

Master's degree students serve as human resources consultants to nonprofit organizations

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Students in the master's degree program in human resources offered through the Department of Human Services served as consultants for three nonprofit organizations in North Carolina during the spring semester. They 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 resources and leadership, with the assistance of graduate student Ashlei Harris, who served as liaison between the teams of graduate students, the professor and the nonprofit organizations.

Thomas Farrell, one of the student team leaders, said the experience provided an avenue to demonstrate academic proficiency and application while supporting a community-based nonprofit organization. "Incorporating this project into the curriculum has proven invaluable," said Farrell. "Practice and exposure gained throughout the process builds confidence, preparing us for successful future careers."

Three teams assisted the Charles House Association, a nonprofit based in Carrboro that provides daytime elderly care for older adults. The team worked with Paul Klever, the executive director, to revise the employee handbook, create a social media policy and develop a new hire orientation program.

"The WCU graduate HR student teams' work was professional, informed and extremely helpful," said Klever. "Their contribution to our community nonprofit organization was invaluable."

Two other teams worked with Denise Bitz, executive director of Brother Wolf Animal Rescue in Asheville. Brother Wolf is the largest no-kill shelter in the state of North Carolina. One team worked on editing and rewriting the employee handbook. The other team developed benefit options for the organization, which included a unique vegan policy.

"I feel as though a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Thanks to the students at WCU for helping Brother Wolf Animal Rescue create some essential documents and policies," said Bitz. "It's not enough to have these documents in your head when you start to become as big of a nonprofit as we are. They need to be in writing and become a standardized part of your everyday practice. Since our work involves saving animals on a daily basis, there were always things that seemed to get in the way of us being able to develop these documents, and it was an ongoing challenge."

Thanks to the WCU students that we worked with, I am now able to put my focus back on saving animals now that I know this other important work was done for us."

One team worked with Brittany Andrews from Alexander Youth Network, a nonprofit that provides mental health services to children and families, and Youth Opportunities, which provides similar services. The team was tasked with merging the AYN handbook and the YO policy manual while keeping unique policies separate. "The work that the master's degree program in human resources team performed for our organization was an invaluable resource. As a nonprofit, we are always trying to make the most out of the resources we have, and having HR professionals be able to help us with revamping our HR policy manual saved us resources and time," said Andrews. "I was so impressed with the caliber of work that the students created and would recommend them a thousand times over."

In the continued development of the human resources handbook for nonprofits, two other teams worked with Germain to further develop the foundations of an HR Center for Nonprofits. The teams were tasked with researching the top 10 human resources needs for nonprofit organizations and commonly used non-monetary employee incentives and benefits.

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