

Alia Eccles

Driven student puts her leadership skills to test

BY STUART J. ROBINSON/Contributing Writer

Alia Eccles returns a call promptly. That's a bit surprising, given how busy she is. Only 19 years old, the Arizona State University junior is taking 19 credit hours this semester, working 20 hours a week and holding down leadership positions with two student professional associations. She is double majoring in finance and economics and minoring in statistical analysis. All this while commuting daily from Fountain Hills, where she is adjusting to life as a newlywed.

"I'm very good at juggling my time," she explains. "I got married (in May) two days after my last final," says Eccles, who believes the timing may have been a blessing in disguise. "I didn't have time to freak out about it for two months beforehand. I was focused on finals."

Focus is a big of a mantra for Eccles. "You work as hard as you can," she says. "You do the best job you can do. Within ethical boundaries, you push yourself as far as you can. And make sure you do what you like."

Lately, that has led her to combine her professional education with community involvement. Since this summer, she has been working with the Spirit of Enterprise Light Rail Project, an effort by ASU's W.P. Carey School of Business to assist companies affected by transit construction in the Valley.

"We do marketing needs assessments, go into the business, figure out how we can improve customer flow, figure out what the business needs to stay afloat and hopefully come out better than they were to start with," she explains.

In the process, Eccles says she has been exposed to varying management styles. "Prior to light rail construction, the businesses were doing fabulously. And many of the owners have minimal experience in terms of book learning, but they managed to learn so many creative ways of doing things," says Eccles, who hopes to apply some of those approaches when she finds herself in management.

According to Nettie Klingler, one of the W.P. Carey team leaders overseeing the student business consultants, Eccles has been a quick study.

"She's not the typical student of her age," Klingler says. "Many of them don't have the discipline she has, the stick-to-itive-

ness. She's shown that she's been able to get the job done — and get it done with quality work."

Asked what she thought Eccles might be doing in five years, Klingler said, "I see her working for a large corporation, or maybe a large government agency, as an economist."

During the 2005-06 academic year, Eccles worked with others from ASU to mentor students at La Joya Community High School in Avondale through the Rodel Community Scholars program.

"We went in and created a small, student-run business to try and help the students to put a connection between their class work and the bigger world," she says.

"We showed them, 'This is what college can do for you. ... This is how much more money you could be making if you pursue this. This is how you could help your family to have a better life, to help future generations get ahead.' Once they saw that connection, the rest was all them. ... When we went into the school, the class we were working with, about 25 percent wanted to go to college. When we left, about 75 percent of them did."

A passion toward community service also led Eccles to her husband, Alex, who is training to be a first officer with Phoenix-based Mesa Air Group. They met while she was distributing pizza to homeless people on Mill Avenue in Tempe. No, he wasn't one of the homeless; he was walking down the street and offered to help out.

Eccles' local connections are wide ranging. Though she was born in Berkeley, Calif., her family came to the Valley when she was 11 months old. She has lived in Ahwatukee, Tempe, Chandler, Phoenix and Fountain Hills.

