

South Mountain Community College Customer Success Story

About South Mountain Community College

South Mountain Community College (SMCC) is a Maricopa Community College with its main campus in Phoenix, Arizona. It was established in 1978 and started teaching students in 1980. Currently, over 8,000 students study at SMCC, either at the main site, or satellite locations in Guadalupe or Laveen. The college is led by Dr. Shari Olson, who arrived in 2011 and introduced the concept of a Strength-Based Institution. Dr. Olson had successfully used People Acuity twice in the previous decade to use strengths to drive engagement at other colleges where her leadership positively influenced outcomes



SMCC Wanted Growth

SMCC came to People Acuity to increase performance in two key areas: student engagement and retention. Dr. Olson was familiar with Gallup studies that have shown significantly increased engagement in faculty, staff, and students as they discover, develop, and regularly apply their strengths. She wanted to replicate these results at SMCC, hoping to co-create the best quality of life at the college. SMCC worked with People Acuity in three phases to strengthen their interdependence and development as a Strengths-Based Institution. This included helping faculty, staff, and students learn their personal strengths and develop Strengths Strategies to maximize their use in daily life on and off campus.

People Acuity's Approach

The People Acuity inside-out approach began with the top tier of leaders, given their ability to influence others toward interdependence and strengths use. All top and mid-level managers learned about the impact of strengths on their own engagement and wellbeing, and worked to individually apply strengths to be more effective. Feedback was very positive and more advanced training was offered. This resulted in curricula changes, and integration with Advising, Career Services, and New Student Orientation.

The second phase focused on applying the learning to students, through infusion into a College Success Course and the New Student Orientation experience. Student Advisors received advanced training from People Acuity to support a coach-like approach to working with students. Feedback during this phase was also positive, with a high percentage of them either agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements referencing both confidence and skills awareness increases in the areas of academics and career. Seeing the benefits, the strengths-based experience was made available to more SMCC enrollees.

The third phase of SMCC's strengths work was designed to increase the application of strengths at the team level. It focused on increasing positive influence (leadership) through teams. The introduction of this *Interdependent* Collaboration experience produced an environment filled with trust, high performance, engagement, teamwork, and productivity. It resulted in new employees adopting new goals and increasing collaboration and the development of Internal Strengths Coaches who serve as resources to faculty, staff, and students.

Results

Feedback has been phenomenal with 96% of participants indicating they were very satisfied with their learning journey. These and other efforts of SMCC leaders have resulted in several national award recognitions. In 2019 they were a top ten finalist for the 2020 Bellweather Award which recognizes leaders who are exceptional at planning and governance. They won a 2020 League Excellence Award for the extra-mile efforts to make a difference in the lives of students. In 2019 they were also named as a finalist for the Aspen Prize for Community College excellence. The SMCC efforts to make life better for staff, faculty, and students has definitely led to increased interdependence, energy, performance, and engagement has positively impacted relationships and results. SMCC's commitment to these kinds of learning experiences continues as the benefits of it are undeniable!