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# Mesa college partners with private school

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Posted: Sunday, August 9, 2015 4:15 am

By Shelley Ridenour, Tribune

A public-private college partnership between Mesa Community College and The College of St. Scholastica is expected to strengthen the presence of the private college within the largest community college district in America.

The two colleges have created a five-year partnership in which St. Scholastica is offering a bachelor of arts in social work program on the Mesa Community College campus. The first classes begin in September and the 22 available student spots have already been filled.

### Scholastica

Cecilia Veloz, Juan Pedroza Reyes and Cornelia Best discuss compassion during a class last spring offered by The College of St. Scholastica on the Mesa Community College campus. [David Huff photo]



A specialty of St. Scholastica is health sciences, St. Scholastica's Arizona campus Director Maria Laughner said. Coupled with the absence of bachelor's programs in health information management fields at Arizona colleges, it made sense to leaders at the Minnesota college to offer those in Arizona, she said. St. Scholastica officials specifically looked for areas "where we excel and there are shortages in Arizona" as course offerings for the Arizona campus were determined, she said, with social work the end result.

Students in the social work program will attend classes on the Mesa campus. St. Scholastica uses classrooms in the Mesa college's social science building.

Using the existing college infrastructure was easier than constructing a new building for St. Scholastica, Laughner said. Plus, it's easier for students and means St. Scholastica officials come into contact with more Mesa Community

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College students.

To enroll in the St. Scholastica social work program, a student must be a junior. Many students are coming from Mesa Community College, where they've already earned an associate's degree or at least completed two years of classes.

St. Scholastica staffers wanted to start small in Mesa, but the 22 students already enrolled for fall exceeded the goal of 20 students, Laughner said.

St. Scholastica employs five professors in Mesa now. That number will grow next year. Plans call for two cohort programs to launch next fall, she said, so around 40 new students can enroll next fall, joining the 22 who'll be in their second and final year of the program.

Laughner said the non-profit college likes working in small settings.

Student success is important, she said, and keeping enrollment low will help ensure that.

Students will leave St. Scholastica with a bachelor's degree and the ability to become licensed social workers. Statistics show the number of jobs in social work is increasing, Laughner said. St. Scholastica is proud that it places all of its graduates within six months of them graduating, she said.

"That's a benefit of small enrollment," Laughner said. "We're focused on that outcome."

A plus for this year's students, Laughner said, is they are all receiving a scholarship that discounts their tuition by 15 percent, dropping it to \$344 a credit hour. They'll receive the scholarships for two years.

"That's a really good price for a private college," she said.

Mesa Community College's Dori DiPietro said the community college is happy to partner with St. Scholastica "to provide an enhanced opportunity for our students." DiPietro is faculty director of Mesa's social work program.

"Together we can offer students everything they need for the successful completion of their bachelor's degree in social work, at an affordable cost, right here," DiPietro said.

St. Scholastica is a private college with multiple campuses in Minnesota. Its original campus opened in 1912 in Duluth. It expanded to Arizona in 2014.

Mesa Community College is the largest of the 10 Maricopa County Community College District colleges. Mesa Community College has 23,000 students. The Maricopa college district boasts enrollment of about 260,000 students.

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