

MASTERING THE NEW MILLENNIUM

You can find them on the steps of the White House and on streets of countries abroad, in Broadway cast lists and in Silicon Valley. Some manage their own businesses and some are crusaders for change, while others seek simply to brighten a child's day. For these 15 alumni, who completed their education at the Capstone between 2000 and 2015, success has come to mean many things, but the most fitting definition may be pursuing their passions.

Brian Adams

When Brian Adams graduated from The University of Alabama in 2002 with a bachelor's in management, he left behind several entrepreneurial ventures he'd started while earning his degree, having dabbled in T-shirt printing, graphic design, e-commerce—and clean clothes. His first business, Bama Butler LLC, picked up and delivered college students' laundry.



Upon graduation, Adams headed to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, and was with that group for six months before moving to Houston to get married, and deciding to become an entrepreneur. "I couldn't go to work for anyone because I'd be a horrible employee," he said. "Working for myself is the only way I know." He fell back on prior experience to create Restoration Cleaners LLC, now a multimillion-dollar cleaning company aimed at restoring fabrics and electronics. It's managed by Adams as part of his private holding company, BA Investments, through which he also runs Rumber Materials LLC, a manufacturing entity.

His achievements haven't gone unnoticed. Adams was named to the *Houston Business Journal's* "40 under 40" and *Inc.* magazine's "30 under 30." He received a 2010 Outstanding Leadership Award from the U.S. Leaders and Entrepreneur's Association and was included in the 2014 Empact Showcase, which highlights the role

Presenting 15 graduates from the first 15 years of the 2000s who have already made their mark on the world.

by Kayla Montgomery and Sarah Mahan



of young entrepreneurs in the economy and recognizes each recipient at an event held at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Adams' key to success is as timeless as it is true. "I work hard," he said. "I go to work, and work 60 minutes every hour."

Lindsay Blakey



Bringing joy is her job. As a seasonal character performer for Walt Disney World and entertainment coordinator at Give Kids the World, a nonprofit resort for children with life-threatening illnesses who are visiting central Florida's theme parks, Lindsay Blakey uses her 2014 public relations bachelor's degree from UA to create smiles. For the past three years, after a semester with the Disney College Program, she has performed as several Disney characters, including Mickey Mouse; Minnie Mouse, who she said she can transform into in just three minutes; Stitch; Donald Duck; and Pinocchio. "You get to see the kids' reactions, and they really believe that you're that character," she said. "You're just a professional hugger, so that's my fun job."

After graduation, Blakey moved to Florida for an internship with GKW, which has since turned into a full-time position. As entertainment coordinator, she is charged with anything that's enjoyable for the kids. The resort works with 250 national and international wish-granting organizations, like the Make-a-Wish

Foundation, to make children's dreams come true.

As part of their visit to the 70-acre storybook resort, the children and their families get to participate in themed parties, planned by Blakey, each day of their week-long stay. "We have Halloween, Christmas, Candy Land, birthday parties, Village Idol (which is like karaoke), a tea party, and a pirate and princess party each week," she enumerated. "We do that just in case they don't get to celebrate their birthday party or Christmas or Halloween one last time, or they've been in the hospital dealing with treatments or therapy. The kids love it." Blakey hopes to either move up the ranks at GKW or at Disney, she said, so she can continue to "turn my degree into pixie dust."

Jenna Brayton



For most of her life, Jenna Brayton saw herself as a professor. Brayton, who graduated from the University in 2011 with a master's in political science, imagined she would be spending her days instructing college students. Instead, she is passing her time in the White House, serving as the associate director of digital strategy.

There is no normal day for Brayton, who works on social and digital media campaigns under U.S. President Barack Obama. "Every day is different," she said. "One of the really unique things about working in the White House is you can plan for whatever you want, but it

ultimately depends on what happens that morning." Brayton first joined the president on his 2012 re-election campaign. Having grown up in Chicago, she was a longtime fan of Obama. "It's a dream come true for me to be able to work for him at the highest level of government as my boss," she explained.

During her tenure, her team has handled several large-scale projects, including the changing of the White House's photo policy. Effective July 1, 2015, guests are now able to take photos on tours. At work, she draws on the people skills she learned in college to thrive in an industry based on relationships. "Politics is such a people industry, so UA really helped me with that," she said.

