

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

SBA scholars make research projects their own

By Karen Hildebrandt, contributing writer

Research experience listed on a student's resume usually means assisting faculty members with their research. At OU's School of Business Administration (SBA), research scholars not only serve as paid research assistants to faculty, they also design, develop and complete their own research projects – all at the undergraduate level.

Initially funded through a Chrysler LLC grant, the program introduces highly motivated students with an exciting new challenge, while providing faculty with rewarding results and new mentoring opportunities. After a highly successful inaugural year, the SBA has expanded the program to include additional students, more diverse research topics and a new program in social and public policy, with support from OU's Office of the Provost.

"I've gained so much experience and I've only just started this fall," said OU Junior Matilda Dule, who is working with Mark Simon, associate professor of management, to analyze how top executives make leadership decisions. "Professor Simon is working with me on my ideas and helping me to hone in on one important topic for my own research. It's great professional experience."

The program has about 10 students who are paid for working on faculty research for up to 10 hours per week. They must also take a three-credit, year-long course to complete their own research, and they are awarded accelerated major standing or scholarships.

The program also gives students an opportunity to publish and present research results. OU senior Carlena Janiak worked with Ron Tracy, SBA associate dean, to determine the effects of Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards on consumer usage and the environment through her research project last year. Janiak discovered CAFE standards might increase vehicle miles traveled and fuel emissions, leading to an adverse effect on air quality. She presented her findings, along with suggested alternatives, such as improved emissions regulations, to the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, and OU's Meeting of Minds program last year.

As the program grows, many research scholars will have the opportunity to mentor incoming research scholars. "I have lots to share, based on what I learned, to make sure that other students have a positive learning experience," Janiak said.

"If you're going to grad school, this is an excellent way to get a head start on the research process," added Janiak, who has applied to grad school with an interest in environmental economics and international trade.

"If you're going right into the workforce, it's an opportunity to see how properly researched ideas can be implemented successfully. Whichever path you choose, it sets you apart from the pack and that's always a good thing."

SUMMARY

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Created by David Groves (groves@oakland.edu) on Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Modified by David Groves (groves@oakland.edu) on Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Article Start Date: Tuesday, January 27, 2009