Kenan Institute symposium spotlights blockchain, crypto landscape

by Shannon Cuthrell — January 22, 2019

Around 150 business leaders, public sector regulators, students and faculty will join on Thursday at UNC Chapel Hill to share their insights on blockchain, cryptocurrency and the regulatory considerations surrounding the fintech landscape.

The event, held January 24 from 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Kenan Conference Center, is organized by the Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, a nonprofit think tank that focuses on business policy research specific to North Carolina’s economy.
The Kenan Institute is using the event as a venue to share details on a new research initiative it’s launching with support from Ripple. Last June, the Kenan Institute, together with UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School, was selected as one of 17 institutions to take part in Ripple’s $50 million University Blockchain Research Initiative, focusing on financial policy in the crypto and blockchain space.

The results of the new initiative have circulated under wraps since last year but will finally be revealed this week at the event.

Kenan Institute Director Gregory Brown says the support from Ripple enables the organization to research, understand and communicate the regulatory ramifications of rapidly expanding fintech development.

The aim of the program is to “explore this shifting landscape and provide guidance on how emerging technologies will affect businesses and policy moving forward,” Brown added.

Within the backdrop of the initiative’s soon-to-be revealed program, the event also brings together a multidisciplinary group of speakers to share research and insights on opportunities in fintech.

Brown adds, “We built our speaker lineup around what we think are the topics of most concern to folks in the financial services and investment communities, and tapped into our partnerships to bring together the most knowledgeable presenters who could speak to those topics.”

Highlights of the agenda include:

A presentation on ICOs from Cam Harvey, a research associate at Massachusetts-based National Bureau of Economic Research and professor of finance at Duke’s Fuqua School of Business, where he teaches a course called Innovation and Cryptoventures. He also founded and leads the Duke CFO Survey, a quarterly poll of over 1,500 CFOs around the world.
In another presentation, New York University Albert Fingerhut Professor of Finance and Business Transformation David Yermack will aim to answer the question, “Are ICOs here to stay?” Yermack also serves as head of the NYU Pollack Center for Law and Business and chairman of NYU’s finance department.

A panel will discuss the future of fintech, moderated by UNC Distinguished Professor of Economics Eric Ghysels, who teaches courses in empirical finance and time series econometrics. Panelists include:

- Alex Adelman, CEO and co-founder of New York startup Lolli, a Bitcoin rewards app.
- Mike Maguire, enterprise partnerships and investments executive at SunTrust Bank in Atlanta.
- Stephen Markwell, head of treasury services and product strategy at JPMorgan Chase.
- Dean Nolan, director of merchant services and payment referral programs at Fifth Third Bank in Charlotte.

Another panel will discuss regulatory considerations in crypto and blockchain. Speakers include:

- Anna S. Mills, corporate attorney at Womble Bond Dickinson in Charlotte, specializing in cross-border multi-state transactions, mergers and acquisitions, corporate formations, and more.
- Russell Wong, an economist and researcher at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.