



**MCCCD AACHE Chapter Statement on Academic
Vision
for the Maricopa Colleges**

February 14, 2006
MCCCD Strategic Conversation
Scottsdale Community College
Maricopa Community College District

Introduction

The exponential growth of the Latino population in the metropolitan Phoenix area is a demographic phenomenon which must be addressed in developing a compelling academic vision for the Maricopa County Community Colleges. Central to this recommendation is the inclusion of the academic perspectives of Latino faculty and staff.

The Maricopa Colleges should reflect the communities they serve. As the fastest growing population, Latino students within the Maricopa Colleges bring opportunities and challenges that can only be addressed through academic planning. A fundamental question which should be answered at this strategic conversation is: How can educational needs of Latino students be improved within the Maricopa Colleges? Within this context, the strategic conversation on academic vision should be receptive and supportive of Latino academic initiatives.

Employment Qualifications

The recruitment of Latino faculty will improve the academic quality of the Maricopa Colleges. Commissioned for thousands dollars, the Pederni report (February 2003) indicated that there are serious problems with the employment practices and lack of a unified recruitment plan within the Maricopa Colleges. This report provided a unified recruitment plan and outlined positive suggestions to improve the climate that have been ignored for years. As a result of not dealing with these problems, we find that the climate has suffered which has a direct impact on the students we serve and to the institution.

Open Admissions

AACHE is strongly opposed to the view that the Maricopa Colleges become selective institutions. Inasmuch as Arizona universities aspire to become competitive with schools like Harvard, Stanford, and Yale, the Maricopa Colleges should remain true to its egalitarian tradition. Because many at-risk students come from low income households, the Maricopa Colleges should continue an open admissions policy. First generation Latino students tend to exhibit a lack of academic readiness and the requisite study skills needed to thrive, succeed, and graduate from college. In many cases, the Maricopa Colleges represents the last hope for Latinos to obtain an education.

Many Latino students are leaving college because they do not feel a direct connection to college life. The Maricopa Colleges should find ways to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Southwest in all facets of the college experience. For instance, private sector businesses have signage in both English and Spanish; the Maricopa Colleges should have select signage in Spanish that sends a welcoming message, which acknowledges the academic orientation of each college.

Academic departments should evolve to affirm the enriching aspects of Mexican and Latino culture. For instances, music departments should offer more classes in Mariachi or ethno music related styles. Dance departments should offer *folklorico* dance. Similarly, art departments should offer courses in Mexican and Latin American art. In short the Maricopa Colleges should embrace the cultural heritage of the Southwest.

Academic Freedom

In recent years professors who teach within the Maricopa Colleges have used the mantle of Academic Freedom to assail Latino students and employees (Carroll, 2006). Recently, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has found instances of systemic discrimination against Latinos who work within the Maricopa Colleges. While a faculty member has the responsibility for student learning, within the framework set forth by the AAUP, a professor does not have the right to assail students and District employees because of their ethnicity. AACHE recommends that MCCCDC faculty embrace and promote civility in the way they communicate and interact with District employees. It is important to underscore the need to build an inclusive learning community where the faculty, administrators, and professional staff celebrate the diversity found in the Southwest. AACHE recommends that MCCCDC reaffirm its commitment to the Maricopa Community Colleges Guiding Principles adopted on June 25, 2002 by the Governing Board, and to the statement of Academic Freedom set forth by the AAUP.

Chicana and Chicano Studies

AACHE supports the establishment of Chicana and Chicano studies at all ten colleges within the Maricopa Colleges. Presently, Arizona State University and the University of Arizona offer course work leading to degrees in Chicana and Chicano Studies. Chicana and Chicano Studies

will prepare students for leadership positions within a professional setting. This academic area should be fully funded.

The focus of this academic program would be to build the analytical and methodological skill set within a public policy context. The courses would explore pre-Columbian cultures of Mexico, the historical forces that shaped the relationship of Mexico and the United States, and contemporary social, political, and economic forces that influence Latinos. Because of the interdisciplinary perspective of the academic area, students would receive instruction in the humanities, social sciences, and English composition.

