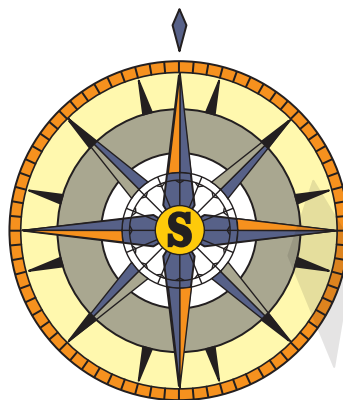# SOUTH MOUNTAIN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Self-Study Executive Summary
March 2009

Charting Futures, Connecting Worlds

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Overview of SMCC

South Mountain Community College (SMCC) is a comprehensive two-year college that serves the rapidly growing and extremely diverse communities of South Phoenix, Ahwatukee, Tempe, Guadalupe, and Laveen. Since 1979, SMCC has grown with and for its surrounding communities, while maintaining its main campus as a base of operations in service to the South Phoenix region: establishing the Guadalupe Center in the town of Guadalupe at the eastern service area border in 1989; offering both credit and non-credit courses at the Ahwatukee Foothills Center at the southern area border beginning in 1999; and, most recently, offering courses at multiple sites in Laveen, west of the main campus.

During the 2007-2008 academic year, South Mountain Community College served a total of 8298 students with 74% of those students enrolled in credit courses. The college currently offers 29 associate and transfer degrees as well as 24 certificates of completion.

SMCC is a federally designated Minority Serving Institution (MSI), with nearly 60% of its students representing ethnic minority groups; and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), with nearly 40% of its students of Hispanic heritage. The college supports the Maricopa Community College District's mission and is a true reflection of the community it serves. Equally as important, the college continues to serve its many diverse constituents by providing excellence in university transfer, career, and personal enrichment opportunities.

Student Profile

The students of SMCC truly represent the diversity of its service area. They have come to the college to earn credits toward university transfer (19.73 %), to advance in their careers (31.55%), and to engage in, and increase their knowledge of, areas of personal interest (21.12 %).

Nearly 81% of SMCC students are part time and 19.4% carry at least 12 credit hours per semester, qualifying them for full-time status. A majority of the college's students are female (61%), and 37% of the student body attends primarily at night. Sixty-seven percent of students are continuing SMCC students, 11% are former students, and, in spring 2008, 21.5% were new students to the college.

	Enrollment Status		Gender		Ethnicity					
	Full Time	Part Time	Male	Female	Hispanic	White	Black	Asian	American Indian	Other
Spring 1999	20.8	79.2	37.9	59.4	51.2	22.0	16.1	1.4	3.1	6.2
Spring 2008	19.4	80.6	35.5	61.0	38.2	31.3	15.6	4.6	4.6	5.6

More than 70% of SMCC student enrollment is first generation college students, approximately 20% have limited English language proficiency, 12% are enrolled in developmental writing, reading, or mathematics courses, and 48% receive federal financial aid (15.7% of those receiving loans).

SMCC enrollment and Student Equivalency (FTSE) have steadily increased over the last nine years.

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total Head count	5105	5286	5764	7090	7045	7618	7814	8141	7890
Total FTSE	1440	1446	1514	1633	1839	2014	2094	2067	2052

Employee Profile

In spring 2008, South Mountain Community College was home to 63 full-time faculty (RFP), 63 professional staff (PSA), and 35 Management, Administration, and Technology (MAT) employees. Fifty-three other full-time employees rounded out the total number of 214 Board approved employees. Employee diversity approximately mirrors that of the student population with 44% of all full-time employees self-identified as Anglo, 34% Hispanic, 16% African-American, and 9% as Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American. In the same semester (Spring 2008) SMCC employed 189 adjunct faculty who taught 55% of all courses.

Budget

The annual 2008-2009 budget for SMCC was $31,248,953 with 67% held in the general fund, 15% in the restricted fund, 9.7% in the auxiliary fund, and 7.9% in plant funds.

Institutional Changes Since 1999

Leadership

In June 2001, after nine years with the college, President Dr. John Cordova retired from the Office of President of South Mountain Community College and Dr. Kenneth Atwater accepted the college presidency in July 2001.

In January 2003 Dr. Joyce Elsner (VPAS) joined the administrative team of Dr. Ken Roberts (VPAA) and Dr. Kay Martens (VPSA). In June 2005, Dr. Roberts retired and was replaced on the administrative team by Dr. Linda Lujan.

Student Services Leadership

In order to refocus college wide efforts to enhance student retention and support increased enrollment, as well as to better align with the college Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, SMCC reorganized Student Services leadership in the fall of 2007.

