

Bowden Investment Group
Annual Report
2024 Edition

Table of Contents

Introduction

The History and Purpose of Bowden 3
A Letter from the President 4
A Letter from Our Advisors 5

Portfolio, Industry, ESG and Economic Summary

Portfolio Performance 7
Industry Analysis 9
ESG Summary 13
Economic Reflection and Outlook 17

Competitions and Events

Competitions 20
Trips and Firm Visits 22

2024 Stock Pitches

Spring Pitches 24
Initial Fall Pitches 26
Final Fall Pitches 27

Acknowledgements & Appreciation

Final Presentation Guests 26
Guest Speakers 28
Dr. Goff Endowed Scholarship for Applied Investments 32
Member Testimonials 36
Word from Esteemed Financial Professional and Mentor 40
Final BIG Thank You 42

The History and Purpose of Bowden

About the Group

The Bowden Investment Group (BIG) aims to create an active learning environment for high-achieving finance and banking students within the Walker College of Business to gain practical investment management skills. In addition to managing a portfolio with the goal of outperforming the S&P 500 benchmark, the BIG prioritizes the personal and professional development of its 12 undergraduate members. These members are strategically chosen for their academic ability and leadership skills. The Bowden Investment Fund comprises equities and ETFs worth approximately $360,000.





BIG History

In the Fall of 1994, Dr. Don Cox and Dr. Delbert Goff set out to create a club where students who sought real-world investment opportunities could meet and obtain hands-on experience in the financial world. While the club was met with great enthusiasm from students, it also faced significant challenges as investment clubs were few and far between; and there was little precedent as to how to solve many of the issues the club came across. Dr. Cox and Dr. Goff decided to reimagine the group and create the Elbert V. Bowden Student Managed Investment Fund which was named after Dr. Elbert V. Bowden, a passionate educator whose patronage helped to launch the group. While Dr. Bowden passed away in 2004, his legacy lives on through the fund.

Throughout its 26 years, the group has seen multiple leadership changes. Dr. Cox left his role as faculty advisor in 2004 when he was appointed Associate Dean of the Walker College of Business. Dr. Goff filled Dr. Cox's role and devoted hours and hours to help build and grow the Bowden Investment Group into what it is today. It was also during Dr. Goff's time as faculty advisor that the group received its unofficial title of the "Bowden Investment Group."

In the Fall of 2010, Mr. David Thompson began his role as the Executive-in-Residence and dedicated his time and knowledge to the group for ten great years until departing in 2019. In 2018, the Bowden Investment Group was fortunate to gain Dr. Hadley and the current Executive-in-Residence, Mr. Shawn Poole. After contributing so much to both the school and the fund, Dr. Goff and Mr. Thompson both stepped into advisory roles in 2020 and handed the reins to Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole. Together, Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole have provided the Bowden Investment Group with invaluable knowledge on both financial analysis and how to be a young professional in today's world.





Letter From the President



Reflecting on this year, it's truly inspiring to see what can be accomplished when dedicated students commit to challenging themselves and growing through every high and low. From intense competitions to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene and navigating a complex political landscape, 2024 has indeed been a remarkable year.

Sometimes, I can't believe how far the Bowden Investment Group has taken me, especially when I think back to my freshman year of college. I started at NC State as a Chemistry major but quickly realized it wasn't for me – I couldn't even tell the difference between ions and cations. After deciding to transfer to Appalachian State to finish my degree, I took a leap of faith and transitioned into business. During my first semester at App, I began to thrive and found my footing in the mountain town not far from home. As I spent time around Peacock, I heard whispers about the Bowden Investment Group and its legacy. I knew immediately that I wanted to pursue this, so it became the "North Star" of my college career. Leading up to interviews in Spring 2024, I began to doubt myself and second-guess my abilities. However, I knew that being a member of Bowden was what I came to App to achieve. So, in true Keira Andrews fashion, I threw on my hot pink pantsuit and headed out to secure my spot in this prestigious group. Bowden has been the most influential and impactful experience of my life: giving me new friends, an expanded outlook on the world, and pushing me to be better – both professionally and personally. It has meant the world to me to have the opportunity to serve my class as their president. Leading this group has not only been about personal growth but also about building a lasting legacy and fostering leadership that will inspire future members of the Bowden Investment Group.

Not only has this year been fun, but it has been a catalyst for immense growth and learning within our group. It has been incredible to witness our team's evolution and cohesion into a strong team. This transformation would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our faculty advisors, Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole, who believe in and support us throughout our endeavors.

To close, we would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all our gracious donors, respected alumni who have paved the way for our success, and our devoted advisors who have profoundly shaped our experiences inside and outside the classroom. Your steadfast support and encouragement have given us the opportunity to achieve our goals and make significant strides forward, and we are profoundly grateful.

Go APP!
-Keira Andrews

Letter From the Advisors

On behalf of the Bowden Investment Group, we are proud to present the 2024 Annual Report, celebrating the achievements of the BIG Classes of 2024 and 2025.

This year has been defined by exceptional dedication, resilience, and growth. Our students continue to push boundaries, embracing challenges and honing the skills necessary to excel in an ever-evolving financial landscape. Their commitment to excellence—both academically and professionally—has been truly inspiring.

Experiential learning remains at the heart of the Bowden Investment Group, and competition participation continues to be a hallmark of our students' development. Every member of both the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 groups competed in prestigious events, applying their knowledge in dynamic, real-world settings. The 2023-2024 class represented BIG at the CFA Institute Research Challenge, the University of Georgia Stock Pitch Competition, and, for the first time as an entire group, the GAME Forum. The 2024-2025 cohort has already expanded on these experiences, further strengthening BIG's reputation on the national stage.

Beyond competitions, learning extended well beyond the classroom, providing students with invaluable real-world exposure and professional development opportunities. This year, we had the privilege of visiting industry-leading firms, including Wedge Capital, Dimensional Fund Advisors, Wells Fargo, Evercore ISI, Pagaya, and Pzena Investment Management. These experiences allowed students to engage with professionals, gain deeper insights into various financial sectors, and expand their professional networks.

As we celebrate another year of success, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the supporters, alumni, and industry professionals who continue to invest in the development of our students. Your mentorship, guidance, and belief in our mission make a lasting impact.

We look forward to another year of challenges, growth, and achievement.

As always, Go BIG!



Dr. Brandy Hadley, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
David A. Thompson
Distinguished Scholar of
Applied Investments



Mr. Shawn Poole, CPA
Executive in Residence



Portfolio, Industry, ESG and Economic Summaries

Portfolio Performance

Picks and Shovels Approach:

Investing in transformative trends doesn't always mean chasing the most obvious winners. The "picks and shovels" approach takes inspiration from the gold rush, where those selling essential tools—rather than prospectors—often profited the most. This strategy focuses on companies that provide critical infrastructure to high-growth industries, allowing for exposure to major trends with reduced volatility.

One such example is Vertiv (VRT), which has benefited from the AI boom by supplying essential power and cooling solutions for data centers. Rather than betting on specific AI companies, our investment in Vertiv allowed us to capitalize on AI-driven demand. Likewise, ServiceNow (NOW) plays a key role in digital transformation by automating enterprise workflows, making it an indispensable force in AI adoption.

By leveraging this approach, we positioned the fund to benefit from AI and digital transformation without the risks associated with picking individual winners in these rapidly evolving sectors.

Magnificent 7:

In 2024, one of the most defining market trends has been the continued dominance of the Magnificent 7—Meta, Alphabet, Nvidia, Amazon, Apple, Tesla, and Microsoft. These seven companies have solidified their status as the backbone of the stock market, collectively representing $16 trillion of the S&P 500's $46 trillion market capitalization as of December. Recognizing this trend early, BIF strategically capitalized on the momentum, securing a 29.49% return from investments in Apple, Amazon, and Microsoft. These stocks alone account for 16.35% of our portfolio (Figure 1). However, we made the decision to sell Tesla in May due to concerns over declining market share despite rising electric vehicle sales. This proactive move reflects our commitment to continuously evaluating market leadership and adjusting our portfolio to maintain strong performance. As these tech giants continue to shape the broader market, our ability to anticipate shifts within this elite group remains key to delivering strong returns.

Figure 1: BIF Total Value

Ticker	Price	Shares Held	Weight	Total Value
AAPL	$ 250.42	84	5.86%	$ 21,035.28
AMD	$ 120.79	82	2.76%	$ 9,904.78
AMZN	$ 219.39	91	5.56%	$ 19,964.49
BLK	$ 1,025.11	14	4.00%	$ 14,351.54
CELH	$ 26.34	478	3.51%	$ 12,590.52
FLEX	$ 38.39	430	4.60%	$ 16,507.70
GD	$ 263.49	46	3.38%	$ 12,120.54
IVV	$ 588.68	96	15.75%	$ 56,513.28
IWM	$ 220.96	139	8.56%	$ 30,713.44
KO	$ 62.26	203	3.52%	$ 12,638.78
MP	$ 15.60	809	3.52%	$ 12,620.40
MSFT	$ 421.50	42	4.93%	$ 17,703.00
NOW	$ 1,060.12	16	4.73%	$ 16,961.92
PLNT	$ 98.87	131	3.61%	$ 12,951.97
PM	$ 120.35	105	3.52%	$ 12,636.75
PYPL	$ 85.35	178	4.23%	$ 15,192.30
SHEL	$ 62.65	226	3.94%	$ 14,158.90
VHT	$ 253.69	45	3.18%	$ 11,416.05
VRT	$ 113.61	135	4.27%	$ 15,337.35
XLU	$ 75.69	150	3.16%	$ 11,353.50
YETI	$ 38.51	318	3.41%	$ 12,246.18
Cash				$ 870.37
			Total:	$ 359,789.04

Investing in AI

If one theme has defined the market in 2024, it's the explosive rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The public rollout of ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Tesla AI, Amazon G, Meta's Llama 3, Apple Intelligence, and Alphabet's Gemini has brought AI to the mainstream, fueling widespread adoption across industries. BIF identified this trend as a long-term growth driver and opened a position in ServiceNow (NOW) in May 2024, recognizing its role in enterprise automation and AI-driven workflow enhancements. Since then, the stock has surged 51.57%, reflecting the immense demand for AI-powered solutions in business operations.

With AI continuing to revolutionize industries, our strategic investment approach ensures that we remain well-positioned to benefit from its ongoing expansion.

