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News

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Recent graduate's nonprofit granted tax exempt status

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Editor's Note: This is an update to a story that originally appeared in [St. Thomas Lawyer](http://www.stthomas.edu/news/2012/07/24/learning-the-law-of-nonprofits-by-launching-new-organizations/) (<http://www.stthomas.edu/news/2012/07/24/learning-the-law-of-nonprofits-by-launching-new-organizations/>), the School of Law magazine.

Alexandra Champion came to Professor Scott Taylor's Nonprofit Organizations practicum with a background in leadership consulting and a plan for inspiring girls to build confidence, take action, and recognize their leadership potential. Over the course of the semester, she developed her idea and learned how to implement an effective plan to establish and lead her proposed nonprofit, The Center for Girls' Leadership. This fall, the Center achieved its first milestone — an IRS grant of tax-exempt status.

"The biggest change will be in our eligibility for grants," said Champion, explaining that foundations and charities often restrict grant eligibility to those organizations which qualify as tax-exempt charitable organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. In addition, its tax exempt will allow the Center to participate in Minnesota's 2012 Give to the Max Day. Held each November, this online giving event raises millions for Minnesota nonprofits and increases their visibility to the public and other charitable organizations.

After a summer of studying for the Minnesota bar exam, Champion and her board are finalizing curriculum and activity plans for the Center's first fall event, a Saturday leadership camp for middle school girls. Organized through the St. Vincent de Paul school in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, the event will expose 6th through 8th grade girls to leadership principles and encourage the development of leadership skills through small group discussions, activities, personal reflection, and a community service project. Champion hopes to make leadership camps a monthly event, open to girls attending both public and private schools. Girls' Leadership 101, a specialized program designed to further the leadership goals of high school girls, will also be offered through partnerships with schools through the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.

Also in progress are plans to continue the Center's Steps to Success program. Building on the success of a prior event exposing girls to careers in the legal profession, Champion hopes to develop two-day camps exposing girls to women working in a variety of professions. Ideally, Champion says, "the next Steps to Success program will introduce girls to women working in the STEM fields," acquainting them with female role models and mentors working in traditionally male-dominated technical fields.

The Center for Girl's Leadership maintains close ties to the University of St. Thomas, recently taking on four St. Thomas undergraduate students as interns to assist with group facilitation and grant writing. Five of the eight members of the Center's board of directors are current or former St. Thomas law students, fostering a "uniquely dynamic and supportive" environment of common goals, according to Professor Taylor. Professor Taylor and Champion have also maintained contact as Champion continues to build her organization's programming and reputation. Professor Taylor continues to offer the Center his expertise, while Champion and her board brainstorm assignments and ideas for current practicum students based on their experience in the field.

This year Professor Taylor is guiding a new group of law students through the phases of establishing a nonprofit, from the initial grant of nonprofit status to creating a mission-driven and sustainable development model. He recognizes that each student has a unique dream for his or project, and the course is structured to support each student's individual passion as he or she works for the common good. One of the course's current projects is a plan to access donated play equipment and sponsor sports activities to improve the lives and health of children living in poverty. Another former student, currently awaiting a decision on his application for tax-exempt status, hopes to facilitate international adoptions from Honduras to the United States. As the class continues, Professor Taylor and his students will work to "create traditions and provide resources to support any student" in fulfilling his or her dream of improving the world. The success of Campion's project is an exciting development, and an example that current students can look to as they seek to achieve their own goals through the nonprofit practicum.

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