

OVERVIEW

Estrella Mountain Community College, located in the metropolitan Phoenix, Arizona area, is a comprehensive institution of higher education that meets the diverse needs of citizens residing in Western Maricopa County. The College began offering courses and related services in 1990 as an educational center of Glendale Community College, an existing North Central Association-accredited institution. Estrella Mountain was granted its initial accreditation from The Higher Learning Commission: NCA in the spring of 1997.

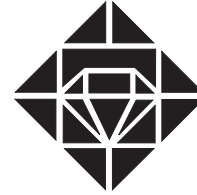
The campus currently serves a fall enrollment of 4,958 students. The current service area population of approximately 220,000 residents is expected to more than double in the next twenty years; as a result, future enrollment is projected to be 20,000 or more students.

ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN SERVICE AREA

Estrella Mountain serves residents of western metropolitan Phoenix and a diverse mix of rural and suburban towns and cities comprising more than 220,000 residents (see the Resource Room for a map). More than half of the college's service area is minority, with Hispanics representing 41% of the total population. Estrella Mountain currently serves the communities of Avondale, Buckeye, El Mirage, Gila Bend, Goodyear, Litchfield Park, Surprise, Tolleson, and west Phoenix

The area of southwestern Maricopa County that Estrella Mountain serves is in the midst of rapid growth. According to the Maricopa Association of Governments, the area includes some of the fastest growing municipalities in Maricopa County (Avondale, Goodyear and Surprise). Between 1990 and 2000 the service area population grew by more than 68% with most of the growth occurring after 1995. Rapid growth in the area is expected to continue for the next two decades.

ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



"Your Success is Our Success"

Chapter 1

ENROLLMENT AT ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN

Estrella Mountain enrollment is characterized by steady growth in both headcount and in full-time student equivalents (FTSE). Enrollment for the fall 2001 semester was 4,985 headcount and 1,766 FTSE. Part-time students continue to dominate enrollment at Estrella Mountain. During fall 2001, 82% of all credit students attended part-time.



STUDENT PROFILE

The College serves multiple market segments (see the Resource Room for a complete description) as follows:

- ◆ Youth
- ◆ Career Seeking Adults
- ◆ Enlisted Military
- ◆ Adults with Special Needs (English as a Second Language Basic Skills)
- ◆ Adults with Special Interests
- ◆ Senior Adults (Age 55+)



The Estrella Mountain student population is more diverse with regard to ethnicity, gender and age when compared to the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) student population as a whole. Based on the fall 2001 semester, Estrella Mountain had the third highest percentage (40%) of minority students in Maricopa and the second highest percentage (31%) of Hispanic students. Age is another source of student population diversity. The age range of students ranges between 13 and 84 with a standard deviation of nearly 13 years.

The Estrella Mountain student population also is characterized by a high percentage of females and working students. Approximately 57% of Estrella Mountain's students are female (compared to 54% in the Maricopa District). More than 64% of Estrella Mountain students are also employed and 38% work more than 30 hours per week.



GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Estrella Mountain operates under the auspices and policies of Maricopa County Community College District governance. At the same time, the internal administrative structure and philosophy of Estrella Mountain allow the College to reflect and respond to the concerns and characteristics of its service area, while still adhering to the mission and vision established at the Maricopa Community College District level.

Estrella Mountain administrative and governance structures are described in detail as part of the response to Criterion Two.

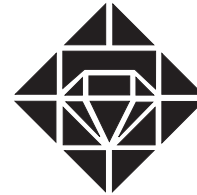
ABOUT MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

All Maricopa colleges are overseen by a single Chancellor and Governing Board, and are united by a common mission statement. In addition, a number of policies and administrative decisions are made at the Maricopa level and require Board approval; for instance, salary, hiring, terms of employment, legislature, as well as all interactions with federal, state, and local governmental entities.

Each college is separately accredited by The Higher Learning Commission: NCA with its own mission reflecting its unique community demographics and service area concerns. Each college is also shaped by the priorities and vision of its faculty, administration, student population and community.

