FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The University of Alabama: Moving from classroom theory to workplace performance.

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (May 21, 2014) – As the economy improves and the labor market evolves, so does the need for new skillsets in the workforce. Companies are once again investing in employee development and fine-tuning their management processes and organizational competencies in order to prepare for the changing demands of a global market. The latest research from Destiny Solutions, a leading innovator of lifelong learning business solutions, reflects this growing trend with companies. According to Destiny, 70 percent of employers felt their employees would need continuous learning just to keep up with their jobs. Yet, the survey revealed that only 39 percent of employers have internal programs in place or contract to provide training in-house.

Additionally, company leaders are realizing that a significant amount of their senior leadership and most experienced workers will be retiring in the next several years, taking valuable knowledge and experience with them.

According to Leroy Hurt, Associate Dean of Continuing Studies, “We have learned from organizations that they feel an urgency about transferring knowledge to younger employees and also preparing younger employees to step into positions of greater responsibility. Companies will lean on their Chief Learning Officers to ensure comprehensive talent development programs that succeed in those different dimensions.”

To help firms overcome such challenges, The University of Alabama, through its outreach arm, The College of Continuing Studies, (CCS) has been working with businesses large and small to identify training needs and management systems to address their particular problems.

For example, the college partnered with Allstate Financial’s Southeast Region headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, to create the multi-phase High Performance Leadership development program to address specific company needs and desires to enhance management skills. High Performance Leadership was delivered on-site at Allstate.

The CCS team is being lead by Dr. Robert Prescott, a leading expert in the area of executive leadership.
“Telephone interviews, combined with the latest in leadership research, determined the focus of the program,” Prescott said, “We then customized our efforts around better communication, influence, decision making and accountability. These four essentials made an excellent launch pad for participants to focus on how to be better managers.”

About 80 Allstate field sales leaders have taken part in two half-day training sessions that included determining their current level of leadership understanding, establishing individual leadership goals and developing individual personal plans and actions for achieving those goals.

Participants also received personal coaching phone sessions covering topics of their choice such as sales, people management and time management.

Chad Solomon, a Birmingham field sales leader for Allstate Southeast, was one of the participants in the CCS High Performance Leadership training and said he is already benefitting from the program. “I’ve finished my 90-day plan and am working on sticking to it, which includes being a good resource to the folks I manage and being more efficient with my time,” Solomon stated. “I am also picking up new ideas in the course and am getting great feedback as a result of the things I am implementing.”

As the relationship with Allstate has grown, the CCS team has developed other programs to meet Allstate’s needs including preparation and coaching sessions for new agent candidates for the insurance licensure exam.

“The University of Alabama staff is delivering a program tailored to address our business challenges and develop leadership competencies that our leaders are already working to perfect,” said Kim Barger, Allstate Southeast human resource manager. “Our company is intentional about continual learning for our employees and leaders alike. The UA program delivered the right mix of developmental learning for our leaders customized just for us.”

Like the companies it works with, the College of Continuing Studies has evolved and adapted to meet the needs of its business customers. It’s no longer about simply offering training certificates and conferences on the UA campus. Companies are demanding more responsiveness and accountability in almost every line item expenditure, especially employee development.

“Our college has always functioned somewhat like a private sector company. That’s one of the reasons we have more flexibility than one might think when considering the University of
Alabama,” said Rebecca Pow, Interim Dean for the College of Continuing Studies. “It really is a great business model. We can bring the extensive resources of a major university to bear on a client’s particular problem, when and where they need us.”

Another company that CCS partners with is Lisega, in Kodak, Tennessee. Several “star” employees did not have the bachelor’s degrees they needed to advance into higher levels of responsibility within the company. With the help of CCS, Lisega has placed two of its employees in the University’s online undergraduate mechanical engineering program. Several other employees are currently completing prerequisite credit and by 2015, over ten employees are expected to be participating in the program.

CCS also identified and allayed two primary concerns companies have about making investments in employee development. They are concerned that the employee might leave the company after receiving training and the amount of time employees will be away from their jobs. While it is possible that an employee might leave, data suggests otherwise. In fact, the turnover rate for employees taking advantage of education benefits is reduced by 50 percent.

“These concerns are certainly understandable, but the University has come a long way in removing these barriers,” stated Dean Pow. "By working with students to maximize application of transfer credits or evaluating past work experiences for academic credit, UA works to find ways to help students move through their degree program and save tuition costs. Clearly, those strategies benefit both the student and the employer. Many UA degrees are offered online and we can go to the employer’s business site to deliver training, thus reducing the amount of time an employee is away from the job,” Pow added.

“Help us solve problems in the workplace” has been the cry from the business community. Moving from classroom research and theory to problem solving in the business world is a goal that UA’s College of Continuing Studies is happy to fulfill.

##

For more information about these programs, please contact Bill Elrod, Director of College Relations at 205-348-2199 or belrod@ccs.ua.edu, or go to www.ccs.ua.edu.

The College of Continuing Studies delivers The University of Alabama to individuals pursuing educational goals and career growth, and to organizations building excellence in the workplace.