

# Navigating Career Development in Graduate School: Insights from the Director of the CRC

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Eric Raine:

Welcome to another episode of the UB Manageable podcast. My name is Eric Raine, I'll be your host for today's episode, along with Patrick Lageraen as our co-host. Joining us today in the studio is Melissa Ruggiero. She is an assistant dean and director of the Career Resource Center at the School of Management. Melissa, thanks so much for being here.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Thank you very much for having me.

Eric Raine:

Absolutely. We appreciate you taking the time. Patrick and I have been really excited to record this episode, especially because we wanted to really talk about the resources that are available through the CRC. And given your directorship and leadership over the CRC, we're able to have a conversation directly with you on things that are currently going on, talk to prospective students about what they'd be able to plug into, if they choose to come to UB School Management, but also talking to current students that might listen to this that maybe aren't leveraging the CRC as much as they could be, as well as alumni. So, if you don't mind, we'd like to start by just talking to you about your background.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Sure. Great. Okay. And there's so many resources that we won't have all the time to talk about them, but we will. But you asked about my background, I'm a Buffalonian. I grew up in the suburbs, a suburb called West Seneca, if you're familiar? And I never intended to come to UB to go to school, to work, anything. Not that it wasn't great, but my brother went here. I wanted to forge a new path and I'm very independent and I wanted to go far away. So, I got into University of Michigan, and I got into Penn State. I was a diver in high school.

Eric Raine:

Oh, that's cool.

Patrick Lageraen:

Very cool.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And my ego was a little hurt that I didn't get recruited by either of those really incredible schools, 'cause I wasn't that good, but I could be a walk-on. So I thought, "Yeah, all right, I'm going to Penn State. They have a really good diving program. I'll figure out academics later."

Eric Raine:

And it's your own path. Right? You're like, "I'm going to go here. I'm leaving Buffalo."

Melissa Ruggiero:

It's not too far away. Three hours and change. I can come home if I need. And then I started thinking more and more and my dad said, "Are you going to graduate school?" And I said, "Yeah, probably. I don't know what for, but I'm probably going to graduate school." He said, "Well, then why would you spend all your money on your undergrad when you can go to this fantastic school that we have in our backyard? Or at least go to a SUNY school undergrad and then spend your money on graduate school?"

Eric Raine:

That's good advice.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah, I thought it was great advice and it made sense to me. And I actually had the brains at 18 to agree with him, and I said, "Okay, well what's in it for me?" He said, "I'll pay for your graduate school if you do a SUNY undergrad."

Eric Raine:

That sounds like a pretty good deal though. Right?

Melissa Ruggiero:

I know, right? So, I wrote it down, I made him sign it, and then I was lucky enough to explore, when I was a sophomore and junior, trying to figure out, "Well, what am I going to do with this degree and what would I go to graduate school for?" Because that's a big decision. That's life changing. And once I figured

it out, and I can tell you that story if you want, but once I did figure it out, I found out that UB had a really fantastic program in higher ed administration. They had a focus on college student services, and that's exactly what I wanted. I wanted to be a career counselor at a college. Pretty specific.

Eric Raine:

You're very specific.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah. I got lucky that I figured it out.

Eric Raine:

Especially knowing that early on, too.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yes. And UB had this really great program and only took seven students in the program a year because they had seven grad assistantships.

Eric Raine:

Interesting.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And you know what grad assistantships mean? You don't pay for school, they pay you.

Eric Raine:

Wow.

Melissa Ruggiero:

So my dad got a really good deal.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, exactly. Maybe he knew that ahead of time and he was making the offer knowing that you were going to rise to the occasion and maybe get school covered.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Every semester he's like, "Are you sure I don't have to pay for anything?" I'm like, "Well, I have \$250 worth of books." 'Cause when I went to school, we bought physical books. But other than that, which I got, it's no big deal. "No, not only do they pay for school, but I get paid to go."

Eric Raine:

Absolutely.

Melissa Ruggiero:

It was the best thing to finish school and not have loans, really the best thing ever. So, it just kills me right now what our students have to go through to school.

Eric Raine:

Yeah. Choosing to make that investment. Yeah, absolutely.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yes. And that's why if they're making that investment in school, they're also making that investment in themselves. And that's why using our career center is so important because they have to be intentional about how they're planning for their future.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, the intentionality is definitely important, and I think that's something that is a focus of the CRC as far as engaging with students, at least in my personal experience. But kind of going off of that then, so you did school here in Buffalo, even though it wasn't necessarily what you intended at first.

Melissa Ruggiero:

I loved it.

Eric Raine:

So after you finished your graduate program at UB, I know we were talking before we started the episode here that you're going to be celebrating 27 years working for the university. And so you have excellent experience with a lot of different perspectives on things that have changed at the school over

time. And obviously, getting into your current role as director of the CRC, would you be able to tell us a little bit more about your professional experience that led up to that?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Sure thing. Okay. So, do I start future and go back or do I start in the back and go to the future after?

Well, while I was in graduate school, I was doing hiring and training for a market research firm, thinking at some point maybe doing human resources if higher ed didn't work out 'cause there wasn't a lot of hiring going on.

I did three unpaid internships because it's really hard to get a job in higher ed at the time, and I wanted to figure out if this was right for me, so it's not all about the pay, it's about the experience. And I loved what I did, so it secured in my head that, "This is right for me and I could be good at this." And when I graduated with my master's, I was lucky enough to get one of three openings in my field between here and Rochester. That's it.

Eric Raine:

Wow.

Patrick Lageraen:

Wow.

Melissa Ruggiero:

It was crazy.

