Transcript
Pima Community College Perspectives
Segment 1: “Adult Education”
Guest: Regina Suitt, Advanced Program Manager, PCC Adult Education

Segment 2: “Teaching Languages Online”
Dr. Dolores Durán-Cerda, PCC World Languages Faculty

(male announcer) Welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives, a look on how education enriches our community. And now, here's your host, Nina Trasoff.

(Trasoff) Hello, and welcome to Pima Community College Perspectives. I am Nina Trasoff. I'm really delighted that you could join us again. With me, as always, is Rachelle Howell, who is the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Pima Community College. And, uh, Rachelle, it is a new year. We've already taken a look at sort of an overview of what's going to be happening in the, in this semester that—that's just underway. But, uh, time to take a look back at one of the first programs and rehash where we are with Adult Education. Because that's one of the things Pima's most known for, isn't it?

(Howell) Well, it is. We, we serve a large number of students through our Adult Education program each year, and it's really key to our community. And it's key from, from a couple of perspectives. There are so many individuals who don't have their basic high school credential, and in order to move forward in life and move forward past basic skills-types of jobs, uh, even—even into just entry-level jobs, individuals really need some sort of a high school credential. Um, so it impacts individuals, and it impacts their lives; not just their lives, but their children's lives, and it builds a legacy that can be really destructive to a family long-term, that lack of, lack of education. But it also impacts the community from an economic standpoint, because if we have individuals that don't have basic skills and can't move past low-paying jobs into higher-level, higher-skill jobs, you know, we don't attract good businesses to the, the local community, which impacts our economy. It—it impacts all of us.

(Trasoff) It's one of the foundational aspects, and Pima does so much in this community. But I think it is important to focus on Adult Education. With us today as our guest is Regina Suitt. And Regina, we spoke last fall about, um, the important role that Pima Community College and the, the Adult Education system within the College plays in our community. Has, have you seen any changes since last fall in, in terms of the demographics from unemployment figures going up and—and shifts, not necessarily for the better at the moment?

(Suitt) Uh, thanks for having me again, too. Um, yeah, you know, we—we are seeing more students, just like the rest of the College. When folks are unemployed and see that they have to do something else or something more to, to—to gain unemployment, uh, they come to the College. And we are seeing that as well. We, um, are already serving more than we had served last year, with less funding, and we're seeing a trend, a higher number of 45+ students, uh, and we're seeing, um, more men, actually, coming too.

(Trasoff) That's interesting. Um, and—and what are they coming for?
(Suitt) They're coming for, um, Adult Basic Ed. to get their skills up-to-date so that they can go to the G.E.D. classes. So they're coming for those basic skills, and also G.E.D. preparation, and also G.E.D. testing.

(Trasoff) And if they don't have that, as Rachelle was saying, then it's so hard for them, almost impossible for them, to then move on into other education that can help them learn, a--acquire the new skills they need in the new economy.

(Suitt) Right. Um, even entry-level jobs, as Rachelle said, require some type of credential, and in Arizona, one out of every five diplomas is a G.E.D. diploma. So this system, this educational system, this opportunity, really is important for people. It's really important for Arizona if we want to see the high-skilled, uh, employees that businesses need.

(Trasoff) You have-- this is hard to figure out. So you're talking about an increase in the need, an increase in people. Is your funding increasing at the same time?

(Suitt) Uh, I wish I could say "yes" to that, but, and it is kind of contrary. But right when we, right when people need this system the most, when we have the greatest need, because of the unemployment rate and because of what's happening with the economy, that's exactly when the state eliminated 100% of the funding.

(Trasoff) One-hundred percent?

(Suitt) One-hundred percent of the funding for Adult Education and G.E.D. testing. So right now, we are surviving on, um, stimulus dollars, other state allocations, but mostly federal monies. Um, and, unfortunately, with the new Congress, we're--we're nervous about the federal, uh, legislation around funding Adult Education as well. If the new Congress pushes back funding levels to 2008, that could hurt our system as well. There is a required match, so the, kind of, the Band-Aid that we are living on right now, uh, will be gone in 2012.

(Trasoff) So, if federal funding is cut, if we are--if you're able to succeed in getting federal funding, there has to be a state match to that?