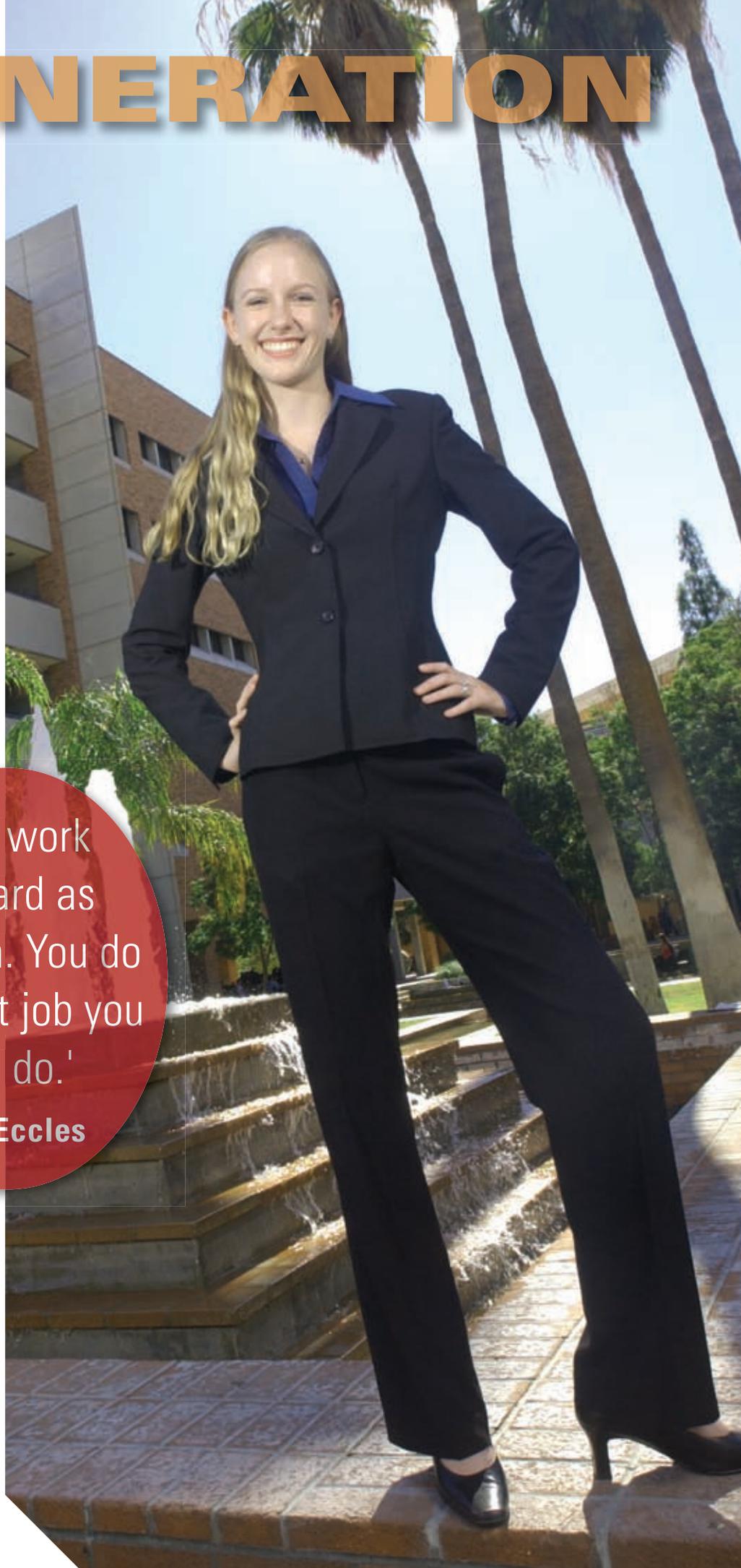
"I love Arizona," she says. "I love the Phoenix metro area. The people here are wonderful. The weather is perfect."

All of which made choosing a college easy for her.

"I consider myself a native Arizonan, as much as you can be, and I just didn't want to leave," she says. "ASU has a wonderful business program and it's great in terms of bang for your buck ... and there are tons

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of opportunities for anyone who is willing to reach out and grab them."

In September, she was named one of 10 inaugural McCord Scholars who will receive \$7,000 each toward their undergraduate studies at the W.P. Carey School.

Eccles already is mulling her options for after college.

"My criteria for my first job are that it be something where I can do a lot of critical thinking," she says. "I love problem solving. That's one of the things I like about

both finance and economics: (They're) a lot of connecting the dots and putting the puzzle together and figuring out what the best possible scenario will be ... and how you can influence that to increase your odds of getting the best outcome."

Eccles acknowledges that career opportunities might require her to leave the Valley for a while. "I'm willing to move," she says, but "I'd like to ultimately end up back in Phoenix — because, like I said, I love it here."