With the retirement of the Dean of Enrollment Services in 2007, the college was able to create two Associate Dean positions: one for Enrollment Services, and one for Student Development. The Associate Dean for Enrollment Services maintains alignment with the college enrollment management model and supervises the departments of Registration and Records, Financial Aid, Assessment, and Advisement and Recruitment. The Associate Dean for Student Development provides direction for Student Life and Leadership, Service Learning, New Student Orientation, Career Services, Disability Services, Childcare Services, and chairs the college retention task force.

Academic Division Realignment

Also implemented as a method of accommodating future college growth, supervisor responsibility, and increased efficiency, the college's three original academic divisions were reorganized into six. The departments and programs contained by the college's three original divisions, "Communication, Fine Arts and Developmental Studies", "Information Technology, Business and Social Sciences", and "Mathematics, Science, and Engineering" have been reorganized into the following new academic divisions:

1. Division of Language Arts-English, ESL, Reading, and Foreign Languages
2. Division of Math, Science, and Engineering
3. Division of Business and Information Technology
4. Division of Communication, Fine Arts, and Social Sciences
5. Division of Counseling, Health, and Wellness
6. Division of Library and Teaching and Learning Center

Facilities Expansion

Since the 1999 Higher Learning Commission visit, the remainder of funds from a successful bond initiative in 1994 were used to build the Student Enrollment Services (SES) building, to build the existing two-story Technology Center and Computer Commons area, and to re-stucco all of the existing buildings on the main campus. Also, in the fall of 2003, SMCC added a $10 million Performing Arts Center (PAC) to the college main campus. The 43,000 sq. ft. center is divided into three separate buildings: 1) the performance hall which includes a lobby, 350-seat theater, and stage; 2) a building for "back-of-house" functions such as dressing rooms, make-up room, and green room, and 3) a multi-use building housing a 100-seat "black box" theater, 75-seat dance studio, multipurpose classrooms, and faculty/administrative offices. The Performing Arts Center has won national and international architectural awards and acclaim for its innovative design and use of materials.

The 2004 MCCCD $951 million dollar bond initiative was created to fund improvements on or adjacent to existing campuses, as well as to buy land for future development. Using these bond monies, two major land purchases have been made: 5.8 acres ($2,750,000) in Ahwatukee, and 43 acres ($8,016,000) in Laveen.

The fiscal year 2007 brought more expansion: the Life Science Annex, funded through a Title V grant and local tax dollars, was completed for use at the beginning of the Fall 2007 semester. The Desert Skies Telescope Observatory space was added in May 2007, and in conjunction with Northern Arizona University, an additional classroom building was constructed at the northeast corner of the main campus.

In June 2008, using 2004 capital bond funds, nearly 5000 more sq. ft of space along with nearly 1,300 sq. ft. of remodeled space was opened for use at SMCC's Guadalupe Center. The expansion included a new non-lab science classroom, two new general-purpose classrooms, an assessment/tutoring center, a remodeled student services area and improved administrative and faculty office spaces, three outdoor zones for flexible use (including classes); and a community room comprised of two classrooms.

In total, using grant funds, partnerships and funds from the 2004 bond initiative, the following additions, enhancements, and remodeling projects have also been completed since 1999:

- Remodel of the gymnasium to include mold reduction and HVAC improvement
- Complete remodeling of the gymnasium bathroom facilities and Physical Science Building restrooms
- Conversion of several racquetball courts into much needed storage areas
- Remodel of Welcome Center, Administration and Technology Center
- Remodel of Student Services building
- Remodel of Library to include Marketing and Public Relations Department
- Remodel of Library space to accommodate TRIO program administration and student services
- Remodel of Security Department facilities
- Removal of tennis courts to create more adequate parking for Athletics
- Resurfacing athletic track (2007)
- Remodel and expansion of the Central Plant (summer 2009 completion)

Degrees/Certificates/Programs of Study Added Since 1999

South Mountain Community College prides itself on its alignment with state, county, and service area workforce and needs. With healthcare (including fitness training), education, management, engineering, and the IT trades listed among the 50 fastest growing career fields in Arizona and in Maricopa County (Arizona Department of Economic Security), SMCC is clearly positioned to provide substantial opportunities for its constituents to take advantage of these economic opportunities.

Since 1999, the college has added 30 degree and certificate programs, in areas including but not limited to Early Childhood Development (Montessori), Advanced Behavioral Health Sciences, Information Technology, and Small Business/Entrepreneurship.

