Conference explores opportunities in alternative investments

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The Freeman School's David Thompson, far left, moderates a panel on private equity trends at the second annual Freeman Alternative Investment Conference, which took place at the Freeman School on Oct. 24. Speakers on the panel included, from left to right, Gareth Turner, Ben Gerber, Rankin Hobbs, Chip Dunn and Canaan Heard.

Given recent the recent slowdown in deal volume and exits, some commentators have suggested that the golden era of private equity is over, but Gareth Turner believes the best may still be to come.

“Don’t underestimate the ability of private capital to innovate and find ways to stay relevant,” said Turner, partner in Apollo’s Private Equity business. “The proof is in the pudding. Investors will continue to reward the firms that have earned their trust by staying disciplined and delivering consistent returns.”

Turner was one of more than two dozen financial executives, portfolio managers, investors and academics who visited the Freeman School on Oct. 24 to share their insights for the second annual Freeman Alternative Investment Conference.

The conference, made possible by the Aaron Selber Jr. Alternative Investments Endowed Fund with support from the Schwartz Family Center for Experiential Business Learning, was launched to introduce students and the Tulane community in general to issues and trends in alternative investments. This year’s event featured sessions on the state of the industry, careers in alternatives, trends in private equity, the future of the credit market and more. In addition to Apollo, companies represented included Fidelity Investment, Permira, HarbourVest, Moody’s Investor Services, iCapital, Select Equity Group and Erigo Capital Partners.

“It was a very student-centric conference,” said Mara Baumgarten Force, professor of practice in finance and instructor in the Aaron Selber Jr. Course in Hedge Funds. “The students in the Selber Course handled all the organizational details, from contacting the speakers and choosing moderators to greeting speakers when they arrived on campus and serving as hosts. It was kind of the ultimate experiential learning project in the sense that the student had to interact on a professional level with some of the top investors in the field.”

The conference kicked off with a fireside chat on the state of the industry featuring Force and Jake Kriegsfeld (BSM ’13), managing director of the Tulane University Investment Management Office, which oversees the university’s $2 billion endowment.

“There’s often a misperception that endowments are kind of sleepy investors,” Kriegsfeld said. “I don’t know if they get lumped in with pensions, but they’re actually quite distinct in terms of their risk tolerance. We have no end date in mind. That dramatically changes your options of what you can invest in and opens the

door to a lot more private equity and venture capital.”

Kriegsfeld’s talk was followed by a series of panel discussions featuring distinguished alternative investors as well as a luncheon and closing reception in which students could interact with participants.

“I was thrilled to see so many members of the Tulane community come together to support each another,” said Force. “Everyone was here because they love Tulane and want to help our students succeed in alternative investments. I am so grateful for everyone who generously participated in this labor of love, and I’m already looking forward to next year’s conference.”