

Boston's Barry Makes the Grade

His enthusiasm, personalized attention, and informality keep students flocking to this prof's Basic Finance class

By Kristin Dew, with additional reporting by Francesca Di Meglio
September 19, 2006

Boston College business students must really like Professor Mike Barry, whose classes are the first to fill up during registration. His course in introductory finance is a requirement for all business majors, but even the "C" students return for his corporate finance and investing courses.

Undergraduates expressed their devotion, when surveyed by *BusinessWeek* in 2006, by voting Barry their favorite Boston College business professor, making him among the top in the country. It's no wonder, because Barry comes from a long line of teachers; his grandfather and uncle were both professors. "I guess it's in my blood," he says. "I love being able to get students interested in what we're covering in class."

Basic Finance is a requirement, so plenty of students enter the class without any interest in the subject—but that lack of interest doesn't last long. To combat sleepy eyes, Barry starts off that first day by telling students to just call him Mike and to start thinking about their future 401(k) plans. He reminds students of the payout from starting a 401(k) at a young age, and they perk right up. If students want to pass, they must attend the lectures. Barry distributes basic notes, so students can concentrate on the mechanics, and opts for examples, current events, jokes, and tips on finance careers instead of PowerPoint presentations. "I try and tell them that it's finance, not formulas," says Barry. "I'll bring in an article about something going on in finance and say, 'Look, here's why it happened so don't get locked into formulas.'"

NO TIME CLOCK. That doesn't mean students are on easy street. Known for giving three-hour-long finals full of tough applied-finance problems, Barry is no pushover. "He expects quality work, but he also teaches really well and doesn't skip much," says Rachel Barnett, a 22-year-old recent grad who majored in finance and marketing and took both Basic Finance and Corporate Finance with Barry. "He goes into more depth than other teachers, so his classes are more difficult." Students are graded mostly on exams (usually two midterms and a final), and part of the grade is based on group projects (usually case studies or term papers).

As if being a professor weren't enough, Barry doubles as a career adviser. Barry's students go on to create a tight alumni network, and down the road they let him know when a spot opens at a company. During recruiting season, he spends the first 10 minutes of class talking about what to do and what not to do in the job search, and he gladly helps students prepare for interviews. "I think we're very well-rounded when it comes time for interviewing," says Inna Shaykevich, a finance and economics major who will graduate in 2007. Barry knows many of his students personally, and he frequently matches students with opportunities he hears about. He connected Rachel Barnett with an investment professor for a research project. Then, during her job search, Barry helped her find extra reading to review the kind of math that pops up during interviewing.

Office hours with Barry are as much a part of education as his lectures. This is time that he uses to learn more about students' interests and skills so he can help them find the right internships and jobs. "I care about them when they leave," says Barry. "That distinguishes us [professors at

Boston College] from someone who punches the time clock." Every August, recent grads start to e-mail him their new contact info, and he keeps in touch. "Then, in a few years, I write letters of recommendation for [graduate] business school," says Barry. Aspiring MBAs are all the better for it.

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