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WSU Business Minds of the Future
By, Wendy Wikstrom

Washington State University is tapping into the businesses of the future, by supporting the business minds of the future. There is no question that many WSU graduates have gone on to accomplish great success in the past. But times are changing and WSU Business professors have decided to be forward-thinking and say, “Why not help the students begin their success while still attending college?” Consequently, WSU has followed the lead of major universities, such as Stanford and MIT, by fostering an entrepreneurial culture for our students. This culture is referred to as “From Learning to Practical Application.” In other words, use real world business applications for in-class studies and homework assignments. And then apply them to the real world. This is what Chris Stahl did.

Christopher Stahl is a vibrant business graduate student at WSU. With the support of Joe Harris, Business Development Specialist at the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, and Dr. Bintong Chen, Business Professor with WSU online learning, Stahl is a prime example of the “From Learning to Practical Application” logic.

Stahl has presented a class consulting project to the Seattle Seahawks; he’s worked with professionals at Microsoft, PNNL, Nordstrom, Boeing and with several departments at WSU.

Stahl is currently working on a business venture with MBA student, Chris Bloom, business alumni, Casey Brazil, business professor, Joe Harris and a computer science student, Scott Robinson. This innovative online venture is still in negotiations and is expected to become a reality by 2006.

When asked, “What did you gain the most from your experiences?” Stahl replied, “I’ve been doing business plans since high school, but as far as competitions in college go, I’ve been in four...Business plan competitions provide a unique look at what it takes to actually start a business from the ground up. It’s a true test of all the knowledge you’ve learned in the classroom.

“Business plan competitions first started in the early 1980's at the University of Texas. Two Texas MBA students wanted to have a business school activity that was as challenging and prestigious as law school Moot Court competitions. For the business schools, participating in the contests can be a powerful drawing card for potential bright, motivated students. Their payoff is filling their classes with enthusiastic, entrepreneurial students who, if they hit it big, have the potential to contribute enormously to the financial future of the school.”

The “From Learning to Practical Application” approach to business education and the real world has been demonstrated by Stanford alumni, such as: Steve Ballmer, CEO of

Microsoft Corporation; Jeffrey Bewkes, Chairman and CEO of HBO; and Richard Fairbank, Chairman and CEO of Capital One...the list goes on, as will the WSU Alumni list of brilliant business minds.

As for Stahl, when asked what his dream business is, he replied with an admirable list of views, including, "I want to continue to work with young people and universities. Places like WSU are rich with new ideas and fresh talent. Experience is critical to the success of any business, but it's hard to beat the spirit and dedication of youth."