

Making service learning a campus institution

BY CLIFF NEWELL

The West Linn Tidings, Dec 2, 2010

Amanda Baker is awfully young to be starting institutions at a college.

But that is what she intends to do at Marylhurst University by instituting service learning as a vital and continuing part of campus life.

Baker has the right stuff for this unusual task, because Oregon Campus Compact hired her as its AmeriCorps VISTA representative at Marylhurst.

“Instead of money, we granted a human resource,” said Signe Bishop, program coordinator for Oregon Campus Compact. “Amanda is that person.”

It could be concluded from this statement that Baker is as good as gold. Certainly, her enthusiasm is golden. She is brimming over with plans to bring in students, faculty and even community members into her project.

“In my first year here I showed that service exists on this campus,” Baker said. “The public was shown that Marylhurst is dedicated to service.”

Baker’s program will include taking students to sites where service is needed and also planning special events, like the Service Learning Summit in 2011. She will be working with the school’s sustainability organization (MUSAC) to assure Marylhurst continues on its course toward attaining sustainability with a special month in April 2011.

But students want to have fun, too, so Baker is combining fun with service for a dance in December that will benefit the Oregon Food Bank.

Fortunately, Baker can draw upon a rich heritage of service at Marylhurst. Not only from the founding Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, but from Marylhurst graduates who have made their careers in serving others. They will be speaking on a panel during the school’s homecoming celebration in 2011.

“They’ll be acknowledging that Marylhurst inspired their mindset for service,” Baker said.

Her second year as Marylhurst’s AmeriCorps representative will enable Baker to finish what she started. Following graduation from the Art Institute of Chicago, where she founded the unique service-oriented project Volunteering with Art, it did not take Baker long to find the job she wanted.

“I saw this position open at Marylhurst, and it was right down my alley,” Baker said. “I was interested in starting from the ground up, and I’m interested in seeing where it goes this year.”

Baker will be getting strong support from the Marylhurst faculty, including the person who brought her to the university – Melanie Booth, director of the Center of Experiential Learning and Assessment. Then there is the Service Advisory Committee with professors David Plotkin and Jan Dabrowski.

Baker welcomes their help.

“The committee aspect is great,” she said. “It assumes the sustainability of this project.”



CLIFF NEWELL / WEST LINN TIDINGS
Amanda Baker of AmeriCorps, left, and Signe Bishop of Oregon Campus Compact are eager to instill service learning as a key program at Marylhurst University.

“Sustainability is important, especially in the third year,” Bishop said. “We’ll see if what Amanda has built will still live on.”

Copyright 2010 Pamplin Media Group, 6605 S.E. Lake Road, Portland, OR 97222 • 503-226-6397