

# Maricopa Community Colleges-Rio Salado Community College - Tempe, AZ

## Team Report

HLC ID 1340

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Review Type: Assurance Review

Open Pathway

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## Context and Nature of Review

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### Review Date

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02/09/2026

### Review Type

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Assurance Review

### Scope of Review

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- Assurance Review

*There are no forms assigned.*

### Institutional Context

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Rio Salado College (RSC) is one of ten institutions that comprise the Maricopa County Community College (MCCCD) District. RSC is a mature institution, accredited since 1981. The college functions as a comprehensive community college serving an expansive district while partnering with businesses, high schools, and its communities bringing unique educational opportunities and support services. Recently, (2022), the college was approved to offer baccalaureate programs in Elementary Education/Special Education and Public Safety Administration.

RSC offers an array of certificates, degrees (career and transfer) and workforce programs that provide a breadth of engagement opportunities for the community and for students through many modalities, chiefly online. RSC serves approximately 44,000 students including dual enrollment, face to face, an incarcerated re-entry, adult education, and online with certificate and degree programs supporting student goals. The college espouses accessibility and affordability and seeks to create an environment that welcomes and respects all individuals. The college promotes an environment that values civic engagement for students and employees through curriculum, student support services, community support opportunities, and co-curricular events.

### Interactions With Constituencies

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Interaction with IT office and ALO for a tutorial on using the LMS.

### Additional Documents

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Nothing has been entered.

# 1 - Mission

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The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

## 1.A. Mission Alignment

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The institution's educational programs, enrollment profile and scope of operations align with its publicly articulated mission.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Rio Salado College (RSC) has reviewed and edited its Mission statements (Vision, Mission, Values) multiple times in the recent past. In preparation for the 2020-2024 Strategic Plan, college stakeholders were invited to review and comment on Mission statements. Subsequently, these statements were reviewed in preparation for the 2024-2026 Strategic Plan and finally in 2025 in response to the Executive Order issued to higher education institutions regarding diversity. Throughout the various reviews, college stakeholders were involved. The Mission statements even as they evolved, continually identified RSC's interest in serving its community fully. RSC keeps its Mission statements current and relevant.

The Assurance Argument identifies the many ways that the college shares its Mission---through campus signage, web material, catalog, and more. RSC keeps the Mission central to functions both through new employee orientation and referencing the Mission during Employee Meetings. These efforts convey how the Mission is made an integral part of employee life and central to college operations.

RSC's academic programs and support services are consistent with Mission declarations on affordability and accessibility. The college offers the majority of its courses using Open Educational Resources. This access to digital materials means little or no cost for students. Combined with the work of the Accessibility Council whose efforts improve access to programs, services and campus activities, RSC lives its Mission, Vision and Values.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## **1.B. Mission and Public Good**

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The institution's operation of the academic enterprise demonstrates its commitment to serving the public good.

### **Rating**

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Met

### **Rationale**

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The college offers many examples of serving the public good, specifically in their approach to college access. RSC has created an impressive array of access points for its academic programs through academic program scholarship support, an incarcerated re-entry program, high school partnerships for Dual Enrollment, workforce programs, and adult education offerings. Along with these many entry points, appropriately, the college offers comprehensive services designed to serve these different audiences.

RSC serves the public through many support services that assist success for both students and the community. Some examples include hosting radio stations with news, local information and cultural broadcasts; a dental clinic hosted by dental hygiene students, and a Cafe that both informs and assists community members on nutritional information and food preparation. The college cited two dozen more services that define their commitment to serving students and community through partnerships with innovation and focus on public service. Rio Salado's evidence confirms its engagement and service to the public.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 1.C. Mission and Diversity of Society

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The institution provides opportunities for civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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RSC has expanded its civic engagement commitment through co-curricular learning that includes experiential learning in courses. This is evidenced by the Co-curricular Student Assessment dataset. RSC acknowledged challenges in gaining student interest in expanding further with co-curricular learning opportunities given the student profile of online and dual credit learners. RSC might consider assessment practices with RSC student organization opportunities as it relates to civic engagement, many of which were listed in 1.B.

A recommendation from the 2022 team was to conduct additional climate surveys, RSC followed through on this recommendation and they now participate regularly in the Decisionwise Employee Engagement Survey, confirming college interest in campus-wide involvement in their community. Evidence to date indicates favorable scores on campus climate and engagement.

RSC keeps their mission and the diversity of society as a focus in their work. Evidence provided showed the addition of Social Responsibility as an institutional learning outcome for students. Other examples centered on civic engagement in curriculum, student service projects, student organizations with service components (PTK and NSLS), experiential learning (field experiences, service learning), and a formal Community Engagement Council. RSC provides Student Organization opportunities for students that directly relate to civic engagement. Examples provided include the National Adult Education Honor Society, and the National Society of Leadership and Success.

RSC outlines clear policies for non-discrimination. Policy examples include administrative regulation policy for the district, an Office of Conduct and Community Standards, and a Student code of Conduct policy. Inclusive processes and Activities examples include the “Start at Rio” web tools for entering students, RioConnect, Disability services, Accessibility Council, and the International Education Center. These different policies and programs provide support for all students.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## Criterion 1 Summary

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The institution's mission is clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution's operations.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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RSC demonstrates a commitment to its mission, vision and values, which have been reviewed and edited in response to strategic planning and state Executive Orders. RSC's dedication to the institutional mission is evident in its strategic planning, academic programs, and publication efforts (campus signage, web material, etc.,). RSC also integrates its mission through employee onboarding and meetings.

RSC's commitment to the public good is demonstrated through its diverse educational programs, scholarship opportunities, adult education programming, incarcerated re-entry programming, dual credit, and workforce development initiatives. The institution's service to the community expands into hosting radio stations, a dental clinic, a café, and additional services.

Finally, RSC creates numerous opportunities for its students and the community to support its mission and enhance perspectives of society. For instance, co-curricular programming includes experiences requiring civic engagement. Additionally, the institution added Social Responsibility as an institutional learning outcome and provides evidence of civic engagement that supports the outcome.

RSC has the structure necessary to truly carry out its mission, vision, and values.

## 2 - Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

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In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### 2.A. Integrity

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Actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures.

#### Rating

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Met

#### Rationale

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Rio Salado College (RSC), operating within the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), provides substantial evidence that its governing board, administration, faculty, and staff adhere to established policies and procedures. The district's governing Values, Governing Board Policies, Administrative Regulations, Code of Conduct, and required annual disclosure forms collectively articulate expectations for ethical and lawful behavior. Employees and board members are required to complete Public Stewardship and Ethics Training, with triennial ethics recertification. Additionally, employees complete mandatory online modules such as the FERPA Level 1 tutorial. These training and acknowledgment processes reinforce institutional accountability.

RSC demonstrates structured and transparent decision-making through its Executive Team, which meets weekly to review strategic and operational items. The Faculty Senate and Faculty Chairs meet regularly under a formal constitution, providing faculty leadership in curriculum and policy discussions. Additional governance bodies such as the President's Cabinet, Deans Council, and the cross-functional Development Team meet monthly or biweekly and serve defined roles in recommending or making decisions within their areas. The Budget and Infrastructure Council further enhance transparency by monitoring financial management and infrastructure planning. Collectively, these bodies show that institutional decisions consistently flow through formalized and participatory structures.

