

Human resources students serve as consultants to businesses, organizations

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During the spring semester, students in the WCU's master's degree program in human resources served as pro bono human resources consultants for businesses in the region. They developed and delivered eight projects for various entities, including a nonprofit organization, a locally owned small business, and a town government.

Their work was part of a human resources consulting course taught by Marie-Line Germain, assistant professor of human resources and leadership.

Germain supervised the students' consulting projects, and was assisted by graduate student Lisa Phillips and Alex Hall, who graduated from the program in the fall of 2014.

Projects included work on job descriptions, performance appraisals, and a grievance policy, and the development, execution and analysis of an employee satisfaction survey for **Green Opportunities**, a nonprofit located in Asheville; the creation of an employee handbook, job descriptions and an employment contract for **MS Lean**, a small landscaping business also in Asheville; and a citywide compensation analysis study for the town of **Canton**, which was coordinated by Hall.

Kendra Penland, interim executive director of Green Opportunities, said she appreciated the value of the consulting work performed for her organization, which does not have an in-house human resource function. "The WCU students' analysis and recommendations were professional, thoughtful and very intentional. The quality and scope of the work produced by the WCU graduate students were invaluable at a critical time for our organization, currently in transition," Penland said.

The team's helpfulness and effectiveness also was commented upon by MS Lean owner Stephen Smith, who said: "Dr. Germain and her students were great. The work really left me speechless; an unbelievable degree of quality and dedication. A tremendous amount of effort went into this project. I'm forever grateful."

Seth Hendler-Voss, the town manager of Canton, said the consulting team helped the town execute a pay study to make it more competitive in the regional market. "The students, under the guidance of a volunteer human resources professional, were able to compile and analyze a tremendous amount of data in short order and ultimately produced a tangible new pay plan that we hope to enact. Looking beyond compensation, the students challenged us to consider other measures that may increase retention and employee satisfaction. The partnership with WCU gave Canton a professional-grade product at no cost and exemplifies the university's commitment to serving as a relevant resource to surrounding communities."

This spring, the **College of Education and Allied Professions** awarded program alumnus Alex Hall the "Peak Performer" award in recognition of his continued engagement with the program, including the pro bono consulting work he facilitated throughout his enrollment at WCU.

Since 2011, graduate students in WCU's master's degree program in human resources have provided pro bono consulting on 69 projects for 41 nonprofit organizations, small businesses, and local governments in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee.

For more information about the program, contact Germain at 305-962-8668 or at mgermain@wcu.edu.