Eric Raine:

It's very selective.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

Especially because you were saying, too, in the program that you're in prior to that it was only seven spots and you were able to secure one of those, and now it's one of three and you were fortunate enough to earn a position in that as well.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And in essence, I was the engineering career counselor. So I worked at the University-Wide Career Center, which is now called the Career Design Center. And my role was to be the career counselor for all the engineering students, and they graduated 700 undergraduate students a year. And it was me alone serving all the undergraduate students, all the graduate students, the alumni, and they didn't really have anyone focused just on engineering before. My salary was half paid for by the school of engineering. And it was a really great learning experience, I had good mentors. And I did that until 2022. I helped renovate their internship program and it was really great.

So then I was hired by the School of Management in what is now Carrie Gardner's position, but things have changed, and it was called Learning Experientially in an academic Practicum Leap. Really? Okay. So anyway, I ran the internship program for a few years, seven years, no, three years, I think. And then the existing director of the career center there wanted to expand his staff and wanted me to join that staff and hire someone else to run the internship program. So that's what happened. And at that time, the Career Resource Center, which is now 12 people large, was four. And we didn't have nearly as many master's students as we do now. We didn't even have one MS program at the time. So we all did everything. And in time, Gwen Appelbaum, if you know who she is-

Eric Raine:

Of course.

Melissa Ruggiero:

... she was hired and her mission was to grow our staff to be competitive nationally in comparison to other career centers across the nation that serve business schools. And she did a great job doing that. And now we have 12. And when she grew the staff, she created levels in our office and that gave me the opportunity to be a team lead, and I became the team lead for the graduate team. And that's what I did prior to my current role as a director.

So I was making decisions on our MBA students, the programming that you would have, the career education that we would give you, the events, what tools you would be using. I was supervising our other staff that you work with one-on-one and managing that budget. And then last year in March, I became the director.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, and congratulations on that.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Thank you.

Eric Raine:

I think what's amazing, to reflect on some of the things you were saying, is the number of students that you've had an impact on over those years. So you're talking about thousands and thousands of students, which is incredible. And at the same time, the university was recognizing the importance of these resource centers, especially with obviously students are coming into these programs and the end line goal, I would say for the vast majority, is planning for, what are the next steps after school? I know some students think, "Oh, I need to go to school. It's just kind of my path." And then similar to your own experience, along that way, you sort of figure out, "Okay, where do I want to go?" And then when you figure out where you want to go, you need resources to be able to help propel you in that direction.

And I think that's one of the things that the CRC is excellent at. And so pivoting into more about what the CRC does under your direction, obviously there's a lot of different components to this. So to name a few, I know when Patrick and I were researching going into recording this episode with you today, we're talking about career development internships, like you mentioned, full-time employment, and then also employment or employer relations with people that are actually in the industry and in the market, to bring that knowledge to students while they're in the program, advising students one-on-one, like you mentioned, networking events, and also interviewing and training. So being prepared to be able to secure jobs and internships in the desired paths that students are looking for. So if you don't mind going into maybe a little bit of detail and these various areas as far as some of the things that your team is doing so that listeners of the episode here can understand what the CRC does and then how they can engage.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Sure. If you want to go down that list, I'm going to read this upside down.

Eric Raine:

Absolutely.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Now that's fine.

Eric Raine:

No, here you go.

Melissa Ruggiero:

So, in terms of career development, since these are graduate students that are listening to this podcast, I know that not all graduate students know what they want to do and that some of our students are going into this program thinking that they'll use this time to figure it out. Usually graduate programs are quick. A lot of our MS programs are one year.

Eric Raine:

Right. And that year goes really fast.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Right. It goes really fast. And I'm going to be completely blunt here and say that your time in that graduate program, even a two-year program, will feel much more productive and you will be more productive in the outcome if you know at the beginning what it is you want to do. But it's not a requirement. Right? At least have a bit of a direction. And I know, 'cause I'm on the admissions committee, that people say one thing on a admissions essay-

Eric Raine:

They seem to be more sure of that direction than they might be in reality.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And then I meet them in our intro meetings in September, and that's not really what I want. So the earlier you can do that activity of discovering what it is you want, the more time you're going to have to prepare for that eventual outcome, gain the skills relevant for what you want. And I've met with too many students in an MBA program last semester, fourth semester of their MBA program, completely switching things up and saying, "Well, I did an internship in the summer, I didn't really like it, so I did a different internship in my fall semester and I loved it. And now I'm switching from finance to operations and I don't have any coursework except the courses I'm going to take in the spring, and I don't really have much to offer. Now what do I do?"



Eric Raine:

And that's a double-edged sword-

Patrick Lageraen:

Good question.

Eric Raine:

... 'cause you're figuring it out. And it's great to have that realization, but then at the same time it's like, "All right, now what do I do with the limited amount of time I have here while I'm in the program before I make my decision on how to start preparing for jobs and interviews and things like that?"

Melissa Ruggiero:

Exactly, Eric.

Patrick Lageraen:

Without having to get another degree.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Right. Right. So what can I leverage from my first year that a supply chain employer will still want? Which is the first thing we try to do. So, doing that exploration early on, even before you come to school, is crucial. And a lot of those resources are available on our website to everyone, so you don't have to be a student, but we do webinars in the summer.

Eric Raine:

And there's information available even before starting the program. I think one of the questions that pops into my mind going off of that is... And this isn't something that I necessarily did, because for me personally, I'm a dual degree student, so I was already in a graduate program here at the university and I was deciding to take a one-year break to do my full-time MBA year. And so I was sort of already on that pathway of kind of heading in the direction I think I might want to go.