The institution's adherence to integrity is reinforced through strong compliance and accountability systems. The Office of Institutional Integrity & Compliance (OIIC) coordinates regulatory compliance, including state authorization and federal mandates, as evidenced through its structured program development workflow. The OIIC also maintains an award-winning Compliance Calendar, ensuring systematic tracking of federal, state, and accreditation requirements, and convenes a broad-based Compliance Committee two to three times per year. The Office of Conduct and Community Standards, which houses Student Conduct Administration, Title IX, the Behavioral Intervention Team, and the Office of Academic Integrity, operates under formal MCCCD policies, including the Student Rights and Responsibilities regulation and the Student Conduct Code.

Fiscal integrity is also demonstrated through annual external audits conducted by the Arizona State

Auditor General, where MCCCCD consistently receives unqualified audit opinions, most recently for FY2024. Internal audit services provided by the Internal Audit and Management Advisory Services Department further strengthen oversight of district and college operations.

Although the institution offers a substantial set of policy documents, several areas depend primarily on the existence of policies rather than demonstrated evidence of how those policies function in practice. Specifically, the narrative provides limited examples showing:

- How governance bodies' decisions have directly shaped institutional operations,
- Measurable outcomes or effectiveness metrics from required employee training, and
- How student complaints or grievances have led to concrete improvements.

In subsequent Arguments, the college might consider strengthening these sections with clearer illustrations of practice, evidence of impact, and examples demonstrating how policies are actively implemented and assessed. Providing such evidence would more fully demonstrate the application, not only the existence, of integrity-related policies.

The institution provides substantial evidence that it operates with integrity and follows its established policies and procedures, as demonstrated through its documented governance processes, compliance frameworks, and required training programs. In subsequent Arguments, the college might consider further illustrating how these structures function in practice by offering concrete examples of their effectiveness and impact on institutional operations.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.B. Transparency

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The institution presents itself accurately and completely to students and the public with respect to its educational programs and any claims it makes related to the educational experience.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Rio Salado College (RSC) demonstrates strong transparency in the accuracy and completeness of the information it provides to students and the public. Following the 2022 HLC Team Report, which noted the clarity of information regarding RSC's control structure on its *About Us* and *Leadership and Administration* webpages, the College promptly updated these pages to explicitly clarify its relationship to MCCC and its Governing Board. This corrective action illustrates responsiveness and commitment to public accuracy.

RSC provides comprehensive and easily accessible information about its academic programs through multiple channels, including the College Catalog, program websites, class schedule, and searchable tools for curriculum details. Detailed information regarding tuition and fees, the Net Price Calculator, and cost of attendance ensures financial transparency. The College also supplies complete State Authorization disclosures, including participation in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), which communicates whether students in other states may lawfully enroll in programs and whether credentialing disclosures are required.

Accreditation information, including RSC's continuous accreditation status, display of the HLC Statement of Accreditation, and programmatic accreditations, is available publicly and in compliance with accreditation requirements. Admission requirements are clearly explained through published Administrative Regulation 2.2 and in the catalog. RSC also ensures that each course syllabus includes standardized language regarding expectations, academic integrity, accommodation statements, and Title IX information, supporting consistency and transparency in the learning experience.

RSC's Institutional Advancement (IA) Department plays a central role in ensuring accuracy and currency of public-facing materials. IA oversees marketing, communication, web development, recruitment, social media, and alumni engagement to maintain a consistent and accurate college message. A formal Website Governance Guide establishes defined procedures for maintaining website accuracy, roles and responsibilities of content owners, and standards for updates, accessibility, and compliance. Annual website audits conducted through the Compliance Calendar ensure updated content, improved navigation, and alignment with accessibility requirements.

RSC also exhibits transparency through extensive reporting and disclosures. The Department of Institutional Effectiveness publishes annual dashboards and reports, including enrollment demographics, Pell recipient data, retention, graduation, and transfer rates, as well as a comprehensive College Fact Sheet. To meet federal consumer-information obligations under the Higher Education Act, RSC maintains publicly accessible HEA/consumer information pages, linking to required

disclosures on safety, financial aid, outcomes, and compliance policies.

Information about faculty and staff, including qualifications and leadership structure, is available through public directories and the College Catalog. RSC also transparently communicates information about the educational experience via documentation of academic student organizations, such as Phi Theta Kappa, National Society of Leadership and Success, and Honors, as well as Student Life programs.

In addition, the college publicizes its cultural and co-curricular offerings, including historical and cultural programming by the Community and Engagement Council, International Education Week, community service opportunities such as the East Valley Rotaract Club, and its educational radio programming through KJZZ, KBACH, and the Hear Arizona podcast initiative.

While transparency is clearly demonstrated across academic, financial, and governance information, the narrative could be strengthened by clarifying how annual web audits translate into systematic improvements, such as identifying common issues, tracking the types of updates made, or documenting trends over time. Additionally, although SARA participation is noted, the institution may wish to more prominently feature its licensure disclosure automation as an important transparency measure for out-of-state students.

RSC provides clear, comprehensive, and accessible information to students and the public regarding its programs, costs, governance, accreditation, and overall educational experience. In subsequent Arguments, the college might consider sharing how its auditing processes and automated disclosures might lead to enhancements in public information accuracy and accessibility.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.C. Board Governance

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In discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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The Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) Governing Board demonstrates autonomy and clear fiduciary responsibility in overseeing the district's 10 colleges, including Rio Salado College (RSC). The Board functions independently, with decision-making directed by its stated mission, vision, values, and strategic priorities. The Board composition is seven elected officials and one student board member; all functioning in support of the college and enjoying independence; five elected positions are tied to geographic districts and two are elected at-large, ensuring diverse county representation. Board members serve staggered four-year terms, which fosters continuity and stability of governance operations.

The Governing Board oversees the Chancellor, the district's sole employee who reports to the Governing Board, and who holds authority and accountability for district operations and delegates implementation of administrative regulations to vice chancellors, college presidents, and other leaders. This delineation of authority ensures the Board remains focused on policy-level oversight while day-to-day management is performed by district and college executives.

The district's Governance leadership model, supported by formal Board Policies and Administrative Regulations, establishes procedures, expectations, and accountability mechanisms for Board conduct. Required Board training is outlined in Governance Investment, which mandates professional development for new and continuing board members to ensure informed financial and academic decision-making. Board members also complete onboarding training delivered by the Office of General Counsel, such as the comprehensive training session delivered at the December 14, 2022 Board Work Session.

The adoption of the Shared Governance Blueprint (2022) reinforces the district's commitment to inclusive governance and systemic collaboration across the colleges. This framework defines shared governance as engaging internal constituencies in the creation of plans, policies, and procedures, thereby improving decision-making. The Blueprint established a Shared Governance Council (SGC) composed of five district-wide councils:

- Teaching, Learning, and Classroom Council
- Student Access, Success, and Experiences Council
- Operational & Human Resources, Facilities, and Technology Council
- Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Compliance Council
- Shared Governance Executive Council (SGEC)

These councils serve as standing bodies responsible for making recommendations or final decisions where delegated by the Chancellor. RSC's President sits on the SGEC, ensuring representation of the institution's interests in system-level decisions.

The Governing Board reinforces transparency by conducting regular monthly meetings that are open to the public. Meeting agendas are published in advance, and minutes dating back to 2017 are publicly accessible. The Board receives reports from constituency groups—including college administration, Faculty Senate, adjunct faculty senate, employee senate, and student life, which helps ensure broad stakeholder involvement in shared governance processes.

Ethical conduct expectations are clearly defined through the Board Members Code of Conduct, which outlines professional conduct standards, non-partisanship, and rules governing gifts, gratuities, and compensation. Per the Manner of Governing, board members may speak individually as elected officials but are obligated to act collectively in the best interests of the institution.