(Suitt) Yes.

(Trasoff) Otherwise you lose the federal funding as well.

(Suitt) Correct. So we were able, the Chancellor took the lead in Arizona and, and was able to put enough state monies together, uh, to get the federal match through 2012. But after that, if the state Legislature does not reinstate funding, or if there's some other solution that is not found, we will lose that federal match as well. And when I say "we," it's not just Pima Community College, but the entire state system of Adult Education and G.E.D. testing.

(Trasoff) It seems long-term, short-term benefit. I understand the need to--to do some budget-trimming. We've got to become more, um, pay-as-you, I--I don't know what the right term is, but we have to be more efficient in the use of our funding. But it seems to me, if you're looking long-term, in terms of efficient use of dollars, this is a solid investment.
(Suitt) Right. And there are a lot of people who are counting on it. Um, over 800,000 people in Arizona do not have a high school credential. So, if we expect to recover, economically, uh, bring business into this state with high-paying, high-skilled jobs, where will we find those workers? Well, some would say that we have them. We have 800,000 of them who need just a little lift, or a push, uh, to get into, uh, higher-skilled occupations.

(Trasoff) And that's the ones, those are the kinds of occupations that cycle, and this could be a very positive cycle if we can just get it, get it going.

(Suitt) Right. When you teach a parent, when you teach an adult, you affect so many other things. You, uh, affect crime rates, poverty rates, health issues, families and children. A children's first teacher is their mother, so when you teach a mother, you teach their child; is a long-term benefit.

(Trasoff) Let's talk about that, because you received recognition, uh, a national honor, for a program having to do with adult literacy.

(Suitt) Right. Our AmeriCorps program was chosen, um, out of many hundreds of AmeriCorps programs throughout the country, uh, to, uh, uh, for innovation. So they were chosen, um, out of 52, uh, one of 52 for an Innovation Award. And uh, AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps members go and help with, uh, our, our teachers, they help with our students, they volunteer in the schools, they, uh, really, they do thousands and thousands of hours. And in return for those, uh, volunteer hours, they receive an educational stipend at the end of their service. So it's kind of like a Peace Corps kind of program, but right here, homegrown, helping their community that they live in. And it also helps them.

(Trasoff) And I--I do think it's important to emphasize the intergenerational and the paying forward and the future benefits of this. You are helping that parent learn to read, but, I know in years past I--I volunteered for my Rotary with reading and literacy and found some of these kids had never been read to at home. And some of it's language, and some of it's illiteracy. And how do you get the kids seeing their future in college and then university and in the business world if they have no model?

(Suitt) Exactly. And that's why, uh, the AmeriCorps program family literacy classes, and the, our Family Literacy program is, is also very important, all of our classes, because when children see their parents in school, when they see their parents learning and studying and valuing education, they do the same.

(Trasoff) That modeling is so important. Tell me about some of the other, uh, services that you provide.

(Suitt) So we have, um, English language instruction classes; we have Adult Basic Ed. classes; we have G.E.D. preparation classes; we have family literacy programs in several sites in Sunnyside and T.U.S.D. We have a program for developmentally disabled adults, called RAISE. We also have a large refugee program, so folks who are assigned to Tucson through the, um, refugee community and who need to learn English come to, um, Pima College Adult Education.

(Trasoff) And the Workplace Education program?
(Suitt) We also go into workplaces and do onsite English and Basic Literacy and Adult Basic Ed. classes.

(Trasoff) And I think, you mentioned something in passing that I think is important to state, because the whole idea is to really help people understand how important this is to all of us; no matter our education level, we are a community and interrelated and impact each other. The lack of education, and we may not have the exact statistics, but I know it's very high, that the prison population's illiteracy rate is well above the norm. So that seems to have a direct impact, which hits our pocketbooks.

(Suitt) Right. We could list a lot of things that we're last at, or first at. But I think it--it serves us better to say that we have this educational system in place to help hundreds of thousands of people in Arizona so that they don't go to prison, where there is a 60% or 70% illiteracy rate, or they don't fall into poverty, um, or they--they don't have children that can't read at level by the third grade.

