

IN THE LEARNING BUSINESS

Kathi Vieser Bianco*
(From: *Rivier Today*, Spring 2006)

FOR CHRISANN MERRIMAN, TEACHING TOMORROW'S BUSINESS LEADERS IS A SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY



Photo by Randy Yandell

Most business majors follow a fairly straightforward and common career path: earn a bachelor's degree, begin working for a company and, perhaps, earn an M.B.A. while continuing to advance in the corporate arena. **Chrisann Carta Merriman '96** was heading down that road when she graduated from Rivier with a degree in marketing. But a decade later, the desk she sits behind is not in an executive suite but rather in a building on the campus of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor (UMHB) in Belton, Texas, where she is an assistant professor of management and marketing.

Merriman's new career direction began during her M.B.A. program at Southern New Hampshire University, when she took a course in training and development within organizations. "I enjoyed this course very much," she says, "and decided to continue learning about how adults learn and how I can make them successful." Upon completing her M.B.A., she enrolled in SNHU's graduate program in

business education and took a part-time position teaching at the Stratham campus of New Hampshire Community Technical College—both while continuing to work full-time in technology marketing and raising a newborn son.

A Ph.D. was next on her list of goals, but in order to balance work, school and family, Merriman chose what was still a relatively new delivery method – online education. “I am a very driven person who desires to learn, so independent work is possible for me,” she says. In Capella University’s online Ph.D. program in organization and management, Merriman spent 15 to 20 hours per week responding to professors’ questions and doing research for her dissertation. At the same time, she began teaching for the University of Phoenix’s online graduate program in marketing management.

“I believe the online format lends itself to business students,” she says. “The online format forces students to synthesize their thoughts clearly and concisely before they post a response. Business students may never have a face-to-face meeting with individuals they are working with to complete a project; therefore, the ability to execute a project virtually is a vital skill.” Merriman is so committed to the idea of online education that she has continued to teach for University of Phoenix even after accepting a full-time onsite position from UMHB, and she hopes to teach online courses for Rivier in the near future.

Merriman also finds advantages to her role in the classroom. “I see myself as being more of a facilitator than a professor,” she says. “My objective is to guide the students to learn and apply the material, versus telling the students theories and expecting them to recite the material back to me.” Being there in person gives her the opportunity to more effectively present herself as a role model to her students when they are challenged. “The students today are trying to balance a great deal, so I try to use my own experiences to demonstrate that they can do anything they set their minds to.” She finds it especially rewarding to see students who are struggling not only to understand what she is teaching, but become more actively engaged in the learning process as a result.

With her career now focused on teaching, Merriman is enjoying the personal rewards of a career in academia. “My paycheck is certainly smaller than it was in the corporate world, but I believe I am making more of an impact teaching 90 students each semester about marketing and management and how they can make their mark.” More importantly, the schedule allows her to spend more time with her husband, Kelly, and their son, Owen, who is now in kindergarten. “My previous positions required many days of traveling,” she says. “This position allows me to be home when he is on vacation.” Merriman’s future plans include a continued focus on research and publishing. “I see myself with a few published articles, maybe a book. In my spare time, I hope to have an independent consulting venture to keep me connected with the business world.”

A native of Nashua, Merriman is learning to adjust to life in the South. “I do miss the season changes, but I do not miss the snow,” she says after having enjoyed an 80-degree Christmas. However, her brother and husband’s family still live in New Hampshire and Vermont, giving her multiple opportunities to visit her home state. She also enjoys the opportunity to revisit Rivier, whether in person, online or just in her heart. “The foundation Rivier provided me was invaluable and helped me succeed. I hope others have had similar success in their lives. ■

* **KATHI VIESER BIANCO** is a freelance writer from Long Island, New York, specializing in higher education and consumer marketing. The winner of multiple awards for both nonfiction and fiction writing, she holds a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University and master's degrees from New York Institute of Technology and the City University of New York-Queens College.