Transcript
Pima Community College Perspectives
“PCC Trains First Responders”
Guests: Sharon Hollingsworth, Training Director, PCC Public Safety and Emergency Services Institute
Brad Olsen, Deputy Chief, Tucson Fire Department

(male announcer) Welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives, a look at how education enriches our community. And now, here’s your host, Nina Trasoff.

(Nina Trasoff) Hello, and welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives. I am Nina Trasoff, and I am so glad that you chose to join us again today. My co-host and guest today, as always, is Rachelle Howell, who is Assistant Vice Chancellor at Pima Community College. Hello!

(Rachelle Howell) Hello, Nina.

(Trasoff) We have a really interesting topic today, and it’s really one of great importance to the community, of an important program Pima offers that benefits this community on so many levels. And we’re talking about public safety and emergency medical and paramedic training.

(Howell) Yes, you know it’s really one of the key programs where they are, two of the key programs that we offer. You know, and just to back up for a moment, one of the things that a lot of people don’t know or don’t realize is that Pima is one of the largest providers of first responders in the community. So if you’re interacting with a nurse, or a firefighter, or in the case of the programs we’re talking about today, paramedic or EMT, odds are that that individual that you’re interacting with is a Pima graduate or has had some training through Pima in some way. And you know, not only are we proud of the quantity of first responders that we’re able to turn out, and specifically again, EMT and paramedics, but we’re really proud of the quality. In fact, our graduates on the national-- it’s called the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, correct?

(female speaker) Correct.

(Howell) We have a really high pass rate; 98 percent for ours compared to 83 percent nationally, which I think is just outstanding.

(Trasoff) And that quality of training actually permeates every one of Pima’s programs, you know, that we’ve talked about, but it’s especially here because our community so relies on our first responders. And our special guest today is Sharon Hollingsworth who is the Training Director for the Public Safety and Emergency Services Institute at Pima. Welcome, Sharon.

(Sharon Hollingsworth) Thank you.

(Trasoff) Thank you for taking the time. Tell me a little bit about what your position is and what the Institute does.
(Hollingsworth) I am the Program Training Director for the Public Safety and Emergency Services Institute, the EMS portion of it. And what we do is we provide basic life support continuing education to the community, as well as advanced life support and paramedic training to the community and to several other of our local agencies here in Tucson.

(Trasoff) Now just for the sake of disclaimer and also credibility because I think it’s a really important point, you are with Tucson Fire Department.

(Hollingsworth) Yes, ma’am, I’m a practicing paramedic firefighter with Tucson Fire.

(Trasoff) So that real life practical experience has to get into every aspect of the training because you know what’s needed first hand.

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely. All of our instructors at Pima Community College are actively working in the field or in the hospital environment as paramedics or nurses and physicians. It’s important to stay active in the field. The field of medicine is quite dynamic, and in order to provide our students with the best education, we need to be able to find out what’s going on within the community, what’s new into the arena they are in, and the best way to do that is to actually be practicing in medicine.

(Trasoff) And what is the coursework like? What is the training like, for example, if you wanted to compare an EMT versus a paramedic? What are the different kinds of trainings and intensity?

(Hollingsworth) An EMT basic program is 9 credit hours at the College, and that equates to about 100 hours of training in the classroom. Within that 100 hours is also 10 hours of clinical and/or vehicular rotation where they get the actual hands-on practice. Versus a paramedic is 57 continuing education credits or units at Pima Community College. The minimum amount of education hours that is required per national registry with the state is 1,000. Our program at Pima College offers 1,270. Within that 1,270, our students do a minimum of 504 clinical and vehicular rotations where they are actually riding on the trucks, they’re working in the hospitals, they’re doing the skills that they’ve learned in the classroom. By the time they graduate, they’ve actually been able to touch patients, to treat patients, to differentially diagnose, so when they’re in the field, they have that confidence to do what they’ve been trained to do.

(Trasoff) And the community wins as a result of that because whether it’s a car accident, a personal emergency, whatever, you guys are the ones, whether it’s, whatever fire department, not just TFD, you’re the ones who are the first ones on the scene.

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely. Yes ma’am.

