

DEVELOPING

WKU-O building better employees for Daviess County

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer Nov 3, 2017

David Powers is working hard to make sure students who graduate from Western Kentucky University-Owensboro are ready for local employment.

Powers, the administrator for career and workforce development at WKU-O, said over the past year the school has implemented a new program, Economic Development through Guidance Education, in an effort to help students find direction for a specific career path, among other things.

He said WKU-O is unique because students who attend are typically non-traditional and whose sole purpose is to better their lives. For most, their final goal is to acquire a job.

"They are trying to improve their position in life," he said. "Most of our students are working with children, and they are doing everything they can just to go back to school and get it done."

He said they are practical and focused on taking the next step, which is why the EDGE program has helped so many of them.

In its first year in 2016, 11 students graduated from the program. Of the 11, eight of them obtained positions in their chosen career fields and three entered graduate school. In 2017, 37 students enrolled into EDGE.

The program is designed to boost the local economy through what Powers called experiential learning: learning through experience and exposure to local jobs and industry, and problem solving and professional skills.

It's a five-step program that Powers said is really "common sense type stuff" that when implemented together have created positive results for the students.

Step one is for students to meet with a career coach to create a detailed career development plan, which typically involves meeting with counselors and sometimes taking a series of personality tests.

Step two is for students to complete the college's Dynamic Leadership Institute, which helps students address soft skills and helps with professional development opportunities.

Step three is completing an internship related to the student's major that can then be applied to his or her resume.

Step four is for students to begin building their professional network, which can involve meeting face-to-face with employers in the area, or creating an online networking presence.

Step five involves students actually creating their professional portfolio, including a resume, cover letter and research paper.

"We have found that through encouraging our students to do this, they find opportunities," he said. "It's not hard, not complicated."

Samantha Taylor, 32, of Owensboro is a WKU-O senior studying organizational leadership who began her college career as a biology student.

She said she has come very far in a short amount of time, thanks to the opportunities provided through EDGE and DLI.

"The EDGE program has shown me that I have all these skills to be a leader, and I never knew it," she said.

Through the program, she networked with area CEOs and has had two manuscripts selected to be published in college textbooks, something she said never would have happened without the EDGE program.

"It has opened my eyes to so many different options and possibilities," she said.

Previously, she thought she would become a lab technician through the biology program, but now she has aspirations to work for NASA, Taylor said.

To learn more about the EDGE program or other similar programs offered through the WKU-O campus, visit wku.edu/owensboro/career_services or contact Powers at david.powers@wku.edu or 270-684-9797.

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