



Attract New Talent

WITH THE

Guest Lecture Program

Foundation tool
lets you promote
equipment finance
to the next generation

By Susan L. Hodges



“The Guest Lecture Program is a great way to get acquainted with the talent that’s coming up—and it gives you an advantage.”

—Ricky Rios, Commercial Equipment Finance, Inc.

RICARDO “RICKY” RIOS of Commercial Equipment Finance, Inc. (CEFI), of San Juan, Puerto Rico, delivered his first industry lecture to college students just a few months ago. During his presentation he used the Guest Lecture Program, a PowerPoint slide deck developed by industry experts to introduce students to the equipment finance industry, sponsored by the Equipment Leasing & Finance Foundation.

“We’ve hired young people since we opened nine years ago, and 20% of our current employees were recruited straight out of college,” says Rios, Chief Operating Officer of this independent. “Now we have our first summer intern, and he is one of the students who attended our lecture.”

Rios scheduled the lecture through the student finance association at the University of Puerto Rico. After his presentation, he invited students to CEFI’s facilities to learn more about the company. “We set up the conference room and furnished snacks, and eight students came. It wasn’t a huge turnout, but it was intimate and allowed everyone to participate. It was also good because they got to see our offices—and when we asked afterward if anyone was interested in participating in a summer internship, they all raised their hands.”

The company hired one of the eight, who was completing his internship when Rios spoke with *EL&F* magazine in July. “We feel like we brought value to everyone who attended our lecture and particularly to the intern who’s here now,” Rios says. “The Guest Lecture Program is a great way to get acquainted with the talent that’s coming up—and it gives you an advantage.”

Break from the Crowd

Kirk Phillips, President and CEO of Wintrust Commercial Finance in Frisco, Texas, shares that opinion. “No one plans to go to school for a degree in equipment finance, and the Guest Lecture Program helps us get the word out about our industry,” he says. “But it also gets us out of the pack where everyone recruits at the job fairs. At lectures, students get a chance to interact with a senior person in an organization, and many times, the sharp ones come up afterward to engage you in dialogue. They also want to network with you.”

Ricky Rios (far left) meets with students at his company.



Shortly after he came to Wintrust two years ago, Phillips reconnected with the business school at his alma mater, Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. He had taught there and was invited to return and speak.

The Guest Lecture Program was maturing at about the same time. "It all came together for me and felt very comfortable," he says. "I really enjoy presenting and engaging with the students."

To prepare, Phillips downloaded the GLP PowerPoint deck from the Foundation's website and spent "maybe 45 minutes to an hour" modifying it to tell his own story as well as that of the industry. "The presentation contains a lot of information, including facts about buying versus leasing and tax implications, so you can get very technical if you want," he says. "But most people use it as a starting point and then customize it for their presentation style and their particular story. The key is that you tell your own story."

Bonnie Wright, Senior Vice President & National Sales Manager-Bank Division at Wells Fargo Equipment Finance in Folsom, California, enjoys the program so much that she'd lecture once a month if she could. "You cannot fail in front of this audience, so if that's what's stopping you from participating, don't let it," she says. "You're an expert in their eyes and the voice of wisdom. If you stumble, they'll support you. They're eager to hear from you and they drink up the information."

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Wright has presented the GLP three times and is scheduled to lecture twice more this year. "The first time I did it I had a child in college and I thought, 'What better than to have a friendly face in the audience,' so I selected that school," she says. "Then I reached out to my alma mater as a way to give back, and next I contacted a school locally. Our industry gives us the opportunity to work with business owners in our community and build up the economy where we live, and the GLP is another great way we can do that."

Wright says students who attend the talks want to know where to start their careers and what to do if they make mistakes. "They also want to know how you got into the business,

what excites you about it and how you've become a leader," she adds. And while she agrees that each speaker should tell his or her story, Wright thinks it's also important to focus on the industry collectively. "That's a much more energetic way to speak instead of talking about your own company," she says.

Tell the Story

Jeffrey Elliott agrees. "The GLP is about getting young people interested in our industry," says Elliott, Chairman of the Foundation and Senior Managing Director of Huntington Equipment Finance in Cleveland. "Ours is a business that many of us fell into and didn't know much about, and we'd like to change that for the next generations. By getting in front of students to educate them about what we do and bring them into the industry, we're paying it forward to make a lasting impact."