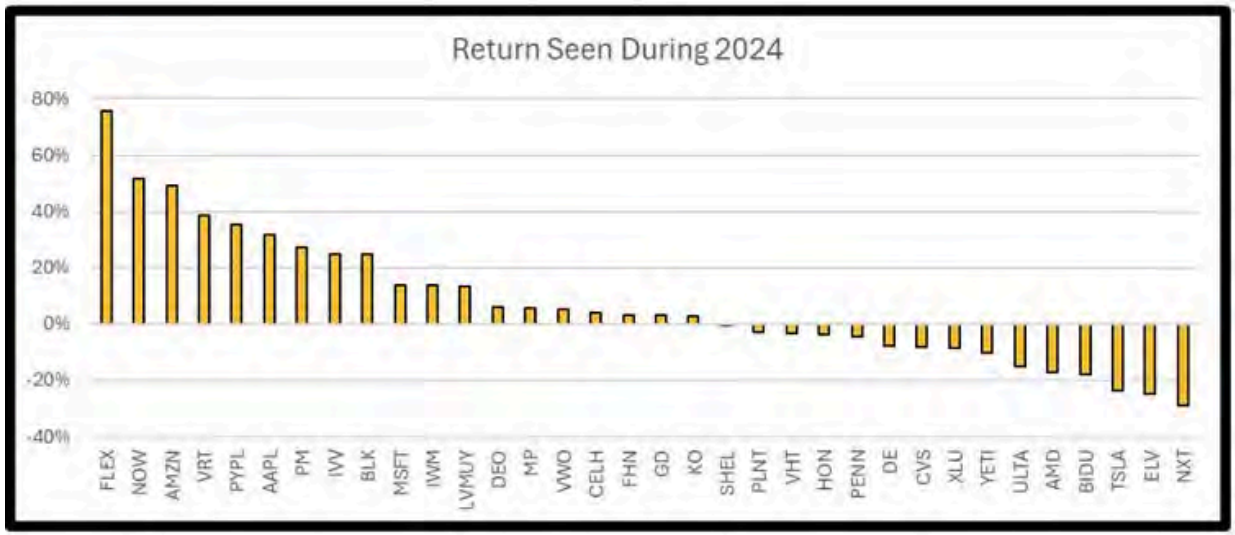
BIG Top Performers:

Four of the top performers in the Bowden Investment Fund are involved in AI, a trend we believe will continue into 2025. ServiceNow (), Amazon (), Vertiv (), and Flex (), (Figure 2) all had a fantastic year and contributed heavily to our growth as a fund.

ServiceNow, a top performer, offers cloud-based solutions to help manage workflows and operations across many Fortune 500 companies. ServiceNow has performed exceptionally well due to its current incorporation of AI in its workflow management, something that investors are very bullish about. Amazon Web Services (AWS) remains the market leader in the cloud computing space, surpassing competitors such as Microsoft, Oracle, and IBM. AWS allows businesses to run their computing, storage, and networks in the cloud, reducing companies' need for physical computing hardware. Vertiv, a key player in our "picks and shovels" investment strategy has performed exceptionally well. Vertiv offers data center infrastructure to AI companies, providing advanced power and cooling systems designed for AI training models. Flex, our best performer, specializes in electronic manufacturing and supply chain with end-to-end solutions.

We believe that with the continued investment in AI and data center infrastructure, these companies will continue to have strong growth into 2025 and beyond.

Figure 2: Individual BIF Stock Returns



Bottom Performers:

2024 was a strong year for the market, but not all stocks performed well. A few notable underperformers in our portfolio include Nextracker (-29%), Elevance Health (-25%), and Tesla (-24%).

Nextracker, as a solar energy company, struggled in the latter part of the year due to concerns about the future of clean energy. The uncertainty surrounding government policies put pressure on the stock. Elevance Health also struggled towards the end of the year as it missed Q3 earnings in October, leading to a 14% drop. This miss in earnings was due in part to rising expenses and a decline in Medicaid membership. Our final underperformer was Tesla, which may come as a surprise. We sold out of our position in Tesla on May 3rd to allocate funds for new equities. At the time, this decision seemed appropriate due to Tesla's underperformance in vehicle manufacturing. Unfortunately, as of December 31st, Tesla has gone up 122% since we sold it. This provided us with a valuable lesson in the impossibility of timing the market.

Buys:

This past year, the Bowden Investment Group opened 12 new positions (Figure 3). Our group was very bullish about the U.S. economy in 2024 and this gave way to more pitches in cyclical sectors such as technology, entertainment, and consumer discretionary. While this is true for the individual stocks purchased, our ETF selection is much more defensive. We added two new ETFs to the portfolio, the Utilities Select Sector SPDR Fund (XLU) and the Vanguard Health Care Index Fund (VHT). These ETFs were added to increase the BIFs weighting in utilities and health, sectors that we believe are able to to capture steady and low-risk gains in the near future. All of these purchases aligned our portfolio closer to the weighting of the S&P 500, and we are very happy with the total returns of these purchases to date. To learn more about these pitches, please read the *Spring Pitches* and *Final Fall Pitches* sections later in this report.

Figure 3: BIF Equity Purchases

Transaction Date	Ticker	Purchase Price	Shares Purchased	Total
3/4/2024	NXT	$57.43	148	$8,500
3/4/2024	VHT	$268.20	45	$12,069
4/11/2024	PYPL	$64.92	178	$11,556
4/29/2024	VRT	$93.22	135	$12,858
4/29/2024	ELV	$531.02	26	$13,806
5/1/2024	NOW	$692.14	16	$11,074
5/1/2024	BIDU	$103.50	129	$13,352
5/3/2024	PENN	$15.42	230	$3,547
12/2/2024	XLU	$83.22	150	$12,486
12/6/2024	CELH	$27.95	478	$13,358
12/6/2024	PLNT	$103.72	131	$13,587
12/6/2024	YETI	$41.63	241	$10,033

Sells:

Over this same period, we exited 13 positions, reflecting a deliberate shift in our portfolio strategy. In several cases, we moved away from more conservative holdings—such as Deere & Co. and CVS—in favor of companies with stronger growth potential and greater long-term impact. Broader macroeconomic developments also played a key role in some of our divestments. For example, we exited Baidu due to diminishing confidence in the Chinese economy, and First Horizon amid continued underperformance across the financial sector. Nextracker was sold as rising interest in nuclear energy has recently weighed heavily on renewable energy equities.

Diageo was removed from the portfolio due to a combination of slowing growth in the alcoholic beverage industry, persistent supply chain issues, and weakening confidence in its international expansion strategy. In April, the previous cohort made several final portfolio decisions, including the sale of Honeywell, driven by a lack of clear catalysts; Tesla, due to a loss of conviction in its long-term position within the EV space; and Louis Vuitton, based on concerns about its vulnerability to economic instability in China.

Later in the year, we exited Penn Entertainment after it failed to meet key performance drivers, and we sold Elevance Health in light of increasing uncertainty surrounding the impact of the new administration's policies on the healthcare sector.

Figure 4: BIF Equity Sells

Transaction Date	Ticker	Sell Price	Shares Sold	Total
2/20/2024	DEO	$150.40	56	$8,422
3/4/2024	CVS	$74.52	164	$12,221
3/4/2024	DE	$368.59	31	$11,426
4/11/2024	AMD	$168.48	20*	$3,370
4/11/2024	BLK	$779.84	9*	$7,019
4/15/2024	MSFT	$422.93	8*	$3,383
4/29/2024	ULTA	$406.38	20	$8,128
4/30/2024	FHN	$14.77	894	$13,204
4/30/2024	HON	$193.99	53	$10,281
4/30/2024	VWO	$42.39	506	$21,449
5/3/2024	LVMUY	$170.15	56	$9,528
5/3/2024	SHEL	$72.39	46*	$3,330
5/3/2024	TSLA	$182.07	55	$10,014
9/18/2024	PENN	$20.25	766	$15,512
11/14/2024	BIDU	$85.05	129	$10,971
12/6/2024	ELV	$395.60	26	$10,286
12/6/2024	AMD	$140.79	20*	$2,816
12/6/2024	NXT	$37.13	286	$10,617

Performance Analysis:

April marked the first monthly downturn in benchmark indices in months. The BIF saw its largest portfolio turnover of the year, closing four positions and making three partial sales while adding PayPal, Vertiv, and Elevance Health. Vertiv quickly became a top performer.

May was strong, with major indices reaching all-time highs. Before semester-end, the previous class sold LVMH, Tesla, and a portion of Shell.

June and July were inactive for the BIF, but markets surged, led by large-cap growth stocks. The fund capitalized on this rally, with Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon gaining 8.87%. However, losses in Flex (-12.25%), Baidu (-11.02%), and MP Materials (-21.51%) offset gains. July closed up 2.71%, with Philip Morris (+13.65%) and Flex (+9.02%) leading.

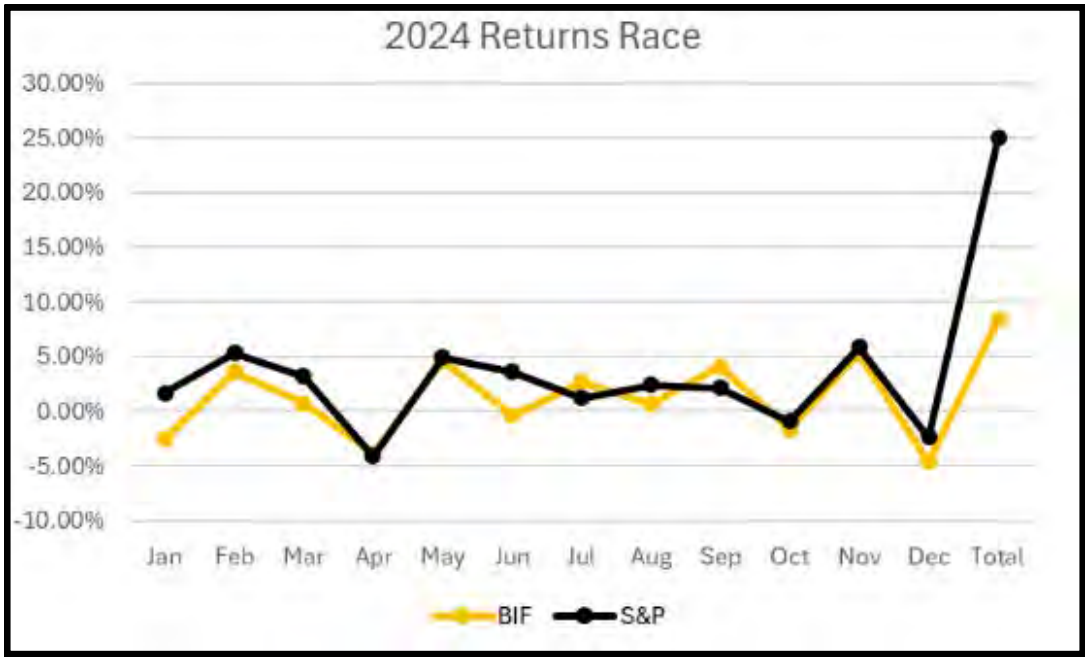
August saw volatility due to concerns over the U.S. Carry Trade, but the BIF managed a 0.67% gain.