The Maricopa Community Colleges are experiencing a period of leadership transition. After 22 years, Chancellor Dr. Paul Elsner retired, an interim Chancellor was appointed by the Governing Board and in July 2000, a new Chancellor, Dr. Fred Gaskin, assumed leadership of the Maricopa Community Colleges. Since July 2000 two of the four Vice Chancellors have changed and one Vice Chancellor position has been added. Additionally, four of the ten Maricopa colleges (Phoenix, Paradise Valley, South Mountain, and GateWay) have new Presidents and one, Chandler-Gilbert, is in the search process.

ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



“Your Success is Our Success”

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING AT ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN

Planning has played a critical role in the development of Estrella Mountain since its inception in 1988. This overview provides context for the current institutional self-study. More detail concerning planning is contained in Criterion Four.



The thirteen-year history of Estrella Mountain is marked by three distinct planning phases:

Stage 1: Planning for the College 1988-1992

This stage included Phase I construction planning and the establishment of a set of planning directions that served as the founding principles to guide initial development of the College. These efforts guided the operation of the College from its first courses offered in the community, in Fall 1990, until the opening of the Estrella Mountain campus in 1992 (see Strategic and Institutional Planning Document No. 1 in the Resource Room). Planning for Phase II facilities development of the College started during this stage (1991) and continued through 1994.



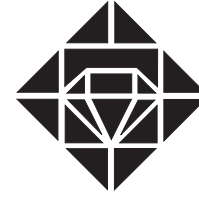
Stage 2: Ensuring Institutional Effectiveness 1993-1995

The next stage of planning at Estrella Mountain focused on organizational development and preparation for the initial institutional self-study. Estrella Mountain began its first self-study in the fall of 1995. A College-wide steering team was created to undertake these planning efforts.

Organizational development accomplished during this stage included the establishment of customer market segments, customer research, the creation of Institutional Values, the College Vision, its Mission and Purposes, a commitment to becoming a customer-driven organization, and a College Service Strategy.



During the latter part of this stage of planning, preparations were begun for Estrella Mountain to seek its initial accreditation from NCA. This process resulted in a redesign of the original steering team into four work groups to address strategic planning, institutional effectiveness, student academic achievement, and an institutional self-study.



"Your Success is Our Success"

Stage 3: Strategic Planning for the Future 1996-2001

The College received initial accreditation in the spring of 1997. The challenges identified in this initial self-study served as the foundation for all subsequent strategic planning activities and related plans.

In addition to the Institutional Self-Study, formal plans resulted from the other three work groups that were essential to the institutional self-study process. They served as the shaping force to guide the years immediately following the College's initial accreditation. These plans included the following:

Strategic Planning

Building on the original set of planning directions from 1988 and growing with the subsequent stages of planning, strategic planning enabled Estrella Mountain to continue to achieve its purposes and to begin to position itself through the year 2003.

Plan for Institutional Effectiveness

The Plan for Institutional Effectiveness at Estrella Mountain was patterned after a national model created by the American Association of Community Colleges. The Estrella Mountain plan included locally developed measures combined with nationally recognized measures suggested by the model. This approach resulted in a comprehensive model for Estrella Mountain to assess its effectiveness in achieving the College Mission and Goals (purposes).

Student Academic Achievement Plan

The Student Academic Achievement Plan established the student learning outcomes by which student academic achievement can be directly measured. Recognizing that traditional benchmarks of student success - graduation rates, course completion, grades, and student persistence - are indirect measures, Estrella Mountain faculty and staff adapted an outcome model that was originally inspired by the Alverno College's (Milwaukee, WI) ability-based learning program.

LONG TERM IMPACT OF 1996 SELF-STUDY

A candid appraisal of strengths and challenges identified by the self-study process provided the framework for the College to build on its strengths and address its challenges. The College's 1996 Institutional Self-Study resulted in a set of six Institutional Challenges and 36 self-identified recommendations for institutional improvement. These challenge areas and recommendations were communicated to all college stakeholders.



