

## Students test business skills in simulations

Approximately 100 sophomores in **Valparaiso University's** College of Business Administration will demonstrate their ability to solve problems and make decisions under the watchful eyes of area business executives in the coming weeks.

Business students currently are preparing for Valparaiso's half-day Assessment Center business simulations on Oct. 3 and Oct. 17, which place them in leadership roles that allow them to practice responding to real-life business situations. As part of the annual exercise, local business executives observe the students' actions and offer one-on-one feedback on the soft skills – such as communication, body language and teamwork – that are critical in the workplace, but often difficult to evaluate in a classroom setting.



Toni Bickerstaff, internship and assessment coordinator for the College of Business Administration, said students will be presented with common business challenges, such as resolving conflicts with colleagues and identifying the costs of different courses of action.

The upcoming experience will place students on a simulated student government board at VU that has been created to provide direct input to senior university administrators on issues including information technology, facilities and student services.

During the Assessment Center, Bickerstaff said each student will complete four activities: a conflict situation with a senior executive, a group effort to identify key issues and costs associated with changes, an impromptu presentation to institution leaders on the benefits and disadvantages of a course of action, and a writing exercise.

"These are situations our students will find themselves in whatever industry they enter or whatever role they have in an organization," Bickerstaff said. "In the conflict situation, for example, they work on their ability to persuade someone to accept a course of action that they initially oppose."

After completion of the Assessment Center exercise, Bickerstaff said students will discuss the feedback they receive from local executives and work with faculty advisers to develop plans of action that will improve their business skills.

"Many of the sophomores who participated in our Assessment Centers say the experience showed them what their innate skills are and what skills they need to work on during their time at Valparaiso to be prepared for success in the business world," Bickerstaff said. "The simulations also give our students a lot of confidence in their abilities so that they're willing to put themselves out there a little more."

More than 40 managers from area businesses will evaluate student performance during the exercises. Among companies that regularly have managers participate in Valparaiso's Assessment Center simulations are Centier Bank, Family Express, Urschel Labs, Powdertech and Opportunity Enterprises.

Assessors watch for things such as the first impression each student makes and the ability to react to new information or problems, Bickerstaff said.

"The Assessment Center provides students with an opportunity to learn about themselves and to interact with members of the local business community," Bickerstaff said. "It's a wonderful learning experience to have business executives give each student immediate feedback on skills that can give them a marketable edge in the workplace."

Valparaiso is a national and international leader in the Assessment Center concept, and all business majors participate in the simulations during their sophomore and senior years.