



SOUTH MOUNTAIN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Academic Plan 2020-2025



The College With A Heart

Focusing on Student Success

Our Vision

South Mountain Community College educates minds, transforms lives, touches hearts, and builds community

Our Mission

South Mountain Community College provides quality higher education for our diverse community. We create a caring teaching and learning environment that fosters student development and supports productive citizenship in an increasingly global and technological society. Our purpose is to meet these needs by offering:

- General education courses
- Transfer programs
- Occupational education and career development
- Continuing education
- Developmental studies and English as a second language
- Cultural, civic, and social events
- Academic support and student services

Our Values

We are inspired and guided by our core values:

Collaboration

We are inclusive in our relationships with colleagues, departments and community, and respectful of their ideas.

Community

We serve our community by recognizing our inter-dependence, celebrating our history, honoring our diverse cultures, and building our future.

Excellence

We model exemplary teaching, learning, service and leadership through continuous improvement, creativity and innovation.

Integrity

We are accountable to the communities we serve and are truthful, sincere, transparent, and responsible for our actions.

Wellbeing

We are a college community that encourages and develops social, physical, career, community, and financial wellbeing.

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Introduction: About South Mountain Community College

By Dr. Summer Cherland & Dr. Travis May

“Estamos Aquí!” “We are Here!” In the late 1970s, the citizens of South Phoenix demanded to be valued when they called for a college in their community. Wrote one businessman, “We feel the creation of an institution of higher education will serve not only to provide us with trained and skilled personnel for our businesses, but will also serve as a catalyst for economic and social change in this community.”¹

For years, the unpredictable Salt River made traffic in and out of South Phoenix nearly impossible. Potential students found other Maricopa college campuses difficult to get to, since there was only one bridge crossing the river, and few had access to reliable transportation. Instead, students and leaders in South Phoenix wanted access to higher education on their own home turf. They knew that a college would be a beacon in the community. So, in 1978, business leaders, community members, and politicians mobilized for the creation of South Mountain Community College (SMCC), but it wasn't easy. They faced challenges as state and city leaders refused the notion that a largely agrarian, rural, and impoverished community would see much collegiate success. The South Phoenix residents set out to prove them wrong.

Eventually, major state and local politicians were influential in crafting the legislation that got SMCC built, but it was the people at the base of the majestic South Mountain who proved that a college in South Phoenix would be successful.² This land, purchased from the Heard Corporation on 24th Street near Baseline Road, held a shared and rich history. While South Phoenix residents proudly saw their heritage reflected in the ancient irrigation canals of the Hohokam, postwar cotton fields, iconic orange groves, and widely-lauded Japanese flower gardens, they also saw the future. As ground broke, The Phoenix Gazette hailed the new college as “part of the revitalization of South Phoenix.”³ In 1980 a small number of faculty and staff were hired, and classes were officially in session. To accommodate the 796 students who initially enrolled in 1980, classes were held in temporary buildings and at the nearby Catholic Church as construction continued.⁴

Over the course of its short history, SMCC has grown to match the predicted revitalization of South Phoenix. Each year, students saw new buildings, more faculty and staff, and more fellow scholars join their campus. They've watched as the neighborhoods around the campus changed and grew, new businesses came, and others went. They've been at the heart of 20th and 21st century changes affecting the greater Phoenix area. SMCC now serves over 6,000 students annually, who come to the campus for a variety of classes and opportunities in technology, entrepreneurship, performing arts, sciences, and general education. The population is as diverse as the city itself, with scholars coming from rural, urban, and suburban neighborhoods. The award-winning South Mountain Community Library reflects the unique relationship the campus has to our community. It is one of the only in the country to partner as a shared enterprise with a city public library.⁵ SMCC offers classes in the day, evenings and online, providing a great educational experience for our community at the main campus, Guadalupe Center and Laveen, and was recently recognized as one of the best community colleges in the country.⁶

¹ Morris, M. (1979, March 5). **Greater South Mountain Business Association.**

² Gutierrez, Alfredo. Interview. 6. November 2019. De los Santos, Alfredo. Interview. 20. November 2018.

