

Questions for Maria Hesse Feature Interviewee

Maria L. Hesse serves as President and Chief Executive Officer for Chandler-Gilbert Community College, one of the ten Maricopa Community Colleges serving the Phoenix metropolitan area. President Hesse began her educational career at the Judson School in Scottsdale, Arizona where she served for seven years as a teacher, dean, and high school principal. She has been with the Maricopa Community Colleges for more than 20 years working with several of the colleges. Her early years in the Maricopa Colleges included positions as Director of Student Activities and Services, Coordinator of the Ford Foundation funded Transfer Opportunities Program, and Manager of Faculty Employment for the Maricopa Colleges.

As college president, Maria is preparing the college to significantly expand student enrollments and further develop breadth and depth in academic and occupational programs. Working with business, industry, and community partners, the college is in the process of developing programs in health care, homeland security, and biotechnology while broadening its programs in aviation and information technologies. She is deeply committed to student success through innovative instructional methodologies and comprehensive support services. The college's civic engagement program has been recently recognized by the American Association of Higher Education and the National Learning Communities Project has highlighted the college learning communities and service learning programs in several national publications.

Maria holds Master of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science degrees from Arizona State University. She has a Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University and is a graduate of the Harvard Institute for Educational Management. Her honors include receiving the Maricopa Colleges Innovation of the Year award, the Woman of Distinction Award from the Women's Leadership Group, and Outstanding Faculty and Outstanding Manager Awards from CGCC. She has served as a consultant to other colleges from Florida to California on service learning, learning communities, technology, and accreditation.

President Hesse serves on many boards including East Valley Partnership, the Chandler Chamber of Commerce, the Gilbert Chamber of Commerce, the Alumni Association of Arizona State University, the Maricopa Advanced Technology Education Center, and the Gilbert Economic Development Advisory Board. Maria is also actively involved in community service with the Boys and Girls Club of the East Valley, United Blood Services, and numerous other organizations.

- 1. President Hesse, you spent many years as a faculty member, and were among the team of faculty and staff at Chandler-Gilbert Community College who realized the importance of service learning and civic engagement. Now, as president of CGCC, have you found other valuable characteristics of service learning and civic engagement that help you grow and strengthen CGCC?**

Service learning has been an important pedagogy for almost fifteen years at CGCC. Our commitment to service has deepened over the years as we have learned more about the communities we serve.

One of the most valuable characteristics of service learning has been a focus on reflection. Although reflection can take many forms, we often ask students to reflect in writing as a means of clarifying what they think and what they have learned. We incorporate intentional reflection into a wide variety of courses, programs, and activities for students, faculty and staff.

2. How has service learning and civic engagement helped you forge your mission at GCCC?

Service learning and civic engagement are embedded in the culture of the college. As we have progressed, we have grown in our understanding of the problems our communities face, how students can apply their considerable energy and talents in the community, how we structure learning experiences, and how the community can be involved in the education of our students. We want to help develop an ethic of service in both students and employees, while encouraging them to examine their capacity for community leadership.

3. How has service learning and civic engagement enhanced and expanded relationships within the Chandler-Gilbert community?

Generally, during the course of serving in the community, students connect with their teachers and other students in a deeper way than they do in other classes. Furthermore, many say that it has helped them form lasting bonds with members of their communities whom they may not have otherwise met.

I'll share one specific example of what can happen over time. Our relationship with the local Boys and Girls Club began about fifteen years ago when the director called the college requesting support. We started together with a dozen employees and students volunteering at a handful of special events. When the service learning program began, several courses became intimately involved in service learning experiences with the club. Eventually some of the faculty and staff, and their families began serving on the board of the club, and the club started using the college to find employees for staff positions. Our college undertook a campaign to involve other Maricopa Community Colleges with their local Boys and Girls Club. Now ten local clubs receive direct support from multiple colleges, including scholarship programs. And, as it turns out, we have now hired the director of our local club as the director of student life at the college. He is doing a wonderful job of continuing to support the club while connecting at-risk youth to the college.

- 4. President Hesse, as a national leader, what advice do you have for other community college presidents who are beginning to incorporate service learning and civic engagement into the missions and objectives of their college?**

I have several suggestions. First, start with those faculty and staff who are ready and willing, and provide morale support and encouragement, and, if possible, financial support. It takes considerable time and effort to get a program running well. So be patient, build upon your successes, monitor and adjust, as needed.

The faculty and staff need to hear the college administration articulate a definition and rationale for service learning and civic engagement. They need the college administration to identify and clear the roadblocks. Furthermore, the community connections and linkages that a college administrator is apt to have can be tremendously helpful in starting or enhancing a service learning and civic engagement program.

- 5. President Hesse, is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you would like to say about service learning and civic engagement at Chandler-Gilbert Community College, or in general about service learning or civic engagement?**

There is so much to say on this topic. The benefits to students, faculty and staff, as well as the college and the community are immense. As colleges, what could be more important than developing educated and reflective citizens while building community alliances?