(Trasoff) Because that's a real indicator of success, of graduation from high school and the ability to go on.

(Suitt) Right.

(Trasoff) Those early years are so important. So we talked a little bit about who your students are. Um, how much do you want, uh, how important is it, do you think, that your students speak to other people about their experience?

(Suitt) You know, I think it's, you know, a hundred times more important than listening to me is to listen to our G.E.D. graduates and listening to the stories that they tell. Listening to those who have really used the G.E.D. as their stepping stone, the first step into going on to college, going on to university, going on to PhD. programs. Uh, I know several people who started with G.E.D.s. Our former Surgeon General, Dr. Richard Carmona, is a G.E.D. grad, and he goes around and says how important that first step was for him and his future. G.E.D. grads really should be talking to people. Talk to their families, talk to their business, businesses, talk to their employers, talk to their legislators, talk to everyone they can and talk about how important this educational system really is.

(Trasoff) 'Cause I think there is a misperception that G.E.D. is just basic, and why--it doesn't really impact us as a society. And I--I think people forget that G.E.D. is just a first step for so many people.

(Suitt) Right. It--it is. It's just a first step, and um, and--and, like we said before, the most basic of jobs require some type of diploma, so it really is a first step.

(Trasoff) Regina, it's been a pleasure talking with you again. Um, let's hope things resolve in a positive way. But the work that you're doing in helping adults get their basic education and then have that opportunity to move forward in life is so important. I appreciate your being here.

(Suitt) Thank you so much.
(Trasoff) We’re going to take a break, and when we come back we’re going to be talking about language instruction, foreign language instruction at Pima Community College. I think you’ll find it fascinating.

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(announcer) For more than 40 years, Pima Community College has helped prepare the citizens of Tucson and Pima County for good jobs and better lives, for themselves and their families. We don’t do it alone. We appreciate your ongoing investment in education, especially during these extraordinarily tough times. Your tax dollars, combined with student tuition, make it possible for thousands of Southern Arizonans to get a jump-start before transferring to a university, to get the training they need to stay competitive at work, and to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow. Many of our students are seeking to restart their careers after losing their jobs, and some, their homes, during the recession. All of our students know, as you do, that the more you learn, the more you earn. We know that today’s students are often juggling work and family, as well as school. That’s why Pima offers classes at night and on weekends at six campuses, more than 180 other locations, and over the Internet. Our programs deliver education how you want it, and give you the opportunity to achieve your goals at your pace. Today’s Pima Community College students will be tomorrow’s firefighters, nurses, police, teachers, and small business owners, the backbone of a safe, healthy, prosperous Tucson and Pima County. Thank you for your support as we continue to help you and your family build a better tomorrow. For more information, contact us at 206-4500 or visit us on the Web at pima.edu. Pima Community College, Developing our Community Through Learning.

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(Trasoff) Welcome back. I'm Nina Trasoff and this is Pima Community College Perspectives. And I am still joined by Rachelle Howell, who is the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Pima Community College. Uh, Rachelle, this segment we’re going to be talking about languages. And it seems a little counter-intuitive to think that you could learn languages online, but that’s become a part of the teaching process, or at least an availability.

(Howell) It is. And really, online education in general is so ubiquitous; it—it’s really mainstream. It’s not necessarily a special way to take a class any longer, and anything can be taught and learned online, including languages. And, and I think you might be surprised, and we’ll hear more about it in a moment, but learning language online, language teaching online really works well. And, and I think there are a lot of technologies that people might be surprised are used, uh, for—for learning a language online, and it—it’s a neat process.

(Trasoff) I think even in the "dark ages," as we were talking before we came on air, um, I remember learning, having a learn--having a Language Lab when I was learning in high school, where you sat with the headsets, and you listen to a native speaker and then repeated. So if you extrapolate with all of the technology that is available today, um, yeah, I'd say there must be tremendous potential.

(Howell) Yes.
(Trasoff) And to talk about the realities of that, our guest this segment is Dr. Dolores Durán-Cerda, and she is, uh, with Pima Community College. And, Dolores, can you talk a little bit about this? How is technology impacting how you're teaching?

