

'More than just academics'

MCC promotes civic engagement

By Sally Mesarosh

Mesa Community College student Amanda Fahy believes there's more to a college education than just academics.

This past semester she took time from her studies to volunteer at Care Partnership, a non-profit that helps nearly 20,000 people every year.

Fahy helped out in the organization's after-school program by assisting with homework and craft activities, and even shooting a few hoops on the basketball court.

"I really enjoyed the kids," said Fahy, a social work major.

"It helped solidify what I learned in the classroom and gave me experience I wouldn't get anywhere else."

Fahy, a west Chandler resident who plans to transfer to Arizona State University after she finishes her degree at MCC, said she will likely continue to volunteer in her community even after she graduates.

"Volunteering keeps you in touch with what's happening in the community and provides an opportunity to meet the people who live in your area," Fahy said.

Now MCC students like Fahy will have even more opportunities for civic engagement.

The Community College National Center for Community Engagement, housed at MCC, received a \$270,000 award from the Teagle Foundation to support the development of a three-year project to coordinate service-learning projects at seven of America's civically engaged community colleges.

The project is designed to improve and promote model courses and curricular programming that foster personal, civic and moral responsibility.

"We are committed to educating our students about the importance of building diverse, equitable, healthy and sustainable communities," said MCC President Shouan Pan.

"Recognized as a leader in community and civic engagement, Mesa Community College is honored and excited to have this opportunity to expand civic learning and strengthen our linkages with our communities."

Duane Oakes, faculty director of MCC's Center for Community & Civic Engagement, said MCC was chosen because of the college's focus and strong commitment to service learning and civic engagement. For the past eight years, MCC has been named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, which recognizes higher education institutions that reflect the values of exemplary community service.

Last semester, 32 MCC students volunteered 630 hours of service with Tempe organizations.

Over the past eight years, 1,468 students have donated 33,545 hours to Tempe elementary and high schools, city of Tempe Parks and Recreation, Tempe Library, Tempe Police Department and Project C.U.R.E.'s Tempe office. Project C.U.R.E. is the largest provider of donated medical supplies and equipment to developing countries around the world.

Oakes said the best

way for students to learn is by doing.

"When we can connect our students to active learning and things that help link them to the community, it will help make their

classes more relevant and provide more opportunities to change the world," Oakes said.

"Experiences like that also help them build their resume. As a faculty member, any time I can help students do that, it makes everything connect for me."

The project will enable seven community

colleges to work together and participate in local and national dialogues to further integrate responsibility into existing courses.

Seven specific areas have been identified to better equip students to address some of the 'great questions' of meaning, value and

personal and civic responsibility.

"Our society needs to prepare our students to be better citizens so they can help make the changes that are needed in our society," Oakes said.

"That's what higher education should be about."