

# Accolade

Fall 2025

## **BRIGHT FUTURES**

Adult Education program brims  
with courage, resilience  
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## **PAVING THE WAY**

Meet the award-winning alum  
advising those following in her  
footsteps | **page 13**





# Board President's Message

IT TAKES COURAGE TO COME BACK. TO FORGE A NEW PATH. TO CHANGE.

You'll see plenty of courage in this issue, starting with the cover story about Adult Education. The department provides second chances to a population of students whose potential is as great as any other, so long as they pursue the great equalizer – education. Sometimes a listening ear and some encouragement is all they need. The department's new director, Cara, provides a terrific example. She took a leap of faith when making the switch from the nursing career for which she trained to the unfamiliar. In Adult Ed, she is learning the ropes while leading a team of four full time and 10 part time instructors, a student success coach, and two administrative/data personnel.

The Foundation's goal is to enable access to the college, especially for those who might otherwise be unable to attend. We help facilitate the intellectual stimulation, career acquisition and growth, and yes, even sometimes the re-creation or dreams of our students. We also help keep them current, up-to-date with the times. For instance, the college continues with its artificial intelligence project, leading the local education community into the unknown through learning. Too, the college is finding new ways to meet training needs in more remote areas simply by talking to the people living and working in those regions.

Ongoing renewal is one of the things that draws people to Cochise College. The organization simply must evolve in order to effectively serve constituents. I am extremely proud to be affiliated with this great hometown college and extend my sincerest thanks to all of you whose donations help us support student access while assisting the college evolve with its communities and with the times.

*Larry Borger  
President  
Cochise College Foundation*



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"Accolade" inspires charitable support of Cochise College by raising awareness about competitive advantages of the college and the activities of its students, faculty, staff, and the Cochise College Foundation, which promotes student success through scholarships, facilities development, and program support.

**Cover photo:** John Boothby, student speaker for the Adult Education program in May 2025. Photo by Dani Foti.



# *From the Cochise College President*

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, Cochise College's comprehensive 10-year accreditation visit will be right around the corner.

There are few things more important in the life of an institution than accreditation. It's the foundation that ensures our students can transfer credits, receive federal financial aid, and present employers with academic credentials that hold real value. Accreditation is synonymous with credibility.

Our February 2026 site visit is a formal acknowledgement that we're doing right by students and our communities. It lets everyone know that Cochise is committed to quality and continuous improvement, and that it lives up to its mission every day. It's also an opportunity to share the great work of our faculty and staff with peer reviewers from other institutions. They'll evaluate everything from our academic programs and governance to student support services and resource management.

Following our last comprehensive review, HLC encouraged us to strengthen

our workforce development efforts and broaden our community outreach. And we've done just that by reimagining positions and responsibilities, expanding career and technical education and workforce programs in conjunction with community partners and implementing ways for communities to engage with the college and share their needs with us.

This work ties directly to our mission: to provide inclusive and accessible educational opportunities that support social responsibility, community engagement, meaningful careers, and lifelong learning. That's why accreditation matters. It's not just a requirement; it's a shared responsibility and a point of pride for all of us who are part of the Cochise College story.

*James Perey, Ed.D.  
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# *Bright futures begin in Adult Education*

PROGRAM BRIMS WITH STORIES OF COURAGE, RESILIENCE





AS THE SUN SET on the Douglas Campus on May 14, a crowd settled into red metal chairs for the most emotional completion ceremony of the year. The 30 participants were among 52 who had earned high school equivalency with the help of the instructors and staff of Cochise College Adult Education.

Cara Elkins, the department's new director, shook off nerves and made her way to her spot on the stage. Not one to relish the spotlight, she'd arranged for an emcee, a colleague from her days as a member of the nursing faculty. But it took a different kind of courage and self-confidence for Elkins to make the leap from the role of assistant director of nursing, a program from which she graduated in 2017, to lead a grant-funded department with which she had limited experience. She thrived in her work with recruitment and retention in the Nursing Program, but she also reached a point where she wanted to broaden her impact.

"When the opportunity arose to lead Adult Education – a program that supports a different vulnerable population – I couldn't pass it up," Elkins says. "It was a chance to help a department move from surviving to thriving, and to make a meaningful difference in even more lives through the diverse programs we offer."

Elkins became director in March 2025, and her first graduation was one of the biggest highlights. Seeing the number of lives the department impacts daily is powerful, she notes; students earn their equivalency every week, and each one is a celebration of smiles, hugs and cheers. One time per year, the department comes together to celebrate all of its graduates with a ceremony.

Elkins' first months in the role were not without challenges.

"Understanding the grant and funding structure of the program was something no one could have fully prepared me for. It's a complex system. I'm learning a completely new set of standards, working with new staff, and adopting a new way of thinking.

It's pushing me to grow both as a leader and as a person, and I'm genuinely grateful for that opportunity."

This year also included a federal funding freeze as the government conducted a broad review of education grants. The funds were released to programs mid-year, but Elkins reports the grant funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which also supports AZ@Work, is at risk of being defunded as early as July 2026. Without the grant funding, the college would be hard-pressed to effectively offer instruction to what is arguably both the most at-risk and the most motivated student population.

*Most students aren't coming directly out of high school or believing "college just sounded good." Their lives have already begun.*

"I understand the government's need to adjust funding to ensure resources are used effectively, but Adult Education is one area I believe should be viewed as an impact-driven investment," Elkins said.

During this year's freeze, the college stepped in and ensured that at least minimal services could continue, an act Elkins points to as an understanding of the importance of the program.

Adult education students run the gamut from those who just didn't get through high school to those who wish to improve their English skills in order to better integrate in the United States. Some are pushed into enrolling and later see how high school equivalency can change their lives. Others have hit a wall in the workplace and know the only way over it is education.

