

Kasie Whitener (00:02):

Welcome into Moore Impact. I'm Kasie Whitener, your host and today's episode is going to focus on our mentoring program for our undergraduates and our graduate students. With me in the studio, Corey Mikels, director of Alumni Engagement and a double alum from the Moore School 2018 and undergrad in the PMBA in 2023. You love this place, <laugh>?

Corey Mikels (00:23):

I do. I, they brought, I came in as a student and I really never left. I feel like so very passionate about the Moore School. It's given me a lot in the past and I'm just happy to be able to still work with, you know, staff members, the students and give back in any way that I can.

Kasie Whitener (00:41):

Let's talk about the Office of Alumni engagement and the structure thereof and how you guys engage with our alum. We've had at least one alumni on the program and so we know that our alum want to give back. They wanna be part, talk to us about the office that you work in and who's in that office and what kind of work you guys do.

Corey Mikels (00:57):

Yeah, exactly. Okay, so there's a mighty team of four. There's four individuals and that has changed, you know, over the course of a few years. But we have solidified that group so far. And my boss is Bo Hart. He is Senior Director of Alumni Engagement. He is a Columbia native but did his undergrad at Virginia Tech. But he has come back and has been in this role now for a few years and it's been an absolute pleasure. Funny story actually. I worked at the Alumni Association as a marketing intern in my undergrad. Nice for USC and so I actually met Bo then. We got to work together on a few projects, but it's just been great to be back and working with him all these years later. And then myself and then we have Molly Rowe. She is our events girly. She does all kind of our annual shuck and shag event, which is our big alumni homecoming event.

Kasie Whitener (01:54):

That's the one that's coming up

Corey Mikels (01:55):

This Friday. We're so excited. And then also our huge leadership awards. We do like a dinner gala kind of thing in the spring and it's also amazing, but she also does a lot of regional events throughout the year. So a great way to engage with our alumni. And then Selena Chavis is, is our newest addition, but she has several, several years of experience in higher ed and working at the university. And so she has been great. She is our backend data heavy communications piece that we desperately needed. So we are so excited and serving over 58,000 alumni around the world, you know, can be challenging. So it's just so great to have such a strong team. We, you know, get along now, not even just inside the building, but we are very friend, very friendly outside as well. And so it's just been a really great past few years building this team up and you know, making it what it is today.

Kasie Whitener (02:52):

It's great for the four of you to have this love and passion for than Moore School. And I know there's been the series of sort of road trips where you've been out and about. I was on the phone with Bo a

couple weeks ago and he was headed to Raleigh. Tell us about these road trips and how you guys are going onsite to meet alumni where they are.

Corey Mikels ([03:07](#)):

Yes, so we've always, you know, really been passionate about hosting events and being actually in the cities that our alumni are living in, where they're working, where we have these strategic partnerships with companies and hiring and you know, other avenues as well. So that's always been important. But with our dean, Dean Verma, who we have just really enjoyed getting to know him over the last year or so that he's been in place. He really wanted us to end up doing more, which is great. And we're excited. I mean, I personally love to travel so I am never gonna turn that down. So we have kind of come up with some new ideas for our events. We do have a core six cities or so that we kind of always are visiting and that's based on, you know, alumni population. Also where our hiring partners are, where we, you know, there there's always, there already is an active community there happening.

Corey Mikels ([03:59](#)):

So we travel to those at least twice or so a year. And those events kind of range in what we're doing. So it could be anything from more of a cocktail kind of reception hour with a brief presentation and words from the dean or another key community player for us or an alum of course. But then we're also now integrating some other opportunities, whether it's more of an educational piece. So leading up LA I guess that was two weeks ago. Yeah, we went to Raleigh, but earlier that day we were in Charlotte, North Carolina where it's our largest, one of our largest alumni bases. We did a breakfast that morning and we brought in a professor from the Moore School, Joel Wooten, who is amazing. He did,

Kasie Whitener ([04:40](#)):

We've had him on the podcast.

