

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ARIZONA WESTERN COLLEGE

2009 NCA Self Study



An Executive Summary of
a Report Written for the
Comprehensive Evaluation
for the Higher Learning
Commission of the North
Central Association

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Executive Summary

2009 Arizona Western College NCA Self Study

This Executive Summary provides highlights from the Arizona Western College Self study report, which was submitted for continued accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Occurring on a ten-year cycle, the self study process represents a comprehensive review and evaluation of the College in the light of its vision, mission and goals. The programs and services of the College have been shown to reflect the actualization of the vision, mission, and goals of Arizona Western College. Voluntary accreditation also provides an opportunity to assess formal educational activities as well as to evaluate governance and administration, admissions and student services, preparation for the future, student academic achievement, organizational effectiveness, and relationships with outside constituents. Through this self study, AWC has demonstrated that it satisfies the five criteria of the Higher Learning Commission. It also has provided a vehicle for examination of the strengths and opportunities for improvement at the College. The full report is available through the President's Office or at www.azwestern.edu/accreditation.

Profile of Arizona Western College

Arizona Western College (AWC) was the first community college established under the Arizona Community College Law. Prior to the establishment of the College, the closest state institution of higher learning was Arizona State University in Tempe, 200 miles from Yuma. In 1963, the first students were admitted to the College. At the time, enrollment was projected to reach 600 students in five years with an enrollment of 2,500 to be reached at an unspecified point in the future. This initial prediction underestimated the community's desire for higher education by 50%; in the first semester, well over 900 students enrolled. By 1998, enrollment approached 8,000. As of spring semester 2008, enrollment stood at 12,051.

The Arizona Western College District, located in the southwest corner of Arizona, includes both Yuma and La Paz counties—an area of approximately 10,000 square miles of desert with a sparse but rapidly growing population of 208,000. This represents a total growth of nearly 36% in the past decade. In addition, an influx of part-time residents and visitors from northern states and Canada nearly doubles the population of the area during the winter months. Figures from the 2000 Census indicate that 43.7% of households report speaking Spanish in the home. Demographically, Yuma and La Paz counties differ in significant ways. While the two counties are roughly similar in geographical size, Yuma County accounts for more than 90% of the District population.

Arizona Western College sits on the edge of a dramatic mesa overlooking the expansive Gila River Basin. Buildings and grounds are meticulously maintained, and the campus provides a lovely desert-oasis setting for the typical activities of a vibrant campus—study, reflection, social interaction, recreation, residence, dining, and intellectual exchange.

The College has been at the national forefront of developing communications and instructional technology. Not only has AWC kept pace with technological advances over the previous decade in infrastructure as well as program development, but in the process it also



has gained national recognition for innovation and performance. For example, the College has maintains state-of-the-art, interdepartmental communications networks; it broadcasts its own cable Television channels and AM/FM public radio stations; it has developed campus-wide broadband and wireless Internet service; and it offers complete on-line services for admissions, advising, registration, and payment. Distance Learning resources include expanding on-line learning and degree programs as well as an Interactive Television Network for conducting classes across the expansive service region in real time. At present, AWC is undergoing a quantum leap with the construction of new classrooms, learning labs, offices, and service space throughout its service area. The main campus is adding well in excess of 200,000 square feet, including a dramatic service and administration complex and College Community Center, an Agriculture & Science Complex that places College agricultural facilities among the best in the West, and a newly designed Early Childhood Development Learning Laboratory. In South Yuma County, AWC's San Luis Learning Center opened a new facility of 20,000 square feet in January, 2008. In La Paz County, new construction of 20,000 square feet is being added to the Parker Center, and approximately 6,000 square feet is being built in Quartzsite.

The ranks of faculty and staff have continued to grow with the College as well. Arizona Western College's full-time staff includes 110 full-time faculty, four full-time academic counselors, 127 professional/administrative staff, and 139 classified employees, with compensation based on specified qualifications and educational attainment. A generous benefits program includes a four-day work week along with health, dental, vision, and life insurance; income protection in the form of short-and long-term disability insurance; deferred compensation plans; and an excellent retirement plan combining participation in the Arizona State Retirement System with federal Social Security.

The Future-Oriented Organization

Arizona Western College offers education in more than 50 fields of study. Students at AWC today have a wide choice of degrees and programs within five general types: 54 occupational certificates; 3 Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC) certificates for students who plan to transfer to an Arizona public college or university; 30 occupational Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees; 1 Associate General Studies (A.G.S.) degree for transfer students; 29 other transfer degrees including Associate of Arts (A.A.) degrees, Associate of Business (A.Bus.) degrees, and Associate of Science (A.S.) degrees.