Faculty governance plays an important role in the overall governance ecosystem. The Residential Faculty Senate at RSC, aligned with the Residential Faculty Agreement, supports shared governance by contributing to policy development and teaching and learning initiatives. The district's Instructional Councils, composed of one voting faculty representative from each college per discipline, oversee the course bank, curriculum planning, and transfer pathways further demonstrating that decision-making structures intentionally incorporate academic expertise.

Although the district demonstrates strong governance processes, the narrative offers limited evidence of how/if the Governing Board evaluates its own performance or how outcomes from board training contribute to decision-making. Additionally, while RSC submits constituency-based reports to the Board, the documentation does not state how their reports are received/acted upon.

In subsequent Arguments, the college might consider providing clearer examples of Board self-evaluation practices, demonstrating how board development influences governance decisions, and describing the mechanisms by which reporting structures are aligned and coordinated across the full district.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.D. Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

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The institution supports academic freedom and freedom of expression in the pursuit of knowledge as integral to high-quality teaching, learning and research.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Rio Salado College (RSC) demonstrates strong institutional support for academic freedom and freedom of expression through clearly defined policies, district governance structures, and resource practices. The rights of residential (full time) and adjunct faculty are formally outlined in Section 3.1 – Academic Freedom of the Residential Faculty Agreement, establishing the professional autonomy faculty need to explore, present, and assess knowledge consistent with academic standards.

MCCCD maintains a district-level Academic Freedom Committee with three standing subcommittees —Education and Training, Academic Freedom Assistance, and Policy Review and Recommendation—to monitor, reinforce, and advance academic freedom across its colleges. RSC further supports academic freedom through its Academic Freedom Philosophy Statement, which affirms the importance of academic freedom within the context of the college’s mission and is posted on both the residential and adjunct faculty intranet sites to ensure visibility and institutional alignment.

The institution also demonstrates commitment to freedom of expression, consistent with state law. RSC submits an annual Free Expression Report to MCCCD, documenting compliance with district policies regarding free assembly, expressive activity, and the free exchange of ideas. This reporting structure reflects transparency and alignment with statutory requirements safeguarding student and community expression.

RSC’s library services further reinforce freedom of expression and intellectual inquiry. The library’s Banned Books Week research guide promotes awareness of issues related to censorship and affirms access to diverse materials and viewpoints. Additionally, the Collection Development Policy and Procedures includes an Intellectual Freedom Statement that guides acquisition practices, ensuring collections represent a broad spectrum of ideas central to academic discourse.

These policies and practices collectively demonstrate that the institution protects the essential freedoms required for robust teaching, learning, and research.

While the institution provides clear evidence of policies and structures that support academic freedom and freedom of expression, the narrative would be strengthened by offering concrete examples ( if any) of how these commitments are enacted in practice, such as in situations in which academic freedom concerns were addressed or ways in which the Free Expression Report has informed campus dialogue or led to improvements. Such illustrations would more fully demonstrate the operationalization of these principles.

RSC offers strong evidence of its support for academic freedom and freedom of expression through formal agreements, district-level committees, policy-aligned reporting, and library practices that reinforce intellectual freedom. In subsequent Arguments, the college might consider supplementing this evidence with specific examples showing how these policies and structures function in real-world contexts to further demonstrate their effectiveness and impact.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 2.E. Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application

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The institution adheres to policies and procedures that ensure responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Rio Salado College (RSC) demonstrates strong institutional support for responsible knowledge acquisition, discovery, and application through documented research activities, ethical policies, instructional support systems, and college-wide academic integrity procedures. Faculty and students engage in scholarly work shared through various internal and external forums, as evidenced in the institution's compilation of research examples

The college supports faculty scholarship through sabbaticals, which are available every seven years under Section 12.8 of the Residential Faculty Agreement. An example of this engagement is a recent sabbatical producing a dissertation focused on equity and institutional inclusivity.

RSC demonstrates robust evidence of educational research contributions, including the development of predictive analytics models such as RioPACE (Progress and Course Engagement) and RioPACT (Persistence and Completion Tracking). RioPACE uses student engagement indicators to support early intervention efforts and is embedded in 565 online courses, while RioPACT analyzes persistence and risk factors to support equitable outcomes; both models have received recognition for innovation, including RioPACT's 2023 WCET WOW Award.

Student participation in knowledge creation is supported through community-based learning, which is identified as a core purpose in RSC's mission documents, enabling students to contribute to applied and community-engaged research activities. Organizations like Phi Theta Kappa engage students in Honors-in-Action projects that combine research and service, such as the *Take a Break* project focused on stress-relief interventions.

RSC secures external funding that contributes to applied research and disciplinary advancement. The College documents a number of grants, including the NSF-funded *Nano Knows No Limits* initiative, which resulted in presentations and dissemination of best practices for semiconductor technician education.

The institution provides extensive library guidance that supports ethical and effective information use. Students frequently access citation and research guides, evidenced by high usage data on APA, MLA, and plagiarism resources, and instructors may request virtual or in-person library instruction sessions. RSC emphasizes information literacy, a college-wide learning outcome assessed at the course, program, and institutional levels. Policies require citation of third-party materials and include standardized copyright acknowledgments in all online syllabi.

The Library Instructional Coordinator collaborates with course developers to identify ethically

appropriate third-party materials, including subscription-based resources and Open Educational Resources (OER), ensuring proper copyright compliance. A centralized Copyright Department assists faculty in securing permissions, selecting materials, and educating faculty and students on copyright responsibilities through guides covering image, audio, and video use.

Academic integrity is reinforced through an institutional Academic Ethics and Integrity webpage, required syllabus statements, and enforcement of Administrative Regulation 2.3.11 – Academic Misconduct. The Office of Academic Integrity (OAI) monitors the assessment database for anomalies (e.g., shared IP addresses), uses a Peer-to-Peer Plagiarism Detection System, and coordinates with faculty chairs to administer progressive interventions.

The college is actively addressing the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI). RSC is developing an institutional AI Roadmap, informed by national models, and establishing focus areas, charters, and task timelines. Faculty have created college-wide syllabus language regarding AI use, developed department-specific guidance such as the STEM policy manual, and participate in workshops hosted by the Innovation Think Tank. The district also provides AI resources, including misconduct guidance, syllabus templates, and student-facing materials. Writing tutors support students suspected of improper AI use, and RSC participates in the International Day of Action to promote academic integrity.

The New Student Orientation (NSO101), a free non-credit online module, introduces students to academic integrity expectations. A reported average of 1,600 participants annually, with a 16.7-percentage-point increase in persistence for NSO participants compared to nonparticipants, illustrates its effectiveness.

Responsible research oversight is ensured through MCCC's Institutional Review Board (IRB) Policy, which requires faculty, staff, and external investigators to follow federal human-subjects regulations. Local College Research Review Committees screen proposals, and full IRB review occurs when required. Research must receive site approval from the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and IRB members complete required training at appointment and every three years thereafter.

While the institution provides extensive evidence of research engagement and ethical practices, the narrative would benefit from additional clarity regarding the scope of grant activity, such as the number of grants awarded and associated funding levels—as well as concrete examples illustrating how predictive analytics have informed or changed teaching or advising practices. Such detail would strengthen the demonstration of responsible knowledge application.

