

Human resources students continue free consulting work for organizations

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Students from Western Carolina University's master's degree program in human resources are continuing their tradition of providing free human resources consultation services for organizations around the eastern U.S. this fall as they work with eight clients ranging from Georgia to Pennsylvania.

About 35 students are involved in the consulting work this semester, including internship students, some program alumni and graduate students taking courses taught by Marie-Line Germain, associate professor of human resources and leadership. The client organizations include several in Asheville, Surry Community College and Habitat for Humanity in Gwinnett County, Georgia.

Since 2011, more than 350 graduate students in the human resources program have served as pro bono consultants for nonprofits, small businesses and government agencies. "Our HR consulting initiative serves as a model of extreme service-learning in which student-consultants, the professor and the organizations all interact remotely," Germain said. "The online 10-week consulting model makes the work process seamless, the students are extremely engaged in their consulting tasks, and the organizations are consistently pleased with our work.

"The organizations we are helping this semester are referrals from previous clients," she said. "That attests to the quality of our work. My goal is to continue to expand our consulting initiative beyond its current boundaries."

More than 40 students completed 21 consulting projects for clients last spring semester. Germain supervised the students' consulting tasks, assisted by Becky Frankenfield, a current graduate student, and Rachel Sossoman, a program alumna. The spring projects included the revision of a policy manual for the city of Morganton and the creation of a drug screen policy, an employment application and the revision of performance evaluations for the city of Brevard. It also included the completion of a salary study, the review of benefits offerings and the creation of an employee handbook for TapSnap, a photo booth rental franchise in South Carolina.

TapSnap owner Brian Pisor said he is thankful for the assistance. "Dr. Germain and her team helped us develop an impressive employee handbook, analyzed salary and benefits offerings for our future employees, and consulted with us on other HR-related questions," he said. "As a small organization without a lot of resources, it was invaluable to have the expertise they offered. Not only that, but they were extremely professional and easy to work with."

Spring projects also included development of an employee handbook and employee development plan for CleanWorks, a social enterprise company specializing in residential and commercial cleaning in Asheville. "The team Dr. Germain had us work with was attentive to our needs and helped shape the finished product to match our company values," said company owner Judd Cody.

Other spring clients included the YMCA of Western North Carolina, Black Mountain Home of Black Mountain, I-AM-Recycling in Raleigh, My FreedomCare and Community Hands in Tennessee and Glow Academy in Wilmington.

For more information, contact Germain at 305-962-8668 or mgermain@wcu.edu, or visit hrprogram.wcu.edu.