Corey Mikels ([04:42](#)):

Yes, you have! <Laugh>. He is amazing. He did a breakfast, we, it's, I keep on calling it a lunch and learn, but it was a breakfast and learn where he talked about AI and data and the workforce and workplace and it was incredible. And we, you know, hosted alumni in that way. We also are doing events that are around our giving. So our Give for Garnet Day, which is also in the spring. We'll do some events around that as well. And then this year something new that we did that a lot of other universities actually do is to kind of kick off the year we call it Kickoff with Moore. And that was hosted six different cities all on the same evening. That was back in September. And it was just a great way for us to welcome new graduates to these cities, let them know, hey, there's so many other graduates living here, they wanna help you. They wanna be here to support where they can. So that was a great event in itself. But we're hoping just to continue to expand. We have so many great ideas. We have so many alumni that are willing to help and that are excited to see us when we come to town. And we even wanna be able to eventually give them the responsibility to even hosting these events without us actually being there. But overall, you know, it's great turn outs. We have the best time and you know, we love it. So

Kasie Whitener ([05:55](#)):

It's just a good chance to reconnect with other Moore school students. Well folks that had that same Moore school experience that you had and of course I love that you said the new alumni into these towns. Mm-Hmm <affirmative> helping them to make friends and build their network, their professional network in town. So you mentioned six cities. I got Charlotte, I got Raleigh. What are the other four?

Corey Mikels ([06:12](#)):

So actually Raleigh is, we consider it one of our core cities, but it's definitely one that we kind of, we might not hit every year twice a year. So our six main ones though are Charlotte, North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, Charleston, South Carolina, Greenville, South Carolina, and New York City. And then Dallas, Texas. So that isn't, Dallas is one of our newer ones, but it is growing rapidly. We see it as an area, Texas in general. A lot of our students are wanting to move there. We have a lot of companies that have moved there in the recent years that are hiring our students and there's just a lot of hype around Texas in general and we're excited and we love to visit. So Dallas has really become one of those corner markets for us.

Kasie Whitener ([07:00](#)):

It sounds like the office is doing a lot to strengthen that alumni network in a way that we think of the ability to give incoming students something to look forward to when they graduate. And a pathway into a nationwide, a worldwide, a global network really of other Gamecock alum. Talk about the mentoring program because I think this is a huge opportunity for individuals to interact individually. One-On-One with somebody that has a specific fit or a specific niche. And you guys are doing a great job of pairing people up. Tell us where it came from, how did it start and then what does the operation look like

Corey Mikels ([07:35](#)):

Exactly. And just to mention, you know, we do travel to all these places, but I personally think the mentor program is such a great opportunity for us to interact with these alumni that we might not be able to see face to face throughout the year. So this is something we've seen a huge growth in with alumni being able to interact with us, you know, hear upcoming news and get excited again to be engaged with the Moore School and especially our students, our alumni love to speak with our students and hear what's going on. So yes, background though of the Moore school mentor program is what we call it. I know that's kind of a mouthful so we might have to work on that name in a little bit. <Laugh>. But so I started this role in February, 2020 and I was handed over some information and some, you know, kind of background on the mentor program.

Corey Mikels ([08:22](#)):

There had been other mentoring opportunities that had been put in place before I was here. And it really seemed more of kind of, they would, they selected a few alumni that are more in the Columbia area that wanted to give back. There were, you know, they selected a couple number of students but it was a much smaller program. I believe when it first started there was probably 30 participants in all. And that was 15 or so students, 15 or so alumni mentors and they had application processes and then kind of were, you know hand matched together and then asked to kind of meet, but there was not much, you know, follow up throughout the week. And then I don't think there was really a set ending time either to kind of, you know, very organic in that nature and I think it worked really well. But you know it kind of, I think as you know, positions changed and you know, people left and came and that kind of thing, you know, well in

Kasie Whitener ([09:20](#)):

2020 was covid. Exactly. So just a tremendous amount of transition.

