

{ 2006 EXAMPLE OF EXCELENCIA – ASSOCIATE LEVEL }

## ACHIEVING A COLLEGE EDUCATION (ACE) PROGRAMS MARICOPA COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGES, ARIZONA

### *Clearing the Pathway for Latino Students from High School to College to University*

**W**ITH A POPULATION THAT HAS GROWN 50 PERCENT OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS AND IS EXPECTED TO INCREASE BY AN ADDITIONAL 8 MILLION PEOPLE BY 2015, ARIZONA IS THE SECOND FASTEST GROWING STATE IN THE COUNTRY. GROWTH IN THE HISPANIC POPULATION IS DRIVING THE CURRENT POPULATION BOOM. FROM 1990 TO 2000, THE HISPANIC POPULATION IN ARIZONA NEARLY DOUBLED FROM 700,000 TO 1.3 MILLION. FROM 2000 TO 2004, THE HISPANIC POPULATION IN ARIZONA GREW 22 PERCENT (1.5 MILLION), AND IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE ITS GROWTH. (AZ Human Capital: Latino Students and Their Families, *Excelexia*, April 2006)

Arizona traditionally has had one of the nation's highest high school dropout rates and one of the lowest college enrollment rates in the nation. By the end of the most recent academic year (2004-05), 21,956 Arizona high school students had dropped out. Of that number, 12,429 were from Maricopa County alone.

The Maricopa **Achieving a College Education (ACE)** programs were created to address the collective concerns of the community regarding the dire state of high school graduation and college enrollment rates for Latino students and all students. ACE is designed as a concurrent high school/college enrollment scholarship program that targets "at risk" students, who generally do not consider attending college.

ACE has three goals that link the K-20 educational pipeline, creating a partnership pathway from high school, through community college, and on to university. These goals are increasing the number of students graduating from high school, continuing in college, and earning a degree or certificate.

From its inception almost 20 years ago through 2005, ACE has served 6,133 students and almost 60 percent of them have been Latino. This ability to reach and serve Latino students has been a hallmark of ACE's programs.

A Ford Foundation-sponsored study found nine essential elements that make the ACE programs a success with students and parents:

- 1) the creation of student cohort groups,
- 2) a focus on at-risk students,
- 3) high academic standards,
- 4) a non-threatening environment
- 5) continuous contact with students,

- 6) family involvement,
- 7) strong collaboration between institutions,
- 8) long overlap of transition points, and
- 9) scholarships and financial aid information.

Success of ACE participants as of 2002		
	High school graduation rates	College enrollment rates
ACE Participants	88-96%	83%
U.S. Average	74%	67%

Source: ACE program, and U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education, 2006*

As of 2002, 88-96 percent of participants had graduated from high school, and 83 percent of ACE graduates had enrolled in college. ACE graduates outperform the general Maricopa Community Colleges student population. The average ACE graduate's college grade point average (GPA) is 3.1 while the general Maricopa student population average GPA is 2.81.

Higher Education Credential Earned to Date			
Certificate	Associate Degree	Bachelor Degree	Master's degree or more
124	165	151	3

Source: *Achieving a College Education programs, Maricopa Community College District*

ACE director Stella Torres is proud that the program has always assumed that all students have potential, "despite what they may have been told [in high school] regarding their chances of going to college." She credits students for being "the real achievers," and ACE provides the "nudging factor, the gentle push toward the door we've opened." "We treat them like college students," she says, "and they rise to the occasion."

ACE's program outcomes confirm that college is a viable option if students are given the opportunity, have access to a strong academic program, and receive adequate information and financial support. Moreover ACE's program outcomes demonstrate the power of institutional commitment to efforts that address Latino student success. This dedicated effort to unlock the potential of Latino students and other young people and to support their highest academic aspirations makes the ACE Program at the Maricopa Community Colleges in Arizona the 2006 Example of *Excelexia*—Associate Level.