



**TEXAS**  
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## **Capstone Project Collaboration Benefits Students and DSHS**

By Lauren Wheat

Partnering on capstone projects with university students and faculty provides numerous benefits to both organizations and the students who participate in them. Lily McClure, Workforce Director at the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS), collaborated with UT Austin's Human Dimensions of Organizations (HDO) capstone class throughout the Fall 2023 semester. HDO is a distinctive program at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) that concentrates on identifying and resolving people-centered workplace issues, crucial for fostering effective working environments.

HDO is not always an easy space for students to gain practical experience. As part of this collaboration, students worked with McClure to develop ideas for how DSHS can enhance its approach to employee listening and responding to feedback. Students contributed ideas on comprehensive and regular ways to gauge DSHS employee sentiment and respond to employee feedback. In addition, students from various disciplines were introduced to the world of public health, which brings new perspectives to the field.

Throughout the fall, McClure coordinated a visit to the DSHS lab, including a presentation on DSHS and public health. She organized several meetups to address student questions and offer feedback on their projects, and reviewed final reports and presentations that summarized the student's research and recommendations.

McClure's role centers on recruitment, retention, and creative collaboration with diverse teams and resources at DSHS, making her collaboration with UT Austin students align with her mission of investing in people. She expressed, "The students were able to dig into existing research and use that to inform their insights. Having that added capacity to my work was so helpful. I enjoyed getting to see how their educational experiences informed their questions and it energized me to create an opportunity for them to experience work I am passionate about."

According to the HDO capstone class professor, Dr. Tracy Wuster, meaningful experiential learning connections were formed by the students. "Having our students work with DSHS on the employee listening project has been such a good learning experience. The HDO team (nicknamed "The HDO Wizards") had to understand DSHS as a large, complex organization, to research employee listening and feedback strategies, and to produce recommendations that--we hope--will help improve employee experience at DSHS," he said. "It was immensely rewarding for me as a professor to see students taking on a real-world project and crafting such thoughtful solutions to help such an important organization. This research project benefited our students immensely, and, in return, we hope their work will help DSHS!"