But for students that are accepted to the program and have an offer, let's say coming into the MBA program full-time, are they able to engage in the CRC-

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yes.

Eric Raine:

... during that summer leading into their first fall semester?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Absolutely.

Eric Raine:

So maybe if you could expand on that a little bit so listeners can kind of learn of what they could do if they are trying to figure this out.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Not only are they allowed to, but they're required to.

Eric Raine:

Okay.

Melissa Ruggiero:

We give them a checklist of things that they have to do. Minimally, they have to update their resume and update their LinkedIn, hopefully invite us to connect with them on LinkedIn.

Eric Raine:

And that's really important, too. I think we don't want to necessarily understate the fact that it is a checklist item, like you're mentioning, but that is not just something to cross off the list, but it's actually something, if you haven't already been building a LinkedIn profile and building your network out, it's something that you're going to want to really start thinking about doing. So I think it's great that you're already getting students to engage in that process before even starting.

Melissa Ruggiero:

But you do it not to get a job, you do it also to help with your career development to help with the understanding of, "What can I do with this career?" Because when you have this tool, not only can you search, "All right, I'm thinking maybe being in purchasing. So, let's look to see who was in my

undergraduate and now my graduate program that has anything related to purchasing, let's search them up and see what kind of companies are they at, what are their titles? What did they do before this current job? What's their career path? Who are they connected to that I'm connected to?"

Eric Raine:

That's a big one.

Melissa Ruggiero:

"Can I connect with them and ask them something about their job?" And we have lots of videos that show them how to do that and connect to resources. And we want them to do as much of that as possible, because the more conversations you have like that where you ask someone, "How did you make this decision and what do you like about your job? What do you not like about your job? What would you do differently?" All questions like that. When you're asking about them, you're not talking about you, you're talking about them. The more of those you have, the easier and earlier you can make those decisions for yourself. My favorite question to ask, when you're doing this informational interview is what we call it, near the end of that conversation where the last questions to ask is, "Now that you have an idea of the types of things that I talk about and want to learn about, is there someone else that you recommend I talk to?"

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, bingo. Great question.

Melissa Ruggiero:

I love that question.

Eric Raine:

Because then it kind of gets you moving in the right direction of answering questions you don't even know you necessarily have yet, too, because you're starting to figure it out. And I think talking about career development, especially before you start in a program, rather than it just being a situation where you're figuring it out after you're in the program, or to your point, where you're three or four semesters in and then you're like, "Hang on a second, let me start engaging in these conversations because I'm about to graduate and this summer I really need to start figuring out what I'm going to do." The CRC is

there and available and willing and able to engage you in that process really early so that way you don't have to be scrambling and things like that.

Patrick Lageraaen:

If I could add something about that.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, absolutely.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, I really like how you forced us to do the resume over the summer, as ironic as it sounds. It's like the day you start your MBA, you're already thinking about graduation. But I think that mindset's really important because I'll sit there and I'll just stare at my resume and think, "What do I want it to look like? And then how do I get there?" So I'm constantly thinking about, "How can I improve this? What certifications, what classes, what skills can I build to make this better?" And it's good to be in that mindset during your whole program.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Have you thought about looking at the jobs that you would eventually apply to?

Patrick Lageraaen:

Absolutely. Reading job descriptions.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah. "What do they want from me?"

Patrick Lageraaen:

Totally.

Melissa Ruggiero:

"And where's the skills gap? What's not on here?"

Eric Raine:

I think that's where internships also play into. So you mentioned Carrie Gardner earlier and she's obviously a vital component of the internship process. Could you talk to us a little bit about what that looks like? What does the CRC do for students that are saying, "Hey, I might have a gap in my resume and experience, I'm interested in this area and can I get an internship in this so that way I can either, one, gain the experience needed to be able to then go post-grad into something in that area, or to be able to explore?"

'Cause I know, you mentioned in your personal experience, you did three unpaid internships. Those three internships provided you with a lot of insight and knowledge and experience. So it can be two-sided. It can either be the thing you already know you want to go into, therefore you need an internship, obviously it's a requirement of the program, but at the same time, it might also be something where it's like, "I don't necessarily know, but I do have an interest in this area. Maybe I can get an internship there to be able to build my resume in the right direction."

Melissa Ruggiero:

Right. "Or if this internship isn't working out, I don't really like it. What can I salvage? What skills can I gain that I could use in the next thing that I do plan on doing?" So there's a lot packed into there because I know our listeners are MBAs and MS students, and our MS programs are very varied. A lot of our MS programs are one year less than a year long and don't offer an option for an internship, like our finance, three semesters, internship.

Some of our programs, if it's two semesters long, there isn't an internship, like our business analytics, but there's a capstone, and the purpose of that is skill development, implementation of what you've learned so far. And that can be portrayed in the way an internship is portrayed on a resume and we can help you do that. You are not called an intern, but it serves the purpose as experience.

Patrick Lageraen:

Experiential learning.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Exactly. And this capstone and like our MSMIS program, our students in that program end up with, some do two, some do seven projects that are very relevant. And there are students who are career switchers, and in the very beginning of their program, everything is all the old stuff and it's not what they want to do anymore and they think, "There's no way I am ever going to be able to get this new job that I

want."And then by April or May, that old stuff that they could barely fit on one page, if not two pages, is down to five lines because they have all this new content they didn't even realize they were going to have.

Our MBAs, it is a requirement two year program, it's a requirement to do an internship, unless you have previous management level work experience, I think it's two years of management level work experience, managing people, managing projects. But even if you have been waived from that requirement, we encourage you to do an internship anyway. And most of our students want to do one anyway. And the best time is the summer in between, though you do have options to do other time periods as well.