³ South, J. (1979, August 23). Ground Broken on \$8 Million Project, College Hailed Spark To S. Phoenix Revival. **The Phoenix Gazette.**

⁴ Brooks, R.A. (1978, April 16). Establishment of South County Community College. **Maricopa Community Colleges Governing Board Agenda, AZ.**

⁵ South Mountain Community College. (2018). **Fast Facts Report.**

⁶ College Choice. 2018-2019. <https://www.collegechoice.net/rankings/best-community-colleges/>

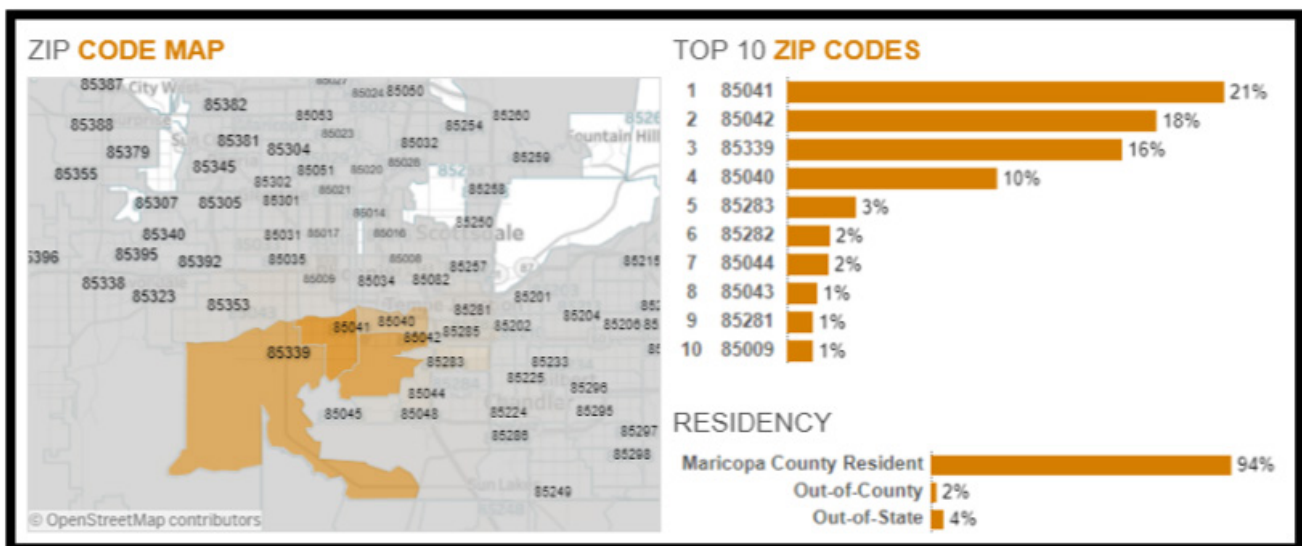
In the 2019 – 2020 Academic year, South Mountain Community College celebrates its 40th anniversary, but this is just the beginning. We look forward to many more years of excellence and service to our community. You are valued! “Estamos Aquí!”

Much of this history was researched as part of the South Phoenix Oral History Project.

About Our Students

While the percentages vary slightly from semester to semester, our students consistently represent the rich diversity of our South Phoenix communities. Seventy percent of our students are first-generation college students. Eighty-five percent are minority students. Fifty-five percent identify as Hispanic. As such, SMCC is designated as a minority-serving and Hispanic-serving institution by the federal government. Fifteen percent of our students identify as African-American, 5% identify as American Indian, 15% identify as Caucasian. The average age of our students is 24. In Fall 2018, 46% of our students were 19 or younger, 26% were 20-24, 15% were 25-34, 13% were 35 or older.

Seventy percent of our students are part-time; 30% are full-time. On average, our students take 8 credits per semester. Approximately 50% of our students aspire to transfer to a university. The other 50% are comprised of job-seekers, dual-enrollment students, and students taking classes for personal enrichment. The majority of our students (60%) take classes with us during the day while the remaining students take classes at night, on the weekends, or online.



Almost all of our students are Maricopa County residents who come from one of the following zip codes: 85041, 85042, 85339, and 85040.

Median income in these top four zip codes is between 20-40% lower than that of Maricopa County and the State of Arizona. Median income in the 85040 zip code is \$31,590 whereas the county median income is \$56,499. Population density across all four zip codes is also significantly higher than the county and the state. In 85040, the population density is 7x that of Maricopa County .⁷

⁷ <https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/tapestry-segmentation/zip-lookup>

Purpose

For almost 40 years, SMCC has excelled largely as a transfer institution. As we look to expand our influence, it is essential that we honor our past related to excellence in general education. Additionally, while we hope to serve an increasing number of students for years to come, we recognize that serving our students also means that we guide them on a path that leads to completion. We recognize that completion can be defined as attaining an associate's degree, transferring to a university, or earning another credential toward some sort of meaningful career.