Brayton is not sure of her next stop after the administration leaves office—perhaps she'll return to her teaching plans, in a region with warmer weather than Washington, D.C., she said. But she'll take valuable lessons with her. "It used to be that I would get a little distraught if things would go off plans, but things happen at the White House in two minutes," she explained. "I've learned to be flexible."

Nick Burroughs



Nick Rashad Burroughs was in a math class in 2014 when the trajectory of his life took a dramatic change. The UA musical theatre major, preparing for graduation, received a call that he had an audition for the lead role of Lola in

the Tony Award-winning musical *Kinky Boots*. He stepped on a plane that same day. After seven callbacks, Burroughs received the phone call—he was cast not on the national tour, for which he had auditioned, but in the Broadway production itself, to understudy Billy Porter in the lead role. "It's been the biggest dream come true to be able to do a show like *Kinky Boots*, where it relates to my life," he said. "One of the lyrics in the songs is, 'You change the world when you change your mind,' when you change your mind about someone and accept them for who they are. It's a beautiful story to tell."

He had a week to pack his things and relocate to New York City. It was his foundation in the theatre and dance department at the University, he said, that allowed the entire whirlwind experience to begin in the first place. "In musical theatre, they work personally with each student—with flaws and strengths—and really prepare us for how to take on an audition like that," he explained. "I'm always very grateful that they pushed me really hard."

Burroughs never imagined that he would land on Broadway immediately after college. In fact, he had prepared his mother for the hardships he anticipated in pursuit of his dream. "I told her I wouldn't be on Broadway for at least 10 years," he recalled. "The best part of my career was being able to play the lead with my mom in the audience."

Henry Busby

Henry Busby's first project after his 2012 graduation from UA's telecommunication and film program hit close to home. He and Marcus Tortorici, '12, filmed a spec commercial on boxer and Tuscaloosa native Deontay Wilder, who has since gone on to be crowned the

WBC heavyweight world champion. And recently, Busby teamed up with Clayton Collins, '12, to film a 30-minute NBC special on Wilder. "That was one of the best whirlwind experiences I've ever had—the whole thing came about in such a seemingly fated way," he explained. "Once we finished that commercial, that's what led me to New York—that's what led into me doing what I do now—and then to have that same story come full circle three years later was pretty wild."

Busby, based in Brooklyn, directs and shoots commercials, music videos and TV shows, and also works as a photographer. "There's not a normal day," he said of his profession. "A lot of it is the boring stuff that people don't really think about that comes with being your own boss and running your own business. There are a lot of days where I'm in the apartment all day. But when I'm gone, I may be gone for weeks."

He has worked with high-profile clients such as Nike, Verizon, Nestle, Everlast, Castrol, Frenchkiss Records, Billboard, Refinery29, Runner's World, *Boston* magazine, *Birmingham* magazine and Billy Reid. Each task, he said, has the potential to bring two levels of satisfaction. The first comes from simply executing a successful project, but the second rises from a deeper level, when working on subjects that touch the heart. "You're making something for someone else, but you're making it for yourself," he explained. "For



me, to be that attached to something and to put it out in the world is really satisfying."

Cameron Diver



Since 1982, Cameron Diver has supported the Crimson Tide. Watching his first Alabama football game on TV as a boy, at the end of coach Paul W. "Bear" Bryant's career, Diver became a fan, and still follows Crimson Tide athletics, from almost 8,000 miles away.

Originally from New Zealand, Diver currently resides in New Caledonia, where he is deputy director-general of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, an international organization founded in 1947 by the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to improve social, economic and sustainable development in the Pacific Islands. In his role, Diver is responsible for the operations management side of the organization, which includes finance, human resources, IT, translation and interpretation, publications and general administration. He also looks after four of seven technical divisions, including public health, fisheries, statistical development and social development.

When he had the opportunity to further his professional development, he chose courses in management and leadership studies offered through UA's College of Continuing Studies. He completed the certificate program in 2015. "I found it quite

useful as a means to revisit my own practice as an executive, and to allow me to have a look at myself from a third-party perspective to see what I can do to improve the way that I interact with staff members and colleagues, and the way I lead change,” Diver said.

The best part of his career is working for an organization that actively influences the region, he added. “It’s interesting to work for an organization where you can see the impact of what it is you’re doing quite concretely when you’re in the field,” he said. “You can actually see the impact the work is having in the lives of people on a day-to-day basis.”