And so your question is what do we do? How do we help? So I will tell you specifically about our MBAs. You remember January Advantage, our orientation that we do for our MBAs two day long in January? We bring previous internship supervisors into, it used to be a physical space, now it's virtual 'cause we want you to be able to still be on vacation in January when we run this. But we run networking between our usual suspects of MBA internship supervisors. We of course have a School of Management career fair that's for both undergrad and grad in the fall semester. We advertise that our MBAs are available and looking for internships to our previous many years worth of previous internship supervisors and HR and recruiters.

And of course we reach out to people who haven't done anything with us before, but we know that they're the hot companies that our students really want. We have a staff member who is our senior employer relations manager, and her role and Carrie's role as the director of Internships, they're reaching out to employers to come on campus or to virtually recruit our students at all levels, MBA and MS and undergrad all the time.

A lot of recruitment is done, especially lately, especially since COVID, it's really done hands off now. They're not doing the travel that they used to. They're not coming on campus like they used to. And I'm really going on a tangent here, but I'm on a committee of people like myself, directors of career centers across the country. And the committee is mostly comprised of career center directors that work with both undergrad and graduate students. That's kind of rare. I don't know if you know that.

So I'll back up for our listeners. Our career center, it serves only School of Management students. There is a university-wide career center that serves all of our students. And any ranked, good, strong business program will have their own career center, but in most cases, it just helps their graduate students.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Wow, I see. That's interesting.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Our career center works with both undergrad and grad.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Good to know.

Eric Raine:

Especially because you're getting the synergy. There are a lot of students that come into the MBA program here that come from undergrad, or whether they're on a business track and they know they might want to do an MBA. Or I know for Patrick and myself on our Corporate Champions team, we had people with backgrounds in psychology, English, engineering-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Economics.

Eric Raine:

There's a lot of different backgrounds. I'm only naming a few, there's dozens. But the fact that students can actually start engaging in the process of thinking about career development, engaging with the Career Resource Center through the School of Management, especially coming into the graduate program, I think is a powerful tool.

And for people that are listening to this that might be prospective students or maybe considering School of Management, whether you're at UB and you're thinking about a graduate program here or if you're from outside of UB, just knowing that that exists and the fact that you're that involved with the development of individual students, I think is really important, is something that students should know about.

Melissa Ruggiero:

We're almost annoyingly involved, aren't we? We're bugging you all the time.

Eric Raine:

The thing is though, I think that that's really important because of the fact that students, admittedly like Patrick and I, being students going through the full-time program, we are swamped with work. There's no way around it, and it should be that way because we're being pushed to limits, we're learning a lot through that process. But at the same time, it's easy to miss things that are going by in communication. So, when the CRC reaches out and says, "Hey, we're doing this event," or "We have this resource," and you think, "Oh, that's something I don't have to worry about until next year because I'm still a little ways away from graduation," that's a fault of ours. And it's definitely not the CRC's, obviously because you're reaching out to us anecdotally or sending a lot of communication. I think the thing about it is paying attention to that early on is really important.

So if you're listening to this and you've just accepted, or let's say you got an offer to the UB School of Management for your MBA and you're thinking like, "Okay, I'm looking at these other programs," the thing about the CRC at UB is the fact that they're there constantly. Your team is always there and ready to engage with us.

And kind going into a little bit of personal experience, I've met with the CRC throughout my time in my full-time MBA year to discuss what I can do with my dual degree. For me personally, I ended up getting a waiver for the internship, which just for a full disclosure, it doesn't opt you out of the requirement, because if you do get a waiver, you still have to do a three credit elective in its place, so keep that in mind.

However, at the same time I thought, although I'm waived from an internship, I think an internship is really important, especially because I have very specific interests and I met with Pam Krakowiak, who is another incredible resource, a person on your team who I have great experience working with. And she's someone who can also, aside from the internship side of things, can also prepare you for the interview process and how to get selected by certain companies and has industry knowledge.

Because certain companies have certain requirements of what they're looking for. Certain will look at how your resume is built, certain components of the resume, and it's tough as students to even guess at what that might be. But there's no reason for us to be guessing at those things because have an entire resource center dedicated to engaging in this process.

So, all the while, we're plugging through classes and dealing with all these things that we do as students, you are working on a daily basis to provide these resources. And I think it's really important for listeners and even current students and alumni, which we were talking about before, is that the Career Resource Center is here throughout all of those stages of the process. And the earlier you engage and the earlier



you start thinking about these things, the better. And there's probably not anything that you're going to bring to the CRC from a career interest perspective that they're not going to be able to help you with.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Right. If we don't know, we figure it out. We find someone who can.

Eric Raine:

Yeah. And as students, there's only so much we can do. You mentioned LinkedIn, I think LinkedIn is a really powerful tool. It's provided ways to be able to engage with people that I, with intention, can find in industry or in a specific area that you might not necessarily have done without LinkedIn as the tool. So, for example, when I met with Pam, one of those times she had said, "Hey, I know someone who's a graduate from the same dual degree program as you within the past 10 years, someone who is in this non-traditional area," something I was looking at specifically. And she made an email introduction, I added that person on LinkedIn, and within a couple of weeks I had a meeting set up with that person and I had an hour-long conversation about their path. And that honestly would not have happened if I didn't have the resource that UB has with CRC. It wouldn't have happened on its own.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And we do these things all the time.

Eric Raine:

Exactly. And this is just one example, I'm just talking from personal experience, but the fact that you're able to provide these types of opportunities to every single one of us if we're willing to engage, I think is something that, again, can't be understated.

