

I. An Overview of Mesa State College and Western Colorado

Public colleges and universities are inextricably linked to the regions and communities in which they are located. A college often is a significant partner in regional economic development. Not only can it be a major employer, but it also is a business that purchases a large volume of goods and services having a substantial local impact. A campus frequently is a social and cultural focal point that enhances, in its broadest sense, the quality of life of area residents. Be it art or athletics, a college brings activities and programs that otherwise would not be so readily accessible to a community. As a public institution, a college also serves as an information resource to which a region looks for answers to questions with which it is grappling. By its very nature, a college must be responsive and responsible to public needs in ways that are appropriate to its strengths. At the core of its responsibilities, though, a public college exists to deliver education to those who support it.

Mesa State College is a regional public institution established to serve the educational needs of Western Colorado. Founded in 1925, the college has evolved into a higher education center of nearly 6,200 students and now offers academic and technical programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels in Grand Junction, Montrose, and surrounding communities. This report examines the impact of Mesa State on Western Colorado. It begins with the college's contributions to educational attainment by residents of Colorado's Western Slope, followed by a description of the many ways in which the college better the region's quality of life. While the documentation is largely qualitative in nature, the college's influence nonetheless is significant. The third perspective is economic in nature and examines Mesa State's impact on the regional economy. Diverse as these contributions are, the common thread running through the three major chapters of this report is the way in which Mesa State College is working to achieve a higher degree of leadership in Western Colorado.

The College

The founding of Grand Junction State Junior College in 1925, with 39 students enrolled in seven classes, marked the beginning of postsecondary education on Colorado's Western Slope. As Mesa County Junior College, the number of students



grew to 270 by fall 1937; headcount increased to 1,300 by 1963. Over that period, the range of community college programs expanded, and an area vocational school was added in 1967. By 1974, the college had evolved into a baccalaureate-granting institution, leading enrollment to triple in 16 years and reach 3,891 students in fall 1979.

Finally, in 1994, the Colorado legislature authorized Mesa State to offer selected graduate degrees as the needs of the region grew. With the addition of graduate programs, Mesa State College became the only four-year institution in Colorado to offer a full range of undergraduate programming that spans

vocational certificates, associate degrees (both academic and vocational), and baccalaureate programs in addition to master's degrees. With the growth in enrollment and the expanded role and mission¹, degrees awarded by the college increased significantly in scope and number. Table 1-1 summarizes the changes in award activity for specific years over the last decade.

Mesa State College began a unique cooperative relationship with Mesa County School District 51 and local businesses in 1991. Through the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) partnership, the college and school district direct the operations of the Unified Technical Education Center (UTECE) offering vocational and technical trades to students in grades 9 – 12. Largely through UTECE, then, the college serves as the major provider of secondary and postsecondary technical education, job training, and career counseling that prepares the region's workforce.

The growth of Mesa State College, particularly over the last decade, has paralleled the development of Western Colorado. Between 1993 and 2003, the college's enrollment

¹Mesa State College's role and mission, reenacted in C.R.S. 23-53-101, is described as: "There is hereby established a college at Grand Junction, to be known as Mesa State College, which shall be a general baccalaureate and specialized graduate institution with moderately selective admission standards. Mesa State College shall offer undergraduate liberal arts and sciences, teacher preparation, and business degree programs and a limited number of graduate programs. Mesa State College shall also maintain a community college role and mission, including vocational and technical programs. Mesa State College shall receive resident credit for two-year course offerings in its commission-approved service area. Mesa State College shall also serve as a regional education provider.

