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Unique CIBRE Summer Internship program provides collective learning experience

Claire Hagemann spent her summer internship teaching social networking lingo such as friend, status and wall, to an unlikely audience – senior citizens at the Older Persons Commission in Rochester. Hagemann was able to integrate classroom learning into relevant work experience by teaching a course on Facebook and developing social networking tools for the OPC.

Hagemann, a junior in the general management program, was one of nearly three dozen SBA students taking part in the CIBRE Summer Internship Program. The unique program grouped most of the students into teams of two to five to work on assigned projects based on their skills and areas of interest, and connected students with a partner organization.

"The internship provided me with much needed experience in both a professional setting and in management," says Hagemann. "My job was to run this class and market it to OPC members, as well as to create a Facebook group for them to connect and network with each other on. Through this, I gained many new skills, the most interesting of which being the ability to market and sell a fairly new product or service to an unlikely demographic."

Unlike a typical internship, the CIBRE Summer Internship Program was a collective learning experience, with students meeting regularly to share their knowledge, and learn from other students. Each student group was assigned a graduate student mentor, who met with the group on Saturdays, four times during the ten-week internship program. If the interns weren't paid by their employer or sponsor, they were paid from a SBA CIBRE fund.

"We brought together several components to provide students a collective learning experience," says Mohan Tanniru, dean, OU's SBA. "Interns planned and implemented a project, worked together as a team, and shared knowledge in Saturday meetings."

In addition to the OPC, student interns worked at organizations such as Volkswagen, Ajax Paving and Ancor Information Management and tackled diverse projects including database design, market analysis, process improvement, general sales/marketing, accounting, information systems applications and web-based research.

Ron Mayes, post Masters MIS certificate student, was a project coordinator and served as a student mentor. He saw firsthand the benefits of the collaborative internship, meeting with the students to discuss the goals of their experience and potential improvements to systems or processes.

"One of the interns needed to survey potential customers and another intern suggested surveymonkey.com, an online survey tool. This suggestion was appreciated by not only the intern, but by the entire group who wasn't aware that this online resource was available," he says.

Tanniru is pleased with the overall program as well as the benefits the students gained through it.

"I consider the program a success if students can benefit from the internship experience and it adds value to their career profile and differentiates them," says Tanniru. "But, the immediate measure of success is that the students are learning and enjoying the experience and the companies are pleased with the work."

At the OPC, Rhonda Nelson, program and events department head, was delighted with Hagemann and the popularity of the sold-out Facebook course. "The term Facebook is referenced on the nightly news, and talked about by children and grandchildren and friends. The current social networking tools are intriguing to many of our OPC attendees," says Nelson. "It has been a pleasure to have Claire at OPC for the summer internship program. Her enthusiasm for this project won the respect of staff and seniors."

By Dawn Pauli

SUMMARY

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