"Many times, all that students need is for someone to listen to what they envision for their lives," says data specialist Jack Petty, who has been with the department for 13 years.

Petty points out that most of the students aren't coming directly out of high school or from the position of knowing their career goals or believing "college just sounded good." Their lives have already begun. They may be juggling jobs, raising children, and coming from different educational levels, and they usually can't afford to drop everything for something that may or may not pan out. What's more, some aren't aware of the help and resources available to them until they are registering and realize what education can do for them.

"You get to see an evolution," Petty says. "That blossoming is amazing. And you get to hear these really, really great stories."

Every day, Elkins says, we interact with individuals who are pushing through barriers to change their lives. Those stories are what help make the high school equivalency completion ceremony such a draw.

John Boothby's is one such story. Boothby came to Sierra Vista from Yuma in 2016 to help open a residential recovery center for men. A high school football standout, he had been recruited to play for Arizona Western College, but his struggles with substance abuse and addiction meant he couldn't continue. At the graduation ceremony, he shared his journey toward sobriety and education's role in helping him move forward.

"Addiction took so much from me... my health, my relationships, and my self-worth," he says. "But hitting rock bottom also gave me something invaluable: the

clarity to realize I needed a change. Recovery wasn't just about quitting substances; it was about rebuilding myself from the ground up. Today, I'm proof that transformation is real, and no one is beyond redemption."

Boothby first pursued high school equivalency in 2016. Even though he was unsuccessful, he said it was a humbling moment in his life. While he picked himself back up, he found new work as a life coach to youth battling substance abuse. However, he discovered he could only go so far without a high school diploma, so back he came to Cochise College, where things looked a little different the second time around.

Several years ago, the college began offering an Integrated Education and Training program, coupling high school equivalency with training for direct employment. Boothby pursued customer service training, and that helped him when he set out to earn a behavioral health technician certificate, for which he received a scholarship that reinforced his commitment to helping others. The scholarship, he said, reminded him that his past doesn't disqualify him; it equips him to serve with empathy and understanding. Now, he's applying those certificate credits toward a general studies degree and will enroll in Spring 2026 in courses in addiction and treatment and trauma-informed care. His ultimate goal is to become a nurse or a therapist, with a mission to turn his pain into purpose and his struggles into strength for others.

This semester, Boothby is a member of the Sierra Vista chapter of Phi Theta Kappa international honor society and the National Society of Leaders and Success. He's also enrolled in a ceramics class, where faculty member Virginia Thompson helped him make a metaphorical discovery: he is a perfectionist, but, like ceramic pieces, unique and just as good, if not better, with flaws.





Boothby is quick to acknowledge the learning environment maintained by college personnel, naming Elkins, Petty, Sie-Se Washington, Kresta Roosevelt, Jennifer Woolston, Andy Espinoza, and Bryan Homrighausen, as individuals willing to step out of their comfort zone and go out of their way to help students.

“The instructors believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself. Even when you’re down, they make you feel like you’re up. Graciousness and understanding...it’s a core value of the college.”

Boothby believes so much in the Adult Education program that he is considering participating in a student club that will partner with the national Coalition on Adult Basic Education and give students a platform to connect, advocate and engage in leadership opportunities. Elkins sees the club, which is still in development, as a way to further reinforce the value and visibility of Adult Education.

“Moving into Adult Education has been one of the most rewarding and most challenging decisions I’ve made in my career,” Elkins says. “Every student in our program has a unique and powerful story worth sharing, and I want people to recognize the good work happening here every single day.”



*John Boothby and other Adult Education graduates celebrate ▲*

## ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Cochise College Adult Education serves about 550 students annually in locations across the county, and its services may soon extend into Graham and Greenlee counties. Despite challenges related to technology access in more rural locations like Willcox, Elkins’s goal is to impact as many lives across southeastern Arizona as can possibly be served. She plans to grow Adult Education into a model program that the State of Arizona looks to for evidence-based practices, forward thinking, and adaptability.

“With the staff and instructors we have, that goal is absolutely within reach. We’re already known for the incredible work we do helping students pass one of the most challenging tests – math. People need to understand that learning English can take someone from unemployment to management, and earning a high school equivalency can increase annual income by nearly \$10,000.”

- **English for Speakers of Other Languages** provides literacy instruction to help non-native English speakers improve their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
- **Adult Basic Education** helps adults build and strengthen important skills like reading, writing, math, and problem-solving, giving students the foundation to move forward in school, work, and life.
- **High School Equivalency** offers students three options for preparation for tests and is students’ ticket to new opportunities in work, school, and more.
- **Integrated Education and Training** enables students to build academic skills *while* gaining hands-on training for a career. Students learn reading, writing, math, and job-readiness skills at the same time they prepare for in-demand careers. Current IET offerings focus on CNA and dental assisting, customer service, and production and skilled trades.

# College foundation adds two new board members

Cochise College President Emeritus Dr. **Karen Nicodemus** and Cochise College alumnus **Alfredo Romero** recently joined the board of the Cochise College Foundation.



Nicodemus, of Palominas, led the college as president from 1997 until she retired in 2009. Her tenure at the college, which dates to the mid-1980s, began with volleyball and women's basketball coaching roles. She also

served as a faculty member in sociology and health and physical education, served as chair of the academic division that included those areas, and moved into administrative leadership roles in planning, assessment and instruction. After retirement, she provided educational consulting services. Nicodemus comes with fresh non-profit experience. She is the founder and chief executive officer of Patches' Happy Pastures, a relatively new equine rescue and sanctuary targeting senior horses whose owners can no longer care for them.

"We're excited to welcome Karen into the fold," said foundation board President Larry Borger, Bisbee. "Her passion for higher education and the students of Cochise College is obvious, and with her experience in many roles with the institution, she lends a perspective that few others can."

