

## **UHV business majors get real-life experience**

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THOMAS DOYLE - Victoria Advocate

Two business majors at the University of Houston-Victoria neared the end of a real-world experiment this week.

major Mindy Gonzalez and management major Joshua Zeller have worked as interns at the Small Business Development Center putting to use the skills they have learned in the classroom.

"Each one was assigned to a senior counselor and they have been assisting those counselors with their clients," said Carole Parks, director of the center. Each student was required to spend 120 hours over the spring semester with the center, she said. About half of that time was spent working with actual clients, Parks said.

The two students helped create business plans, designed marketing pieces and performed financial evaluations on actual companies in the 11-county region served by the UHV SBDC, Parks said.

This year was a test-run for the program, Parks said. "It's worked out so well we've decided to commit to do it on a regular basis," she said.

Both students spoke favorably of the experience.

"I wanted to get hands-on experience for what I was learning in school," Zeller said, adding he received exactly that. Classes teach students the way business is supposed to work, but oftentimes in the real world it can work very differently, he said.

For example, during his internship Zeller worked with clients whose experience levels ranged from skilled business professionals to those with virtually no business experience, he said.

"I've learned a lot. I had no prior experience in my field of marketing," Gonzalez said. But along with designing business plans, Gonzalez also assisted at Victoria-based consulting firm in the design of a principal marketing brochure.

"I felt like she had a lot of very conclusive input," said Tom Cornett, with Cornett Testing and Consulting, a Victoria-based nutrient and pest management consulting and testing firm. "She came up with some wonderful ideas."

The brochure will be used to tell potential clients what services the company provides, and existing customers of additional services they could utilize, he said. The design is still being developed, and Gonzalez is still contributing ideas, he said.

Gonzalez also helped with marketing and public relations duties for the SBDC itself, said Mike Samford, a senior business development specialist who oversaw the intern.

Zeller logged in a bit of solo consulting time with The H.E.A.T. physical training studio in Victoria.

After shadowing Keith Mudd, senior business development specialist, for several weeks, Zeller was allowed to meet with the client alone and assist with financial analysis work, Mudd said.

"If I could afford (him), I'd hire him full time right now," said Nic Green, owner. Green said he is preparing to expand his business, and Zeller helped him design a new budget that will allow him to purchase additional equipment, he said.

Zeller brought in a fresh perspective, Mudd said. Sometimes those closer to their education temporarily will take a different viewpoint than someone who has been in the workforce for some time, he said. That fresh perspective can often be helpful.

The internship was designed to give business students an idea of how small businesses operate, and facilitate greater cooperation between the educational side of the university and the SBDC, said David Summers, assistant professor of management and overseer of the internship program.

To be eligible, students must be undergraduate seniors at the University of Houston-Victoria majoring in the school of business. They apply for the program by submitting a resume and undergoing an interview very similar to a pre-employment screening, he said.

At present, Summers and the SBDC plan to bring in another two interns for the fall semester.

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