

UW-Stout: Construction team places in ABC national competition

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Menomonie, Wis. — If four University of Wisconsin-Stout construction majors someday are asked to plan a six-story, 300,000-square-foot building with underground parking, they should be able to jump right in.

The students recently were in a national competition for the construction planning of such a building, a new federal courthouse being built in Nashville, Tenn.

The annual Associated Builders and Contractors contest asked student teams to submit a detailed proposal for the entire project, including demolition, site development, parking, project management, safety, quality control and more.

“This competition encapsulates everything we learned in school and threw it together in one big project,” said Ryan Arts, a senior from Kaukauna who will graduate in May.

The other team members were Alex Blake, a senior from St. Paul; Vinnie Lien, a junior from Chippewa Falls; and Bronson Roshell, a senior from Chippewa Falls. They are members of the university’s Student Construction Association.

“We had never worked on a building that size. We put in a lot of late nights,” Arts said.

“This is the most relevant field experience you’ll have, short of being in the actually

industry. Each of us has had a co-op too, and we took that experience and applied it.”

UW-Stout was one of nine collegiate teams out of 26 in the U.S. that made the finals. UW-Stout earned a second place in the estimating division, in which every cost had to be included.

“Every nut, bolt, screw, the footings, columns, etc., and we had to assign the cost to each one. We looked at the architectural plans and a spec book with a list of exactly what’s in the building,” Arts said.

UW-Stout’s entry was 86 pages. Arts says team members each spent about 80 hours on their own time working on the entry.

The top team overall, including all divisions of the project, was Florida International University.

The pandemic delayed the competition. Teams worked on their proposals in late winter and spring, submitting them at the end of April instead of presenting in person at a conference in March in Nashville. They made their final presentations virtually on Zoom in August.

The adviser for UW-Stout, Jim Bunkelman, was pleased with how the team did.

“Even with all the challenges they faced this year, with a last-minute conversion to a virtual competition, Stout’s team made us all proud. I also extend many thanks to our construction industry partners who were instrumental in the team’s success,” Bunkelman said.

Bunkelman is an instructor in the operations and management department. He also is president and CEO of Royal Construction in Eau Claire.

“ABC does an outstanding job of creating a real world experience that challenges these students to perform at the highest level,” Bunkelman said.

Arts and Lien were part of the UW-Stout team that also made the 2019 finals and took first place in the safety division.

Arts, whose father owns a general contracting business in Kaukauna, is excited to begin his career in 2021 after four years at UW-Stout.

“I liked the cost of tuition, and it offered a really good education for the money. Stout has one of the best construction programs in the nation. I’d recommend it to anybody. I’m very confident I’ll do well in this industry,” Arts said.

The construction undergraduate program at UW-Stout prepares students to manage projects, including technical, engineering, business, marketing and management aspects.

UW-Stout is Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University, with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes.