



The Risk Management and Insurance Program at Ole Miss

by Andre P. Liebenberg, Ph.D.

Ole Miss (www.olemiss.edu)

The University of Mississippi (founded in 1848 and affectionately known as Ole Miss) is an institution with a long and rich history — most recently highlighted by its hosting of the first presidential debate between Barack Obama and John McCain. The main campus of Ole Miss is in the small college town of Oxford. The campus features beautiful Georgian architecture and stunning landscaping, including “The Grove” — which is best enjoyed on football Saturdays when the Ole Miss Rebels take on their Southeastern Conference rivals.

The RMI Program (www.olemissbusiness.com/insurance)

The RMI program at Ole Miss (housed in the top 100-ranked School of Business Administration) is among the oldest in the world. The major dates back to 1947 and the first insurance classes were taught in the 1930s. For the vast majority of its history the program was staffed by only one full-time faculty member — assisted at times by several generous adjuncts.

The most significant event in the program’s history was the arrival of Dr. Larry Cox in 1995. During his tenure, the number of RMI majors has grown from 19 to more than 100 and private endowments supporting the program have more than quintupled. In 1998, Dr. Cox was named the first holder of the Robertson Chair of Insurance — funded primarily by private contributions from Jack “Bouncer” and Gwenette Robertson and other local insurance professionals. Since 1995 two additional RMI positions have been created — a second tenure-track faculty position and a project coordinator. The newly created tenure-track position was filled in 2001 by Dr. Karen Epermanis, who played a vital role in the early growth of the program. The project coordinator position was filled in 2005 by Camille Mitchell, an Ole Miss MBA graduate and Oxford resident who has excelled at organizing and managing the program’s various special events. In 2006, Dr. Epermanis left to join the faculty at Appalachian State University and Dr. Andre Liebenberg arrived from Old Dominion University to assume the newly endowed Liberto-King Professorship of Insurance. In addition to two RMI faculty positions supported by the Robertson Chair and the Liberto-King Professorship, the program occasionally relies on the service of local professionals to teach classes on the Oxford and Tupelo campuses.

Another key event in the program’s history was the formation (in 1995) and active participation of the Ole Miss Insurance Advisory Board. The Board consists of 25 industry leaders with a wide variety of backgrounds and has been pivotal in improving industry-university communication, student job and internship placement and private funding of the RMI program. The Board, which meets quarterly, is very involved in the operations of the program — helping to organize a wide variety of special events,

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and monitoring financial reports pertaining to the program. A recent initiative of the advisory board was the creation of an RMI Professional Society, comprised of alumni and friends, with the primary purpose of supporting the Ole Miss RMI program.

The staffing of the Ole Miss RMI program is currently in transition as Dr. Cox prepares for his retirement in May 2011. Dr. Liebenberg will succeed him as Robertson Chair and will thus assume leadership of the program. Stephen (Steve) Fier, a Ph.D. candidate at Florida State University, will join the faculty in August 2011 and will hold the Liberto-King Professorship.

The faculty will continue to adhere to its mission of excellence in teaching, research and service. While the faculty has received several teaching awards, it views job-placement as a primary indicator of teaching success. The placement rate of almost 100 percent reflects the success of Dr. Cox's strategy of connecting students with employers. The faculty is committed to performing high-quality research and thrives on the research-active environment of the School of Business Administration. Its research has been published in the leading RMI journals and has been awarded nationally competitive research grants. In addition to its university and departmental service, the faculty strives to serve the profession by leading and participating in academic societies such as the American Risk and Insurance Association, the Southern Risk and Insurance Association and the Risk Theory Society.

Curriculum, Professional Designations and Scholarships

The program focuses primarily on commercial property-casualty insurance and risk management. While our classes contain substantial material from textbooks and professional media, we are careful to include several comprehensive projects that enable students to apply their knowledge to "real-world" problems. CPCU designation materials are incorporated into our classes and students are encouraged to take the CPCU exams in our approved testing center. Like many other programs, we reimburse the registration fee for students that pass the CPCU exams. Recently, several of our courses were approved for designation credit by the National Alliance for Insurance Education. Students are able to graduate with two credits toward to the CIC (Certified Insurance Counselor) or CRM (Certified Risk Manager) designation.

RMI majors are required to take the following courses.

- **Risk and Insurance:** The introductory course in the RMI sequence. This class lays the foundation for the RMI course sequence and is used to recruit new RMI majors as it is an elective course for non-RMI majors. Guest speakers are selected to provide students with broad exposure to the industry and career paths, and to generate excitement about the insurance industry. Officers of the student RMI Society make a presentation regarding the major and their experiences with internships, trips to conferences, etc. The class includes a group project in which students evaluate the personal risk exposures and insurance portfolio of a "client." Students are required to apply the risk management process to their client and make recommendations regarding insurance and non-insurance techniques.
- **Life and Health Insurance:** Our primary life-health offering that builds on students' exposure to these exposures and coverages from the introductory class. The class includes a project in which students are required to evaluate the adequacy of a "client's" life and health insurance portfolio and make coverage recommendations.
- **Commercial Property Insurance:** A hybrid of two CPCU courses — Insurance Operations (CPCU 520) and Commercial Property Risk Management and Insurance

(CPCU 551). The class includes a group project in which students provide an in-depth analysis of a selected property-casualty insurer. Their reports include a detailed financial analysis of the insurer using NAIC statements, A.M. Best reports and other materials. This project assists students with their job search as the entire set of company reports generated by each cohort for the past several years is available to students as they prepare for job and internship interviews.