The academic plan has been developed with these three objectives in mind:

- **Maintain general education excellence**
- **Increase enrollment**
- **Increase completions**

Guiding Principles

Over the course of a six-month period, stakeholders internal and external to SMCC participated in a series of planning and steering sessions designed to provide both direction and focus to our academic enterprise. The result of the process has been a recognition of what we have done well over our history along with an identification of our priorities into the future. We plan to aggressively explore these priorities as we seek to meet the objectives set forth in the previous section. As we pursue those objectives, we have identified four guiding principles for the academic plan: student-centered, faculty-focused, community-conscious, and dedicated to diversity.

Student-centered

Our students are at the center of our institution. We strive to provide them with a high-quality learning environment and unique, challenging opportunities. We value each and every student. As such, each initiative that is promoted as a result of this plan will be resourced and implemented from a student-centered perspective.

Faculty-focused

We recognize the essential role that our faculty play as academic leaders at SMCC. We recognize that any academic enterprise thrives when the faculty are provided with the tools, resources, and supports to create extraordinary learning experiences for our students. As such, each initiative that is introduced as a result of this plan will be resourced and implemented from a faculty-focused perspective.

Community-conscious

Our Vision:

South Mountain Community College educates minds, transforms lives, touches hearts, and builds community.

Our Mission:

South Mountain Community College provides quality higher education for our diverse community. We create a caring teaching and learning environment that fosters student development and supports productive citizenship in an increasingly global and technological society.

In order to fulfill our lofty mission and vision, we must strive to meet the needs of our surrounding community. We strive to be a deeply-embedded community college that is responsive to the diverse needs of our community partners to include (but not limited to) industry, K-12 districts, and universities. As such, each initiative that is introduced as a result of this plan will be resourced and implemented from a community-conscious perspective.

Dedicated to diversity

We deeply value that people are alike and different in many ways, and strive to provide a safe and positive environment for all people to learn and develop. Our diversity enriches us individually and as a society, and we seek to foster sensitivity to and appreciation of differences. We commit to working with intention to recognize and address achievement and equity gaps.

Developing the Plan

In an attempt to align the development of this plan with the process used to develop SMCC's strategic plan (developed in 2012), questions were crafted with respect to the four phases of appreciative inquiry. The phases are as follows:

The Vice President of Learning's office conducted a total of eight planning sessions with approximately 200 participants from September 2018 to December 2018. The Center for Teaching and Learning developed a system whereby answers/discussion/input were captured by note-takers digitally through tablets at each table of 5-7 participants. This data was collected at each table, then aggregated by CTL staff and distributed to all participants as PDF documents immediately following each planning session.

Discovery Phase

Appreciating the best life has to offer

Outcome: Strategic Directions

Dream Phase

Envisioning results of what might be

Outcome: Mission, Vision, and Values

Design Phase

Co-constructing what should be – the ideal

Outcome: Institutional Priorities

Destiny Phase

Sustaining efforts through empowering, learning, adjusting, and improvising

Outcome: Action Plans, Policies, Organizational Structure, Integrated Budget, and Planning

These were the specific questions asked of all planning session participants. Each planning session lasted 90 minutes.

- What does SMCC do really well? (Discovery Phase)
- What programs would you like to see at SMCC? (Dream Phase)
- How can we be more responsive to the needs of our community? (Design Phase)
- What will SMCC look like ten years from now? (Destiny Phase)

The Vice President of Learning, in coordination with faculty senate leadership, then selected an Academic Plan faculty steering team comprised of highly-engaged faculty from across the college. These five individuals, along with faculty senate leadership and the VPL office, worked to sift through, analyze, and organize all the raw data from the planning sessions. This process resulted in the themes, priorities, and goals presented here.