Corey Mikels ([09:24](#)):

It kind of, yeah, it kind of transitions a little bit. So one thing when I took on this role, they really wanted to bring something like the mentor program back and kind of evolve it a little bit and I was excited to do so. I love that kind of, you know, thing. And my job is working with the students piece 'cause mostly I'm working with alumni, but it's nice to kind of have that mix. And so I actually met with some other departments around the university. I did a lot of research just in general of other universities and how they do their mentor programs. And actually I worked with a gentleman named Zach Driver. He was actually working at the College of Engineering for USC at the time and he was creating a mentor and he had already created a mentor program and I was just so inspired.

Corey Mikels ([10:05](#)):

He did such a great job with it. So shout out to Zach 'cause I did take some pointers from him. And so I think we eventually officially launched the new program in 20, in the spring of 2020. And it was a smaller group too. I think we had maybe 50 or so participants on each side. But we have an application process that, that the alumni fill out. We also have our students fill out an application. We then go in and actually do the hand matching. Which is really fun. I enjoy it. I, I laugh 'cause we almost say it's kind of like a dating app <laugh> and you're like looking at the interests and who you think would be a good match and those kind of things. And we base it off multiple criteria. So whether it's degree or educational, whether it's career aspirations and interests, location, company, that kind of thing.

Corey Mikels ([10:56](#)):

So we go in and we make those matches. We usually then, you know, supply those matches to the mentor and the mentee and then we always strive to make it a very student driven opportunity. You know, I'm always telling the students we have orientation beforehand and you know, this is your chance to really hone in on these skills of communication. You should be the first one to, you know, make that introductory email ask them to set up a scheduled time, those kind of things. Really laying out a calendar to look ahead. So we were able, we were able to do that. And you know, I definitely met challenges those first couple of times 'cause we were like, what are we doing? This is all new to everybody. But what I learned is the initial program, what we set for four weeks, so about a month.

Corey Mikels ([11:42](#)):

And then of course if, you know, groups wanted to continue to meet, they were more than welcome to. But I was only kind of really centered around that one month. And then we kind of, you know, after the first two or so times we did it, I kind of looked at it and got some feedback from our mentors and the students that were participating. We ended up increasing the timeframe. So it now is a six week program we thought gives a little bit more time. We offer it once in the fall semester and then once in the spring semester. And then to also help a little bit with facilitating conversations and making sure, you know, no one's going in blind. I actually provide weekly resources for the full six weeks. So every Monday morning our mentors and mentees, they wake up from an email from me. So they're probably gonna be very tired of me after the six weeks <laugh>. But the resource guide is just basically topics that they can have conversations about. They're around anything from networking to building your personal brand to your elevator pitch, interview prep, those kind of things. And then they also have activities that they can complete with their mentor throughout the week that are associated with points. 'cause You know, being a Gamecock we have to do everything in a competitive nature.

Kasie Whitener ([12:56](#)):

I was about to say that. It sounds like a competition. Okay.

Corey Mikels ([12:59](#)):

And so at the end of the six weeks, the mentor and the mentee that received the most points for completing some of these activities, they win some great prizes. We have shout out, we have a brand new brand shop, so swag shop that people can buy apparel for 'em. And so we've been really using that as a way to kind of hand out some pieces and promote that as well. But great prizes all around. But again, all those topics and activities are optional. But it's a great opportunity for our mentors, I mean for our alumni and students to connect. And I have just received such great stories from people that have participated. You know, a lot of the times our students are walking away learning so much and you know, gaining so much experience but also just information and knowledge. But it's really fun because a lot of times I get our mentors coming back and writing me and saying, I've learned of a brand new, you know, resource or a brand new topic that they're learning in class right now that I had no idea that I'm actually gonna take back to my company.

