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Career Center Connects Business Students with Professionals

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Office of University
Communications

April 28, 2016

Networking Activity Provides Practice for Communication Skills

Students in Assistant Professor Sheldon Gathers' Principles of Management class at Gardner-Webb University recently discovered just how short—or how long—60 seconds can seem.

During an activity held April 20, each student had about a minute to present an elevator speech to local business professionals. An elevator speech is a concise message about a person's experience, expertise and goals. Gathers collaborated with Lisa Yerrick, director of the Office of Career Development, to incorporate this activity into class assignments this semester. Working with the Career Center, the students crafted and perfected their elevator speeches and wrote resumes.

"I believe that interpersonal communication skills are very important regardless of what industry students choose," Gathers observed. "The opportunity for students to participate in a simulated environment and receive feedback from potential employers is vital for their learning and development. The event allowed them to build their confidence when they see an opportunity to speak with someone who can influence their careers."

The business leaders who came to listen to the speeches were Marilyn Ramsey, Ultraforce Staffing, Shelby, N.C.; Greg Grier, Cleveland County Department of Social Services, Shelby; Tom Hart, Town of Boiling Springs, N.C.; Thomas Fekete, Fifth Third Bank, Shelby; Annie Freeman, Clark Communications, Asheville, N.C.; and Brandy Christman, PNC Bank, Shelby. A group of five students sat at a table with one professional. The students took turns making their presentations and received feedback. When all five students had presented, the group went to speak with the next business leader. Students presented their speeches three times during the 50-minute class time.

Freeman and Hart were impressed with how well the students prepared for the event. Freeman reminded students that non-verbal communication, such as eye contact, smiles and emotions, is just as important as the content of their speeches. Hart, Boiling Springs Town Manager, advised students to include something more personal in their presentation. "Little details like where you grew

Carlo Jimenez, a May graduate, presents his elevator speech to Brandy Christman of PNC Bank in Shelby, N.C.

Boiling Springs Town Manager Tom Hart, right, listens to students present their elevator speeches.

up can help you make a connection or find a shared experience with the people you are talking to and that goes a long way in building relationships,” he noted.

Hart also took the time to encourage Courtney Yanch, a junior international business major. During her first presentation, she said “um” many times. When she presented for Hart, she mentioned that she was trying not to say the syllable as much, and Hart noticed the difference. He also told her not to focus too much on the problem or her speech would seem stilted.

“It was wonderful to hear the advice from all three representatives I spoke with,” Yanch shared. “I could see improvement in myself and other students as we continued to say our speeches. It was an amazing learning experience.”

Carlo Jimenez graduates in May with a degree in sport management. He appreciated receiving advice from potential employers and hearing the other presentations. “It’s helpful to see how other people structured their speeches, and the material they include that I might’ve left out,” he affirmed.

Even before the networking event, Chukwunenyekwu “Chu” Umeadi benefited by completing the assigned speech. Umeadi graduates in July with a bachelor’s degree in computer science and has been offered a job. During his interview with the company, he was able to use what he had learned.

“This speech helped me in more ways than imaginable,” he assessed. “I felt prepared to speak about myself and had a lot of confidence going into it. I learned how to comfortably sit in front of an employer and speak about myself in a manner where they would have no choice but to hire me.”

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The Career Development Office is dedicated to serving Gardner-Webb students and alumni with an emphasis on two fundamental roles—aiding in career exploration and self-discovery and providing a myriad of resources to aid in the job search process. The Career Development Office also sponsors career fairs throughout the year and is open to all current students and alumni.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for professional success and for productive citizenship.