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STATE SENATOR HIRES MULTIPLE USFSP ALUMNI, STUDENTS

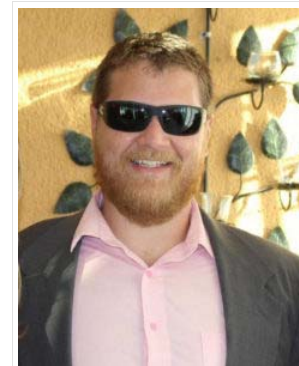


From left: Vanessa Thompson and Melissa Hertzfeld

There is a growing trend of USF St. Petersburg students and alumni being hired as staff members in the office of State Sen. Jeff Brandes. So far, the senator has hired three in just four years.

"Our team has hired multiple graduates from USFSP because of the quality of education provided here in our community," said Brandes. "We look for dynamic team members who have problem-solving skills and are focused on execution. We find that many of the graduates from USFSP exhibit these qualities."

Bobby Combs, 31, a 2012 Finance and International Business bachelor's degree recipient, was the first USFSP Bull to work in the Senator's office. Combs started as a volunteer during the 2012 campaign run after meeting Brandes through a mutual acquaintance at a local yacht club. He later was hired as an employee, where he worked until Summer 2015. His interest in politics spawned from a love for entrepreneurship and a desire to better



Bobby Combs

understand how it works in the community and contribute to the success of small businesses.

Next was Vanessa Thompson, 25, an alumna who received an MBA in Marketing and Management from USFSP in 2015 and a bachelor's degree in Entrepreneurship before that in 2013. Thompson was recruited by Combs when he showed up at the Bayboro Harbor waterfront looking for student interns.

"Bobby came into the waterfront area where we had both worked together at one point, and said he was looking for interns for Sen. Brandes," said Thompson, who grew up outside Chicago and always had an interest in politics. "I said, 'look no further.'" After starting as an intern, she later was hired as an employee.

The newest member of the team is Melissa Hertzfeld, 24, who landed an internship in the office in October 2015. She officially was hired as a District Legislative Aide in April 2015. Hertzfeld, a graduate student working on her MBA in International Business and Management, said she sought a career change when she heard about the internship through USFSP Career Services.

"I was going through a career change and this opportunity presented itself," said Hertzfeld, who says she is fascinated by politics. "It also presented an opportunity to be involved in many different industries at the same time. I thought it would be great to figure out what it is that I wanted to do, but then I ended up realizing I just wanted to do this."

At the district office, they handle day-to-day office activities, events and constituent issues. Additionally, each intern had an opportunity to visit and work with the senator in Tallahassee during different legislative sessions.

"I had no idea what Tallahassee was like before I went, and I thought to myself afterward, 'I really like this and want to keep doing this,'" said Thompson about her experience at the state capitol. "The bug kind of bit me."

Brandes, whose many interests and projects involve the St. Petersburg community, has always taken a special interest in the expansion and growth of USF St. Petersburg.

"USFSP has grown to be an important pillar of our community," said Brandes, whose involvement at the university has included helping secure state funding for the construction of the new building for the Kate Tiedemann College of Business. "The campus adds an important dynamic to our downtown core and the county as a whole. USFSP provides an important resource to our business community, and I am consistently impressed with the talent produced from the campus."

Combs, known as the "constituent whisperer" by his former coworkers in the office, said he was glad he to help make a difference in the lives of St. Petersburg constituents during his time in the legislative office. He recalled one of the most impactful calls from a suicidal veteran, whom he helped check into the local Bay Pines VA Hospital for treatment.

"It's rewarding at the end of the week to know that you've changed the lives of 20 to 30 people," said Combs.

State Senator Hires Multiple USFSP Alumni, Students

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