Table 1-1. MESA STATE COLLEGE DEGREES AND CERTIFICATES AWARDED BY LEVEL

Level	Award	Program Name	Degrees/Certificates Awarded in --		
			1993-94	1998-99	2003-04
Certificate					
	C	Auto Collision Repair	5	2	-
	C	Culinary Arts	-	-	1
	C	Diesel Engine Mechanic and Repairer	3	-	-
	C	Electric Lineworker	24	17	25
	C	Electronics Technology	-	1	0
	C	Manufacturing Technology Cluster	2	13	12
	C	Office Supervision & Management	10	-	-
	C	Transportation Services Cluster	2	5	5
Level Total			46	38	43
Associate (Vocational)					
	A.A.S.	Administrative Office Technology	27	15	5
	A.A.S.	Auto Collision Repair	7	4	-
	A.A.S.	Communications Technology Cluster	-	-	5
	A.A.S.	Computer Information Systems	9	-	-
	A.A.S.	Criminal Justice	-	1	1
	A.A.S.	Culinary Arts	-	-	17
	A.A.S.	Electronic Engineering Technology	8	5	3
	A.A.S.	Environmental Restoration Engineering Tech.	11	-	-
	A.A.S.	Graphic and Printing Equipment Operator	2	-	-
	A.A.S.	Graphic Design	4	-	-
	A.A.S.	Manufacturing Technology Cluster	2	13	22
	A.A.S.	Nursing	23	-	-
	A.A.S.	Radiologic Technology	11	11	13
	A.A.S.	Transportation Services Cluster	2	4	4
	A.A.S.	Travel, Recreation, & Hospitality Mgt.	18	12	0
Level Total			124	65	70
Associate (Transfer)					
	A.A.	Liberal Arts - A.A.	35	41	40
	A.S.	Liberal Arts - A.S.	8	9	8
Level Total			43	50	48
Baccalaureate					
	B.S.	Accounting	29	20	17
	B.S.	Biological Sciences	2	45	25
	B.B.A.	Business Administration	72	128	118
	B.S.	Computer Information Systems	-	-	8
	B.S.	Computer Science	5	11	14
	B.A.	Economics	2	-	-
	B.A.	English	1	39	24
	B.A.	Environmental Restoration & Waste Management	2	16	-
	B.S.	Environmental Science & Technology	-	-	8
	B.A.	Fine & Performing Arts	-	25	31
	B.A.	History	3	23	20
	B.A.	Human Performance & Wellness	-	24	32
	B.A.	Liberal Arts	49	14	22
	B.A.	Mass Communication	1	31	29
	B.S.	Mathematics	1	8	3
	B.S.N.	Nursing	34	38	35
	B.A.	Parks & Recreation Resource Management	5	1	-
	B.S.	Physical & Mathematical Sciences	32	-	-
	B.S.	Physical Sciences	1	14	11
	B.A.	Political Science	-	9	9
	B.A.	Psychology	3	51	39
	B.A.	Selected Studies	26	1	-
	B.A.	Social Sciences	77	15	2
	B.A.	Sociology	1	24	32
Level Total			346	543	479
Master's					
	M.B.A.	Business Administration	-	1	15
Level Total			-	1	15
Institutional Total			559	697	655

increased by 31.5%. Similarly, Planning Region II—which encompasses Garfield, Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties—grew by approximately 25%, while the population of Grand Junction expanded nearly 50% between 1990 and 2000. The city’s population is projected to continue growing at a similar rate for the next 10 years.

With its increased size, Mesa State has become a major economic figure in the region in terms of employment. In 2003, the college employed 1,194 full- and part-time faculty, staff, and students, ranking third in total employees in Mesa County after School District 51 and St. Mary’s Hospital and Medical Center. With a payroll in excess of \$22.5 million, the college also ranked third in size of payroll in the county.

The most recent step in the college’s maturation came in 2003 when the Colorado General Assembly designated Mesa State College as the Regional Education Provider² for the 14 Western Slope counties shown in Figure 1-1: Delta, Eagle, Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Mesa, Moffat, Montrose, Ouray, Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Routt, San Miguel and Summit. With this responsibility will come growing demands to provide education and technological skills that meet the needs of the region’s changing workforce.

The Western Slope Region of Colorado

With its origins as a community college, Mesa State College historically focused on serving the educational needs of Mesa County residents through traditional program delivery. With its recent designation as a Regional Education Provider, however, the college now is responsible for meeting the educational needs of a more diverse and dispersed population, either through delivering the courses directly or arranging for another institution to do so. The 14 counties that comprise the college’s service region represent nearly 28% of Colorado’s total area and are very different in their demographic, economic, and geographic characteristics. The sheer physical area of the region—28,535 square miles—as well as the significant topographic divisions, create major challenges for the college as it develops and delivers programs for the region’s residents.

