



➤ **Career Ready**
Student Matt Fagan enjoys the Business Building courtyard after a M.S. Business Analytics client presentation.

HOW I LEARN BY DOING

By Matt Fagan, M.S. Business Analytics Student

“I don’t think I’ve ever received more questions per hour than I did last night.”

I’ll never forget hearing those words from Rich Clayton, vice president of Oracle’s Business Analytics Product Group. It was the night before our M.S. Business Analytics cohort and Oracle were launching a collaborative industry project, the capstone experience of our new master’s program in the Orfalea College of Business. We represented its first class, the inquisitive guinea pigs.

We all did our best to pretend to know what we were getting into.

The next day, in Redwood Shores, we sat down with Oracle’s team to dig into our task: surveying five years of global sales data from Oracle’s Enterprise Performance Management product offered via its software-as-a-service platform. The goal was to analyze 250 product lines to identify where the company should invest its marketing efforts for maximum growth. It wasn’t a school project — it was a con-

sulting project: Cal Poly (the firm) and Oracle (the client). And our recommendations, although helped along by our classwork, were to be entirely our own production built from our own faculties.

Thankfully, each student didn’t have to go it alone. Our teams provided an incredible learning environment. We brought with us a variety of professional experiences — from a Taiwanese nuclear engineer to a Bakersfield banker. Throughout our undergrad careers, each



Facing Feedback

M.S. Business Analytics students hear direction on their presentations from Oracle's Ivgen Guner (center).

teammate was used to taking on an entire project by themselves, staying up until 3 a.m. before an 8 a.m. deadline to pull someone else's weight. Now, we put five of these A-types, both in personality and academia, together. It was my first experience of a real *team* — an actual functioning entity with an output greater than the sum of its components.

With the real team came real data: clean averages across more than 7,000 companies that use Oracle products — static images of the client's past, captured in numbers. We were charged with interpreting a whole command line of hierarchy, both explicit and implicit. Oracle gave us a clear storyline — a defined beginning, middle and end — and hired us as casting directors to find the actors, the twists and the struggles. This was not some sample file uploaded by an academic website; this was a detailed picture of a Fortune 500 company that carried real implications.

The data itself is confidential, but I can say that we built our own random forests and iterative logistics to find the best model to represent the information. We minimized variance and maximized

precision, and we connected the data to legitimate business insight ourselves.

After 10 long weeks and a 50-page report, it was time for our final presentation to Mr. Clayton, Elena Drozd, director of the Advanced Analytics Group, and other members of the Oracle team. Our group took the angle of actionability. We focused on providing specific recommendations Oracle's team could implement immediately while connecting the data to specific business decisions. Standing in front of Oracle's team to present was an empowering test of nerve, especially knowing they intended to put these findings into action.

I was blown away when our presentation was named best of the class, especially

7,561

Students analyzed data on
7,561 companies using 250
Oracle software products over
the last five years.

considering the caliber of work done by our classmates on other teams. Each group took a slightly different approach that Oracle found valuable, reiterating that there can be multiple right answers in a field like analytics.

Our reward was the standard trophy in business — more work. We were granted the opportunity to give an extended presentation to Ivgen Guner, the senior vice president of Oracle Global Business Finance, among other senior executives in marketing and data analytics at Oracle's headquarters.

We updated our report and walked in not knowing what to expect, and we met the most commanding audience of any presentation. Although we were the focal point of the discussion among Ms. Guner and other Oracle executives, we provided more of an axis for their objectives and understanding. The aggressive and targeted questioning gave us a taste of the nature of internal corporate meetings and proved to us just how well we understood the data and the story we built with it.

Working with Mr. Clayton, Ms. Drozd and the entire Oracle team was far above and beyond any class project thanks to its legitimate impact and review. The mix of joy, surprise, success, all the countless hours of work, the research, the modeling — it all culminated in that presentation to our clients.