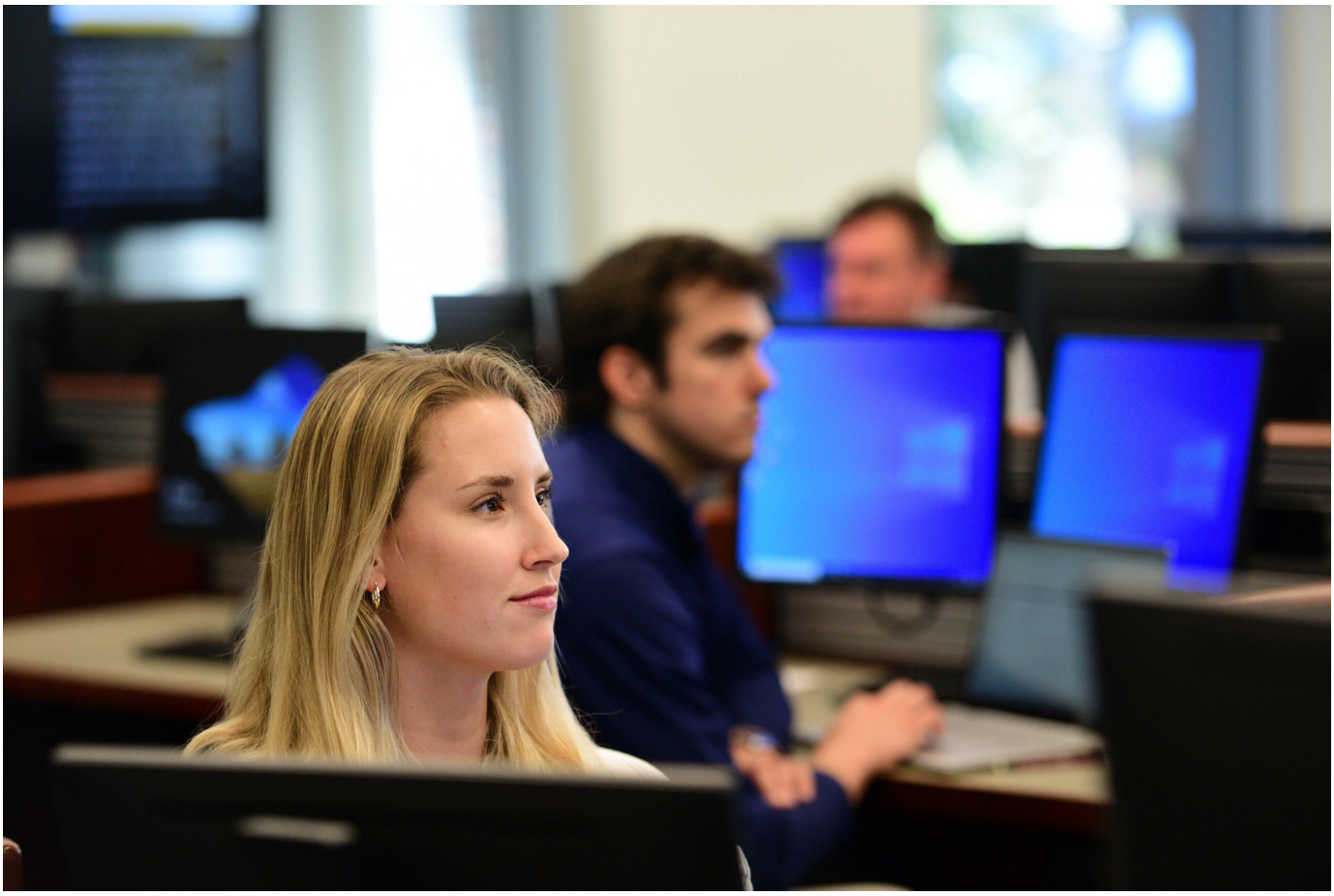
Master of Business Analytics students learn storytelling through data

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Osman Kazan has always made numbers matter with a simple tenet: “Tell a story with them.” That’s what he does to shape the Freeman School’s Master of Business

Analytics degree into a rigorous, experience-based education of the technical side of business. How do you create a compelling story from data? “Process, visualize, draw conclusions,” Kazan said. Kazan, director of the program, said the students’ work focuses on finding business intelligence answers to real-life problems. They study issues that matter to everyday people – New Orleans Police emergency response times, auto industry recall trends and the financial impact of hurricanes, among many other topics. They use these real-world data-sets to analyze problems and pose solutions. “If their organization comes to them with a problem, they’ll have to find the scope of the problem,” Kazan said. “And they will need data for that.” Business Analytics graduates use this problem-solving experience to find careers across industries. Many enter business fields like marketing, finance and consulting. Others expand beyond traditional business into sports, entertainment and music industries. Law firms are starting to hire analytics graduates too. “The projects that these students implement in the field are from diverse backgrounds,” Kazan said. “That also results in diverse employment opportunities for our students.”

Finding success in Freeman analytics

The program is home to many students with business and engineering backgrounds. Math, science and economics students excel too. But the program also admits students from non-technical backgrounds like sociology and anthropology -- even English. “Anybody who has a passion for retrieving, processing and telling a story with data is a very good candidate for our program,” Kazan said. Each class is project-based, meaning the students learn by working through assignments with peers, rather than sitting through lecture-style learning common in undergraduate studies. “Rather than saying, ‘here is the code, let’s run through this,’ we are actually trying to do it together,” Kazan said. Students also master a host of critically important programming languages: SQL, R, and Python are just a few. Students start the program with a practicum course to learn the basic tools of the degree and end with an in-depth capstone project finalized with feedback from faculty and industry experts. They choose between three specialized tracks of study: accounting and finance, energy, and marketing and management.

An emphasis on real-world data

Kazan’s strives to make his courses relevant – even fun. Students in one of his classes got to simulate March Madness, the popular college basketball tournament

that’s broadcast nationwide. They gathered historical data from team records and used it to predict the tournament results down to the ultimate winner. They’ve also coded Wordle, the popular New York Times word-puzzle game. Their studies hold deeper meaning too. After Texas was hit with a series of weather events that damaged the state’s power grid, students forecasted energy demand for the Energy Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT). “We want our subject matters to be relevant,” Kazan said. That way, students can stay tuned to news around the country and watch the data they study play out in real life. Students also interact closely with industry leaders. In 2019, Freeman analytics students got the chance to collaborate with experts at the business analytics department of the New Orleans Saints and Pelicans professional sports teams. Four students joined the teams’ sports analysts on a project examining factors that influence attendance and fan experience at Pelicans basketball games. “The ability to work with real-world data is something that not a lot of people are actually going to be able to get,” Josh Gaiman, a business analytics student who worked on that project, said. “It really gives you a full understanding of what it means to actually be in this field.”

Becoming the storytellers

Master of Business Analytics graduates enter a growing field armed with the technical qualifications they need to succeed. “The degree is valuable in the marketplace,” Kazan said. “There’s tons of jobs out there.” Many graduates work in banks or finance fields. Some student-athletes thrive in the program and go on to work in analytics roles for major professional sports teams across America. Others enter healthcare or service industries. The program even sent a recent graduate to work in motion pictures. The diverse placements show the growing impact business analysts can make anywhere. “The whole steps of problem definition, data collection, modeling, analysis, visualization and delivery -- these are really important fields,” Kazan said. “Some students may be good at one of these, but we give equal importance to all of them, so that students become the storytellers of successful businesses.”