

Class project turns students into philanthropists

By Amy Cox O'Hara

Andrew Carnegie once said, "It is more difficult to give money away intelligently than it is to earn it in the first place."

Students enrolled in the ASU class *Philanthropy: Theory and Practice* (NLM 550), a master's degree-level course taught through the School of Community Resources and Development in conjunction with the ASU Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation learned this lesson first hand this past semester.

In a class project that culminated with a \$20,000 check presentation to one Valley nonprofit, students were able to gain hands-on experience and a new insight into the ups and downs of being on a foundation board.

The course, taught by Roger Hughes, executive director of St. Luke's Health Initiatives (SLHI), a Phoenix-based public foundation, gave students the opportunity to make a \$20,000 to grant on behalf of SLHI's Health in a New Key community development program.

The students narrowed down a list of more than 20 qualified nonprofits to five finalists, then they divided into teams that worked with the potential recipients to develop persuasive proposals for support.

Following a round of team presentations, the students played the role of foundation board members and selected what they considered to be the "best fit" with the grant requirements.

Hughes explained that SLHI provides the grant to give the next generation of leaders in the nonprofit sector valuable experience in the business of philanthropy – and to introduce them to the principles of strength-based community development.

Acting as fundraisers and board members, students were forced to see things from several – and often conflicting – points of view.

"It was a valuable lesson in what constitutes a strong grant proposal, and the reality of the subjective nature of many funding decisions," says student Genevieve Croker.

Fellow student Bethany Taylor agrees, adding: "As a development officer, I always thought that raising funds was hard – and that giving

money away, in comparison, must be easy. But by participating in this exercise, I learned just how hard giving money away could be. When you are forced to choose between multiple worthy organizations, it is truly difficult."

In the end, Stepping Stones of Hope, an organization that offers grief and bereavement services to children and their families, was selected to receive the \$20,000 grant.

"All the proposals were good," says student Damon Lemmons. "But this one gave us the greatest sense of community leverage and sustainability."

This is the second year NLM 550 has been offered. Last year's inaugural group awarded \$10,000 to Girls on the Run of Maricopa County, a nonprofit that works to improve the physical and social development of young girls through an innovative running program in schools. Because of the growing interest in the course and the success of the first offering, SLHI was able to double its award contribution this year.

"Our educational curriculum is well-known for bridging theory and practice through experiential learning based within the classroom experience," says Robert F. Ashcraft, director of the Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation and professor of nonprofit studies in ASU's School of Community Resources and Development. "This is especially true in the case of NLM 550. What Dr. Hughes and St. Luke's Health Initiatives has made possible is a stellar philanthropic laboratory that is the envy of nonprofit and philanthropic studies educational programs nationwide."

"This was an exceptional learning experience," says student Saso Andonoski, who comes to the Valley from the Republic of Macedonia. "The class showed the ability to go beyond expressive philanthropy and think strategically. I have learned so much from this class. This was one of my best experiences at ASU so far."

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