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Introduction
Overview of Institutional History and Context

College Profile
Rio Salado College, headquartered in Tempe, Arizona, was established in 1978 as a non-traditional institution designed to provide education to the underserved and un-served geographic areas of Maricopa County. Thirty-four years later, Rio Salado, “the College within everyone’s reach,” is the largest of the 10 colleges that comprise the Maricopa County Community College District in credit headcount, with a focused mission to provide innovative approaches to choice, access, and flexibility, customized, high-quality learning design, and personalized service and organizational responsiveness. Rio Salado College appeals to students seeking quality educational programs and services delivered conveniently to their homes, workplaces, and community locations. The College’s unique approach toward education for the twenty-first century includes online courses that start 48 weeks each year and currently enroll over 43,000 unduplicated students (the largest online community college enrollment in the nation), innovative educational partnerships, and customized programs offered both online and throughout the College’s local communities.

While remaining true to its nontraditional roots, Rio Salado has matured to emerge as a national leader in higher education, exemplifying a successful model for high-quality, low-cost, accessible educational opportunities. Within just the past year, the College has received considerable national recognition for its efficient and highly effective model:

• Rio’s Peer-to-Peer Plagiarism Detector, developed in-house to help ensure the long-term value and integrity of Rio’s academic programs, won the WCET WOW Award in October, 2010.

• Winning by Degrees (November, 2010), produced by McKinsey and Company and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, featured Rio Salado as one of eight highly productive online institutions, and reported that Rio Salado College’s educational model was 48% more cost-effective than the national average.

• Flexing the Faculty, the cover story in the Lumina Foundation’s Summer 2011 Focus publication, highlighted Rio Salado’s highly effective faculty model.

• A case study of Rio Salado College was included in The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education, by Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring, July, 2011.

• Beating the Odds: What It Means and Why It’s Important, (August, 2011), developed with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, featured 32 postsecondary institutions considered as national models for their approaches to boosting completion rates. Rio Salado College was recognized as a high-performing, low-cost institution.
• The Peer-to-Peer Plagiarism Detector won a Showcase in Excellence Award in the Arizona Performance Excellence Program (Arizona Quality Alliance), December, 2011.

Rio Salado College is organized into five divisions under the leadership of President Chris Bustamante:

• Academic Affairs
• Student Affairs & Advancement
• Administrative & Employee Services
• Strategic Initiatives & Information Services
• Public Service

The College employs 463 Board-approved employees in these five divisions, of whom 23 are residential faculty members. Along with nearly 1,400 adjunct faculty who are supported by a comprehensive infrastructure, the College’s workforce provides an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning for its diverse and nontraditional student body.

Rio Salado is part of the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), which is located in Maricopa County, the largest county in Arizona, measuring 9,222 square miles. With almost 3.9 million residents, the county is home to over half of Arizona’s population. MCCCD includes 10 colleges, two skill centers, and a number of education centers serving the greater Phoenix metropolitan area. Although the Maricopa colleges are all units of the larger MCCCD system with a single Governing Board and District administration, as well as common policies and processes regarding personnel, curriculum, students, etc., each college is individually accredited. The MCCCD had 4,349 Board-approved employees in September, 2011, serving over 260,000 students.

Growth and Change Since 2002
Enrollment Growth
Rio Salado College was well-established as a leader in online education and innovative programs and partnerships at the time of its last Self-Study Visit in 2002, and the College has grown enormously in the decade since, with the capacity to scale up continuously as it deals with this ongoing growth. The following chart shows enrollment trends at the College over the past 10 years. While the trend has been upward almost every year, it is particularly notable that the Institution’s Credit Headcount increased by 10% between FY 2009-10 and FY 2010-11, representing the largest single annual increase in the past 10 years, which also translated into an 18% growth in Full Time Student Equivalent (FTSE). In 2010-2011, over three-quarters (75.36%) of credit students at Rio Salado were distance learning students, of which 72.41% were taking classes online.
In addition to growth, the following significant changes have occurred over the past decade. Each of these will be addressed in detail in the body of this Self-Study report.

