

# Educating Financial Leaders for a Rapidly Changing Industry

THE ABA STONIER GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BANKING



## The Challenge

How does a long-established banking school shift its educational approach to accommodate dramatic changes in the financial services industry? How does it build agility and innovative thinking in tomorrow's leaders? That was the challenge facing the ABA Stonier Graduate School of Banking, an institution with a reputation as the industry's pre-eminent graduate banking program.

For decades, ABA Stonier successfully educated banking leaders in traditional areas such as asset-liability management, risk management, pricing, and marketing strategies. But several years ago, the American Bankers Association became aware that a greater focus on leadership development was increasingly necessary. With the rise of digital competitors, fintech, and other disruptive forces, the school needed to hone skills such as strategic agility and critical thinking in addition to imparting industry knowledge.

ABA Stonier sought an outstanding executive education partner to enhance the leadership aspects of its program. It wanted to prepare its students for assuming higher levels of responsibility in their organizations, enabling those institutions to thrive in a transforming, uncertain financial environment.

*“Building a bench of future leaders for the banking industry is a strategic imperative for ABA. Our partnership with Wharton helped integrate a powerful leadership component into our flagship graduate banking program at Stonier, and the results speak for themselves—growing enrollment, a highly relevant curriculum with cutting-edge learning strategies, and a strong network of Stonier alumni—representing the new generation of banking industry leadership.”*

— **Jim Edrington**, Chief Member Engagement Officer,  
American Bankers Association



American  
Bankers  
Association®

## THE IMPACT

- **Sustained Success:** The program has run every year since 2011
- **Increased Program Attendance:** Participation has exceeded ABA Stonier's expectations, rising significantly to 700 per year
- **Leadership Building:** Participants return to their institutions with an increased ability to strategically lead, to motivate and mentor others, and to thrive in a changing industry
- **Career Building:** Students earn both a Stonier diploma and a Wharton Leadership certificate, augmenting their industry credentials
- **Enhanced Reputation:** ABA Stonier is the only graduate banking school that partners with an Ivy League university
- **Marketing Advantage:** Wharton's team-building focus stimulates students to form lasting relationships and a professional network, which facilitated ABA Stonier's launch of an alumni society

## Boosting Leadership Agility: The Looking Glass Simulation

Highly interactive courses led by Wharton faculty prepare students to make fast, confident business decisions in the face of time pressure and uncertainty. One such course is the **Looking Glass Simulation**.

Designed by Wharton especially for ABA Stonier, the simulation breaks first-year students into competitive teams in which they develop a business plan for a hypothetical product on a tight deadline. The teams are thrown various curve balls by game masters including a public relations fiasco, a cyber-security hack, and the need to fire an employee.

This unique experience takes participants out of their comfort zone, helping them to build relationships, work on key business problems, boost their decision-making skills, and refine their crisis communication abilities.

### THE IMPACT

Feedback from participants about the Wharton collaboration has been strongly positive. “It is already a tremendous honor to be a part of Stonier, but to also have the caliber of leadership teaching that Wharton provides is monumental,” says Amy Morbeck, a senior vice president at **Arvest Bank in Overland Park, Kansas**.

Matt Freimuth, a vice president at **BB&T Bank in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania**, agrees: “The Wharton-Stonier partnership brings together the combined credibility, history, and prestige of these two phenomenal institutions/programs.”

Many participants have remarked on the real-world applicability of the Wharton learnings, including Maggie Steinour, a senior vice president and chief administrative officer at **Mid Penn Bank in Millersburg, Pennsylvania**. “It was very insightful. I will be able to use many of the skills I learned during the sessions in my everyday job and interactions.”

Slade M. Simons, an executive vice president at **Gulf Coast Wealth Management in Metairie, Louisiana**, says that topics such as leadership and growth accelerators have been a great addition to the curriculum. “These elements will allow me to have a better framework of understanding for two of the most important factors in running a bank: leading your staff and profitability growth.”

“Leadership nowadays is more than it was in the past—it is not just being a manager,” observes Nuno Rocha of **Millennium BCP in Albufeira, Portugal**. “The Wharton faculty gave us a modern and advanced viewpoint of the topic.”



### Participants in the Looking Glass Simulation said:

*“It offered a great insight into how to better interact with a team, but also how to properly manipulate each other’s strengths to ultimately help the team succeed.”*

— Justin Foster, VP Commercial Lending, Community First National Bank, Kerrville, Texas

*“When they ‘pulled the curtain back’ at the end and showed how our simulated environment was directly related to our present banking environment, I was totally blown away.”*

— Raymond McLanahan, Senior Vice President, Landmark National Bank, Overland Park, Kansas

*“Very helpful exercise and a great learning experience.”*

— William Gambon Jr., Senior Vice President, Century Bank, Medford, Massachusetts