In September, the current class made its first decision, selling Penn Entertainment (-4.09%). BIF outperformed the S&P 500 by 1.64%, gaining 4.09% ($13,344.39). MP Materials (+36.8%), Vertiv (+20.4%), and Baidu (+24.4%) were top gainers, while Shell (-8.0%), Nextracker (-7.8%), and Elevance Health (-6.6%) lagged.

October was impacted by Hurricane Helene, leaving BIF out of session for three weeks. The fund lost 1.6%, underperforming the S&P 500 by 0.69%, with losses led by Elevance (-22%), Baidu (-13.4%), and Coca-Cola (-9.1%), while Vertiv (+9.9%) and Philip Morris (+9.3%) were top performers.

November was the best month of the year, boosted by the November election and "Trump trade" rally, with a total gain of $18,821.22.

Figure 5: BIF and S&P Returns



(Defensive) Industry Analysis

In 2024, sector performance varied widely, with some industries benefiting from macroeconomic trends and technological advancements, while others struggled due to geopolitical and economic challenges. Below, we provide the total performance of the S&P 500 for each sector—Materials, Utilities, Energy, Consumer Staples, Industrials, Healthcare, Information Technology, Consumer Discretionary, Communication Services, Financials, and Real Estate —and provide our outlook for 2025.

Materials: (0.87%)

The materials sector suffered heavily due to a slowdown in China's economic growth. China has experienced a slowdown in domestic demand, particularly when it comes to local government projects focused on infrastructure. However, looking ahead, analysts are bullish on the materials sector. China's stimulus package plan for local governments is allowing for more room for future growth. We recommend overweighting materials in 2025 due to China's expected significant gains in infrastructure. Currently, the BIF's primary exposure to the materials sector is through MP materials at 5.5% of total AUM, as well as exposure through the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). By comparison, materials make up 1.9% of the S&P 500.

Utilities: 18.27%

This year was great for utility stocks, including some of the highest performers on the market. The large power needs of the AI boom primarily drove this. For example, Vistra Corporation is up around 320% for the past year, outperforming even companies like Nvidia, one of the primary beneficiaries of the AI boom. Another important aspect of the utilities sector is the need for home heating and cooling. Revenues driven by consumer utility demands are tied heavily to the seasons and how extreme a season is. The summer of 2024 was globally the hottest summer since 1880, and subsequently, utility demand was at a high. Utilities provide a "picks and shovels" approach to investing in the AI boom, and as such, we recommend overweighting. The BIF is exposed to utilities through its utilities ETF, SPDR (XLU), as well as the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and Russell 2000 ETF (IWM), with 3.8% of the portfolio being invested in this sector. By comparison, utilities make up 2.3% of the S&P 500.

Energy: 2.73%

The energy sector, in aggregate, had lackluster returns for the year. However, each sub-sector has a vastly different story. Upstream oil and gas, the part of the value chain that is responsible for the extraction of resources, suffered the most losses. Upstream oil and gas companies had trouble making profits from the lowering of gas prices over the year. In turn, mid-stream companies, the part of the value chain in charge of distribution and storing crude oil and natural gas, fared well in comparison. Mid-stream companies performed better because they are less affected by commodity pricing and have more predictable cash flows. We suggest remaining underweight in this sector. The BIF only holds one energy stock, Shell (SHEL), and is exposed to the sector through the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM) and iShares S&P 500 (IVV), with 4.9% of the portfolio being invested in energy. By comparison, energy makes up 3.1% of the S&P 500.

Consumer Staples: 10.49%

Consumer staples had a strong year due to their use as a hedge against uncertain economic times and the additional risk many investors take by investing in technology-heavy portfolios. This sector still lagged behind the S&P 500's aggregate return for the year, largely due to shifts in investor sentiment. Additionally, high interest rates have made bonds a more attractive alternative to consumer staples, which are traditionally favored for their stable dividends. Looking ahead, we recommend underweighting consumer staples due to the opportunity cost of higher-growth sectors. However, if interest rates decline, investors may consider investing in consumer staples as a bond alternative. The BIG currently weights 11.5% of the portfolio in consumer staples through companies like Philip Morris (PM), Coca-Cola (KO), and Celsius Holdings (CELH), as well as some in the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). By comparison, consumer staples make up 5.5% of the S&P 500.

Industrials: 18.80%

The U.S. industrial sector performed well despite facing some strong headwinds. Throughout the year, investors balanced optimism—driven by increased domestic infrastructure spending and declining inflation—with concerns over employment data. However, as the year progressed, the labor market eased and strengthened investor confidence. With stronger job markets and lower inflation, the outlook for industrials remains positive. Government infrastructure initiatives will likely drive demand for materials, transportation, and construction-related industries. Given this favorable setup, we recommend overweighting the industrials sector. The BIG currently has 9.9% of the portfolio invested in industrials through General Dynamics (GD), Vertiv Holdings (VRT), the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV), and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). By comparison, industrials make up 8.3% of the S&P 500.

Healthcare: (0.17%)

The healthcare sector faced a challenging year, posting a negative return largely due to declining biopharma investment and uncertainty surrounding the new U.S. administration. The anticipated appointment of RFK Jr. as Health Secretary, a known vaccine skeptic, has weighed on vaccine manufacturers. Despite these setbacks, medical device sales provided a partial offset, as workforce recovery in the healthcare sector has increased demand for medical equipment. Given the uncertainty surrounding future healthcare policies, we recommend remaining underweight in the sector. Healthcare currently makes up 6.3% of the BIF through the Vanguard Healthcare Index (VHT), the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM), and the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV). By comparison, healthcare makes up 10.5% of the S&P 500.

(Cyclical) Industry Analysis

Information Technology: 45.48%

The information technology sector demonstrated remarkable growth across the board, significantly outpacing other sectors. This sector was one of the leading contributors to the S&P 500's growth this year, producing an annual return of over 45%. This year showcased widespread AI adoption that significantly transformed multiple aspects of society and will continue to do so in the coming years. Many businesses across the board have implemented new technologies and services, including multiple generative AI chatbots. This new AI wave is powered by cloud computing and high-quality microchips produced by big companies like Nvidia and AMD. Considering the impressive growth, widespread AI adoption, and increased cloud computing, we recommend overweighting this sector for the upcoming year to capture continued success in the industry. Currently, 31.19% of the BIF is in information technology, specifically through AMD, AAPL, FLEX, MSFT, and NOW. We also have some additional exposure through the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). By comparison, information technology makes up 30.7% of the S&P 500.

Consumer Discretionary: 36.08%

The consumer discretionary sector showcased strong growth, with a total return of 36.08% driven by consumer spending and economic stability. Key trends included a steady job market, sustainable and purpose-driven brand preferences among younger consumers, and the integration of smart technology and AI. Significant events like the Federal Reserve's rate cuts and the swift US election outcome increased consumer confidence and spending on big-ticket items. As we look ahead to 2025, the sector is positioned well for continued strength, supported by favorable macroeconomic factors in the job market and beneficial inflation rates. We recommend overweighting the consumer discretionary sector as the economy is predicted to thrive, and this sector will grow along with it. Consumer discretionary makes up 18.6% of the BIF through Amazon (AMZN), Planet Fitness (PLNT), and Yeti Holdings (YETI), along with additional weight through the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). By comparison, consumer discretionary makes up 11.4% of the S&P 500.

Communication Services: 45.58%

In the past year, the communication services sector experienced significant growth, achieving an annual return of over 45%, driven by the impressive performance of mega-cap tech-related stocks such as Meta and Google. The sector benefited greatly from advancements in AI, which boosted digital advertising revenues through enhanced personalization and efficiency. Additionally, the rebound of wireless service providers in the second half of the year contributed to the sector's success. Overall, the sector's robust performance was fueled by technological innovations, enhanced digital advertising, and a resilient market environment. We foresee these trends continuing into 2025, so we recommend overweighting this sector. The BIF does not hold any singular communication services stock but has a 1.7% weight in this sector due to exposure through the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). By comparison, communication services makes up 9.9% of the S&P 500.

Financials: 28.21%

The financials sector achieved an annual return above 28%, supported by the Federal Reserve's three rate cuts in late 2024 that increased investor confidence and economic growth. The sector experienced growth primarily due to advancements in AI and blockchain technology, which enhanced operational efficiencies and reduced costs for financial institutions. Additionally, the surge in fintech innovations (which were highlighted at multiple major conferences such as Finovate and the Singapore Fintech Festival) fostered collaboration and showcased groundbreaking technologies. The sector's robust performance was underpinned by favorable monetary policies, technological advancements, and a strong focus on innovation and efficiency, positioning it for continued growth and resilience. For these reasons, we recommend overweighting the financial sector over the next year. Currently, 11.85% of the BIF is invested in financials through PayPal (PYPL) and Blackrock (BLK), with additional exposure through the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). By comparison, financials make up 14.1% of the S&P 500.

Real Estate: 2.59%

In the past year, the real estate sector experienced a modest annual return of 2.59%, influenced by diverse performance across its sub-sectors. While apartments, data centers, and industrial properties demonstrated resilience and contributed to growth, the overall sector growth was tempered by economic conditions. Despite predictions of a recession, the U.S. economy remained resilient, supporting the real estate market. Significant trends included the integration of AI models in property management and operations, enhancing efficiency and value. We recommend remaining underweight in this sector as it does not currently provide significant returns and could quickly lead to negative returns in an economic downturn. The BIF does not hold any equity stake in the real estate sector but due to exposure through the iShares S&P 500 ETF (IVV) and the Russell 2000 ETF (IWM). it is incorporated. By comparison, real estate makes up 2.1% of the S&P 500.

