



Estrella Mountain's National Student Engagement Survey, Resulting in Improved Student Success

Dr. Homero Lopez

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) sheds light on student engagement and other strategies that impact student success. CCSSE is administered in randomly selected classes and focuses on teaching, learning and retention, providing a much-needed tool for assessing quality in community college education. Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC), one of ten colleges in the Maricopa County Community College District of Arizona, has participated twice in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. The first administration occurred in spring 2004 and the second in spring 2006.

CCSSE allows for colleges with common interests to form a consortium. As a participant in this national survey, Estrella Mountain helped form the inaugural, 15 member Consortium of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) and Hispanic Association of Colleges and University (HACU). This consortium continues today with new and continuing members. With more than 50% of all Hispanic students enrolled in Hispanic serving institutions and with twice as many Hispanic students enrolled in community and technical colleges as compared to four-year institutions, the HSI/HACU CCSSE consortium supports educational practices that promote student learning in these colleges. Participation in the consortium allows for member institutions to add up to twenty additional questions that are uniquely tailored to the needs of the consortium. The consortium also provides a separate benchmark for the member institutions in addition to the national benchmark scores.

Dr. Homero Lopez, President of Estrella Mountain Community College, (www.estrellamountain.edu) believes the CCSSE assessment tool can serve as a strong motivator for improvement. "One of the key reasons we chose to use CCSSE is that the authentic nature of the survey questions directly evaluates the learning environment. The questions encourage faculty and staff to focus on the most critical elements of student engagement as part of the teaching and learning process."

A Survey of Best Practices

Abriendo Puertas is a series of abstracts published by NCCHC for the express purpose of surveying best practices for student success and professional development of future leaders.

In this issue, the author discusses ways to reach out to a substantial immigrant population in order to benefit individual students as well as the larger community to which we all belong.



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Published twice a year



Affiliated with
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Dr. Homero López brings 32 years of higher education experience to his role as president of Estrella Mountain Community College. With accomplishments as an instructional and administrative leader, he has developed expertise in every facet of college leadership. Appointed Provost in 1988, and then founding President, Dr. Lopez has built Estrella Mountain into a nationally recognized leader within the Maricopa Community College District (AZ).

Since 1987 he has served as a consultant-evaluator for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and was appointed to the American Association of Community Colleges Commission on Academic, Student and Community Development. In 2005, he began service on the National Advisory Board for the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) Board and the National Community College Hispanic Council (NCCHC).

He has been recognized locally and nationally as a visionary leader and has received such awards as the West Valley Arts Council, Champion of the Arts and is considered one of Laredo Community College's (TX) Top 50 Distinguished Alumni. In 2000, he was recognized as a "Distinguished Graduate of the Community College Leadership Program and the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.

Dr. López is a committed community member and continues to serve on several boards, including the Banner Estrella Hospital Senior Cabinet and the Maricopa Community College Foundation Board.

...Survey Leads to Improved Student Success

Soon after Estrella Mountain received its first CCSSE results in the summer of 2004, the college implemented an improvement program. The first step was to include student engagement in the college-wide assessment process. Student engagement is now an Estrella Mountain Core Indicator of Effectiveness for Student Success. In less than a year, Estrella Mountain conducted three improvement sessions with students, faculty and staff; discussed the implications of CCSSE at the annual strategic planning retreat, and identified five improvement strategies for increasing student engagement.

The improvement strategies include: developing a freshmen institute (with learning communities), improving publicity of workshops and services available to students (through the use of electronic kiosks), developing student life activities to increase contact with faculty in non-academic settings, creating facilities to improve adjunct faculty interaction with students, and integrating student support services into the course curriculum. These strategies were identified by students, faculty and staff and are currently being implemented. The college also elevated the concept of student engagement to an Institutional Priority in the Estrella Mountain Strategic Plan. This step will ensure that the Estrella Mountain continues to build a strong environment for student success over the long-term.

With the 2006 administration, Estrella Mountain Faculty also had an opportunity to share their opinions about student engagement by participating in the *Community College Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (CCFSSE)*. "Contrasting faculty and student perception serves as an excellent catalyst to continue campus discussions on student engagement, retention and the ultimate success of our students," commented René Guerra Willekens, Dean of Planning, Research and Effectiveness

Estrella Mountain eagerly awaits the results of its spring 2006 administration of CCSSE to be published in the summer of 2006. The second administration of the survey will provide comparative results to help determine if the recently implemented improvement strategies have resulted in higher levels of student involvement in the learning process. For more information on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement go to www.ccsse.org.