EXECUTIVE IN RESIDENCE

Allen Nance, University of West Georgia alumnus and founder of WhatCounts, one of the largest e-mail marketing firms in the world, spoke with several Richards College of Business classes and student organizations on March 6, as the Executive in Residence, Spring 2012.

Nance engaged students with his nontraditional lecture style where he introduced himself and his company, and then allowed students to set the agenda with questions and topics of interest. Nance talked about his journey as a business owner and the four traits he thinks it takes to be a successful entrepreneur.

The first is the talent to see the future; entrepreneurs largely find success because of their aptitude at foreseeing a need and being the first to develop a product or service and bring it to the market. The second is to believe in something, “Entrepreneurs have an internal confidence that just can’t be taught. In negotiations, for some people ‘No’ is just a starting point.” The third is the ability to build a team; Nance imparted that success is rarely about one person and pointed to his “wicked smart” staff of 500 for his firm’s continued success. Lastly, entrepreneurs should be skilled at capital formation - knowing where to procure and how to effectively use capital.

Nance provided students with honest answers to some of the business world’s most spellbinding questions including how his business overcomes plateaus, what the business risks are in the industry, and his projections for the domestic economy. When asked about his management style, Nance candidly admitted that his had gone through three phases.

“In the beginning it was simple: do it my way,” Nance went on to say that in reality that didn’t work for long, especially as the company continued to expand and integrate. Next he tried a very casual “fluffy” style where he spent a lot of time making small talk and asking how people’s days were, “It felt very fake though and it wasn’t adding anything to the business.” Like an epiphany, Nance said he realized that focusing on team building was what would make the firm and the employees as individuals successful. “I stopped focusing on what I would do and started focusing on how to make each employee successful. If they’re successful then I have already succeeded,” advised Nance.

His parting wisdom to students was to be active in extracurricular programs and to take advantage of opportunities afforded them because experiences now are teaching life lessons that will be applicable in the real working world. He shared that the roots of his company can be traced back to several initiatives he took and programs he participated in while earning his Master’s degree. “If you get an opportunity, take it, you never know where it could lead you.”

WhatCounts delivers billions of targeted messages on four continents in over 35 languages and has received numerous awards including three times being named an Inc. 500 company representing the fastest growing enterprises in the United States. Nance has been recognized in Georgia Trend magazine’s “40 Under 40” feature as well as by Atlanta Business Chronicle as a “Rising Business Leader Under 40”. In 2007, he founded the Southern Foundation which raises money and provides scholarships to teens who are the first in their family to attend college.

The Executive in Residence program invites one local executive each semester to speak with Richards College of Business students.

Mr. Allen Nance speaks to International Management students