

Teaching students to be good citizens key

Dr. Dustin Swanger

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Since the early establishment of higher education institutions, teaching students to be good citizens has been a founding principle. There continues to be the belief that colleges and universities have, as one of their responsibilities, preparing students to be citizens. At Fulton-Montgomery Community College, we take this responsibility seriously.

First, a good citizen is an educated one. At FM we strive to teach students their curriculum of choice, but also a general education program that includes writing, mathematics, history, social sciences, humanities, and other areas. A student who graduates from FM is a well-rounded individual with exposure to, and understanding of, a number of areas.

Second, FM has had a deliberative focus on teaching students civility. This initiative strives to teach students civil behavior, to practice kindness, and to treat others as they would like to be treated. We have had seminars on civility, a civility day, an event where students spoke about what civility means to them, posters, booths, etc. This has been a real college community effort.

Third, FM teaches students to be analytical. That is, to read or listen to information with a critical eye or ear. Does the information make sense? On what facts is the conclusion based? Is this information a factual statement or supposition? Teaching students to question and analyze such statements is critical to being a productive citizen. With all of the 24/7 "news" channels, political spin, advertising, and argumentative discussions about issues, citizens need to be able to ask tough questions and determine the validity of much of the information provided.

Fourth, students at FM get involved in our community. Students, often through student clubs, volunteer their time and talents to help local organizations serve our community. They also conduct fundraisers to support local organizations as well. Students learn that giving to the community and being a part of the community is an important part of citizenship.

Fifth, each year, FM works to have as many students as we can register to vote. Voting is a habit and a responsibility; however, few Americans exercise their right to vote for whatever reason. This is especially true of young folks who are eligible to vote, but do not. On campus, particularly in the fall, we strive to get students registered and promote voting in the elections. Voting is our most basic civil responsibility and yet, America has one of the lowest turn-outs for elections around the globe.

Sixth, students can participate in student government. Those who do so learn a lot about leadership, management, influencing others, Robert's Rules of Order, and governance. Each year I have the privilege of interacting with the students who lead our student government; watching students grow in these leadership positions and talking about leadership with them is a real benefit to my position.

Many Americans take our citizenship for granted. I recently visited Williamsburg, Virginia where the foundations of our political system were created. It was a pleasure to see some of the re-enactments of discussions, arguments, and battles that shaped this country. I believe that at FM, we're trying to instill a sense of civic responsibility in each of our students. We are citizens of a great country; we all need to behave like the privilege that it is.

Dr. Swanger is President of Fulton-Montgomery (N.Y.) Community College.