So with a lot of the things that we talked about that the CRC does, and I know we only really touched upon a few, like you said, you can kind of go on talking about each one of these things in depth. But what are some of the initiatives that are happening right now that you're either newly implemented or things that you're currently working on that you would want people to know about?

Melissa Ruggiero:

We are excited that we have launched Case Coach for our students that anticipate being interviewed with a case interview.

Eric Raine:

Pretty challenging process.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Very challenging. Have you ever had a case interview?

Eric Raine:

I haven't personally. We've done sort of trial runs or we kind of prep for those types of things. I know with consulting, that's a really important one, and I've talked to other people that have.

Melissa Ruggiero:

But not just consulting.

Eric Raine:

Yeah. So if you want to tell listeners a little bit more about what that is.

Melissa Ruggiero:

What? Case Coach or a case interview?

Eric Raine:

Both. Yeah. And how both work together.

Melissa Ruggiero:

A case interview, it could happen in a few different ways, but a traditional management case would be when an organization doesn't really give you the case ahead of time in most cases. They would have an hour planned for this and ask you a market sizing question, or can you... Not a brain-teaser, though that's a kind of a case, but more so a problem solving question where you have to use your logic and go through over, not two minutes, but it could take you a full hour to go through this case. And I could spend a whole hour right now going through how to answer a case question because it's complicated.

Eric Raine:

It's a very dynamic process.

Patrick Lageraaen:

What are you judged on when you do a case interview like that?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Many things. But the one thing you're not judged on is your answer.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Really?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Whether you get it right or wrong, doesn't matter.

Eric Raine:

It's how you got there.

Melissa Ruggiero:

It's how you got there. And if you hopefully can speak out loud, tell them what you're thinking, and justify your logic. So you're asking good questions when they say, well, it could be, "How many windows are on this building?" It's kind of a stupid one, but it's one that you might get.

Eric Raine:

But you have to go through the process of, "How would I figure that out?" Right?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Right. And some of them are far more complicated than that.

Eric Raine:

I'm sure.

Melissa Ruggiero:

But that's just the first thing that came into my mind. So, the way you get to the answer helps them understand how quantitative you are, how analytical you are, whether you're customer-focused or not,.

Your eye contact when you're writing out, "This is how I'm going to get to the answer and then this is how I get to the answer," and then you show them your work. Can they follow your work? That's key. And it's best if you go through lots and lots of cases as practice before you actually get to one because there are students at other schools that have it ingrained into their curriculum and are whizzes at cases, especially when they have a very strong consulting curriculum. And those are schools that populate the McKinsey's and the Bains of the world, so they're going to do really well at those interviews.

So we have purchased Case Coach because it's not a one-time use, "Let me prep for tomorrow's case interview." It is a tool that you can and should be using for months and months, a little bit of practice, a few times a week, and helps you with quantitative skill set, logical skill set, analytical, and teaches you how to answer these questions. And that's more so on the management consulting management cases.

We also purchased Interview Query. That hasn't been launched yet. Hopefully by next week we'll see. And that is for the more analytical and quantitative interviews that our IT students will get, our analytical students will get. And these are the questions where you're given graphs in an interview and you're asked to analyze such and such.

Eric Raine:

You have to interpret the information. Right? In real time. Yeah?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yes. But also, how would you use SQL to do so on and so forth? So these are big data-related questions as well. So we have a limited number of licenses for that. So we'll be launching that to our serious users, to people who plan on really using the tool, because it's something that if you want to get the most out of it, you got to use it x number of times a week to really get the use out of it. So, we're excited about those two things.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, that sounds like a really good initiative. It's not something that I knew about, but obviously if you're heading in a direction where you might be facing that type of interview, knowing that the CRC is working on making these resources available is something that would be monumental for actually being well-prepared. Especially, because you mentioned, there are other programs that might have a specific focus in a certain area that MBA students might be going into. And at UB, the great thing is you're so well-rounded as an MBA student coming out of the program that there's a lot of options and directions

you can go in. But if you're starting to track towards knowing that you're heading in the direction where you might be in a case interview type of situation, knowing that the resources are there and these are new things that you're implementing right now, it's really exciting.

Melissa Ruggiero:

I've always done practice case interviews, and myself and maybe one other person in the office would do the cases, and my cases were starting to get old and I wasn't able to find new ones that I thought really challenged. So I'm glad that we got this tool, it's really helpful.

We also have just launched a new website on the use of AI within your job hunt, not just job hunt, your whole career development, from deciding on what to do through preparing for and your interviews and so on and so forth. So it's like example prompts and really how to use AI correctly. Because you can tell when a cover letter has been written with AI, but it can still be helpful as long as it's just an idea generator for you, and then you have to put your own personality and genuineness in it.

One of the things that even I do when I'm critiquing someone's resume, I look at someone's bullet points and thinking, "There's not enough in here that shows impact." I go to Chat and I put in those bullet points and I say, "Help me or teach me to show more impact, business impact, using numbers, being quantitative, with these bullet points." And I put the bullet points and they give me examples. I can't just cut and paste that because it's not accurate. It's not what really [inaudible 00:39:31]-

Patrick Lageraen:

But it gives you the language, it gives you the verbiage to use.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, it gets you going in the right direction.

Melissa Ruggiero:

It makes me think about something in a different way. So I recommend that as long as it's used right.

Eric Raine:

Yeah. And I think you bringing up this idea of leveraging AI in the career development process and in the job preparation process, interview process, is well-timed. We actually just recently recorded an episode, which depending on the order of when these episodes are released, we were talking to Dominic Sellitto.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Oh, good.