The Cochise College Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization. Its vision is that a Cochise College education is accessible to all who wish to attend. Its mission is to promote student success through scholarships, program support and capital development.

More than 750 Cochise College students received **scholarships totaling \$637,000** last academic year. The foundation also provided more than **\$330,000 for academic programs** and about **\$9 million**, the result of a bequest, to help the college construct the first residence hall on the Sierra Vista Campus. Fourteen volunteers and the college president serve on the foundation board. Directors may serve two five-year terms. Nicodemus and Romero began their terms on July 1.



Romero, of Douglas, has dedicated 26 years of his career to education. Currently, he is the correctional education program supervisor at the Arizona State Prison located north of Douglas. In addition to teaching there since 2006, he has taught social studies, science,

U.S. history, philosophy and construction trades at the Center for Academic Success, Douglas middle and high schools, and Cochise College, from which he graduated with an associate of arts degree in 1995. He also holds a bachelor of arts degree in secondary education/social studies from the University of Arizona and a master's in curriculum and instruction from the American College of Education. Romero was the Arizona State Prison Complex – Douglas Administrator of the Year in 2022 and the Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry Southern Region Supervisor of the Year in 2023.

"We are excited about Alfredo's enthusiasm for students of all ages, and his ability to relate to Cochise College alumni will serve us well as the college considers ways to engage its former students," Borger said.



Bugen Hall student housing on the Sierra Vista Campus. Photo by Kyle Zirkus Photography.

## Precinct 3 elected board seat filled

Cochise County Superintendent Jacqui Clay selected Mark Farr to fill a Governing Board seat vacated by long-time board member Jane Strain, who moved out of state prior to the December 2026 end of her term. Farr was appointed in August and will fill out that term before considering whether to run for another term. He is the senior vice president of business lending at American Southwest Credit Union, and he is passionate about supporting business owners and helping them grow their companies. His Governing Board precinct

includes Fort Huachuca, north Sierra Vista and Huachuca City.

When he became aware that a seat on the board was open, Farr felt drawn to it because he was always active in the community.

"In my youth, I was taught the principle that, 'When you are in the service of your fellow beings, you are only in the service of your God.' I believe that statement and try to live it."

Farr is the branch president of the Whitewater Draw



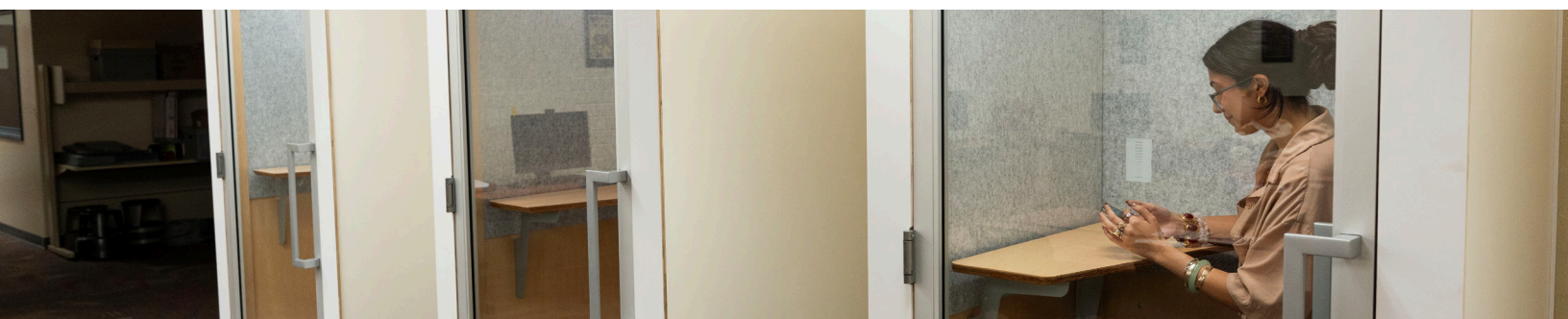
Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a prison ministry serving the Cochise County Jail and the Arizona State Prison Complex in Douglas. He has mentored high school students through Junior Achievement and taught financial literacy to youth and adults. He currently participates in the Boots to Business program, helping service members and veterans transition to civilian life by equipping them with entrepreneurial skills. Farr has been involved with Scouting America (previously Boy Scouts of America) as a mentor, board volunteer and certified climbing and

rappelling instructor for nearly 30 years. In 2010, he received the organization's distinguished Silver Beaver Award.

Farr sees the value in community colleges and is a graduate of Eastern Arizona College. He holds a bachelor of science and a master's in business administration from other institutions but points to his community college alma mater – or “fostering mother” – for the educational experience that led to other successes in his life.



## *Individual study pods meet modern needs*



EARLIER THIS SEMESTER, Cochise College received a \$25,699 Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant from the Arizona State Library, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), to enhance student learning spaces with new solo study pods.

The project *Solo Study Pods for Community Spaces* aims to improve academic success by creating private, technology-friendly spaces for studying, online learning and phone calls.

Director of Library Services Karly Scarbrough ('09) said the project was inspired by two key challenges.

“Many students prefer to study alone and often leave the library when all private rooms are occupied. Other students are hesitant to attend class in our open computer labs. These patterns led our team to explore ways to create more individualized and private learning environments, and the study pods emerged as the ideal solution.”

The initiative aligns with the college's ongoing mission to deliver accessible, affordable, and innovative education. By improving the library and campus common areas, the initiative supports learners and online students who rely on the college's infrastructure for their academic needs.

The college completed the installation at the Douglas Campus library, and the pods are now available to students.

Cochise College is one of several institutions across the state to be awarded an LSTA 2025 grant for innovative library services. This project is supported by the Arizona State Library, Archives & Public Records, a division of the Secretary of State, with federal funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.