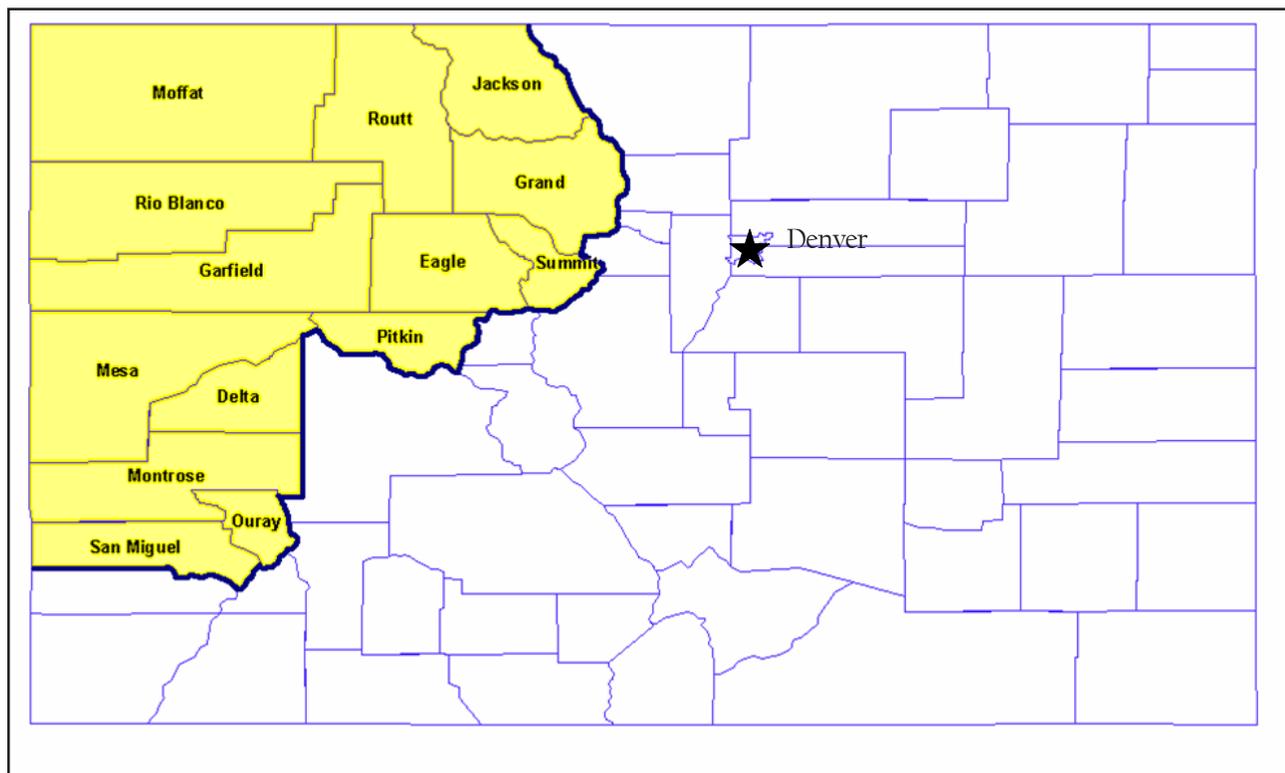
²Mesa State College’s responsibilities as a Regional Education Provider are described in C.R.S. 23-1-127:

(1) “As regional education providers, Adams State College, Mesa State College, and Western State College of Colorado shall have as their primary goal the assessment of regional educational needs and, in consultation with the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, the allocation of resources for the purposes of meeting those needs.”

(2) A regional education provider’s initiatives to meet its regional needs may include, but need not be limited to, the following:

- (a) Extension of existing programs;
- (b) Creation of new undergraduate programs;
- (c) Development of partnerships with two-year institutions; and
- (d) Facilitation of the delivery of graduate education through existing graduate institutions.

