

2018 Top 50 Undergraduate Professors: Lan Nguyen Chaplin, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC Business)

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Lan Nguyen Chaplin

Associate Professor

University of Illinois at Chicago, UIC Business

Lan Nguyen Chaplin is one of the leading researchers in children's consumer behavior and branding. Her award-winning research has been featured in a slew of media outlets including *The New York Times*, *Fortune*, and *Forbes*, among others. Nguyen Chaplin's research on the development of materialism in children won one of marketing's most prestigious awards, the ACR-Sheth award for public purpose research. She has been a professor for the past two decades and has taught at the Villanova School of Business, the University of Arizona, and the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

Age: 42

Education: BA, Biological Basis of Behavior (Concentration: Behavioral Medicine), University of Pennsylvania; PhD, Business Administration (Concentration: Marketing), University of Minnesota

At current institution since: 2013

Twitter handle: N/A – Not enough characters for me.

What professional achievement are you most proud of? The meaningful relationships I have developed with mentors, colleagues, collaborators and students over the last 20 years.

"I knew I wanted to be a business school professor when..." A brochure from the University of

Minnesota, Carlson School of Management arrived in the mail. It featured Professor Deborah Roedder John and her research on children's consumer behavior.

"One word that describes my first time teaching..." Floss (as in dental)

What are you currently researching and what is the most significant discovery you've made from it? Broadly, I investigate what makes children happy and healthy at different ages. Parents, be as involved in your children's lives as you can!

What is your most memorable moment as a professor? In 2014, one of my students told me I was her "UIC Mom." It made me feel really old. But, it was also a nice compliment because as a professor, you want to push your students out of their comfort zone to achieve more than they ever thought they could, but you also want them to feel loved and supported (without coddling) so the journey is less intimidating for them (not unlike what I want for my own children).

Since you first started teaching, how has business education changed? Professors now have to be much more creative in content delivery. On top of leading an interactive classroom while students are tired, hungry and sleep deprived, we're also competing against something much bigger and more exciting than we are—social media—for students' attention during that hour and a half.

"If I weren't a business school professor, I would be..." running my own Montessori School for infants through 8th grade, then coming home to work in my greenhouse.

"Here's what I wish someone would've told me about being a professor": that I'll love my students after just one semester of seeing them only twice a week for 2 ½ hours total. I became a professor because I have always wanted to teach but I was afraid I would grow too attached to my students after having them in my class for 9 ½ months. I thought teaching older students on a semester schedule would prevent me from growing attached. Wrong.

Name of the professor you most admire and why: Hands down, Professor Deborah Roedder John. She's a top notch researcher and educator, but she's also a very plugged-in parent. She has a very kind heart, is humble and has a great sense of humor.

What do you enjoy most about teaching undergraduate business students? Being right in the middle of a room full of youthful enthusiasm and inquisitive minds.

What's the biggest challenge? Getting them to truly believe in themselves.

What is the most impressive thing one of your undergraduate students has done? I am impressed with students who own their own business at age 19, but I've been most impressed with the students who are 19 years-old, taking a full course load, commuting 1 ½ hours each way to attend classes, and working full time to help support loved ones while keeping it all together and having a sense of humor about the chaos when I see them on campus. These are the individuals with a lot of grit and can handle anything.

What is the least favorite thing one has done? Coming up with excuses for missing class — they had to cat/dog sit, go to a concert, sleep-in (my earliest class starts at 12:30 PM), grab lunch with a partner, go to the gym, go grocery shopping (because my class time was the only time they had to stock their fridge), study for another class. If you're going to miss class for these reasons, best not to tell the professor.

Since you've been teaching, how have students changed over the years? They care more deeply about the impact their work will have on society.

What does a student need to do to get an A in your class? Show some grit. Demonstrate a high level of professionalism. Be a valued team member. Be respectful, kind, and humble. They need to believe in themselves so they can hop outside of the box to think in creative ways. And the obvious—Attend, engage, do the work without complaining, and hold themselves accountable for their actions.