RSC adheres to policies and procedures that ensure ethical and responsible acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge. The institution supports a robust culture of research, academic integrity, information literacy, predictive analytics innovation, and responsible AI integration. In subsequent Arguments, the college might consider supplementing its narrative with specific metrics, grant-related data, and examples that highlight how analytic tools are actively shaping institutional practice.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## Criterion 2 - Summary

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In fulfilling its mission, the institution acts with integrity; its conduct is ethical and responsible.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Rio Salado College (RSC), within the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), demonstrates district-, college-, and individual-level integrity through established codes of conduct, ethical expectations, and mandatory training that ensure compliance with federal and state laws and district regulations (MCCCD, 2026). Required employee acknowledgments, conflict-of-interest disclosures, stewardship and ethics training, and adherence to Administrative Regulations collectively reinforce ethical and responsible conduct across the institution.

The institution maintains strong transparency in communications with students and the public by providing complete and accurate information across its catalog, website, marketing, and public-facing materials. This includes detailed descriptions of academic programs, faculty qualifications, governance structures, tuition and fees, accreditation status, and consumer information disclosures.

The MCCCD Governing Board acts autonomously and in the best interests of RSC and its students, guided by clearly articulated governance policies, ethical requirements, elected representation, and shared governance structures aligned with district-wide strategic priorities.

Teaching, learning, and research at RSC are supported by strong protections for academic freedom and freedom of expression, as evidenced by the Residential Faculty Agreement, district Academic Freedom Committees, annual Free Expression reporting, and library practices that uphold intellectual freedom and open inquiry.

RSC promotes responsible acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge through institutional policies and systems, including robust academic integrity procedures, AI ethics guidance, predictive analytics research, library information literacy initiatives, and IRB processes that ensure responsible human-subjects research.

## 3 - Teaching and Learning for Student Success

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The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

### 3.A. Educational Programs

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The institution maintains learning goals and outcomes that reflect a level of rigor commensurate with college-level work, including by program level and the content of each of its educational programs.

#### Rating

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Met

#### Rationale

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RSC evidence confirms that degree programs are aligned with course competencies and program learning outcomes. RSC provided clear examples of where the learning outcomes and competencies are located, shared and enforced. Additional evidence provided demonstrates the work of an Instructional Council and, where appropriate, Advisory Councils to inform programs as to changes and relevancy. A specific example was provided of the Business Advisory Council and how recommendations were incorporated into courses. RSC incorporates faculty and industry input into developing and sustaining programs competencies and outcomes.

RSC demonstrates the use of a Guided Pathways Framework, which is a comprehensive reform model to better support students in achieving their goals. RSC evidenced the Guided Pathways Framework with an example of the their organization of nine Fields of Interest. Furthermore, transfer courses are articulated through course equivalency with the three state universities in Arizona. RSC implements best practices to support student goals and transfer opportunities.

RSC's "One Course, Many Sections" model has been developed to provide course consistency across the college. Evidence was provided that displayed how instructional technology teams track the development, production, maintenance, and deactivation of courses. The narrative provided a description of how a Faculty Chair works with the Instructional Design and Technology Department to develop a course for wide usage. Assessment examples were provided, which are consistent across sections regardless of modality and enrollment type (e.g., dual enrollment). RSC provided access to course shells for review and it became evident how sections are created by different instructors for the same course. RSC has clear and consistent assessment practices using the "One course, Many Sections" as the vehicle.

The team had access to a modest number of online courses chiefly for confirmation of rigor and RSI. Rio Salado uses a proprietary LMS titled Rio Learn that required tutoring from the college for access and navigating. For the courses that the team explored, it was clear that content was appropriate and

regular and substantive interaction was ongoing.

For Dual Enrollment, RSC follows the same procedures for faculty qualifications, evaluation, syllabus review, assessment review, etc., Evidence from the Dual Enrollment Office website identifies the available infrastructure to support school locations. RSC supports high school students in the same manner as any other student at the college.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.B. Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry

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The institution's educational programs engage students in collecting, analyzing and communicating information; in practicing modes of intellectual inquiry or creative work; and in developing skills adaptable to changing environments.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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RSC outlined contributions to intellectual inquiry through three areas of scholarship: College Contributions, Faculty Contributions, and Student Contributions. In regards to College Contributions, evidence provided points to research efforts related to predictive analytics for student persistence, which includes an award and recognition from outside entities. Further evidence relates to administrative publishing and presentations. RSC administration clearly contributes to scholarship.

RSC faculty regularly contribute to scholarship; the examples provided by RSC demonstrate that faculty are engaged in journal publication, conference presentations, and poster presentations. Conference and poster presentations include national and international conferences. RSC faculty solidly contribute to scholarship.

Additionally, RSC students are engaged in creativity, developing skills that are adaptable to changing environments, and scholarship. Evidence provided confirms that students engage in scholarship through the Honors Program achieving recognition as All Arizona-Academic Scholars. RSC students regularly contribute to scholarship.

The college asserts that all degree programs are designed to have students meet critical thinking and information literacy outcomes through courses and program content. Additionally, for graduation, all students are expected to provide evidence of applying intellectual inquiry in their designated areas of study,

The team notes that much of the information in this section was related to AGECE curriculum and related general education program policies which are a better fit for 3A. In subsequent Arguments, RSC should focus more explicitly on content and evidence for this component.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

### 3.C. Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff

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The institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services.

#### Rating

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Met

#### Rationale

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RSC has a unique faculty model that employs "Residential" (full-time) faculty who serve as Faculty Chairs for their assigned program areas. Necessarily, with 40,000 students and 24 FT faculty, RSC employs a large number of adjunct faculty (~1200) reporting to or coordinated by Residential Faculty and their staff. The institution provided evidence that HLC has noted this model as acceptable to support the efforts of the college. RSC noted enviable longevity in the adjunct faculty ranks, conveying stability and consistency for faculty sufficiency. Although this alternative model appears to be managed well, the team encourages the college to monitor the balance between adjunct and full-time faculty and continuously review the impact for responsiveness to student needs.

Argument narrative identifies engagement in district-wide councils and task forces as well as opportunities to serve on the MCCCCD Faculty Executive Council. A faculty instructional team provides support for the Residential Faculty Chairs, and the college provided job descriptions identifying how these positions support faculty in the hiring process, refining department policies and procedures, overseeing issues, and evaluating adjunct faculty.

The institution is committed to ensuring that faculty and staff members are adequately credentialed. RSC has established clear guidelines for assessing faculty qualifications; confirmation of qualifications was noted in the Residential Faculty Agreement. Additional evidence from a sample of residential faculty and adjunct credentials (along with teaching assignments) provided by RSC demonstrated how the process is followed and seems effective. Additionally, evidence from the MCCCCD website shows a clear policy for maintaining the same qualifications of faculty regardless of adjunct or dual enrollment assignments. If an adjunct faculty member does not yet meet the minimum requirements, RSC provides a Faculty Credentials Development Plan to support teaching while working towards academic requirements. Evidence from the Standard Operating Procedure details the annual review of this process. RSC should consider including fields of study in the directory to make clear that faculty credentials align with teaching areas.

RSC offers its faculty and staff training and professional development opportunities to ensure that they in turn provide students with quality educational experience. The Argument identified a fund for Residential Faculty provided for within the Faculty Agreement and adjunct faculty are provided funding through the AFPG program. Also, the MCLI provides teaching and learning support, along with Quality Matters Training. Evidence provided confirms support for adjunct faculty training along with a breadth of support from the Institutional Services Director and Coordinator. Evidence includes participation in faculty meetings, attendance at Adjunct Faculty Development Workshops, New Adjunct Orientation, and an adjunct faculty development fund. Evidence offered confirms that the

institution continues to grow faculty in their knowledge and skill development with a sabbatical policy that guides opportunities for faculty to develop new courses, research, or complete dissertations.