- The College vision was focused from the notion of creating “a climate of high expectations for…success” of students, customers and employees to “We astonish our customers!”
- Subsequently, in order to define a common understanding of “astonishment” in the implementation of the vision, the Service Standards of Accuracy, Consistency, and Timeliness were adopted as part of the College’s mission documents and institutionalized at the departmental level.
- The College developed RioLearn in partnership with Microsoft and Dell Computers. This online course management and delivery system was customized to accommodate Rio Salado’s unique centralized course development model and multiple course start dates and scalability.
- A 13,600-square-foot Conference Center was built adjacent to the College’s Tempe headquarters.
- The College received $64.5 million for construction and renovation projects as part of a $951 million General Obligation Bond that was passed overwhelmingly by voters in 2004.
- The College purchased the 60,000-square-foot building next to its Tempe headquarters. This building, with minimal renovation, became the College’s administrative headquarters, known as Rio@Hohokam, while the original Tempe building was renamed Tower@Rio.
- Rio Salado’s core educational value of continuous improvement was strengthened to Relentless Improvement, to emphasize the College’s long-standing commitment to the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle of improvement.
• Sustainability was added as a College core educational value, with a commitment to the triple bottom line of sociocultural, environmental, and economic sustainability initiatives.

• Rio Salado elected to join the Higher Learning Commission’s Academy for Assessment of Student Learning in 2007, and built a systematic and comprehensive Program Review process as its project.

• The College partnered with the City of Surprise to build the first Communiversity in the western United States, the Communiversity@Surprise.

• In February 2010, Dr. Linda Thor resigned from her position as president of Rio Salado College after almost 20 years. Dr. Chris Bustamante was appointed interim president, and subsequently named President of Rio Salado College in June, 2010.

• Rio Salado College emerged as the only community college recognized nationally in the arena of data mining and predictive modeling to promote student success.

**Accreditation History**

• 1978: The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools granted Rio Salado Community College candidacy accreditation status.

• 1981: Rio Salado Community College received accreditation for five years, following a request from the College for an evaluation for accreditation at the Associate Degree level.

• 1986: Rio Salado Community College was approved for continued accreditation for a six-year period.

• 1992: Rio Salado Community College was approved for continued accreditation for a 10-year period.

• 2002: Rio Salado Community College was approved for continued accreditation for a 10-year period, with no follow-up reports or visits required.

**Significant Accomplishments, Strengths, and Challenges from 2002**

The 2002 visiting team did not note any areas of concern. During the exit interview, the team noted the following areas of significant accomplishment:

1. The College has developed a focused mission statement, which has enabled efficient use of resources and targeted growth. The mission statement, together with vision, purposes, pride factors, and values are well understood by all employees and are posted prominently throughout the College. There is a commitment to live the values on a daily basis and to reward and recognize those who lead their colleagues by example.

2. The College has developed an exemplary process for recruiting, hiring, training and evaluating, and rewarding adjunct faculty members and supports the work of teaching and learning with a network of support people and services that is broad and deep to serve effectively its distributed student body and employees.

3. The College's enrollment has grown by 15% a year for the last five years, while the cost per student has increased only 19%. Such efficient growth is a significant accomplishment, made possible by innovative programs such as dual enrollment whose popularity has contributed significantly to sustain this level of growth.
4. Rio Salado’s systems approach to Distance Learning, with its amazing level of technical and personal support, is a national model that balances access and convenience of learning and student support, with high expectations for student success and instructional rigor. It is principally through its distance learning model that the College’s twenty-six enrollment periods enable students to learn anytime, anyplace and be supported in a variety of ways tailored to meet the individual needs of each student.

5. The College has an exemplary approach to the development and evaluation of a number of Educational Service Partnerships designed to meet the needs of both public and private sector clients. The commitment to quality assurance of teaching and the focus on clear learning outcomes is outstanding.

6. Rio Salado College has demonstrated its commitment to the improvement of teaching and learning through its extensive and comprehensive assessment program. There is notable involvement of both full time and adjunct faculty and staff in the assessment process, a mature process which has in most of its elements reached high end levels of two and three in the Higher Learning Commission’s assessment evaluation grid.