Figure 1-1. COUNTIES DESIGNATED TO BE SERVED BY MESA STATE COLLEGE
AS A REGIONAL EDUCATION PROVIDER



Population

Mesa State College's service region is primarily one of small populations, illustrated by the fact that three of the counties—Rio Blanco, Ouray, and Jackson—have fewer residents than the enrollment at the college. Mesa County, with 120,000 residents or 32% of the region's population, has the greatest concentration. Grand Junction and the surrounding communities in the Grand Valley comprise the sole metropolitan statistical area on the Western Slope. The next most populous county—Garfield—focuses on the city of Glenwood Springs and is approximately 40% of the size of Mesa County.

As summarized in Table 1-2, population growth between 1990 and 2000 in Western Colorado was uneven. The highest percentage gains—exceeding 80%—were associated with the resort counties of Eagle, Summit, and San Miguel. By contrast, Jackson and Rio Blanco Counties experienced a slight decrease in residents. Counties with an equal or higher share of their respective populations under 18 years of age than the statewide average (25.6%) included Moffat, Garfield, Montrose, Rio Blanco, and Jackson Counties. Those counties with a proportion of their population greater than Colorado's average for 65 year olds and older (9.7%) were Delta, Mesa, Montrose, Jackson, Ouray, and Rio Blanco. The demographic profile for Montrose,

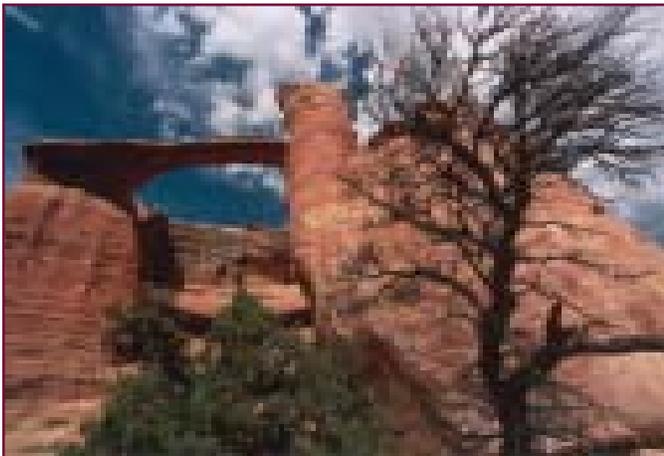
Table 1-2. MESA STATE COLLEGE 14-COUNTY SERVICE REGION BY TOTAL POPULATION IN 2000

County	Total Population	Population Chg (1990 - 2000)	Projected Population (2010)	Percent Persons in 2000 Census Who Were --	
				Under 18 Yrs Old	65 Yrs & Older
Mesa	119,281	24.8%	143,591	25.0%	15.2%
Garfield	45,521	46.1%	58,558	27.1%	8.8%
Eagle	43,027	90.0%	56,819	23.5%	3.0%
Montrose	34,572	36.9%	43,371	26.8%	15.2%
Delta	28,421	32.7%	34,405	24.0%	19.7%
Summit	24,225	82.8%	32,427	17.4%	3.3%
Routt	20,255	39.8%	24,390	22.6%	5.0%
Pitkin	14,810	17.5%	18,906	16.7%	6.8%
Moffat	13,154	16.1%	14,526	28.5%	9.4%
Grand	12,711	56.2%	16,740	21.8%	7.8%
San Miguel	6,951	80.5%	8,919	17.6%	3.4%
Rio Blanco	5,945	-1.1%	6,548	26.5%	11.2%
Ouray	3,882	63.1%	4,648	22.8%	12.2%
Jackson	1,589	-1.7%	1,720	25.6%	13.1%
14-County Total	374,344		465,568		
Colorado	4,417,714	30.6%		25.6%	9.7%

Source: Colorado Data Book. Downloaded 6/28/04. http://www.state.co.us/oed/bus_fin/contents.html.

Rio Blanco, and Jackson Counties was above the state's averages for both age categories.

Colorado is a highly educated state. In the 2000 census, approximately 32.7% of its residents reported having a baccalaureate degree or higher. Half of the 14 counties in Mesa State's service region had higher averages of educational attainment than the state. Educational levels for the region are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II.