RSC demonstrated that it has the resources and processes appropriate to conduct reviews of faculty and staff. Examples of faculty evaluation identified a probationary review offered through a Peer Assistance and Review model. Probationary faculty are reviewed annually and they submit a Faculty Evaluation Plan every third year after the completion of probation. Evidence provided confirmed the effectiveness of the process.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

### **3.D. Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching**

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The institution provides student support services that address the needs of its student populations, as well as the teaching resources and infrastructure necessary for student success.

#### **Rating**

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Met

#### **Rationale**

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Rio Salado College's support services are offered both online and on-site. For example, RSC's library services, including information literacy instruction, are designed to reach and support online learners in alignment with their primary student audience. RSC's tutoring services are offered both on-site and online through synchronous tutoring sessions and through a partnership with Brainfuse. In addition, RSC initiated the Student Digital Experience (SDX) to improve the student experience in proprietary online systems. The SDX resulted in a number of enhancements to the online systems, including improved calendar functionality and an actions list for student users. RSC's support services are adequate to reach the student populations they serve by incorporating multiple modalities and options for students.

RSC provides preparatory instruction through a number of initiatives, including the Welcome Students page on the website that introduces students to RioLearn, the option of two first-year experience courses that address topics such as goal setting and financial literacy, and a non-credit New Student Orientation class that orients students to learning at Rio Salado. Students are placed into appropriate classes based on a multiple-measures approach that is detailed in the Addendum. The Academic Advising Department works with students to develop a semester-by-semester plan that is available to students online through RioCompass.

RSC provides transcript analysis through the Academic Records and Registration Office. The Academic Advising Office offers advising appointments in-person, video, or telephone appointments. Advisors assist students in the development of a semester-by-semester plan that is available to students through the RioCompass system. Students can also view a degree progress report that identifies courses not yet completed in the program of study. The

range of modalities and availability of online information aligns with the needs of the diverse RSC student population.

RSC provides technical assistance through the Technology Helpdesk and offers online access to services and instruction through a variety of proprietary software applications. The college's Student Digital Experience served to enhance the online platforms to improve usability and functionality, and demonstrates RSC's commitment to infrastructure that supports teaching and learning. Science laboratories are completed by students using at-home lab kits provided by the college. Computer labs throughout Maricopa County are available to students to complete coursework, to submit required paperwork, and obtain instructional assistance. RSC provides clinical practice sites to meet the needs of their dental programs as well as a Dental Hygiene clinic with requisite equipment for student use. The RSC library provides online and on-site access to materials and students also have access to all MCCCDC libraries in as well as interlibrary loan services.

Overall, the support services and resources provided by RSC are available in formats that match the needs of the student population and allow students to access them at a distance.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.E. Assessment of Student Learning

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The institution improves the quality of educational programs based on its assessment of student learning.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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RSC has established an assessment philosophy and process that clearly measures the degree to which students meet the college-wide learning outcomes. The assessment of the college-wide learning outcomes is shared in the Assessment of Student Learning Report, which includes the percentages of assignments aligned with each learning outcome that demonstrated college-level competencies. In addition, the report outlines assessment data for each learning outcome, provides summary data per outcome, and describes an example plan-do-check-act cycle for a specific course that assessed the given learning outcome. Clearly identified improvements based on assessment data were identified for writing (GBS151) and oral communication.

Co-curricular student assessment appears to be an assessment of students who participated in co-curricular activities (Honors courses, Phi Theta Kappa, etc., and the degree to which they performed college-level work that aligned with the college-wide learning outcomes. Research identified that students participating in co-curricular activities performed better on the cross-college outcomes as compared to the general student body. These results affirm the value of the co-curriculum in student development and complementarity to learning outcomes..

Assessment of program-level learning outcomes is included in the program review report. The example provided is for the General Business program. Nine program-level learning outcomes were identified for the AAS in General Business and seven for the CCL in General Business. Assessment data is reported as the percentage of students performing college-level work for each of the outcomes listed. Charts also included the course number and name of the activity/assessment aligned with the outcomes. Examples of curricular changes based on program-level learning outcomes assessment was provided separately, but does not correlate to the General Business Program Review.

Additional program reviews provided in the Addendum demonstrated the consistent use of program reviews to report assessment of student learning outcomes. The additional documentation also provided more evidence of the use of assessment data to improve courses and programs. For example, in the Administration of Justice program review, improvements were identified as modifications of the instructions "to provide examples and specific guidance regarding the expectations for college-level writing."

Adjunct faculty and dual enrollment classes are included in the assessment processes. Dual enrollment students performed at higher rates than the regular student population in some instances. RSC provides a dashboard, the Dynamic Assessment Data Display (DADD), that displays student learning analytics with real-time data. The DADD also tracks course outcomes including pass, fail,

and withdrawal rates.

Overall, RSC assesses student learning outcomes at the college and program level, though program-level assessment occurs at the course level with program-level outcomes clearly mapped to specific courses and assignments/assessments. The descriptions of the assignments/assessments mapped to the program-level outcomes are typically brief and do not fully describe what students do. For example, in the Nanotechnology Program, assessment of program-level outcomes was exclusively tied to performance on final exams in a number of courses. It is unclear whether specific questions were used to assess the specified outcome or whether the grade on the final exam overall was the indicator of college-level performance for each outcome. When assessment results indicate students are performing at college-level rates lower than acceptable, then changes based on those assessment results are identified within the program review documentation. It is unclear if the college has identified a set percentage of students expected to perform at college level or if that varies with the program and/or outcome.

Program-level assessment is incorporated into program review while college-wide outcomes assessment is reported both in program review documentation (at the program level) and in a college-wide Assessment of Student Learning Report. RSC provides evidence of using assessment data to improve the quality of its educational programs; however, the information provided indicates that improvements are not made across all courses or programs but are limited to specific courses mapped to the outcome(s) for which college-level performance was below the anticipated target.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 3.F. Program Review

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The institution improves its curriculum based on periodic program review.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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Rio Salado College has established a formal model for program review and a template document to guide the development of the reviews. Each program review consists of program goals, student learning outcomes data, student demographics, data on enrollment and graduation, and program resources. The program review provided in the Argument was the General Business program, which includes an AAS and CCL. The General Business Program Review document contains robust data about the program, its students, and student success. It includes assessment of program-level learning outcomes and college-wide learning outcomes, as well as information on co-curricular programs associated with General Business. The General Business Program Review identified specific changes made to lessons within one course, GB 151, based on the assessment of college-wide learning outcomes. In addition, the document specifies changes made to the program as a result of curriculum evaluation, a process that includes a three-year cycle for course curriculum review within the General Business program. Additional examples of program reviews provided in the Addendum confirmed the use of the template and the consistent implementation of the program review process.

Program reviews are conducted on a five-year cycle, and RSC provided a master schedule of program review from 2008-09 through 2029-30 that documents the cycle. Districtwide Instructional Councils and MCCCDC evaluation, review, and quality assurance practices support the work of RSC in ensuring program quality. RSC has an established Transfer and Credit for Prior Learning Policy and relies on a variety of methods to assess prior learning for credit. In addition, the College maintain programmatic accreditation for four programs.

RSC's program review process is well-defined and occurs on a regular, five-year cycle. The process includes opportunities for faculty to identify program and course-level improvements through assessment data, curriculum evaluation, course retention and completion data, feedback on teaching effectiveness, and a reflection on overall program performance.

### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

### 3.G. Student Success Outcomes

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The institution's student success outcomes demonstrate continuous improvement, taking into account the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.

