4-21-2004


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Interdisciplinary Social Science major Lisa Matzner sees service to the community as an academic responsibility. And she put her research where her heart is.

Matzner was one of USF St. Petersburg’s first class of students selected to present research at the inaugural Tomorrow’s Leaders Symposium on campus April 20. The forum showcased innovative student research and creative work produced this year under the tutelage and support of campus faculty. Projects ranged from psychological science to business ethics and several involved community partners such as Lowry Park Zoo and Community Action Stops Abuse.

For her Leadership Studies practicum, Matzner worked with Steve Ritch, PhD, and a long-time volunteer of CASA to investigate a troubling trend with its volunteer retention. Because of its important work for women and families, CASA was receiving a steady stream of first-time volunteers. But the agency noticed a gap in the number of those who returned.

Matzner's research investigated the pattern, and she designed a formal training manual to orient volunteers to the agency's needs and expectations. CASA is now using the manual for volunteer training.

Symposium faculty coordinator James McHale, PhD said opportunities like this help prepare students for progressively demanding academic experiences.

"Students presented and defended their work to a range of faculty from diverse fields. The interdisciplinary discussion makes the experience much more academically challenging."

Tomorrow’s Leaders on Campus Today
By: John Husfield
April 21, 2004 2:28PM EST