7. Rio Salado College has successfully undertaken to build an organizational structure that is coordinated, systemic rather than geographic, and fosters a collaborative approach to the work of teaching and learning in a rapidly changing world. The notable and significant ability to be limber, flexible and respond rapidly should be a model for the district. The College is a model of organizational learning and adaptability based on that learning.

In the Assurance Section of the Report of the Comprehensive Visit, 38 areas of strength were particularly commended, and 10 areas of evidence that needed strengthening were noted. These have been addressed within the Self-Study document in the context of the content as follows:

1. The College has articulated its concern for its own ability to sustain the high level of service it has made a standard in the face of the projected growth of both the population of the county and the enrollments at the College.

   Response: As indicated above, Rio Salado committed to College-wide Service Standards—Accuracy, Consistency, and Timeliness—as part of its mission documents. Information about how these standards have become institutionalized at the departmental level will be provided in Criterion 2c. Where appropriate, the College has also outsourced frontline services to maintain high levels of service. This is explained in Criterion 2b.

2. The College also recognizes the importance of recruiting, employing, and retaining a diverse work force across all the levels of the institution as it seeks to serve a population that will shift in the next 5-7 years to a majority minority.

   Response: The percentage of ethnic minorities employed by Rio Salado has increased in all categories since 2002. More information is provided in Criterion 2b, where it is noted that the ethnic diversity of employees is well-aligned with the majority of Rio Salado College students, and also generally well-aligned with the population of Maricopa County.

3. The College itself, as well as the District, has benefited from a strong financial base of support for many years. Rio Salado acknowledges the importance of sustaining and increasing that support to fund programs and services to meet the changing needs of a growing and changing population.
Response: The College’s initiatives to scale up responsibly are addressed in Criterion 1e, and the real-time cost management system currently under development is described in Criterion 2b.

4. Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dated October 18, 1996 entered into between MCCCD and the North Central Association the District agreed to provide a breakout of its expenditures by each of its colleges…It is the team’s observation that the Memorandum of Understanding that exists relative to individual college reporting makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the team to express a detailed opinion about the finances of an individual college…A more appropriate model may be for a team to periodically review and express an opinion on the finances of MCCCD taken as a whole.

Response: This recommendation is a District-level issue and is not within the College’s purview. The MOU, which is still in place and which was updated in 2004, is described in Criterion 2a.

5. Even with the admirable and advanced attention given to the assessment of student academic achievement and to the support of student success across the multiple modes of delivery of instruction, the College acknowledges the need to find ways to motivate students to use services that will help them achieve their desired learning outcomes. This is especially the case with students who engage for the first time with distance learning.

Response: Each of the support services departments provides multiple modalities for student access and interaction. Metrics are employed to gauge usage of these services, and this evidence is provided in context throughout this Self-Study, primarily in Criterion 3c and Criterion 3d. The evidence indicates that most of the services are now well-used.

6. Consider establishing intervals for overall review of General Education which could lead not only to the obvious comprehensive look at the program but also to appropriate and timely recommendations to the district for curricular changes. Such an approach might put the College in a more proactive position to affect the reportedly lengthy process of approval at the district level.

Response: The College has instituted General Education Program Review as part of its comprehensive Program Review process. This is described in detail in Criterion 3a.

7. To get a better gauge of transfer student success, the College is encouraged to pursue the Criterion Three Committee recommendation to make transfer information a part of the articulation agreement with its articulation partners as well as attempt to collect data from major in-state transfers, and out-of-state transfers, especially for dual enrollment students.

Response: Transfer and articulation agreements are District processes and not within the purview of individual MCCCD colleges. These processes have improved significantly, and are covered in detail in Criterion 4c. Notably, the Maricopa-ASU Pathway Program (MAPP) is part of the Getting AHEAD (Access to Higher Education and Degrees) statewide effort between Arizona’s Board of Regents, universities, and community colleges, which is partially funded by a $1.5 million grant from the Lumina Foundation.

8. In its self-study (p. 174), the College acknowledges that although “a great deal of planning is ongoing at the department level . . . much of this activity is held in departmental memory by personnel rather than in written form.” The team observed this phenomenon as one of
the indicators of the need for formalizing and communicating more effectively the process of continuous improvement across and for the entire institution that is so much a part of the culture of the organization.