# *Cochise continues exploration of AI*

Efforts to learn about artificial intelligence in education and the workplace have continued at Cochise College since the institution hosted a nationally known speaker on the topic early this year. The college wrapped up its first book circle on the subject in September. Participants included college faculty and staff, a local school board member, and teachers from K-12 charter schools. The group reviewed Bowen and Watson's "Teaching With AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning." Participants felt that it helped them gain an overview of how pedagogy can adapt to and benefit from AI while avoiding common pitfalls.

About 65 people participated in AI workshops open to educators throughout Cochise County this semester. Topics included:

- Generative AI for Educators, in which participants learned the basics, built practical skills and explored how to use AI tools ethically and responsibly,
- Generative AI for Leadership, which empowered leaders to build capacity, lead change and drive innovation in education,
- Ethical Issues of Generative AI in Education, which equipped educators and administrators to address key ethical issues and make informed decisions about AI use in educational settings,
- Redefining Assessment in the Age of AI, which inspired participants to rethink strategies to measure authentic student learning in light of the availability of AI technology,
- Building Student AI Literacy, which taught educators to equip students to understand, evaluate and ethically engage with AI,
- Generative AI for Differentiated Instruction, which helped participants understand generative AI tools through a special education lens

In addition, for-credit courses in Introduction to AI Ethics and Applications in AI Usage are in development. Once the curriculum has been approved, the three-credit courses will serve as part of the cybersecurity program and also as general education courses available to any student at the college. Development of the courses represents the college's initial effort to meet industry and student needs, which could grow as the technology is more widely adopted.





## *Cochise in the Community engages county stakeholders*

An endeavor that began in Douglas several years ago is now being carried out in other remote communities served by the college. Cochise in the Community, sponsored by the Community Engagement Division, seeks to engage stakeholders in less populated areas to identify opportunities to provide programs and services to meet needs, as well as to promote college activities. Academic deans and other decision-makers have begun participating. As a result, the college began offering AI for Business, Excel

for Business, Beginning Photography, CPR and CDL in Willcox this semester. In addition, the sessions help residents become more familiar with college personnel serving their region of the county, opening doors for collaboration. In Douglas, Cochise in the Community takes place every Friday. The sessions are new in Benson and Willcox and are currently scheduled one time per semester.



## *Campuses evolve to meet community needs*

Visitors to the Douglas Campus this semester have been met by construction vehicles and personnel working to create a new exit to Highway 80. The two-way drive was changed to a one-way drive a number of years ago, requiring guests to travel in a counterclockwise direction in order to reach the exit, no matter where they had been on campus. The new configuration will allow those parking in the first lot on campus a way to leave without traversing the entire campus loop. The project was undertaken in part to accommodate Hensel Phelps, the company working on construction of a new port of entry near Douglas. Hensel Phelps is leasing Building 100 (usually known as the Administration Building) while working on the project. The building will be reimaged and renovated for future use by the college.

In addition, remodeling is taking place in various Douglas Campus buildings to create four new classrooms, allowing the college to better accommodate student demand. A classroom

located in the library has been split in two, and the attached building that most recently housed Adult Education will soon accommodate a full-sized classroom. The building that most recently served as the University of Arizona offices will become the new landing spot for senior administration, as well as a conference and classroom.

Sierra Vista and Douglas campus residence halls are at or near capacity. Bugen Hall, the 46-bed Sierra Vista Campus living quarters, opened in January and this semester is housing students enrolled in a variety of programs, including the Southeast Arizona Law Enforcement Training Academy cadets.

Finally, the Sierra Vista Downtown Center was the site of a ceremony celebrating the opening of a law enforcement simulation lab in July. The lab features law enforcement vehicles that simulate the experience of driving conditions officers might face on Cochise County roads.

# New fund supports aviation students

Cochise College alumnus **Rebecca E. Burghy** ('87) was a full-time faculty member in aviation when she passed away unexpectedly in December 2024. To honor her life of service to students pursuing careers in aviation, Burghy's family established a scholarship in her honor. Burghy was a graduate of the professional pilot program. Her passion for flying began with a ride in a local rancher's plane. She was a certified flight instructor – instrument with multiple certifications and taught tailwheel, vintage and specialty over the years. Her aviation career spanned from flight instruction with Spokane Airways to aircraft demonstration at Lancair/Columbia Aircraft, to Boeing Commercial Planes, where she earned a patent in 2021.



## HALL OF FAME

Congratulations to the Class of 2025!



**David Gowan** ('02)  
*Arizona State Senator*



**Humberto S. Lopez** ('67)  
*Businessman and philanthropist*



**Rebecca Orozco**  
*Liberal Arts Faculty (retired)*



**Jane Strain**  
*Governing Board (retired)*



**Charles "Red" Young**  
*Educator*

Save the Date

**Class of 2025 Induction Ceremony**  
**4 p.m. Friday, April 24, 2026**  
Sierra Vista Campus, Student Union  
Event registration opens in the new year:  
**[cochise.edu](http://cochise.edu)**



**COCHISE COLLEGE  
FOUNDATION**



# *Advisor recognized as champion for students*

AS A FIRST-GENERATION college graduate, single mother, and lead academic advisor at Cochise College, **Marie "Angie" Castillo** ('99) knows first-hand the hurdles many students face on their educational journeys. Her dedication to helping others navigate similar challenges recently earned her the Outstanding First-Year Student Advocate Award from the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, a prestigious organization based at the University of South Carolina.

Castillo never expected to become the person students turn to for guidance, reassurance and hope. Nearly nine years ago, she began her career at Cochise College as a scholarship navigator in the Financial Aid Department. Today, she leads academic advising efforts at the Douglas Campus.