(Trasoff) These skill levels, I mean there’s a lot of work that they go through. And Rachelle already talked about the quality of the training, not just because you have practicum as well as the classroom, but your pass rates on the national exams, which everybody takes, are incredibly high, well above national average. And that has to speak to the quality of education that you’re giving.
(Hollingsworth) Yes ma’am. Pima College, the support we have through the administration, as well as all the instructors we have, I think is the ones who deserve credit for that. Our program differs from many other programs where you just don’t have one instructor in front of the classroom; we actually have a variety of instructors from all areas of the community. So they are not just being trained on, by one department or one area. If you bring everybody in, it brings a better perspective of what’s going on out there. And I think that is where the credit is really deserved.

(Trasoff) That is, that is very interesting, because when they get out there, they have to be able to think on their own and be able to consider all of those perspectives once they are making life and death decisions.

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely.

(Trasoff) Tell me about the students. Is there a difference between the EMT versus paramedic students?

(Hollingsworth) Traditionally, the EMT basic students are of a younger generation; many are high school graduates. Some have actually been in the workforce and are just redirecting their careers. So there’s actually a huge variety there. In paramedicine, most of our students have a background in EMS. They have been an EMT, practicing EMT basics, and they are trying to advance their careers. We do have several that graduate from the EMT basic program and know this is what they want to do, and they just move right into it. So there’s a huge variety. But in the paramedic program, most of our students have been working in the field, have some sort of foundation already set for them, and usually are older.

(Trasoff) Where does it lead? We talked about Emergency Medical through a fire department or a rescue department of some sort. But what are other career paths that can be taken?

(Hollingsworth) We have many students that graduate from our program and they go on to nursing school. We’ve had two of our students graduate and go on to medical school. We’ve had a couple go on to PA school.

(Trasoff) “PA”?

(Hollingsworth) Physician’s Assistant.

(Trasoff) Thank you.

(Hollingsworth)[chuckles] I’m sorry. And it’s really whatever they want to do. Many of them go out of state to practice. After acquiring their Associate’s Degree from Pima Community College, they have the option of going to NAU or another affiliated four-year college and getting their Bachelor’s Degree in Allied Health Sciences. So really it’s unlimited. They can advance.

(Trasoff) Do you have people who just come in because they just want to know how to do that and have the confidence for themselves? I’m talking more on the EMT level.

(Hollingsworth) At the EMT basic level, yes ma’am, we have several people that have come in to do that. Usually they are caring for maybe a parent at home or a loved one, and they just want to know what to
do in that type of emergency situation. We offer CPR training at the Public Safety Institute, and we see a lot of people coming in there; maybe they have some new grandchildren or they are caring for a parent, and they want to know what to do if and when an emergency happens.

(Trasoff) What about the number of students? How many students are in this program? Is it a very large program?

(Hollingsworth) The EMT basic program through the East Campus at Pima Community College, they will offer anywhere from three to four classes a semester, and I believe the maximum amount of students they can get through there is 32 in a class. For the paramedic course we have, the maximum amount of students that we can have in a course is 24, and I would, my best guesstimate is we graduated 100 students last year from the paramedic program. Through our continuing education I would estimate we have anywhere from 200 to 300 students coming through a year.

(Trasoff) One of the things you talked about earlier, Sharon, was the fact that so many or all of your instructors are actually practicing in some way in the field and that things are constantly changing. I really would like to talk about that because telemedicine is impacting them, and TFD, I think, now has really some amazing communication with emergency rooms. And that has to require your paramedics to retrain constantly.

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely, absolutely. Telemedicine, in the past, we would always communicate with the physicians in the emergency room when we were transporting a patient there. The emergency rooms have gotten so busy, and we have gotten so busy in the field that sometimes it’s quite impossible, and it would take away from patient care if we were to always require to contact the hospital and to get direction from them. So something that medicine has moved into is we now operate under administrative orders where we have set guidelines from our medical director, and we practice based on that. We will still call the hospital and say, “This is what we have. This is what we’re coming in with.” They know the administrative orders, so they know what we are going to be doing in the field.

There are certain situations where we’re going to call and give them more detailed information, especially if we have a traumatic event or we’re going to transport multiple patients to a hospital, we want to give them a better idea of the resources that they may need. But for the routine medical call, we just let them know that we’re coming in, this is the type of patient, and they know what to expect of us. Most departments are moving in that direction. Another thing that has changed in the field is we have the capability in the back of our trucks to turn on a camera and actually let the physicians in the emergency room see what we’re doing in the back of the truck, and we can communicate with them as we are coming in. Those type of situations that would require that are usually in a traumatic event.