The six Institutional Challenge Areas were converted to College Strategic Directions that now form the heart of the Estrella Mountain Strategic Plan. Recommendations were condensed into institutional priorities linked to the larger Strategic Directions. Estrella Mountain's Strategic Directions are listed below:

Planning and Charting Our Future

Estrella Mountain must fully implement a system of planning and assess progress towards mission.



Growing and Expanding

Estrella Mountain must be proactive in meeting the needs of a growing West Valley population.

Creating Partnerships

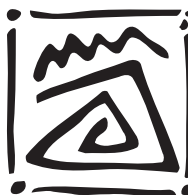
Estrella Mountain must continue to engage in partnership activities that advance the mission of the College.

Investing in People

Estrella Mountain must continue to organize and develop its human resources to meet the changing organizational needs.

Creating a Climate for Success

Estrella Mountain must continue to develop and invest in systems that support becoming a quality-driven institution.



Integrating Information Technologies

Estrella Mountain must continue to invest in technologies to support teaching and learning and the development of new delivery formats.

THE 2002-2004 STRATEGIC PLAN

The most recent version of the Estrella Mountain Strategic Plan represents a continuous planning process that updates institutional priorities and sets annual strategic goals to move priorities forward.

The Strategic Plan is intended to guide all planning and resource allocation processes including long-term plans, divisional plans, all other operational plans, and the budgeting process. Continuous improvement and regular updates are built into each plan. See Criterion Four for more details on the Estrella Mountain planning process.

In addition to providing the groundwork for the latest version of the Strategic Plan, the 1996 self-study findings also led to the reevaluation and redevelopment of the College Mission and Purposes, its values, its institutional effectiveness program and the student academic achievement process.

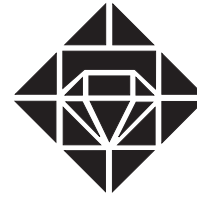
Estrella Mountain is committed to monitoring, reviewing, and updating the Strategic Plan on a continuous basis. The most recent update of the Strategic Plan occurred during the summer of 2001 and will continue to be updated on an annual basis. This 2001 accreditation process and visiting team results will also be used to confirm, change and update the Strategic Directions and Priorities of the College in late spring 2002.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

Estrella Mountain Community College Center sought initial accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission: NCA. An institutional self-study report was submitted to North Central Association and the Evaluation Team in 1996. As a result of the North Central Association Evaluation Team visit and recommendation from the Review Committee, Estrella Mountain Community College was granted initial accreditation on April 7, 1997 by the Commission.

The Evaluation Team members indicated in their report that they were impressed with the institution, its leadership, faculty and staff. The unique nature of Estrella Mountain and the commitment of all to continue its mission were very evident to the Team. Faculty and staff were acknowledged “for putting into place an institution that puts the

ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE



“Your Success is Our Success”

Chapter 1

student in the center of whatever they do” (*Estrella Mountain North Central Association Report 1996*).

RESPONSE TO CONCERNS



The strengths and challenges identified in the first institutional self-study (1996) have served as the foundation for all subsequent planning activities at Estrella Mountain Community College. These planning activities included refinement of the College’s mission and goal statements, reexamination of the institution’s core values and the completion of Estrella Mountain Community College’s strategic plan and subsequent planning.

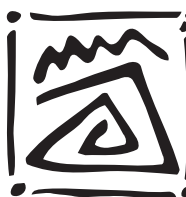
The Evaluation Team Report identified three concerns to which Estrella Mountain has actively and fully responded.

First Concern

“The hours of operation of the Information Commons did not seem adequate to meet the students’ need for access to Estrella Mountain Community College’s unique technological learning environment.”



The College agreed that expansion of the hours of operation of the Information Commons would increase student access to technological resources. A locally developed survey instrument was administered to students in Spring 1997 to determine the scope of this expansion. At the time the concern was raised, the Information Commons was accessible for 67.5 hours per week from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 7:30 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. on Friday; and 8:00 a.m. to noon on Saturday. Based on the results of the survey, hours of operation have been changed.



