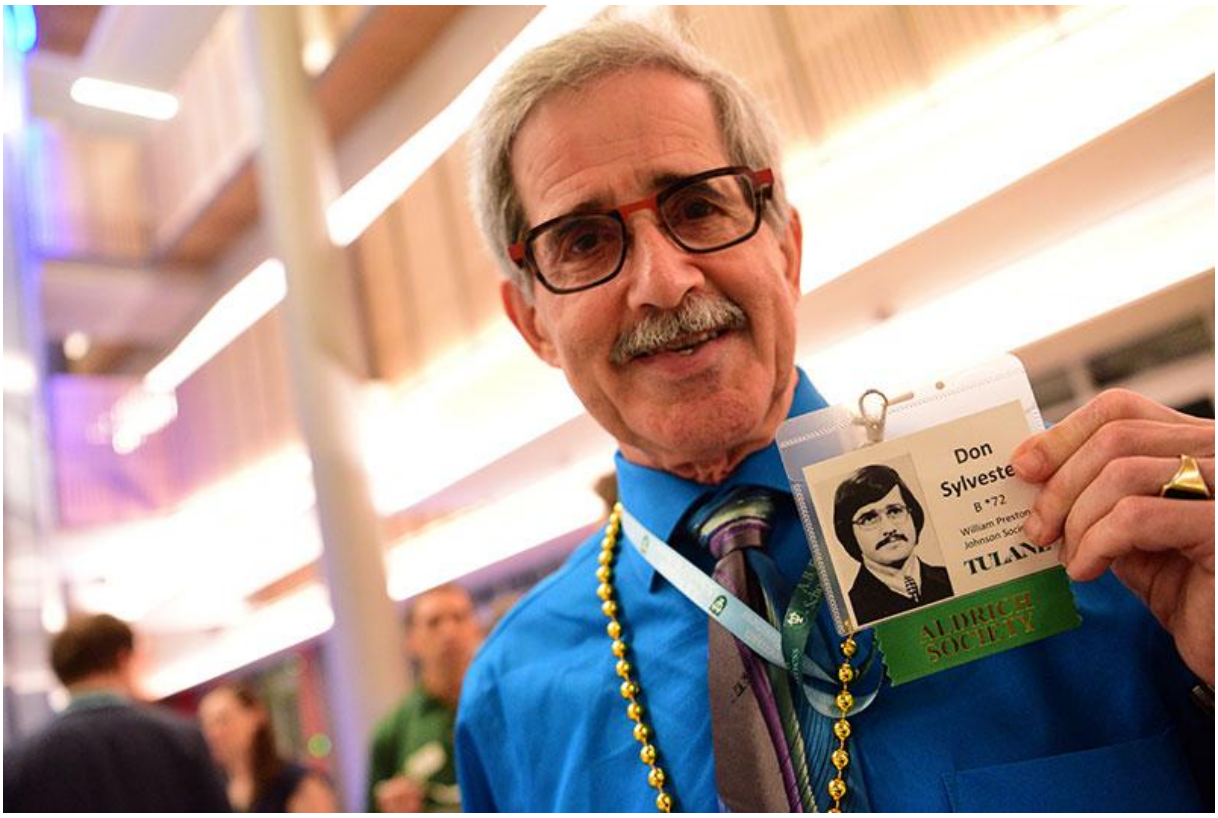
# Alum creates scholarship to give students ‘freedom to take risks’

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Don Sylvester (MBA '72) shows off his Tulane yearbook photo during his 50th Reunion Celebration at the Freeman School in November 2022. Sylvester and his wife, Patti, recently created a scholarship fund to give future graduate students the same opportunity he enjoyed as a Freeman scholarship recipient.

When Don Sylvester (MBA ’72) looks back on his career, he traces part of his success to the full scholarship that allowed him to get his graduate degree from Tulane’s A. B. Freeman School of Business. That opportunity not only gave him an outstanding education but also the chance to work overseas, with experiences that shaped the trajectory of his life.

Now, together with his wife, Patti, Don has created a scholarship to give future graduate students at the Freeman School of Business the same chance to thrive that once shaped his own path.

When Don enrolled at Tulane for his MBA, his goals were simple: earn a degree that would launch him into the business world and open the door to work abroad. “Living, working or extensive travel abroad really does broaden your view of the world and of your own country, as well,” he reflects.

After Tulane, he went on to hold positions with three different subsidiaries of American companies in Belgium and the Netherlands, where he held a variety of roles, including in management consulting, internal auditing, financial analysis and strategic business planning. It was in Amsterdam that he met Patti, a Canadian, who would later become his wife.



Don and Patti Sylvester met in Amsterdam and remain committed to the value of international work, travel and experience.

Don says his Tulane MBA gave him a clear advantage in the job market and prepared him to think on his feet once he arrived in Europe, where many of his roles required him to start from scratch and learn quickly on the job. And the scholarship also changed the course of his career.

“Graduating without major debt gave me the freedom to take risks,” Don said. “So many people leave school with enormous loans that limit their options. Because I had that scholarship, I didn’t have to chase the highest paying job right away — I could go abroad, build my career and gain life experiences that shaped everything that followed.”

After working in Europe for a dozen years, the Sylvesters moved back to the United States, where Don worked as a personal financial advisor for 26 years.

Over the years, Don has stayed closely connected to the Freeman School, including serving as co-chair of his 50th reunion. That involvement has given him a front-row seat to the school’s evolution. “I’ve been really impressed with its focus on experiential learning,” he said. “The school is giving students real-world experience and emphasizing entrepreneurship in ways that prepare them to step right into their careers.”

When Don and Patti considered where to leave their estate, they reflected on the experiences that had most shaped their lives. Both had received scholarships for graduate education, and they recognized how transformative that support had been. Said Patti, “We believe deeply in education, and we wanted to pay forward what we had been given, because it was a true gift.”

The Sylvesters created an endowed scholarship that will provide lasting support for Freeman graduate students who demonstrate both financial need and academic excellence. At the same time, they structured their gift so that students can begin receiving funding immediately.

For Don, the combination was important. Referring to the ability of students to receive funding right away, he said, “You get to actually see its immediate impact on a student. And I also like the idea of an endowment so that students we’ll never meet can benefit long after we’re gone.”

It’s a gift that reflects both gratitude for the support they once received and confidence in the generations to come.  Their generosity ensures that the impact of a Tulane business education will continue to grow, far into the future.