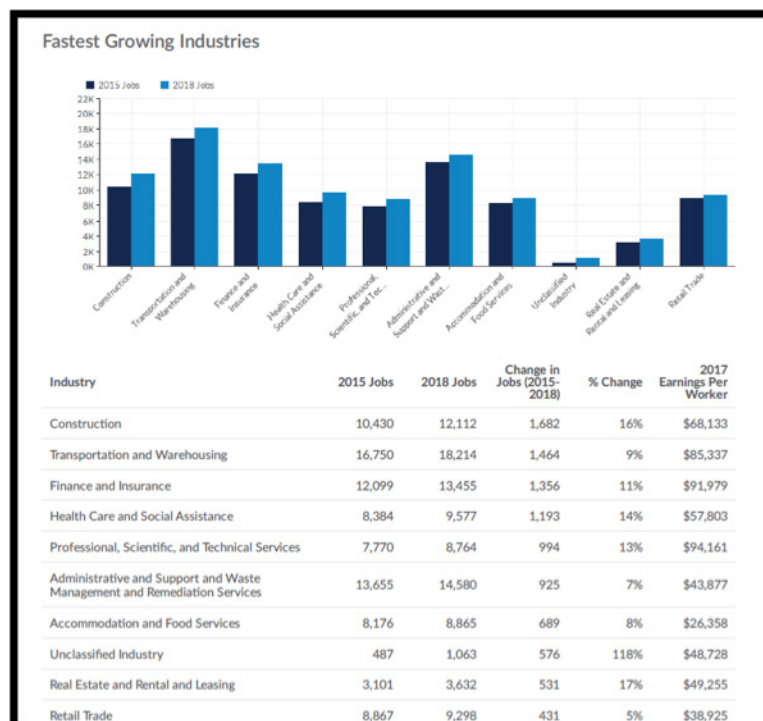
Planning sessions:

Session participants	Date
Community partners	September 14, 2018
Residential faculty	October 12, 2018 October 16, 2018 October 24, 2018 October 31, 2018
OE&T Division	November 7, 2018
Community partners	November 9, 2018
Student session	November 29, 2018

Faculty steering team sessions:

Session participants	Date
Faculty steering team	December 10, 2018
Faculty steering team	January 11, 2019
Faculty steering team and faculty senate leadership	February 15, 2019
Faculty steering team	March 25, 2019
Faculty steering team and faculty senate leadership	April 25, 2019

Data provided to all planning session participants⁸:



⁸ EMSI: Labor Market Analytics - <https://www.economicmodeling.com/>

SMCC Distinguishing Characteristics

This section is designed to recognize the characteristics that make SMCC distinct—a special place for students, a special place to be. It is an attempt to honor the identity of SMCC—an identity that has developed over the last 40 years.

Innovation

We are a truly innovative institution that invests in people, processes, and technology to support the innovation agenda. Consequently, we tend to lead our peer institutions in a variety of ways. We have worked hard to build a culture of innovation, one that rewards the exploration of ideas and initiatives designed to improve the way we go about serving students and our community.

We pride ourselves on being nimble, agile, and adaptable. This level of responsiveness has allowed SMCC to effectively manage a wide variety of adverse situations over the years. This commitment to responsiveness also allows us to better serve the evolving needs of our students and our community.

Diversity

Our designations as a Hispanic-serving and Minority-serving institution are at the heart of our identity as an institution of higher education. Not only do we recognize the ethnic diversity of the population we serve but we recognize the various needs of our increasingly diverse population. As the college with a heart where every student is valued, recognized, and respected, we have created an environment where first-generation students of all colors from all socio-economic backgrounds can thrive.

Recently, we were visited by a group of researchers from a university in the Midwest that identified (based on IPEDs and other data sources) South Mountain Community College as an exemplar for student success in the STEM areas for Hispanic-serving institutions⁹. We are extremely proud of this recognition and believe it speaks to the important position we occupy in the community of South Phoenix.

Uniqueness

The College with a Heart

The unofficial slogan of South Mountain Community College is “the college with a heart.” At SMCC, students are challenged academically but cared for personally. Each and every student matters. Students can expect that their stories will matter, that their identities will be valued, and that they will be given every support possible to succeed.

Small Class Sizes and Personalized Attention

At SMCC, students can expect class sizes between 15-24 students. The average class size for Fall 2018 was 17 while the average class size for Spring 2019 was 16. Students can expect to be more than a number at SMCC. The relatively small class size ensures that their learning will be interactive and that they will receive personalized attention throughout their time at SMCC.

