

Kasie Whitener (00:02):

Welcome back to the Moore School podcast. This is Moore Impact. I'm your host, Kasie Whitener. And with me today, Dr. Rohit Verma, our Dean of the Moore School of Business. Welcome into the podcast.

Dean Verma (00:13):

Thank you, Casey. My pleasure to be here.

Kasie Whitener (00:15):

I'm glad you're here. We have a lot to talk about: you're new in the role, you're going into your second year at the Moore School. So tell us just a little bit about what your vision for the Moore School is. What does it look like to you now and where do we wanna go?

Dean Verma (00:28):

So first of all, thank you very much for inviting me to participate in this program. We are at a very exciting point in time at the Moore School, and I'm fortunate to have this role to be able to work with faculty, staff, and also broader community to really enhance the impact of the school. As you know, I started my position last year, August 1st, so it's almost about a year. And this year I got a chance to engage with our own faculty and students, but also many alumni corporate partners. I also got a chance to meet a wide range of people in the community and across the university. And that had allowed me to get appreciation for the broader impact the school has made over the last several decades. Just a few years ago, many people did not know about our school.

Dean Verma (01:26):

Many people thought it's just another large state university, but we all know that this school has made some amazing impact. A very large number of students from across the country apply to study here. We have faculty who are topnotch in their disciplines. They publish. We have alumni who are leading major companies all around the world. So that's our background. And what we really have to do is build on the strength. So when you talk about the future vision, I would just start with that and say, okay, we don't need to create anything new just for the sake of creating something new. We have many, many strong programs already. Just within degree programs. I can quickly tell you. We have seven different master's program, professional master's program. We have seven different PhD program. We have seven different undergraduate majors or, or concentrations within the school. So what we are going to do is during the second year, we will take carefully take a look at all our strengths. For example, we have a finance scholars program, we have operations scholars program, we have masters in hr, all highly regarded master for International Business Management Science. We'll take a look at those and say, how can we enhance them further? And that has been our working principle, which we are building on.

Kasie Whitener (02:54):

We've had an episode with our finance scholars lead. We've had an episode with our MHR lead. So there's plenty of this conversation happening in Moore Impact already, which is fun to like then bring you in. Like, let's talk about it. Let's capstone all of that, right? The students that we have that are currently enrolled have all of these opportunities available to them. But we also wanna reach out to those potential students that may be coming to the Moore School and answer the question, why should they study with us? Do you think that it's these, the strengths that we have in our existing programs are some of that messaging we can put out to potential students?

Dean Verma ([03:29](#)):

Yes, we can definitely talk to potential students about our strong program, but I'll go a little bit beyond that. Honestly, this day if somebody wants to get basic knowledge in any field you can just go to YouTube, <laugh>, you know, or, you know, many young people, they just go to chat GPT, for example, right? So, point is that the basic knowledge is readily available. You don't need to go to university for basic knowledge. What you do need to go to university is to enhance our mind, you know, to interact with people, to, to learn critical thinking, to be able to understand unstructured information, and then try to make sense out of that and so on. So those are kind of things which universities can really impact students these days. And these are the elements which make Moore school unique.

Dean Verma ([04:28](#)):

So you gave example of finance scholars and, you know, operations scholar, essentially, they are all examples of experiential learning action based learning, active learning. And when I see our school, I see many, many of these things around there. Furthermore, we have other programs where we let students decide and take the lead. We have more than 30 plus student clubs, and each of these clubs are run by students. We give them some budget. We give them other resources. So students can come in, they can create a consulting club, they can join you know, club, which is based on some hobby. It could be a club, which is based on some public service and all of that. So I think those are kind of things which I think prospective students should look at above and beyond what you do in the classroom.

Kasie Whitener ([05:22](#)):

Yeah, I agree. I think there's an opportunity for them to kind of build their own experience at the Darla Moore School with, given all of these club opportunities, all the societies and the different scholar programs that we have, and there's a, a chance for them to participate in real projects and work with real companies and spend time in our community that I think may not be equal in other places. I think, especially given our location in downtown Columbia, it's this capital of the state. We have a number of businesses that are located here, and there's a chance for them to be out into the world more so than there might be at, at, you know, at a university that maybe doesn't have that same urban access.