Response: The need for more formal communication between departments and employees has been consciously addressed as part of the College's employee development efforts, and will be discussed in Criterion 2b. In addition, Relentless Improvement has been institutionalized as an educational core value, and deliberate efforts have been made to inculcate greater awareness of the PDCA cycle of improvement to College employees at all levels. These efforts have included PDCA brochures and posters, an employee engagement PDCA contest, and the introduction of the system-wide formal and sustainable Program Review process referenced above. Project Management, which was adopted by the College several years ago, formally documents and communicates cross-College collaborative planning and initiatives.

9. Although the College is clearly in compliance with the requirement to establish a process and to receive and respond to student complaints, the self-study report acknowledges that “the existing student complaint documentation process does not include enough information to determine college-wide trends or patterns. The team agrees with the College's own recommendation to “develop an electronic tracking and reporting system for formal and informal student complaints” (p. 187)—in conformity with its philosophy of going beyond customer service to customer astonishment.

Response: The creation of this centralized system for receiving and responding to student complaints at all levels, developed through the College's Helpdesk system, is described in Criterion 1e.

10. The Orientation/Teacher Education Program Plan lists six steps necessary to successfully complete the teacher preparation programs…Promotional materials for the program should clearly communicate to students that the secondary program requirements range from 33 – 57 credits and that, before they can student teach, secondary education students must pass the Arizona Educators' Proficiency Assessment, which includes questions about content.

Response: Program Progression Information is posted on the Teacher Education Post-Baccalaureate Program Plans website, and is updated regularly.

The Self-Study Process
Rio Salado College began the visioning process for the 2011-2012 Self-Study with a kick-off meeting in May, 2008. During the 2008-2009 academic year, College leadership reviewed the 2002 Self-Study report and conducted preliminary planning for the committee structure, roles, and processes for the upcoming Self-Study. The purpose of the 2011-2012 Self-Study was articulated as an opportunity for the Institution to formally examine itself and thereby assess its strengths and challenges in accomplishing its mission. Therefore, the Self-Study process would be based on the College's foundation of continuous improvement, which had been institutionalized in the College culture since the early 1990s.

An employee contest was held to identify a theme for Rio Salado's Self-Study process. The winning slogan, “Innovation and Improvement,” embodies the College's long history as an innovative and forward-thinking institution, continually seeking new and unexplored paths
to meet the needs of its stakeholders, while remaining cognizant of the necessity for evaluating processes in a cycle of improvement. A self-study icon was designed that maintained Rio Salado’s branding by incorporating the Rio “wave,” but in a manner that set it apart from the College’s traditional branding, by flipping the wave and adding the color yellow. The wave is emerging from an object, symbolizing the progress of Rio’s Self-Study as the College moves through the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle in compiling and evaluating the evidence.

The Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA), as the College’s Chief Academic Officer, has served as Co-Chair of the Self-Study process. In addition, the College President appointed the Faculty Chair of Library Services to serve as Co-Chair with the VPAA. The Library Faculty Chair had been designated as the writer prior to the Co-Chair appointment, and she retained that role as well.

A Planning Team was formed in fall 2009, and the formal Self-Study Plan was developed. A tri-chair structure was established to lead each of the Criterion Teams. Tri-Chairs were drawn from the ranks of senior administrators and Faculty Chairs, and along with the Self-Study Co-Chairs and Planning Team members, made up the Self-Study Steering Team. Some changes occurred on the original teams as a result of retirements and personnel moves. The final members of the teams were as follows:

**Self-Study Co-Chairs**
Vernon C. Smith, Vice President, Academic Affairs
Hazel Davis, Faculty Chair, Library Services

**Roles**
- To provide direction to the Self-Study Steering Committee
- To provide resources and personnel as appropriate to the Criterion Committees
- To compile and publish the final Self-Study Report

**Self-Study Planning Committee**
Chris Bustamante, College President
Vernon C. Smith, Vice President, Academic Affairs
Hazel Davis, Faculty Chair, Library Services
Jennifer Shantz, Faculty Chair, Curriculum Development/Digital Media Content
Sharon Koberna, Dean, Administrative & Employee Services
Nicole Albo, Associate Dean, Instruction & Institutional Integrity
Rick Vaughn, Faculty Chair, STEM Initiatives