(Trasoff) What about the changes medically itself because medicine is changing...

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely.

(Trasoff) We’re learning so much. There was an article in the New York Times recently about even the diagnosis of breast cancer and treatment of breast cancer has changed because of some studies that are
coming out. So how does that, not that in particular, but how does that constant change impact your coursework and continuing education for your paramedics?

(Hollingsworth) It’s quite dynamic. Every year our instructors and our managing staff will go to training conferences, to any EMT or NREMT, just to stay up to date. Currently in EMS, we’re going through the new national standard changes, so we’re having to re-establish our whole curriculum. Things that we’re changing with the new standards are they’re increasing our treatment of respiratory-type of illnesses. We’re using more ventilators and such. It’s just dynamic. There are great changes. American Heart Association, every two years, updates their profile. If you can remember back about, I think, over the last 10 years, when we used to do CPR 15 compressions and 2 breaths, and now they’re even recommending that we just do compression-only CPR with minimizing the interruptions. That, those changes all came based on clinical trials through the Sarver Institute at the University of Arizona.

(Trasoff) Right.

(Hollingsworth) Just trials and studies and things that we were doing in the field to help justify these changes. So it’s those changes that we’re practicing in the field that have the impact nationally.

(Trasoff) So it impacts your study, and you have to constantly be updating your coursework.

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely.

(Trasoff) But how do you also reach out to the paramedics that, do they have a certain amount of continuing ed. that they need to do every year?

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely. As a practicing paramedic, you are certified, so through national standards and the state, you’re required to re-certify every two years. In order to do that, you have to get 72 hours of continuing education credits. As an EMT, I believe you have to get 60 hours of continuing education credits. They can be acquired through a variety of ways. Many departments have required that their paramedics maintain national certification so that they’re trained at a national level. Some agencies still do internal training. They just make sure that their employees are trained with the local standards.

(Trasoff) You’ve been talking about the national level and the national registry examinations. Can you talk a little about that organization and what are the standards? And I’m hearing that our standards are above what the expectations are.

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely. The Public Safety Institute has a Basic Life Support and Advanced Life Support training certificate through the Department of Health Services here in Arizona. In order to do the training in the state of Arizona, you have to have a certificate through DHS. In order to have your students sit at the national level for these tests, you have to be approved by the state level. They set minimum standards that are outlined through the Department of Transportation in the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration. They set minimum standards. You have to meet those minimum standards or exceed them. I’ve been with the Public Safety Institute for over six years, and we’ve always exceeded those minimum expectations.
One of the things that we train our paramedics to do is not only meet the minimum requirement, but we want them practicing out there, we want them critically thinking. We want them to have the confidence. Something that we realize is that when a student graduates from our program, they are not always going to have a mentor standing beside them or somebody to train them. They are training maybe three weeks. So we want them to graduate and have that type of confidence, so we've increased our standards to make sure that that's provided to them.

(Trasoff) Beyond the medical training, there is also a mindset for people who go into this field, or at least there, I hate to be judgmental, but there should be a mindset that if you're going out there, you are really serving the public.

(Hollingsworth) Absolutely.

(Trasoff) How do you help them understand that? Is it part of, is there a screening before people can get into this, or is this something that is instilled during the educational process?

(Hollingsworth) A little bit of both. We do have a screening to enter the paramedic program. Our Medical Director for the Paramedic Program at the Public Safety Institute is Dr. Andrea Herbert. Dr. Andrea Herbert and Patricia Ellis, who is her assistant, sits on the board for this screening. And the questions we ask the student, we're trying to get a feel for why are they doing this. We don't want somebody... I always look at this as, "I don't want somebody walking into my home and treating my family who doesn't want to be there." We want them, we want people to be serving the public that know what it is to be a public servant. We just don't want them doing it for the money. And it's difficult to screen that. It's difficult to exclude people like that.

But what we try to instill in the students during the training is that you're here for a reason; you're here to serve the public. This may be a routine call for you, but it is a true emergency for the person you are dealing with. And if we can instill that one notion, it then actually is a really, really rewarding profession. Another thing we try to remind them is that we don't get the kudos that we deserve, however, you know in your heart that you made a difference in somebody's life. And I think that's the important part.