#### Rating

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Met

#### Rationale

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Rio Salado College monitors student success outcomes based on its student population. They articulated the ways in which the IPEDS graduation rate of 150% of the normal time to complete does not accurately reflect their student population, particularly given their flexible start options. This mode measures approximately 300 of the total 40,000 students. RSC determined that the IPEDS completion + transfer rate is the more accurate measure to better reflect their student population. RSC benchmarked their students success outcomes against similar institutions identified through IPEDS data as other two-year public colleges that serve a significant number of undergraduate students through distance education. Comparison data were provided for the six benchmark colleges.

RSC identified goals related to student outcomes, including completion and retention rates, in both its strategic plan and its strategic enrollment plan. The college developed data dashboards to easily track progress toward defined goals. In addition, RSC has implemented several initiatives to improve student outcomes including the "W" grading initiative in lieu of an F when the student was inactive for a long period of time, redesign of the advising department, reorganization of the Admissions, Records and Registration Department, the first year experience courses, and participation in the HLC Student Success Academy. RSC implemented Guided Pathways in an effort to improve student persistence. Between 2019 and 2024, persistence rates increased from 35% to 47%, indicating the college's efforts to continuous improve student outcomes have been successful.

Other areas of success in student outcomes includes the Wildly Important Goal (WIG) that faculty adopted to increase course success rates for First-Time-in-College students in online classes, an effort that resulted in an increase in course success rates from 49.4% to 52% since implementation. In addition, RSC relies on department-level initiatives and dashboards, transfer student outcomes reports, and the use of NSC data on graduate transfer success. RSC provided licensure and certification outcomes for their teacher education and dental hygiene programs.

RSC has adopted an intentional approach to continuous improvement of student outcomes through the selection of outcomes that clearly demonstrate a focus on continuous improvement and align with its student population, use of appropriate benchmarks for comparison, and data reports that track the success of strategic initiatives.

#### Interim Monitoring (if applicable)

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## Criterion 3 - Summary

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The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location or other differentiating factors.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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RSC's degree programs are aligned with course competencies and program learning outcomes, and the college provided clear examples of where the learning outcomes and competencies are located. RSC uses the Guided Pathways Framework to better support students in achieving their goals. The "One Course, Many Sections" model was developed to provide course consistency across the college. Instructional technology teams track the development, production, maintenance, and deactivation of courses. Dual Enrollment instruction follows the same procedures for faculty qualifications, evaluation, syllabus review, and assessment.

RSC outlined contributions to intellectual inquiry through three areas of scholarship: college, faculty, and student contributions. The administration clearly contributes to scholarship through internal research projects, continuous improvement efforts, and administrative publishing and presentations. RSC faculty members contribute to scholarship through engagement in journal publication, conference presentations, and poster presentations, including presentations at national and international conferences. RSC students are engaged in scholarship through the Honors Program and course-related activities. Degree programs are designed to have students meet critical thinking and information literacy outcomes through courses and program content.

Faculty engage in district-wide councils and taskforces, and members serve on the MCCCCD Faculty Executive Council. The institution ensures that faculty and staff are adequately credentialed and the college offers faculty and staff training and professional development opportunities, including support for adjunct faculty. The college helps faculty and staff develop their knowledge and skills and provides opportunities for sabbaticals.

Rio Salado provides support services and resources in formats that match the student population and allow students to access them at a distance. Support services are typically offered both online and on-site. Preparatory instruction is provided through the welcome page on the website, first-year experience courses, and New Student Orientation. The academic advising department works with students to develop a semester-by-semester plan and to ensure students are placed into appropriate courses through a multiple-measures approach.

RSC has an assessment philosophy and process that measures the degree to which students meet the college-wide learning outcomes, program and course outcomes. Dual enrollment courses and adjunct faculty are included in the assessment processes. Co-curricular student assessment is based on an

analysis of students who participated in co-curricular activities and the degree to which they performed college-level work aligned with college-wide learning outcomes.

RSC's program review process is well-defined and occurs on a regular, five-year cycle. The process includes opportunities for faculty to identify program and course-level improvements through assessment data, curriculum evaluation, course retention and completion data, feedback on teaching effectiveness, and a reflection on overall program performance.

RSC has identified student success outcomes that clearly demonstrate a focus on continuous improvement, align with its student population, and referenced appropriate benchmarks for comparison.

## 4 - Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

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The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

### 4.A Effective Administrative Structures

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The institution's administrative structures are effective and facilitate collaborative processes such as shared governance; data-informed decision making; and engagement with internal and external constituencies as appropriate.

#### Rating

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Met

#### Rationale

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The team reviewed evidence related to the institution's administrative structures and their effectiveness in facilitating shared governance, data-informed decision making, and engagement with internal and external constituencies. Based on the documentation provided and the structures described, the team finds that the institution maintains clearly defined administrative systems that support collaborative processes and institutional effectiveness. Governance responsibilities are appropriately delineated, stakeholder participation is structured and inclusive, and data-informed decision making is embedded in institutional operations.

At the district level, the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) maintains a clearly defined governance structure in which the Governing Board provides oversight and delegates operational authority to the Chancellor in accordance with established Board policy. Administrative regulations delineate day-to-day management responsibilities, reflecting an appropriate separation between governance and administration consistent with higher education best practices.

At the college level, Rio Salado College (RSC) demonstrates a multi-layered governance model that integrates executive leadership, faculty leadership, staff representation, adjunct faculty representation, and student participation. Governance bodies including the Executive Team, President's Cabinet, Deans Council, Budget and Infrastructure Council, Strategic Alignment Committee, and Learning Assessment Team collectively support institutional planning, academic oversight, resource allocation, and operational coordination. Representation from faculty senate leadership, adjunct faculty representatives, and a student senator within key governance groups reflects broad-based participation and adherence to shared governance principles.

Faculty governance is institutionalized through a formally constituted Faculty Senate, most recently amended in 2024, as well as participation in district-wide instructional councils and curriculum committees. Staff governance structures and established communication channels further contribute to

inclusive institutional dialogue. These mechanisms demonstrate systematic opportunities for employees to participate in institutional processes and decision making.

The institution demonstrates a mature data infrastructure led by the Office of Institutional Research. Tableau dashboards, business intelligence reporting, and routine enrollment monitoring are integrated into executive and operational meetings. Data are shared regularly with leadership teams, governance bodies, and the broader college community. The Team reviewed multiple examples in which data informed strategic and operational decisions, including program review and retirement decisions, organizational restructuring tied to student retention, workforce partnership expansion, and curriculum refinement. This consistent use of data reflects an embedded culture of evidence-based decision making.

Mechanisms for engagement with internal constituencies are structured and ongoing. Students provide feedback through course evaluations, institutional surveys, direct communication channels, and formal representation in governance through the Maricopa Student Senate as well as participation in the President's Cabinet. Faculty and staff engagement occurs through all-employee meetings, open office hours with the President, anonymous feedback mechanisms, annual planning days, and adjunct faculty meetings and surveys. These structured opportunities support transparency, communication, and inclusive participation.

Engagement with external constituencies is facilitated primarily through the President's Advisory Council, which includes employers, community organizations, public agencies, and educational partners. Evidence demonstrates that this engagement has resulted in workforce partnerships and community-based initiatives aligned with institutional strategic priorities. Community connections and Advisory input contribute to institutional responsiveness and relevance.

