

Tuesday, November 24, 2009

MPA student writes million dollar grant to help MI workers

By **Katie Land**, news editor

Bernice Kerner is putting her school skills to work in the real world in a big way. The Oakland University graduate student recently earned a million dollar grant to help older, laid off workers in Southeastern Michigan reenter the workforce.

Originally written as a research project for her Public Administration 690 class, the grant was awarded through the Employment and Training Agency of the U.S. Department of Labor and will be used by the Southeast Michigan Works! Agencies Caucus (SEMWAC) to provide support and programming.

"We are delighted to have a student in our program who is making an impact on an underserved group of people," said Diane Hartmus, director of the Masters of Public Administration program. "We are proud that the skills she learned in this program have enabled her to do this work. It is wonderful to know that our students are out there helping their community. The MPA program is structured in a way that offers an opportunity to excel in real life scenarios."

As the Management Information System Supervisor for the Macomb-St. Clair Workforce Development Board (MSCWDB), Kerner was uniquely positioned for such an opportunity. An "in service" or already working student, Kerner was able to look at her profession with different eyes and find something that needed to be done that was outside the scope of her normal work responsibilities.

Kerner noticed that a growing number of Michigan workers have been laid off at an age too young to retire. Their skill sets do not necessarily fit in to the mold of the modern era, and many need more training.

"I was shocked to learn we had received this grant," Kerner said. "There were 130 applications nationwide and only 10 grants were awarded. I am excited and a little apprehensive, because I must now implement the grant with our partners, and finding time to do this along with my regular duties is a challenge."

The grant is designed to provide a higher level of services through the Michigan Works! system to dislocated workers in Southeast Michigan who are 55 and older. Through a network of 30 Older Worker Navigators located in Michigan Works! Centers, the plan is to engage 2,823 individuals in grant activities and to enroll 1,397 individuals into vocational training. The end goal is to find a new job for everyone involved.

"The reality is that we will probably provide services to a much higher number of individuals than proposed in the grant because these are the type of individuals that walk into a Michigan Works! Service Center every day," Kerner said.

The grant is for \$979,400, which is not a great deal of money when it is spread over three years to support 30 staff members that will be engaged in providing service to older workers, Kerner continued. A large amount of leveraged funds supporting this grant is also coming from the other Michigan Works! Agencies.

"It is important to understand that this is a regional effort, and will be successful because of the great partners we have involved in this grant," Kerner said. Awarded August 17, the grant's funds will be available through August 16, 2012.

Considered a role model amongst her peers, Kerner is even handed and well respected, according to Suzanne Rossi, graduate assistant for the MPA program. "She has a lot of responsibility in her job and is a very articulate and soft-spoken woman," Rossi continued. "But when she speaks, people listen."

For more information about Oakland's MPA program, visit the Web site at oakland.edu/mpa.



Graduate student Bernice Kerner wrote a million dollar grant to help Michigan workers.

SUMMARY

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Created by Katherine Land - Deleted (land@oakland.edu) on Tuesday, November 24, 2009
Modified by Katherine Land - Deleted (land@oakland.edu) on Tuesday, November 24, 2009
Article Start Date: Tuesday, November 24, 2009