Dean Verma ([06:02](#)):

I, I agree. And furthermore, our alumni, our past students, if you will, they feel generally speaking very positively about the school. And we have more than 50,000 alumni all around the world. And actually 5,000 of them, they're right next to us in Charlotte <laugh>. They are running major companies. They have all kinds of things which they're participating in above and beyond their professional work as well. So the incoming students also get a chance to actually engage with our alumni. You know, they come to classes as guest speakers. Of course they are able to come and recruit our current students and so on. So I think joining Moore School is a, joining a very large community of professional people.

Kasie Whitener ([06:54](#)):

Our current students have just a huge number of options, of course, in being engaged with all the different programming that we do, and events and centers and all of that sort of thing. In the classroom itself, are you seeing, or do you have any idea anecdotes of the learning procedures that are maybe I would say learning environments that are maybe more dynamic or anything that you think that we're doing a little bit better in the classroom than maybe some of our competitors are doing?

Dean Verma ([07:24](#)):

So we have several faculty members who are top rated professors not just for their research, but actually for their educational efforts. For example a leading media company, Poets & Quants last year selected three of our professors to be in their top 50 best ranked faculty members. Most, most schools, if they're lucky, they have one on that list. We have three. I think there was only one other university which had three. And that's called University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School, and then us. Now, I give this as an example because I have got a chance to see firsthand how faculty are really engaging students. I got a chance last year to go sit in many different classes, and I also talked to students. And what they talk about is that faculty members are generally speaking, not just delivering the knowledge, they are much more they're much more engaging.

Dean Verma ([08:24](#)):

They do case studies they do group discussions. They're using new technology in a very creative way. And I can give you one simple example. In one professor's class I saw an innovative use of Chat GPT, where the professor was able to create a live debate between two Nobel Laureates who were on the two extreme who had two extreme point of view about one subject matter. And essentially, by following the written work of these two individuals the professor was able to simulate the debate between the two. And this was a fascinating experience for students to see, wow, you know, not only I can just read these scholars work, but I can actually see if they were to talk to each other, how they would have reacted to others' point of view. So there are many, many examples like that, and I think that's what makes our school unique from education point of view.

Kasie Whitener ([09:23](#)):

The classroom dynamics have been a conversation I've had with multiple guests on Moore Impact, because we think about when students are choosing to come to the Moore School to be here for four years, and our degree program begins in freshman year. So they don't have to wait until their junior year before they participate in business classes. So when they agree to come and spend the, these four years, spend this time, spend this money be away from home, a lot of them are coming in from outta state, or at least from out of the city. We want them to know that the environment they're coming to is one that is dynamic, that it's gonna keep them engaged, that it's going to teach them something they couldn't get if they were somewhere else. So, exactly to your point about they could get basic knowledge on YouTube, but could they get this Chat GPT simulation between these two poet laureates that was basically then facilitated by a knowledgeable professor who is very familiar with both of those laureates' work. So I just think that's a, a great example of using technology in the classroom to make it a more dynamic experience.

Dean Verma ([10:18](#)):

I totally agree. Yes.

Kasie Whitener ([10:19](#)):

Let's talk faculty research, because that is another place where the Moore School ranks very highly. We have quite a few accomplished, very accomplished researchers, and have had a number of them come in here and speak on Moore Impact as well, to talk about what they're looking into and why their research matters. Can you talk about why research is such a key component for what the Moore school's able to do as far as its impact on the community and on all of our constituents?

Dean Verma ([10:42](#)):

Yeah, let me talk a little bit in general terms first, and then I'll come specific sure. To the Moore School. See we all know that American universities are world renowned. And, and, and the reason why they are is because they have basically three missions broadly speaking. So education is clearly the first one. Education, we can think about that as a delivery of knowledge, if you will. The second mission is always research, which is creation of new knowledge. And then third is, of course, translating that knowledge to make impact in, in the community or businesses et cetera. So why this is really important is because if we do not create new knowledge, then essentially we will be just recycling the existing knowledge. And we all know that the world cannot go further, we cannot solve real issues if we don't look at new look at the problems and try to solve them in new and different way.

Dean Verma ([11:45](#)):

I think that's the nature of research. In case of business school, our world is the business, right? So that's our domain. And so our faculty member in the Moore School, they have chosen to mostly focus on empirical research, broadly speaking, by empirical research, I mean, using some type of real data whether it's a case study data, whether it's a quantitative data, qualitative data, majority of our faculty members are working on projects, which has data. And I think this is a good positioning for the school because this allows our faculty member to actually identify some of the burning issues in different industry, and then go ahead and, and solve it. So, for example, we have faculty members who are looking at the banking industry in, in the finance department. We have faculty member in the management department who are looking at leadership issues and succession planning and so on.

