

College class helps cities retain businesses

by [Eddi Trevizo](#) - Feb. 17, 2010 03:49 PM
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Students at Estrella Mountain Community College are helping cities retain businesses through an internship program that 200 businesses in Goodyear, Avondale, Litchfield Park and Tolleson. The business retention internship gives students two semesters to learn about economic development, develop a survey that identifies problems that could hinder a business, conduct interviews and present the findings to cities.

"We ask questions about the business facilities, turnover rate and the number of employees," said Surprise resident Otis Alexander, 47, a student enrolled in the course. The aspiring chief financial officer thinks face to face with businesses and conducting survey services will help his career.

EMCC funds the program and students are paid \$9 an hour for the three-credit course, said Landis Elliott, community liaison for the Avondale .

The internship was proposed by a Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce committee, which identified a need for a retention survey while saving money on the interviewing process. The Business Retention and Tourism Support committee will meet with students and cities for a presentation on survey results and the business climate and labor force in the .

"It's challenging for chambers to put together a program like this in this economy," chamber President Sharolyn

Hohman said.

Students met with professionals at businesses such as Corp. and Wilhelm Automotive, which have a presence in the Southwest Valley, to conduct mock interviews before conducting the survey. Fifty businesses in each of the four cities were selected to be interviewed.

Next, business owners and students will meet to discuss and answer questions before presenting survey results to the cities and the chamber sometime in April.

"It's been a great experience," said Mackenzie Brown, 18, a Wickenburg resident majoring in . "We were told this was an experimental class, but I think it will really benefit the cities."

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