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Okay, definitely. First of all, I'd like to thank you for having me here on--on the program. Buenos días, bon jour, guten tag. [all chuckle] Good morning. Um, I've recently been teaching online classes, actually, different modalities. I teach, uh, Spanish 101 for web-hybrid and also self-paced classes and the traditional format. And in all of them, I've incorporated technology. Um, what was it, a couple of summers ago, the Downtown Campus received a Title V grant, and, um, trained the faculty from various disciplines to integrate, uh, instruction technology.

And, but before that, I had been using it. I had been learning about how to incorporate technology, um, using the Internet, because students right now are more interconnected, more than ever, actually, because of their cell phones, because of Twitter, Facebook. They're using their, their gadgets all the time, consistently, and talking to each other, so why not use their mode of communication, their language, with our classes? And it's a little bit tricky for faculty, 'cause, uh, we're what's called, uh, "digital immigrants." I don't know if you're familiar with the term.

(Trasoff) No, would you talk about that? Because I think that is a fascinating concept for people to understand. Because when you're talking about understanding the cultural background of your students as something that helps you be more effective in the classroom, you're not just talking about ethnicity or geography.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Exactly. And it incorporates, well, as I was saying, there's a different between the students who are "digital natives" and digital immigrants. A digital native was born in the "digital age," meaning after 1980, and has grown up with digital technology, such as computers, the Internet, text messaging, uh, chatting on live, uh, online live. And, uh, the digital immigrant is more like us. We were born, um, uh, before 1980, and we have to--we have had to learn how to use the computer and how to use email, um, and the different, um, modalities that we have online. So, that's what we have to learn.

But the digital native, we have to speak their language. And there's so many things available for teaching languages on the Internet that are authentic materials. As you were saying before, there used to be a lab, and you'd go into the lab, put the headphones in. But now you can chat with people from different Latin Americans--specifically with Spanish, as I am, as I teach that, um, people from Latin America, Spanish-speaking countries. You can, um, access museums in Spain or, uh, Mexico City. You can hear Pablo Neruda recite poetry. [chuckles]

(Trasoff) [gasp] Yes, oh my goodness. To hear that in his own voice would be astounding.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Right. And so it's all there, available for them, to them. And, uh, it's just, even though we're separate, we're apart, in different countries, we're brought together through technology. That's so rewarding.
(Trasoff) Forgive me, it just seems to add such richness and importance to the learning of language, depth to it, as opposed to just, "I'm fulfilling a requirement by learning how to pass an exam in Spanish." You're giving them a richness that was not available to my generation.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Right. It's a well-rounded education in languages. Because language isn't just the drills of verb conjugations and, and learning the numbers, but it's also the subtleties of the culture, the, um, the arts, poetry; it's about learning gestures. What are the gestures in--in each, uh, Spanish-speaking country? And you can learn all this. These are the subtleties; this is what comprises, um, learning a language. Not just the language and linguistics, but also the cultural background.

(Trasoff) We have immigration that we--we talk about, and you deal with a lot of immigrants who need to become-- and we were talking earlier about Adult Education helping them become proficient in adult--uh, in English, uh, once they've come to this country. But you talk about a different kind of migration, as well, or immigration.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Mm-hmm, yes, I do. Um, I also talk about, uh, cultural, not only cultural migration, but technological migration. And it's similar to the cultural migration, because people who come from another country, um, it's very, it's harder for them to accept or learn a new language. But those children who were born into a new culture, they learn the new language much easier, and they resist the old, while the adult immigrants accept that they don't know very much. But it takes time for them to learn and then, though, their children help them.

I'm sure you've had experiences where 6-year olds have helped you, [chuckle] and I know my little cousins have helped me on the computer, using different applications or software programs. And they, they know it instantaneously. So we learn from them. It's the same thing in--in the cultural migration now, the technological migration. And that's what we have at Pima Community College. We have a little bit of everything; all different backgrounds, different age groups, people coming back, um, to college after having raised a family or been in the workforce, or, or veterans coming back, too. So we have a little bit of everything. And the students, uh, who are maybe more of the traditional age, 18-21, they help out the older students, and they volunteer information, or, "I'll send to the class listserve this link of how you can do this." So it's very nice to see all these different backgrounds, uh, age, as I said, and cultural, too, to help each other.

