

## Growing Grand Canyon U looking at possible East Valley expansion

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By Michelle Reese, Tribune |

East Valley students may have another higher education option in the next two years after Grand Canyon University announced plans to open a campus here.

GCU, a private, Christian-based school, sent requests to the communities of Mesa, Gilbert, Chandler, Tempe and Queen Creek in search of available land to potentially build its next campus. The school's main campus is located in the West Valley, near 35th Avenue and Camelback Road in Phoenix.

Brian Mueller, CEO and president of the university, said there's interest from East Valley students to attend the school, but commuting is difficult.

"We think this is going to be a good option for high school graduates, but also this is a good option for those East Valley students attending a community college who are looking for a university to transfer to," he said.

Ideally, he said, the university will find between 75 acres and 100 acres to build a campus near a freeway, mall or apartments.

Initially, it will be designed as a commuter campus. But if there is demand, dorms could be built in the future, he said.

There are 6,500 students on the school's main campus. Mueller said 71 percent of the students are from Arizona and 80 percent of those students come from the West Valley.

"The last four years we've worked with enrollment counselors and churches. A lot of students say they really like the small Christian environment of the Grand Canyon campus, the small class size and personal attention, but they want to live at home," he said. "We want to build an East Valley campus that looks and feels like our main campus with all the same programs."

Mueller said the East Valley Grand Canyon campus would open in fall 2014. By 2020, officials hope to have 7,500 students and 2,000 employees there.

There are currently 1,000 employees at Grand Canyon University's administrative center in Tempe. They would move to the new campus and more would be hired as needed, Mueller said.

Higher education in the East Valley is hardly a new thing, but its growth of late has been significant. In addition to the growth and prominence of Arizona State University's Polytechnic campus in Mesa, five colleges have each announced plans to open small campuses in Mesa in the next few months: Albright College, Westminster College, Benedictine University, Wilkes University and Upper Iowa University. The University of Arizona and ASU both have announced plans to offer master-level programs in Chandler, while Northern Arizona University has long held partnerships to host courses and degree programs at Chandler-Gilbert Community College and Mesa Community College.

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