**Roles**
- To develop the Self-Study timeline
- To write the Self-Study Plan
- To communicate and disseminate the Self-Study Plan to internal and external stakeholders
- To monitor the implementation of the Self-Study Plan
- To provide logistical coordination for the HLC Self-Study Team visit
Self-Study Steering Committee Members
In addition to the Planning Committee members, the Self-Study Steering Team included the Tri-Chairs of the five Criteria for Accreditation:

Criterion 1
- Chris Bustamante, College President
- Angela Felix, Faculty Chair, Languages
- Sharon Koberna, Dean, Administrative & Employee Services

Criterion 2
- Todd Simmons, Vice President, Administrative & Employee Services
- Dana Reid, Dean, Instructional Technology & Support
- Kerrie Specker, Faculty Chair, Computers

Criterion 3
- Pat Case, Faculty Chair, Communication/Social Sciences
- Jo Jorgenson, Dean, Instruction & Community Development
- Kishia Brock, Vice President, Student Affairs & Advancement

Criterion 4
- Rick Kemp, Dean, Instruction & Partnerships
- Kirk Bowden, Faculty Chair, Chemical Dependency
- John Jensen, Faculty Chair, Mathematics

Criterion 5
- Edward Kelty, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives & Information Services
- Ron Burns, Faculty Chair, Public Safety Programs
- Melanie Abts, Faculty Chair, Counseling

Roles:
- To align the Self-Study Process with the College's Strategic Planning processes
- To provide operational leadership across the College for the Self-Study Process
- To serve as informed reviewers of the Self-Study plan
- To coordinate implementation of the Self-Study Plan
- To review the findings of the Self-Study Process
- To write Self-Study Criterion draft content

Self-Study Criterion Committees
Criterion Committees were assembled, each of which included a large cross-section of employees from all employee groups and departments across the College. These committees met regularly during the 2009-2010 year to investigate patterns of evidence, and collect data. Most committee members were charged with investigating processes outside of their own areas of responsibility, allowing them to gain insight into the workings of the College from the systems perspective, a hallmark of Rio Salado's culture. Overall, close to 100 employees served directly on one of the Criterion teams. At the end of 2010, the College held a celebration of the work to-date of these team members. Lunch was provided, and a specially designed Self-Study icon was awarded to employees for their Reward & Recognition plaques, along with congratulatory letters from the College President and the Self-Study Co-Chairs.

During this time, the Steering Team collectively developed a comprehensive outline of the planned Self-Study document, making decisions about where content would be included to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that all team members had a common understanding of the overall process.
Self-Study Content Template

A Self-Study Draft Template was developed to collect standard information about each department at the College. As part of this template, employees identified how their work at the departmental level lined up with the College's mission documents, and they also provided evaluative information about metrics used to determine the effectiveness of their work. This content was then used to begin drafting the Self-Study document.

Engagement of the College Community

In addition to the direct involvement of large numbers of College employees who served on criterion teams and provided content for the Self-Study template, the Planning and Steering Teams devised an ongoing series of events designed to create awareness and engagement with all employees.

- A SharePoint site was developed in fall 2009 that included information about the Self-Study process, the Self-Study Plan, minutes of the Planning and Steering Team meetings, links to pertinent information, and the opportunity to submit questions in confidence to the Self-Study Co-Chairs. As the work of the Criterion Committees progressed, each had a work area on the site where minutes and content were posted. A survey page allowed for the posting of all survey reports. Drafts of the Self-Study chapters were posted for review and comment. This SharePoint site was accessible to every College employee.

- Information about the Self-Study process and progress formed part of the agenda of each College-wide meeting held since fall 2009, and each biannual All-Faculty Learning Experience beginning in spring 2010.