- **Commercial Liability Insurance:** Follows the CPCU Commercial Liability Risk Management and Insurance course and prepares students to take the CPCU 552 exam. This class is our primary effort to prepare students to pass a section of the CPCU designation as it focuses almost exclusively on the relevant CPCU materials.
- **Corporate Risk Management:** The capstone class of the RMI curriculum. The class provides an advanced analysis of the risk management process for corporations. Students learn how to evaluate and manage risks using an enterprise-wide perspective. The highlight of the class is a case study that requires the creation of a risk management and insurance plan for a fictitious company. The case studies are developed in collaboration with colleagues at Florida State University and the University of Georgia. Students apply their knowledge from prior RMI classes to form recommendations regarding loss control techniques, insurance coverages, etc. Students then present their recommendations to a panel of brokers, underwriters and risk managers. For the faculty, these presentations (and the subsequent discussions with the external panelists) are an important quality control opportunity. The presentations are also an opportunity to showcase the skills and talents of our students to leading industry professionals.

In addition to the abovementioned “traditional” courses, RMI majors are able to earn credit for performing up to two paid internships and/or studying abroad.

- **Internships:** The internship program has been very successful as all students requesting an internship have been placed. Students are required to keep a journal of their experiences and are evaluated at the end of the internship by their supervisor(s). Ole Miss students have also benefited greatly from the NAPSLO internship program. In 2009, two of our students were selected for the highly-competitive internship program and one student was selected to attend the annual meeting in Florida (she was subsequently chosen as the best NAPSLO intern and was awarded a further internship in Bermuda). More than 60 percent of fall RMI graduates successfully complete an internship.
- **Study Abroad in London:** Students have the ability to experience the Lloyd’s and London insurance markets in May each year. In recent years, students have spent time at a box with an underwriter, discussed placements with Lloyd’s brokers and visited with reinsurers.
- **Scholarships:** The RMI program typically awards \$30,000 annually in scholarships from internal funds. In addition to these internally funded scholarships, students compete for external scholarships from professional organizations. Organizations that have awarded scholarships to RMI majors include the CPCU Society Memphis Chapter, the Memphis RIMS chapter, the Council of Agents and Brokers and the Spencer Foundation.

Industry Involvement

The Ole Miss RMI faculty is committed to creating opportunities for students to connect with employers and future colleagues. In addition to our successful internship program, students are exposed to employment and networking opportunities through the following avenues.

- **Careers Days and Placement:** The most important industry events for students are the spring and fall *Ole Miss RMI Career Days* held on campus. Historically we have held the career days in the spring, usually around St. Valentine's Day. In recent years, roughly 30 firms have attended the spring event. In 2010, we held our inaugural fall career days in early October. The focus of the career days is an RMI career fair. Employers are able to schedule interviews in the Ole Miss Career Center on the morning of the career fair as well as the entire day following the career fair. Employers receive an advance copy of the RMI résumé book (that is also mailed to more than 500 employers throughout the U.S.) and are able to manage interview scheduling electronically. The ultimate purpose of the résumé book, career days and focused curriculum is to prepare our students for employment in the insurance industry. The Ole Miss RMI program prides itself on its placement rate of almost 100 percent. While many of our students ultimately accept jobs in the Southeast, we are impressed at their willingness to relocate — a sampling of placements in 2009–2010 includes Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City and Tampa.
- **Insurance Symposium:** The most visible activity of the Advisory Board has been the planning, development and hosting of the Ole Miss Insurance Symposium each year. The Symposium attracts nationally known speakers, recently including the CEOs of Travelers, ACE USA, Republic Group and the Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America, among others. The symposium, held on campus at the Inn at Ole Miss, typically attracts roughly 350 insurance professionals and RMI students. The symposium offers attendees the opportunity to earn continuing education credit, listen to industry leaders, network with fellow insurance professionals and support the RMI program. For the RMI program, the symposium is an important way to attract new visitors to our campus and to develop or strengthen relationships with employers.
- **Various national and local conferences:** Throughout the year students attend a range of professional meetings. The Memphis RIMS chapter has been an active supporter of the RMI program for many years and welcomes students at its monthly meetings. Each year, the Memphis RIMS chapter sponsors a group of students to attend the annual RIMS meeting. Several students have also benefitted from the highly competitive Anita Benedetti Student Involvement Program that sponsors attendance at the national RIMS meeting. Other professional networking and educational opportunities enjoyed by students include the Mississippi Insurance Education Day, the Insurors of Memphis shadow day, and the Troy/NAPSLO surplus lines symposium and career fair.

Conclusion

Despite being one of the world's oldest programs, the Ole Miss RMI program continues to innovate and improve. In recent years, our curriculum and research agenda have developed to reflect changes in the risk management and insurance landscape — such as the advent of enterprise risk management and the financial crisis. Other programmatic innovations in the past few years include the addition of a second (fall) annual career fair and the formation of the Ole Miss RMI Professional Society. These positive developments are facilitated by the commitment of our staff and advisory board and the generosity of our alumni and program sponsors. We are deeply grateful for the consistent support of the industry that we serve and remain focused on improving the quality of our RMI program.

For more information on the Ole Miss RMI program please visit our website at www.olemissbusiness.com/insurance or contact Dr. Liebenberg at aliebenberg@bus.olemiss.edu.

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CPCU eJournal, Vol. 64 No. 4
April 2011
www.cpcusociety.org
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