ESG Summary

This year, the ESG Analyst role has been redefined as the "Portfolio Risk Manager" role and has further expanded to cover all types of investment risk. The Bowden Investment Group continues to follow the ESG guidelines created by past classes to create a portfolio that is mitigated from long-term investment risk and is compensated for the risk that it inevitably takes on. The criteria for risk analysis in the Bowden Investment Fund are outlined as follows:

Criteria 1: Our holdings have Refinitiv/LSEG and Sustainalytics Ratings that are better or on par with the industry and competitors.

Criteria 2: To ensure our holdings are committed to ESG awareness and improvement, each company must file an ESG or Sustainability Report annually. In the instance of no reporting, the class must justify the occurrence and compare it with competitors.

Criteria 3: The Entrenchment Index analysis must be reported for each holding, and each holding must have an Entrenchment Index of four or fewer. If a potential holding has an Entrenchment Index of four or more, there must be an additional discussion amongst the team before a stock can be bought.

ESG Ratings from Sustainalytics:

Ticker:	Score:
AAPL	16.8
AMD	13.7
AMZN	26.1
BLK	18.4
CELH	38.8
FLEX	7.6
GD	34.1
KO	39.6
MP	47.1
MSFT	14.2
NOW	16.3
PLNT	26.7
PM	26.6
PYPL	16.4
SHEL	38.1
VRT	22.6
YETI	8.6
Total: Average:	**24.22**

Entrenchment Index

Ticker	Staggered/ Classified Board	Supermajority Requirement for Bylaw Amendments	Supermajority Requirement for Charter Amendments	Supermajority Requirement for Mergers	Poison Pill	Golden Parachute	Total
AAPL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AMD	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
AMZN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BLK	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
CELH	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
FLEX	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
GD	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
KO	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
MP	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
MSFT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NOW	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
PLNT	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
PM	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
PYPL	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
SHEL	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
VRT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
YETI	1	1	1	1	0	1	5
						Total Average:	**1.71**

As noted in the chart above, two stocks bought within the fall semester, (PLNT) and (YETI), have Entrenchment Indices greater than four. YETI was voted into the portfolio following a group discussion due to its extremely low Sustainalytics score of 8.6, showing negligible ESG risk as a long-term investment. PLNT was also voted into the portfolio based on heavy performance-based incentives for its executives, giving confidence in its governance and long-term reliability.

ESG Stock Pitch Competition

Reece Fisher and Brianna Gilmore spearheaded App State's first-ever external stock pitch competition this year. This was a significant milestone, as the Bowden Investment Group has never put on an event like this one. The premise of the competition was for participating teams to choose a stock that they believed was an impressive investment opportunity while also having strong ESG characteristics. Our finalists for this year were Whitworth University, Loras College, and East Tennessee State University, claiming first, second, and third place, respectively. Through running the ESG Stock Pitch Competition, our group learned a lot about what goes into planning and executing such competitions.

Reece Fisher and Brianna Gilmore did a fantastic job of organizing the event, marketing to student-managed investment funds across the country, and finding a panel of judges to officiate. In this past year's competition, we had the pleasure of having Dr. Goff, Joshua Jarrett, and Dr. McNeil serve on our panel of judges. Reece and Brianna also arranged for AJ Patton, the CEO of 548 Enterprise, to serve as the competition's keynote speaker. This competition wouldn't have been possible without Reece and Brianna, and we are extremely grateful for their hard work. We are also very thankful for the generous support of Dennis Covington of Savant Wealth Management for sponsoring the event.

Later this spring, our 2025 Portfolio Risk Analyst, Luke Barbaryka, will manage the second annual Bowden Stock Pitch Competition with the theme of "Sustainable Horizons."

We want to invite all Bowden alumni and anyone interested to join us on March 28th at 2:00 PM to attend the competition via Zoom. We were extremely pleased with the presentations for the inaugural Bowden Stock Pitch Competition last year and hope you all will join us to see what the teams will present this year.



Economic Reflection and Outlook

Inflation:

In 2024, inflation remained a significant concern for the global economy. The year saw fluctuating inflation rates due to various factors, including supply chain disruptions, increased consumer demand, and rising energy prices. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) showed a year-over-year increase of 3.5%, reflecting persistent inflationary pressures. Central banks worldwide, including the Federal Reserve, closely monitored inflation trends and adjusted monetary policies to mitigate the impact on the economy.

Interest Rates & Fed Funds Rate:

To combat inflation, the Federal Reserve implemented multiple rate hikes, raising the Fed Funds Rate from 4.5% to 5.25% by year-end, according to Federal Reserve reports (Federal Reserve, 2024). These hikes were designed to slow economic overheating and bring inflation closer to the Fed's 2% target. The higher rates led to increased borrowing costs for businesses and consumers, impacting corporate investment, home affordability, and discretionary spending. The housing market felt the impact most acutely, with mortgage rates surging and refinancing activity slowing considerably, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) (MBA, 2024).

Despite these measures, inflation remained stubborn in certain sectors, particularly in housing, healthcare, and services, suggesting that rate policy alone was insufficient to fully contain price pressures. By the end of the year, markets speculated whether the Fed would pause hikes or pivot toward easing monetary conditions in 2025, contingent on further economic data (Bloomberg, 2024).

In 2024, after maintaining the effective federal funds rate at 5.33%, the Fed implemented three rate cuts. In September, they made an aggressive rate reduction of 50 basis points, bringing it down to 4.83%. In the subsequent FOMC meeting, they further reduced the interest rate by 25 basis points to 4.58%. Finally, on December 18th, they enacted one more 25 basis point cut, lowering the interest rate to 4.33%. The effects of these rate cuts included lower borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, which helped to stimulate spending and investment.

Fixed Income:

The fixed income market experienced significant volatility in response to rising rates. Bond yields climbed as investors demanded higher returns to offset inflation risks, with the 10-year U.S. Treasury yield increasing from 3.0% to 3.75%, according to Treasury Department data (U.S. Treasury, 2024). This shift led to a decline in bond prices, particularly for long-duration fixed income assets, which are more sensitive to interest rate movements.

Despite the challenges, fixed income remained a key component of diversified portfolios, providing stability and income, especially as concerns over equity market volatility grew. Inflation-linked bonds, such as Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities (TIPS), gained popularity, as investors sought to hedge against rising prices (Capital IQ, 2024). Corporate bonds also faced pressure, with credit spreads widening as higher rates increased borrowing costs for companies, particularly in rate-sensitive industries such as real estate, utilities, and consumer discretionary (IBISWorld, 2024).

Commodities:

Commodities experienced significant price volatility in 2024, driven by supply chain disruptions, geopolitical tensions, and fluctuating demand. Energy prices, particularly oil and natural gas, saw substantial increases due to production constraints and geopolitical conflicts. Agricultural commodities also faced price hikes due to adverse weather conditions and supply shortages. These factors contributed to the overall inflationary environment. According to McKinsey, these increased commodity prices have prompted many companies to explore alternative sources and invest in more sustainable practices to mitigate future risks.

Election:

The 2024 U.S. presidential election had a notable impact on the economy and financial markets. The election outcome influenced investor sentiment and policy expectations. The new administration's economic policies, including fiscal stimulus measures and regulatory changes, were closely watched by market participants. The election's impact on trade policies, taxation, and government spending shaped economic forecasts and investment strategies. Furthermore, uncertainty around the election underscored the importance of political stability in ensuring market confidence and economic growth.

Future Outlook:

Looking ahead, our economic outlook for 2025 remains cautiously optimistic. The Central bank is expected to continue their efforts to manage inflation and support economic growth. The focus will be on balancing monetary policy to avoid stifling economic recovery while addressing inflationary pressures. Technological advancements, renewable energy investments, and infrastructure development are anticipated to drive economic growth. However, uncertainties related to geopolitical tensions and global supply chain disruptions may pose challenges. Due to the high amount of uncertainty, we recommend safer investments for the 2025 fiscal year as we see how the market reacts to all of these economic pressures.



Competitions and Events

Competitions

The Bowden Investment Group participates in many competitions each year, including the CFA Institute Research Challenge, the UGA Stock Pitch Competition, and the Quinnipiac GAME Forum. These competitions primarily take place during the spring semester, allowing our members to refine their skill sets before competing against other schools and student-managed investment funds. These competitions offer a unique opportunity for us to bond and grow as a group outside of the normal Bowden classroom. Stock pitch competitions are unlike anything else within the Walker College of Business and have been a great learning experience for Bowden classes. In 2024, Bowden also hosted its own inaugural stock pitch competition, which was a significant milestone for our group.

2023-2024 CFA

Each year, a team of three to five members of Bowden are selected to participate in the CFA Institute Research Challenge and are known as the “Broyhill Fellows.” In the 2023-2024 school year, this team consisted of Brianna Gilmore, Corbin Lammers, Maximus Pavone, Derek Mahato, and Ashley Meacham. This team pitched a "sell" on the company Nucor (NUE), an American steel company based out of Charlotte. The team based its pitch on delays in infrastructure implementation and narrow company margins. The CFA team advanced all the way to the Americas Regional level after winning both the sub-regional and NC local competitions. Overall, the team is very proud of their success and the valuable insights they gained.



