

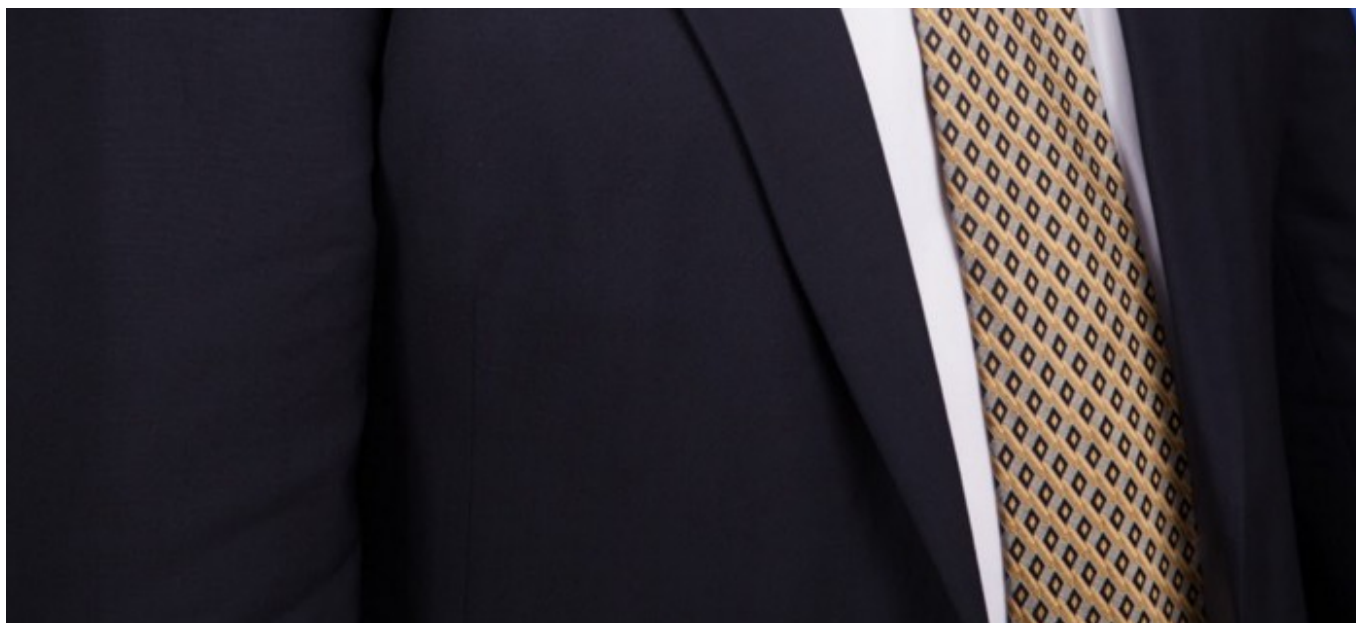
# Duane Oakes: Faculty Advisor for Mesa Community College



Up to Us [Follow](#)

Aug 17 · 6 min read





## **“Enter to learn, go forth to serve” — Duane Oakes**

Mesa Community College took first place for the 8th annual Up to Us competition. Duane Oakes, Faculty Director for Mesa Community College’s Center for Community & Civic Engagement, served as the team’s faculty advisor and helped the team to realize and achieve their success. As a first-generation college student who spent his time growing up working on harvesting crops, he was never involved in student government until he entered community college. There, he found amazing leadership opportunities and became a student leader where he found his future career working in Higher Education mentoring students like him. We asked Duane about his experience as a faculty advisor and journey with Up to Us — here’s what he said.

## **You are the faculty director at Mesa Community College’s Center for Community & Civic Engagement. Can you explain what you do in this role?**

I teach a leadership class and oversee our Center for Community & Civic Engagement. My goal is to prepare students to be better citizens — to grow and go out and make a difference in the world.

In my class, I can’t teach leadership, I can teach principles. They have to practice them. I build service learning projects, and students have to adopt a leadership endeavor. With Phi Theta Kappa, the national honor society, we use the saying “Find the need, take the lead, do the deed”. We created a model where we help them, and the students mentor

the students for the upcoming year. As a faculty member, I try to build that continuity — especially at a community college.

How did your journey with Up to Us start?

When I was presenting at a national conference for service learning and civic engagement, Hilary Allen( current Program Manager) and Kelly Chan (former Outreach Manager) came up to me and told me that my campus needed to be involved with Up to Us. I jumped at the opportunity and opened the door for students.

What was the most interesting part about being the faculty advisor for the Mesa Community College team?

Two aspects. First and foremost, when I see a student get excited, have their event be a success, and they're creating leadership roles and thinking outside of the box — that's the purpose.

