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Student-run investment group connects undergrads to the world of finance

Many students leave UC Santa Barbara to pursue a career in finance, but a lucky few leave having already managed a portfolio as part of their undergraduate curriculum.

After all, there is no more realistic way to learn about the benefits and consequences of investing than to dive in and try it for yourself. That is one goal of the Deans Investment Group (DIG), which gives students interested in finance a structured environment to apply what they've learned in the classroom to real-world capital markets.

"DIG was founded as a way for students to get hands-on experience in investing, and also a way to bring a group of our very talented and generous alumni into greater contact with students, so that they can help train our newest alumni in the finance sphere," said Erik Eyster, chair of UCSB's Department of Economics.

The program selects 10 new fellows each winter quarter who are mentored by students who have already been in the group for a year. They meet twice weekly with an instructor to design investment strategy, develop economic and industry outlooks, determine asset allocation, and conduct market research and in-depth sector and company analysis.

The group is tasked with overseeing the management of the UC Santa Barbara Dean's Investment Fund. These funds, established by gifts from alumni, department supporters and the business community, are earmarked for future student scholarships.

But the students aren't making decisions alone. They are guided along the way by a board of expert alumni advisors — all of them active in the finance sector and willing to share their knowledge.

"Our board is always available to talk about any topics we are interested in, from specific stocks to more general market trends," said Raquel Parizeau, a senior studying economics and accounting who is a current member of the group. "This allows us to have industry expert opinions as well as exposure to potential career paths."

DIG students present their potential trades to the board for careful vetting and thorough dissection. "The process of getting feedback and having to respond in real time to pointed and direct questions from board members is valuable in the workplace," said Eyster. These trades are ultimately submitted to three faculty advisors, who help oversee the day-to-day operations of the group.

The structure of DIG doesn't just build an undergraduate's skills as a shrewd investor. It also encourages the group to work together and to find a consensus among dissenting opinions.

"Students are able to practice what they're learning in the classroom, but they also have the opportunity to build skills like collaboration and teamwork, as well as the process of presenting in front of board members, getting feedback and then refining their ideas," said Eyster. "All of these are things that we don't really do in traditional academic education."

The group, which is highly competitive and has an extensive application process, is open to third- and fourth-year students from any major who have received a certification for strategic investments.

Founded in 2021, DIG continues to evolve and grow with each new group of fellows, but one thing remains constant: a commitment to building the skills and experience that will benefit students when they leave UCSB.

“The Dean’s Investment Group is a showcase program, which embodies three key divisional goals—providing students with experience to put their classroom-based education into practice; involving our alums in practice-oriented teaching and mentoring; and generating funds for need-based scholarships,” said Charlie Hale, SAGE Sara Miller McCune Dean of Social Sciences. “We extend deep gratitude to all our DIG instructors, to our development partners, and especially to our stellar DIG students, who make this program shine.”

“Honestly, this is what I have learned the most from in college,” said Parizeau. “It’s not my classes. It’s being involved in programs like this.”

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