Freeman hosts inaugural Alternative Investments Conference

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Associate Dean and Professor of Practice in Finance Myke Yest, far left, moderates a young alumni panel discussion during the inaugural Freeman Alternative Investments Conference, which took place at the Freeman School on Nov. 1. Pictured along with Yest are, from left to right, Sam Childs (BSM '21), Aidan Hussein (BSM '23) and Matthew Yam (BSM ’23, SLA

’23).

A distinguished roster of alumni, faculty and students came together on Nov. 1 for the first Freeman Alternative Investments Conference.

A joint program of the Selber Endowed Courses in Alternative Investments and the Schwartz Family Center for Experiential Business Learning, the conference offered students interested in alternative investments an opportunity to learn more about the space, including industry trends, career opportunities and cutting-edge academic research.

“This is something we’ve wanted to do for years,” said Mara Baumgarten Force, professor of practice in finance and instructor in the Selber Course on Hedge Funds. “We would love to build this out to create a whole ecosystem for our alumni, parents and students to learn more about alternative investing and help each other progress within the space.”

The conference kicked off with a welcome from Peter Ricchiuti, senior professor of practice and research director of Burkenroad Reports, which laid the foundation for the kind of experiential finance education that the Selber courses deliver. That was followed by a panel discussion on trends in the alternatives industry featuring Rankin Hobbs (BSM/MACCT ’21), associate with LongueVue Capital; Jacques Soenens (BSM ’93), founder and CIO with Great Gable Partners; and David Thomas, CEO of Equitas Capital Advisors.

Finance major Jake Marzullo (BSM ’25), a current student in the hedge funds course, said the panelists provided valuable insights about what they do and how they got to where they are now.

“As a senior, it was really helpful for me in trying to decide where I want to end up down the line,” said Marzullo. “For underclassmen who may not know a lot about the industry, there was also a lot to give them a better understanding of what some of the different career paths in finance might look like.”

Following the industry trends panel, three young alumni — Aidan Hussein (BSM ’23), founder of Night Sky Capital Management; Sam Childs (BSM ’21), founder of Astra Prime; and Matthew Yam (BSM ’23, SLA ’23), investment analyst in Tulane’s Investment Management Office — shared insights on breaking into the industry.

Next, Freeman School faculty members Amanda Heitz, assistant professor of finance, and Oleg Gredil, professor of finance, spoke about the role of academic research in investing and their specific research related to alternative investments. They were joined by Dan Joss, principal with Tessa Asset Management, who discussed how he used Heitz's research on bank failures to invest in distressed banks.

The morning wrapped up with student teams in the Selber Course on Hedge Funds delivering elevator pitches for their proposed funds and getting feedback from the speakers.



Dan Joss, right, principal with Tessa Asset Management, speaks with Freeman students at the Freeman Alternative Investments Conference luncheon.

The conference was a fitting tribute to the Selber Courses in Alternative Investments, which this year celebrated their 10th anniversary. The family of businessman and investor Aaron Selber Jr. (BBA '50) established the two courses, one focusing on distressed debt and the other on hedge funds, to teach the area of investing favored by Selber, a member of the Burkenroad family and an enthusiastic supporter of the Freeman School and Burkenroad Reports. From the beginning, the

courses were modeled after Burkenroad Reports to enable students to learn by doing. Over the last decade, the Selber courses have become cornerstones of both the finance curriculum and Freeman's experiential learning offerings.

"With the launch of the Freeman Alternative Investments Conference this fall, we see it as a nice annual bookend to the Burkenroad Reports Investment Conference in the spring," says Myke Yest, associate dean of undergraduate education and instructor in the Selber Course on Distressed Debt. "It's an opportunity for students to see that there's an entire universe of alternative investments out there, including not only hedge funds and distressed debt but also venture capital, private equity, real estate and more."

Force adds that the conference is also an opportunity for its alumni participants.

"Students can learn from alumni in the industry, but alumni can also recruit students, and both students and alumni can meet and network with one each other," she says.

Marzullo plans to join investment banking firm William Blair following his graduation in May 2025, but he hopes to eventually work in a hedge fund.

"Usually, you have to work for a couple of years in investment banking or another area on the sell side before you can work in a hedge fund," he explains. "One of the reasons I chose investment banking is because I wanted to have that opportunity one day.

"I've taken a few experiential learning courses at Tulane, and the Selber course was definitely my favorite," Marzullo adds. "It was the most valuable class I've taken, and I would recommend it to all Tulane students."