Andrea Duke



Dr. Andrea Duke picked up distance running as a way to relieve stress from her job at the Pentagon following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and never slowed down. Duke, who graduated with a PhD in communication from UA in 2008, ran her first marathon in March 2002, and 46 races later, has earned a spot in the Olympic trials, to be held Feb. 13, 2016.

She qualified for the trials after recording a time of 2:41:12 in the Chicago Marathon on Oct. 12, 2014, beating the 2:43:00 time requirement by nearly two minutes. She had become an elite runner when she won the Rock ‘n’ Roll New Orleans Marathon in February 2014, and then decided to put her

talents to the ultimate test. “What makes me a little different is the fact that I had been running for almost 13 years in the marathon, and it just came around all of a sudden,” she said. “I just decided, ‘Let’s see what I can do,’ and ran the qualifying time.”

Throughout the training process, Duke has worn multiple hats, balancing a life as a businesswoman, professor and mother of two. “I had to schedule strength training, PT, recovery, work and kids,” she said.

Currently sponsored by Oiselle Running Apparel, she has become a popular figure in the marathon world. “I find that I’m becoming an inspiration and a motivator for other people, and what keeps me going is the fact that people are looking to me,” she noted. “On the flip side, I’m being inspired and motivated by them. I want to be a good role model for my kids, my teammates and the people who follow me, and show that you can start at 4:30:00 and get where I am. You can have really bad days, but turn around and it will be okay.”

David Eagles



Imagine taking over a company when its top leaders have just left, a reality each new U.S. presidential administration faces. David Eagles, who earned a bachelor’s in finance from UA in 2002 and a master’s in public policy from Harvard, has made it his mission to make those conversions as seamless as possible. As the director of presidential tran-

sitions at the Partnership for Public Service in Washington, D.C., Eagles leads the Ready to Govern program, which will assist the 2016 presidential candidates and outgoing presidential administration in navigating the transition process.

The nonprofit, nonpartisan partnership engages Congress and promotes presidential transition reforms; develops management recommendations for the next administration; and trains political appointees to lead effectively. “Fixing how our government executes, how it delivers, and how it solves problems is just the same as turning around a large company,” he explained. “It depends on leadership, engaging your employees and creating a culture around excellence in management. Shifting environments are the opportunity for real change, and that is why presidential transitions are so important.”

Prior to his work with the partnership, Eagles was the vice president for change management and chief of staff to the CEO at Waste Management after working as a consultant. In the public sector, Eagles has been appointed under two Republican presidential administrations as the adviser to the secretary of Housing and Urban Development. In this capacity, he was presented the Distinguished Service Award by the HUD secretary for his work during the nation’s housing and credit crisis of 2007–2009. He served in a leadership capacity on the transition team for Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney’s 2012 run for the presidency and has also worked for the Republican National Committee. He advises young graduates to “be aggressive and stay humble,” valuing what others have learned and accomplished.

Ryan Joy



He remembers peeling off the plastic wrap from the new appliances in the first Checkers franchise in the country, the one his father opened in St. Petersburg, Florida, when he was in middle school. From that point on, Ryan Joy said he hasn’t considered working anywhere else except the fast food chain known for its black-and-white checkered logo. Now the senior director of research and development for Checkers and Rally’s, Joy said working in his father’s franchise restaurants and his 2001 UA bachelor’s degree in restaurant and hospitality management have rounded out his expertise. “That’s what put the success story together,” he said.

It wasn’t immediate, though. After graduation, he landed in the corporate office in Tampa, Florida, as a marketing coordinator. At that time, the company’s product development area lacked a dedicated space, with research often occurring on restaurant patios instead of in a test kitchen. Thanks to Joy’s persistence, it now has a dedicated 4,300-square-foot design and research center, featuring a commercial kitchen and focus group facility. He and his team of 10 spend hours in the kitchen, narrowing the hundreds of ideas they envision each month to a dozen items that will be seen on menus in the chain’s more than 800 locations. “Customers can taste the food and give me feedback in real time, which is really valuable,” he said.

