

Carmen McKell—Distinguished Alumna

Since graduating in 1987 with a major in Psychology, Carmen McKell has embodied the aspiration of Houghton’s Mission statement—“to lead and labor as scholar-servants in a changing world”—especially “the changing world” part. During the three decades since graduating from Houghton, Carmen has applied the critical thinking and experimental tools she acquired at Houghton to provide leadership in several companies employing various applications of statistics and analytics. Her career has taken her into positions in both the public and private sector, and to countries around the world, most notably Canada and India. Today, she is the president and co-founder of Avrij Analytics, a company that created a software application which allows college and professional sports teams to apply the tools of data analytics to scout for players.

Carmen inspired Houghton’s President’s Advisory Board to take an active role in supporting the college’s early exploration into the field of Data Science as an academic major. She and her husband, Garfield Fisher, spent several years working alongside Houghton faculty and staff to lay the foundation for both the curricular and co-curricular aspects of the Data Science major. It was through their connections that some of the early Data Science students were able to experience the application of data analytics at major events like the Super Bowl.

Paul Young, Carmen's former professor and advisor at Houghton, and a fellow Canadian from the Maritime province of New Brunswick, recalls with appreciation the way that Carmen brought to her work steady, persistent discipline, as well as the capacity to inspire vision and creativity in those around her.

Matt Skillman, a 2016 alum, recalls working with Carmen during his senior year, as part of the new Center for Data Science Analytics, which Carmen helped launch at Houghton. He expressed gratitude for all the things he learned from her, saying, "[Carmen] has a strong desire to see a new generation of data experts rise up and change the world for the Kingdom. I'm proud to have studied under her and to know that she continues to use her skills to help others learn."

Don Purdy, Houghton alum of 1989 and now one of Carmen's colleagues at Avrij, praises Carmen's positive and driven approach to setbacks, saying, "She recognizes that it's okay when we make a mistake, but she always learns from it, and more importantly, teaches the rest of us how not to make it again."

Carmen, your many accomplishments testify to your creativity, your capacity to adapt your Houghton education to changing needs, your undaunted entrepreneurial spirit, and your persistent courage—or "Grit" in the face of challenges. We are grateful that, in addition to representing Houghton so compellingly to the larger world, you have also chosen to invest in the lives of current Houghton students, inspiring them to take their place in the growing world of data analytics and its applications to every arena of our society and

economy. It is our privilege to honor you today with the Distinguished Alumni Achievement award.