The team notes as strengths the institution's clearly defined governance structure, inclusive shared governance model, and embedded culture of data-informed decision making. Representation across faculty, staff, adjunct faculty, and students reflects broad-based participation in institutional processes. Structured engagement mechanisms and integrated data systems support collaborative planning and operational transparency. Opportunities for continued strengthening include more systematic assessment of governance effectiveness and clearer documentation demonstrating how stakeholder feedback directly informs institutional change. These observations relate to documentation of effectiveness rather than the adequacy of governance structures.

Overall, the institution maintains effective administrative structures that facilitate collaborative governance, data-informed decision making, and meaningful engagement with internal and external constituencies. Decision-making is consistently data-informed, supported by Institutional Research dashboards, analytics, and regular reporting. Engagement with internal and external stakeholders is routine and intentional, supporting transparency and responsiveness.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.B Resource Base and Sustainability

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The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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The team reviewed evidence related to the institution's financial condition, budgeting practices, infrastructure planning, enrollment management, and personnel resources to determine whether financial management effectively supports current operations and ensures long-term sustainability. Based on the documentation provided, financial monitoring reports, reserve levels, allocation methodology, and strategic investment planning, the team finds that the institution maintains sufficient financial and human resources to support its mission and operations. Financial oversight and planning processes appropriately balance short-term operational needs with long-term commitments.

Rio Salado College (RSC) operates within the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), which maintains centralized fiscal oversight and GASB-compliant fund accounting practices. Revenue is diversified across property taxes, tuition and fees, grants, donations, and auxiliary enterprises. The District's FY25–26 adopted budget of approximately \$1.7 billion includes \$111.3 million in reserves, providing a buffer against enrollment volatility and unforeseen expenses. These reserve levels and diversified revenue streams provide a stable financial foundation for the institution and its colleges.

The District implemented a revised allocation model incorporating a base allocation, IPEDS headcount averages, weighted FTSE, and equity-based scholarship considerations, replacing the prior enrollment-only funding formula. This methodology enhances predictability and equity in resource distribution across the system. RSC's FY25–26 allocation of approximately \$66 million reflects stable year-over-year funding aligned with institutional priorities and operational needs.

Financial monitoring occurs at both district and college levels. The Governing Board receives regular financial reports, and RSC Business Services provides monthly budget-to-actual reporting to executive leadership and managers, enabling timely oversight and adjustments. In response to concerns noted in the 2022 Team Report regarding Fund 2 auxiliary revenues, the institution conducted a comprehensive audit, corrected coding discrepancies, and realigned revenue allocations. Fund 2 revenues now appropriately support ongoing operational expenses, and the team finds that the institution responded effectively to the prior concern.

The team also notes that MCCCD received the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, reflecting adherence to nationally recognized standards for transparency, accountability, and financial reporting quality. This recognition

further supports the conclusion that financial management and reporting practices are sound.

The institution demonstrates attention to long-term sustainability through maintenance of reserve levels, structured technology lifecycle replacement planning, deferred maintenance investments, and the absence of planned physical expansion that would increase financial exposure. Enrollment growth over the past three fiscal years, implementation of a Strategic Enrollment Management plan with defined key performance indicators, and diversification of revenue through out-of-state tuition and employer partnerships further strengthen the institution's financial outlook. Technology asset tracking and scheduled refresh cycles reflect proactive capital stewardship and responsible infrastructure management.

Personnel resources are sufficient to support operations. The institution maintains a clearly defined organizational structure with appropriate staffing levels across academic and administrative units. As of June 2025, RSC employed 543 full-time employees and maintains a stable adjunct faculty cohort with significant long-term service, supporting instructional continuity. Hiring processes comply with district and federal regulations, and credential verification is centralized and standardized. Investment in onboarding, professional development, supervisor training, wellness initiatives, and employee recognition contributes to workforce stability and organizational effectiveness. Recognition as a 2025 Great Colleges to Work For further reflects employee engagement and confidence in leadership.

The team notes as strengths the institution's centralized fiscal oversight, strong reserve position, diversified revenue streams, structured allocation methodology, and proactive infrastructure lifecycle planning. Integrated budgeting processes and regular financial monitoring demonstrate responsible stewardship of resources and alignment with strategic priorities. Opportunities for continued strengthening include expanded multi-year financial forecasting and clearer articulation of long-term cost drivers and sustainability assumptions. These observations relate to forward-looking financial modeling rather than current financial stability. Physical infrastructure is well maintained using lifecycle planning, maintenance systems (CMMS, BAS, EMS), and multimillion-dollar investments. Technological infrastructure is robust, with regular equipment refresh cycles and significant investment in security, instructional technology, and network capacity.

Overall, the institution demonstrates adequate financial and personnel resources to support its operations and balances present needs with long-term commitments in a manner that supports ongoing sustainability. The institution benefits from a stable and sustainable financial foundation within a district budget of \$1.7B and substantial reserves. The updated district allocation model increases transparency and equity by using headcount, FTSE, and a base allocation to determine funding.

## **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## 4.C Planning for Quality Improvement

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The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations and the external environment.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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The team reviewed evidence related to the institution's strategic planning processes, integration of planning and budgeting, use of data, and alignment with district-level priorities to determine whether the institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. Based on the documentation provided, evidence of integrated planning cycles, structured retreats, institutional data systems, enrollment forecasting, financial modeling, environmental scanning, and external planning engagement, the Team finds that the institution engages in systematic, data-informed strategic planning that integrates operational, financial, and academic priorities.

Rio Salado College (RSC) demonstrates an established culture of integrated planning that connects strategy, budgeting, and operational execution. As part of its commitment to strengthening planning maturity, the institution joined the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) in 2019. SCUP membership provides access to national best practices in integrated planning, and institutional leadership has participated in SCUP's Integrated Planning Maturity Model framework. The Associate Dean for Strategy and Advancement completed the SCUP Emerging Leader program, strengthening institutional capacity for systematic and aligned planning processes. This engagement reflects intentional investment in planning expertise and continuous improvement.

The institution engages in regular, systematic reviews of academic programs, departments, and functional units. These reviews, including Academic Program Reviews, Annual Faculty Chair Reports, Department Reviews, and project management dashboards, inform institutional planning and funding decisions. Planning discussions are integrated into Executive Team budget retreats, which now occur in a three-phase annual cycle consisting of a Winter alignment retreat, a Spring planning and development retreat, and a Fall implementation retreat. This structure connects performance data to financial decision-making, translates strategic priorities into budget assumptions, and monitors execution to ensure alignment with institutional goals.

Department Reviews have been institutionalized through the annual College-wide Spring Planning Day, during which departments develop goals aligned with the college strategic plan. Revised templates include department outcomes, standard operating procedures, resource needs, and opportunities to leverage emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Faculty Chair Reports include enrollment and retention trends, program completion data, PDCA cycles, and resource requests. These planning documents are systematically incorporated into budget deliberations and funding decisions. Evidence demonstrates that funding allocations have been directly tied to program reviews, technology upgrades, staffing adjustments, and discontinuation of low-enrollment programs,

reflecting fiscal stewardship aligned with strategic priorities.

Student feedback is integrated into strategic planning. Results from the Priorities Survey for Online Learners (PSOL), course evaluations, and other satisfaction instruments inform service enhancements and instructional improvement initiatives. Data-driven initiatives such as the Student Digital Experience (SDX) project, the Guild Outcomes Project, and the allocation of resources for instructional design and AI-enhanced learning demonstrate responsiveness to student experience and completion data. Institutional Research compiles enrollment forecasts, Student Success indicators, and Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) results to inform retreat discussions and long-term planning cycles.