2002 brought the Bilingual Nursing Fellows Program (BNFP), designed specifically to meet the growing metropolitan need for Spanish speaking nurses. Also developed since the last accreditation visit is the Department of Engineering. Its primary intent is to provide an affordable and academically rigorous introductory Engineering program. The program is focused on the needs of students planning to major in Engineering at a four-year university.

Technology

Since the last HLC visit in 1999, South Mountain Community College and its Technology Department have worked diligently to keep pace with the technological expectations of area workforce trends as well as those of university academia. The following list represents improvements made which significantly impact students, faculty, and staff.

- Built Technology Center (classrooms, publicly accessible Computer Commons, Teaching and Learning Center, faculty offices)
- Implemented Blackboard Course Management System (District-wide)
- Launched new SMCC Public Website

- Extended presentation systems (digital projectors, pad cameras, instructor A/V stations) to 85% of all classrooms
- Deployed pilot VoIP phones
- 2006-2009 begin and complete college wireless access
- Standardized classroom layouts, software, systems and technology
- Deployed PeopleSoft Student Information System rollout
- Added Online Student Orientation
- Initiated Student Advising Sign-in and Tracking System

Criterion 1: Mission and Integrity

South Mountain Community College operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students

Since 2003, and the re-writing of South Mountain Community College's Vision, Mission, and Values Statements, the college has done much to clarify and unify the college in alignment with those statements. These efforts have given the college a stronger foundation, and in so doing, the ability to accommodate the many changes occurring both in its service area and internally.

Successes

- The 2003 revision of college mission statement documents created a much needed basis for current and future college change and growth.
- The revised SMCC Vision/Mission/Values Statements much more clearly articulate the ideals at the heart of the college, particularly that of valuing all types of diversity.
- The college mission continues to place student success and educating the whole student at the core of its mission.
- Publically stating the values held by the college more clearly guides college actions.
- The role of South Mountain Community College continues to be an extremely important one to its constituents as the college continues to provide affordable access to learning opportunities to its diverse populations.
- The college mission statement ideals are strongly supported at all levels of the college.
- In times of crisis, the entire college (administration, faculty, staff, and students) acts in accordance with its positive guiding principles and maintains its highest level of integrity.
- The college maintains high standards of fiscal and legal responsibility.

Challenges

- The values stated by the college mission documents include a statement concerning "excellence in learning"; yet SMCC, like many institutions, is still in process in defining how best to measure learning excellence and how to use those results to inform continuous improvement.

- One aspect of SMCC's mission statement focuses on Developmental Education, and college efforts have been well-intended, but overall MCCCD retention and persistence rates of developmental students fall below national benchmarks. As an institution that has traditionally served underprepared students, SMCC has only recently initiated efforts to improve its results.
- Like any complex organization, SMCC and the district struggle with effective communication strategies among and between levels of its organization. The current level of internal communication is viewed as a challenge by a number of college employees and the college is focusing on ways to improve those lines of communication.
- SMCC's website is evolving and is not yet adequate to meet the needs of its current and potential students. The institution recognizes the importance of improving both its content and navigation, and will be committing resources toward improving this essential communication and marketing tool.

Criterion 2: Preparing for the Future

South Mountain Community College's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

South Mountain Community College has the plans and the processes to ensure that it will respond to future challenges. Well-planned, community-sensitive college expansion, and improved workforce program development are examples of SMCC's efforts to align its goals and priorities with the district goals and with the directly assessed needs of its service area. The college Strategic Enrollment Management process has been recently refined for efficiency and effectiveness. Planning processes have been refined to enable the college to meet its future challenges and attain its long-range goals.

Successes

- Budgeting is closely linked to both the college planning process and its mission.
- Long-range planning allows for flexibility, and planning is evident in most college operations.
- The college is effectively addressing the very real need for facilities growth.
- All levels of SMCC planning are in support of the college mission statement.
- The College Technology Committee has done an excellent job of coordinating, planning, and implementing technology use and innovation within the organization.
- SMCC has made major progress in the areas of evaluation and assessment since the last HLC accreditation visit.
- The Human Resources office is effectively meeting current and future needs, and these resources are well-managed.
- The college has completed multiple reorganizations to better meet its anticipated needs.

Challenges

- A "culture of evidence", and one which plans and bases decisions on that evidence, is in its beginning stages.

Often, there exists a gap between the amount of data collected about those elements that closely concern the college, and the analytical use of that data as information from which to move toward the future.

- While planning at the college level is much improved, department and division-level planning processes are still being refined.
- The MCCCD employee evaluation process (per employee group policy) is not a proactive planning tool and does not link college goals to individual and department goals.
- Student enrollment and recruitment is a concern and will continue to be a challenge given the increased competition from private colleges and universities, and distance learning providers.
- Financial resource development, i.e. institutional advancement, is only in its beginning stages.

