

MCC losing students; Red Mountain campus at risk



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(Photo: David Kadlubowski/The Republic)

Steep, relentless enrollment decline at Mesa Community College could force the dramatic downsizing or even closure of its Red Mountain campus, a 100-acre architectural jewel opened less than 15 years ago.

Full-time enrollment at MCC has dropped by nearly a quarter since the 2010-11 school year and by more than a third at the Red Mountain campus specifically, according to an MCC report. Factor in widespread budget pressure at the Maricopa County Community College District level, and things aren't looking good.

"The realities, the landscape, are changing for us," MCC President Shouan Pan said at a November public meeting. "Right now, Mesa Community College's budget is such that we cannot continue to operate all sites as

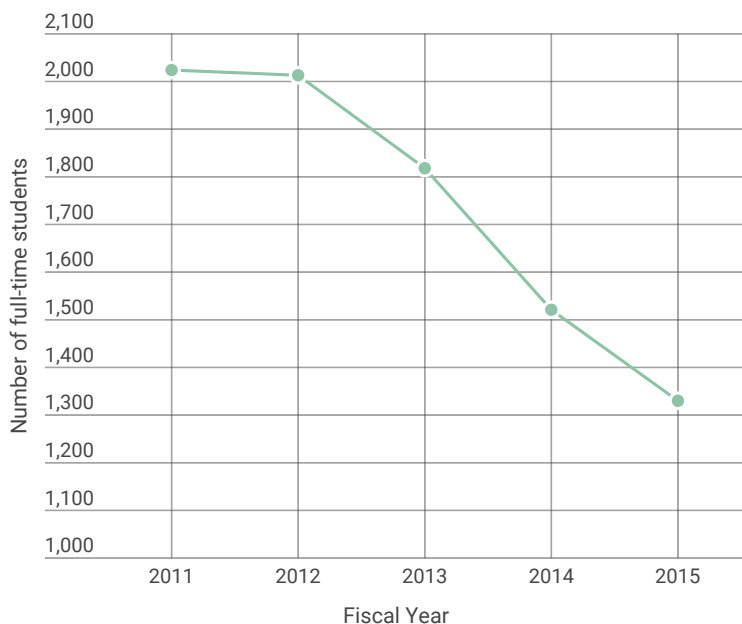
is today.

"We are down every year on many, many, many points," he said. "We need to look at ways (to) sustain this campus and develop 'what if' plans."

A task force Pan assembled to do just that cited a decline in high-school graduates and increased competition from other schools such as Grand Canyon University as factors contributing to the enrollment slump. It developed a "last resort" closure plan for the campus, which could be triggered as early as September 2016 if enrollment continues its downward spiral.

It also outlined a more imminent plan involving the conversion of Red Mountain from a campus to an instructional site. Under that proposal, which could be implemented in January, MCC would consolidate administrative and enrollment services at MCC's original Southern and Dobson campus.

Red Mountain enrollment



Red Mountain campus

Enrollment of full-time (or full-time-equivalent) students has been dropping at Mesa Community College -- particularly at its Red Mountain campus -- after peaking during the 2010-11 school year. If the decline continues, it could force the dramatic downsizing or even closure of Red Mountain, a 100-acre architectural jewel opened less than 15 years

Red Mountain, a 100-acre architectural jewel opened less than 10 years ago.

Nationally, enrollment at two-year colleges dropped 6 percent in 2014, with a 15 percent loss in "nontraditional" students.

Source: MCC.

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Red Mountain enrollment (https://infogr.am/red_mountain_enrollment)



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Mesa leaders outraged over MCC 'rebranding' plan

(<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/mesa/education/2015/11/06/mesa-leaders-outraged-over-mcc-rebranding-plan/74766380/>)

Red Mountain's most recent adopted budget was about \$7 million. Closing the campus would save about \$5.5 million, while converting it would save about \$1.5 million.

In all situations, MCC would attempt to keep Red Mountain's faculty and staff on the payroll by moving them to the Southern and Dobson campus.

Pan stressed that the plans are "merely a simulation" at this point and require further review from district officials and the community. Faculty members, however, are already preparing for the worst, lamenting the possible loss of what they've deemed the most beautiful and cutting-edge campus in the system.



AZCENTRAL

Mesa Community College unveils Performing Arts Center

(<http://www.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/arts/2014/10/22/mesa-community-college-performing-arts-center/17731745/>)

Red Mountain opened in 2001 near Power and McKellips roads with the help of millions in voter-approved bond funding. Tucked away in the Sonoran Desert, its 100 acres are home to saguaro cacti and other native plants, plus roadrunners, quail, cottontails and coyotes.

The campus has outdoor lab and instruction space, and classes weave sustainability and environmental issues into their curriculum. Its buildings, too, attempt to "bring the outdoors in," and their designs have garnered recognition nationwide.

"It just seems like a real shame to let something like that go 15 years into it. Amazing facilities don't happen overnight," said Andrew Holycross, a biology professor who has worked at Red Mountain for nine years. "It's a brand-new campus. We are a lot more effective in terms of the dollars we get for the number of students we educate, and yet that's the one on the chopping block?"

Holycross said MCC opened Red Mountain with the idea that several programs would be exclusively based there but has since "drifted a long way from that model." Only six degree and two certificate programs fit that mold, according to the task force's report.

"Why aren't we talking about programs in things like cyber security, things in the medical field, anything having to do with IT?" Holycross said. "Those are things that wouldn't mean a lot of investment in terms of infrastructure, and I bet if we went to the business community, we could find partners."

While such unions are absent from the task force's recommendations for boosting enrollment, the committee is pushing for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) partnerships with Mesa Public Schools and Grand Canyon University.

It also recommended:

- Adopting a "2-4-1" class schedule supported in student surveys, where three- and four-credit classes meet two days a week, five-credit classes meet four days a week and high-demand one-credit classes are available on Fridays;

- Using interactive video-conference classrooms and online classes for courses that can't be added to the traditional Red Mountain schedule given low student demand;
- Expanding marketing and recruiting programs, with a focus on recent MPS high-school graduates.

Red Mountain Provost Patrick Burkhart insisted the contingency plans were "not intended to be a message conveying inevitability" but rather "a message intended to convey that we're pulling out all of the stops...and those efforts are already underway."

The campus has reduced overtime pay, cut supply budgets, hired fewer adjunct professors and increased classroom sizes to cut costs.

"Would I rather see this as a campus over an instructional site? Hell yes, I would," Burkhart told staff at the public meeting. "But I'm more interested in seeing it persist."

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