Corey Mikels ([13:58](#)):

Right. And, you know, utilize in these kind of things. So it's really, really neat. I think it's an opportunity, you know, to learn on both ends at this point. So

Kasie Whitener ([14:07](#)):

It sounds like you've struck a balance between having enough structure that people don't feel like they're wandering blindly, but also having enough freedom there that the individuals can pursue the path that's gonna be of most benefit to them. Which, you know, to be congratulated for that because it seems like that that would be a really hard line to walk, right? Like how do I give them just enough structure without being, you know, oversight to intensive and and creating something that feels more like a structured learning environment instead of a mentoring relationship. Exactly. These relationships in the initial six weeks and then there's the opportunity afterwards if the two wanna stay engaged, that's just no longer under the oversight of the Moore School.

Corey Mikels ([14:47](#)):

Exactly, yes. And I will say for the most part, I do believe a lot of the mentoring mentee pairs do stay in contact. I get a lot of follow ups saying, you know, I started with my mentee when she was a sophomore and now she's a senior and I'm helping her prep for her final interviews for maybe a full-time opportunity. And so yeah, a lot of these mentoring relationships, they become very close and you know, you see even friendships kind of bloom from that. So I think that in itself is just be able to widen and expand your professional network and your personal network is always something that I always encourage to our students. You know, you never know who might be there to help what contacts or doors they might be able to open for to you. And at the end of the day, they're all very successful professionals in themselves. They've been in your exact same place before. And so being able just to provide and be another sounding board and be able there to, you know, ask these questions, it's, it's really, really exciting. I think it's just another reason, you know, why the students that end up choosing the Moore School or coming to USC, you know, they are so successful in the end they have all these opportunities and extra resources. So I'm happy to be able to provide that for them.

Kasie Whitener ([15:56](#)):

So I'm a student, I'm what a freshman, I'm a sophomore that maybe I wanna get engaged in this MM-hmm <affirmative>, what's the right time for me to be thinking about being in this mentoring program?

And then walk me through the process of finding it and applying for it and and hearing back and getting enrolled and all of that.

Corey Mikels ([16:11](#)):

Yes. Great. Okay. So yes the program is open for anyone at this point. We've opened it fully from freshmen to even graduate students are able to participate, which has been great. I will say we are seeing a huge growth in our freshman population doing it, which I'm so excited because I would feel like when I was a freshman, I know I can't even imagine going and applying for a mentor program.

Kasie Whitener ([16:35](#)):

<Laugh>, I haven't even been aware that such a thing existed when I was a freshman. But they're so focused. These young people are so laser focused on where they want to go. I can see them finding any path that they think will get them there.

Corey Mikels ([16:45](#)):

It's incredible. I mean so many times I hear from the mentors, they're like, these freshmen have already are already talking about internships and what classes they wanna take and where they wanna be in two or three years. And these alumni were like, we weren't even thinking that way at that point. So it's really exciting to see the transition and how, you know, passionate they, these students really are becoming and how focused like you said. But yes, so we offer it for all majors, all I mean all years. And then basically for this fall application that opens usually in the August or so that is posted throughout Moore Connect, which is our virtual online platform that all students and alumni and you know, any affiliated partners with the Moore school have access to. It's free. So all the applications are posted on there.

Corey Mikels ([17:32](#)):

We also send out mass emails, you know, to students and alumni to kinda make them aware of when the applications are open. Lots of social media, that kind of thing. But very organic and a lot of the times, 'cause I do ask the question on the application, where did you hear about the mentor program? A lot of it's become word of mouth, right? Referrals, which has been so exciting. These students have enjoyed their experience so much. They tell their friends, their classmates, you know, you gotta do this as well. And it just keeps on leading. I've also had a lot of great professors and staff members that teach some of our, you know, BADM classes and U101 classes have been, you know, huge proponents of the program and really sharing it with their students. So I'm so appreciative of that as well. So basically you fill out a pretty short application. Again, fall usually in August, in the spring we usually open around January and then you have about a month and a half to apply. Every student that applies gets in. It's not a problem. <Laugh>, we'll make sure we get them matched with somebody. And then...

