

Mesa Community College
Self-Study Report
2005

**Executive
Summary**

Submitted to
The Higher Learning Commission
of the North Central Association of
Colleges and Schools

Mesa Community College

Self-Study Report 2005

Executive Summary

For continued accreditation with

**The Higher Learning Commission
of the North Central Association of
Colleges and Schools**

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INTRODUCTION

This Executive Summary provides highlights from the Mesa Community College Self-Study Report 2005 which was submitted as formal application for continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. Accreditation, which occurs on a ten-year review cycle, is critical to the college for a number of reasons: it ensures the quality and integrity of MCC’s programs and services, allows students to transfer credits to other accredited colleges and universities, enables students to obtain financial aid and veteran’s services, and allows the college to participate in projects funded by federal grants. The full self-study report provides a comprehensive and public view of the college that reflects its mission and values, how these are carried out through programs and services, and how they are documented and evaluated. The full report is available through the President’s Office or at www.mc.maricopa.edu/selfstudy.

OVERVIEW OF MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Mesa Community College (MCC), located in a rapidly growing urban/suburban area east of Phoenix, Arizona, is the largest of the ten colleges in the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD). As a member of the Maricopa District, MCC is governed by an elected governing board of five members, and since 1988, Dr. Larry K. Christiansen has served as the college president. The MCC expenditure budget for FY2004-2005 was \$70 million. Bond monies fund large technology, capital improvement and construction projects, and in November 2004 the voters of Maricopa County passed a district-wide \$951 million bond referendum.

MCC is a comprehensive community college offering transfer education, career and technical programs, developmental education, continuing and community education courses, and business and industry training. The college is comprised of two comprehensive campuses: the original campus is located on the western border of the city of Mesa and the newer Red Mountain campus is located 14 miles to the northeast near the eastern border of the city. An Extended Campus provides MCC

classes at two downtown locations, the Williams Campus, Tempe High School, and numerous other locations throughout the community.

The college has experienced continuous and rapid growth since its first enrollment of 330 students in 1963. By fall 1975 almost 12,000 credit students were enrolled; this grew to approximately 17,000 students in fall 1985, over 22,000 students in fall 1995, and almost 28,000 students enrolled today. In fall 2004, 27,834 credit students were enrolled at all MCC locations, representing a full-time student equivalent of 15,126. Student goals and backgrounds are diverse – 62% plan to transfer to another college or university; 27% are taking courses to prepare to enter the workforce, improve skills for present jobs, or change careers; and 11% are taking courses primarily for personal interest.

The average age of credit students is 26 years old and their ethnic-racial background is as follows: 66% White, 15% Hispanic, 4% Black, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander; 3% American Indian/Alaska Native; 8% other or unspecified. On average, students take eight credits per semester, 63% attend part time, 53% are female, and 47% are male.

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ACCREDITATION AND THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

This current self study was conducted to prepare for the college's fourth comprehensive accreditation visit by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. Consistent with the HLC's Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) accreditation process, MCC conducted the self study using the newly defined accreditation criteria: (1) Mission and Integrity, (2) Preparing for the Future, (3) Student Learning and Effective Teaching, (4) Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge, and (5) Engagement and Service.

The self study was carried out over a two-year period by a large committee and several sub-committees representing over 80 members of the college community. The focus of the self study work was to determine how the five criteria and their related core components would be interpreted to fit MCC's mission and culture, and to identify and gather evidence to demonstrate how the college fulfills the criteria. Evidence consisted of a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data including over 50 interviews with key stakeholders, student surveys, faculty and staff surveys, a community leaders survey, facilitated discussion groups, and existing college reports and documents.

The self-study process allowed the college community to examine itself in relation to accreditation criteria, provide evidence about those criteria, and identify college strengths as well as challenges for the future. Each criterion and its core components are discussed in detail in the full report. In addition, the report addresses a number of other topics such as significant changes at

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the college since the 1995 accreditation visit and college compliance with federal regulations. The accreditation criteria, a summary of findings, and strengths and challenges for the

future are summarized in the following section.