(Trasoff) That seems to add so much depth to the learning experience, not just the language and the technical experience, but the learning experience itself.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Exactly.

(Trasoff) What are some of the benefits about, uh--uh, of some of these alternative modes?

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Well, the benefits are, um, well, we have different modalities, uh, at Pima Community College. We have the traditional language format, where they meet twice a day, in class. We have the web-hybrid, which is instead of meeting twice a week, they meet, uh, once a week, and then the rest is done online. And then we have the completely online classes, the express classes, as well. And so, um, each student is different, and so they have to find where
they fit best. So, for some students it might be better for them to be all the time in the classroom twice a week, uh, have that face-to-face interaction.

But I would say the most popular classes right now, uh, in languages, in Spanish, particularly, is a web-hybrid, which is a combination of both. They get the face-to-face, um, contact with the instructor, myself, and with each other, and they're able to converse, and then they do some exercises and, and they're able to do podcasts, where they record their voices describing their own family, um, comment on each other. We also do Wimba Live classroom, where...

(Trasoff) Define "Wimba," please.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Okay. Wimba is, is, um, a software program where students can access, they can be anywhere. They can be at home, they could be at work, they could be in the library. But we are all chatting live, basically, simultaneously, and--uh, but it's done visual--with visuals. So I can have pictures. If we're reviewing for an exam, we can--I can post up pictures of a house, for example, and then we describe the different rooms and the furniture, and what are the household activities that we do, the chores that we do to complete the tasks of the day, et cetera. And so they're able to interact with each other, ask each other questions, ask me questions. So it's--it's a virtual classroom. It's fascinating, and the students love it. And if they haven't had experience with it before, they learn, and I--I'm able to help them, and they get the technology, um, support from Pima as well. And they--they tell me at the end of the semester that they've just loved it.

(Trasoff) I just think that sounds like an amazing way to learn language, so much better than when I was struggling in a classroom as--as a teenager trying to master some languages.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Right. And some students are shy, or some students live in rural communities or perhaps are disabled and can't come to campus easily, so this is the perfect modality for them as well.

(Trasoff) And you've been--we've been talking about languages, uh, but it's also you speaking the language of the student. We've talked about the technical migration and--and immigration and--and all of those things, but your students, the younger students, have a whole other reality of the world than things that we might think of. And you--you gave one example when we were talking earlier about the Beloit College, um, studies, where they talk about the kids who were the incoming freshmen. If they've just gone from high school into college, they don't know Clint Eastwood except as a director.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Yes.

(Trasoff) And other things like that. So it really is a difference in language.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) It is. Language and their whole mindset. So we, as instructors, need to, um, come together, reach, I guess, reach the students at their level of their mindset. And another example is in the Beloit College mindset list is, "Fergie is a pop singer, not a princess." So we have to be up-to-date with, with popular culture, with technology, enabled, in order for students to learn better, and in order for us to learn from them as well. Um, for example,
another one was, "Nirvana's on the classic oldie's station," which makes me feel really old.

[both laughing]

(Trasoff) Imagine how the rest of us... I think that is just right on target. Um, but how does Pima keep up, because technology is changing constantly. I mean, it's exponential differences every year.

(Dr. Durán-Cerda) Mm-hmm, that is true. Well, as I had explained before about the Title V grant, that's one example of how faculty are being trained in cutting-edge technology, and there are workshops being offered. I was in the first group a couple years ago. So that whole summer we were, we went to, um, a community college in Phoenix. We, um, did hands-on, um, applications of software, we--we learned how to use Wimba. And we support each other, and once in a while we get together for brown bag lunches and kind of keep us up-to-date as to what we're doing in the classes. We have learning studios. The--the Downtown Campus was remodeled, and the library now is the, um, the Center for Integrated Learning, so it's a library, a computer center, tutoring, everything together. So the support of the students is there, and the technology's available, it's hands-on, and it makes it accessible to everybody.

(Trasoff) Dolores, it's been fascinating talking with you. Thank you so much for joining us. Rachelle, always a pleasure. And thank you for joining us on Pima Community College Perspectives. I hope you'll be tuning in next week.

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