Eric Raine:

And he was actually telling us some examples that he's run into also where students might leverage AI to be able to create something in writing, whether it's an email or whatever it might be, or obviously you're talking about resumes in this context. And really, it's an incredible tool to use if it's used with the right inputs. And so also helping students understand how to put things into that type of system to be able to get useful outputs, I think is a great component of what the CRC is working on doing in real-time, because it's a moving target and things are changing very fast.

Melissa Ruggiero:

But the prompts are helpful. You can ask Bard or any of them, "What is a smart career path for someone who eventually wants to be a CFO?"

Eric Raine:

And then you can take those outputs and it changes maybe you're thinking, "Okay, I need to go learn about this specific area because it's not something I was thinking about before, but the AI has told me this is something to think of." And really, it's just helping you along your path, rather than answering questions for you or doing the work for you, so to speak.

So with that, I know one of the things that we were interested in learning about from the CRC's perspective is the use of AI with interview prep, and maybe let's say it's last minute and someone sees a job posting that comes up and it's like, "I've got to get my resume submitted and I might have to interview for this before I'd have a chance to go to the CRC, make a meeting, meet with them, speak with them." Can you use AI in this type of situation?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Absolutely.

Eric Raine:

So could you tell us a little bit about what that might look like for someone in that situation?

Melissa Ruggiero:

AI is used within two tools that I recommend. One, the university-wide career center has something called, it used to be Interview Stream, Big Interview.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Oh, yeah. In undergrad.

Melissa Ruggiero:

You had to use it for MGG 500 or 600 too, didn't you?

Patrick Lageraaen:

Oh, we did, right.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

That's right.

Melissa Ruggiero:

So that's an AI tool. So, I highly recommend that our students use and use and use and use Big Interview as many times as you need to. 3:00 in the morning, I'm not going to do a practice interview with you, but you can use Big Interview. You can select any 10 questions out of a humongous bank, plus there's a ton of videos for you, but it does provide some feedback that can be helpful. But LinkedIn also has, if you've ever looked on LinkedIn, I think if you're not a premium, you still have access to it.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay. Interesting.

Melissa Ruggiero:

On the left-hand side, there's some new things just for the last few months that have come up that are relevant, searchable interview prompts and interview tools.

Eric Raine:

That's good to know. Honestly, because of the fact that this is moving so fast, through the school, I've done a couple of those big interview where it's simulated, but not necessarily with LinkedIn. So I think that's something to look into. It's really interesting to hear that.

Melissa Ruggiero:

I have sat through demos of AI interviewing tools where they've used technology to gauge your personality and your judgment and your likability and et cetera, et cetera, based on your eye contact and your facial expressions and how you answer things. And it's more scary than it's useful. And based on-

Eric Raine:

It can definitely feel intimidating.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And based on the national opinions from companies who we've talked to over the last five years on that topic specific, they move away from that because they really don't think that it's inclusive enough.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, I know there's a lot of different ethical considerations when it comes to AI. And obviously, that could be a topic of an entire podcast in and of itself.

Patrick Lageraen:

I know these interview things are going to become more common as AI gets better. I just want to clarify something about it. So you record a video of yourself answering the interview questions. Right? In a Big Interview?

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yes.



Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah. Who's able to see them? Is it just the AI?

Melissa Ruggiero:

And who you send it to?

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Melissa Ruggiero:

You can send it to whoever you want.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Eric Raine:

I think that's a really important point that you bring up, Patrick, 'cause I know when we did ours, one of the things that I took away from it, and it might seem simple, but given the fact that we're in a post-COVID era, things are very virtual and digital and remote, and I know in-person is great, and obviously interviews can be either in person or over video conferencing. One of the things that I ended up finding out from using the interview process and working with the CRC was that it was utilizing AI to give certain feedback. But then when I submitted it to CRC and I found out information from it, one of the things that I learned was my ability to actually come across as a little bit more animated and smile more.

Because when you're looking at a camera and you're answering questions, you could think that you're coming across that way. And you might be able to do it that same exact way in person and it would've worked. But because you're in a virtual setting, you lose it unless you really focus on making sure that you're coming across that way. And that's not something you would even know, because typically you'd get that feedback in person. And I could run through a practice interview and someone from CRC could say, "Hey, you could make more eye contact, or when you're speaking maybe smile more and show that you're really enthusiastic about this specific question that they brought up." And that in and of itself, I think, is just one small example of how the AI, paired with the human interaction, can actually be really sort of synergistic.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And my worry, honestly, my worry about not just the AI, but also companies making decisions based on only virtual, my worry is for the neurodivergent population who might not be able to convey what it is that they really want to convey. Or the person watching the video doesn't understand something and someone with anxiety or autism hasn't mentioned ahead of time, a reason why they're always looking that way, constantly looking that way, looking that way.

Eric Raine:

And you could take a really awesome candidate who might just be doing one simple thing in a certain way on a virtual interview, and they might pass by that person for a job selection, when really it's like you're missing an amazing candidate because it just was done through a video conferencing or something like that.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Exactly. Exactly.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, I think it's a really important point that you bring up. And I think the fact that that is something that the CRC is thinking about on behalf of students and preparing and giving resources to be able to find ways to navigate that process. Because the thing is, even if that is a challenge that exists, it's still real, whether it's right or wrong, if someone were to get passed up for certain reasons like that, it's still putting someone at a disadvantage potentially if they don't have the preparation that would allow them to put their best foot forward and show what they bring to the table. So, I think from a student perspective, I'm really thrilled to hear that that's something that's being taken into consideration in a virtual environment these days.

