

THE CAVALIER DAILY

Forbes 30 under 30 recognizes five U.Va alumni

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On Nov. 14, Forbes released its reputed “30 Under 30” list for 2018, recognizing a group of young entrepreneurs excelling in various projects and ventures. This year, five University alumni made the lists, including Muzzammil Zaveri, Sam Bernstein, Chelsea Follett, Jeremy Martin and Kevin Eisenfrats.

Jeremy Martin

Among the five University alumni who made it into Forbes’ 30 Under 30 lists is Jeremy Martin. Martin and fellow co-owner Chase Damiano were featured in the Food & Drink category. Martin is currently the Director of Finance and Investor Relations at Commonwealth Joe Coffee Roasters.

Martin recalled finding out that he and Damiano had made the list.

“Everything stopped for those few moments,” Martin said.

Martin graduated from the University in 2009 with a dual major in systems engineering and economics. He initially became involved with CWJ when a few University alumni connected him to the company’s current CEO, Robert Peck, who is also a University’s alumnus. Martin started off giving financial advice to CWJ, but later joined the company in 2014 full-time as one of its directors.

“I learned about the company, its mission, the level of passion that was there,” Martin said. “After another year of working in investment banking and eventually being promoted, I actually turned it in down and joined [CWJ].”

One of Martin’s favorite aspects of working at CWJ is not only its mission to provide quality and fresh coffee, but also how involved the company is with its customers.

“That engagement with customers and prospective customers is super rewarding when they're drinking something so different from what they're used to like a Keurig or drip coffee,” Martin said. “And they have that a-ha moment and you get to experience that with them.”

Peck lauds Martin’s contributions to CWJ, citing Martin’s efforts in leading the company’s expansion into New York City and his financial expertise.

“There is no way [CWJ] would be where we are without [Martin and Damiano],” Peck said.

At the end of the day, however, Martin reflected on how his accomplishment of being featured on Forbes’ was not about him.

“It's about Commonwealth Joe being presented in a very positive way, with the ability to continue gaining traction within both D.C. and New York, and capture the attention of the audience across the rest of the country,” Martin said.

Muzzammil Zaveri

As undergraduates studying computer science, Muzzammil Zaveri and Ethan Fast built the friendship and academic foundation that would help them start Proxino, a company aiming to detect errors in Javascript for developers. Y Combinators, a major seed venture capitalist firm, invested in their company and Zaveri moved to West Coast.

“Eventually, I ended up on the venture side,” Zaveri said. “I wouldn't call it accidentally, but it was sort of a by-product of that.”

Zaveri has invested in companies like **Tile, Vurb and Weebly**. In 2015, he joined one of the oldest and **most prestigious** venture capital firms in Silicon Valley, Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield & Byers. His smart investing led him to be named on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list for Venture Capitalism.

“It's a great recognition for the work he's done and his leadership in the venture community, and terrific to see one of our graduates honored this way,” David Evans, professor of computer science, said in an email statement. “Muzzammil has a great entrepreneurial mindset, and has helped lots of interesting companies grow.”

Zaveri stressed the importance of pursuing passion and making positive use of free time while studying as an undergraduate.

“There's nothing like being in a setting where you can make mistakes and explore interests,” he said. “Doing something that you're strictly passionate about may not be the most productive — you can explore interests and area that you might be passionate about and that can be a great springboard into your own career, or whatever you decide to pursue in life after school.”

Zaveri believes he was very lucky with the connections he made at the University, especially with meeting his co-founder, Ethan Fast. He credits Evans, his advisor with empowering him with knowledge and encouraging him to learn more about tech startups.

“[Evans] really encouraged and spent time diving into startups and exploring some of my interests in building side projects,” he said. “And through that I met my co-founder [Ethan Fast] and ultimately, we ended up starting Proxino together.”

Sam Bernstein

When Sam Bernstein first stepped into a leasing office in Charlottesville during his first year, he was shocked by the disorganization and the apparent frenzy to find a place to live surrounding the University. Most students accept the disarray, sign the paper and move on. But Bernstein wasn't most students.

He is the co-founder and CEO of the online rental search site LoftSmart, and as of November 14, a 2018 Forbes 30 under 30 honoree in the category of Consumer Technology. His company, which is co-founded by Sundeeep Kumar, aims “to create transparency” about local rental listings by allowing users to search, review and lease rental properties in 28 college markets across the country.

Bernstein, who left the University after the fall semester of his third year to pursue LoftSmart and received the Thiel Fellowship for “young people who want to build new things instead of sitting in a classroom” in 2017, said, “My only regret is that I didn’t do it sooner.”

During his two and a half years at the University, he focused on entrepreneurship and furthering his ideas with the assistance of visiting lecturers Adam Healey and Brendan Richardson, both at the McIntire School. Here, he developed the first platform for LoftSmart, raised his first \$180,000 for the project and, ultimately, decided to leave school and run with it.

“Education is changing and more and more students are getting hungry for real world experience earlier, especially in the entrepreneurship field,” Healey said. “Sam is having an incredible learning experience, just not within the construct of a university.”

At age 23, he is one of the youngest 30 under 30 recipients in his category, but despite his age, Healey said that Sam has been the most impressive student he’s ever had.

“[He is] bright, motivated, and mature beyond his years,” Healey said.

There is a risk, of course, to leaving behind the cushion of the University, but it was one that Bernstein knew he had to take. While he acknowledges that everyone takes different paths, he encourages other students looking to make a change to start now.

“There’s never going to be a better time in life [than right now] to do it,” Bernstein said. “What’s the worst that could happen? If the absolute worst is that you go back to U.Va and you’re back to where you were before — you’ve missed a year ... Do it anyway.”

Chelsea Follett

Chelsea Follett, who earned a master’s degree in foreign affairs from the University in 2014, is currently the managing editor of HumanProgress.org. A project of the highly recognized Cato Institute, HumanProgress.org intends to “[correct] misperceptions regarding the state of humanity through the presentation of empirical data that focuses on long-term developments,” using data from sources such as the World Bank and the United Nations to foster a greater and more comprehensive understanding of the drivers and rate of human progress.

One of Follett’s earliest motivations to get involved in data driven policy and progress analysis stemmed from her courses at the University. Her class readings inspired her to think critically about data and ideas behind Human Progress.

“During my first course in foreign affairs at U.Va., we read ‘The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined’ by Steven Pinker, a professor at Harvard University,” Follett said. “That was my favorite book in that class. You could say that that was when I first came into contact with some of the ideas behind Human Progress.org.”

Follett also spoke in reverence of the quality of education she received at the University, which she mentioned has a ‘green light rating’ from Buyer, the institute for rights and education which rates universities on freedom of speech.

“It’s still very much committed to the ideals of TJ, [and stands as] a place of inquiry,” Follett said. “I still follow Larry Sabato on Twitter, and I thought all my professors were experts in their fields — I really learned a lot from them. It was a wonderful education.”

In addition to her academics, Charlottesville's internship opportunities further developed Follett's passions and interests. Follett found that her internship opportunity at the Rutherford Institute, gave her multiple perspectives that she considers integral in her work today. She strongly encourages current students to intern to find and develop career interests, as she did.

"Charlottesville is such a vibrant place," Follett said. "The institute is committed to freedom and human rights, and their internship program does give you research experience, but it also has a lecture series for all the students interning there. I would say that it introduced me to a lot of the ideas that led me to where I am."

Kevin Eisenfrats

The Cavalier Daily was not able to reach Kevin Eisenfrats for an interview.