THE ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

Criterion 1-Mission and Integrity: Mesa Community College operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

Summary of Findings

Mesa Community College has, through a systematic and incremental process, developed mission documents that accurately reflect its institutional priorities. The college has stayed true to its mission as evidenced by the degree to which students, staff, college leadership and community members perceive the mission to be appropriate for the college. Support and understanding of the mission is widely held. Further, planning and budgeting processes reinforce the accomplishment of the common elements of the mission, vision and learning objectives. Integration of key components of the mission in departmental planning provides evidence of the centrality of the college mission to the every day life of the college.

A well established structure of governance and administration supports the development, communication, and realization of the college mission. Shared governance processes demonstrate employee and student involvement. The integrity of the institution is supported by processes and policies that protect the rights of individual constituencies, promote fiscal responsibility, and ensure that the college meets legal and ethical standards.

Criterion 1: MCC's Strengths and Challenges for the Future

By articulating its shared values, Mesa Community College has created a foundation for framing discussions about issues of importance to the college. At the same time, because they affirm strong ideals and identify the college's distinctiveness, these values have helped create a strong sense of community both within and outside the college.

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MCC's attention to the critical role of diversity and inclusiveness is a strength. The inclusiveness of diverse people and ideas is one of the stated college values, diversity is the focus of one of the college strategic goals, and

numerous programs and services are designed to fulfill the diversity goal. These attest to MCC's understanding that, as the local, national, and international context changes, so must the college as it serves as a key access point to higher education for so many individuals.

Sound financial planning and fiscal responsibility at both the college and district levels have provided the college a stable foundation on which to build programs and plan for the many changes in the future. Furthermore, the college's stewardship for public dollars is recognized by the community served.

Mesa Community College faces challenges that must be conscientiously planned for in the future. The college's growing enrollment is anticipated to continue; this means that there are more students to be served, more locations to be operated and maintained, and more people to be involved. *It is incumbent upon the college to ensure that key stakeholders have a voice in decision making and that the ideal of shared governance is upheld.*

A related challenge is balancing the tension between the college's spirit of innovation and the realities of being part of a large district bureaucracy. It will be increasingly important to be vigilant to ensure that processes and procedures do not overwhelm the innovative spirit of the individuals who make Mesa Community College a vibrant institution of higher learning.

Numerous methods are used to... solicit input from the college departments regarding future initiatives and needs, and integrate department plans...and the college's overall strategic plan.

Criterion 2-Preparing for the Future: Mesa Community College's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Summary of Findings

Long term strategic and operational planning, once identified as an area in need of improvement, has become an outstanding strength within Mesa Community College. Input is gathered and coordinated through a wide variety of methods, with the aim of ensuring that every person connected to the college has the opportunity to anticipate future needs and contribute to the betterment of the institution. Employee groups, students, and community stakeholders are engaged in ongoing evaluation of the success of MCC in fulfilling its primary mission and actualizing its values.

Numerous methods are used to collect as much feedback information as possible, solicit input from the college departments regarding future initiatives and needs, and integrate department plans, the college operational plan, and the college's overall strategic plan. This integration proceeds in a cyclical rather than linear fashion and has been systemically incorporated into the decision-making process and resource planning. Furthermore, planning drives budgeting decisions and has resulted in major investments in the initiatives deemed most important to the good of the college as a whole. Even with constraints - financial, human and physical - MCC has the capacity to manage growth and change effectively and consonant with institutional mission and values.

Criterion 2: MCC's Strengths and Challenges for the Future

Mesa Community College has implemented a comprehensive planning process that is dynamic, participatory, and drives budgeting and decision making. Planning is based upon

regular environmental scanning as well as data from systematic institutional assessment and evaluation processes.

The college has enjoyed financial stability at a time when many institutions of higher education are experiencing severe financial cutbacks. A successful bond in 1994 allowed MCC to build a second comprehensive campus, construct new buildings on the existing campus, and fund new technology initiatives. The passage of the 2004 bond referendum demonstrates the public's satisfaction with the community colleges as stewards of public funds and will enable MCC to complete many of the additional capital improvements for which it has planned.

At the same time, burgeoning growth has strained some of the college's systems. In terms of human resources, MCC has had to rely more and more heavily on adjunct faculty to support the addition of courses, programs and sites; the percentage of course load taught by full-time faculty is declining. In addition, the hiring process is extremely cumbersome and time consuming, sometimes resulting in the loss of qualified candidates.

Approaches are in place to address these issues, but diligence will be required to assure the ratio of full-time and part-time faculty is in balance.

