College students gain leadership from service

BY DIANE KNICH

When Candice Coulter was a student at Burke High School, the College of Charleston represented another world even though it was only about a mile away.

She felt safe at Burke, where most students were black like her. But she wanted new experiences when she enrolled in college.

Unlike many of her friends in the Class of 2007 who enrolled

College of Charleston student and Burke High School graduate Candice Coulter (center) plays with her after-school WINGS program students.

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“T hey cried,” Coulter said. “It was one of the most emotional days I have ever had. How did I do this?”

On Friday, Coulter and other group leaders were teaching children in the WINGS program at Memminger Elementary School about responsibility. They talked in small groups about being responsible for both good and bad behavior.

And they had a lot of fun participating in dance contests, having snacks and just being together. The youths in Coulter’s group, or what the program calls her “nest,” came to her for hugs, smiles and jokes.

Visser said word is spreading quickly about the program, which is in its third year at the college. Last year, 75 students applied for six freshman slots. This year, the college so far has received 2,700 applications for six slots.

Students in the program receive scholarships that range from $2,000 to $4,000, and a $1,000 AmeriCorps award. And some of them receive work-study money as well.

Visser said that although many students in the program come from low-income families, “it’s not a poor-kids program.”

For instance, she said, one student came from a middle-class family where four siblings were enrolled in college at the same time. The student didn’t receive any financial aid and was working four part-time jobs to get through school.

“Lhe big goal is shifting campus culture to value service.”

Reach Diane Knich at 937-5491.