Kasie Whitener ([18:34](#)):

Is there not any like, okay, we're gonna defer you to the next semester. Are you, if, if you had an overrun of 150 students or applying at a time, I mean is there a capacity here?

Corey Mikels ([18:42](#)):

I've actually never run into that problem yet. Usually we have way more alumni ready to go. I usually have to tell the alumni we're gonna have to maybe keep them for next semester because that is usually the bigger issue. But I will say this past semester, this current semester has been the largest number we've ever seen. We actually had 171 students sign up this semester almost.

Kasie Whitener ([19:05](#)):

That's a lot.

Corey Mikels ([19:06](#)):

Almost three times as much as we usually have. I mean a little less than that, but it was wild to see those numbers and I was actually having to go finally put a, you know, hold on the last day of the application for the students. Close that one down. But I was up till a couple days before actually the pairing was due still emailing alumni saying like, Hey, I need you guys to, you know, apply. I need you guys to do it. And we ended, ended up getting everyone matched so it was fine. But yeah, it was, it was a wild experience this past semester and, but I'm so grateful 'cause that's just means it's growing and Yeah,

Kasie Whitener ([19:37](#)):

No, it just means obviously the program is working or people wouldn't be recommending it to their friends. Yes. Okay. So I'm an alum. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And I'm hearing this and I'm like, wow, this is amazing. I didn't know about this. I missed all the emails and the social media. Yes. And the LinkedIn about it. And so now this is the first time I'm hearing it is on more impact. How do I get engaged? How do I say, Hey Corey, pick me. Yes,

Corey Mikels ([19:54](#)):

You can always of course email me and I'm happy to provide next steps. We also have a website. If you just type in Darla Moore mentor student we can get the exact website for you as well. I don't know it off the top

Kasie Whitener ([20:07](#)):

Of my head. <Laugh>, I'll find it, I'll add it to the show notes. No problem at all. It is perfect.

Corey Mikels ([20:11](#)):

There is a, it talks about all about the mentor program so you can learn even more about it. And then there's also a submission box on the right hand side where you, if you are interested in participating but applications are not currently open you can fill in your information and then you will receive an email directly when those applications open. Awesome.

Kasie Whitener ([20:29](#)):

So we can go ahead and put our name in the pod. Yes. And then when the application's open, you'll let us know like, Hey, by the way, we're

Corey Mikels ([20:35](#)):

Ready to go. Exactly.

Kasie Whitener ([20:36](#)):

Awesome. This is so great. So we've got our program for the fall underway. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> people are doing the thing and they're matched up and they're having a great time, but there's still time to get ready for spring. And of course if you go to, to this website, go ahead and let Corey know that you're interested. You can get on the list and then the applications will open in January. The whole thing will begin again. Exactly. Yep. This is really exciting.

Corey Mikels ([20:55](#)):

I hope it's even bigger. So I think we had around 300 and you know, whatever, 171 times two as this semester. And so I would love to see it grow and grow and grow to 400, 500. You know, as many people we can get interested and we can impact these students, the more exciting it is. And you know, I, I love it. So I just hope it continues to grow.

Kasie Whitener ([21:16](#)):

This is just a lot of fun. You don't have to have any special knowledge, anything other than you were a more alum and you experience that too and now you're in your career and ready to help out bringing some of those students forward with you. I love the hand up opportunity here with this program.

Corey Mikels ([21:30](#)):

Exactly. It's easy. It's just some time. <Laugh>.

Kasie Whitener ([21:33](#)):

Alright, thank you so much. Corey Mikels from the Alumni Development Group. Thank you for being with us. And thank you for doing the mentor program. Check back in with us in a year and see if you've been able to get to those numbers you were looking for. I

Corey Mikels ([21:43](#)):

Definitely will.

Kasie Whitener ([21:43](#)):

<Laugh>. Alright, this is great. This has been Moore Impact. When you learn more, you know more, and when you know more, you do more. Thanks for listening.