"I'm passionate about helping students reach their goals and creating an environment where they feel seen, supported, and empowered," Castillo said. "That passion comes from my own experience navigating higher education without a roadmap."

Castillo's commitment to student success extends beyond academics. She mentors new advisors, coordinates advising strategies across departments, and participates in initiatives like Cochise Ready, an

orientation experience designed to help first-year students build a strong foundation. When she learned she had been selected as the college's Outstanding First Year Student Advocate, Castillo was stunned.

"I was honestly very surprised and deeply humbled," she said. "Just knowing that my colleagues thought highly enough of my work to nominate me was already a huge honor. Being recognized for something I love doing every day, especially supporting students, is incredibly meaningful."

What sets Castillo apart is her empathetic, student-first approach, one shaped by the dual roles she has balanced most of her adult life.

"As a first-gen college graduate and single mom, I understand the importance of feeling seen and guided," she said. "I meet students where they are, listen to their stories, and help them believe they're capable - because they are."

Her work is deeply personal. One of her most memorable advising moments involved a student who had recently immigrated to the U.S., facing cultural adjustment, a language barrier, and financial hardship. Through consistent support, scholarship guidance, and encouragement, Castillo helped her map a path toward transfer and success.

"She came back recently to share that she had received scholarships and was moving on to pursue a degree in nutrition and human performance," Castillo recalled. "Her husband told me how much she talked about me at home and that I had believed in her. It was one of the most touching moments of my career."

For Castillo, this recognition is more than an award. It's a reminder of the impact of meaningful connection.

"My advising philosophy is built on empathy, trust, and follow-through," she said. "Small actions like a follow-up email or remembering a student's name can make all the difference. I want every student to know they matter."

Looking ahead, Castillo hopes to see continued growth in student support services that are proactive,

inclusive, and deeply collaborative.

"I'd love to see even more departments working together to create a seamless student experience," she said. "Ultimately, I want every student to feel like they belong here that support is not just available but built into the culture of the college."

She's also quick to point out that she's not alone on this mission. "I work with an amazing team, many of whom are first-generation graduates themselves. We bring a level of care that goes beyond the job description. And I believe when we lead with empathy and consistency, we help transform lives."

## *Student activities leader selected for development program*

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP & ACTIVITIES **ANDY ESPINOZA** is one of 39 participants in the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) Enlace Mid-Level Leadership Program. The program is a development experience for college and university professionals at the mid-level of their higher education organizations.

Espinoza, a 2012 graduate of Cochise College, began his career as a student employee in Student Services, where he discovered his passion for helping others navigate their educational journeys. His selection for the program reflects his dedication to student-centered leadership and his commitment to higher education. In his role, Espinoza works with Student Government and other college clubs and their activities. He is involved with the President's Student Leadership Academy and the Civic Engagement Committee.

The Enlace Mid-Level Leadership Program covers academic and student affairs management, regional institutional accreditation, effective data utilization, higher education advocacy issues, and personal interaction with professional search firm partners. It connects leaders with others across the nation, explores best practices in academic and student affairs, and strengthens skills to continue making a positive impact on students and the community.





# *Faculty, staff achievements celebrated at convocation*



Four employees nominated by their peers for exemplary service to students, their departments and the college received the Non-Exempt Staff Award (NESA), formerly known as the Achieved Classified Excellence (ACE) award. Honorees, from left, are Events Management Coordinator **Katie Sorensen**, who works in Community Engagement & Outreach; Academic Career Advisor **Angie Castillo** ('99), who works in Student Services; Accounts Receivable Technician/Cashier **Carmen Morales** ('90), who works in the Business Office; and Willcox Center Coordinator **Jodi Brock-Olivares**, who also is a member of the Community Engagement & Outreach team.

In addition, recently retired Cochise College faculty **Margarita Fate** and **Chris McVean**, each of whom served for 10 or more years and made meritorious contributions to the instructional process, were named faculty emeriti.



Curriculum Development Manager **Melissa Faglie** ('94) and **Abe Villarreal** ('01), dean of the Douglas Campus, received the NISOD award, which includes participation in the National Institute for Staff & Organizational Development annual conference. NISOD empowers faculty, staff and administrators at community and technical colleges through relevant, engaging and meaningful resources, recognition and relationships. In addition, at its Mexican Independence Day celebration, the Mexican consulate in Douglas honored Villarreal for his efforts to build community, engage students and residents from all walks of life, connect individuals with local resources, and serve as an ambassador for Cochise College and higher education.



Cochise Cares, which tracks the volunteer service of all who register, awarded **Jennifer Ratkovich** the Employee Volunteer of the Year Award for 2024. Ratkovich tallied 161 volunteer hours primarily by live streaming church services every weekend and cooking for the church fish fry fundraiser that takes place every six weeks. Ratkovich is the administrative assistant for facilities at the Douglas Campus.

# College employees pursue leadership development

This academic year, **Quintin Molina**, dean of the Business and Technology Division, and **Cara Elkins**, director of Adult Education, are fellows in the Arizona Community Colleges Leadership Academy. The new program is built on the Aspen Institute Curriculum for Community College Excellence. It is designed to advance higher education practices that significantly improve student achievement; develop leadership skills focused on learning, completion and employment; and build a network of innovative community college leaders across Arizona. In addition to readings and other work, fellows will be grouped in areas of common interest to research, produce and present a project in June 2026. **Dr. Jenn Wantz**, executive dean of community engagement, is serving as a champion for Molina and Elkins, providing ongoing support and mentoring, connecting leadership academy learning with college priorities, serving on the advisory board to identify future academy improvements, and supporting fellows with their projects.