UGA

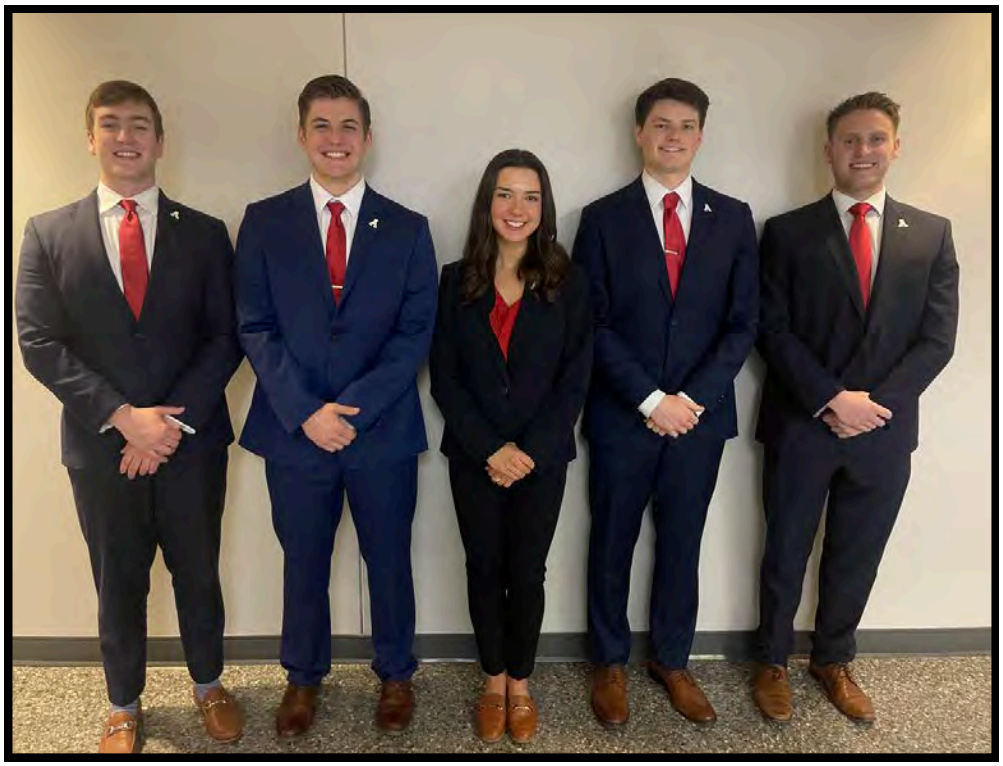
The Bowden Investment Group submitted two pitches to the University of Georgia Stock Pitch Competition. One team consisted of Hudson Smith, Parker Sciolino, and Victor Tovar. This team pitched a “buy” on the company Cloudflare (NET), a cloud services provider. The team based their pitch on the increasing cybersecurity risk in the future. Our second submission was by Aaron Atwell, David Chalmers, Reece Fisher, and Luciano Zito. This team pitched a “buy” on the company Lamb Weston (LW), one of the world's largest frozen potato producers. The team based their pitch in response to the fast food industry's recent growth. Unfortunately, neither one of our submissions was invited to present in Georgia.

Quinnipiac GAME Forum

During our annual trip to New York, Bowden members also participated in the Quinnipiac GAME Forum. This year, our accountants, Ashley Meacham and Victor Tovar, competed in the poster presentation. Although we didn't take home the win, our class as a whole benefited significantly from the experience. The group attended fireside chats and panel discussions on topics such as digital investments, equity research, and advancements in financial technology. Our very own economist, Husdon Smith, even had the opportunity to participate in one of these panels.

2024-2025 CFA

The CFA Institute Research Challenge team for the 2024-2025 academic year consists of Keira Andrews, Carson Beane, Jack Parquette, Davis Pharr, and Brenden Wortman. This team pitched a "buy" on the company Honeywell (HON). Honeywell is a commercial conglomerate that produces engineering services and aerospace systems. The team based its pitch on Honeywell's dynamic portfolio and innovation technology. They are awaiting the team's acceptance into the NC local live competition round. Overall, the team is very proud of their work over winter break and grateful for the assistance of their faculty advisor, Dr. Hadley, and their industry mentor, Mr. Patrick Wells.



Trips and Firm Visits

NYC Trip

In March of 2024, the Bowden Investment Group took its annual trip to New York City. This trip provides students with an opportunity to learn about the history of banking, as well as compete in the Quinnipiac GAME Forum. The group was honored to be joined by Bowden alumni Cooper Bumgarner and Zachary Stowell throughout the trip.

The trip included visits to several firms, including Evercore ISI, Pzena Investment Management, and Pagaya Technologies, where the group met with alumnus Madeline Hamiter, c/o 2019. The firm visits provided the group with unique insights and opportunities, including attending Evercore ISI's premarket meeting. The group also visited the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange to witness the ringing of the opening bell. While there, the group enjoyed a private tour of the iconic institution and spoke with a Market Maker about his experience and how the NYSE has changed over the years.

On the last day of the trip, the group split up to explore the city's museums and iconic landmarks together. The Bowden Investment Group extends its gratitude to Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole for their dedication in organizing this trip, as well as to the donors and firms whose support made this invaluable learning experience possible. This trip was a wonderful opportunity for the class to foster lasting connections, create meaningful memories, and gain valuable industry insights. These experiences are something the group will continue to cherish throughout their careers.



Charlotte Firm Visits

In April of 2024, both the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 classes made multiple firm visits throughout downtown Charlotte. Among these firms were Wedge Capital, Dimensional Fund Advisors, and Wells Fargo Securities.

At Wedge Capital, we were hosted by Mr. Brad Horstmann, who shared his extensive experience with the company and also brought in his colleagues to teach our classes about algorithmic trading and fundamental analysis. Both of our classes benefited greatly from the experience, with the Class of 2025, for the first time, observing and learning the art of asking thoughtful questions in a real business environment.

At Dimensional Fund Advisors, we were hosted by BIG alumni Jonathan Fogle, Jewell Ward, John Rucker, and Johnathan Smith. While at the firm, our groups learned much more about factor investing and investment strategy oversight from a number of Dimensional's trading advisors. After an informative session and lunch, we joined our hosts for a tour of the building and trading floor, where we had the opportunity to see the traders in action and ask more questions about the industry. Before wrapping up our visit, we also enjoyed ice cream in Dimensonal's beautiful dining hall- a sweet ending to a busy day.

At Wells Fargo, we were hosted by BIG alumni Charlotte Rice, Matt Ramundo, Edward Crowther, and adjunct professor Sam Kaufman. Our groups were given the opportunity to hear from Matt and Edward about investment banking and capital markets, as well as Matt's specific specialization in collateralized vehicle loans. We were also given a tour of the Wells Fargo trading floors, which gave us a glimpse into what investment banking life at Wells Fargo could look like. Later, we met with Sam Kaufman and his colleagues to talk about the importance of proactive risk management in protecting bank investments.

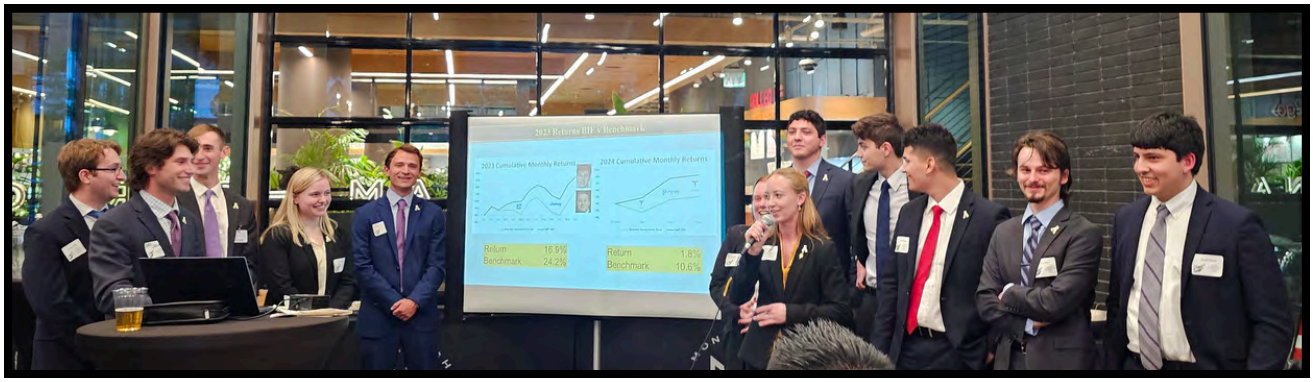
Again, we want to extend our appreciation to Brad Horstmann, Jonathan Fogle, Jewell Ward, John Rucker, Johnathan Smith, Charlotte Rice, Matt Ramundo, Edward Crowther, and Sam Kaufman for hosting these events. These trips would not have been the same without your contributions, and our groups are extremely thankful for these opportunities.

We also want to give Charlotte Rice an extra BIG thank you. The Wells Fargo firm visit would have never been possible without Charlotte going out of her way to make it happen. We are extremely appreciative of the effort that Charlotte put in for us, and we hope to be invited back in the near future.



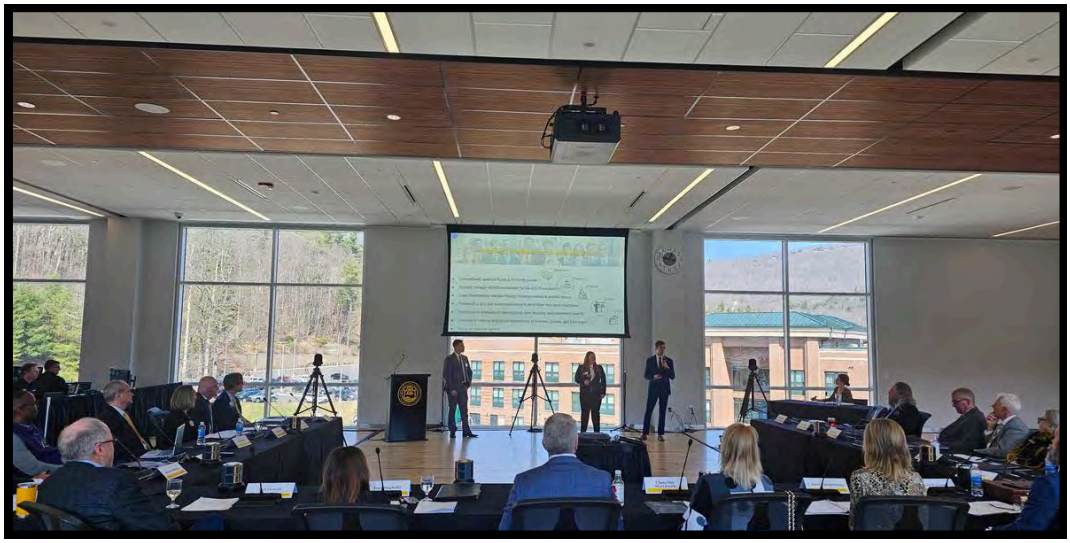
Alumni Dinner

During the trip to Charlotte, our groups invited BIG alumni to join us at the Monarch Dining Hall for our annual dinner, which has been an ongoing event for many years. Members connected with alumni, expanded their business networks, and reflected on their year in Bowden. The Class of 2024 also gave their annual review presentation to the alumni, showing the amazing things they accomplished in the past two semesters.



Foundation Board Presentation

Over Spring Break, Maximus Pavone, Victor Tovar, and Brianna Gilmore had the honor of presenting to the Appalachian State Foundation Board, sharing insights on the Bowden Investment Group, our activities, and the fund's 2023 performance. They also had the opportunity to network over lunch with university and foundation leaders, including Chancellor Everts and Vice-Chancellor Jane Bargothi. As the only student organization invited to the board meeting, it was a privilege to showcase our experiences and the impact of managing Foundation funds. We are deeply grateful for the continued support of the University, Foundation, Foundation staff and Board, Chancellor Everts, Vice-Chancellor Bargothi, and Vice-Chancellor for Foundation Finance Clayton Christian.



