

Mesa leaders outraged over MCC 'rebranding' plan



Maria Polletta, The Republic | azcentral.com 10:25 a.m. MST November 6, 2015



(Photo: MCCCC)

A "rebranding" plan that would shake up how Mesa Community College's name is displayed and marketed has Mesa leaders incensed, with officials calling the idea "horrible," "bone-headed" and threatening to MCC's deep-rooted identity.

The concept is one of several elements in Maricopa County Community College District's "One Maricopa" initiative, a years-long attempt to unify and streamline the district's 10-school network. While the move wouldn't formally change the colleges' names, it would make them secondary to the district's name in signage and other materials.

In Mesa, that would mean a new, sprawling monument sign reading "Maricopa Community Colleges | Mesa" instead of "Mesa Community College" at the main campus at Southern and Dobson. It would also involve a logo redesign.

"We've done studies that show that many people in Maricopa County are familiar with their local college but don't know or understand it's part of a larger college system," district spokesman Tom Gariepy said. "This was developed to show people that each college is part of that larger organization.

"Students enrolling at each of our colleges can take classes and enjoy benefits at any of the other colleges, and it's important as we look to attract students to our organization that we make it clear to them that that's the case," he said.



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Gariepy said that under the district's original system, the community colleges competed for students, and "back in the high-growth years of the 1980s and 1990s, that was an effective strategy." But "things have changed dramatically over the last few years," he said, so "we need to look differently at things."



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While Mesa leaders say they generally support the philosophy behind the "One Maricopa" program — components such as centralizing public safety have already been implemented successfully — they argue the rebranding would weaken MCC's standing in the community and cripple relationships with supporters.

"(W)e think the name change is a big mistake," Mayor John Giles wrote in a late October e-mail to Mesa Chamber of Commerce President Sally Harrison. "MCC has too much history and loyalty in the community to be tossed aside."

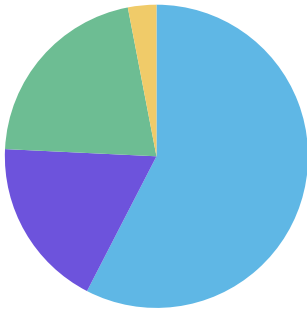
Story continues after infographic.

Mesa Community College

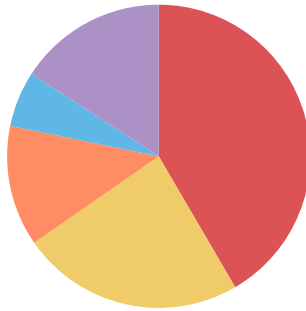




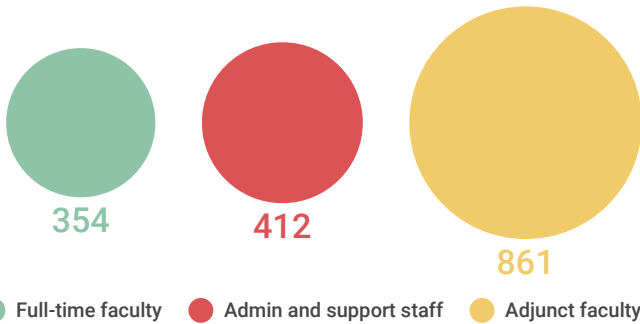
White Hispanic Black Asian/Pacific Islander
 American Indian/Alaska Native Other/Not Specified



Attend during day
 Attend at night
 Attend online or hybrid
 Attend on weekends



Plan to transfer to 4-year college
 Plan to enter job market directly
 Take classes for personal inter...
 Want to learn specific job skills
 Have another plan or goal



● Full-time faculty ● Admin and support staff ● Adjunct faculty

SOURCE: Mesa Community College.

NOTE: Percentages were rounded; some graphs might not add up to 100 percent.

Harrison responded that the chamber's executive council had met to discuss the issue and "was pretty adamant that we strongly and vocally oppose the name change."

The loudest protests, though, have come from Vice Mayor Dennis Kavanaugh, whose district includes MCC's main campus. E-mails show him lambasting the proposal both in discussions with colleagues and with district officials.

"I do not know of a single community leader in Mesa who supports (this) and that includes the college's biggest longtime advocates, including me," he wrote in an Oct. 21 e-mail to Rufus Gasper, chancellor of the community-college district. "This proposal ... will very likely adversely affect current and future city/college partnerships, fundraising and alumni relationships."

"There are better models to brand a district system which do not denigrate the host community," he continued. "Do you think that any Mesa elected official or community leader will want to attend the dedication of such a monument sign at Dobson and Southern?"

In a message to MCC President Shouan Pan, Kavanaugh said the change "would not be well received in Mesa or in any other political jurisdiction whose name is currently part of a community college." MCC has declined to comment on the rebranding proposal so far.

Giles and Kavanaugh later collaborated on a formal letter to Chancellor Gasper, in which they asked the district to "postpone the implementation of the rebranding efforts until further meetings with key community stakeholders and broader public discussions are held."

"While we applaud the many needed improvements realized through the (One Maricopa) initiative including the consolidation of staff, course offerings and other resources, we were left with a deep apprehension of the associated rebranding effort," they wrote.

Harrison, the Chamber president, also submitted a letter to Gasper contending the "renaming and rebranding MCC will unravel the fabric that is now Mesa Community College."

The growing backlash appears to have slowed the rebranding process, if not temporarily halted it altogether.

"The chancellor has told the mayor's office that he would be happy to meet with the mayor, and is happy to meet with other people in the community," Garipey, the district spokesman, told *The Republic*. "The community's input is important, and ... we really won't know about a timeline (for the rebranding) until those discussions are held."

Timeline: Mesa Community College through the years

1963: 330 students register for classes at Phoenix College's "Mesa Extension," 809 W. Main St. in Mesa.

1965: The college becomes a separate institution from Phoenix College; name changes to Mesa Community College.

1966: MCC's main campus at Southern and Dobson opens, with 2,053 students enrolled.

1967: MCC receives institutional accreditation.

1968: 253 students become MCC's first graduating class.

1974: The athletic mascot changes from the Hokam to the Thunderbird.

1976: The first career fair is held to help connect students with employment options.

1985: MCC offers over-the-phone registration for the first time, limited to one course not requiring advising or testing.

1990: Construction of the Alumni Clock Tower is finished.

1997: The Rose Garden is finished and dedicated.

2000: Ground is broken for the Red Mountain campus.

2004: President George W. Bush visits MCC to discuss a proposal for a federal job-training grant.

2007: The national Council for Higher Education Accreditation awards MCC the CHEA Award for Institutional Progress in Student Learning Outcomes.

2014: A new, 462-seat Performing Arts Center opens.

2015: MCC celebrates its 50th anniversary.

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