Dean Verma ([12:45](#)):

We have faculty member in the management science department who are looking at some very innovative industries above and beyond manufacturing. They're looking at not-for-profit like food banks. They're looking at, you know, people who are disadvantaged as, as a customer or as a, as any other member of the community, and then trying to figure out ways by which they can get better access to, to goods and services and so on. So in our school, I see first very broad impact empirical work, meaning we using real data. And what is very unique is that our faculty consistently publish in top journals. It, it is important to publish in top journals because first of all, it shows the overall quality of what the level of quality of our faculty's work, but also because of the impact. You know, if you're able to publish in top journal, then we can definitely be assured that the, the work which you are doing will be most highly regarded and, and then get used. So it's, it's great to be part of this academic community. And

Kasie Whitener ([14:02](#)):

They're contributing in general to this broader conversation, this global conversations around these really big problems that need solving. Right? That's right. So, Jason DeBacker was here a couple of episodes ago. We talked about tax policy and the opportunity to, through his research, recognize what potential tax policies would have as far as impact is concerned, which ones would work, which ones would not, what, what desired outcomes people can expect. When Joel Wooten was here two weeks ago, we talked about innovation and companies coming to the Moore School and saying, we have this challenge. And Joel's position was, well, is that the real problem? Or can we get at the root of the problem through our research and then come to a solution for the problem? So I think there's a connection too, between the research that we're doing and the people who are doing the research, and then the companies that come to us looking for assistance and looking for help.

Kasie Whitener ([14:54](#)):

Those company partnerships are really critical to not only give our students mm-hmm, <affirmative> an opportunity to see real world application, but also to give these companies a chance to maybe turn the corner on some particular challenge that they've been having or they've been experiencing. Can you talk a little bit about these, like the most of these, what Joel was telling me about are like graduate level problem, graduate school student projects, right? But sometimes there are undergrad projects as well. Can you talk a little bit about the connection between the companies that we're serving through these projects and how our students benefit, but also how the companies benefit from the more school work?

Dean Verma ([15:28](#)):

Sure. yeah. So as I mentioned earlier, we have a large number of faculty members. We have about 180 faculty members in our school, and we have right now 12 different research centers. And we are in the process of setting up two more. These research center actually play a very important role in connecting our faculty and students with the industry. Most of these centers are supported by large number of companies. These companies identify problems in their area and they would typically reach out to a center and then create a project and say, well, we have this issue. So for example, it could be a process improvement type of problem. It could be computer database related problem. It could be where we have large amount of data in the company, and then somebody has to analyze.

Dean Verma ([16:26](#)):

It could be a company trying to launch a new product or a service, and they wanna do some market research done, and so on. So these centers then become a vehicle by which we can connect with the industry, bring their problems, and then somebody has to solve the problem. And this is where faculty and students you know play a big role. Typically these projects are led by one or more faculty member, but students actually work on these real problems. So by doing so, students, first of all, they get to solve real problem, but they also get a chance to learn, you know, learn about the industry, learn how to actually take that unstructured information, put into some sort of a framework. So it's really win, win, win, win for faculty, win for students, and win for industry. And, and, you know, this was one of the reasons why our management science department actually was able to get the top award by an association called informs. INFORMS is the one of the largest professional society in business management. And they just awarded us with the UPS Smith Prize earlier similar prize earlier recipients of that award include universities like MIT and Carnegie Mellon. And now we have been recognized because, in part, because of projects like this and how we have made a strong impact for both faculty and students while connecting with the industry.

Kasie Whitener ([17:56](#)):

We've been talking about the event that we're going to celebrate that INFORMS prize, and it's hearkening back to this event that we had in the spring that we talked a little bit about on previous episodes of the podcast, which was the 50th anniversary of the International School of Business, the Darla Moore International School of Business. Can you talk a little bit about that event as a kind of capstone to your first year being here? What was it like to have all those alumni on site, to have all those companies that were here? People were really excited about that event. It was a great day, just a really great day. Just tell us a little bit about the planning of that and, and what the impact of that is for the school.

Dean Verma ([18:33](#)):

Sure. So as, as we have been discussing, this was our 50th year of leadership in international business. And right when I came August 1st last year as soon as I heard that this will be our 50th year and celebration year, I suggested to faculty that, you know, we should, we should build on that, right? And normally we only have a leadership recognition award dinner where we honor distinguished alumni and there are three different awards. So people from around the world come to attend that event. And so, my discussion with the faculty leaders and, and the Alumni Affairs was that, well, if people are coming here from all around the world, why not build on that, you know and try to create a intellectually stimulating program and create a program where there will be a forum between faculty, alumni, and industry leaders, and we should have students engaged with that.