Notwithstanding the passage of the 2004 bond referendum, the college will be challenged to make wise decisions in capital and technology investments. Faculty, staff and students have a seemingly insatiable appetite for new technologies, and strong leadership will be required to ensure that technology planning leads to allocations that are necessary, appropriate, and learning-centered. In addition, the facts of aging buildings at the Southern and Dobson campus, the severe crunch for space college wide, and parking issues must be addressed in a coherent and systematic manner. Decisions will need to be driven by institutional priorities and good planning.

Criterion 3-Student Learning and Effective Teaching: Mesa Community College provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

Summary of Findings

The effectiveness and excellence of teaching and learning at Mesa Community College are highly valued among members of the college community. It is paramount that students who come to and leave the institution, regardless of background, culture, and experience, are successful learners and have access to quality faculty, student services, curricula and programs, learning resources and environments, and numerous opportunities to fulfill their educational goals. Student learning outcomes are articulated and regularly assessed, and the results of assessments are used to improve teaching and learning.

Highly qualified faculty members are responsible for the curriculum which is developed through systematic processes. Students are afforded a variety of learning experiences, such as service learning and civic engagement, global and international education, student leadership and organizational activities, as well as multiple ways and modalities of instruction. Planning, assessment, instructional innovation, and student service are deeply vested in the culture and operation of the institution.

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Criterion 3: MCC's Strengths and Challenges for the Future

Mesa Community College is proud of its student assessment program and views it as a major strength of the organization. MCC has been able to document positive student learning results over a number of years. Student outcomes assessment is comprehensive and integrated into the academic life and culture of the college. The college community has moved beyond implementation of the assessment process to the meaningful use of assessment results to improve student learning.

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Evidence from all facets of the institution indicates highly motivated, talented, and innovative faculty and staff. The administration provides significant resources and support to foster a spirit of innovation. The faculty demonstrates depth of knowledge in their disciplines and mastery of pedagogy in their teaching. This excellence is recognized by students who consistently report high satisfaction with the quality of their instructors and the instructional program.

Students at Mesa Community College have the benefit of a complete collegiate experience that includes a wealth of academic and student development resources. Students can avail themselves of rich learning and leadership opportunities outside the classroom through countless co- and extra-curricular activities.

While assessment and evaluation processes have permeated the college's instructional programs, evaluation processes in non-instructional areas are not as systematic or fully developed. The college can build upon its established expertise in assessing and evaluating instructional programs by encouraging and supporting evaluation efforts in non-instructional areas wishing to collect reliable and systematic effectiveness data.

In developing a second comprehensive campus, new programs, and additional course sites, the college has relied heavily upon adjunct faculty. While adjunct faculty members bring much expertise and richness to the classroom, the college is challenged to increase the number of full-time residential faculty who fully participate in curriculum development and the academic life of the college.

The curriculum and program development process, which is driven by and carried out through district-wide policies and procedures, is viewed by many at MCC as inordinately cumbersome and time-consuming. The development cycle is prolonged by bureaucratic processes and political agendas. The college is challenged to influence this system in a positive way so that new courses and

programs that meet the needs of students and community can be developed in a more expeditious manner and timeframe.

Criterion 4-Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge: Mesa Community College promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

Summary of Findings

The vision, mission, and goals speak directly to the college's commitment to promote a life of learning by fostering and supporting the acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge. A multitude of evidence points to the college's support for professional growth and continuous learning for all employees. While primarily a teaching institution, the college supports and encourages scholarship and research in its multiple dimensions. The move towards more formally defining the practice of scholarship enhances the existing exemplary work of the college.

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A clearly articulated general education philosophy provides the foundation for a rich general education curriculum that is also reflected in the stated student learning outcomes for general education and the assessment of these outcomes. The curriculum is aligned with the college mission and supports inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility. Currency, usefulness and relevance of programs are regularly assessed by both internal and external audiences to ensure their continued applicability. Student life activities engage students in their communities, build social responsibility and leadership skills, and reinforce the learning inherent in the curriculum. In total, MCC offers a diversity of offerings and programs that create a rich and well-rounded academic climate and a complete collegiate experience for students.

Criterion 4: MCC’s Strengths and Challenges for the Future

The richness and diversity of Mesa Community College’s general education curriculum allow students to choose from a wide range of course options to fulfill general education requirements.

