Jill Berg is designing her future through a joint admission interior design program offered by Northern Arizona University and the Maricopa County Community College District. “The classes that I’ve taken at Phoenix College integrate directly into the NAU program,” Berg says. “Phoenix College’s program is the perfect handshake with NAU, as I am able to take the confidence in the skills I have learned and build them toward my bachelor’s degree.”

NAU and MCCCD work together to help students earn both an associate’s and bachelor’s degree in interior design. NAU and the Maricopa Community College District created a transfer partnership where students attend Mesa, Phoenix or Scottsdale Community Colleges for two years and then transition to NAU for the final two years with no loss of credits.

“We collaborate with the program directors at the three community colleges to articulate each of our interior design programs together so the transition is smooth for students,” says Sheryl McCaleb, an NAU interior design faculty member located at Scottsdale Community College. “It is a perfect connection that no other college or university offers in our field.”

McCaleb, a 25-year veteran of commercial and residential design, says all of the upper division courses are available on the SCC campus at the University Center—a learning environment designed by McCaleb to feature “warm and inviting interiors that are conducive to learning.”

Continuing with the same students also helps the camaraderie of the program. “Our students are fortunate to have a variety of options for continuing their education beyond the associate’s degree and NAU has been an extremely valuable partner,” says Sally Krollinger, director of the interior design program at Mesa Community College. “Students welcome the opportunity to continue their studies while maintaining friendships with other students formed during their community college experience.”

According to Ken Roberts, program director for the interior design program at Phoenix College for 20 years, a bachelor’s degree in interior design builds an opportunity for landing good employment.

“Although students have found employment success with an associate’s degree, a higher level degree from a university such as NAU opens many more doors in the design industry,” Roberts says. Roberts plans his classes to promote practical skills that are tied to the industry and includes hands-on opportunities. He has led “design study tours” in Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York, as well as international study tours in England, France, Spain and Italy.

“We also have had some interesting internship opportunities, such as helping to remodel the Wrigley Mansion and completely renovating a two-bedroom apartment for Ronald McDonald House,” Roberts says.

Charles Cooper, residential faculty and director for the interior design program in the Applied Sciences Division at SCC, says, “The opportunity for our students to complete their design education through NAU and remain on this campus, in a familiar environment, is invaluable.”

Cooper says earning a bachelor’s degree is becoming the baseline for being employed in the design industry. “There is such satisfaction to see my graduates in successful careers, establishing design firms and employing younger grads,” Cooper notes. “Design education has also allowed me to write, publish, produce and implement workshops and tours for design professionals. It is a joy to come to work every day; there is just something so fulfilling when discovery and learning happens.”