Criterion 3: Student Learning and Effective Teaching

South Mountain Community College provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

SMCC provides student learning and effective teaching and fulfills the stated educational mission of the college. SMCC faculty, staff, and resource centers seek to provide the very best for our students.   Our many educational programs strive for excellence, and are improving the ways they assess themselves and their curricula. The Learning Assistance Center is experiencing new tutor certification training, and the director is working to establish supplemental instruction and a genuine Writing Center within the LAC. The Teaching and Learning Center trains our teachers to be more effective ones, and promotes effective distance learning.

Challenges

- Assessment at the course, program, and college level needs to be improved and the General Education Outcomes project and our acceptance to the HLC Assessment Institute will provide opportunities for doing so.
- Though college-wide assessment has been occurring, assessment measures are not yet clearly connected to actual student learning expectations. This is both a district challenge and a college challenge.
- Engaging adjunct faculty in assessment and professional development remains an ongoing challenge. The adjunct faculty orientation, as well as individual department efforts, has provided a start, but the college will have to become more systematic in its efforts.
- In proportion to our high at-risk student population and growing numbers of developmental students, few of our instructors have developmental education training. Our focus on developmental learning and retention should offer some improvement.
- Providing comprehensive learning support services at all sites and locations and for evening and weekend students continues to be a challenge. More online learning and student support tools and resources will provide some alternatives.

Criterion 4: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

South Mountain Community College promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

South Mountain Community College has policies in place that maintain and monitor academic and professional integrity and responsibility. Continued improvement in the areas of program review and attention to specific course curricular review will improve the depth of knowledge students can attain at the college. One concern is that students on the 2007 SMCC CCSSE survey revealed that often curriculum is a) not meeting their intellectual needs, and b) not asking them to go beyond where they have already been academically. Working to create more intellectually challenging expectations in our courses will do much to model our own love of life-long learning.

Successes

- SMCC faculty and staff embrace district and college-offered opportunities for professional growth and development.
- A much improved Program Review process and format has been established which results in effective evaluation of college programs.
- The college and district commit significant resources toward faculty, staff, and student development.
- The college and district provide clear guidelines and policies concerning academic integrity, student privacy, and copyright policy.

Challenges

- Curricula at SMCC must be made more challenging for students.
- There is a growing need for curricular assessment focused on preparing students for a global, diverse society.
- There is more that could be done to publicly honor and recognize faculty, staff and students for their professional and academic achievements
- The college needs to focus on fostering and supporting creativity and innovation in teaching and knowledge acquisition in students.

Criterion 5: Engagement and Service

As called for by its mission, South Mountain Community College identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

For the nearly 30 years of its participation in its surrounding communities, South Mountain Community College has engaged with, and provided excellent services and programs for, its service area constituencies. Through workforce development efforts, the college collaborates with its partners to provide Maricopa County with much-needed bilingual nursing employees,

trained behavioral health professionals, and Early Childhood Education professionals.

Services provided by SMCC Student Services exemplify the Higher Learning Commission's standard for learning from its constituents and responding to them based on that assessment. SMCC Student Services is actively engaged in all levels of college strategic planning, and is dedicated to developing each student as an independent learner.

College community outreach efforts have resulted in increased participation in Dual Enrollment courses, a continually evolving Honors Program, and an extremely successful Storytelling Institute. The college continues to improve and refine its recruitment efforts as well.

The community relationships and connections built by the college are carefully maintained, and have resulted in long-term positive perceptions of the college's presence in its communities. The college communities value its efforts through continued participation in the programs the college offers, and by continuing to be involved in the planning and development of additional programs and services.

Successes

- Increased awareness and involvement from internal and external constituents.
- The inclusion of Workforce Development as a priority in the college strategic planning.
- Multiple partnerships with large external organizations have been created and successfully maintained.
- College workforce development activities are sought after and valued by community leaders.
- Programs, services and staff are all committed to supporting the independent learner.
- Annual inclusion in college strategic planning and the creation of Student Learning Objectives for many Student Services departments.
- Strong communication between SMCC Student Services programs.
- Dual Enrollment has been formalized on both the high school and college sides. The result is an almost doubling in FTSE generated from AY 02-03 to AY 06-07.
- The SMCC Honors Program budget has recently been increased, commensurate with the increase in Honors participants.

