Liaison's new GME Perspectives series kicked off in December 2020 with a conversation between Poets&Quants Editor-in-Chief John Byrne and BusinessCAS Research Director Stephen Taylor. In the most recent installment, Stephen spoke with Caryn Beck-Dudley, CEO of the Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Read the following transcript for insights into her his views on:

- **AACSB’s new business accreditation standards**
  “The changes are principles-based, not rules-based. We’ve doubled down on mission.”

- **The societal impact of business schools**
  “What are we doing to really step up to the plate to solve the world’s most pressing problems and innovate for change? Business schools have the ability to do that — and they have done it — but, boy, we’ve been quiet about it.”

- **The role business schools can play throughout the university**
  “The business school itself is perceived as a cash cow, an island, that just generates money for the rest of the university. That type of thinking won’t work in the future.”

- **The role of non-traditional programs in business schools**
  “AACSB wants to ensure that students are well trained for the future workforce, not for the workforce of the past. I think credentialing and certificates have a big role to play in that.”
Stephen Taylor (ST): AACSB recently revised its business accreditation standards. What’s important to know about the new standards?

Caryn Beck-Dudley (CBD): We started on this re-imagining accreditation path about two years ago when I was chair of the Board of Directors. It encompassed people from all over the world; we had hundreds of listening sessions. Everybody’s pretty excited. The 2020 standards launched in July, and we have 21 pilot schools right now involved in finding out what’s working.

Really, the changes are principles-based, not rules-based. We’ve doubled down on mission. Your mission might be to your local community, your mission might be to your country or your mission might be an international mission or a global mission. We allow schools flexibility in that choice. The one thing that I’m most excited about is the societal impact. There’s an expectation now that business schools — in their teaching, in their community outreach and in their research — must demonstrate societal impact.

ST: How can business schools make a societal impact?

CBD: Your positive societal impact doesn’t have to be altruistic, although many schools across the globe do give away some of their products. I think about how much time we spend at work in business schools. If we’re not creating a positive societal impact, what are we doing? What are we spending our time doing? I am very anxious to see how business schools tell us what they’re doing because we really don’t have a good catalog of that yet. How are they inspiring others? What are we doing to really step up to the plate to solve the world’s most pressing problems and innovate for change? Business schools have the ability to do that — and they have done it — but, boy, we’ve been quiet about it.

ST: Do you think that business schools are going to continue to be under the kind of increased pressure to deliver revenue that came out of the pandemic or will that pressure somehow decrease after the pandemic?

CBD: No, it doesn’t go away. The revenue consideration is always going to be there. But what I’m really excited about is that we’ve only just begun to see the role business schools can play throughout the university — and in combination with governments and business — to really solve problems. We’ve really seen that with the pandemic.

Business schools have, in many situations, have been like islands within universities. The business school itself is perceived as a cash cow, an island, that just generates money for the rest of the university. That type of thinking won’t work in the future.

Business schools have to be partners across the university. The rest of the university can learn from a lot of business schools, for example, about how to do online education.

ST: A lot of schools are trying to figure out how to fit certificates into their offerings. What’s your take on that?

CBD: AACSB cares about everything that has to do with business education, but we’re not prescriptive on certificates. In fact, the new standards allows for a lot of flexibility, a lot of creativity and a lot of innovation in the certificate badging world.

A lot of business schools are now offering credentialing and certificates, and they’re doing short courses with or without their executive partners. AACSB wants to ensure that students are well trained for the future workforce, not for the workforce of the past. I think credentialing and certificates have a big role to play in that. We’re hoping to see a lot of experimentation with interdisciplinary programs as well.

ST: We need well-trained, compassionate leaders who are focused on ethics. Is GME, as a field, prepared to take on the challenge of producing leaders who are more compassionate and ethical than some of the leaders we’ve seen in the past?

CBD: I hope so. You can get business subject matter just about anywhere now. There are thousands of great YouTube videos on how to read a financial statement. So the role of the professor, I think, is changing. The role is becoming that of a mentor, a coach, a facilitator. It involves emotional intelligence and the practice of being ethical. Faculty members need to understand that that’s our value. If we don’t have that value, people really can get a free business education without going to business school. Business schools really need to focus on the human skills that we need to move forward because the technical skills change every couple of years.
We saw that with the vaccines. Scientists created them, but somebody had to distribute them. Somebody had to market it to get people to understand that they can take it. You have to package it. Those are areas where business schools really thrive.

ST: What’s your take on diversity, equity and inclusion in business education right now?

CBD: Some schools are doing it really, really well, but most of us are not. We’re still rooted in our history and our culture. Diversity and inclusion is all about social justice in a global sense. What we’re talking about with diversity and inclusion and equity is really a sense of belonging. How do you ensure that people within your organization feel like they belong, have a seat at the table and can help make the organization stronger? We’re going to start incorporating that type of thought into all of our AACSB conferences so people can have really hard conversations about really hard topics. We require all of our accredited schools to focus on diversity and inclusion and to not discriminate against people, of course. But, boy, when I watch the news, that does not seem to be enough.

AACSB now has 42 members across 13 countries in Africa, including seven accredited members in Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa. We’re also co-sponsoring a student entrepreneurship competition. We do a lot of work with African business organizations, business schools, academy management, etc. A lot of times, innovations come from places where they don’t have a history of business schools and business education. That creativity is an opportunity for us. Business schools that are over 100 years old can actually learn from schools that don’t have that history.

We’re not going to tell them how to run business schools. It’s a partnership. They give us their best ideas and we give them our best ideas. We really collaborate to determine what the business school of the future will look like worldwide. I think business schools have a huge opportunity to make an impact. What we teach, how we think about solving problems, how we move goods through society. All of that is incredibly valuable. We saw that with the vaccines. Scientists created them, but somebody had to distribute them. Somebody had to market it to get people to understand that they can take it. You have to package it. Those are areas where business schools really thrive.