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Maricopa County Community Colleges to add 360 jobs to aid student retention

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By Mary Beth Faller
The Republic | azcentral.com
Sun Sep 15, 2013 10:25 PM

The Maricopa County Community College District will hire about 360 new full-time faculty members over the next several years as a way to keep students from dropping out.

About 60 percent of classes are taught by part-time, or adjunct, faculty and 40 percent by full-time faculty. The colleges want to flip that ratio and have more residential faculty who can spend more time engaged with students.

"We want to focus on outcomes, and that happens in the classroom," said Rufus Glasper, chancellor of the 10-college district.

"We're going to focus on the fact that faculty are going to be asked to not only teach students but to help us understand a better pattern of success," he said. "We'll be asking faculty to do more in terms of advisement and more things with clubs — to actually be on campus more and be around more of our students."

The percentage of part-time faculty in the system grew over the last several years, mainly because of the economy. During the recession, enrollment surged by more than 33,000 students as laid-off workers went back to school and high-school graduates chose the more inexpensive community colleges over universities.

At the same time, state funding plummeted, and the district's budget shrank as a result. That led to the colleges hiring more part-time teachers, who don't receive benefits, and leaving many full-time faculty positions open. With the economy slowly recovering, the student head count has dropped by about 15,000 from the peak of about 242,000 in 2010-11.

The swell in community-college students nationwide, as well as interest by President Barack Obama, put a focus on the traditionally low rates of completion at two-year institutions. At the Maricopa Community Colleges, the graduation rate was 20 percent, according to the most recent statistics.

In 2010, the district committed to increasing the number of graduates and students who successfully attain a professional certificate or transfer to a university.

Glasper said that filling all 360 full-time positions will take five years or more and will be funded at least partially by money saved by hiring fewer adjuncts.

This year, 32 full-time faculty positions were added across the district, which cost about \$2.3 million. However, because the budget was not approved until June, the professors in those positions this year have a one-year contract while the colleges conduct a search before filling the jobs permanently.

This past spring, the district raised tuition and the county property tax. Part of the revenue was used for the hires.

The district has about 1,470 full-time faculty positions and about 6,800 adjunct positions this year.

Each college will determine what it needs, but Glasper said the positions might be filled by looking at the district as a whole, hiring for programs that most urgently need professors.

Barry Vaughan, a philosophy professor at Mesa Community College and spokesman for the Maricopa County Community Colleges Faculty Association, said that many studies have found higher graduation and retention rates for students when colleges have more full-time faculty, and lower rates with more part-time faculty.

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"If our goal is student success, we have to have a maximum number of full-time faculty," he said.

The Adjunct Faculty Association supports the plan. One reason is that a recent survey showed that about 46 percent of the part-timers would like to be hired as residential faculty.

Lysia Hand, president of the association, said adjuncts work as hard as full-time faculty.

"Many adjuncts have been in the district a long time, and they're seasoned and know the system," she said. "They're aware of student success and go to all the training."

But another pool of adjuncts are professionals who cycle in and out of the system, she said, teaching and moving on.

"That's where you have the risks," she said.

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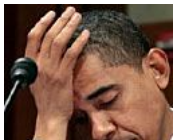
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