



## Online master's in HR program provided more than 830 hours of pro bono consulting last fall

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Students in the online master of science in human resources program provided more than 830 pro bono hours, working on 10 HR-related projects for nonprofits and small businesses in our region.

“Our growth has been exponential over the past 11 years. Part of our success is due to our students’ high-quality consulting work for our clients and their passion for helping,” said Marie-Line Germain, professor of human resources and leadership and founder of HR Consulting Initiative.

This fall, clients included Mercy Urgent Care, WestBridge Vocational, Interfaith Assistance Ministries, WNC Social Media Buzz Inc., and MAHEC, all in NC. The HR projects included job description analyses and updates, the creation and revision of a goal-setting performance

management program for supervisors, the review and update of a total rewards package, and the development of a diversity and inclusion training program.

Sandy Stimson with WestBridge Vocational was delighted with the student's work.

"Writing job descriptions that are clear, informative and specific to a position is not an easy task," Stimson said. "It's easy to copy something off the internet, but difficult to specify one to an actual position. The students enrolled in the WCU's MSHR consulting course not only understood the importance of creating a job description that meets this criterion, but they also delivered on it. WestBridge Vocational received four job descriptions that are ready to be put into use. We sincerely thank the team for their professionalism and dedication to our business."

Although the students' work is done 100% remotely, one of the students working for WestBridge Vocational insisted on paying the client a visit.

Another client, Barbara Chambers with Mercy Urgent Care, also expressed her satisfaction with the MSHR students' work: "This is my second opportunity to work with the WCU HR Master's interns and I am truly amazed again. Assigned to Mercy Urgent Care were three teams of multiple students. Mercy had a whole professional team working on projects that otherwise would not be able to be completed. Mercy is a non-profit that has a very slim margin, so this program has allowed Mercy to scale with limited resources. One of the teams developed diversity, equity and inclusion training that will immediately get utilized by our team. This has been a gap that is now filled.

"The two other teams looked at Total Rewards and Performance Management. Mercy was able to implement the performance management in November for this year's reviews. This program means so much to us at Mercy. The work is thoroughly researched and relevant. The teams are professional and self-directed. A concern I had before partnering with Dr. Germain's students was the amount of time I would need to allow for the projects. After my first summer semester, that was not a concern anymore. The teams ask what they need and are organized prior to meetings to request all the needed resources. I would, without hesitation, recommend the program to other businesses that are in need of project work with professionalism and response."

Rhona Ragen, Interfaith Assistance Ministries Board Member, noted that, "The WCU HR Consulting Initiative is an invaluable tool to not-for-profit agencies. The process is very client-oriented and completed in an expedient and professional manner. Most highly recommended."

Lorelei Garnes, the owner of WNC Social Media Buzz in Waynesville, highlighted the cost-saving aspect of the HR Consulting Initiative. "The Employee Handbook completed by the WCU HR master's class has helped my company thousands of dollars and created a sense of urgency for HR documentation and services," she said.

The HR Consulting Initiative continues to partner with the Small Business and Technology Development Center to serve local Cullowhee and Asheville businesses. SBTDC is an extension of the business and technology services from the University of North Carolina that provides management counseling and educational services to small and midsize businesses in the area.

When Germain founded the HR Consulting Initiative in 2011, the intent was two-fold - to provide opportunities to the MSHR students to practice and learn how to provide HR consulting services in a professional manner utilizing all they have learned, and to provide a pro-bono service to small businesses and nonprofit organizations. At the end of 2022, more than 1,000 MSHR students have completed more than 487 consulting projects for over 331 organizations in 20 states - and even a few outside the country. This represents nearly 22,000 hours of pro bono HR consulting, and counting.

For more information about the HR Consulting Initiative, contact Germain at [mgermain@wcu.edu](mailto:mgermain@wcu.edu).