⁹ <https://ocrl.illinois.edu/hbcc>



South Mountain Community Library

South Mountain Community Library

South Mountain Community Library is one of just a few libraries in the nation that serves simultaneously as a community college library and a public library. Students and faculty from South Mountain Community College use library resources and the facilities as their research and information center. SMCL also serves children, teens, and adults as the 17th branch of the Phoenix Public Library system. Employees from both organizations staff this unique building, and patrons have access to almost all of the resources that both organizations have to offer.¹⁰

Storytelling Institute

The Storytelling Institute began 20 years ago with a vision of the power and relevance of a storytelling program at our community college, and that vision proved to be vividly true. Storytelling as an academic discipline, as an art-form, and as a tool for building community has never been more relevant. Public interest in storytelling is at an all-time high. Development of the Storytelling Certificate has produced high level storytellers and continues to attract new students to our campus. Storytelling has grown into a prominent program for SMCC .¹¹

Bilingual Nursing Fellowship Program

The Bilingual Nursing Fellowship Program (BNFP) at South Mountain Community College, in cooperation with Phoenix College and Gateway Community College, offers one of the foremost bilingual nursing programs in the country. Due to the rapid growth of the healthcare industry, there is a high demand for qualified bilingual nurses. BNFP attracts students from South Phoenix and the entire state of Arizona .¹²

Community Entrepreneurship Center

SMCC's Community Entrepreneurship Center (CEC) serves as a business incubator for student entrepreneurs offering education, services, tools, and resources for start-up and existing businesses. Students participate in venture pitch competitions via their involvement with the CEC.¹³

¹⁰ <http://www.southmountaincc.edu/library/>

¹¹ <http://www.southmountaincc.edu/storytelling/>

¹² <http://www.southmountaincc.edu/programs-certificates/bnfp/>

¹³ <http://www.southmountaincc.edu/business-management/cec/>

Teaching and Learning

Extraordinary Faculty

The 69 residential faculty and approximately 250 adjunct faculty at South Mountain Community College come from diverse backgrounds and exhibit excellence across the academic and educational spectrum. Faculty teach and do research in diverse academic fields, including the fine arts, social sciences, education and communication; math, science and engineering; rhetoric, composition, and languages; and computer, business, and technical programs. Our library and counseling faculty effectively serve and support students' information literacy and career exploration.

Above all, our highly skilled faculty share a commitment to student success. In addition to teaching and engaging in service to the college, SMCC faculty sponsor co-curricular clubs and activities, support the college food pantry, and volunteer in local organizations. We are small in number, and the resulting close interaction we have with each other and our students makes us strong together. We are the college with a heart, and our faculty live that mantra through their daily interactions and commitment to students in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community.

Focus on Student Learning Outcomes

While district curriculum lists numerous competencies for each course, the faculty of South Mountain have dedicated themselves to write three course-level Student Learning Outcomes (cSLOs) for each course taught at the college.

These cSLOs are the big-picture items that a student should be able to do after having completed the course. Faculty obtain or create assessments to measure student attainment of the SLO, analyze the data and use the results to improve the course. The cSLOs help to define the program-level Student Learning Outcomes (pSLOs) and are mapped to the institutional-level outcomes (iSLOs). The iSLOs are (1) Critical and Creative Thinking; (2) Quantitative Analysis; (3) Information Literacy; (4) Oral and Written Communication.

Learning Resources and Supports

South Mountain is committed to student success and providing the necessary resources in and out of the classroom to support student persistence and completion. South Mountain currently offers students free tutoring in all subjects in the Learning Resource Center and the Computing Commons and writing assistance in the campus Writing Center. We currently provide embedded tutors in English, Science, and Math classes, and the embedded tutoring program is being scaled to provide service in additional academic areas.

Our faculty keep office hours and have designed co-requisite course formats to provide increased opportunities for students who benefit from additional instructional time. Reading, English, and Counseling faculty are working to provide contextualized instruction to support reading, writing, and career exploration in disciplinary courses. SMCC faculty believe the college is a community of learning, so faculty take responsibility for supporting students' goals and success in and out of the classroom.

Focus on program review

Academic programs at SMCC include occupational and academic certificates, academic programs by department, as well as Learning Division programs and support resources such as tutoring. Each program conducts a self-review on a three-year cycle of its demand and effectiveness, alignment with the institution's mission and goals, student success, enrollment and retention trends, program resources (faculty, facilities and equipment), and strategic plan for improvement (or other program modification including sunseting a program that has outlived its usefulness).

These reviews are conducted by lead faculty (or staff) facilitated by the college's iTeachSMART team and data support from Institutional Research, and then reviewed by a panel of administrators, assessment team faculty, and a representative from our district office. Program Review helps direct strategic planning and annual budgets.

Student cohort communities

Our student cohort communities grow out of, and are a reflection of, SMCC's distinguishing reputation as "the college with a heart," the college offering personalized attention. Our student cohorts allow students and faculty to work more intentionally together while allowing students to develop a sense of community, group identity, and cohesiveness with one another. Some examples of current cohort on campus include the BNFP (Bilingual Nursing Fellowship Program), ACE (Achieving a College Education), Women's Rising, and MEN (Men's Empowerment Network). The students in these programs develop a strong sense of belonging and connection to one another, which are key factors for student success and persistence.