"When it comes to grading, I think students would describe me as ..." Very tough (and the students who get As would add, "but fair")

If your teaching style/classroom experience had a theme song, what would it be? "Have it all" by Jason Mraz (It's about wanting someone to have the best in all aspects of life)

Using just one word, describe your favorite type of student: Gritty

Using just one word, describe your least favorite type of student: LazyGrump

"If my students can develop thick skin and truly embrace the ups and downs of the scholastic, personal and professional journey, then I've done my job as their professor."

Fun fact about yourself: I am the youngest of 14 children from a Vietnamese refugee family.

What are your hobbies? Trying to keep my houseplants alive, playing the violin, coaching 3rd and 4th grade girls' lacrosse

How did you spend your summer? Working. Getting back in shape. Being with my family. It was a crafty summer with my 8 year-old daughter. I have a 12 year-old son who still really wants to spend time with me so I totally took advantage of that and spent hours a day just talking to him about life. Such a great summer.

Favorite place to vacation: Fiji (with my husband); Vietnam (family vacation)

Favorite book: Love You Forever by Robert Munsch (It's a heartwarming story about a mom's love for her child)

Favorite movie and/or television show: Breaking Bad

Favorite type of music and/or favorite artist: Simon and Garfunkel

Bucket list item #1: Go on a scheduled weekend vacation with my husband every other month where we don't answer any emails and we'd only pick up our phones to check on the kids.

What's the biggest challenge facing business education at the moment? Today's business environment is one that is undergoing disruptive and exciting changes especially with the influence of social media. At the same time, expectations to deliver results have never been higher. To help students confidently and competently embrace the dynamic environment when they transition from the classroom to the boardroom, business schools need to prepare students with technical skills, social skills, conceptual skills, and professional skills.

"If I had my way, the business school of the future would have much more of this..." Fun team building experiences like scavenger hunts around campus and competitive relays (the ones we used to have so much fun doing in grade school). Give up some lecture time so students can work together in exciting and creative ways. When students get to know each other outside of the traditional classroom setting, their interest in working together catapults them into producing their best work, individually and collectively. It's great to discuss the importance of good communication but it's even better to let students experience the pitfalls of poor communication first-hand in a scavenger hunt that requires team members to discuss strategy face-to-face, not via text. Grades are not on the line, but pride is. Which team can follow the rules of the game and communicate best to finish first? Corporations send their teams on scavenger hunts for team building, so why not send our students?

"And much less of this..." Exams

Looking ahead 10 years from now, describe what "success" would be like for you: I'd like to inspire and bring out the best in my children, husband, colleagues, collaborators, and students to the point where they naturally want to pay it forward.

Students say...

"Lan taught me and many others how to become successful as future professionals while placing a strong emphasis on giving back to others and always keeping compassion at the top of our minds. My classmates and I learned to tap into our grit and challenge each other to continuously deliver improved results. By not sugarcoating her feedback, Lan allowed us to present work in an environment where we could feel comfortable making mistakes. We were able to take advice and learn how to polish and refine our ideas in a way that would set us up for successful results and leave the course understanding how success is earned."

"The ambiguity of the course projects were both thrilling and rewarding. I learned to become comfortable being uncomfortable, and I know that if it wasn't for her courses I wouldn't be where I am today."

"Based on word of mouth, I was intimidated by Professor Chaplin's class at first. I was told it was challenging and required large time commitment. Having taken the class, I can confirm that the rumors were true, but in the best way possible. Professor Chaplin made sure to challenge students in order to prepare us for the professional environment. The course load was designed to push students and create stronger time management habits. A highlight of my college experience was taking Professor Chaplin's class."

"It's one thing to be a good professor, it's another to be a great professor. This distinction was obvious to me Fall of 2017 when I took Consumer Behavior with Professor Lan Nguyen Chaplin. From the first day of class I felt like I was being treated like more than just a student, I felt like I was being treated as a true business professional. Professor Chaplin made every lecture meaningful. She not only taught us marketing but she taught us life lessons and how to be good people. She was tough on her students to prepare us for the real world. I was always a good student but this was the only professor that challenged me to be better than just good."