By keeping tabs on food trends, Joy has created taste treats like the company’s Cold Creations menu, which increased sales by up to 20 percent on the first day it was introduced. He said those popular innovations have garnered a trust from corporate executives, company operators and franchisees. “For them to trust me, and trust me to give them products that are going to sell, that’s a huge reward,” he said. “It puts a huge smile on my face.”

Kevin Jackson



As a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, one of three federally recognized Cherokee tribes, Kevin Jackson works to preserve his people’s culture as its information technology desktop support services manager. Using his bachelor’s degree in business management from Montreat College and his 2013 master’s degree in human environmental sciences from UA, he developed an interactive website for online language preservation and learning, continuing to expand the use of IT within the tribe to preserve its history.

“I have a passion for cultural preservation and education,” he said. “I participate regularly in our traditional ceremonies and encourage all of our people to do so. My children attend our language immersion academy, and my involvement with the school motivated me and gave me resources for the creation of the website. Working with the school

educated me in the importance of our language and making us who we are. The loss of language means loss of identity.” He said his next project will be expanding the tribe’s broadband network.

For the past three years, Jackson has served as mentor for a Costa Rica eco-study tour that offers local youth in North Carolina, where he lives, the opportunity to learn about sustainability and share their culture with that country’s indigenous people. He is also on the board of the Cherokee Youth Council, and is chairman of the Eastern Band’s Code of Ethics Committee. A past recipient of the Jones-Bowman Fellowship, he is now a board member and mentor for that program, which helps working adults and youth enhance their leadership qualities through formal education and first-hand experiences, while they learn about Cherokee culture, traditions, governance and sovereignty.

Tennille Lowe



Born and raised in Phenix City, Alabama, Tennille “TD” Lowe, who earned a B.S. in economics from the University in 2008, has always been the child who dreamed big. In fourth grade, she envisioned a product that was on store shelves eight months later, though she received no profit from it. At the time, she said she was unfamiliar with the process to claim ownership of ideas, and as a result, forfeited the rights to hers once it was

shared with a company.

Devastated, she dreamed up the beginnings of EnovationNation while still in elementary school. Today, her company aims to give inventors and entrepreneurs a place to develop, protect, share and ultimately monetize their ideas. By providing a platform for people to publish their work, those seeking patents can document ownership of ideas, preventing others from patenting them in accordance with recent changes to U.S. law. “The new law now states that it doesn’t matter who has the idea first: It’s all about who publishes or documents that they had the idea first,” she explained. “People with more access to resources have the ability to document ownership faster than others with no or limited resources. EnovationNation empowers small innovators to compete in the race.”

Immediately following graduation, Lowe landed a job with Aflac insurance company. Four years later, she moved to Silicon Valley to pursue a master’s degree in computer science at Stanford, though those plans haven’t yet reached fruition because she received initial capital investment for EnovationNation before classes began. Lowe was included in the *Washington Post’s* list of *16 Women Who Deserve a Spot on Tech Companies’ Board of Directors* and has also been featured in *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *TechCrunch*. EnovationNation was recognized by a United Nations organization as the top innovator of 2013.

Brian McWilliams

He hatched the idea for his own nonprofit before he could legally drive a car. Brian McWilliams, who received a BS in biology from UA in 2015 and is pursuing a master’s in

business administration, organized a 5K race at age 15 to offset medical costs for a family friend’s son, who was paralyzed from the waist down. “The family had been doing some level of fundraising to defray medical costs, through T-shirt sales, but nothing that was going to take a big big chunk out of the financial burdens that they had been placed under,” McWilliams said.

The race, in its sixth year, has exceeded his expectations, and is now a regular fundraiser for the Team Alex Fund, which helps children affected by spinal cord injuries and illness. The first race raised \$30,000 from its corporate sponsors and 800 runners, and the next five brought in more than \$125,000 combined to fund therapy and mobility equipment not covered by insurance, providing anything from a wheelchair ramp for a minivan to equipment for a spina bifida camp.

McWilliams said the Team Alex Fund is an example of what he aspires to continue in his future career: creating new ideas and helping meet people’s needs. He hopes to use his UA degrees to be a “mover and shaker” in the business side of medicine. “In the future, I think there are going to be more and more intersections where physicians in the business are going to need to understand the economic factors at play in medicine, and the business professionals are going to need to know the medical elements of the business they’re trying to run in order to deliver care



in the most effective way that they can,” he said. “To build both of those skills was the most I could hope to get out of any university education anywhere.”