So, one of the questions that I had was sort of about market research and industry knowledge. So, a lot of times students are interfacing with the CRC, and we can understand what you do on a daily basis from the things that are tangible to us because we're there and we speak with you and we see your communication and things like that. But there's a lot of things that you're doing behind the scenes that we really don't necessarily know about on a weekly basis, let's say, or a quarterly basis. So, maybe if you could share a little bit of information about some of the things that you're doing to be up to speed with

current trends in the marketplace or in the hiring process that students don't necessarily know about, but you're staying in tune with.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Well, I did mention before that I'm on a committee with people like myself across the country. And I'm not the only one in my group that does that. Everyone on my team of 12 is in a national consortium of some sort. Also, some of us are on statewide and local consortiums. And when we do this, we are giving best practices, learning from each other, sharing our own stories. The positive for UB in that way, is that when we do that, is that we are getting the name of UB out there, and it increases the value of your degree when other schools know how incredible we are.

I regularly read the things that come into the inbox that I said, "Yeah, sure, subscribe, subscribe." The Forbes, the Fast. But also, I really keep up on what's happening with international or immigration, because so many of our graduate students especially are international. And though the laws themselves don't change and haven't changed in more than 20 years, the implementation and the way the laws are interpreted change, especially depending on who sits in office.

Eric Raine:

And that shifts pretty regularly. And I know one of the things that we talked about on previous episodes, and is something that students are engaging in currently, is the fact that the MBA program has a STEM component, which then changes the timeline for students that are international, that move to the US, get their MBA here at the School of Management, and then have a certain timeline that they're on as far as their work opportunities here in the US.

And so I think that's important for our listeners to tune into, because if you're an international student listening to this and you're thinking, "Okay, well, I know the CRC is there, maybe I know a little bit more about what the CRC is providing for me as an incoming student, or I'm choosing UB because these things are available to us." The fact that you're also paying attention to those things that affect immigration because of the international student population is really important.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yep. And that we have an entire staff member who's dedicated towards keeping up on that. In addition to myself, Katie Rusek, who I believe has done one of these podcasts.

Patrick Lageraen:

She has.

Eric Raine:

Yep. Yes, she has.

Melissa Ruggiero:

So, Katie's responsibilities are to stay up to date and share with the rest of the staff when there's things that we need to know about it. And also faculty, especially key faculty. She also plans events specifically for our international students. She's already had four this month just for our international students.

But I would say that the events that she's running about living and working in Canada are not just for international students, but that's who tends to pay attention to that because it's an alternative to the H-1B. So she brought in the Canadian consulate to talk about becoming a permanent resident. She has a panel of three alums who are in Canada, two from Toronto, one from Vancouver. She just the other day did a panel of alumni from three very prominent organizations, Walmart headquarters, Microsoft, and I forgot the third one, to talk about-

Eric Raine:

Big companies though.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah. To talk about their experience getting their first job after their graduate degree and how they talk to their employer about the H-1B, and best practices for themselves, what worked, what didn't work because they're international. And she also ran a session on how to get an O-1 visa, which we haven't been talking a lot about. And I think we should be talking more about because it's kind of an alternative to an H-1, not exactly an alternative to an H-1. It's definitely not an alternative to OPT, but for students who have several years of experience and are doing some research with our faculty members, they could go a different route.

Eric Raine:

Interesting.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah. So this alum said, "This is how I did it. These are steps, exactly what you need to do."

Eric Raine:

And you're leveraging all options. And I think the fact that you mentioned Canada, too, is another selling point for University at Buffalo School of Management, because we have physical proximity Canada.

Within a 15 to 20 minute drive, you can be in another country altogether. And understanding that there's work opportunities and career advancement potential, obviously here in the US from an immigration perspective or for domestic students, but also the fact that there's Canada right there and we sit right on the border. So that's something else to keep in mind, and I think is great to know.

I'm learning a lot about what the CRC provides, and I've been a student full-time in the MBA program, I'm in my second year. But just even having this conversation with you, I think really opens up some of these other areas that it might not be applicable to me personally, but to listeners that are tuning into the podcast, I think that these are questions they might have. And just knowing that you have a home base to really lean on and rely on is great.

So, thank you very much for running us through a lot of those things. One of the ways that we wanted to wrap up with the podcast was talking to you a little bit about University at Buffalo and the School of Management. And given your tenure here and your experience and your leadership, what are some of the things that you love most about UB? And for prospective students, why should they consider the School of Management for their graduate education?

Melissa Ruggiero:

What do I love most about UB? The people here are genuinely 100% dedicated towards the students. Now, I hope you haven't met anyone that proves me wrong, but everyone that I work with-

Patrick Lageraen:

I haven't.

Melissa Ruggiero:

You haven't? Great. Everyone I work with for the last 20, it's more than 27 years because I went to school here for six years, and then when I was a high school student, I used to come here for diving practice. So anyway, it's been a really long time.

Eric Raine:

So you can speak to that experience over those 25, 30 plus years of interaction with the university and how even throughout the different things that happen economically or socially or whatever's happening in the world around UB, it's still a place where people really care about their students.

Melissa Ruggiero:

So years ago we had this mantra, it was Students First, and I still believe in it, students first. Now, we don't use that anymore. Now it's Here Is How, which I don't think really took off as much as they wanted it to, because what does that mean? But anyway. Sorry.

Eric Raine:

Is it the Here Is Now, is that the one that's on the-

Melissa Ruggiero:

Here's how. There's here is everything. Here is this, here is that.

Eric Raine:

But it's here. That's the thing they're emphasizing. Right? It's UB. Yeah.

