

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Ferris students perform study for Chamber of Commerce**

BIG RAPIDS – A special project performed by students in a Ferris State University College of Business class for the Mecosta County Area Chamber of Commerce (MCACC) proved to be a win-win venture for everyone involved.

At the end of fall semester, 10 seniors in Professor Beverly DeMarr’s Human Resource Management class presented their “Business Trends Project” to the MCACC’s Business Development Council (BDC) and received rave reviews. “To say we were pleased with the results is an understatement,” said Kevin Roe, Chamber past president, in a letter to Ferris President David Eisler.

“The guidance provided by Dr. DeMarr resulted in a well-researched, well-written document that will aid the Chamber in providing programs that will ensure its members are successful in their business endeavors,” added Roe. He cited the students for “the amazing amount of dedication it took to bring this project to fruition. Their commitment will result in a continued relationship between the Chamber and the students in the College of Business,” said Roe.

The report focused on nine emerging business trend areas identified by the BDC that were researched by the class. Trends covered by the study were: Workforce Wage and Benefit Mix; Workforce Age; Education System Changes/Job Skills; Non-Discretionary Costs for Small Business; Consumer Medication Costs/Medical Services Cost Under Health Care Plans; Emerging Technology; Transportation and Warehousing; Environmental/Governmental Regulations with Emphasis on Water Use Rights; and Industry Sector Shifts.

“It was important for our students to have this valuable chance to apply the skills they learned in the classroom,” said College of Business Dean David Nicol, who initially discussed mutually beneficial project possibilities with the Chamber in a meeting last summer with Executive Director Anja Wing. “It was a tremendous learning experience that taught them they have to be able to conduct research, interpret their findings, and assemble and present the results.”

“What started as the students asking, ‘What have we gotten ourselves into,’ turned out as a real team effort,” said DeMarr, who teaches Management and also serves as faculty advisor for the Ferris student chapter of the Society of Human Resource Management. “Bewilderment turned into pride in the finished product,” said DeMarr of the group that became known as “The Chamber Students.” “I don’t think I’ve ever been more proud of a group of students.”

The students worked on the project nearly every day, or so it seemed to Sarah Johnson of Whitehall. “We would meet for class in FLITE (Ferris Library for Information, Technology and Education) and use the computers, reference books and additional resources,” she recalled. “Then outside of class I would find myself looking up things on the Internet and working with several of the other class members.” Johnson said she knew just a few of her classmates when the project started, but “we all felt like friends” by the time the project was done.

“It was an ambitious task and something that I had not done before,” said Paul VanPortfliet of Grand Rapids, who considered the project good preparation for his future

graduate school studies. “This was definitely an invaluable experience that made me feel comfortable with doing research,” he said.

“The project team went through a real life, hands-on exercise, a quality that will set them apart from other graduates on their resumes,” said Dean Nicol. “They were actually doing something that makes a difference. The ongoing interaction between the class and the BDC was a valuable experience and a great learning environment.”

Other project participants were Carl Blakemore of Hersey, Tera Jones of Baldwin, Taunya Keller of Detroit, Toni Lynn Malsom of Newaygo, Kristy Nunn of North Street, Latasha Perkins of Battle Creek, Rebecca Sebald of Birch Run and Lyndsey Simmons of Scotts.

Dr. Nicol noted that both the University and Chamber benefited from the project. “Our students received a valuable and unique learning experience that was not available in other ways,” he said. “The Chamber received needed information that normally would have required a costly study. The cooperation that developed will lead to further projects and a chance for our students to interact directly with Chamber members.”

In fact, another project is underway this semester in which College of Business students will provide the Chamber with research on a wide variety of employee benefits and a needs assessment instrument that will be used to identify what benefits employees value the most.

The students who completed the first project were graded by DeMarr, as well as their peers, on pre-determined criteria that included such things as class attendance, teamwork and their contributions to the study. They all pitched in to organize, draft, edit and complete the final paper and power point presentation. Their 85-page report featured an executive summary, chapters on each trend area and a listing of works cited.

They also evaluated their data and made recommendations to the Chamber in each trend area. For example, in noting that some local retired workers still sought to be part of the workforce, the students recommended that the Chamber keep a registry of these persons. Such a list of workers’ skills, experience and availability could save businesses from having to run employment ads and review applications.

“I think the 10 students who participated received a firsthand lesson in dealing with customers,” said DeMarr. “It was quite a real world experience for them at which they really excelled. Like one of them told me, ‘We gave them what they said they wanted, what they thought they wanted, and what they didn’t even realize they wanted.’”