Chicana and Chicano Studies could lead to enhanced recruitment and retention efforts of Latino students. MEChA students at GCC are currently working with the administration to establish this academic course of study.

Expand MI/LfU District-wide

The Multiple Intelligences/Learning for Understanding (MI/LfU) faculty initiative at Glendale Community College recently received national recognition by National Council of Instructional Administrations (NCIA) as a first place winner in the category of “Assessment of Student Learning.” Created and developed by GCC psychology professor Dr. René Díaz—Lefebvre, in a 1994-96 experimental pilot study, the MI/LfU approach to imaginative learning and creative teaching and assessment for understanding, is based on Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory. The time has come for MI/LfU to migrate to the other colleges within the Maricopa Colleges.

Within the context of assisting Latino students experience success in an academic setting, MI/LfU is aligned with MCCCDC commitment to open access and the challenge of serving an increasing number of developmental students. Focusing on deep learning, MI/LfU was created to foster understanding of academic content. This instructional approach encourages critical thinking as central to the learning process.

MI/LfU has been integrated into the following academic areas: art, psychology, biology, chemistry, mathematics, education, communications, nursing, Spanish, music, and English. Students are challenged to become active learners. Because “a performance of

understanding” is a public event, students work hard at ensuring that their presentation is college level work.

Academic assessment is based on promoting a of culture evidence. A five-criteria grading rubric assesses student performance and understanding in: 1) creativity/imagination; 2) demonstration/performance; 3) organization/format; 4) reflection/ meta cognition, and 5) evidence of understanding.

Student retention and satisfaction are important benefits of the MI/LfU instructional approach. Significant quantitative and qualitative data have been collected, analyzed, and peer reviewed; the results suggest support for curriculum change and a paradigm shift toward institutionalizing MI/LfU.

Developmental Studies

For various reasons, a large number of Latino students, who attend the Maricopa Colleges, never completed their high school studies. In many cases, the Maricopa Colleges represent the last chance to obtain an educational foundation for these students. These students score at the bottom in English, mathematics, and reading. Yet they are able to continue their educational studies with institutional support and encouragement. The Maricopa Colleges has the obligation to fully support developmental education in order for at-risk students to be competitive in the job market and move up to academic/transfer programs. The influx of Latino students whose primary language is Spanish necessitates the offering of ESL classes at all MCCCDC colleges. Recent research strongly suggests that Latino role models have long term salutary effect on students. In this respect, MCLI could sponsor symposia that address the learning barriers of Latinos and other underserved student populations.

Evolution into Baccalaureate-Granting Colleges

The Maricopa Colleges are known for outstanding academic programs, which parallel course work taught at Arizona universities. In recent years, tuition costs to attend Arizona universities continue to spiral upward. As a result obtaining a university education is becoming prohibitive for students from low-income families. The population growth of metropolitan Phoenix has placed a strain on Arizona State

University. Academic planning should begin to examine how two-year colleges can be transformed into four-year baccalaureate-granting institutions. The Arizona legislature is exploring ways to enact legislation granting select community colleges statutory standing in order to offer four-year degrees. The Latino professoriate must be involved in the exploration, planning, and implementation of 4-year degree programs. Certainly, Chicana and Chicano Studies should be offered as a four-year degree program.

Institutional Memberships

The success of Latino students in academic programs within the Maricopa Colleges is advanced through professional organizations. It is recommended that all the Maricopa Colleges join the Arizona Association of Chicanos for Higher Education (AACHE) as institutional members. AACHE is committed to providing student scholarships and sponsorship of student organizations aligned with its institutional mission. With the growing interest in Chicana and Chicano studies, the Maricopa Colleges should have membership in The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS). This organization sponsors scholarly symposia and research opportunities. Moreover, MCCCDC should also explore membership in the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA), and the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), which provide many educational opportunities to Latino students.

Conclusion

This policy statement explored how the Maricopa Colleges could address equity within academic areas. Any fruitful conversation must be open to the voices of underserved communities. The richness of Mexican and indigenous cultures should be interwoven into the fabric of the Maricopa Colleges. Employment practices in relation to Latino employees continue to be problematic. In serving the public interest, the Maricopa Colleges must eliminate the institutional barriers that impede the academic achievement of Latino students.