



West Valley VIEW

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

Tuesday, August 25, 2009

Hitting the books

Estrella Mtn. Community College enrollment soars as semester starts

Tuesday, August 25, 2009



ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN
Community College students head to class Saturday. The college has experienced a 16 percent increase in students this year.

Will work for education

The economic impact at the college is two-fold. The students are returning in droves to be educated for more promising careers; however, their budgets are tighter, making it difficult to pay for courses.

"More students are seeking assistance," Shellenbarger said. "The numbers are definitely much higher than ever before."

As tuition is on the rise at state universities, students have turned to the Maricopa Community College District as a lower-cost option.

"I'm sure there are students who were going to go to universities and don't have the funds in this economy," Shellenbarger said.

It seems the hottest place to be this week isn't a new restaurant or concert venue in the West Valley.

Strap on your backpack, sharpen your pencils - the local hot spot is Estrella Mountain Community College.

"It's wildly crazy!" said Lauren Shellenbarger, dean of student services at the college.

Enrollment and advisement lines remained steady in the weeks leading up to the start of the semester.

"We are 16.1 percent higher in head counts this year than we were this time last year," Shellenbarger said. "People are coming back to be recareered."

As many people face layoffs, they are returning to the community college to begin new career paths or get additional education in their own field.

"Our general studies classes are filling very quickly. We've had to add sections," Shellenbarger said. "At our Skills Center, the medical programs are bursting at the seams. And quite a few of our culinary courses are completely full."

Keeping up with the demand has kept college administration on its toes. One thing that is helping the college handle the influx of students is the use of satellite locations. Buckeye Union High School and Estrella Foothills High School offer evening college courses.

"We have also expanded our classroom days," Shellenbarger said. "We have more afternoon and early evening classes, and people are enrolling in them. We've been doing everything we can to accommodate the increase."

With the average class costing about \$300 for tuition, many still need financial help.

"According to our latest available information, Estrella Mountain Community College has received 89 percent more financial aid applications than the previous year," said Rosanna Short, Estrella Mountain Community College director of financial aid.

The college, at Dysart and Thomas roads in Avondale, continues to do everything possible to take in everyone seeking an education, Shellenbarger said.

"There has also been a 19 percent increase in students receiving benefits from the GI Bill," Short added.

Last year, 65 percent of EMCC's students were younger than 24. The statistics are not yet compiled for this year. Shellenbarger said she thinks the 6,347-student population may be even more diverse this year.

"We love it," she said. "We want everybody to come to school and be successful."

Beth Kristin Ott can be reached by e-mail at bott@westvalleyview.com.

Related Links

Content © 2009 West Valley View
Software © 1998-2009 **Iup! Software**, All Rights Reserved