

Business students from University of Portland offer to volunteer for unions

Two dozen students from the University of Portland's Pamplin School of Business will attend the Monday, March 23, meeting of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

In addition to listening to union issues, students will form in groups of two to three persons to volunteer at a local union office.

"It's part of their class grade," said Judy O'Connor, executive secretary-treasurer of the labor council. "It can be computer work, research, walking a picket line; whatever you agree to do."

The project is part of a human resources management class taught by associate professor of management Jack Kondrasuk. He has been bringing both graduate and undergraduate students to labor council meetings for 30 years — after the university discontinued labor relations classes.

"Most of these students come from families with management backgrounds," Kondrasuk said. "They don't know much about unions."

By bringing students to a 90-minute council meeting and teaming them up

for 10 to 12 hours with a union local, Kondrasuk hopes the young adults will gain a different perspective of who union people really are.

"It's not something you can get by reading a book," he said.

"The professor exposes students to a union environment so that they will be more well-rounded as they go out and pursue their careers," said NOLC Board member Lynn Lehrbach, an official with the Teamsters Union.

The Teamsters Union has used student volunteers, and Kondrasuk has invited Lehrbach to speak in the classroom at the private university.

"They will pick your brain about everything, so be prepared. These kids come to learn," Lehrbach said.

Kondrasuk's class is set up under a points system in which a majority of the students' grade is earned by creating a fictional HR Department. Additional points are achieved from six smaller projects that include writing a résumé; creating plans for employee pay and job training; conducting a safety inspection; and working with a

union. The union portion carries the most weight, pointwise, and the union awards the points — not Kondrasuk.

Over the years, students have walked picket lines, filed papers and done research. "They like projects that challenge them; doing something that will make a difference," Kondrasuk said.

The students are computer savvy and are good at research, Kondrasuk noted. Students could help a union computerize their office system; perform wage/benefit comparisons by industry that possibly could be used for bargaining; they will even research union history. Nothing is off the table, although Kondrasuk would rather not have students used for simple filing.

Students will be at the Monday, March 23, meeting of NOLC. After the meeting they will hang around to see if any unions are interested in their services. Kondrasuk said six teams of two to three students each will be available to start work immediately. Grades are due from the union by April 15.

Oregon retirees alliance elects new officers

Gerald "Jerry" Morris, a retired member of the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon, was elected president of the Oregon Alliance for Retired Americans (OARA) March 14 at the organization's annual convention.

Morris succeeds Verna Porter, who did not seek re-election. Instead, Porter will focus more time as a lobbyist for OARA and other retiree groups.

In other election results, Ron Rogers was re-elected treasurer and Scott Blau was re-elected as a trustee. Porter was tapped first vice president; Jane Netboy, second vice president; Leanna Hakala, secretary; and Roz Giese, Jim Davis, and Jay Thiemeyer, trustees.

Delegates adopted two resolutions — one opposing Medicare Advantage Plans, and one in support of the Employee Free Choice Act.

The convention's keynote speaker was George Kourpias, recently retired president of the national Alliance for Retired Americans and a retired general president of the International Association of Machinists in Washington, D.C.

Kourpias said that after being completely shut out by the Bush Administration over the last eight years, he and other union leaders have already been invited to the White House several times by the Obama Administration.

"I think Barack Obama will be a great president, but we in labor have to be vigilant. We have to stay focused and be ready to take them on if they try to get Social Security or Medicare," Kourpias said.

The Alliance meets monthly on the fourth Thursday at 10 a.m. at Westmoreland Union Manor, 6404 SE 23rd Avenue. For more information, e-mail the alliance at valeriaj@comcast.net.



Recently retired Alliance for Retired Americans president George Kourpias (left) talks to ARA Northwest Regional Representative Bill Holayter and Gay Lincoln of the Oregon ARA chapter during a break at Oregon's state convention in Portland March 14.



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