

Hard Times Are Good Fit for Finance Degree

May 08, 2009 11:15 AM Fran Simon

fsimon@tulane.edu

Roommates Dennis Cristallo and Robert Myers are graduating this Saturday (May 16) with bachelor of science degrees in finance from the A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University. Not long after celebrating this accomplishment, they will be starting in the school's master of finance program. Is their decision a reflection of the current economic downturn? "Absolutely," they say in unison.



Roommates Dennis Cristallo, left, and Robert Myers are jumping immediately into graduate school in the summer after graduating this May with finance degrees. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"I've had a couple of dozen interviews but companies are not hiring," says Cristallo, who had hoped to find a bank position in private wealth management.

The [master of finance](#) program, which experienced a 35 percent increase in applicants this year, begins in the summer with a class of 80.

Cristallo and Myers say they hope to become more attractive candidates for employment after completing the one-year program.

“My reasoning is that if we can't get a job now, hopefully by May 2010 things will have turned around,” Myers says. “In the meantime we'll have done something to better ourselves and to improve our chances of getting good jobs.”

In March, the Princeton Review listed the [Freeman School](#) among 15 institutions offering superlative preparation in finance.

“We're having a phenomenal year,” says Bill Sandefer, director of graduate admission, financial aid and enrollment management at the Freeman School. “When the market changes ? that's when the finance degree becomes really relevant.”

Venkat Subramaniam, associate professor and Exxon Professor of Finance at Tulane, says the master of finance program gives “a very significant edge to a student in the job market.” According to Subramaniam, the loosening of the U.S. monetary policy now should improve employment prospects and productivity in a year or two, and finance jobs will go to the people with advanced skills and knowledge.

The master of finance degree “is not just an additional line on a resume,” concurs Salvatore Cantale, clinical professor of finance and economics, who directs the program. He points to the Student Managed Fund course in which students help manage a portion of the university's endowment, and the Burkenroad Reports, an investment research program in which students research and write equity-analysis reports on small and undervalued companies across the region. In Cantale's financial engineering course, participants use Crystal Ball, a state-of-the-art simulation software program that teaches concepts such as value at risk that are used as risk metrics worldwide.

Subramaniam predicts that when the economy warms up, a variety of finance positions will begin reappearing in the market, including equity analysts and portfolio managers, in-house credit evaluators in lending institutions, and trading and risk managers who can stay on top of the currency markets globally. In addition, he predicts that in Texas and the Southeast, energy finance ? including trading in energy assets and risk management ? will offer opportunities.

Soon-to-be enrolled graduate students Cristallo and Myers agree: this is an interesting time to be studying finance.