General education student learning outcomes have been clearly defined and performance on these outcomes is assessed systematically and regularly. Assessment results demonstrate significant student learning in general education. Articulation agreements with state and other universities allow students to transfer their general education credits to four-year institutions.

MCC knows its constituencies and actively and continuously seeks to learn from them in order to meet their changing expectations.

Workplace skills have been defined as student learning outcomes for students participating in career and technical programs.

These skills are assessed annually and results consistently show that students completing career and technical programs outperform students beginning their programs of study.

Pursuit of a life of learning pervades all facets of the college community and is manifested in numerous ways through professional development and other personal and professional growth activities. As the academic culture of the college evolves, there is a growing emphasis on participation in research and scholarship, both basic and applied, and especially in the areas of teaching and learning.

As this emphasis on research and scholarship develops, the college needs to examine how such pursuits are documented, recognized, and rewarded. It will also be necessary in the near future to develop more formalized research guidelines, policies, and procedures to ensure that individuals conduct scholarly activities using accepted research practice.

Students will benefit from more structured emphasis upon, and opportunities for, practicing scholarship within their coursework. Such scholarly activities will reinforce the responsible use of knowledge and the application of technology to enhance student learning.

Criterion 5-Engagement and Service: As called for by its mission, Mesa Community College identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

Summary of Findings

Mesa Community College clearly demonstrates evidence of engagement and service. The college mission documents speak to the importance of the many constituencies that comprise its community. The college has enacted its mission and values through innumerable programs and services in mutually beneficial ways. MCC knows its constituencies and actively and continuously seeks to learn from them in order to meet their changing expectations. The college engages its internal and external constituencies in many ways, both formal and informal - while upholding important traditions and testing new innovations. As plainly stated in the mission, “Our ultimate goal is to improve the quality of life in the community we serve.”

Criterion 5: MCC’s Strengths and Challenges for the Future

Mesa Community College’s Center for Service Learning is devoted specifically to advancing student learning through service to and engagement in the community. Learning through service is also realized through a rich complement of student life and co- and extra-curricular activities. The value placed on community service is also enacted by faculty, staff and administrators who are engaged in countless community-based organizations and activities.

Mesa Community College has numerous long-standing and mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations with the private sector, local municipalities, public schools, universities, and community-based organizations. The college is continually sought out by these partners as well as by new constituencies wishing to collaborate or to have access to college programs and services. MCC is perceived by internal constituencies and by community leaders and partners to be upholding its mission and values.

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The President's Commission on Excellence in Education is an active community advisory group with a record of providing advice as well as support for college initiatives. The development of the Red Mountain campus and the one-college, two-campus model is evidence of the Commission's strong support and of the college's eagerness to respond to community needs.

Mesa Community College is challenged to ensure that its many diverse constituencies have a fair and equal voice in college matters. The college cannot assume that what worked in the past will work in the future, or that the constituencies of the past will be the constituencies of the future. The college must be diligent and proactive in reaching out to the increasingly diverse community that seeks its services and programs.

The college is challenged to anticipate, consider and meet the wide range of expectations that will come from its constituencies in the future. This will require setting and pursuing clear institutional priorities that are widely understood and consistent with the college mission.

Finally, the college's partnership with the city of Mesa carries with it many expectations from various constituencies. With the passage of the 2004 bond referendum, MCC Downtown will become a reality. The development of a coherent vision and programmatic focus for MCC's presence in downtown Mesa will be critical to its success.

REQUEST FOR CONTINUED ACCREDITATION

Mesa Community College demonstrates, and has documented through a rigorous self-study process consonant with the expectations of the Higher Learning Commission, that it fulfills the criteria for accreditation.

The college presents evidence throughout the self-study report that it carries out its mission and actualizes its values of learning, excellence, inclusiveness and community.

Mesa Community College demonstrates, and has documented through a rigorous self-study process consonant with the expectations of the Higher Learning Commission, that it fulfills the criteria for accreditation.

The self-study process was conducted in a thoughtful manner and provided MCC with an opportunity for reflection. Moreover, members of the entire college community had unique opportunities to collaborate and work together for the common good of the college.

Mesa Community College respectfully requests continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, a Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, for a period of ten years.