Presenting at Lake Hickory Country Club: A Picks and Shovels Approach

Our 2024-2025 class had the privilege of participating in the ASU Foundation's *Appalachian Presents* series at the Lake Hickory Country Club, where we explored the picks-and-shovels approach to investing. Our members delivered an in-depth presentation on key investment themes, including Artificial Intelligence, Electric Vehicles, Aging Populations, and Defense. This event provided an invaluable opportunity to refine our presentation skills, engage in thought-provoking discussions with industry professionals, and expand our professional networks. By sharing insights on emerging market trends, we strengthened our ability to analyze investment opportunities and communicate complex financial concepts effectively.



Prime 21 Dinner

Following our Foundation Board presentation in March, our 2023-2024 class received an invitation from Trustee Mark Ricks to an exclusive dinner at Prime 21, a private steakhouse in Banner Elk, where he is a distinguished member.

This event was a great opportunity for our group to experience the highest end of fine dining and to explore the impressive property developed by the Prime 21 entrepreneurs. Our group was given a tour of all five restaurants on the property as well as an introductory lesson to mixing premium cocktails and ordering drinks at a high-class bar. During the dinner, the Prime 21 staff assisted us in navigating the menu full of unique appetizers and expertly prepared steaks. For many of us, this was a chance to try new dishes—such as oysters—for the first time and the experience in full was nothing short of exceptional.

More than just a memorable dinner, this evening was a unique learning opportunity and a fitting culmination of our class's journey after more than a year of collaboration. We are deeply grateful to Trustee Ricks for his generosity and to both his team and the Prime 21 staff for their outstanding hospitality.





BIG Day with Dr. Goff: Career Insight and Advice

Our 2024-2025 class began the semester with a strong focus on professionalism, underscoring its importance as we prepare for careers in the financial industry. A key highlight was an engaging session led by Dr. Goff, whose insights provided us with invaluable tools for navigating the corporate world. Through his guidance, we gained a deeper understanding of workplace etiquette, effective communication, and the expectations of high-performing professionals. This session not only set a professional tone for the months ahead but also laid a solid foundation for our members as they transition into the financial sector, equipping them with the skills necessary to excel in their future careers.

BIG Day at Camp Broadstone

On our third BIG Day, we ventured to Camp Broadstone for a day of team-building activities! While it differed from our usual classroom setting, the trip provided a valuable opportunity for bonding—an experience each class eagerly anticipates. Through a series of challenges, we worked together to solve problems creatively, gaining insight into each other's communication styles and strengths.





BIG Day at Blowing Rock Country Club

On our final BIG day, Mr. Poole welcomed us to the Blowing Rock Country Club for a Resume and LinkedIn Bootcamp, followed by an Etiquette Luncheon led by Amy Odom. Throughout the day, our class collaborated to enhance our resumes and LinkedIn profiles, ensuring they effectively showcased our experiences and skills. After the bootcamp, Amy Odom, Executive Director of Walker College of Business Career Services, guided us through an etiquette luncheon, offering valuable insights into professional dining etiquette and table manners.





2024 Stock Pitches

Spring Pitches

The following is a list of all the stocks that were pitched in the spring semester by the class of 2023-2024. All of these presentations were well-informed and insightful, but unfortunately, only a small number of stocks are accepted each year. These first five pitches were the only ones that were admitted into the BIF.

Hudson Smith
(Baidu)
NYSE: BIDU

Baidu is the "Google of China" with a dominant search engine, cloud computing software, and a robust advertisement platform. BIDU was voted into the portfolio based on conviction around the company's many innovations in the Chinese technology space and healthy cash flows. BIDU was bought on (5/1) and was subsequently sold on (11/14) due to concerns about China's economic stability and population.

Reece Fisher
(Elevance Health)
NYSE: ELV

Elevance Health is a health insurance provider and long-term care partner strategically poised to benefit from the growing demographic of individuals enrolling in Medicare due to an aging population. ELV was voted into the portfolio based on conviction around increasing revenues from the U.S. elderly. ELV was purchased on (4/29) and was subsequently sold on (12/6) due to general concerns around the healthcare sector.

Parker Sciolino
(Service NOW)
NYSE: NOW

ServiceNow is a cloud-based workflow automation platform that focuses on business processes and IT services. NOW was voted into the portfolio based on conviction around its AI capabilities and use within the Fortune 500 space. NOW was bought on (5/1) and is still in the portfolio.

Hudson Smith & Derek Mahato
(PayPal)
NYSE: PYPL

PayPal is poised for significant growth as a leader in digital payments, backed by robust financial health, strategic international expansions, and a focus on profitability. PYPL was voted into the portfolio based on conviction around popular use and high profit margins. PYPL was purchased on (4/11) and is still in the portfolio.

David Chalmers
(Vertiv)
NYSE: VRT

Vertiv is an infrastructure technologies company that provides energy management systems for data centers around the world. Vertiv was voted into the portfolio based on conviction around its "picks-and-shovels" approach to the AI market boom. VRT was purchased on (4/29) and is still one of the portfolio's best performers.

The following pitches did not make it into the portfolio but were great presentations overall.

Maximus Pavone
(AAR Corporation)
NYSE: AIR

The AAR Corporation is a leading provider of products and services for both commercial aviation and defense. The company is in a prime position to grow its sales based on Boeing's difficulties and increases in travel post-pandemic.

Aaron Atwell
(Baxter International)
NYSE: BAX

Baxter is a healthcare company that operates in three main business segments- medication delivery, bioscience, and renal. With the acquisition of Hillrom, Baxter is poised for sales growth, especially in the kidney care sector.

Victor Tovar
(Avis Budget Group)
NYSE: CAR

Avis Budget Group is a leading global provider of vehicle rental services, operating through the Avis, Budget, and Zipcar brands. Avis operates over 11,000 rental locations across 180 countries as well as its car-sharing fleets across major cities.

Luciano Zito
(CBOE Global Markets)
NYSE: CBOE

CBOE is a leading provider of trading and investment solutions, offering a diverse array of products including options, futures, equities, and FX, along with innovative trading technology and analytics services.

David Chalmers & Parker Sciolino
(Charter Communications)
NYSE: CHTR

Charter Communications is a prominent broadband connectivity and cable operator company in the United States. It caters to a wide range of services, including the Internet, video on demand, pay-per-view, voice communications, and mobile services.

Victor Tovar & Aaron Atwell
(Li Auto)
NYSE: LI

Li Auto is a Chinese EV automaker specializing in electric SUVs. The company dominates with its flagship L6 SUV, priced 5% lower than Tesla's Model Y, and is poised for expansion into the US market in 2025.

Luciano Zito, Reese Fisher, Aaron Atwell, & David Chalmers
(Lamb Weston)
NYSE: LW

Lamb Weston is a leading supplier of frozen potatoes to restaurants and retailers globally. For over 70 years, the company has continually introduced new products to meet customer needs.

Luciano Zito
(Match Group)
NYSE: MTCH

Match Group is a global leading provider of online dating services, known for popular apps such as Tinder, Match, and OkCupid. The company is in a prime position for growth due to increased interest in emerging markets and a popular brand image.

Parker Sciolino, Hudson Smith, & Victor Tovar
(Cloudflare)
NYSE: NET

Cloudflare is a global provider of cloud services, specializing in the performance and security of websites and applications. The company offers services for DDoS mitigation and secure content delivery to a variety of industries.

Hudson Smith
(Qualcomm)
NYSE: QCOM

Qualcomm's leadership in 5G chip innovation, combined with its strategic expansion in the automotive semiconductor market and dominance in smartphone technologies, positions it for robust growth as it capitalizes on advances in AI and machine learning.

Luciano Zito & Reece Fisher
(Ferrari)
NYSE: RACE

Ferrari represents the epitome of Italian luxury and performance, with a storied racing heritage and a commitment to innovation that continues to set new standards in the automotive industry.

Reece Fisher
(Ultragenyx)
NYSE: RARE

Ultragenyx is a pioneering biopharmaceutical company dedicated to developing innovative treatments for rare and ultra-rare genetic diseases, offering transformative therapies with a diverse clinical pipeline.

Victor Tovar
(T-Mobile)
NYSE: TMUS

T-Mobile is a leading wireless network operator in the United States, known for its innovative approach to the telecommunications industry and its strategic acquisitions of MetroPCS and Sprint.

Aaron Atwell
(Uber Technologies)
NYSE: UBER

Uber is the largest on-demand ride-sharing provider in the world. Positioned as a premier ride-sharing platform, Uber leverages comprehensive data collection and utilization, to drive demand and increase profitability.

David Chalmers
(UnitedHealth Group)
NYSE: UNH

UnitedHealth Group is a leading healthcare company that provides a wide range of health insurance, healthcare services, and technology solutions. The company aims to improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery in total.

Parker Sciolino
(Veeva Systems)
NYSE: VEEV

Veeva Systems is a cloud-based software provider for the global life sciences industry. The company offers clinical trials, regulatory compliance, and customer relationship management systems for its buyers.

Initial Fall Pitches

Davis Pharr
(Boot Barn)
NYSE: BOOT

Boot Barn Holdings is one of the largest and fastest-growing retail chains that specialize in Western lifestyle and work-related footwear, apparel, and accessories. The company operates in over 430 stores across 45 states. Each store contains high-quality products across over 40 brands, offering a large array of boots, denim, western-style shirts, belts, buckles, and other jewelry and accessories. These products cater to a broad range of blue-collar workers, as well as many men, women, and children looking for stylish clothes to add to their wardrobe. BOOT has been organically growing its number of stores across the country, as well as its online presence through three main web domains.

Final Recommendation - The thesis for BOOT was related to the company's increasing expansion, both in physical stores and online sales. Our decision not to invest in BOOT came from a large jump in price right around the time of the fall stock pitch. As a group, we could not find a reason to believe the company could continue its current growth trajectory based on the financials.

Luke Barbaryka
(Campbell Soup Company)
NYSE: CPB

Campbell Soup Company, a prominent food industry giant, offers a vast array of products through its extensive Meals & Beverages and Snacks segments. The company was originally founded in 1867 and has been a pantry staple around the world for over a century. The company has expanded its snack portfolio by acquiring brands like Snyder's-Lance and Sovos Brand, allowing it to offer a wider range of snack options to consumers. Through these strategic acquisitions and industry-high investment in product innovation, the company is poised to further increase its market share and revenue.