ACE Graduation

eLearning

The SMCC eLearning committee is comprised of faculty from each academic division as well as academic administrators and staff. The team develops processes and policies to ensure that all faculty teaching in an online or hybrid modality (combination of face-to-face and online activities) have received training in online pedagogies and passed a satisfactory evaluation of their readiness to conduct an online or hybrid course. SMCC utilizes Canvas as its online Learning Management System (LMS). Our Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) provides support and training for faculty using Canvas and eLearning pedagogy, and promotes the sharing of best practices.

Active and engaging learning environments

At South Mountain, students find a variety of teaching approaches and course formats designed to make learning enjoyable, engaging, and effective. Class is no longer focused on the traditional lecture-only instructional approach. In the classroom and online, students are asked to collaborate, cooperate, and be active participants in their own learning. Students can take courses in traditional face-to-face formats, and hybrid and online offerings are also increasingly available.

SMCC faculty continually engage in professional development to enhance their knowledge and use of active and engaging learning environments. In addition, faculty are continuously involved in developing OER (Open Educational Resources) as a way of enhancing learning materials and saving students money on textbook costs.

Community

K-12 District Partners

South Mountain Community College is located in the Roosevelt Elementary School District and serves three high schools in the Phoenix Union school district (South Mountain High School, Cesar Chavez High School, and Betty Fairfax High School) and AAEC (Arizona Agribusiness & Equine Center), a close partner charter school. Additionally, SMCC serves high school students through dual enrollment and the Early College ACE (Achieving a College Education) program.



Industry Partners

South Mountain Community College is an active member of the local chambers of commerce in the City of Phoenix, Ahwatukee, and South Mountain areas. Current community partners include Girl Scouts of America, Arizona@Work. Industry partners include Galvanize Inc., Marisol Credit Union, Sensei Project Solutions, Prisma Graphic, Altura Communication Solutions, American Express, Mediware, Faithlife, Phoenix Labs, Base 11, Dassault Systems, Cisco Systems, Tech Data, Robert Half, and more.

From left to right, Dr. Maria Harper-Marinick, MCCCDC Chancellor, Al Rosebal, Galvanize CEO, and Dr. Shari Olsen, SMCC President

Tribal Partners

South Mountain Community College partners with local neighboring Arizona tribes to meet the education needs of their tribal members.

- Gila River Indian Community GRIC), the Akimel O’odham (Pima) and the Pee-Posh (Maricopa) Indigenous people whose ancestral lands are all in Maricopa County.
- The Pascua Yaqui Tribe is primary based in Mexico but has various villages throughout Arizona, of which the largest populations are within Tucson and the Town of Guadalupe (home of SMCC’s Guadalupe Center).

Looking to the Future

As we consider where we have been as an institution and how we have developed and evolved over our nearly 40 years of existence serving the South Phoenix community, we are interested in formulating a vision for our future, one that identifies a set of key priorities to guide our efforts into the future. We also recognize the fluid and dynamic nature of the communities, industries, and students we serve, so we must be committed to being responsive to their evolving needs as well. We acknowledge that our distinguishing characteristics have created a solid foundation from which we will expand our identity moving forward. We have also considered our initial objectives and how these priorities might allow us to achieve them (maintain general education excellence, increase enrollment, increase completions).

Priority 1: Addressing equity gaps

We acknowledge that gaps exist in the achievement of our diverse student population. These gaps have traditionally been prominent across disadvantaged, under-served, and minority populations. We aspire to provide a supportive environment whereby students of all backgrounds can be successful, but we also recognize the unique needs of students who require supports that align with their diverse needs.

To that end, SMCC is committed to decreasing time-to-degree and increasing graduation rates for all students. We are working to achieve that goal using a three-pronged approach: First, identifying and eliminating institutional practices that pose barriers to progress. Second, developing holistic placement methods to help students navigate the collegiate environment academically, socially, and financially. Lastly, providing co-curricular experiences to address opportunity gaps in student preparation, exposure, and experience and to honor each student's contributions during his or her academic journey¹⁴.

Priority 2: Address community needs and interests

Strategically successful community colleges are deeply-embedded in their communities. They are responsive to the diverse needs of those communities and recognize that "community" is their middle name. SMCC recognizes the importance of being good partners and aspires to work with our community partners to facilitate learning that leads to productive citizenship.

