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 Baylor Business
McCombs School of Business

by Kristin Todd

helping local businesses aspire *a little higher*

PRAGMATIC APPLICATION REIGNS SUPREME FOR GIA CHEVIS' AND KEVIN KOBELSKY'S
UPPER LEVEL ACCOUNTING CLASSES, WHERE STUDENTS ARE PAIRED WITH
LOCAL COMPANIES AND NON-PROFITS TO SOLVE
THEIR ACCOUNTING AND
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) ISSUES.

Kobelsky, assistant professor of Accounting, teaches through projects with Waco companies and has done so for several semesters. Kobelsky's students have worked with a number of companies and organizations including Central Freight Lines, First National Bank of Central Texas and Sterling University Housing. Most recently, students collaborated with Profiles International, a human resource management and employee assessment company; and Academy Capital Management, a small investment advisory firm; to analyze the companies' information technology (IT) security policies.

"The issue of IT security is increasingly important," Kobelsky said. "This includes computer access security, such as internal and external hacking and identity theft, and physical security, such as equipment and financial records."

The projects were completed as a consulting job where students conducted interviews, gathered data, examined client activities for a key operational system, and made recommendations for bettering the company.

"The students worked in small groups of two or three as external consultants," Kobelsky said. "For many of them, this is their first chance to work with a client."





{ Tara Houdyshell }

baylor
accounting



{ Tripp Austin }

{ Tara Houdyshell }

{ Jeremiah Marshall }

{ Marsha Stewart }

the team

studied laws for nonprofits relating to resale shops. they made recommendations for redesigning the donation form for the shop.

Kobelsky, a former consultant himself, said the students' project recommendations are evaluated based on professionalism, content, quality, applied material, addressed issues and applicable recommendations.

Andrew Hejtmanek, a Shreveport, La., graduate accounting student, worked with two other students on the Profiles

International team. "Our goal was to assess the current IT security policy in place at Profiles International and offer suggestions that could potentially help the organization in the area," Hejtmanek said.

No project is completed without its challenges. Hejtmanek said he had to become more accustomed to the

logistics of IT, but his group members provided support.

After receiving his master's degree in Accounting in May, Hejtmanek will begin working with BKD, LLP, one of the 10 largest CPA and advisory firms in the nation. He said completing the class project provided work experience and exceeded his expectations.

“Overall, I learned a great deal more than I thought possible at the beginning of the semester,” he said. “Had I simply sat through the class, I would have learned something. However, given the opportunity to work with professionals in the field in a real setting, I was able to put the information into practice.”

Kobelsky knows the positive impact that the projects provide for his students.

“These students are providing a real service relevant to their studies,” Kobelsky said. “They are helping clients and helping themselves. For many of them, the semester projects vindicate their interest in accounting.”

While Kobelsky’s students worked within the corporate world, students in Chevis’ graduate management accounting class got a taste of the nonprofit sector. Chevis, an assistant professor of Accounting, split the students into project groups to work with two organizations: the Family Abuse Center and Mission Waco.

Chevis said the projects offered last semester ran parallel to class time, and students usually met once each week with other group members.

“Similar to a consulting project, the students developed an engagement plan for the clients,” she said. “They then met checkpoints for the project throughout the semester to stay on track.”

Seven students worked with Mission Waco, a local Christian ministry that specializes in offering relationship-based outreach programs empowering the poor, increasing community involvement, and addressing social injustice issues. The project group focused on the efficiency of the organization’s computer system that was tracking costs.

“The students worked on making the system more conducive to grant billing,” Chevis said.

Kristin Argo, a Dallas graduate accounting student, served as a team member for the Mission Waco project.

“We helped Mission Waco transition to their new system by suggesting ways to more efficiently structure their chart of accounts,” she said. “This new structure would allow the system to generate budget reports to all of Mission Waco’s different program directors.”

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the project was not the project itself, but the communication of ideas.

“One of the challenges our team faced was a communication barrier between Mission Waco’s staff and ourselves,” Argo said. “While trying to establish the scope of the project and the specific work our team was going to perform, we had trouble translating our technical accounting jargon into terms that would be easily understood by those outside of the accounting profession.”

Without the project getting lost in translation, Argo said it was an invaluable experience.

“I was grateful for the opportunity to invest time and knowledge into a project which gave back to the Waco community, especially an esteemed organization like Mission Waco that was founded on Christian values,” she said.

Eight students broke into four teams to help with different aspects within the Family Abuse Center, a local organization that provides a safe haven for victims of domestic violence. Meredith Jones, executive director of the Family Abuse Center, served as the project manager for the students.

“I had been approached to have Baylor students work with the Family Abuse Center,” Jones said. “The students helped conduct research for the implementation of new policies and procedures.”

One team researched options for an old building the organization owned. Another team analyzed expenses from the

previous year and compared them to budgeting in the facility that has housed the organization since February of last year. A third team assessed the true profitability of the organization’s bingo game fundraiser.

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The final team of students worked with the organization’s resale shop, “2nd Chance.” The ideas of this team turned into reality.

“The team studied laws for nonprofits relating to resale shops,” Jones said. “They made recommendations for redesigning the donation form for the shop, and we are planning on using that new form.”

Jones said students met with her once each week at the start of the projects and more sporadically throughout the duration of the assignment. Team members also had the opportunity to interact with the organization’s board and staff members.

“I learned a lot from the students,” she said. “They were mature and hard-working. You have to be open-minded and willing to receive feedback from them. I thought it was a valuable experience and would definitely do it again.”

Chevis said the projects, which were presented at the end of the semester, were conducive to the students’ learning through direct application of subjects discussed in class.

“These projects were 100 percent applied and tailored to the client,” she said. “They were able to learn more about communication and working with different types of people. They realized how valuable their skills are, as far as contributing to a client.”

Chevis said she would continue offering the projects, which prove to be a win-win situation, as part of the class curriculum.

“Obviously, there are time constraints and boundaries, but students were able to make an impact and learn, and the clients walked away with recommendations they can consider.”