- A public Self-Study website was developed in spring 2011 to provide information to all the College's external and internal stakeholders. Content was added to this site as the process progressed, and the complete Self-Study will be posted to the public website upon submission to the Higher Learning Commission in January, 2012. A notable feature of the public website was the Self-Study film series, which highlighted the Criteria for accreditation in parody form, while still providing accurate and substantive information, and the “Telling our Story” video which explained the Self-Study process in the form of a children’s story. This offered an additional employee engagement opportunity, when a “casting call” was issued for young children of Rio employees who are featured in the film.

- Self-Study 101 and Self-Study 102 workshops were presented by VPAA Dr. Vernon Smith and the Planning Team to College employees at the Tempe headquarters, and at several of the College’s locations throughout the county. Self-Study 101, presented in fall 2010, included an introduction to the Higher Learning Commission and the Self-Study process, an explanation of the Criteria for Accreditation, preliminary data findings and how these were being addressed through the PDCA cycle of quality assurance and relentless improvement, and an invitation to employees to become involved in the Self-Study work. Quality Assurance (Q.A.) and Relentless Improvement (R.I.) buttons were distributed, and many employees began wearing these. Self-Study 102 was conducted in fall 2011, and reported on the findings
of the Self-Study process. R.I./Q.A. t-shirts were provided for all employees in the lead-up to Self-Study 102, and many employees wore them for the events.

- An employee engagement PDCA contest was held in spring 2011. Employees used recycled materials (including Q.A. and R.I. posters that had been widely posted in the lead-up to Self-Study 101) to demonstrate how their respective departments followed the PDCA process, which also reinforced the College’s core value of Sustainability. Members of the President’s Advisory Council selected the winners from a group of finalists identified by the Planning Team.

- A Self-Study Ice Cream Social was held at Rio’s Tempe headquarters in July, 2011. Customized mouse pads showing the College’s culture page were distributed.

- HLC Fairs were held at the College’s Tempe headquarters and several of the College’s locations in fall 2011. Employees created booths that required participation in activities relating to the Criterion Core Components with which their departments identified. Reaction to the Self-Study fairs was overwhelmingly positive, both in terms of the learning that took place, and the sheer fun and opportunities for interaction that the experience provided.

- An HLC Self-Study Banner was created and taken to all Self-Study events, where employees had the opportunity to sign and signify their identification with one of the five Criteria for Accreditation.

- Towards the end of the Self-Study process in fall 2011, all supervisors were required to take their employees through an exercise that investigated how departments saw their roles related to each Criterion, providing evidence and airing any concerns that they had regarding departmental performance. These results were then discussed at the Supervisor Team meetings.

The inclusive model used to engage all employees in self-study, with large Criterion Committees, the process of reflection, evaluation, and use of the template to develop content at the departmental level, in addition to the series of engagement activities noted above, has resulted in a Rio Salado College Self-Study document that is truly the product of a collaborative effort, involving employees across a wide spectrum of the College.

**Request for Continued Accreditation**

The following intended measurable outcomes of the Self-Study were established by the Planning Team at the outset:

1. Achieve 10-year accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, without the requirement of progress reports, monitoring reports, or focus visits.
2. Review the College’s progress since the 2002 Self-Study Evaluation, paying special attention to the recommendations of the previous HLC team.
3. Assess the College status relative to accomplishment of its vision, mission, and purposes.
4. Describe student learning outcomes through a culture of ongoing assessment and systematic, comprehensive Program Review.
5. Involve all of the College’s internal and external stakeholders, and provide opportunities to contribute to the accreditation process.
6. Produce a Self-Study Report that can serve a variety of internal and external purposes, including achieving continued accreditation.
7. Determine the College’s best option for the next accreditation cycle.

In reviewing the substantial evidence for these outcomes provided in the completed Self-Study document, the Planning Team has determined that outcomes two through seven have been met through the Self-Study process, in conformance with the principles of innovation and relentless improvement that are Rio Salado’s hallmarks.

Rio Salado College has therefore determined that it meets the five Criteria for Accreditation, and looks forward to the peer-review validation process while hosting the Visiting Team on March 5-7, 2012.

With the submission of this Institutional Self-Study report, Rio Salado College formally requests reaffirmation of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools for a period of 10 years.