Our vision speaks to this: "South Mountain Community College educates minds, transforms lives, touches hearts, and builds community." We are committed to symbiotic relationships with our community partners and will continue to seek new and innovative ways to work with organizations within the communities we serve.

Priority 3: Professional development

In order to do all of the incredible things we aspire to do, we need to recognize that people are our greatest asset. Hence, we must design systems, create and resource opportunities to develop people. We must commit to providing our faculty and staff the freedom, resources, and support necessary to pursue professional development opportunities as such opportunities have a direct impact on our ability to provide students with optimal experiences at SMCC.

¹⁴ <https://www.equityinhighered.org/indicators/u-s-population-trends-and-educational-attainment/>

Priority 4: Supporting the holistic student

At SMCC, the non-traditional student is our traditional student. As such, we recognize that our students have responsibilities and obligations outside of their experience with us. They have jobs, families, responsibilities, and challenges beyond SMCC. We are interested in continuing to foster the whole student. We recognize the cognitive and non-cognitive factors that contribute or detract from their success. We aspire to be an institution where our students feel supported and valued holistically and not simply based on their identity as a student. By investing in both cognitive and non-cognitive supports, we provide our students the absolute best chance to be successful here and beyond.

Priority 5: Academic excellence

Our history is one of academic excellence. Our present is one of academic excellence. The vision we have for our future is one of academic excellence. We recognize the importance of providing our students with rigorous learning opportunities that will prepare them for their next steps in life, whether those steps involve a four-year university, a meaningful career, or any number of positive outcomes. We aspire to create credentials that are rigorous and commit to providing extraordinary teaching and learning experiences to support their attainment of those credentials.

3-5 year Critical Goals

Contextualized Support

As South Mountain moves forward with Developmental Education reform, contextualization of courses will become more important for faculty and students. In order to contextualize courses, faculty are working to increase the relevancy of reading, writing, and math skills for students' expressed fields of interest. Discipline faculty are also working with faculty in gateway courses to include reading, writing, and math skills in their courses to improve the overall experience of the students on our campus. An example of this is reading faculty teaching a note-taking mini-lesson in a CIS class. Another example is an ENG101 course in which the writing focuses on a specific field of interest. Contextualization will benefit all students and better prepare them for success within and beyond their college career. Contextualization intends to make the student's learning experience more meaningful.

Priorities addressed: Priority 1 | Priority 3 | Priority 5

Learning communities and cohort experiences

Learning communities are a proven strategy for creating high-quality learning experiences for all learners because they allow students to make explicit connections between different courses and disciplines. As mentioned in the preceding section, contextualization benefits students by providing relevance.

Learning Communities provide students and faculty a format for contextualized content and deep learning; therefore, SMCC is committed to supporting faculty and staff in the creation of collaborative integrated Learning Communities in a variety of formats and modalities. First, we are creating contextualized teaching and learning in curricular pathways or as part of students' first-year experience. To that end, we are building paired/linked classes with multiple integrated assignments and co-curricular experiences where students make real-life connections between the classroom and their future pathways. Over the next three to five years, we will develop coordinated studies programs that are team-taught by faculty in different disciplines, such as mathematics and biology, which will increase students' preparation and success in critical courses.

Priorities addressed: Priority 1 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5

Expansion of workforce development

South Mountain Community College aspires to expand its occupational offerings to meet the ever-evolving community employment needs and job trends. We seek to utilize localized labor market research to add new programs and modify existing ones, and to work with the Maricopa Workforce and Economic Development (MWED) office, employer connections, and occupational administrators across the district to identify workforce needs. We actively seek opportunities to develop business and industry partnerships to provide advisory insight, create internship, apprenticeship, and entry-level job placement opportunities for our students, and secure industry experts as guest presenters in the classroom or on field trips. Conversely, we seek to learn the training and educational opportunities needed by these employers for their workforce so that we might provide solutions for them.

Priorities addressed: Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5

Expand e-learning and increase e-learning student success

Currently 23.2 percent of SMCC students take an online class compared to 33.5 percent across MCCC¹⁵. With a growing list of work and family obligations, students are increasingly seeking alternative, flexible delivery modalities for their learning needs.

SMCC recognizes the trend for increasingly flexible instructional options, with both asynchronous and synchronous modalities, but expansion must be met with a firm commitment to student success. Therefore, any expansion should include improving support structures for online learners, researching best practices to create next practices, and ensuring students are prepared for the unique challenges associated with eLearning.