Challenges

- The need to assess/evaluate workforce development efforts based on quantitative data, including the compilation, interpretation, and organization of both internal and external constituent feedback.
- The programmatic needs under Workforce Development often are in need of more permanent funding because many of the programs are supported through grants.
- Recruitment of a greater number of instructors who can teach courses requested by businesses.
- The expansion of occupational-related disciplines that can be successfully offered to local businesses.
- Continuing to serve students well while adhering to increasing budget constraints.
- The development of creative solutions to these possible budget constraints.
- The Dual Enrollment program recognizes the need for a more systematic post-participation process, including

the compilation, interpretation, and organization of quantitative feedback data from external and internal constituents.

Reflections on the Self-Study

South Mountain Community College has been engaged in its Higher Learning Commission Self-Study process over the last two years, a process that was both inclusive and thorough. Participation in this study was college-wide and included numerous opportunities for input from the college community and its constituencies. The goals of the self-study, generated early on in the process by the Project Manager group, were largely focused on 1) improving cross-college awareness of strengths and challenges, and on 2) unifying the college through self-study inclusiveness and improved college-wide communication. Through multiple faculty-staff development programs designed to communicate with and include faculty and staff, and through the process of the self-study itself, these two main goals have been achieved. The stated goal of "improved academic assessment and rigor" has been addressed through the college's application and acceptance to the HLC Assessment Academy, and "a clear plan for the college's future" is quickly emerging through more clearly aligned college-wide planning processes.

The self-study report and the supporting materials demonstrate that SMCC meets each of the five criteria for accreditation set by the North Central Association Higher Learning Commission (HLC). In addition to providing sufficient evidence of the college's adherence to its stated mission; its preparation for the future through effective and thorough planning processes and sound resource management; its commitment to quality in teaching and learning and to modeling/valuing lifelong learning; and its capacity and commitment for engaging and serving its constituents and communities, the college has also recognized clear evidence of the four HLC cross-cutting themes inherent in a highly successful educational organization:

Future Oriented

SMCC engages in thorough long and short term planning of fiscal resource use, technology implementation, human resource use, and enrollment management. These planning processes, as well as the college priorities and goals that are developed, are directly connected to the college mission, a mission that specifically states the college will prepare students for their many futures. The college has also proven itself flexible enough to adapt quickly to current economic and environmental trends in its service area while still maintaining its long-term vision of growth and commitment to its diverse communities. SMCC is committed to providing its students with the very best in technological services; these services provide students with the technological tools necessary for their future successes.

Learning Focused

SMCC has long been an organization focused on providing university transfer and life-long learning skills to its students. Though the areas of student learning assessment and strong scholarship (academic rigor) are areas in need of improvement, concrete planning and current actions are taking place to fully meet the academic needs of its students. General Education Outcomes are being developed to more effectively assess student learning; the college Developmental Education Program

is clarifying both its purpose and those essential skills necessary to provide success for its developmental students; and the APRASL Program Review process continues to be refined. The use of data as the basis for improvement has become more institutionalized during the self-study process. Additionally, the college does much to foster and create the capacity for life-long learning of its faculty, staff, and students.

Connected

SMCC, through the specific components of its vision, mission, and values statement strives specifically to serve the "common good" of the greater society. Maintaining strong ties and open two-way communication with all of its communities is foundational to college operations. Multiple collaborations with state universities, local school districts, and industries are evidence the college values connectedness, and the college's presence on many local "village" planning boards provides the college with important community feedback. SMCC is perceived as an integral part of each of the communities it serves, and SMCC students connect at the local, metropolitan, state and national levels through volunteerism, academic efforts, and Student Life and Leadership organizations and affiliations. Though external communication is stronger than it has ever been, connections internal to the college are still evolving. This self-study process has done much to improve overall college connectedness.

Distinctive

Among the ten colleges of MCCCD, SMCC is distinctive in three significant ways:

- its clarity of mission,
- its valuing of the diversity of all of its constituents, and
- its ability to maintain its focus and integrity even as it adapts to the rapidly changing environment
  of its service area.

Though the wording of the SMCC mission has been clarified over the last ten years, the heart of the college's mission has always been to provide an effective link to the university experience and to serve, in a compassionate way, all of the citizens of its communities. This attitude of inclusiveness and respect for its constituencies has fostered the amazing diversity found at "South". Faculty, staff, and students represent many cultures, and evidence of the college's stated values can be found throughout the college environments. Even in these times of significant economic and service area challenges, the college has remained focused on its mission. The use of clear college priorities and goals as the base of all strategic planning has kept the college thriving in tough economic times. The current self-study has inspired the college to be more reflective and to re-commit to improving its programs and services around the motto "Students First."