Final Recommendation - The thesis for CPB was related to the company's stable performance for many years and reliable dividend. Our decision to not invest in CPB was largely due to its lack of substantial future growth prospects and the higher potential returns offered by other pitches.

Jack Parquette
(Dillard's)
NYSE: DDS

Dillard's is a major American department store chain known for offering a wide range of high-quality products, including clothing, footwear, accessories, cosmetics, and home goods. The investment thesis was based on strong financials, continued expansion, and operating efficiency. Dillard's had a large amount of excess cash and very little debt, giving it financial flexibility as it continues to build new stores in the Midwest. Additionally, the company benefits from its own construction subsidiary, allowing it to build and maintain stores without relying on a third party.

Final Recommendation - The thesis for DDS was related to the company's strong financials and continued expansion. As a group, we decided not to invest due to concerns about competitive pressures in future market expansion. Dillard's smaller online presence was also considered a weakness as the retail industry continues to shift toward e-commerce.

Alex Greaves
(Ensign Group)
NYSE: ENSG

The Ensign Group, Inc. is a healthcare provider primarily focused on post-acute services like skilled nursing and rehabilitative services, alongside a range of other operations including mobile diagnostics and patient transportation. Operating primarily in the United States, it offers services through its independent subsidiaries across multiple states. Through the increased demand for elder care and investment in the healthcare industry, this company is in a position for future growth.

Final Recommendation - The thesis for ENSG was that the company was going to capitalize heavily on aging population trends. As a group, we decided not to invest as we believed that these trends had already been priced in and that there was no longer a substantial upside for investment.

Collin Sadler
(Ethan Allen)
NYSE: ETD

Ethan Allen is a premium and custom-made American furniture company. Since its inception, the company has become a leading designer and retailer of upscale furniture, emphasizing modern esthetics and personalized service. ETD offers a wide range of products, spanning from furniture all the way to lighting and home accessories. Ethan Allen is widely regarded as America's #1 premium furniture company, with its products even being used within the White House.

Final Recommendation - The thesis for ETD was that the company was well-positioned to capitalize on an up-swing in the housing market and home renovations. Our decision not to invest in ETD was due to concerns about recent revenue declines and the company's lagging position even as a premium competitor.

Tymber McClellan
(Pinterest)
NYSE: PINS

Pinterest is a search and discovery platform in the communication services sector. Pinterest derives its revenue primarily through advertisements, allowing companies to target their promoted products. While operating in a highly competitive market, Pinterest has been able to find its niche and operate successfully due to its focus on visual search and e-commerce integration, which sets it apart from other social media platforms. Additionally, Pinterest provides analytics to its advertisers to enhance profitability on the company's platform.

Final recommendation - The thesis for PINS was based on the company's position to expand to global markets and the ability to drive sales for advertising companies. As a group, we decided not to invest as we believed that Pinterest could not compete long-term with competitors such as Facebook and Instagram with much higher returns on ad-spend.

Final Fall Pitches

The following is a list of all the stocks that were pitched in the fall semester by the class of 2024-2025. Each of our analysts put a great deal of time and effort into making full models for their stocks, as well as conducting thorough research into the their respective companies and industries. These first three pitches were the ones that successfully made it into the portfolio.



Celsius develops, processes, markets, distributes, and sells fitness energy drinks and powder supplements with a focus on physical performance and metabolism. The company's drinks are marketed as pre-workout supplements and are distinguished by their lack of preservatives, artificial colors, and flavors. While the company has been around for over 20 years, it did not become popular until mid-2020 and has been growing rapidly since.

Final Analysts: James Buck & Alex Greaves

James Buck
(Celsius)
NYSE: CELH

Final recommendation - CELH was voted into the portfolio with a 1-year target price of $54.11 and a potential return of 60.8%. We believed that the company would grow due to an increase in health-conscious consumers, increasing profit margins, and the increased future use of PepsiCo's distribution system.



Planet Fitness, Inc. operates and franchises fitness centers, providing affordable, non-intimidating gym experiences to a broad consumer base. Its facilities emphasize a welcoming environment with a focus on cleanliness, accessibility, and innovative fitness offerings. The company offers a range of equipment, training programs, and membership options, including its popular Black Card membership, which provides additional perks such as access to all locations, massage chairs, and tanning.

Final Analysts: Jesse Ferrante & Davis Pharr

Jesse Ferrante
(Planet Fitness)
NYSE: PLNT

Final Recommendation - PLNT was voted into the portfolio with a 1-year target price of $118.28 and a potential return of 13.8%. We believed that the company would grow due to its leadership in the value fitness market, coupled with its capital-light franchise model. With over 2,600 locations and significant room for expansion, PLNT is poised for high future growth.

Carson Beane
(Yeti Holdings)
NYSE: YETI

Yeti Holdings, Inc. is a premium outdoor brand known for its durable, high-performance products. Founded in 2006, Yeti has gained recognition for its rugged coolers and has since expanded into drinkware, bags, outdoor gear, and apparel. With a focus on quality and innovation, Yeti caters to outdoor enthusiasts as well as everyday users, maintaining strong customer loyalty and a reputation for reliable, adventure-ready products.

Final Recommendation - YETI was voted into the portfolio with a 1-year target price of $46.92 and a potential return of 12.5%. We believed that Yeti would grow its future sales due to an increased direct-to-consumer business model as well as long-term demand from key demographics based on the company's superior brand quality.

Final Analysts: Carson Beane & Collin Sadler

The following two pitches unfortunately had to be converted into sell pitches over the fall semester due to valuation difficulties and economic / industry events. These pitches were still very insightful and helpful for the group to understand how to analyze companies for short sale pitches.

Keira Andrews
(Hims and Hers)
NYSE: HIMS

HIMS is a leading provider of health and wellness products, offering a wide range of solutions across its telehealth and consumer health divisions. Its flagship telehealth platform sets it apart from traditional healthcare providers by offering convenient and accessible medical consultations. The company manages a digital platform that enables patients to receive prescriptions and treatments right from their home. As consumer preferences shift towards digital health solutions, HIMS is well-positioned to capitalize on this trend, benefiting from increased demand for online healthcare services.

Final Recommendation - Following extensive analysis, we issued a sell recommendation for HIMS due to current regulatory risks, uncertainties around cash flows, as well as exaggerated volatility in past months. Even though HIMS is positioned for future growth, heavy competition and high industry risk have kept us from investing in the company.

Final Analysts: Keira Andrews & Tymber McClellan

Brenden Wortman
(Nov Inc.)
NYSE: NOV

NOV Inc. is a leading provider of equipment and technology solutions for the oil and gas industry. The company designs, manufactures, and services a wide range of products, including drilling rigs, wellbore technologies, and completion and production solutions. NOV Inc. operates globally, serving customers in various segments of the energy sector. The company's innovative technologies and comprehensive service offerings position it as a key player in the industry, supporting the efficient extraction and production of oil and gas resources.

Final Recommendation - After thorough analysis, we issued a sell recommendation for NOV due to the company's declining revenue growth, increased competition, and exposure to volatile oil prices. Additionally, NOV Inc. faced challenges related to regulatory changes and environmental concerns, which could impact its long-term profitability.

Final Analysts: Brenden Wortman, Jack Parquette & Luke Barbaryka



Acknowledgements and Appreciation

Final Presentation Guests



Matt Ramundo
Investment Banking Analyst at Wells Fargo
Bowden Alumnus, c/o 2022



Brandy Crump
Associate Broker at Aon
Bowden Alumna, c/o 2022



Joshua Jarrett
Counterpoint Global Director of
Research at Morgan Stanley



Luciano Zito
Investment Banking Analyst at Wells Fargo
Bowden Alumnus, c/o 2024



Cooper Bumgarner
Advisor at Edward Jones
Bowden Alumni, c/o 2021



Dr. Lori Medders
Department of Finance,
Banking and Insurance Chair

Guest Speakers



Dr. Delbert Goff
Alumni Relations Coordinator
Bowden Investment Group



Madie Ludwick
FAR Program Manager
LPL Financial



Jason Tripplet
Head of Commercial Banking
First Horizon Bank



Corbin Lammers
Financial Analyst at LPL Financial
Bowden Alumnus, c/o 2024

We extend our sincere gratitude to the incredible guest speakers who took the time to share their insights, experiences, and advice with us throughout the year. Your willingness to engage with our group has provided us with invaluable knowledge, deepening our understanding of the financial industry beyond the classroom.

Dr. Goff Endowed Scholarship for Applied Investments



Dr. Delbert Goff has played a foundational role in the Bowden Investment Group as its co-founder and long-time advisor. For over 20 years, he has guided the group's development, mentoring and inspiring hundreds of students. His leadership has created a lasting legacy that continues to shape the experiences of future Bowden classes.

In October 2024, this legacy was further strengthened with the awarding of the Dr. Goff Scholarship for Applied Investments to three outstanding students: Collin Sadler, Carson Beane, and James Buck. This scholarship has been instrumental in allowing these students to fully commit to their Bowden coursework, competitions, and industry trips. Without this financial support, these students would still be working over 20 hours per week in part-time jobs and would not be able to experience all that the Bowden Investment Group has to offer.

By alleviating financial burdens, this scholarship ensures that students can focus on maximizing their educational and professional growth within the Bowden Investment Group. Beyond this initiative, Dr. Goff continues to support the group in his role as Advisor and Alumni Coordinator, ensuring that his impact endures for generations to come.

The Dr. Delbert C. Goff Endowed Scholarship for Applied Investments will allow many students the opportunity to participate in Bowden. This scholarship has already made a tremendous difference in the lives of many students, and the group urges anyone who is interested in contributing to visit **here** for more information and to donate.

It is impossible for the group to travel to New York, Charlotte, and other locations, without the gracious assistance of our alumni and donors. For this reason, we truly urge you to think about the impact that the Bowden Investment Group had on you and to consider donating towards the success of the group and the future students and classes that will follow in your footsteps.

Member Testimonials

The Bowden Investment Group is the premier learning experience within the Walker College of Business. Members are prompted to push themselves far past traditional expectations for business students. Students receive an unparalleled business education through internal and external presentations, distinguished visiting guest speakers and professional firm visits, class operations and positions designed to simulate that of a post-graduation work environment, and the collaborative assignments required to manage the BIF. The 2024-2025 class members were asked to reflect on their experience in Bowden and share their thoughts.