Priorities addressed: Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 5

Modern learning spaces and infrastructure

Our goal is to provide our students access to modern, effective learning spaces and facilities. We recognize that students' expectations in regards to technology has increased exponentially along with the incredible growth of the internet and the content that resides on the web. Increasingly dynamic and robust content requires organizations to invest heavily in the infrastructure necessary to support and protect it.

We aspire to create learning spaces that are conducive to different pedagogies so as to allow faculty the flexibility to modify these spaces when needed. We are committed to providing our students with access to modern spaces to enhance and maximize their learning experiences here at SMCC.

Priorities addressed: Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5

Guided Pathways

Through the implementation of Transformation initiatives at our district office, each of the ten colleges in MCCC¹⁵ has committed to creating a more efficient and effective experience for our students. Guided Pathways is one of these initiatives and has been implemented at various institutions across the country with positive results. Through a concentrated effort on the student experience to recruitment, registration, onboarding, program advising, and completion, Guided Pathways has and will continue to fundamentally change the student experience for the better. We are committed to implementing the key aspects of Guided Pathways from a student-centered perspective in hopes of creating an experience that results in a clearer and more effective path to success.

Priorities addressed: Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5

¹⁵ <https://www.maricopa.edu/about/institutional-data/dashboards>

Employability and Soft Skills

We recognize that imparting applicable knowledge, skills and abilities to our students only partially fills the need for them to secure employment. Students also need employability skills, problem-solving skills, analytical skills, and “soft skills” to turn that job into a successful career. SMCC seeks to provide holistic learning both in and out of the classroom, learning that allows students to better prepare for workplace success as well as life in general. We offer workshops on resume writing, teamwork, communication, interviewing skills, and other career-readiness needs, and often embed these into the curriculum. Students may participate in mock interviews to sharpen their skills.

We are looking for ways to improve student access and participation in these activities. We recognize the importance of developing the whole student through a focused effort to infuse soft skills into the student experience at SMCC.

Priorities addressed: Priority 1 | Priority 2 | Priority 3 | Priority 4 | Priority 5

Acknowledgements

Faculty Co-authors:

Dr. Camille Newton and Dr. Mark Spencer

Stephen Hustedde and Nancy Deegan

Jennifer Avila

Ryan Senters

Dr. Kimberly Pope

Introduction: Dr. Summer Cherland and Dr. Travis May

Christianne Nieuwsma, Interim Dean of Academic Innovation

Kyle Mitchell, Adjunct and Program Analyst Sr. (Office of the VPL)

Additional Participants and Contributors:

Patricia Herrera and Dr. Jeannette Shaffer (SMCC Center for Teaching and Learning)

Student session participants | Faculty session participants | Community session participants

Dr. Camille Newton, Dr. Carlos Caire (Faculty Senate leadership)

Aryn Peppin, Sarah Sharits, Kathy McAvoy (Administrative support)

Leadership

Dr. Shari L. Olsen

President

Dr. Clyne Namuo

Vice President of Learning

Dr. Osaro Ighodaro

Vice President of Student Development

Dr. Janet Ortega

Vice President of Organizational Effectiveness and Technology

Tim Budworth

Associate Vice President – Technology

Bernice Portervint

Dean of Academic Innovation

Guy Goodman

Dean of Enrollment Services

Damita Kaloostian

Dean of Planning, Research & Development

Division Chairs

Mark Nielsen

Computer Information Systems
myCareer, Library and Center for
Teaching & Learning

Dr. Jerome Garrison

Music Comm. Fine Arts & Social
Science

James Smith

English Language Arts

Dr. Jacqueline Levy

Biology Math, Science, Engineering &
Counseling

Maricopa County Community College District Governing Board

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Ms. Kathleen Winn

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Dr. Tom Nerini

Mr. Dana G. Saar

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Leslie Cooper

General Council

Dr. Karla Fisher

Provost

Elliot Hibbs

Chief Operating Officer

Darcy Renfro

Chief of Staff

Brian Spicker

Interim President and Chief Executive Officer



**SOUTH MOUNTAIN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Main Campus

7050 S. 24th St
Phoenix, AZ 85042
602.243.8000

Guadalupe Center

9233 S. Avenida del Yaqui
Guadalupe, AZ 85283
602.243.8000

Laveen/Betty Fairfax High School

8225 S. 59th Avenue
Laveen Village, AZ 85339
602.243.8000



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