The team finds the institution's Strategic Enrollment Management plan to be particularly strong. The SEM plan includes detailed metrics, clearly defined key performance indicators, and structured monitoring processes. The institution demonstrates a thorough understanding of student demographics across its various locations and delivery models. Enrollment, retention, and completion data are disaggregated by population and location, allowing leadership to identify trends and tailor interventions accordingly. Evidence indicates that adjustments to staffing, programming, student services, and instructional strategies have been implemented in response to location-specific student needs. This level of demographic awareness and data application reflects a mature and responsive enrollment management approach that strengthens the institution's strategic planning processes.

Strategic planning at RSC is aligned with district priorities. MCCC's 2023–2026 Strategic Plan and Systemwide Strategic Enrollment Management Plan provide system-level direction, and the Chancellor reports quarterly progress to the Governing Board. At the college level, RSC established a Strategic Alignment Committee (SAC) to ensure alignment between college-level initiatives and district priorities. SAC integrates reporting across planning documents, including the College Strategic Plan, the SEM plan, Department Reviews, and 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX) initiatives. The institution reports having reached a proactive stage of integrated planning maturity through its structured alignment processes and SCUP-informed framework.

The 2024–2026 Strategic Plan was developed through shared governance processes, vetted through multiple leadership bodies, and published following campus-wide engagement. Operationalization occurs through the 4DX framework, with departmental Wildly Important Goals aligned to institutional strategies. Progress is monitored through departmental dashboards, annual monitoring reports created by SAC in collaboration with Institutional Research, and updates shared at all-employee meetings and planning forums.

Institutional Research plays a central role in integrated planning by maintaining Tableau dashboards, compiling enrollment forecasts, supporting grant reporting, conducting environmental scans, and coordinating student learning outcomes assessment. Enrollment forecasting conducted in partnership with external consultants and environmental scans produced by the district Enterprise Performance Office incorporate labor market data, workforce demand indicators, and program viability analysis. Program development processes include additional market research and stakeholder vetting to ensure alignment with workforce and community needs.

The team finds that strategic planning is systematic, iterative, and data-informed. Planning cycles incorporate enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning outcomes assessment, operational performance metrics, and analysis of the external environment. Budget development is directly linked to planning documents, and progress toward strategic goals is monitored through structured reporting mechanisms.

The team notes as strengths the institution's integrated retreat model linking strategy and budgeting, institutionalized department and program review processes, structured monitoring through dashboards and annual reports, strong alignment between college and district strategic priorities, active engagement with SCUP planning frameworks, and a particularly robust Strategic Enrollment Management plan grounded in detailed metrics and demographic analysis. Opportunities for continued strengthening include further longitudinal documentation of measurable outcomes tied to strategic initiatives across multiple planning cycles. These observations relate to continued maturation of assessment practices rather than the presence of systematic planning.

Overall, the institution demonstrates systematic strategic planning for quality improvement that integrates enrollment projections, financial capacity, student learning assessment, operational data, and environmental analysis. Planning processes are structured, collaborative, and data-driven, and they guide resource allocation and institutional improvement.

Environmental scans and enrollment forecasting inform new program development, resource allocation, and long-term planning. The Strategic Alignment Committee ensures coherence between college- and district-level strategic goals. The 4DX framework supports execution, operational alignment, and progress tracking at the departmental level. Recent planning cycles have incorporated investments in AI capacity, digital learning enhancements, and technology upgrades to strengthen instructional quality.

### **Interim Monitoring (if applicable)**

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*No Interim Monitoring Recommended.*

## Criterion 4 - Summary

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The institution's resources, structures, policies, procedures and planning enable it to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its educational programs, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

### Rating

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Met

### Rationale

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The team reviewed evidence across Criterion 4 related to governance, financial and personnel resources, and systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. Based on the documentation provided, the team finds that the institution demonstrates integrated systems that support institutional effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Rio Salado College operates within a collaborative shared governance framework that clearly delineates authority while ensuring broad participation from faculty, staff, adjunct faculty, students, and external stakeholders. Data-informed decision making is embedded across executive, academic, and operational processes, supported by a strong Institutional Research function.

The institution maintains sufficient financial and personnel resources to support its mission and current operations. Centralized fiscal oversight, diversified revenue streams, stable allocation methodologies, regular monitoring processes, and a strong reserve position provide reasonable assurance of financial sustainability. Personnel structures and professional development investments further support operational continuity.

Strategic planning is systematic and integrated. The institution engages in continuous improvement through structured planning cycles that align budgeting, enrollment forecasting, student learning assessment, department reviews, operational performance metrics, and environmental scanning. The Strategic Enrollment Management plan demonstrates particular strength, with detailed metrics and demographic analysis informing adjustments across locations and delivery models.

Overall, governance, financial stewardship, and integrated strategic planning processes function cohesively to support institutional quality and sustainability.

RSC demonstrates effective shared governance, adequate and sustainable financial and personnel resources, and a strong culture of continuous improvement supported by integrated, data-informed planning processes that incorporate enrollment trends, student feedback, fiscal analysis, departmental reviews, operational assessments, and environmental scanning.

## Review Summary

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### Criteria For Accreditation

Met

### Federal Compliance

Not Required

## Core Components Ratings

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| Number | Title                                                               | Rating |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 1      | Mission                                                             |        |
| 1.A.   | Mission Alignment                                                   | Met    |
| 1.B.   | Mission and Public Good                                             | Met    |
| 1.C.   | Mission and Diversity of Society                                    | Met    |
| 1.S.   | Criterion 1 Summary                                                 | Met    |
| 2      | Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct                          |        |
| 2.A.   | Integrity                                                           | Met    |
| 2.B.   | Transparency                                                        | Met    |
| 2.C.   | Board Governance                                                    | Met    |
| 2.D.   | Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression                          | Met    |
| 2.E.   | Knowledge Acquisition, Discovery and Application                    | Met    |
| 2.S.   | Criterion 2 - Summary                                               | Met    |
| 3      | Teaching and Learning for Student Success                           |        |
| 3.A.   | Educational Programs                                                | Met    |
| 3.B.   | Exercise of Intellectual Inquiry                                    | Met    |
| 3.C.   | Sufficiency of Faculty and Staff                                    | Met    |
| 3.D.   | Support for Student Learning and Resources for Teaching             | Met    |
| 3.E.   | Assessment of Student Learning                                      | Met    |
| 3.F.   | Program Review                                                      | Met    |
| 3.G.   | Student Success Outcomes                                            | Met    |
| 3.S.   | Criterion 3 - Summary                                               | Met    |
| 4      | Sustainability: Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning |        |
| 4.A    | Effective Administrative Structures                                 | Met    |

|      |                                  |     |
|------|----------------------------------|-----|
| 4.B  | Resource Base and Sustainability | Met |
| 4.C  | Planning for Quality Improvement | Met |
| 4.S. | Criterion 4 - Summary            | Met |

## Overall Recommendations

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### Accreditation Recommendation

Continue Accreditation

### Pathways Recommendation

N/A (Not an Option)

### Conclusion

Rio Salado College has sufficient human, technical, and financial resources to fulfill its Mission.

The college continually works to improve its services and support to students with a focus on successful attainment of course and program learning in order to move them on to transfer institutions or the world of work. RSC enjoys a clear and strong Strategic Plan that has important and useful metrics for college function and improvement. RSC sets institutional goals, budgets, and plans and collects data to assess and evaluate its progress.

RSC is an innovative institution that seeks to be as flexible, adaptive and responsive as its own creativity and budget allow. RSC offers mission-driven services and programs even as it prepares for future demands from students, community, and business partners