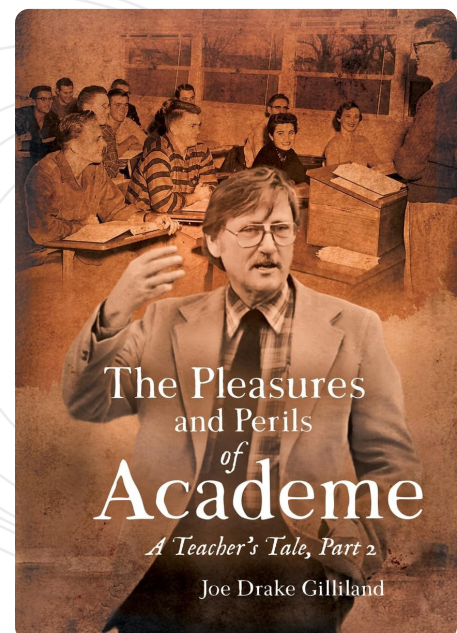
Class 34 of Project CENTRL includes **Jodi Brock-Olivares** ('01, '20), coordinator of the Cochise College Willcox Center. Project CENTRL is a one-year, experiential learning leadership development program of the Arizona Center for Rural Leadership, which

cultivates passionate, educated leaders who provide a voice for and serve rural Arizona. Brock-Olivares moved to Willcox as a youngster when her family started a small ranch. She has volunteered for many years with the county fair livestock auction and is secretary of the board of directors of the Willcox Quarterback Club, which supports K-12 athletic programs. In addition to her work at the college, where she is dedicated to expanding access to education and creating meaningful opportunities for rural students and families, she helps manage a small family restaurant.

Assistant Dean of Marketing, Communications and Advancement **Robyn Martin** is participating in the NCMPR (National Council for Marketing & Public Relations) Leadership Institute, designed to develop the leadership skills that communications professionals need to advance and succeed as a key member of their colleges' administrative leadership team. The program focuses on individual development, team dynamics and organizational context. The college marketing team Martin leads recently returned from the NCMPR District 6 conference with two gold and three silver awards recognizing outstanding achievement in community college marketing and public relations.

# Founding faculty publishes second book

**Dr. Joe Gilliland**, one of the college's first faculty members, recently published *The Pleasures and Perils of Academe: A Teacher's Tale, Part 2*. The tome is a continuation of his memoir, based on his early years and decades teaching at Texas' Lee College and Cochise College, where he was a founding faculty member from 1964 until he retired in 1996. He continued teaching part time for a number of years before turning his attention to writing.





# College self-study primed for February accreditation visit

## What is Accreditation?

Accreditation is an external review process assuring colleges, universities, and education programs meet rigorous quality assurance and improvement standards. Through institutional self-evaluation, peer review, and institutional response, accreditation evaluates formal educational activities and institutional operations essential to the effectiveness of the college.

Cochise College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), a national accrediting body for degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the United States. Cochise College has been fully accredited since 2003, with its most recent reaffirmation in 2020. In February 2026, an HLC peer review team will conduct an on-site quality assurance review with our institution.

## Why is it Important?

Accreditation assures that Cochise College (CC) meets the highest national educational standards and:

- Affirms that CC is providing quality educational experiences for its students.
- Allows CC students to receive federal financial aid.
- Aids in meeting licensure and employment requirements.
- Aids in credit transfer to other institutions.
- Provides valuable feedback on how well CC is meeting its goals for student learning.
- Creates opportunities for CC to assess, evaluate, and improve its programs and services.

## Accreditation Criteria

HLC evaluates colleges and universities for educational quality against a set of five quality criteria:

1. Mission
2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct
3. Teaching and Learning for Student Success
4. Sustainability, Institutional Effectiveness, Resources, and Planning

## Reaffirmation Timeline

CC's HLC Reaffirmation process is underway. An HLC Multi-Location visit on Dec. 4, 2023, commended operations at the Willcox Center and FT. Huachuca Center. In January 2024, an Institutional Change visit approved CC to offer a BS in Nursing and a BAS in Leadership, Management, and Operations. In June 2025, CC will submit a Quality Initiative report, reporting and tracking progress on the development and roll-out of the Baccalaureate programs. The comprehensive on-site evaluation for reaffirmation will occur Feb. 23-24, 2026.

## Accreditation Reaffirmation Process

HLC reaffirmation occurs on a 10-year cycle. Cochise College follows an Open Pathway model, which separates the process into three components: (1) Quality Initiative, (2) Comprehensive Evaluation and Assurance Review, and (3) Peer Review visit, report, and recommendation.



A timeline can be accessed via the [accreditation website](#).

## Cochise College - Accreditation Focus

**ENGAGEMENT:** Solicit broad participation from diverse constituencies in gathering evidence for our comprehensive review, analyzing institutional performance, and reviewing conclusions and recommendations.

**TRANSPARENCY:** Keeping all stakeholders fully informed regarding accreditation processes and activities.

**CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:** Recognizing programs and practices contributing to CC's overall success and identifying others that can be created or further developed to support CC's teaching and service mission.

**REAFFIRMATION:** Achieving continued accreditation by meeting all HLC Criteria and Federal compliance requirements.



HLC@COCHISE.EDU

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# Fall athletics season wrap-up

The Fall 2025 semester was a season to remember for Cochise College Athletics, as both the women's soccer and rodeo programs showcased the Apache spirit of resilience, teamwork, and pride. From the soccer pitch to the rodeo arena, Cochise student-athletes delivered standout performances, earned postseason berths, and strengthened the program's legacy of excellence across the NJCAA and NIRA circuits.

## WOMEN'S SOCCER: BALANCED, BATTLE-TESTED, AND PLAYOFF-BOUND

Under head coach **Santos Rangel**, the Cochise College women's soccer team capped one of its most complete campaigns in recent years, finishing 9-5-3 overall (5-4-1 ACCAC) and securing the No. 3 seed in the NJCAA Region I Tournament.

