

## The Communiversity @ Surprise Education and Workforce Study Analysis

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### Introduction

In order to address the growing demand for higher education opportunities; Rio Salado College spearheaded the effort to develop the Communiversity @ Surprise. There is a growing demand for educated employees in business, education, health care, information systems, and public safety as all of these industries are expected to grow within the next 10 years. Specifically, educational services within the West Valley are expected to see a 44% increase in the number of job opportunities by 2018 while Health Care should see an increase of approximately 11,000<sup>1</sup> jobs.

### Communiversity @ Surprise

The Communiversity @ Surprise is a higher education center that offers programming from three community colleges and up to five universities. The college and university partners, public and private, will provide course offerings that allow students to pursue degree pathways that include certification, associate degrees, bachelor degrees, and beyond. The degree pathways supported through the Communiversity have been identified as educational programs that are in demand in the service region. The classes at the Communiversity will be available in traditional educational delivery, as well as online and hybrid offerings. As the Communiversity grows over time, the breadth and depth of programming will expand.

The degree pathways include, but are not limited to:

- Business
- Education
- General Education
- Health Care
- Information Systems
- Public Safety

### Education

On behalf of Rio Salado College, the Hanover Research Group was commissioned to conduct a study of the education data trends in Maricopa County. The purpose of the study was to identify educational trends and opportunities; and to provide Rio Salado College with data to make informed decisions on potential program offerings at their college center locations in Surprise, Arizona.

The Hannover study examined education program demand at three levels: the associate level, the bachelor degree level, and the master's degree level. When considering the associate level, business management and administrative services, computer and information sciences, and nursing were the fields with the highest number of degree completions between 2000 and 2005 in the Surprise area. The fastest rate of growth, 12%, was experienced by nursing degree completions. Moving onto bachelor's degrees, the field with the most degree completions was business management and administrative services, followed by social sciences and history, and then education. At the master's level, degree completions in business management accounted for the most numerically.

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<sup>1</sup> Data gathered using Economic Modeling Specialists (<http://www.economicmodeling.com>), the Hanover Research Group, and the ERISS Workforce Study. Detailed results from all three sources can be provided upon request.

Regardless, compounded by the expansion of the healthcare industry in the Surprise area, the growth rates in nursing degree completions at all levels indicate that this is a field of particular interest. Considering statistics from the Maricopa Community Colleges on degree completions in 2005, Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) certificates, Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) certificates and Nursing Assistant certificates accounting for nearly half of the completed certificates, with LPN and LVN certificate completions increasing at average growth rates of over 105%.

Degree pathways from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities have been hailed by policy and academic pundits as a potential solution for satisfying labor needs while simultaneously reducing the often insurmountable costs of attaining a four-year degree. Research has also consistently demonstrated that community college students who transfer into four-year institutions perform as well as students who study at four-year institutions for the entire four years.

### Workforce

On behalf of WESTMARC, the City of Surprise, and Rio Salado College; ERISS, a national research organization, was commissioned to conduct a workforce study on the greater West Valley and in Surprise, Arizona. WESTMARC defines the West Valley as all cities located on or west of I-17. This West Valley Workforce Study was the first of analysis of its kind produced in the region. The City of Surprise Workforce Study indicated that four of 12, or 33% of industries reported growth; including Business, Education, Government, and Health Services. Each of the degree pathways offered at the Community College were identified as educational programs that would benefit Surprise, according to the workforce study. While employers in the WESTMARC region appear to be satisfied with their workforce, there are opportunities for improvement. Twenty percent of employers reported that using technology tools and information systems was a common deficiency among their employees. Additionally, 25% of respondents stated that workplace literacy was a problem affecting productivity amongst workers. Of these 25%, the most common deficiency was communicating effectively in English (50%) followed by thinking critically and acting logically to solve problems (30%), and working in teams (20%). These opportunities for improvement can provide the Community College with occasions to provide training solutions to employers in the region.

Rio Salado College also uses the data gathered by Economic Modeling Specialists (EMSI), a third party vendor that provides a web-based suite for regional workforce and economic research. Use of this data gives Rio Salado the ability to have three data sources (EMSI, Workforce Study, and Hannover) to help determine future growth in the West Valley. According to EMSI workforce needs will continue to increase in the West Valley. Specifically, the industries of Healthcare/Social Assistance and Education will see increases in the number of jobs by 29% and 44% respectively.

### City of Surprise

The City of Surprise has an estimated population of 109,000<sup>2</sup> citizens. In 2006, Money magazine named the City of Surprise as one of the 10 fastest growing cities in America. Additionally, Surprise was awarded the Most Business Friendly North American Micro Cities of the Future and Best Quality of Life by Foreign Direct Investment Magazine. Currently, while there is a

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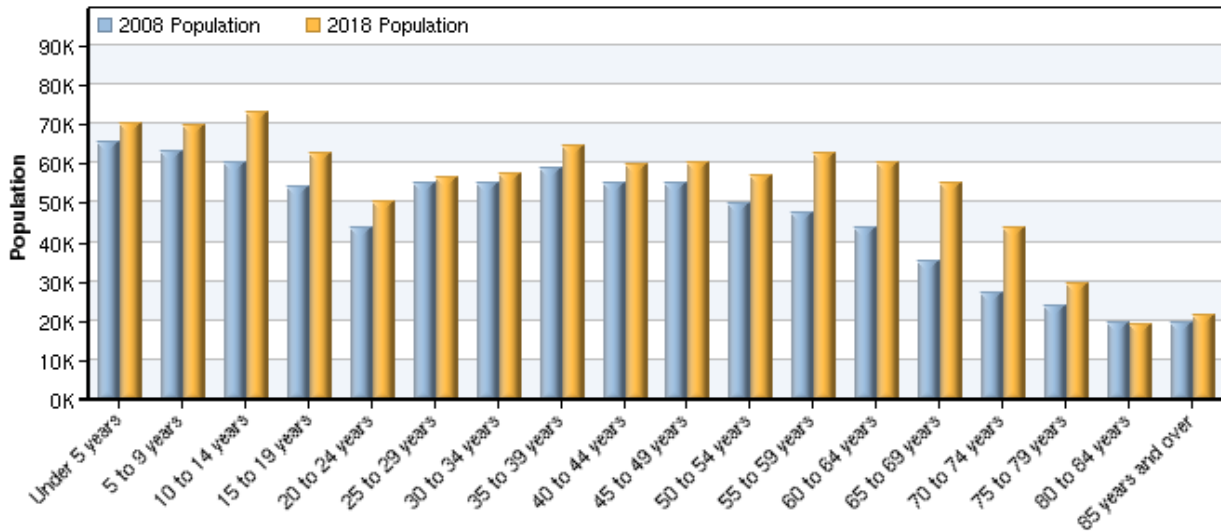
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.surpriseaz.com/files/ed/demographics.html>

growing demand for higher education opportunities there is only one institution of higher education located in Surprise, The Rio Salado College Lifelong Learning Center.

<b>Maricopa Association of Governments Resident Population Projection*</b>				
<b>MPA</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2030</b>
Surprise	93,356	146,890	268,359	401,458

*\*May 2007*

**WESTMARC Region – Population Projections by Age**



**Conclusion**

Given the data related to population growth projections, education and workforce needs, the Communi-versity @ Surprise will be the provider of choice for Surprise and the surrounding region. Rio Salado College’s value of choice, access, and flexibility will provide our customers a myriad of options regarding obtaining higher education goals. The Communi-versity @ Surprise will be a direct contributor to quality of life and social beneficence for the West valley and beyond.