMI was ranked No. 70 among the more than 200 national liberal arts colleges.

To cut the ratings even more finely, VMI ranks 21st out of 230 institutions nationwide offering a superior accredited engineering program, as well as the institute's computer science program.

# MARKETING GRAPES



With vineyards springing up all over Virginia (the fifth largest wine/grape-producing state in the nation according to Wikipedia), Mr. Macdonald’s advertising class was glad when the owner and marketing director of Ecco Adesso agreed to be our topic for this year’s class project. Yes, they are a newly established vineyard and resort looking for recognition and customers. But what of the name? What does it mean or signify?

Ecco Adesso is an Italian expression that means, literally, “Now Here.” Curious? Yes. Inspired? Perhaps. First, it references Italy with its heritage of good living and good wine, and, perhaps, it inspires action, like maybe, Do it now—move! Their setting is impressive and beautiful: 350 acres of rolling hills bordered on the east by the Blue Ridge, Ecco Adesso offers unique guest retreats, private event spaces, a new wine pavilion, hiking trails with bubbling springs and waterfalls,

orchards, and an amazing selection of Virginia wines and ciders. The owners are the Weatherly family (Michael Weatherly, wife Cierra, children Siena and Mylan). Weatherly explained that he and his wife were longtime fans of Italy and have a long-held desire to replicate the look and life of a country estate in the Tuscany region of Italy, but in Virginia. For Prof. Macdonald, Ecco Adesso presented an ideal situation to teach by experience, creating marketing for a real-life business, where the students can meet the owners and hear their desires and aspirations—so this site, which is only about ten miles from post, fit perfectly.

Professor Macdonald initially divided the class into two opposing teams—to enhance the competitive edge—and promised that the highest grade would go to the best team’s marketing plan. In February, the class visited the site. The first stage was research-discovery, to know the industry and the competition. During the visit the cadets were able to see both great potential, and some drawbacks. One such was that signage was small, poorly positioned, and unprofessional. Another was the evident

lack of hours of operation and lack of parking for visitors. The second stage was to establish a strategy to achieve stated goals which grew out of discovering and understanding Ecco Adesso’s strengths. The last and most important stage was, of course, execution—to design the advertisements, to plan the kind of events (like weddings, reunions, milestone events like 50th birthdays, etc.) that would bring the most customers to Ecco Adesso. And through all of this, sell the wine that is grown on the property as well as the wines of local vintners.

Finally, the class had to do a presentation in the form of a marketing booklet and an in-person presentation, with the owner and his marketing officer present. This took place in April, in the classroom at Scott Shipp

Hall. At this point, Prof. Macdonald had merged the two teams so that the client only had to see one presentation—and it was received with enthusiasm. Best of all, some of the ideas are in use today (like a paint night, a book club meeting, or trivia night) six months later. One team even designed an attractive wine label, mounted on a bottle of Chardonnay. 🍷