Caroline Nabors



Since graduating from UA with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and international studies in 2010 and a master’s degree in applied linguistics in 2012, Caroline Nabors has found herself on two different continents other than North America. She joined the U.S. Peace Corps after finishing her graduate program, spending 27 months in Bluefields, Nicaragua, and has lived in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam since January 2015.

Nabors relocated to Vietnam to begin a fellowship sponsored by the U.S. State Department and Georgetown University, serving as the English Language Fellow in Ho Chi Minh City, splitting time between the cultural affairs office at the America Center and the University of Education and Pedagogy. While working at the center, she has developed workshops and trained teachers, and welcomed Second Lady Jill Biden to a training session. At the university, she participates in activities ranging from teaching writing, speaking and intercultural communications to coaching debate teams. “The best parts of any job abroad, in my opinion, are the people you meet,” she shared. “Ho Chi Minh is such an international city, and the

opportunities I have had to share with people from all over the globe help me evolve in a way that is not possible at home. The shared experiences also make me a better teacher.”

The move did not come without its challenges, she said, as she had to adjust to life in a massively populated city. Others interested in relocating to other countries, she said, should not let possible difficulties deter their dreams. “Embrace uncertainty and just go,” she stressed. “You will experience high highs and low lows, but if you suspend judgment and step into a new culture, you might find traditions you like even more than your own.”

Amitabh Shah



When Amitabh Shah moved to Talladega, Alabama, he found a city like nothing he had ever experienced. Shah, from Ahmedabad, India, a city of 7 million, travelled to Alabama as an exchange student in his sophomore year of high school. “Everybody asked me, ‘Oh, you live in India; do you live in trees?’” he recalled. “I always said, ‘Yes, we live in trees, but we have elevators to go up and down.’”

The culture shock didn’t dissuade him; he finished his high school career in Talladega, and received a presidential scholarship to UA. A member of the Computer-Based Honors Program, he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in management information systems in 2003. With a stop at Yale for a master’s degree and

after declining an offer to work on Wall Street, Shah returned to India to improve “real streets,” founding YUVA Unstoppable, an organization that aims to create a better world. By mobilizing youth, it works for the welfare of the disadvantaged in India. “Everyone might not be able to give money, but they can give their time. Anyone can give two hours a week to go out and volunteer,” he said.

Today, YUVA has mobilized more than 140,000 volunteers across the country, helping approximately 300,000 underprivileged children. “I’m very grateful to Alabama, because I’d been around poverty all my life—I’d become numb to it,” Shah explained. “The seeds of kindness and compassion were sown in me at the University.”

In January 2015, Shah received the Prince’s Prize for Innovative Philanthropy, developed by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and the Tocqueville Foundation in Paris. “It was very humbling to win this year,” Shah said. “They said the biggest thing they liked was the idea of giving two hours a week is such a globally scalable concept.”

Smith Sinrod



She sends her alma mater boxes of fabric, leftovers from creating her most recent fashion collection. “I need to get a box down to the fashion students, so they can have some fun stuff to play with, considering I really enjoyed when that

happened,” said Smith Sinrod, a 2009 graduate of UA with a bachelor’s degree in apparel and textiles. She learned almost everything she needed to become a fashion designer in college, she said. “I knew how to doodle before, but that was about it,” she laughed. While at the Capstone, she learned how to draw fashion illustrations, make patterns and drape fabrics. These are the basics, Sinrod noted, that are taught at any fashion school—except UA also had the added bonus of great football games.

After launching her brand, called by SMITH, in Atlanta in 2010, Sinrod is now based in New Orleans, and her line is produced in the Garment District of New York City each season. She designs two collections each year, meaning she has now debuted more than 10, each featuring Thai silk, her signature material. Her work, which she said is inspired by her Southern roots, is sold in upscale stores domestically and internationally, and has been featured in several fashion shows and media outlets, including *E!*, *Regis and Kelly*, *Town & Country*, *Real Simple* and *Southern Living*.

Besides having to break the language barrier to get her first collection manufactured in Thailand, Sinrod said adjusting to the combination of designing and selling her products was her biggest challenge. “I started to realize that I had to be a business woman, too. Now, that’s the main part of my job, doing the sales and running the business. Designing is probably the smallest thing that I do—but it has the biggest impact.”