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UWF College of Business has the right teaching formula

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With so much pandemonium, corruption and controversy engaging our attention, is it any wonder happenings of merit are sometimes overlooked?

Lame excuses notwithstanding, here's giving some good guys their due.

Recently, the University of West Florida College of Business learned the results of the Business Field Test that 110 of its senior students took last fall. It was the college's first-time use of the measurement tool, employed to provide assurance of student learning as the college nears accreditation rigors, anticipated for spring 2008.

The results: UWF students ranked in the 80th percentile nationally, among some 80,000 students similarly tested, representing 469 national universities. Ten UWF accounting students ranked in the 95th percentile. Test areas covered included accounting, economics, management, finance, marketing, business analysis, information systems and international business. UWF test-takers also excelled when measured against a 10-school sampling of peers, similar-sized business colleges or universities, whose scores were found to be only in the 40th or 50th percentiles.

Business Dean Ed Ranelli credits smaller classes, qualified faculty engaged in their discipline and dedicated to teaching, and a curriculum offering plenty of case analysis, field work and team projects, for UWF's good showing. Of 47 faculty members, all but a handful have doctorate degrees.

The College of Business plays large in both UWF enrollment and economic growth in the region. Its 1,700 students make up 17 percent of UWF's 10,000 student count.

Its graduates provide a steady supply of fresh talent for the region's business firms, which, in turn, offer quality jobs.

Accounting graduates are in especially high demand in the region, says Ranelli, due in large part to a university's cyclical benefits.

Among the region's largest and fastest-growing businesses are Pensacola-based O'Sullivan Creel and Saltmarsh Cleaveland & Gund, both ranked among Florida's Top 15 accounting firms, and Alabama's Carr, Riggs & Ingram, Florida-based at Destin, ranked No. 38 nationally. Leaders at those firms, respectively, are College of Business alumni Mort O'Sullivan, Ron Jackson and Steve Riggs.

More than half of the 95 employees at Saltmarsh are UWF graduates.

A good supply of accounting graduates really assists us, says Jackson (class of 1976), firm president. A UWF Business College hallmark of quality is the personal attention students receive from instructors, he says. At Carr Riggs, regional offices, 30 to 40 percent of 300 employees are UWF graduates. Again, the college difference is its teachers: They have A players, says Riggs, firm partner (and 1976 graduate).

Good jobs at growing businesses are what our economy craves. Regional starting pay for accounting graduates averages about \$40,000. That's well above the Pensacola-area average wage of \$30,393 (according to UWF Haas Center).

And the cream rises, said one CEO.

William Moes of Pensacola, UWF's top scorer in last fall's testing, started college at the University of Central Florida, then returned to his hometown university as a sophomore attracted, for one, by the smaller class sizes. At UWF, Professors will give you one-on-one help, and there's more interaction in the classroom.

Moes will work with Riggs' firm after completing his master's degree in accounting in December. Notes Riggs: We were lucky to get him. And we're lucky to have UWF and its College of Business.