

Avondale Estrella Mountain Community College's enrollment up 13 percent

by [Megan Gordon](#) - Sept. 17, 2010 10:57 AM
The Arizona Republic

Estrella Mountain

Community College's enrollment has seen double-digit increases this year.

Overall enrollment is up by 13 percent with the largest increases in social work, nursing and culinary programs, said Carissa Pool, marketing and public relations coordinator.

Culinary class at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale

Dean of Students Lauren Shellenbarger said although anecdotal, much of the growth is a result of the sluggish economy.

Arizona's unemployment rate

was 9.6 percent in July, slightly higher than national rate of 9.5 percent.

Shellenbarger said many Estrella students were laid off and are now "re-careering," because they can't find jobs.

The school has also seen a large increase in traditional students, who attend Estrella right after high school graduation, she said. Many choose the local community college rather than a university because of the lower

tuition costs and the ability to live at home, Shellenbarger added.

Culinary student Michael Robles, 18, who graduated from Willow Canyon High School in Surprise in May, said he was impressed by the culinary teacher's workplace experience and that Estrella, 3000 N. Dysart Road in Avondale, is close to home.

"I think the fact that (Estrella) has a restaurant for students is a big help," he said, referring to Region's, Estrella's student-run restaurant which serves three-course meals twice a week. "We can get all of our experience here, without even having a job."

Estrella opened in 1992, spending five years as a branch of Glendale Community College. In the spring 1997, the Southwest Valley college received its accreditation and welcomed 2,670 students to its campus. Over the past 13 years, that number has increased to 7,550 students.

Maricopa Community Colleges are seeing a 10 percent enrollment gain for 2010-11. More than 106,000 students have enrolled for at least one class, compared with about

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97,000 last school year.

Estrella Mountain, Rio Salado, South Mountain and Chandler-Gilbert community colleges are leading the way with double-digit percentage increases.

"We are open, and we are just accommodating as best we can to meet the needs of the community and the students are coming in," Shellenbarger said. "We keep our class sizes fairly small . . . and we would open another section (if enrollment surpassed) 32 students per class."

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