Melissa Ruggiero:

Yeah. But it used to be Students First, and maybe that was just a student affairs thing when I worked in student affairs. Now that I'm in academic affairs, I don't hear it, but I lived it. We all lived it. We all really put students first. That was the whole point. And it was evident, and it feels it's even more every day. I never question the judgment of the people who I work with 'cause I know the reason why they're doing everything that they do is for the students. And if I don't agree with something that they're doing or something that they're saying, I still trust that they're doing that for the right reason, and I respect that and vice versa. They do the same for me. So, that's one of the things that I absolutely love about UB, and it should be one of the reasons why someone wants to come here.

Patrick Lageraen:

It's a great work environment, too.

Melissa Ruggiero:

I don't know why we don't get into all of those awards, like best places to work. We never do that, and we really should. I think my office would win not just the best award in School of Management, but best award for all of UB because we have the best office.

Eric Raine:

Being an MBA student myself, I know I'm biased in saying that, but I wholeheartedly agree with that. And the thing that you mentioning this idea of students first, it really comes down to an individual student thinking about considering School of Management for their graduate education. They are thinking about themselves, they are putting themselves first, they're saying, "You know what? I want to invest in my future. I want to go to graduate school. I want to better myself and go in a direction with my career that will benefit myself, my family, and my career development and things like that." But knowing that you're plugging into a place that is also focused on that for you is amazing. And I know from my personal experience, I can see that on a daily basis.

Melissa Ruggiero:

I'm glad.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, and it's the CRC, because obviously going to school is with that inherent sense of, "I want to do something with this degree, I want my job." And we spend a lot of time in our careers doing what we do on a daily basis, but knowing that the resources are set up in a way for you to be able to succeed and that other people are caring and looking out for you on your behalf as you decide to invest in yourself is everything.

Melissa Ruggiero:

But it's the same with graduate programs, the undergraduate advising, and even people who you don't see that are behind the scenes that are managing facilities and the IT center. Yeah.

Eric Raine:

It all comes together to produce an environment and a culture that students can plug into where you will benefit.

Patrick Lageraen:

And the benefit of that Students First mantra is the success stories that you see students. It's got to be incredibly satisfying watching all these students, helping them when they're at this stage and then watching them through two success. That's got to be the best part of the job.

Melissa Ruggiero:

It absolutely is the best part of the job. I don't have the kind of job where I see an end point, where I work on something and then I'm done. There's always work in progress, but there's never... Some students come in and say, "Thank you very much. I got a job and so on and so on." That's not why I do it. It's wonderful when I hear those stories because I'm feeling wonderful for them, but there's never that sense of accomplishment in that way. In our kinds of job and all the 12 people who work in my office, we'll run an event and then the event will be finished and there's that sense of accomplishment. And we'll see the employment rates and that'll feel good, but there's still the 5% that didn't get the job.

Patrick Lageraen:

But there's got to be a sense of accomplishment on a micro level? When you work with a student on multiple sessions, maybe 10 hours total, and then they finally get that job that they really wanted.

Melissa Ruggiero:

And not even just getting the job, but I meet with someone five, six times, we do three practice interviews, and I could tell by the third practice interview, they couldn't answer it that way the first time we met and they're so much more comfortable now than they were before. And I'm doing my student notes afterwards and I'm writing about how much growth they had. And yeah, that feels fantastic. It does, but it's not about me.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, I think that selfless nature about the way you are approaching your leadership perspective for CRC, but that it also is emulated by the people that work as staff inside the CRC, but faculty, like you mentioned, the people that are working behind the scenes that don't get recognized on a daily basis, or that people don't realize that they're there doing their job. It's until maybe that job isn't getting done that you notice, "Wait a second, that was really important," or something like that.

But from a student perspective, I can at least say that I completely agree with what you're saying and that I can see that as a student. I can feel that as a student. And I think people listening to this podcast



who are considering the School of Management and are curious and are just trying to learn more about a specific area of interest, if you're tuned into this podcast episode and you're listening to this because these are topics you care about, I think it's important to know that this is the mindset of the leadership within the School of Management.

So finally, we will end off here on some advice that you might be able to share with students from your perspective, especially from the career planning perspective, is they're applying to the School of Management, they're considering coming here for graduate education. What advice could you give them, maybe from a CRC perspective, but also just a general perspective?

Melissa Ruggiero:

I'll keep this kind of brief. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Be curious. Don't be afraid to try things. Don't be afraid to fail. Meet as many people as possible, as early as possible, as often as possible, and make those conversations about the person you're talking to, not about you. Because if you're an introverted person, it'll be so much easier when you're making the conversation about them instead of you, and you'll get more out of it. So, you just got to try it.

Eric Raine:

I think that's excellent advice. And really, when you're around so many incredible people, you come into an MBA program and you realize that there's so much experience from the people that sit to your left and to your right. And that if you take the opportunity to get to know them and learn a little bit about their background, in the process of doing so, they might also learn a little bit about you and your background. And that exchange is a beautiful component of what the University at Buffalo School of Management has to offer.

And so from a student perspective, we want to thank you for everything that you're doing at the CRC and the things that we have engaged in that I've seen short-term success with already and growth because of the fact that you do what you do on a daily basis, but also I know that there are things that are yet to come with the things that we're able to engage with. So thank you, and we appreciate you coming in. We really enjoyed the conversation, and so thanks for taking the time out of your day to join us.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. Thank you so much.

Melissa Ruggiero:

I appreciate you asking me, giving me this chance, and we look forward to seeing all of our new and current students in the CRC.

Eric Raine:

Absolutely.

Patrick Lageraen:

All right.

Eric Raine:

If you'd like to learn more, you can go to the University at Buffalo School of Management Career Resource Center CRC website. My name is Eric Raine, I've been your host for this episode. Thanks for listening.