

WRPI USDA WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

WRPI – Water Resources and Policy Initiatives – provide paid experiential learning opportunities for CSU students at all 23 campuses. The USDA grant served 200 students over a four-year period and was made possible by centralized administration and infrastructure.

The WRPI leverages the CSU’s system-wide academic excellence into an important resource for addressing the complex issues about water confronting California today and in the future. WRPI provides training opportunities through the commitment of the CSU Chancellor’s Office and through various federal grants and agreements, including the Watershed Management Experiential Learning for USDA Careers. The USDA project was launched to serve underrepresented CSU students under the hypothesis that long-term, repetitive exposure to experiential learning through paid internships results in improved persistence and performance.

Working with students from all 23 CSU campuses from a single cost-center presented some challenges, including recruiting, hiring and payroll. For example, it is difficult to validate Social Security numbers via the I-9 for students from multiple campuses, and there is much room for human error in handling documents from multiple sources.

To overcome these barriers, the WRPI created a centralized administrative structure at one cost-center – CSU San Bernardino. Rather than students being employees of their own campuses, they are all employees of University Enterprises Corporation/CSU San Bernardino, with one office for payroll and human resources. This greatly decreases the program’s administrative costs.

To address the issues of recruitment, hiring and payroll, the WRPI entered into an MOU with the U.S. Forest Service to tap into their existing recruitment pipeline, and works with campus career centers. Applications can be completed online, orientations are web-based, and I-9s are checked at each campus and forwarded to the central administration. Students are able to fax or email signed, templated timesheets to increase accuracy and streamline payroll processing.

Because these barriers were resolved, and due to the WRPI’s efficiency, only two students have dropped out of the program and the grant has been renewed for an additional \$2 million over the next four years.

OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

By utilizing spend management, opportunities now are quickly and easily identified by campus users, allowing the CSU to plan and allocate resources toward appropriate efforts. This allows for the combination of procurement efforts across campuses and the management of ‘maverick spend.’ *(Maverick spending is the expense resulting from purchases that are breaking the rules established by corporate procedures.)*

The next step in this process is to implement built-in efficiency measurement tools to quantify and analyze the program’s savings and efficiencies.

MILESTONES

Sep 2015

- Grant renewed for an additional four years. Plans to implement PDFs and electronic signatures/ timesheet submissions to further decrease human error.

Sep 2013

- Web-based HR orientations.

Jul 2012

- New procedures for faxing timesheets.

Dec 2011

- Found multiple errors and continued barriers in process.

Sep 2011

- Developed first procedures for recruitment, hiring and payroll.

Jul 2011

- Awarded \$2 million USDA Watershed Management funding for paid internships.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESULTS

221 served, 219 completed.

25 graduated with master's degrees, 40 graduated with bachelor's degrees.

14 began master's program, 1 began post-baccalaureate program, 1 began Ph.D. program.

2 \$40,000 Ph.D. scholarships awarded.

Average GPA increased from 3.27 to 3.42.

Administrative costs approximately 10 percent.

IMPACT AND BENEFIT

Students gained understanding of the relationship between classroom learning and job skills. Paid experiences allowed them to focus on a potential career versus an unrelated part-time job. Preliminary data, while incomplete, supports the hypotheses that these experiences lead to improved persistence and performance when compared to the general student population.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Electronic signature employment packets simplify payroll processing and timeliness.
- 2 Employment readiness and agency supervisor training webinars reduce staff time spent during pre-employment.
- 3 Long-term exposure to experiential learning increases persistence and performance.
- 4 Efficiencies, automation and central administration decreases the time and cost of administering programs.

PROJECT TEAM

Boykin Witherspoon

executive director, and David Zoldoske, associate director (Fresno State) – Oversight, direction, outreach

Michele Penilla

assistant project manager

Christina Rodriguez

intern specialist

Christia Williams and Ingrid Valdez

Human Resources – HR, payroll

Support staff

including student employees – Administration and payroll