IN THE EARLY 1980s, Cornell’s Graduate School of Management had entered a phase of flux and development, as it redefined itself and its mission. The dust was settling following Johnson’s classroom metamorphosis into the Samuel C. Johnson Graduate School of Management. When Curtis W. Tam became the school’s seventh dean in 1985, he spearheaded a capital campaign to expand the faculty and establish a critical mass in each significant discipline. With the help of development officers Ann Calkins, Dennis Walles, and Dan Manosov ’79, MBA ’80, the school raised the $46 million that enabled the faculty to increase its ranks to 50 and the students to more than 450.

In addition to academic rigor, the school concentrated on better collaborating with other Cornell units — a theme that would continue for decades to come. Joint programs included the Full-Year Asian Language Concentration (FALCON) with Asian Studies and the Program in Manufacturing Management (PIMM) with Engineering. The school also invited faculty from other schools, such as Arts and Sciences and ILR, to lecture in or co-teach courses.

As its reinvention continued, the school began identifying new priorities. Students were demanding better service from the school’s placement office and alumni began to expect better workforce. In addition, students and alumni began to expect better coverage of international topics was uneven. In the ever-more competitive MBA marketplace, the school and its supporters began to pay increasing attention to these issues.

Important achievements included the development of programs that remain hallmarks today, such as the Twelve-Month Option — now known as the One-Year MBA — that catered to students and engineers with an interest in business and cemented the business school’s ties with the College of Engineering. Compressing the traditional two-year MBA curriculum into a single calendar year, the TMO allowed professionals with rigorous scientific or engineering training and backgrounds to leverage their knowledge and skills over an accelerated schedule.

Developing this and other programs to fit the market was another of the themes in this period of the school’s history: During Merten’s tenure, for example, the curriculum became more flexible, offering courses ranging from a fraction of a credit to 15 credits. Classes were taught by a wider range of educators — not only academics with PhDs, but also top practitioners, often without advanced degrees.

TURNING A LANDMARK INTO A HOME

In 1993, Merten announced the school’s move to Sage Hall, a renewed historic landmark of the Cornell campus. The renovation of the building in preparation for this move was symbolic of the school’s changing nature, from traditional and steady to cutting-edge and state-of-the-art. The school aimed to deliver a more deliberately structured experience to ready its graduates for the uncertain business landscape — from the epic savings and loan failures of the 1980s and 1990s that cost taxpayers more than $120 billion, to the dot-com meltdown of the early 2000s — that had shaken consumers’ confidence in business and the economy.

Under Acting Dean Tom Dyckman’s leadership, the school implemented a more concerted strategy to work with the media, ensuring that brand message was consistently represented to alumni, students, faculty, staff, and corporate partners. Over coming years, Johnson would more carefully hone its marketing efforts to polish its image and cultivate relationships with its stakeholders.

Dyckman, who had been on the faculty since 1964 and was instrumental during the search for Merten’s successor, oversaw the renovation of Sage Hall, which opened its doors in 1998. A $58 million capital campaign, led by Rob Dyson MBA ’74, and Nelson Schnepper ’63, MBA ’70, helped the school transition into its newest incarnation. A showplace for the business school at the heart of the Cornell campus, Sage boasted bold new features that enhanced its prestige and capabilities. The Parker Center for Investment Research, the inspired creation of faculty members Charles H. Lee, PhD ’90, and Bhaskaran Swaminathan, and financially backed by Jeffrey Parker ’65, MEng ’66, MBA ’70, combined a real-time trading room, a rigorous research base for its stock-picking model, and
Many of these changes were leadership and community service. Pledged their commitment to funded 30 MBA students who Diversity and Inclusion), signaling in the Parker Center’s mold: The to establish Centers of Excellence Johnson’s ninth dean in 1997. Dean Robert Swieringa, a faculty Ans Dyckman created the Parker Center for Investment Research with the support of a major gift from Jeffrey P. Parker ’65, MEng ’66, MBA ’70. The center became a physical reality in 1998, when the school moved into the newly renovated Sage Hall with its state-of-the-art trading room.

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