

Extended Access.
Consistent Outreach.
Community Commitment.



CLEP® Exams Enable Students to Reach Their Academic Goals

Rio Salado College has broken new ground in serving 21st-century learners pursuing degrees and careers in a range of fields, from law enforcement technology to eLearning design. Serving nearly 160,000 students who participate in both online and blended learning experiences, Rio Salado operates nine strategically located testing centers throughout Maricopa County, Arizona, in an effort to make services accessible and convenient to potential and incoming students. Many of these centers offer extended hours and the convenience of walk-in testing, so members of the community have fewer scheduling and transportation barriers when they're ready to take their CLEP® exams.

Rio Salado College: A Profile

Rio Salado College is part of the Maricopa County Community College District and has earned a reputation for innovation in meeting the needs of today's learners. Offering a range of career-focused associate degree programs, along with bridge programs that connect Rio Salado to area high schools and to many of Arizona's four-year colleges and universities, this college addresses the needs of students who have busy lives and who are committed to succeed in their chosen academic and career pursuits. Offering both fully online and hybrid or blended learning courses, Rio Salado helps students accelerate their academic pursuits so that they can earn degrees more quickly in their chosen fields.

CLEP Exams Offer Opportunity

Rio Salado offers students up to 30 credits for prior learning, and all students have the opportunity to use CLEP exam credits toward graduation. Students can earn as many as 16 credits for qualifying scores on CLEP language exams.

Rio Salado Reaches Out to the Academic Community

Linda Lukey is an active participant in the Maricopa County Community College District's Assessment Council. She actively shares information about Rio Salado's network of testing centers with her colleagues from other community colleges, so all of the district's students have information about testing center hours and access. By actively promoting Rio Salado's testing center locations and hours to the leadership at other institutions, students throughout the county have more opportunity to take advantage of credit for prior learning.

Rio Salado College also operates a CLEP testing center at the Luke Air Force Base to serve active military personnel who are also students pursuing additional course work and degrees. Lukey noted that working with the Luke Air Force Base staff and students is all part of Rio Salado's commitment to the people, businesses, and organizations of Maricopa County.

Outreach to Nontraditional Students Creates a Bridge to Opportunity

Maricopa County has a large ABE-GED population, and Rio Salado College developed the College Bridge Pathways program to help these individuals complete their GED exams successfully and continue to earn both associate and bachelor's degrees. Local high schools are also working with their students and bringing them to Rio Salado testing centers to take the Spanish Language CLEP exam. Lukey said, "The schools make it a 'field trip' and students tour the campus, have lunch, and take their exams. Most do, in fact, earn the full 16 credits in Spanish and that gives them an amazing jump-start on their college education. The local press covered this program, spotlighting the commitment and the determination of students, who organized community events such as car washes to help pay for their exams."

Rio Salado also provides high school students with an innovative dual enrollment opportunity, helping students complete their associate degrees. CLEP exam credits help these students complete their two programs at Rio Salado and then continue their studies at state universities in Arizona.



We offer walk-in testing and we're open a longer time — until 9 p.m. Monday–Thursday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Friday — and we're open on Saturday too."

Linda Lukey
Director of Testing and
Prior Learning Assessment

Rio Achieve Advisors. Innovation in Action.

Rio Achieve Advisors is an innovative program that pairs advisors and peer mentors with students who are degree seeking, with new students, and with those who are often Pell Grant eligible. There are 3,500 advisors in this grant-funded program and they work exclusively with small groups of students, so students receive individualized attention and support. The mentors are trained to check for opportunities for these students to earn credit for prior learning. They show students how they can earn credits and help them determine if available credit options will support their degree and career goals.

Consistent Communication with Faculty and Staff

Lukey noted that training, communication, and a consistently updated website have also helped Rio Salado and Maricopa County Community College District institutions stay aware and current with respect to CLEP exam opportunities. It requires more than a “one time” presentation. Instead, a consistent series of workshops for faculty, advisers, and counselors; admission and enrollment teams; and administrators help keep the credit for prior learning opportunity at top-of-mind awareness. And because Rio Salado serves the majority of students in the online and digital environments, constant website updates are critical to address the informational needs of students, faculty, and the larger community. “I think that educating your staff, not only in the testing center, but admission and records people, and faculty at all levels, from adjunct to department chair, is very important.”

Executive Summary

Rio Salado College serves 160,000 students, the majority of whom live in Maricopa County. With both online and hybrid or blended courses, the college helps students prepare for a range of careers in health care, education, business, and technical fields, and uses CLEP exam credits for prior learning to help students achieve their academic and career goals successfully.

Rio Salado Best Practices at a Glance

- Extend testing center hours and locate testing centers strategically for easy access and outreach
- Provide ongoing training and outreach to faculty and staff about credit for prior learning programs
- Keep online information channels current and complete to serve students, faculty, staff, and the community at large

For more information, visit clep.collegeboard.org.