Keira Andrews - President
Being a member of the Bowden Investment Group has been a pivotal experience for me– both in my college career and my life. As I reflect on my experience so far, I feel so much gratitude for the opportunities and memories that I have gained. Bowden has not only grown my skills and knowledge but has also given me confidence in my abilities and potential to succeed. However, the most important thing that Bowden has given me is friendships that are sure to last a lifetime. I seriously cannot imagine how I would be spending my senior year without being in Bowden– and for that, I feel blessed.

Tymber McClellan - Vice President
Joining the Bowden Investment Group has proven to be a transformative part of not only my college experience but also my career. As I reflect on my accomplishments so far, I can see remarkable improvements in my work since September. This experience has allowed me to grow far beyond my expectations, thanks to the encouragement and guidance of Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole, as well as the many unique opportunities Bowden offers. I am incredibly grateful for the hard work and support from donors and faculty that have made this opportunity possible for me and so many other students!





Collin Sadler - BIG Update Editor
Being a member of the Bowden Investment Group is by far one of the most challenging experiences I have ever faced. I have probably learned more in the past six months than the rest of my college career combined. I am extremely appreciative of the opportunity to be a member of this prestigious group, and I am very proud to be among my fellow members. Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole are also amazing teachers who have encouraged and pushed me farther than I ever thought I could go. I am most certainly a changed man from this experience and I hope to exceed expectations in my professional career due to what I learned within Bowden.

Jesse Ferrante - BIG Update Editor
This year has been one of my most challenging academically, but also the most rewarding. Being a member of the Bowden Investment Fund has been both an honor and an incredible experience. Connecting with alumni has undoubtedly been the highlight of my year. Not only have I built valuable connections, but I've also formed meaningful friendships with a few alumni. My goal was to grow and collaborate with great people, and this experience has far exceeded my expectations. Thank you all for your support—this year has truly been unforgettable.





Brenden Wortman - Economist
My experience in the Bowden Investment Group has been incredibly rewarding and transformative. The connections I made through the Bowden Investment Group have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the industry and guiding my professional development. Overall, being part of the Bowden Investment Group has equipped me with the knowledge and skills to excel in the finance industry, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a dynamic and supportive community.

Carson Beane - Economist

Joining the Bowden Investment Group has been nothing short of an amazing experience for me. Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole have made me want to push farther than I had ever previously imagined. They have asked me what I want out of life, not just what I want to do in life, which has framed my career perspective in a completely new light. The skills and knowledge I've gained in Bowden will undoubtedly shape my future career and personal growth to achieve what I truly want out of the rest of my life.





James Buck - Accountant

The Bowden Investment Group has been a fantastic experience for me. Not only has it increased my personal development, but my professional development has also skyrocketed. I can produce higher quality, more in-depth analyses just by having the experience of actually doing them. During my time In Bowden, I was able to work with amazing people toward a common goal and, through that, learn from different perspectives and techniques that I would not have been exposed to otherwise. While this was a challenging year, every minute of perseverance pushed me to be a better person and professional, and that is invaluable.

Jack Parquette - Accountant

Being part of the Bowden Investment Group has significantly impacted my life. These experiences and opportunities are something I've never had before, and the support of Dr. Hadley and Mr. Poole has helped me tremendously. I also appreciate the ten other members I've gotten a chance to work with throughout all of this. I believe the experiences and relationships I have gained through Bowden will have a lasting impact on my life.





Davis Pharr - Industry Analyst
Becoming a member of the Bowden Investment Group has simultaneously been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my college career. From the beginning of our summer accounting coursework to our final fall pitches, I have noticed substantial growth in my skills, knowledge, and professionalism, far more than I would have expected in the beginning. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to be a member, and soon alumnus of the Bowden Investment Group, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds for all past, current, and future members.

Alex Greaves - Industry Analyst
Joining the Bowden Investment Group has been both a riveting and challenging experience, and I could not be more grateful for it. From the beginning of summer until now, I have been able to see a stark increase in my capabilities. My analysis skills have improved immensely, and I have a much better understanding of what goes into a good investment. When I joined, I was less confident in my abilities professionally, but as we advanced, I felt I could be much more competent in the workforce than if I had never had the privilege of joining the Bowden Investment Group. I am very excited to see what the future holds for the upcoming classes and look forward to seeing the cycle of growth continue.





Luke Barbaryka - Risk Analyst
The Bowden Investment Group has cultivated an experience unlike any other within the Walker College of Business. Since becoming a member, I have grown tremendously, both professionally and personally, due to the group pushing me to be the best person, student, and peer I could possibly be. My work ethic, presentation skills, and professionalism have improved drastically since I joined, and I know this will have drastic effects on the success of my career following my graduation. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to join this group, and I look forward to watching all the success that comes from my fellow members in the coming years!

Words from Esteemed Financial Professional and Mentor

In every successful career, there are individuals whose mentorship, generosity, and guidance leave a lasting impact. For many students at Appalachian State University, and particularly within The Bowden Investment Group, Sam Kaufman has been one of those key figures.

Sam Kaufman has built a distinguished career in finance, holding leadership roles at top institutions such as Wells Fargo, Deutsche Bank, and Bank of America. As a Managing Director at Wells Fargo, he played a key role in investment banking operations, demonstrating expertise in capital markets and strategic financial management.



Beyond his professional success, Kaufman has remained deeply connected to his alma mater, Appalachian State University. His contributions extend beyond the classroom, where he has taught finance courses and mentored students like our very own Jesse Ferrante. He has also been an active supporter of The Bowden Investment Group, frequently engaging with students through guest lectures and industry insights.

Kaufman's dedication to education and mentorship reflects his broader commitment to shaping future financial professionals. Whether by organizing visits with Wells Fargo's Bank Portfolio team or sharing his real-world experience, he exemplifies the importance of leadership, knowledge-sharing, and giving back to the next generation.

As we debated our own outlooks for 2025 in the classroom, we wanted to gain additional perspectives. Mr. Kaufman was kind enough to share his insights with us. Below is an excerpt from our conversation.

After a conversation with Mr. Kaufman regarding the risks of equities, I gained a deeper appreciation for the complexities of portfolio management and the importance of disciplined risk assessment. The discussion reinforced the need for a thorough understanding of market volatility, valuation metrics, and macroeconomic factors when selecting and managing investments.

Personal Experiences with Bowden:

The Bowden Investment Group remains an invaluable asset to the Finance Major at Appalachian State. The opportunity to analyze, model, and select equities for a real-dollar portfolio provides students with unparalleled hands-on experience. This experiential learning environment not only strengthens technical proficiency but also cultivates critical decision-making skills that are essential for success in investment management.

Dr. Hadley and Shawn Poole play an integral role in the group's success. Though my interactions with them have been limited, it is evident that they have earned the respect of the students—an essential factor for the group's long-term sustainability. Their mentorship fosters an environment of trust, professionalism, and high standards, all of which contribute to the group's impact.

On a personal note, I had the privilege of studying under Dr. Elbert Bowden during my undergraduate years at Appalachian State. As my Macroeconomics professor, he profoundly influenced my academic and professional development, shaping my understanding of economic principles and their real-world applications. His legacy continues through the investment group that bears his name, further solidifying his impact on finance education.

Last spring, the group had the unique opportunity to visit the Fixed Income Trading Floor at Wells Fargo. I hope they found it both insightful and engaging. Following their tour, I was honored to facilitate a conference between the Bowden Investment Group and key members of the Wells Fargo Bank Portfolio team, including Alex Papson (Managing Director) and Inga Burger (Director and Portfolio Strategist). Our discussion provided students with firsthand exposure to the intersection of investment management and financial sales, bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world application.

Thoughts on equities for 2025:

After two exceptional years of 20%+ returns, the market may be in for a transition year. Some sectors could digest the gains from their incredible performance, while others might see buying interest as macro events become more favorable. Should this rotation occur, it will help the market broaden out from the "Magnificent 7" stocks that dominated the past few years.

I believe banks, following a strong 2024, could have another excellent year. A steepening U.S. Treasury yield curve may add more yield to their portfolios and increase their net interest margins (NIM). The energy sector also looks promising due to rising global demand and increasing energy needs from AI Data Centers. Additionally, Master Limited Partnerships (MLPs) could outperform, as President Trump's "Drill, baby, drill" policies should drive plenty of crude and Natural Gas through their pipelines.

Despite the remarkable run by many tech stocks, it's hard to bet against the sector due to its continual innovation. Selling QQQ would be difficult to justify.

Insurance stocks are also appealing. Rising renewal premiums and treasury yields have offset tight bond spreads, creating a strong backdrop for the sector.
The bond market is currently pricing in one to two rate cuts by the Federal Reserve. Should inflation cool further, additional rate cuts could come into play, potentially driving stocks higher than anticipated.

Final BIG Thank You

We are incredibly grateful for the experiences, learning opportunities, and personal growth we have gained throughout this journey. From late nights spent on assignments and competitions to visiting firms in Charlotte, our time in this program has been both challenging and rewarding, shaping us into the young professionals we are today.

Our deepest appreciation goes to the generous donors whose contributions make this program possible. Your support funds invaluable trips, alleviates financial burdens, and creates opportunities for lifelong learning and friendships.

We also want to extend heartfelt gratitude to the outstanding leadership, faculty, and staff of WCOB. Their unwavering support and commitment to our development have played a pivotal role in preparing us for the next chapter of our careers.

Finally, we recognize those who came before us—alumni who have taken the time for networking calls, coffee chats, and mentorship. These seemingly small gestures are invaluable to us, guiding our paths and inspiring us to pay it forward. We look forward to the day when we can extend the same support to students who follow in our footsteps.



To our friends and family, your unwavering support has been the foundation of our journey. To our guardians, your encouragement and love have been our greatest strengths—we know our achievements are not ours alone.

To our friends and partners, who have stood by us throughout college, your friendships and shared experiences will remain some of our most cherished memories.

We are also deeply grateful to the knowledgeable speakers and guests who have shared their time and expertise with us. Your insights have illuminated our paths and propelled us toward our goals.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to our amazing advisors—Dr. Hadley, Mr. Poole, and Dr. Goff. Your mentorship, late-night feedback, and dedication to shaping young professionals have made an immeasurable impact. This program would not be the same without your guidance and wisdom, which have prepared us to excel in whatever path we choose.

For any questions or information about the Bowden Investment Group, please contact:

Brandy Hadley, Ph.D.
Hadleybe@appstate.edu
(828) 262-6938

For questions about the Annual Report, please contact the BIG Update Editors:

Jesse Ferrante
ferrantejj@appstate.edu

Collin Sadler
Sadlercd@appstate.edu