

## TEACHING TOMORROW'S TRUMPS

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### MARIA MATARAZZO TAKES A BULLISH APPROACH TO BUSINESS EDUCATION



Photo by Jodie Andruskevich

A corner office in a gleaming city skyscraper. A seven-figure annual salary, plus bonuses. A business card with the title "CEO." Today's business student has bigger dreams than just a key to the executive washroom. In a world where corporate leaders are media celebrities, best-selling authors, and advisers to the president of the United States, students in business disciplines see a limitless future with all the trappings of success. Maria Matarazzo, associate professor and chair of Rivier's Division of Business Administration, sees that same future and gives her students the tools and knowledge to send them as far as their ambition takes them. At the same time, she demonstrates both in and out of the classroom that true personal success entails far more than money and power.

A recognized expert in business education, Matarazzo firmly believes in the value of the undergraduate business degree. “The statistical snapshot of leading CEOs indicates that 97 percent earned an undergraduate degree, with engineering and business administration as the most often received,” she says, citing a Spencer Stuart study of Standard & Poor’s 500 chief executives. For Matarazzo and her Rivier colleagues, a key component of the bachelor’s program is incorporating real-world experience into the curriculum. “Our philosophy embraces an applications-based approach to pedagogy,” she says.



“We undertake a number of projects for local businesses in the areas of marketing, research, business plans, and case analysis.” One such project that received widespread media attention involved teams of students competing in the style of the television program, “The Apprentice” to design original toy ideas for Toys ’R Us. Exposing her students to such aspects of everyday business functions as meetings, budgeting, team-building, and product development in a hands-on environment helped them see immediate practical applications of what they learned in class. “The stakes were high,” says Matarazzo. “The winning team was awarded a \$500 scholarship, trophy, and certificate of achievement. We were later contacted by two international toy companies who had an interest in our student projects.”

Matarazzo’s teaching methods and philosophy have earned her accolades throughout her academic career, but two recent awards demonstrate the esteem in which she is held in both the business and educational communities: the 2004 Excellence in Education Award, recognizing her as the outstanding business educator in the state of New Hampshire; and the 2004 New Hampshire Business Education Association Achievement Award, for dedication to the advancement of business education in the state. “These awards represent the culmination of my contribution to the field,” she says. “I am honored to represent Rivier College and the Division of Business Administration in pursuit of excellence in education.”

One key area in which Matarazzo not only represents Rivier but all women in business is as legislative representative for the New Hampshire Business and Professional Women’s Association. “In part, our mission is to promote awareness of legislative issues affecting women and families, and to inform our citizenry of opportunities to achieve equity and parity in the workplace.” The equal pay initiative is an issue about which Matarazzo feels both passion and optimism, believing that education is a key factor in helping bridge the compensation gap. “While statistics do show that currently, on a national level, women earn 76 cents to the dollar,” she says, “there are encouraging signs that equity issues are prominent among successful organizations that promote innovation and diversity.”

Matarazzo is also an active volunteer with Junior Achievement, an organization that encourages elementary to high school students to appreciate lifelong learning and foster positive attitudes toward work through an understanding of the free enterprise system.

Matarazzo’s own interest in business developed at a young age. “I learned from my father all about business and politics,” she says. “Evening meals were sparked with business discussion.” Her early childhood was spent in Cambridge, Mass., but after the family moved to Nashua when she was in fourth grade, she easily assimilated to the comparatively rural environment and has stayed in the Nashua area ever since. She holds an associate’s degree in accounting, a bachelor’s degree in business education, and an M.B.A. in management from Southern New Hampshire University, where she taught from 1980-1984. She has also completed doctoral courses at Nova Southeastern University. After four years teaching at New Hampshire Community Technical College, she joined the Rivier faculty in 1988.

Matarazzo believes Rivier College attracts a very special kind of student. “Having served at the college for 18 happy years, I could write a book on the subject of the Rivier persona,” she says. “Because of our mission and identity, we attract students who are committed to learning and who demonstrate distinctive ethical characteristics. We have an environment that truly creates an advantage for the Rivier business student graduate.” And helping to create that advantage are professors and mentors like Maria Matarazzo. ■

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