Currently, the Information Commons is accessible for 79 hours per week from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Friday; and 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. In addition, students are also provided with remote access options, such as access to thousands of general, academic and business periodicals, the Maricopa electronic library catalog and specialized databases.

The College has expanded its exploration of student needs beyond just hours of operation. The Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, a nationally standardized instrument, is being used to identify students' needs and to improve college services. The survey instrument has been modified locally to include three questions specific to the concept of access to information. The survey was administered in Fall 1996, and Spring 1997, 1999, and 2001. Complete results of the 2001 Survey may be found in the Resource Room. A summary of the results can be found in Criterion Three.

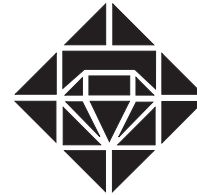
In addition, the college has committed to develop a comprehensive and systematic program to identify students' needs, obtain student feedback for continuous improvement, and further develop increased access to information. Future information requirements and access will need to increase dramatically as the college grows. The College is well positioned to meet these future demands as will be seen in more detail in this Institutional Self-Study Report.

Second Concern

"The Student Academic Achievement Plan did not fully articulate a comprehensive assessment of student academic achievement across all areas of the curriculum."

While it appeared to the Team that Estrella Mountain was developing an appropriate assessment model, it was equally clear that the Plan for Institutional Effectiveness and Student Academic Achievement Plan were still in early stages of development and implementation. The Evaluation Team requested that Estrella Mountain submit a progress report focusing on the Academic Achievement Plan in response to this concern.

The College submitted the progress report on December 1, 1998. The progress report directly addressed the North Central Association Evaluation Team's concerns by including information about refined processes for assessing student learning outcomes, data collection and analysis, recommendations for improving teaching and learning, and plans for the future.



"Your Success is Our Success"

Chapter 1

After being reviewed by the North Central Association staff, the progress report on the plan for Assessment of Student Academic Achievement was officially accepted June 24, 1999, by Dr. Cecilia L. Lopez on behalf of North Central Association. No further reports were required.



The *Plan for Institutional Effectiveness* and *Student Academic Achievement Plan* (see resource room) are college-wide plans developed to present an articulated and comprehensive institutional assessment effort. The integration of these plans into Estrella Mountain's Strategic Planning Model helps to insure that the feedback from these efforts is used for improvement at the college, program and division levels.

Third Concern

"The College's emphasis of student development that permeates the campus was not specifically reflected in the stated purposes of the College."



The College agreed that student development is a major emphasis that permeates the institution and recognized that it was not specifically reflected in the stated purposes of the college.

Utilizing its formal planning structures, Estrella Mountain determined that "student development" should be included as a stated college purpose. As a direct result of the initial 1996 Self-Study, Estrella Mountain made dramatic changes to its college mission and purposes. On April 28, 1998, the Governing Board approved a new *Statement of Mission and Goals* (available in Resource Room) in place of the Estrella Mountain Statement of Mission and Purposes as found in the 1996 Self-Study.



The Statement of Mission and Mission Goals includes stated goals for General Education, Transfer Education, Developmental Education, Workforce Development, Student Support Services, and Community Education. In specific response to Concern Three, the Student Support Services Mission Goal was added and states that Estrella Mountain will "Provide quality services and resources that meet the needs of students and support learning."

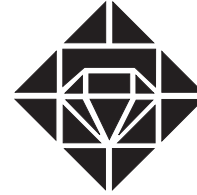
INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY PROCESS AND REPORT

Planning, both formal and informal, has been an integral part of institutional development at Estrella Mountain since its inception in 1988. These efforts laid the groundwork for the initial institutional self-study process in 1996, and the 2000-2001 self-study has continued to build on such a planning foundation. The formal institutional self-study process at Estrella Mountain began in January 2000 with the appointment of one management and one faculty member as coordinators of the institutional self-study process and report. An Executive Team was then formed consisting of the coordinators, senior management, and administrative support staff.

