



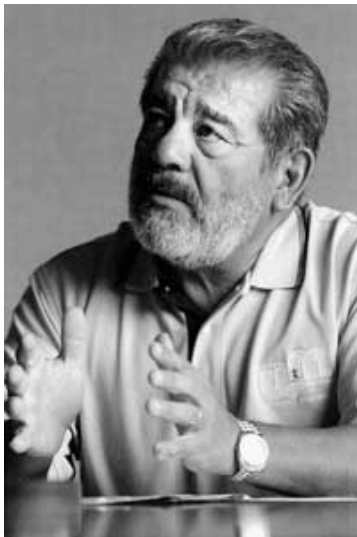
West Valley VIEW

The community newspaper of Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear, Litchfield Park & Tolleson, AZ
Phone (623) 535-8439

Friday, August 22, 2008

Grant helps EMCC focus on student success

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Estrella Mountain Community College is striving to ensure student success, and a federal grant recently awarded to the Avondale institution will aid in those efforts, college officials said.

The U.S. Department of Education issued a \$2.8 million Title V grant to EMCC, which college President Ernie Lara said will help the school become more of a "Learning College."

The Learning College initiative was engendered by the League for Innovation, an international consortium of community colleges that come together for the sharing of best practices, Lara said.

"What a Learning College does is it really provides a structure and framework for us to go back and focus our greatest resources, which is people - our staff, faculty, employees - to ask the one basic question: What are you doing to contribute to the students' learning?" said Lara, who's been at the helm of EMCC for one year.

As a Learning College, "everything we're doing, all the decisions we're making, are really focused on student success. It's all about students and how we can improve their opportunities to succeed," he said.

Objectives to meet

Lara said EMCC has devised four objectives to help it better fit into the Learning College mold.

One objective is building student preparedness and development.

"What that really means is our students are prepared to be successful," Lara said.

Through proper assessments, remedial work and helping students identify their future goals, students are more likely to do well in school and in life, he said.

Another objective for the college is to increase student engagement.

ERNIE LARA, PRESIDENT of Estrella Mountain Community College, speaks about the importance of putting students first in an academic environment. EMCC was recently awarded a \$2.8 million federal grant, which college officials say should aid in student success.

"Students who are engaged in the institution are successful. We want to provide all the opportunities we can. One of the ways we can do that is to enhance our communication infrastructure," Lara said, referring to the development of a new portal and e-mail system, supplemental instruction and promoting student government.

Another objective to assist EMCC in its journey to become a Learning College is to transform campus climate and culture.

"We want to make sure all of our employees, everybody, is on the same page as to what student success, student learning is all about," Lara said.

He said EMCC hopes to bring in consultants to make sure the institution is on track to reaching its Learning College goal.

Additionally, the college is working to engage students in the process of developing learning opportunities, he said.

The fourth objective for EMCC in its Learning College endeavor is to grow and align endowment support.

The \$2.8 million allocation includes a \$375,000 non-federal endowment match, college officials said. To fully maximize the match, the college must raise a minimum of \$75,000 per year during the next five years.

If EMCC is capable of matching those funds through fundraising efforts, the total value of the grant will then be approximately \$3.2 million. Thus, the college will then have more money for scholarships, Lara said.

"As this endowment increases, we will be able to continue to offer scholarships, and so by offering scholarships, we're actually providing access for students wanting to come here," he said.

Benefiting all

The Title V grant received by EMCC is available to Hispanic-serving institutions and is one of the largest grants the Department of Education makes to colleges and universities, said Carol Hale, grants director for the Maricopa Community College District, of which EMCC is a part of.

"But it doesn't mean it's a program to serve only Hispanic students," she said. "This is a capacity-building grant that's meant to strengthen the college itself."

A college or university must have a 25 percent Hispanic enrollment to qualify for the grant. EMCC, a campus of about 13,000 students annually, has a 38 percent Hispanic enrollment, Lara said.

"The grant will really hopefully benefit all students, and being that Hispanic students are here, they're also going to benefit. It's really targeted at helping all students," he said.

For information, visit www.estrellamountain.edu.

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