(Trasoff) That's so well stated because that really is the essence. You know, when I go back to my old reporting days, and I would be out when the first responders were just there, and that was for that person the moment in her or her own life where they needed somebody that they could absolutely rely on.

(Hollingsworth) Mm-hmm.

(Trasoff) And to have your people understand that, that's, I think that's almost as important as the medical training.

(Hollingsworth) Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. The medical training is the foundation, but it's what you do
with that training.

(Trasoff) Well, thank you. I really value the work that you're doing out at Pima and the fact that Pima is playing this important a role in our community, throughout our community in terms of preparing first responders. Our guest has been Sharon Hollingsworth, who is the Training Director for Public Safety and Emergency Services Institute at Pima Community College. We're going to take a break, and then when we come back, we're going to be talking to Chief Brad Olson, who is Tucson Fire Department's Deputy Chief of Training. So we'll hear the TFD side of the story in just a minute. We'll be right back.

[music]

(male announcer) For more than 40 years, Pima Community College has helped prepare the citizens of Tucson and Pima County for good jobs and better lives for themselves and their families. We don't do it alone. We appreciate your ongoing investment in education, especially during these extraordinarily tough times. Your tax dollars, combined with student tuition, make it possible for thousands of Southern Arizonans to get a jump-start before transferring to a university, to get the training they need to stay competitive at work, and to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. Many of our students are seeking to restart their careers after losing their jobs, and some, their homes, during the recession. All of our students know, as you do, that the more you learn, the more you earn. We know that today's students are often juggling work and family, as well as school. That's why Pima offers classes at night and on weekends at six campuses, more than 180 other locations, and over the Internet. Our programs deliver education how you want it, and give you the opportunity to achieve your goals at your pace. Today's Pima Community College students will be tomorrow's firefighters, nurses, police, teachers, and small business owners, the backbone of a safe, healthy, prosperous Tucson and Pima County. Thank you for your support as we continue to help you and your family build a better tomorrow. For more information, contact us at 206-4500, or visit us on the Web, at pima.edu. Pima Community College, Developing our Community Through Learning.

[music]

(Trasoff) Welcome back to Pima Community College Perspectives. I'm Nina Trasoff, and I'm joined this point of the program by Chief Brad Olson, Battalion Chief Brad Olson from the Tucson Fire Department. And Brad, if I may, tell me a little bit about what your role is within the fire department.

(Brad Olson) I'm out at the Training Academy. I'm the Deputy Chief for the Tucson Fire Department and the Training Academy. And my job is the continuing education for the department as well as the recruit training for any new firefighters as they come in. So all of the training once they become a firefighter, they come out to the Academy, or somewhat I have responsibility of getting the training for them.

(Trasoff) So then you work very closely with Pima in terms of the training that they are providing because the program today is about Pima's training first responders.

(Olson) Mm-hmm. That's correct, both from the EMT level all the way through the paramedic level.
(Trasoff) And what is, you have EMTs and paramedics, how do you place them? I presume paramedics are a step above EMT because the training is that much more intense.

(Olson) That's correct. As a firefighter, you get trained to be an EMT, Emergency Medical Technician, and we do that during our recruit training. And then you have to be an EMT for at least a year-and-a-half or two years before you can go on to be a medic in our system.

(Trasoff) Is that because, I mean, partly it's getting them used to being in the fire department, but is it also because as an EMT they get to see a certain level and get comfortable with that before you move them into becoming paramedics?

(Olson) A good paramedic is a great EMT. And to know basics what an EMT does, and just being able to assess the patient, make sure that they know what's going on, an EMT can do that. And that's what we learn right from the beginning; that's what our EMT instructors from Pima College also do for us. And then we let them know that you have to be a good paramedic, or to be a good paramedic you have to be a good EMT, and that's what we try to get all of our firefighters to do. So every one of our firefighters are EMTs. That's why an engine company, a ladder company arrives first, because we have more of those throughout the city, and then our paramedics come in afterwards to help take care of the patient.

(Trasoff) What do you look for? You said a “really great EMT” will make a really good paramedic. So do you choose the people who you encourage then to go on to become paramedics?

(Olson) What we think is that we have a really intense training at the beginning when they become a firefighter. So I think that anybody that wants to become a paramedic on the Tucson Fire Department is going to be a good paramedic because we look for the best as a firefighter and an EMT. So we're hoping that anybody that has an interest in taking care of people, that want to be paramedics, are going to be good paramedics for our system.

