

Human resources students assist nonprofit organizations

January 14, 2014 * *The Reporter*

Students in the WCU's master's degree program in human resources offered through the Department of Human Services served during the fall semester as consultants for nonprofit organizations and assisted with tasks ranging from developing a policy handbook to suggesting non-monetary incentives for employees.

Teams worked under the direction of Marie-Line Germain, assistant professor of human services, with the assistance of graduate student Jillian Ellis, who served as liaison between the students, the professor and the nonprofit organizations.

"Working with nonprofit organizations provides an excellent opportunity for the course content to align with actual professional experience," said Martha McCoy, one of the student team leaders. "Not only are we addressing HR-related issues commonly found in the workplace, we are providing a service to community organizations that may not be able to fund services from an HR consulting company. The experience is mutually beneficial and one of the most valuable aspects of the coursework for an HR student."

One team led by student Ashley Allen assisted the Alliance of AIDS Services – Carolina, a nonprofit based in Raleigh that is dedicated to serving people who are living with HIV/AIDS. The team worked with Stacy Duck, the executive director, to create a policy handbook for personnel.

"They (the students) were very insightful and professional," said Duck. "The product was very well put together. This was exactly what we needed."

Two teams worked with Lael Gray, executive director of the Asheville Jewish Community Center. One team created guidelines for managers and employees to implement and participate in performance evaluations. The other team developed suggestions for nonmonetary incentives for the employees. Gray said the students' work will benefit the organization.

"They came up with innovative strategies for us to address some of our human resources challenges, including employing new technologies at no cost to us," she said. "The teams were thoughtful and responsive."

Three teams worked with Alana Pierce, operations manager for Green Opportunities, a job training nonprofit organization that serves the Asheville area. One team created new policies and procedures for GO's youth employees and volunteers. A second team created new policies and revised existing policies in GO's handbook, and the third created a rollout plan for the new policies to help with implementation.

"Being a relatively new nonprofit and a unique employer, Green Opportunities needed help with various and somewhat unusual HR projects," said Pierce. "The teams diligently and professionally worked to serve our needs and provided exceptional products. This was a great experience and a huge help for our organization."

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

"This pro-bono consulting experience complements the well-roundedness of our graduate students," said Germain. "It helps develop or refine their practical HR skills while serving our community."

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