

Monday, August 11, 2008

First OU Lean Principles course receives rave reviews

Oakland University's inaugural Lean Principles course (HRD 304), offered winter semester 2008, was a rousing success according to participants. The course provided a hands-on introduction to the principles and practices of Lean thinking.

Mark Doman, assistant professor in the School of Education and Human Services, taught HRD 304, which provided an introduction to the Lean principles promoted through the Oakland University Pawley Lean Institute.

For the final course project, four student teams identified a company that was in process of implementing Lean principles, and visited the company to witness the process first hand. Doman said the students performed a "gap analysis" resulting in a set of recommendations for the organizations to improve the way Lean thinking is being applied.

Doman said it was a beneficial project for all involved.

"The students took what they learned in class, saw it in practice, and came to conclusions about its effectiveness," Doman said. "For the businesses, the students were a new set of eyes. They had a new group of people, familiar with Lean principles, who were able to give their viewpoint and see something that someone closer to the company might not."

Rachel Swartout, an OU junior pursuing a degree in psychology, was part of a team visiting NSK Corporation's offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The group reviewed the methods NSK is using to implement Lean principles into the corporation, a global automotive parts supplier, in order to improve company quality, relationships with customers, efficiency and profitability.

"This class was a huge learning experience for me," Swartout said. "The final project was the most in-depth project I've done in my academic career. It tied all of the Lean concepts together."

By visiting with NSK representatives, which included Lean leaders from each department, the student team experienced a taste of the "Lean culture" the company has implemented. Lean principles touch on all areas of the company from training to manufacturing to executive leadership. Swartout said the team learned that company-wide buy in of the practices was essential to success, and in their report stressed that when implemented, a company-wide Lean culture can provide exemplary growth for the organization.

"We learned that Lean can be applied to any business, no matter the field," Swartout said. "It was incredible to look at companies and see how what seemed like an insignificant change could be the first step towards an entire transformation."

She added that the course can help prepare students for their career as well. "This is a course for people wanting to go into their career able to make a difference."

For more information, visit www.oakland.edu/lean.



SUMMARY

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