(Trasoff) It's a nice mindset; I mean the whole issue of public service. We touched on that at the end of the last segment. Talk about the partnership then with TFD, Tucson Fire Department and Pima Community College, because there really is a close tie there.

(Olson) There's a real close tie. Like I said, from the start as a basic firefighter and doing the EMT to the paramedic portion of it, since 2003, we've been using Pima College specifically for paramedic training, and we've put a lot of people through that training. And, you know, working together, having our people that work for Tucson Fire be a part of Pima College and part of the instructor core for Pima College is important because they know exactly what we need out in the field, and they can take that in the Pima College portion of their job and make sure that they're training all of us to do the right thing.

(Trasoff) And you've been on the force for how many years?

(Olson) Twenty-eight years, almost twenty-nine.
(Trasoff) You must have seen some really dramatic changes then in terms of first responder care, what you’re trained to do, and what you’re allowed to do, and the technology to which you have access.

(Olson) We have, and I have. It’s been interesting to go through the process of all of the different changes that we’ve had. I was, I had the opportunity of being a paramedic throughout my career, going from firefighter to paramedic to Captain, and there’s a lot of changes. But you know what? The biggest thing is that you’re taking care of people, and we’ve been doing that right from when I was a basic firefighter. And they’ve been doing that a long time. Pima College has been there, you know, helping us out throughout that time too, so it’s good to have that close relationship.

(Trasoff) And, I mean, you have to have a lot of different training as paramedics because you don’t know what you’re going to encounter when you open the door. It could be pneumonia, and it could be a woman going into premature labor. How do you deal with that?

(Olson) You know, what we learn is that we want to take care of the patient. And what we look at is the patient, and then what’s the problem. We have the ability to talk with doctors through our radios if we have anything, so we can have close communication with them. But the base thing is to look at the person and see what’s going on, you know, their system as well, and we can learn about that system through our training. And we take care of the patient, and we also take care of the person. You know, we don’t just say it’s a system, but it really is. To do something whether it’s mental issues, or whether it’s a physical issue, or whether it’s sick, we have to look at them and say, “What can we do to make this person better?” You know, it wasn’t us that made them sick or whatever; what can we do to make them better? That’s what we want to look at.

(Trasoff) It must be very satisfying. You were talking about the close relationship, and I don’t know what’s chicken and what’s eggs, does Pima reach out to the Fire Department saying there’s new technology available at UMC or TMC or Northwest, whatever, and do they reach out to you and say, “You need to update?” Or do you realize in the field that there are things that are changing, that the training needs to change to accommodate? Or does, is it a little bit of both?

(Olson) The answer’s yes.

(Trasoff) [chuckles]

(Olson) It’s a little bit of both, and the big thing is, you know, the people that work for Pima College are also people that work for Tucson Fire or other agencies around Tucson, throughout Pima County. So we have the ability to say, “What is it that we need?” And then there’s a lot of people that are looking and researching on their own, and they can say, “You know what? Either Tucson Fire or Pima College, we have something that we want you to try.” That is something that Tucson Fire has been able to do as people come to us and say, “We have new equipment that we’d like you to try.” Well, to do that, we have to have people like Pima College who’s willing to listen and learn that equipment or that process as well, so we can all be trained.

(Trasoff) Where does it go? What do you see happening in terms of paramedic, in not just the training, but the ability to respond, because you’re relied on almost like an emergency room now in some cases because of budget cuts and things such as that. There are a lot of people who can’t or people who are without help here.
(Olson) You know, that’s been happening for a long time. 9-1-1 is an emergency room for a lot people that call us to check and see what’s going on, and we have to take care of them. We do that the best we can with the help of Pima College putting our people through the training and the continuing education training. I think on and on we’re just going to get better. People are going to rely on us more.

(Trasoff) Well Brad, thank you so much for joining us. Chief Olson is Tucson Fire Department’s Deputy Chief of Training. And we’ve been talking today about first responders, and it really is foundational for our community. I think it’s one of our Points of Excellence that Pima offers this community, and that kind of partnership with TFD is truly important. Thank you all for joining us today to listen to this conversation about Pima Community College, its perspective on Public Safety in this community. I’m Nina Trasoff. I hope you will join us again for the next edition of *Pima Community College Perspectives*.

[music]

(male announcer) K-J-L-L South Tucson