

College President's/Chancellor Award

Dr. Karen Nicodemus of Cochise College

Cochise College, a small, rural community college in Southeastern Arizona, enjoys an exceptional organizational climate that can be directly attributed to the institution's president, Dr. Karen Nicodemus. She has led the development of a remarkable, relationship-oriented organization at many levels, beginning with herself and her open door policy. She encourages that first names, including her own, are used at all levels of the college. She would also be the first to admit that pronouncing her first name is much easier than Nicodemus.

The past two years offer a snapshot of the commitment towards faculty, staff, and organizational development. The following is an illustrative list of some of those efforts:

- Creating and funding of a new, full-time position, the director of professional development and learning innovations.
- Institutionalizing learning communities across the district, where not only students benefit but also faculty working in teams across disciplines
- Initiating a leadership academy. The leadership academy has been granted an award for being an exemplary initiative of 2007 by the National Council of Instructional Administrators.
- Innovation is encouraged and faculty and staff enjoy the freedom and support to try new things, for example, using electronic clickers in the classroom, teaching blended classes, and participation in learning communities.
- Service learning is another innovation which is being supported by the college. There are constantly new developments on the horizon, to include a pilot mentorship program.
- Professional development opportunities have been expanded to include a new professional growth policy of tuition reimbursement for enrollment in classes outside the college.
- Guest speakers and workshops are offered on campus, facilitated both by outside experts and volunteer faculty and staff.
- Departments such as the library have an annual in-service, and there are regular retreats for instructional managers.
- Each year the College holds two all-employee professional development days that feature nationally known keynote presenters, both at fall Convocation and a mid-year faculty and staff development day; this year, the development day will also feature 24 breakout sessions led by College staff.
- The College offers generous financial support for training and technology locally as well. For example, the online campus director and the science department chair were given time and financial support to develop new ways to serve deaf and blind students. Their developments brought the College national recognition for technology and ADA compliance

Dr. Nicodemus has also served as a role model for stretching one's comfort zone and constantly challenging ourselves in new ways of service. Her performance reputation and accomplishments have earned her gubernatorial recognition and appointment to both the Arizona State Board of Education for which she was elected President for the past year and the Governor's P-20 Council. She has been asked to lead and/or serve on several state task forces, including the Making Opportunities Affordable initiative, the College and Career Readiness Policy Institute, the American Diploma Project; and, task forces focused on aligning K-12 mathematics and English Language arts standards to college and career readiness.

She has been described as a strategic thinker, and a visionary, who has led the College's transformation from a small, rural, fairly insular institution to its current status as one held in extremely high regard across the state and beyond.

Karen's reaction when notified of her selection for NCSPOD's 2008 College President's/Chancellor Award was to quickly recognize that building a positive, work environment that values supporting and challenging employees for their benefit and the students we serve, involves a number of individuals. In 1998, when first laying out her vision for the college, she noted that her vision was for Cochise College to become an institution that is a first choice of students, a first choice of those seeking workforce training, and a first choice for individuals seeking employment.