**Formally submitted: January 6, 2012**

### Criterion One – Mission and Integrity

**Evaluative Summary**

In reviewing the patterns of evidence, the Self-Study Planning Team has determined that Rio Salado College demonstrates significant evidence in support of the Core Components of Criterion 1, and has established that the organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the Board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

**Strengths (Q.A.):**

- The mission documents truly reflect the reality of the College, and employees report a significant connection between their roles and the mission documents.
- Effective governance processes are in place to build collaboration and produce innovation. The Development Team is a stellar example of this cross-functional model.
• The Administration and Faculty Leadership enjoy a strongly collegial and mutually respectful relationship.
• The College continues to adapt to the diversity of its students and communities. Inclusiveness is a core organizational value.
• Academic Integrity processes and procedures have been institutionalized in the fabric of the College, utilizing technology in innovative ways, such as the Peer-to-Peer Plagiarism detector.

Challenges (R.I.):
• As technologies advance, institutional integrity efforts will need to keep pace with increasing opportunities for digital cheating.
• The College’s highly innovative culture will need to be consciously maintained in an increasingly competitive environment.

Planning for the Future:
• The College will need to consider ways to align the mission with the emerging national completion agenda.
• The College will continue to investigate and implement innovative means for maintaining academic integrity practices.
• The College will continue to develop its capacity to meet U.S. Department of Education and Higher Learning Commission regulations, including State Authorization requirements.

Criterion Two – Preparing for the Future

Evaluative Summary
In reviewing the patterns of evidence, the Planning Team has determined that Rio Salado College demonstrates significant evidence in support of the Core Components of Criterion 2, and that the Organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Strengths (Q.A.):
• The College has proven its ability to allocate resources to fulfill its mission and grow as an Institution in a sustainable manner.
• The College has a robust process for employee orientation, training, and development that reinforces the institutional culture.
• Rio Salado College benchmarks well against national data for institutional effectiveness.
• The College has been able to maximize the utilization of General Obligation Bond funding to provide additional service locations for its communities.
• Rio Salado has the most cost-effective model among the Maricopa Community Colleges, and is 48% more cost-efficient than peer IPEDS institutions nationally.
Rio Salado has a strong technology infrastructure that meets the needs of an innovative online institution.

**Challenges (R.I.):**
- Alignment of strategic planning and budgeting processes needs to be regularly reviewed by the Leadership Council.
- Given the current economic and funding environment, external scanning and scenario planning in the Strategic Planning process will need to be increased.
- As more students take advantage of Federal Financial Aid, the College will need to take measures to prevent a rising debt load.
- Resources will need to be reallocated to align with changing Governing Board priorities, State access, retention and completion goals, and the Chancellor's "One Maricopa" initiative.

**Planning for the Future:**
- As the College brings new locations on board, the Institution will seek to meet the needs of local communities in innovative ways.
- Real-time cost budgeting systems will be developed to assist in decision making and strategic planning.
- Technology will continue to be used to connect locations and students, both in person and online.

**Criterion Three – Student Learning and Effective Teaching**

**Evaluative Summary**
In reviewing the patterns of evidence, the Planning Team has determined that Rio Salado College demonstrates significant evidence in support of the Core Components of Criterion 3, and that the Organization has provided evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

**Strengths (Q.A.):**
- Rio Salado has strong evidence of student learning outcomes at the College, program, and course levels.
- Rio Salado College publicly and transparently reports program-level student learning outcomes data through the Transparency by Design (College Choices for Adults) process.
- Rio Salado has built a formal, scalable and sustainable comprehensive Program Review process as its HLC Assessment Academy project.
- General Education has undergone a formal Program Review.
- Rio Salado has a comprehensive adjunct faculty hiring, training, development, and evaluation model.
- RioLearn, the College's customized learning management system, meets the needs of the College's 48-start, one-course, many sections model, and is continually scaled up to incorporate new technologies and meet emerging teaching and learning needs.
The College provides comprehensive student support services in multiple modalities for both academic and operational co-curricular services. Rio Salado College has engaged in data mining and predictive modeling research since 2008, and is a national leader in this emerging field, having built early alert systems for online at-risk students.