Once the Executive Team had conceptualized the necessary processes, set the guiding principles, designed the structure of the institutional self-study, and drafted a formal plan, it then solicited membership for the Institutional Self-Study Steering Team. This resulted in a comprehensive team of 29 members (including those on the Executive Team and Ad Hoc Members) representing all employee groups and major divisions within the College (see the Resource Room for a listing of team membership).

The institutional self-study structure was designed around the General Institutional Requirements and Five Criteria of Accreditation set by the Higher Learning Commission: NCA Criteria teams were created and two or more individuals were selected as Team Leaders. After the All Employee Self-Study Kick-Off in September, additional employees joined teams whose criteria matched their particular interests. Five adjunct faculty came forward and asked to serve on criterion teams. Over a period of 8 months, criteria teams met regularly, then proceeded to examine and analyze the implications and interrelationships of patterns of evidence pertaining to their respective GIRs and criteria. This process, in turn, resulted in the creation and review of criteria team reports which were then presented to the self-study co-chairs who in turn used these reports to write this self-study.

Throughout the process, teams documented all their meetings and decisions. A communication plan (available in the Resource Room) helped College employees and external constituencies remain informed of progress throughout the institutional self-study process. At the



"Your Success is Our Success"

Chapter 1

Spring 2001 Faculty Orientation Meeting and the Spring 2001 Adjunct Faculty Orientation Meeting, the self-study coordinators presented detailed information to faculty about the status and continued efforts of the ongoing self-study. Additional college-wide meetings took place to keep all employees informed. After the Evaluation Team visit, findings of the institutional self-study will be presented to all Estrella Mountain employees and community leaders.



A formal Executive Summary will be published and presented to all employees prior to the Evaluation Team visit in February 2002. Copies of the Institutional Self-Study Report as well as the Executive Summary will also be made available to all employees, to the Maricopa Governing Board members, and to the general public.

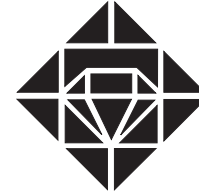
Purposes of the Institutional Self-Study

The following purposes have been established for the Estrella Mountain Community College Institutional Self-Study:



- ◆ Provide documentation to assist the evaluation team and the NCA Commission in their evaluation of Estrella Mountain Community College.
- ◆ Demonstrate that Estrella Mountain Community College meets all criteria for continued accreditation and all the General Institutional Requirements.
- ◆ Analyze and evaluate institutional strengths, concerns, opportunities and challenges in order to continually improve all aspects of Estrella Mountain Community College and effectively prepare for the future.
- ◆ Demonstrate how Estrella Mountain Community College addressed the concerns raised from its initial self-study.
- ◆ Develop and implement a process for communication that will continue to support institutional improvement.





“Your Success is Our Success”

Guiding Principles for the Institutional Self-Study

In order to fulfill the stated purposes, the Estrella Mountain Community College Self-Study will be guided by the following principles:

- ◆ Focus on the institution as a whole
- ◆ Insure wide involvement from all stakeholders
- ◆ Incorporate existing evaluation and planning committee structures and processes
- ◆ Evaluate the institution rather than describe it
- ◆ Maintain ongoing communication to keep all college stakeholders informed and to provide a means for feedback
- ◆ Utilize multiple measures to evaluate the institution
- ◆ Use relevant feedback to improve institutional effectiveness
- ◆ Maintain integrity in all processes
- ◆ Document all aspects of the institutional self-study process

Estrella Mountain Institutional Self-Study Strategy

The Executive Team has:

- ◆ Established guiding principles
- ◆ Conceptualized the process
- ◆ Designed the Institutional Self-Study Process
- ◆ Drafted the Institutional Self-Study Plan
- ◆ Developed a Communication Plan.

Patterns of Evidence

The Institutional Self-Study will use both NCA accepted patterns of evidence as well as those unique to Estrella Mountain Community College in demonstrating that the institution meets each criterion for continued accreditation. Patterns of evidence will be drawn from existing assessment and improvement systems whenever possible.

