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Information Tech Instructors Share Barbour Award at MSCC

Jason Carr and Ray Duch, Information Systems Technology instructors at Mid-South Community College, have been named the latest winners of the Barbour Family Award for Innovative Instruction.

“We are honored to share this prestigious award and greatly appreciate the Barbour family for their commitment to innovative learning efforts at Mid-South Community College,” Carr and Duch said. “The positive results from our project were rewarding enough, but this honor makes it all the more special.”



Diane (Barbour) Ayres, right, poses with Jason Carr and Ray Duch, the latest winners of the Barbour Family Award for Innovative Instruction at MSCC.

Carr and Duch teamed up on their project, “Class Motivation via BEST Robotics and SkillsUSA,” to encourage incoming Technical Center juniors and seniors by creating a spirit of teamwork and enthusiasm in their first year of class at MSCC.

With a goal of engaging the students in active learning, the project included numerous strategies to motivate students to reach their full academic potential. The instructors incorporated BEST Robotics and SkillsUSA project criteria into the curriculum to foster student enthusiasm and encourage hands-on participation.

The results of the team-building project exceeded the instructors’ expectations in a big way. The students placed third in the BEST Robotics competition in their first year! They also received first, fourth, and seventh place in the SkillsUSA competition.

“We are proud of Jason and Ray for their efforts to inspire their students to greater heights,” said Dr. Barbara Baxter, MSCC Executive Vice President. “Almost every employer will tell you that teamwork and active participation are indispensable in the workplace, and this project encouraged students to experience and practice both.”

Beginning in the fall of 2009, Carr and Duch decided to include competition participation in BEST Robotics and SkillsUSA as part of the course requirements for Information Technology Principles and Practices, A+ Preparation, and IT Essentials I and II. They began to integrate items from each competition into the classes. Instead of asking students to write research papers on cell phone technology, they tasked them with programming a remote radio crystal and computer chip to control our robot brain.

The award winners also worked with students for countless hours on Fridays and Saturdays to guide them as they designed, built, programmed and practiced with the completed robot. Every student participated in at least one aspect of the BEST Robotics team (Driver, Booth, Oral Presentation, Notebook, or Spirit). In the spring, the teachers incorporated elements of the SkillsUSA Computer Maintenance and Repair competition directly into their lessons.

In IT Essentials II, Duch used direct teaching and hands-on lab activities to cover items common to the curriculum and to the SkillsUSA engineering competition. In A+ Prep, Carr emphasized sections that would appear on the SkillsUSA A+ state-level competition. (At the national-level competition, one of our students actually earned his full A+ certification by passing the national-level test with a high score.)

“Throughout both semesters, we maintained a high level of excitement so that our students would feel a greater exhilaration for their work in class and in the contests,” Carr and Duch said. “We encouraged students to excel in their ‘normal’ classroom activities so that they would be ‘free’ to work on the robot or on computer repair. The excitement felt by the students was obvious to us, and the results of the motivation process are readily apparent.”

The \$500 award is the result of a generous donation by the Barbour family to honor faculty members who generate new ideas that enhance the already exceptional learning opportunities available at MSCC.

“You can’t have academic excellence if you don’t have good teachers,” said W.L. Barbour Jr. when his family established the award. “Good teachers inspire their students, and students remember their school experiences for a lifetime. Through this award, we hope to bring extra recognition to MSCC’s teachers who are doing such a fine job for the college and the community.”

Previous winners include Chris Davis and Dale Smith.

For more information about creating an employee award or a named scholarship at MSCC, please contact Foundation Director Patti Coleman at (870)733-6764 or by email at pdcoleman@midsouthcc.edu.