Kelli Nienaber, Executive Director of the Foundation, says industry volunteers presented 20–25 lectures in 2016 and 2017 and are on schedule to do the same this year. "We may have done even more, but we don't always hear about them," she says. "Unless people send us photos or tell us about it, we won't know they've lectured, so we're working to better track where and when presentations happen."

The Foundation has long been known for research and industry studies, but Elliott says the organization is now broadening its focus. "We also want to be known for other types of programs, such as the GLP and our Internship Center," he says. The Foundation Internship Center (www.leasefoundation.org/academic-programs/internship-resources/) was created last year and provides a platform for students and organizations to find each other and make connections. Students can post their résumés, search for internships and apply for them online. Employers can post internship opportunities, search résumés or set up alerts when résumés are emailed in and manage applications. Says Nienaber, "The Center was a natural extension of the Guest Lecture Program, because after a presentation, students want to know how they can get an internship or a job and who they can contact to learn more."

Another activity under consideration: mentoring. Says Nienaber, "As we recruit new people into the industry, we want to ensure that they are appropriately mentored so they will stay and develop in their careers."

5 Steps to a Great Lecture

VOLUNTEERS who've presented the Guest Lecture Program emphasize that the Foundation makes it easy. Here are five steps they recommend to also make your presentation successful.

- 1. CALL OR WRITE** to your selected school to say you'd like to speak to business students about the equipment finance industry. Ask for contact information for the Department Chair or instructor who schedules such events. Also ask for contact information for the student business association if one exists.
- 2. EXPLAIN** a bit about the presentation once you've made contact with the appropriate instructor or student leader and work to schedule it. Also ask if there are particular aspects of the industry he or she would like for you to cover.
- 3. TAKE AN HOUR TO PREPARE** by downloading and customizing the PowerPoint deck from www.leasefoundation.org. Reorder the slides if necessary to accommodate your presentation and delete those that speak to areas you will not cover. Focus on the industry collectively rather than on your niche market or your company.
- 4. TELL YOUR STORY.** "When you begin, ask how many in your audience have a car loan, a student loan or a personal loan," suggests Rios. "Find personal ways to help them understand what we do." Present for 30 to 35 minutes and then ask for questions. "Be prepared for anything," says Phillips. "These are smart kids who can come at things from unexpected angles. "One student asked me how important it is in my role to guide and direct the culture of my company, and I had to think about that for a minute."
- 5. HANG AROUND; FOLLOW UP.** Take your time leaving, since students who were too shy to ask questions in front of the group may come up afterwards. Others may want to connect with you on social media or find out where and how they can learn more about the industry. Then be sure to complete the post-lecture survey linked to the Foundation website.

Share Yourself

In the meantime, Elliott and Nienaber are working to entice more volunteers to deliver the GLP. "The tools you need are on our website," says Elliott. "You'll find sample letters to customize and send to the dean of a school's finance department, to the career development office and others. It might take a few tries to find the right contact person, but many of the tools were built from the experiences of volunteers. We have Frequently Asked Questions and a pre- and post-lecture checklist, for example. We get feedback from volunteers and refine the program going forward."

Wright does something similar with the questions raised by students after her lectures. "I love the Q&A period because it's never the same and it challenges me to think about things we need to do as an industry," she says. "The students always have fresh insights about the future, and I take these back and share those insights with my team to help broaden our outlook as we build our future strategy."



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Example: One student asked Wright what, in light of so much online innovation and increasing use of artificial intelligence, made her think that the equipment finance industry wouldn't be replaced with automation. "That was a real stumper, and I had to pause and think about it," she says. "I told them that automation cannot replace the personal aspect of relationships, and that equipment finance professionals are advisors who can think bigger and better than automated systems ever can." The question and Wright's answer to it led her to talk with her team about the services and value Wells Fargo Equipment Finance provides to its customers. Says Wright, "My whole team is benefiting from these conversations."

Meanwhile, Ricky Rios is planning his company's approach to lecturing at private universities in Puerto Rico. "We're definitely interested in doing more of these activities, and this is our next step," he says. "Now that we have our presentation, we're ready to go."

To learn more and see how easy it is to get involved, go to www.leasefoundation.org, click on Academic Programs and then on Guest Lecture Program. Then contact Foundation Program Manager Stephanie Fisher at sfisher@leasefoundation.org to say you'll present. ☰

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Kirk Phillips presents the Guest Lecture Program.