

## Students discuss higher education at town hall

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Higher education was the topic of a recent Youth Town Hall at Arizona Western College.

About 40 students from the high school, college and university levels gathered to discuss the subject and to make recommendations to be sent to the Arizona Town Hall later in April. The group was also linked to the main Youth Town Hall site at Rio Salado Conference Center in Tempe.

Linda Elliott-Nelson, dean of instruction at AWC, said although the Arizona Town Hall has been around for 50 years, this was only the

fourth Youth Town Hall.

“It was nice to see it go across the age spectrum ... One of the realizations is that our youth are our future and we really need to be listening to them so that they have a voice in what’s going to happen.”

After the Youth Town Hall held in 2012 at Yuma City Hall about civic leadership, Elliott-Nelson said, some of the feedback from students was that for the first time, they felt listened to and that their viewpoints were validated.

“That just gave me goosebumps,” she said.

Elliott-Nelson said that after holding a training session for students to moderate and lead their own discussions at the last Youth Town Hall, this time the event was entirely student-led.

“The whole idea is that we would move it on to the students ... The students themselves moderated the discussion with the other students and they did a wonderful job,” she said.

AWC student government body president Tim Taylor led his own moderator training this year and recruited his fellow student government members to be a part of it.

In regards to the students' discussion, Elliott-Nelson said, “They made some really good points. One was to encourage more women in the math and science areas, to inform students of the type of salaries they would earn in different jobs, to plan for college, to start developing the interest to drive them toward college and teach them about the benefits.”

She said some of the pluses to being in higher education that they mentioned were how completing a degree shows determination and the will to succeed to others as well as to potential employers. It also helps to expand the minds of individuals who may have been close-minded in the past.

“They predicted that with more people who have gone through higher education, better decisions could be made in the community. They mentioned that as college and university students, their families see them as role models and also their co-workers see them as role models.”

On April 21, Elliott-Nelson will travel to Tucson to be a moderator at the 102nd Arizona Town Hall on Higher Education and to share the comments of Yuma's youths. A brochure will then be made and distributed throughout the state and to state legislatures with recommendations from the Youth Town Hall as well as the Arizona Town Hall.

“What always impresses me about town hall is that you bring a diversity of individuals together to have discourse about a relevant topic and the recommendations that come out are a consensus of individuals that may have very, very different views, but it's very, very powerful,” she said.

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