Economy

The economic base of the region's 14 counties, by some measures, is quite similar while other indicators reflect significant differences. Table 1-3 presents the counties according to per capita income. Half of the counties—those with more highly educated populations—rank above the statewide average for per capita income. The resort counties of Pitkin, San Miguel, Eagle, Routt, Summit, Grand, and Ouray are highly affluent and contrast with the remaining seven that are relatively more rural and remote. Those with

Table 1-3. MESA STATE COLLEGE 14-COUNTY SERVICE REGION BY PER CAPITA INCOME (1999)

County	Total Population	Per Capita Money Income (1999)	% Persons Below Poverty (1999)	% Business Establishments 1 - 4 Employees	% Business Establishments 50+ Employees	Largest Occupation Type* (% in Category)
Pitkin	14,810	\$40,811	6.2%	61.7%	3.2%	MPR (42.1%)
San Miguel	6,951	\$35,329	10.4%	61.3%	2.1%	MPR (35.8%)
Eagle	43,027	\$32,011	7.8%	63.3%	3.2%	MPR (33.3%)
Routt	20,255	\$28,792	6.1%	62.4%	3.6%	MPR (34.5%)
Summit	24,225	\$28,676	9.0%	61.2%	2.4%	MPR (30.8%)
Grand	12,711	\$25,198	7.3%	65.2%	1.9%	MPR (30.0%)
Ouray	3,882	\$24,335	7.2%	75.7%	0.0%	MPR (37.2%)
Garfield	45,521	\$21,341	7.5%	61.7%	2.0%	MPR (26.9%)
Mesa	119,281	\$18,715	10.2%	56.5%	3.7%	MPR (29.3%)
Moffat	13,154	\$18,540	8.3%	60.1%	2.6%	CEM (23.3%)
Jackson	1,589	\$17,826	14.0%	70.0%	0.0%	MPR (33.7%)
Rio Blanco	5,945	\$17,344	9.6%	60.8%	1.8%	MPR (29.8%)
Montrose	34,572	\$17,158	12.6%	59.6%	2.3%	MPR (25.9%)
Delta	28,421	\$17,152	12.1%	64.7%	2.1%	MPR (28.0%)
14-County Total	374,344					
Colorado	4,417,714	\$24,049	9.3%			

*MPR = Management, Professional, & Related; CEM = Construction, Extraction, & Maintenance.

Source: Colorado Data Book. Downloaded 6/28/04. http://www.state.co.us/oed/bus_fin/contents.html.

lower income levels have economies that are oriented more toward agriculture, ranching and/or mining, and often are the counties where more affordable housing is available for those working at ski resorts.

The region is one of small businesses. At least three out of every five establishments have four or fewer employees. Only Mesa, Routt, Pitkin, and Eagle Counties have more than 3% of their businesses employing 50 or more persons. Of those four counties, Mesa County is the only one with a more diversified, non-resort, economic base. As different as these counties' economies may appear, however, the largest sector for all but Moffat County is in the management, professional, and service occupations.

In conclusion, meeting the educational needs of the Western Slope region poses both opportunities and challenges for Mesa State College. As shown in Table 1-4, there is a clear correlation between educational attainment and earning power. Thus it appears that future economic gains in the region are highly interrelated with the college's ability to deliver the type of education needed by its region. As the next three chapters document, the college already has a significant presence in Western Colorado, and this influence is sure to grow as the college expands its leadership role as a Regional Education Provider. ■

Table 1-4. COLORADO EARNINGS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2000*

Educational Level	Median Earnings
Not a high school graduate	\$21,757
High school graduate	\$28,765
Some college	\$32,294
Bachelor's degree	\$42,237
Advanced degree	\$53,528

*Data limited to year-round, full-time employed Coloradoans aged 21 to 64 years in 2000 who worked 50+ weeks and 35+ hours per week in 1999.

Source: Census Bureau, "Earnings by Occupation and Education". Downloaded 8/27/04. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/earnings/call1coboth.html>.

