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Estrella Community College comes to Wickenburg

by [Lesley Wright](#) - Dec. 27, 2008 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Twice a week, Estrella Mountain Community [College](#) instructor Michael Maguire gets in his car and drives for more than an hour to the small tourist town of Wickenburg.

Behind the faux Western storefronts lurks a modern need, one that Estrella is trying to address in a computer-filled classroom at Wickenburg High School.

After years of requiring students to haul themselves down to the Valley for even basic higher education, Estrella has come to Wickenburg for a pilot semester.

For Rose Rivera, a 53-year-old mother of three, driving to Estrella's campus in Avondale was out of the question.

The Wickenburg resident used to hold several jobs before landing a full-time position as a teacher's aide at Wickenburg Academy. Hoping to advance to an administrative position, she became one of the five students in Maguire's computer class.

"I hope eventually to be more employable," Rivera said.

She faces the same restraints of time and pressure as other adults pursuing [continuing education](#). It's a far cry from her experience as a college student 30 years ago.

"Being on my own then, it was different," Rivera said. "Now, I have a house. Now, I'm more limited."

Maguire is familiar with teaching the mixed-generation CIS 105 (computer information systems) class, with students ranging from 18 to 71 years old.

"The younger ones are bored unless they're playing games," Maguire said. "They're distracted. The older ones don't always have the energy."

Student Matthew Mallicoat, 18, backed this up when he breezed into the classroom nearly an hour early.

"It's too easy," said Mallicoat, who had found a tiny ad for the class in the [Wickenburg](#) paper. "It's way too easy."

And for his older classmates?

"It's way too hard," he said.

Still, the older students tend to have realistic goals, Maguire added. Excel, MSWord and Microsoft Office might be daunting in the classroom, but longtime workers know what today's jobs require.

Carol Arnett, 71, signed on for the class so she could use the computer in her role as president of Wickenburg's Friends of Music group.

E-mail, programs and schedules had to be mastered. Everything she needed to know was in the class textbook - *GO! Technology in Action* - along with a lot of other stuff.

"My middle name is frustration," said Arnett, a retired schoolteacher. "But I need this

information."

Although the class is helpful, she added, "I'll be happier when it's done."

Despite the challenges of learning, the town wants this access to higher education.

The Wickenburg Chamber of Commerce has been working the educational circuit on behalf of residents and employers for 20 years.

"From Day One, we have advocated college classes either here or to be able to have dual enrollment at the high school," said Julie Brooks, chamber president.

Rio Salado [College was](#) in the town for a few years in the late 1980s, but then it was overtaken by the booming population in the Valley.

"We didn't give up," Brooks said. "Finally, Estrella Mountain has been very good to assist us in serving our community with college classes."

Wickenburg now has about 10,000 residents, but Brooks projects a population close to 30,000 within 10 years and hopes a college campus soon will follow.

The current class almost was canceled when few students registered, but Estrella administrators said they are doing more to advertise and hope that the word will spread.

"Estrella Mountain doesn't usually allow classes this small," Maguire said, "but they wanted to give this class a chance."

The college soon may offer similar [classes](#) in Buckeye.

"We're hoping to offer education where the students are," said Laura Schellenberger, Estrella's dean of student affairs. "The folks in Wickenburg were interested."

"It was kind of a mutual need. We are trying to do whatever we can to reach out to the communities," she said.

Rivera and others said that they are recommending the class, and Maguire said that access to [technology education](#) is vital in every region of Arizona.

"In a computer age, it will hold you back not having computer skills," Maguire said. "There is almost no work that is not related to computers."

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Deirdre Hamill/The Arizona Republic

Wickenburg resident Rose Rivera, 53, who is returning to college after 30 years, takes a computer course, hoping the continuing education will help her advance in her career.



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