

Human resources students assist N.C. nonprofit organizations

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Students in the **master's degree program in human resources** offered through the **Department of Human Services** served as HR consultants to four nonprofit organizations in North Carolina as part of their coursework this spring.

Under the supervision of **Marie-Line Germain**, assistant professor of human resources and leadership, and working with graduate student Olivia Graham, who served as liaison between the students, professors and organizations, 12 teams of five to seven students each helped their clients address a specific human resources need.

Four teams worked with the nonprofit organization Dorcas Ministries associated with Christian Community in Action Inc. located in Cary. One team revised and updated the employee handbook. A second team revised policies and procedures. The third team updated the nonprofit's volunteer handbook. A fourth team created an employee performance evaluation system, including forms and processes. Howard Manning, executive director of Dorcas Ministries, said the organization leaders had recognized several human resources needs after the recent acquisition of a larger facility that necessitated an increase in the size of the staff.

"We needed a set of human resources policies and procedures to make sure we were providing fair and beneficial opportunities for our employees and volunteers," said Manning. "We were struggling to develop a strategy to accomplish this without having a human resources department. Dr. Germain and her teams provided an invaluable resource for us at exactly the right time. This allowed our small staff to focus on work related to our mission and strategic plans. The teams were very professional and thorough. They delivered a final product that not only meets our current needs but will be useful as we continue to grow."

Two teams worked with Liberty Corners Enterprises Inc. located on Coxe Avenue in Asheville. One team focused on developing a performance appraisal process. The other developed a step-by-step orientation process, including forms, checklists and presentation tools. Tonya Andrews, finance director of Liberty Corners, was a key point of contact for the students, who ensured that the products developed were tailored to the organization's needs.

Merry Michalsen, who served as a team leader for the group that assisted with creating an orientation process for Liberty Corner Enterprises, described the experience as a tremendous opportunity to get hands-on experience working with a nonprofit organization in ways that many have not had the chance to do. "This truly shows that an online education doesn't have to remove you from that real world — it just allows you to see it and access it in a different way," said Michalsen.

Two teams worked with the Asheville Buncombe Community Relations Council located on South French Broad Avenue in Asheville. One team developed a performance evaluation process that included forms, step-by-step instructions and checklists. Another team created a volunteer handbook. Sarah Nunez, the nonprofit's executive director, said the organization was delighted to have the opportunity to work with the WCU students and faculty. "The projects produced by the teams were beneficial to our internal structures and will assist our organization for years to come," said Nunez.

Three teams worked with Asheville City Schools Foundation located on Mountain Street in Asheville. One team worked on updating the nonprofit's employee handbook.

A second team created a performance evaluation process that included forms and instructions. Kate Pett, executive director of the foundation, said she was grateful for the assistance. "We will joyfully be implementing these tools in the coming weeks, and I am confident that they will enhance our ability to serve children and our community," said Pett.

Cortne Schanbacher, one of the graduate students who worked with Asheville City Schools Foundation to create a performance appraisal process and forms, said the hands-on consulting experience was rewarding and invaluable. "We were able to help an amazing organization expand on their HR processes and gain valuable knowledge at the same time," said Schanbacher.

Another team worked on an independent project creating a portion of a human resources handbook for nonprofit organizations, which Germain will continue to develop.

"The projects also were rewarding for students, who overwhelmingly reported they benefited personally and professionally from this consulting experience," said Germain.

For more information, contact Germain at 828-227-3959 or mgermain@wcu.edu.