

Fostering an Environment for Success

by Becca Broaddus

Professional development is “the advancement of skills or expertise to succeed in a particular profession,” according to Webster’s Dictionary. Hankamer School of Business faculty defined what professional development is to each of their departments.

Andrea Dixon, executive director of the Keller Center for Research and the Center for Professional Selling, said it’s “the bridge that needs to be created for the transition from college to a career.”

“Professional development is everything possible to make our students marketable to potential employers,” said Hope Koch, the Information Systems department’s Career Development director and associate professor.

Anthony Herrera, the Accounting department’s director of Internships and Career Development, said it is “preparing students for their professional careers and helping develop the skills and tools needed to be successful in it.”

Today, faculty members prepare students for their future in addition to teaching. The business school’s Accounting, Information Systems and Marketing departments go beyond the call of duty to prepare their students for a successful career outside the walls of Hankamer.

“We’re exposing students to a variety of experiences to develop skills that will benefit their career, not just in their first job,” Herrera said.

In the Accounting department, the term “Backpack to Briefcase” is not only the name of the development program, it also describes the transformation of a student into a professional. The program extends the educator’s role beyond technical knowledge to help students gain essential skills in supplemental areas like interviewing, networking, mentoring, etc.

“There’s a lot more to education than technical knowledge,” said Charles Davis, department chair of Accounting and Business Law. “Realizing that gives our students a leg up on other programs that don’t have this focus.”



Events within the “Backpack to Briefcase” program include opportunities to network with fellow students and recruiters. It also serves as an introduction to the field and the opportunities within it.

The Accounting Extravaganza is designed to inform freshman and sophomore students of the variety of accounting career possibilities. Accounting Orientation welcomes new majors and gives new students an overview of the program, as well as providing a chance for students to interact.

“From the second they become an Accounting major, we start preparing students for the end result: a career,” Herrera said. “We encourage all of our students to seek internships, school activities and organizations to develop skill sets they need to succeed post-graduation.”

Other events include Lunch and Learn information sessions, Accounting Career Day, a mentoring program, and a graduate professional trip to New York City and Washington, D.C.

“Our efforts pay off because most of our students who want internships, have internships,” Davis said. **“We have new firms contacting us each semester about hiring our students; that’s market value.”**

The Information Systems (IS) department is also making great strides in helping their students reach success.

“Nationally, students are graduating with unprecedented levels of debt, and the unemployment rate among recent graduates is at a record high,” Koch said.

Given the positive job outlook for IS majors, the department is increasing awareness about the opportunities in the field to make sure Management Information Systems (MIS) majors get hired. Since 2007, the number of MIS majors at Baylor has increased by 273 percent.

The IS department’s development program focuses on fostering relationships between students, faculty and potential employers. Koch has started a campaign “on the ground” building relationships with companies.

“We’re building company relationships and we’re making our products, the students, better,” Koch said.

The program includes career development dinners, classroom presentations, consulting projects and career panels for students to attend. Events are run by the students themselves for optimum involvement and professional exposure.

“The events are successful because they’re student-driven, there’s a buy-in from the students, so they see the value of it,” Koch said.

In the Marketing department, they operate through three ‘buckets’ of work: the curriculum, the assessment of God-given talents, and the combination of knowledge and skills culminating as a career path.

“You don’t just get knowledge rich and deep enough to decide what you like off the Internet,” Dixon said. “A student must develop a sense of who they are and compare that to what different roles are out there.”

The program is a system led by a professional development plan committee made up of students and faculty. Together the committee creates student networking events, internship advisory sessions, a branding yourself session, career fairs, field trips and luncheons for students.

“Everyone has the same curriculum; you have to stand out,” Dixon said. “You’ve got to build your own case, and these are great forums for practice.”

One of the big additions to the Marketing department’s efforts in the 2010 fall semester was First Wednesdays. The department hosted a speaker from the field to discuss his or her experience with students the first Wednesday of every month.

“It’s our responsibility at the university level to help the student see what options are available and help them,” Dixon said.

Dixon’s major focus is to get more student-professional interactions.

“There’s an underexposure of professionals to business students,” she said. “The current generation is good at digital networking, but they’re intimidated by face-to-face interactions.”

All three departments stress the importance of professional development as a means to an end. Davis, Dixon, Herrera and Koch all agree that success in their programs can be measured by whether the students have jobs after graduation.

“At the end of the day a department can do a lot, but the ultimate measure of value is placing students in jobs,” Koch said.

But students aren’t getting jobs without help from faculty members. The business school’s departments and faculty members are hosting events and meeting potential employers all in the name of their students’ career success.

“Faculty involvement and commitment breeds an environment so students are dedicated to their future success,” Herrera said.