After beginning the season with just one returning player, the Apaches molded a young but determined squad into a playoff contender in one of the toughest conferences in the country.

### Fast Start in Colorado

The season opened with a statement road trip through Colorado, where Cochise went unbeaten across four matches — highlighted by dominant shutouts over Northeastern Junior College (7-0), Otero College (4-0), and Trinidad State (10-0).

Offensive sparks flew early, thanks to Samantha Herrero, Ana Velazquez, Jennifer Hernandez, and Chayton Barron, while goalkeeper Julia Vigorito anchored three consecutive clean sheets.

### Adversity and Upsets

After tough losses to nationally ranked Snow College and Eastern Arizona, the Apaches rebounded with grit, taking down Mohave CC (2-1) and stunning No. 6 Phoenix College in a 2-0 upset on September 17 in Douglas — a defining win that solidified Cochise's postseason credentials.

### Offensive Firepower

Sophomore forward Diana Taddei led the charge with multiple hat tricks and finished among the nation's top 20 scorers. Her performances, alongside Velazquez's creativity and Tiia Kuhmonen's finishing, powered a dynamic offensive front.

Captain Stephanie Vazquez-Ceron added leadership and one of the season's signature highlights — a 40-yard strike to end No. 2 Arizona Western's shutout streak.

### Defensive Discipline

The Apaches' defensive backbone relied on a goal keeper rotation of Marissa Tamayo, Vigorito, and Monserrat Alzate, who combined for multiple clean sheets. Vazquez-Ceron, Angelita Carlos, and Andrea Vazquez led a cohesive back line that kept Cochise competitive in every match.

### Finishing Strong

Cochise ended the regular season with a three-match unbeaten streak, including a 3-1 victory over Yavapai on Sophomore Day and a 2-0 win at Southern Nevada, earning their Region I Tournament berth and momentum heading into the postseason.

"This group has heart," said Coach Rangel. "They faced challenges but kept believing and working for each other. Finishing strong and earning a playoff spot in such a competitive conference speaks volumes about their effort and growth."

Chayton Barron ▼





## RODEO: APACHES' ROPE CONSISTENCY AND MOMENTUM FOR SPRING

Head coach **Lynn Smith** guided the Cochise College Rodeo Team through a competitive three-event fall schedule in the NIRA Grand Canyon Region, where the Apaches built consistency, depth, and podium finishes to rank third in the region entering the spring semester.

### **Greenlee County Fair Rodeo – Duncan, AZ**

Cochise opened the 2025-26 campaign with solid showings across multiple events. Veterans Taten Erickson and Walker Story led the way in tie-down and team roping, while several newcomers gained valuable early experience.

### **Home Rodeo/Cochise County Fair – Douglas, AZ**

The annual rodeo at the Cochise County Fair drew one of the largest fall crowds, filling the grandstands during a rainy weekend that turned the arena into thick mud.

Erickson delivered another top finish in tie-down roping, while Erickson and Story excelled in team roping, notching strong times in both rounds. On the women's side, Kass Kimble advanced to the short round, contributing key team points and showcasing Cochise's growing women's roster.

The event highlighted not just athletic talent, but also community pride, as fans celebrated the program's enduring Western heritage and hometown roots.

*Sealy Bottom ▼*



### **Mesalands Community College Rodeo – Tucumcari, NM**

Cochise wrapped up the fall with one of its best all-around team efforts, finishing third overall in Tucumcari. Highlights included:

- Tie-Down Roping: Erickson (3<sup>rd</sup> average), Kimble (4<sup>th</sup> average), Story (6<sup>th</sup> long go), and Cason Scouten (8<sup>th</sup> long go)
- Team Roping: Erickson and Story (2<sup>nd</sup> in short go, 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> average); Tristan Goodwin and Garrett Berreth (10<sup>th</sup> long go)
- Saddle Bronc Riding: Goodwin contributed vital team points in a deep field.

"I'm proud of the grit and consistency this group has shown all fall," said Coach Smith. "We battled through tough competition and proved Cochise belongs among the best in the Grand Canyon Region. The best part is — we're only getting better."

## LOOKING AHEAD

With Cochise Rodeo sitting third in the regional standings and women's soccer reestablished as a postseason mainstay, both programs enter 2026 with optimism and purpose. The rodeo team will resume competition in February, while soccer begins preparations for spring training and recruiting.

Across all sports, Cochise's fall athletes have demonstrated that Apache athletics is thriving, powered by community, tradition, and an unwavering drive to compete.

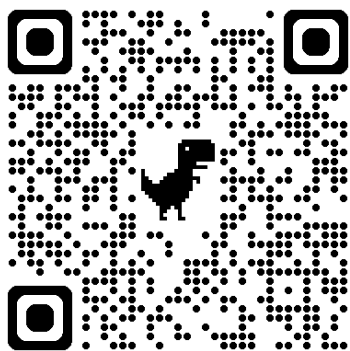
### **Fall 2025 Highlights**

- Women's Soccer: 9–5–3 overall, Region I Tournament qualifier
- Rodeo: 3<sup>rd</sup> in Grand Canyon Region standings (Men's Team)
- Top Performers: Diana Taddei, Taten Erickson, Kass Kimble, Walker Story, Tristan Goodwin
- Signature Wins: Women's soccer 2–0 over #6 Phoenix; rodeo team podium finish in Tucumcari
- Community Impact: Strong local engagement in home events

# PATHWAY TO \$150K CHALLENGE



 COCHISE COLLEGE  
FOUNDATION



Help provide scholarships for Cochise County students.

Log the miles you run/walk or cycle during March 2026.

For every 10 miles run/walked, or for every 30 miles cycled,  
earn a prize drawing entry.

\$40 + tax/processing fee

Look for **Register: Pathway to \$150k** on the left side of [cochise.edu/give](https://cochise.edu/give).

