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# East Valley community colleges embrace new local 4-year options

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Posted: Wednesday, September 25, 2013 5:12 am

By Jessica Boehm, Special to Tribune | 1 comment



[Tim Hacker/ Tribune]

When Andrew Kuhn was in the process of deciding where to transfer after his time at Mesa Community College, he had the well-know Arizona options: Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University or University of Arizona.

But you won't see Andrew trying his hand in Tempe, Flagstaff or Tucson this semester. Instead, he will be at the Mesa campus of Westminster College, one of the five new four-year colleges in downtown Mesa.

Ever since Mayor Scott Smith began to invite new colleges to consider Mesa as a campus, MCC has helped evaluate the suitability of each school for Mesa, said Shouan Pan, president of MCC.

The goal from the beginning was for MCC and the new colleges to work together to create a seamless educational experience, Smith said.

"This was all about creating new opportunities for our residents and it's nice to know that a student at MCC has three great state universities they can choose from and they also now have very, very well-established and

## Mesa Community College

Students walk between classes on the Mesa Community College campus, Friday, Sept. 6, 2013 in Mesa. [Tim Hacker/ Tribune]

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reputable private liberal arts colleges right here in Mesa they can also choose from," Smith said.

Pan said that beyond MCC, some of the new colleges are embracing the presence of Chandler-Gilbert Community and the rest of the Maricopa County Community College District's 10 Valley-area campuses.

"These five new institutions, although they are here in the City of Mesa, really can tap into all 10 [Maricopa Community] Colleges, particularly the community colleges in the East Valley.

Pan said the addition of these new colleges will give local students additional options if they are looking for a smaller campus environment or a school with a religious affiliation.

The possible connection between the region's community colleges and the new Mesa schools help "expand educational options to students and to families within Mesa, within the East Valley," Pan said. "This is not so much about MCC, it's about supporting the mayor's vision, the city's goal."



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Kuhn, who was the student body president during his time at MCC, is one of six former-MCC students in Westminster's first class, which has a total of 24 students. The more personal learning environment and the available resources for his transnational studies major were the main motivations behind his decision, he said.

"I'm from a small town, small high school classes, so ASU wasn't really ever an attractive option for me," Kuhn said.

He said he attended and helped plan a transfer fair for MCC which is one of the tools the school provides to students to help with their transfer decision-making process.

Along with the three in-state universities, MCC also included the new Mesa colleges and other small colleges from other states.

Hillarie Price, regional director of enrollment services at Westminster College, said Westminster has reached out to MCC's student government and Phi Beta Kappa organization to try to attract student leaders like Kuhn.

"When you're used to being somebody on campus, it's kind of hard just to go and just be another face in the sea so at Westminster they don't have to do that," Price said. "They can jump right into leadership roles here as they did and were actively involved in at MCC and now they're able to get into those positions right away at Westminster."

Pan said beyond being an additional opportunity for MCC students, the addition of the new colleges will also motivate positive change at the community college level.

"We all talk about competition but I think it's in some ways the presence of these five institutions may also prompt us to look at our offerings," Pan said. "How do we offer a quality education that is a Mesa Community College brand, that is distinct from other institutions?"

He said some of the new colleges are starting to work out transfer agreements with the Maricopa Community Colleges to make it easier for students to transition.

"This can only benefit the families in the community," Pan said. "In fact, in my mind, it will increase and expand intellectual capital for Mesa and the East Valley."

Jessica, a junior studying journalism at ASU's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, is an intern with the Tribune this semester. She can be reached at tribintern@evtrib.com or (480) 898-6548.

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