

# Mesa Community College

## Achieving Hispanic *Serving* Institution (HSI) Designation

### Why HSI?

As a college *of* the community, a college *for* the community, Mesa Community College (MCC) continuously responds to the community we serve. We are proud of our continuous focus on student success and community engagement. With these foci in mind, we must recognize that our community has changed and carefully consider how we must also change, as an institution, to continue serving our population well.

In 1990, 10% of the City of Mesa and 9.8% of MCC's student body was Hispanic (1992). Today, 28% of Mesa and 25% of MCC's student body is Hispanic. Mesa Public School district is now a minority-majority district with Hispanics representing 46% of the K-8 student population, 42.4% for K-12 (with other minority populations contributing to the minority-majority student population). Elementary schools in Mesa range from a student population of less than 10% Hispanic to *more than 90% Hispanic* at Holmes Elementary School located just 4 miles from MCC's Southern and Dobson Campus.

Additionally, performance gaps exist between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students. For example, 11.9% of Hispanic students entering MCC in Fall 2009 earned a degree or certificate in six years compared to 15.3% for non-Hispanic students. 23% of Hispanic students entering in Fall 2009 transferred in six years compared to 28.1% of non-Hispanic students.

Student performance is not the only gap in our community. Recent research by the Helios Education Foundation determined that "as the economy grows, Latinas/os are often underrepresented in the highest-growth occupational sectors, especially those that require an associate degree or higher." Reducing these gaps will lead to greater post-high school educational attainment for Hispanic students and greater potential for economic success. This holds great promise for reducing the current \$10,000 annual income gap between Hispanic and Caucasian households in the City of Mesa (source: City of Mesa Community Survey data).

As our college vision states, we aspire to lead the way to success in our local and global community. Providing access to higher education and paving the way for success for Hispanic students serves to propel us towards our vision. In addition to purely responding to our changing community, these demographic shifts represent a strategic opportunity to remain a viable and vital resource to the community while contributing to a sustainable future.

### What is HSI?

In the 1980s, congressional hearings took place, focused not only on the lack of access to higher education for Latina/o students but that institutions of higher education with the highest percentage of Latina/o students had lower levels of resources to educate these students. In 1992, the identification and definition of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) became part of the Higher Education Act. HSIs are accredited and degree granting public or private institutions of higher education with 25 percent or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student (FTE) enrollment.

The first appropriations for HSIs took place in 1995 and in 1998 the Title V federally funded grant program through the U.S. Department of Education was established. Funding is

competitively awarded to institutions of higher education serving Hispanic, low-income student populations. Grantee institutions may spend Title V funds in a variety of areas such as construction, maintenance, renovation and improvement in classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and activities to improve student services. Title V funding aims to enhance academic course development and improve program quality to ultimately help retain students and move them toward completion.

While the federal designation focuses on student population and Title V represents potential for funding, the emphasis of MCC's work to date has been on the *Serving* component of Hispanic Serving Institution.

### **What does *Serving* mean for the college and community?**

MCC will work to create awareness of, learning about, and engagement in Hispanic student focused success strategies. We will endeavor to become a culturally aware and competent faculty, staff, and administration in order for Hispanic students and families to experience welcoming employees and inviting spaces on campus. This will mean new expectations for current college employees as well as changes to employee recruiting and on-boarding processes in order to ensure cultural awareness and competence.

The college will monitor Hispanic student enrollment, retention, persistence, satisfactory academic progress, graduation, and transfer rates as measures of success for our HSI efforts. As the Morrison Institute report, *Dropped*, indicates: "interventions to correct the education attainment gap [for Latinas/os] are essential if Arizona is to remain fiscally healthy and capable of competing in the global economy."

As is now evident, delivering on the vision set forth by the leadership of MCC's HSI effort - *Advancing Hispanic student success through active and culturally relevant engagement with MCC's Hispanic students and community* - will mean great things for the college and, more importantly, for our community.

### **Economic Future and Workforce Preparation**

A high school diploma is unlikely to provide a young adult with viable opportunities for middle class employment. Increasingly, jobs of the future will require more than a high school education.

To this end, leaders from multiple sectors are recognizing the importance of increasing the representation of college graduates in the U.S. Since Latinas/os are the youngest and fastest growing population group in the United States, it will be almost impossible to achieve this goal without improving the college success rates of Latina/o students. In fact, "for the U.S. to regain the top ranking in the world for college degree attainment, Latinas/os will need to earn 5.5 million more degrees by 2020." (source: Excelencia in Education)

Hispanic Serving Institutions are identifying opportunities to expand Latina/o student success to meet the national goals of an educated population and a competitive workforce. With the future of the U.S. economy linked tightly to the success of Latina/o students, colleges must think creatively about how they can use their resources and the services available in the community to ensure Latina/o student success. This takes on even greater importance for MCC given the demographic shifts in Arizona and our own Mesa community.

## **Social Justice and Accessible Education**

Community colleges are a particularly attractive option for Latina/o students to begin their college education because they are located in their communities, are open access, and are more affordable and flexible than four-year colleges. However, affordability, family and work obligations, and a lack of college-going “know how” are barriers to college completion often cited by Latina/o students.

Data indicates that many of the Latinas/os who apply for college will apply for financial aid but will receive aid amounts lower than other racial/ethnic groups. Latina/o students are more likely to be juggling competing priorities of school, family and work. The need to support their families financially is one of the most cited reasons for Latinas/os who do not persist to college completion. According to a recent national poll, “66% of Hispanics who got a job or entered the military directly after high school cited the need to help support their family as a reason for not enrolling in college, compared with 39% of whites.”

Latina/o students across the country are more likely to enroll at a public two-year school or community college. This provides MCC with an ideal opportunity to serve our growing Latina/o population by providing not just an accessible, but also a welcoming path to higher education.

## **Success of All Students**

To be awarded the Title V grant, institutions must clearly demonstrate how educational opportunities are expanded and improved for Hispanic and low-income students. Title V grants do not have to be paid back; the funding is intended to provide educational equity. Implementing strategies to increase student success for Hispanic students will result in valuable lessons learned and best practices to benefit all students, clearly a “win-win” for overall student success at MCC.