Professionally, for me, to be able to go to the events, I have gained so much. I had to lobby to be able to go to my first meeting in Atlanta, and went to the meeting in Atlanta. I walked in and thought, "This is the coolest thing that I've been to". I've been to 3 or 4 training sessions, and continue becoming a better resource [for my team]. For me to grow professionally, and take the workshops, I've become a better Advisor, and have been able to better support my students.

Why do you think that the national debt and fiscal policy are important?

I watch our students now and am a little scared. A lot of students don't have a clue. I think they "cannot connect the dots". I'm not worried about me — I have a 2-year-old granddaughter and am scared for how she will grow up, how she will pay for things. This issue is going to be really critical for the students and their kids.

What was your reaction when you first heard that your team won first place?

It was exciting and an honor. I've been involved in a lot of these things over the years like Phi Theta Kappa. Shelby (team leader for Fall 2019 Mesa Community College team) is a chair and we can pull things together and work on different projects. That team was ranked 9th in the nation for community colleges out of 1300. Watching this group,

reading and editing, I told them, “I don’t care if you win or lose, as long as I know what we turn in is the best we can do”. Once they turned it in, I knew it was phenomenal.

When I first got the email, I was ecstatic. There are not a lot of community colleges involved in Up to Us — there are only a handful. Over the 30 years I have worked in Higher Education I have heard so many people say Community College students are not as good as University students. Winning this competition shows our students can compete with anyone. Community College’s open doors and give students self confidence, and shows them know they can do amazing things!

The first conference I went to, my student’s roommate went to Columbia University. Coming home from the conference, he realized that “I’ve done this, I’ve done that — I’m good”. It made my students proud and know that they can do amazing things.

Do you have any advice for your team members moving forward?

Use the resources that are out there. There are so many amazing people. There are resources that people can get support from, connect with. Don’t try to go on the path by yourself — use the resources and then create your own path. I watched too many people start from 0 who don’t build on the successes and failures from the past.

I hope that friendship is there. How do you build those relationships along the way? All of this is about great leadership, service, and experiences — bottom line, 5 or 10 years from now, “We are the team that won. We are the team that did this”. I hope we can build that experience along the way.

## **Advice for The Up to Us community at large? | Anyone who is interested in joining Up to Us?**

I really think that the opportunities that Net Impact and Up to Us provide are amazing. I challenge faculty to go out there and be a part of it. Be participants and get the experience out of it. The door is there, but you need to walk through it and take it. We should be the resource, catalyst, shoulder to cry on, the person to push them out the door.

Use your advisors more. I had to push myself in with the meetings. Creating professional development for advisors and faculty mentors is important. Keep filling the buckets of

the advisors — we become the strength and the foundation for the future teams.

Communication is critical with social media, different communication tools. Critical thinking with understanding the national debt and adapting with change. They wrote a parody on the National Debt and came up with a fun, creative, best-attended event. With all of the COVID craziness, the skills that they learn [with leadership roles] help them in life.

## **What do you see as the biggest benefit for students participating in Up to Us?**

Some students want a sense of power, some are interested in the national debt, some are interested in fiscal issues. I look at leadership in three different ways: a passion, a leadership position, and a sense of belonging. I try to guide students in many of those different areas. If students didn't buy into it, we wouldn't have done it — they did, and we've been able to pass it on through consistency. The whole model of our department has been built around Net Impact programming to be passed onto our students.

The knowledge of the national debt — for the rest of their life, they'll know and understand things differently. When they hear we're going to get money to support something, they'll think, "Where are we getting this from?". They'll understand cause and effect, a connection to the big picture for the rest of their lives.

Personal growth and watching students grow is so important — helping the students have fun and build memories. How do we connect with students? Any project where we can support students, we support 110%. Unless we keep building our future leaders, we're in trouble.

Though he didn't start off with the goal to be a faculty member, Duane's work as a founding Director of Student Life and Leadership at Chandler Gilbery Community College always focused on student development through service and leadership. For the past 20 years he positively impacted the Mesa Community College population and the lives of the students he has worked with, and shows the important role that faculty can play in a student's life. This year's amazing team, including past Up to Us alumni Rachel Mangini who helped serve as a key advisor to this team, contributed to the overall success of Mesa Community College because as he said, "It takes a team to build a team".

Thank you to Duane Oakes for taking the time to speak with the Up to Us team about his continued dedication to Up to Us. Learn more about the campus competition and how you can get involved on our website.

[Faculty](#)   [Education](#)   [College](#)   [Students](#)   [Fiscal Policy](#)

[About](#)   [Help](#)   [Legal](#)

Get the Medium app

