

Human resources initiative marks eight years of pro bono consulting

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For the eighth consecutive academic year, graduate students in the [Master of Science in Human Resources Program](#) have provided pro bono human resources consultation services to organizations around the country and abroad, entirely online.

In the current fall semester alone, the student consultants' combined efforts provided more than 220 hours of pro bono service to nonprofit organizations. The consulting was part of the students' course work in an online consulting courses taught by Marie-Line Germain, associate professor of human resources and leadership. Senior MSHR student Lara Shirar served as project manager, working as the liaison between the Germain, the teams of student consultants and the client organizations.

The client organizations that have benefited from pro bono consulting since last spring semester are located across North Carolina and as far from the WCU campus as Nairobi, Kenya. In the spring and summer, clients included the town of Murphy, Habitat for Humanity in Greensboro, the YMCA of Asheville, and Carolina for Kibera, a nonprofit serving the disadvantaged residents of Kibera, Nairobi.

In addition to serving those organizations, this fall students completed two projects for the Partnership for Children of Wayne County Inc., which has a mission to provide early care and education for children in the crucial development stages from birth to age 5. PFCW works to create partnerships between families and important resources to support and ensure a strong early childhood foundation that will brighten the future of Wayne County.

PFCW's executive director, Valerie Wallace, said she knew her company's human resources processes needed updates to effectively hire and retain the right people. Relating her experience working with the MSHR student consultants, Wallace said, "The work that was generated from this project was of high quality and exceeded our expectations. Both teams were professional, and delivery was executed in a timely manner. The teams kept us updated on a regular schedule so that we were always kept in the loop of what was being generated. We would highly recommend this service to other nonprofit agencies."

Michelle Chambers, PFCW's program accountability manager, remarked on how well the projects suited their organization's human resources goals. "The Partnership for Children of Wayne County Inc. was both satisfied and impressed with the professionalism that was put into both products we received (job descriptions and policy manual) from the WCU HR Consulting Team. This initiative comes highly recommended for all HR needs," she said.

Since 2011, through their course work, more than 740 WCU master's in human resources students have been involved in pro bono human resources consulting work for nonprofits, small

businesses and governmental agencies across the country. So far, the initiative has helped 195 organizations and completed 295 human resources consulting projects in 17 states and abroad at no cost.

The benefits of the initiative extend to students as well, who find the experience valuable, both personally and professionally, Germain said. Michael Fogleman, a student who worked on a salary analysis for BookmarksNC, said, “This course and project allowed me to experience what it’s like to truly make a difference for a real-world business. I can say, wholeheartedly, that this project gave me a sense of purpose, gratitude and pride that I hadn’t felt before in an HR course, and am unlikely to replicate in another.” As project manager, Shirar expressed similar sentiments, including gratitude for the ability “to give back to the community by empowering organizations to better perform their missions” through delivering quality human resources products and services.

The human resources consulting initiative has been collaborating with the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits to offer nonprofit members of the center pro bono expertise on a variety of human resources topics and issues. For more information about the initiative, contact Germain at mgermain@wcu.edu or visit HRconsulting.wcu.edu.