## PLATINUM SPONSOR



## GOLD SPONSORS



## SILVER SPONSORS



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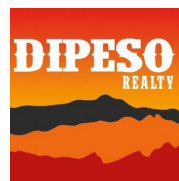


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# Planning Your Legacy

GIVING TO COCHISE COLLEGE



For 55 years, donors to the Cochise College Foundation have promoted student success through scholarships, program enhancements and capital development. Charitable support allowed the foundation to provide 1,068 scholarships totaling \$715,000 to 811 students, and an additional \$128,000 in support of programs, in 2021-2022.

To continue the culture of excellence at Cochise College and ensure access for students, the Cochise College Foundation encourages current and future donors to consider making provisions in their wills for the benefit of academic programs, scholarships and other needs. Estates of any size can leave a mark on the future by supporting local higher education while creating brighter futures for generations of students.

# Planning Your Legacy

Here are three vehicles for leaving a legacy gift.

## A provision in your will or trust

Examples:

- “I give/devise \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the non-profit Cochise College Foundation, EIN 86-0211414, to be used for the following purpose...”
- “I give/devise \_\_\_\_% of the residual of my estate for the benefit of Cochise College’s first responder training programs.”

This vehicle costs nothing during your lifetime and can be modified or revoked.

## Insurance policy

The Cochise College Foundation can be named as the beneficiary of your life insurance policy.

## Beneficiary designation

Assets such as bank and investment accounts, certificates of deposit, savings bonds, annuities, and IRAs, can be conveyed directly to the Cochise College Foundation by contacting the financial institution that holds your account(s) and naming the Cochise College Foundation as beneficiary.



# See the Benefits

If you wish to see benefits during your lifetime, the following options allow you to be personally involved in the creation of your legacy gift and witness its benefits. Each option may provide tax benefits to the donor.

## Endowment

Consider establishing a named charitable endowment. The Cochise College Foundation can work closely with you to document your wishes for using the endowment to benefit students.

The power of an endowment is that a portion of it is used toward the documented purpose each year, while the fund balance has the potential to grow in perpetuity, potentially generating larger distributions over time. You can also make provisions in your will or trust to bequeath a portion of your estate to the endowment upon your death.

The Cochise College Foundation requires a minimum donation of \$10,000 to establish a named endowment fund. There is an administrative fee charged to the endowment annually to provide Foundation oversight.

## 5% Scholarship Fund

Donors may direct a minimum of \$10,000 to the foundation with the commitment that a 5 percent distribution from the accumulated gift/s will be made in your name annually until the funds are expended. Perpetuity is not guaranteed, but the fund will be invested with the intent that it grows over time. There is an administrative fee charged to the fund annually to provide Foundation oversight.

*Options are continued on the next page*



## Annual Fund

Donors may direct any amount of assets to be distributed within a specific time frame according to their wishes. No minimum gift is required. Funds will not be invested and will be expended until they are depleted.

## Gift an Appreciated Asset

The Cochise College Foundation may, upon review, accept gifts of stock or marketable real estate.

## Required Minimum Distribution

Currently, Congress permits IRA owners over the age of 70 ½ to make tax-free gifts, up to a maximum of \$100,000 per year, directly from their account to the Cochise College Foundation. Check IRS regulations for changes that may impact your plans.

## Memorial Gifts

Remember loved ones with memorial gifts to the Cochise College Foundation.



# Consider This

Legacy gifts made to the Cochise College Foundation allow you to support students during your lifetime and afterward. Through the income-generating power of the Foundation's investments, your legacy gift can continue to grow while supporting student achievement for an extended period. The Cochise College Foundation is overseen by a board of directors who consult with experienced investment professionals to manage assets. Scholarship-making decisions are made by professionals employed by the college.

## Contact

Denise Hoyos, Executive Director  
[foundation@cochise.edu](mailto:foundation@cochise.edu)  
(520) 417-4149







#### DISCLAIMER

The Cochise College Foundation (EIN 86-0211414) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Deductible donations are allowable as provided by law. The information provided in this document is general in nature, may not apply to all individuals, and is not intended as legal or tax advice. Prospective donors are urged to consult their professional advisors.

### Cochise College Legacy Society Planned Giving Commitment Form

I/we recognize the power a planned gift has on the lives of Cochise College students and commit to leave a legacy that ensures the community has access to the very best the college has to offer.

Names(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership in the Cochise College Legacy Society includes recognition and invitations to special events.

Please include me/us in the Cochise College Legacy Society and recognize me/us as:

I/we wish to remain anonymous.

I/we intend to provide a planned gift of the following type(s) to the Cochise College Foundation for the benefit of Cochise College and its students:

Will

Revocable trust

Beneficiary designation – life insurance, bank or investment account, retirement plan

Other (please indicate)

Please add any other details you wish to share: \_\_\_\_\_

The estimated current value of this gift is \$ \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this planned gift is:

Unrestricted to provide maximum flexibility for Cochise College.

An existing fund (specify):

I have a specific purpose in mind that I would like to discuss. Please contact me.

I/we have enclosed a copy of document(s) detailing the gift(s) described above.

Yes

No

Completion of this form is not intended to be legally binding, but notification of intent. Information will be kept in the strictest confidence and will be used for internal planning purposes; names may be used for recognition per your instructions. Please discuss your planned giving intentions with your professional advisors.

Donor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Donor Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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*We bring you this image of the 1975-1976 Cochise College rodeo team participating in the Rex Allen Days Parade as a precursor to next year's 75<sup>th</sup> annual Rex Allen Days event in Willcox.*

*Have college memorabilia or a memory to share? Contact librarian/archivist Ashlee Gray at [graya@cochise.edu](mailto:graya@cochise.edu) or (520) 417-4142.*