



# ***WE CAN DO IT!***

MBA Student Organization Forms Strong Alliance of Female Professionals

*Story by Amanda Sebesta*

*Photos by Nicki Evans*

For members of Bauer College's National Association of Women MBAs, the journey to personal and professional success is best navigated with a team.

And in the last year, this student organization has grown its team by more than doubling membership from 2013, marking the highest level of growth since 2011, and refining its mentorship program and professional development events.

The women leading NAWMBA this year all have different stories, but what unites them is a shared goal in supporting each other and their classmates with a mantra that is likely familiar to many others striving for success – “We Can Do It!”



Sometimes, in life and in our careers, we all need a reset button. For Stephanie Williams, getting an MBA was just that.

After earning a bachelor's degree in history from UH in 2006, she began a career as a teacher for grades 4-12. That journey brought her to Madrid, where she taught for a few years, and back stateside, as she began to explore social educational policy research.

From there, Williams decided that her next move was an MBA.

She's modest when it comes to describing her leadership role with NAWMBA, saying that she was "elected by default," but with the help of fellow board members and a group of other ambitious women, they reorganized the organization with an emphasis on outreach and professional development events.

"NAWMBA is about strengthening ties with professionals. It's about collaboration with organizations and customizing your professional development with what you need," Williams said. "And overall, it is to empower women to take on leadership positions in business."

Although Williams is no longer a teacher by profession — she is working in compliance for Chevron — she still knows how to guide others through a bit of well-considered advice.

When it comes to talking to other women about graduate education, she focuses on empowerment through teamwork.

"If you're looking at personal growth, and you think you can't have this because you have kids or a job, or anything along those lines, getting your MBA changes that," Williams said. "You see your classmates doing the same thing as you with all of these factors, and it builds your confidence."

## **STEPHANIE WILLIAMS (MBA '15)** *President*

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As she walked across the stage this May, Nelly Lopez became the first in her family to earn an MBA.

While that is an important milestone, she hopes to blaze an even bigger trail for other women as she takes on the workforce.

“For me, it’s apparent that women don’t have the same presence as males in boardrooms,” Lopez said. “How can women make a path in the workforce when they hold less than one-third of management positions? I want to promote the movement that women are just as qualified as men, and getting involved with NAWMBA made sense because the organization holds those values.”

After earning an undergraduate degree in finance and accounting, she worked for a few years in compliance and private banking and mortgage. She then decided to make a move to oil and gas, while she pursued her MBA at Bauer, where she had the opportunity to work as a portfolio manager in the college’s Cougar Investment Fund.

Graduate education can be a challenge for any student, Lopez said, but it’s an investment worth making.

“People can strip you of things, but they can’t strip you of your education,” she added. “The way that society is moving, an MBA or master’s degree is the norm, and to be able to compete, you have to be on top of your game. It’s tough, but worth it.”

**NELLY LOPEZ (MBA '15)**  
*Executive Vice President*

If Raiya Al Salmi needs a reminder as to why she made the right decision to pursue her MBA, she looks no further than her daughter.

She moved to Houston from Oman three years ago with her husband and their two children. Her husband transferred jobs, and Al Salmi took the opportunity to pursue the Bauer MBA program after reaching a plateau in her career in oil and gas.

“At my last job, I was the only female in my department,” she said. “I wanted to get my MBA and join NAWMBA to empower other women, and I want to set a good image for my daughter, too.”

The full-time MBA student also served on Bauer’s MBA Advisory Board and as a portfolio manager on the Cougar Investment Fund.

“Part of the reason of why I’m into empowering women, is because my father was into that,” Al Salmi added. “He knew how male dominated the culture was, so for me it was about being independent, and he used to tell me to get my master’s degree. He pushed it when I was doing my undergrad and when I came here, it was perfect timing, and I had that in the back of my mind to do this.”



**RAIYA AL SALMI (MBA '15)**  
*Executive Vice President of Finance*