



# Mentorship Program Inspires Women to Pursue Investment Management

## UML Students Build Skills, Connections through Loomis Sayles' Undergraduate Women's Investment Network

By Ed Brennan - 2/7/2024



Senior quantitative economics major Nikan Parsaei, right, chats with Loomis Sayles Investment Director Elise Carner, her mentor this year in the Boston-based investment management firm's Undergraduate Women's Investment Network program. (Image by Ed Brennan)

Midway through her bachelor of science in [quantitative economics](#), Nikan Parsaei was on the lookout for an internship where she could explore one of her major's many career paths.

An email last spring from Assoc. Prof. of Economics [Kelly Hellman](#) had just what she was looking for – and more. Loomis, Sayles & Co., a global investment management firm based in Boston, was inviting women majoring in economics to apply for its Undergraduate Women's Investment Network ([UWIN](#)) mentorship and internship program.

Parsaei was “immediately interested” and fired off her application. She interviewed with the program's mentorship coordinator, Tricia Keefe '91 – one of a dozen UML alumni working at the firm. Parsaei was accepted and became the fifth UML student to participate in UWIN since its launch in 2015.

“I'm grateful to be able to intern at a place where the work culture is so welcoming and everybody is so kind,” Parsaei says from a 33rd-floor conference room at One Financial Center in Boston, where she commutes twice a week during her senior year for the paid internship.

Open to female undergraduates who have an interest in business, finance, accounting, mathematics or economics, UWIN is designed to boost the number of women working in investment management. According to a 2021 Bloomberg report, just 14% of fund managers globally are women.



Nikan Parsaei, second from right, talks about her UWIN mentorship and internship experience with, from left, Tricia Keefe '91, Elise Carner and Shannon O'Mara. O'Mara launched the program at Loomis Sayles 10 years ago. (Image by Ed Brennan)

Parsaei is mentored by Elise Carner, an investment director and vice president at Loomis Sayles. In addition to periodic one-on-one meetings with Carner, Parsaei can network with around 40 other UWIN mentees from schools across New England. They participate in workshops, both in-person and virtually, on topics such as personal finance, communication and self-marketing. They also receive Bloomberg terminal and Excel training, and they experience a day in the life of a trader.

"It's eye-opening to hear about some of the challenges that women still face working in this industry and being taken seriously," says Parsaei, a native of Iran who graduated from Acton-Boxboro High School. Carner is impressed by Parsaei's work ethic and ability to bring "her best self" to every situation. "It takes a lot of courage to come into an organization where a lot of people are performing at a high level and have a lot of experience," Carner says. "She's willing to work hard to get the most out of this experience, which is great."

Economics alumna Sabrina Maldonado '21 participated in the mentorship and internship programs during her senior year. The relationships she built "paved the path" to her current job as a real estate private equity analyst with Liberty Mutual Investments in Boston.



Management alumna Tricia Keefe '91, left, head of corporate services at Loomis Sayles, meets with quantitative economics major Nikan Parsaei, a UWIN participant. (Image by Ed Brennan)

"Knowing the fundamentals of investments is important, but ultimately, having good relationships with people you work with is immeasurable," says Maldonado, who learned about an investment development program at Liberty from a UWIN alumna. "Investment – and Boston particularly – is a pretty tight space. A lot of people know each other through working together at other firms. So that networking helped the most."

Senior business major Aliya Kaufman-Daniel participated in UWIN's mentorship program last year. In addition to getting a big-picture view of investment management, she says she gained networking and leadership skills.

"As women, a lot of us struggle with asserting ourselves in a male-dominated field. It can get kind of intimidating," says Kaufman-Daniel, who is vice president of the Joy Tong Women in Business student organization. "Seeing other women in these positions where we want to be was inspiring."

A Washington, D.C., native with concentrations in finance and international business, Kaufman-Daniel learned about UWIN when she interviewed Keefe for an assignment in her professional writing course. Keefe has been at Loomis Sayles for over 30 years and is currently head of corporate services. One of her priorities is to grow the internship program through "heavy learning and development" with the investment teams.

"I understand that the firm's end goal is for the clients, but we're a human capital business," says Keefe, who earned a management degree at UML. "If we don't continually educate our own population, then we can't expand in how we grow our investments and ideas for the clients."

Parsaei says her internship has taught her about investment management and career opportunities in the finance industry.

Last semester, she spent 10 weeks interning with Loomis Sayles' investment strategy and risk management team. Every Tuesday, she gave the team a presentation on stock market trends.

"I would interpret what certain changes within the stock market would mean for Loomis funds," says Parsaei, who also delivered a presentation on Article 8 funds, which promote environmental, social and governance (ESG) policy, and how they relate to her team's work.

"The challenge was to convey that information in a concise way. I really developed my presentation skills," says Parsaei, whose internship continues this semester with the custom income strategies team.

"I plan to reach out to more people in other sectors of the company, whether it's consulting or any other sector within finance, to learn more about what they do," says Parsaei, who is now open to a career in investment management, thanks to UWIN.

"It was an opportunity that I'm not sure I would have come across if it wasn't for Professor Hellman reaching out to all of us women in the economics department and letting us know," she says. "I'm thankful that she did."

*Reprinted with permission. This material may not be redistributed, published, or reproduced, in whole or in part. This reprint and the materials delivered with it should not be construed as an offer to sell or a solicitation of an offer to buy shares of any fund.*

*Loomis Sayles and the University of Massachusetts Lowell are independent entities and are not legally affiliated.*