**Challenges (R.I.):**
- As an open-door Institution, the College continues to serve large numbers of underprepared students, and seeks to more effectively transition these students through developmental education into college-level coursework.
- Cuts at the state level may continue to cause challenges with base funding of Adult Basic Education programs.

**Planning for the Future:**
- The College will continue to support faculty participation in quality online teaching and learning initiatives, such as Quality Matters™.
- The Faculty Chairs will continue to add College-wide student learning outcomes for assessment across disciplines, beginning with Sustainability in spring 2012.
- Rio Salado will continue to perform educational needs assessments as new locations are established, to provide the appropriate programs and curriculum for local community needs.
- The College is in the final planning and design stage of a student learning/knowledge center, which will combine library, tutoring, and computer lab services in one state-of-the-art facility to create seamless support access for in-person students.
- As technologies advance, Rio Salado will continue to seek additional mechanisms for serving students with disabilities.

### Criterion Four – Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

**Evaluative Summary**

In reviewing the patterns of evidence, the Planning Team has determined that Rio Salado College demonstrates significant evidence in support of the Core Components of Criterion 4, and that the Organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

**Strengths:**
- Rio Salado effectively uses program advisory committees to make improvements in the relevance and usefulness of curricula, especially in its partnership programs.
- The College has a comprehensive, systemic, and centralized process for management of copyright and intellectual property in its courses.
The Alpha Theta Omicron chapter of Phi Theta Kappa has garnered numerous awards at the state and national levels.

Rio Salado has established Information Literacy as a College-wide student learning outcome, thereby showing a strong commitment to the ethical use of information by its students.

Rio Salado is heavily invested in the well-being of its employees, as evidenced by its award-winning Wellness Program, highlighting the seven dimensions of wellness.

Challenges:
- Adjunct Faculty awareness of the tenets of the College’s Academic Freedom statement needs to be promoted.
- Tracking workplace success of former students needs to be increased through the expanded collection of relevant data from alumni and employers.
- Although the College is at the forefront of certificate completion among the MCCCDD institutions, the number of completers needs to be increased in accordance with the national completion agenda.

Planning for the Future:
- The College plans to develop related curriculum and programming in keeping with becoming a signatory to the Democracy Commitment.
- Rio Salado will strengthen its current transfer partnerships and actively seek out new opportunities for online transfer pathways.
- The Rio Salado Honors Program will be expanded to attract additional participants and provide enhanced activities.

Criterion Five – Engagement and Service

Evaluative Summary

Strengths (Q.A.):
- Rio Salado has leveraged community resources to partner in the building of additional locations that serve the needs of local populations, such as the Communiversity@Surprise, and the East Valley Veterans Education Center.
- The College has been awarded over $5 million in grant funding within the past 18 months.
- The College’s award-winning radio stations continue to provide news and information services to an increasingly wide and diverse audience.
- Rio Salado has the only NACEP-accredited dual enrollment program in the State of Arizona, and just went through a successful NACEP reaccreditation process.
- The Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Preparation program has attracted a national partner in the New York Times Knowledge Network.
Challenges (R.I.):
• Rio Salado College will need to strengthen and build new and existing Dual Enrollment partnerships, in keeping with the revised alignment model established by the MCCCD.
• With the College’s ever-increasing national profile, Rio Salado will need to strategically assess partnership opportunities, and grow incrementally in keeping with its mission.

Planning for the Future:
• Rio Salado will continue to develop a systemic infrastructure for maximizing the development of grant revenues.
• The College will continue to explore new partnerships and programs in keeping with its mission.
• Rio Salado will continue to reach out to nontraditional learners to provide accessible, convenient, and flexible learning opportunities.

Conclusion
This Self-Study document represents a point-in-time snapshot of what many consider to be a remarkable institution. Innovation and Improvement, the hallmarks of Rio Salado College, are by their very nature, relentless and ongoing. The evidence within each Criterion amply demonstrate the themes of the Self-Study, and the achievement of its goals. The Planning Team believes that this Self-Study document more than validates that the College meets the Criteria for reaffirmation of accreditation. Rio Salado College eagerly anticipates sharing the enthusiasm and pervasiveness of its dynamic culture, and “telling our story” to the Visiting Team on March 5-7, 2012.