Dean Verma ([19:38](#)):

So that was the, the initial discussion we had back last summer. And like I mentioned, faculty just liked this idea. They just took they basically then did everything on their own. So the day of the event we had several panel discussions. We had on contemporary issues like a war in Ukraine, we had issues about international partnerships about supply, global supply chain and so on. And furthermore, we also had student competition. Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>, right? We had the Proving Ground competition where we asked students to essentially do their own pitch about some creative ideas. And of course, the the top, top groups got prizes and, and, and decent prize money and so on. So, yeah, it, it was great, and I'm glad we did it. And, and I think this is going to become an annual event now. We are already planning for the next year, and next year we hope that our leadership dinner will be in Charlotte. And we will have a similar event throughout the day, either the day before or the day after, where again, we will bring people from industry and alumni, and then we'll engage in, in additional discussion.

Kasie Whitener ([21:02](#)):

There's so much momentum after an event like that when it goes as well as it did, and people were really excited about it. They felt like they felt proud of the school and proud of our accomplishments and the, and the work that we were doing and that our students were doing. And so we get a ton of momentum behind it. People wanna do more. They want the, you know, what's gonna happen in 2025? Like, let's, as we're moving forward, what, what do we have to look forward to? And so I mentioned the INFORMS event where we wanna have a celebration of having won this major award with manage with the management science department. What are some other things that we can look forward to in this upcoming school year, 2024-25?

Dean Verma ([21:36](#)):

So, during the coming academic year, we will have several new initiatives again to build on our strengths. So I have requested all the departments to think about you know, creating events in which they can bring not just industrial leaders, but also leading scholars. So I think this year we have at least three or four different conferences we'll be hosting. We have a conference in finance another one, International Business in Operations and Supply Chain. These three have already been scheduled. And actually on the fourth, there's another one in, in service management. So that, that's what I know so far already. We have a very robust event calendar. I think during the coming academic year we will be hosting alumni events in at least 15 different cities. And both in the United States and around the world.

Dean Verma ([22:35](#)):

We are also trying to invite several speakers from around the world who will be coming in as a visiting scholars or guest speakers in classes and so on. So these are things which will continue to do more,

more of, right more at Moore <laugh>. The idea being that they can further enhance what we already do. We'll also be taking some time to do curriculum review. It has been a while since we looked at our curriculum in a structured way. So this year, my request to faculty colleagues is that let's review our undergraduate curriculum, which is already great, but we can always improve. Let's look at our master's curriculum, especially the MBA and professional MBA programs, and see how we can enhance them further to make them more flexible, yet rigorous and so on. So that's something which we'll be doing.

Dean Verma ([23:34](#)):

We'll also make much bigger effort this year to further solidify and build the brand of our school. What I mean by that is we have several top rank programs and we are known for them, like number one, international business, number three in supply chain and so on. But as a school, we sometimes don't take full advantage of, of all of these rankings and rankings or reputational score, if you will. So what we want to do is basically bring all of these different types of strengths we have together into one umbrella of the school, and that will allow us to further enhance you know, our overall standing. So those are some of the things which we are hoping to do this year.

Kasie Whitener ([24:25](#)):

An overall portfolio of excellence so far already at the Moore School. And exciting opportunities to build out that portfolio that enhance not only our current students' experience, but certainly our alumni reputation, and of course, lure some of those prospective students to, to the Moore School, to want to invest their time and their energy and their talents with us. So it's exciting to be at the Moore School right now, certainly going into 2024 - 25, knowing what's on the horizon for all these different programs. Thank you so much Dr. Verma, for being here and for being a, a leader in the Darla Moore School of Business. We're grateful to you and for your leadership and for everybody that's participating in these efforts to move the school forward.

Dean Verma ([25:05](#)):

Thank you. Thank you. It's my pleasure to be here. And I for those of us, those of you who are listening, please visit us. You know, it's an amazing place. Visit us if you have a student who you want to send to the school, or if you just wanna come and take a look and engage with our faculty and our staff and students just come or attend some of the events. And I think you'll be very pleasantly surprised by all the amazing things which happens here. And my, it's my pleasure to be part of this team. Thank you very much.

Kasie Whitener ([25:36](#)):

Excellent. This has been more impact. When you learn more, you know more, and when you know more, you do more. Thanks for listening.