Summary of Accomplishments Since the Last Accreditation

Throughout the past decade, the College has pursued its mission of developing innovative partnerships to increase both the quality and quantity of programs and opportunities for the people of the region. Some of the more notable of these partnerships include the following:

- With the AWC/NAU "2+2" program between Northern Arizona University (NAU) and AWC, AWC students can transfer seamlessly from the community college to a university program and obtain their higher degrees without having to move away from family or careers.
- The Yuma Educational Consortium (Yuma Elementary District One, Yuma Union High School, Arizona Western College, and Northern Arizona University) allows for collaboration across the district and between educational levels.



- The AWC Nursing and Radiologic Technology Programs have achieved a high degree of excellence in partnership with the Yuma Regional Medical Center.
- The University of Arizona (U of A) has partnered with AWC in developing programs in agriculture.
- The establishment of the AWC Entrepreneurial Center has made possible the delivery of classes and programs for start-up businesses.

Leadership has evolved during the past ten years as significant changes have been introduced through continuous refinements in the administrative and reporting structures. Since the last Higher Learning Commission Self Study in 1999, the College has taken steps to strengthen its administrative structure. The President of the College is delegated all aspects of the administration of the institution.

Over the past ten years, the Student Services, Learning Services, Information Technology Services, and Business and Administrative Services area have undergone incremental organizational change to meet increasing enrollment and increasing demand for alternative delivery systems for learning.

Other significant changes include the following:

- The President has established a far-reaching strategic-planning process, called Vision in Progress, which seeks input from faculty and staff at all levels and is updated annually for a 5-year window.
- The hiring of a new Vice President for Learning Services and reorganization of that area resulted in a high level of concern among faculty and a vote of no confidence. This controversy stimulated a strong grass-roots dynamic of deliberation, analysis, and communication, as well as the development of two working bodies to improve awareness and communication—the Blue Ribbon Task Force and the Workplace Climate Steering Committee.
- The President appointed 17 members to the Workplace Climate Steering Committee who represented a diverse cross section of employees, and members then collected input from their areas to address employee morale on the issues of Equity and Effort, Communication and Training, Value and Recognition, Wellness, Trust, and Environment.
- AWC was selected as the 2008 Overall Winner in Yuma’s Workplace Excellence Awards and named “A Great Place to Work,” by an outside panel of judges.
- The Blue Ribbon Task Force has been seeking feedback through a variety of methods, including an online Blackboard site, and has developed a statement of Learning Services Guiding Principles and Best Practices that is intended to assist in describing what the future will look like.
- In 2004-05, the College created an Office of Diversity. In 2005-06, the Office facilitated 14 faculty and student programs attended by 300 people and actively recruited diverse faculty candidates. By 2007-08, the program facilitated 35 faculty, student, and community programs attended by 2,267 people, including the newly developed Culture Camp now offered each August.
- The Office of Human Resources implemented a variety of practices to increase the number of minority candidates. These practices include enlisting the help of college employees to recruit through networking while traveling on college business, and forming advisory hiring committees that embody a mix of gender, ethnicity, backgrounds, departments, and employee classification.



- The percentage of full-time minority employees increased from 23% in 1998 to 36.2% in 2008.
- In recognition of its consistent commitment to diversity, the AWC District Governing Board received the prestigious Charles Kennedy Equity Award for the Pacific Region from the Association of Community College Trustees in 2006-07.
- In 1999, AWC established the Assessment Committee, which researched and established four outcome areas of student learning to be measured and analyzed: Communication Skills, Quantitative Analysis, Critical Thinking, and Technology Application Literacy. In 2005-06, Embedded Writing and Oral Communication programs were piloted. In 2007, the Assessment Committee was renamed LEAP (Learning Excellence Assessment Process), and the part-time faculty coordinator position was changed to a full-time Director position. Today, Embedded Writing and Embedded Math have been piloted across the curriculum. Prior to degree completion, students are tested in two (randomly selected) of the four areas.

The Self Study Process

Arizona Western College began its current period of NCA/HLC self study preparation in April of 2006, with the scheduled date of the evaluation visit forecast for March 2-4, 2009. Two Self study Co-Chairs were named, originally a Dean from the Student Services area (administration) and a Division Chair from the Learning Services area (faculty). Both now hold higher-level positions (Interim Vice President of Student Services and Dean of Instruction, respectively). Responsibilities of the Self study Co-Chairs included overseeing the general flow of activities leading up to and including the NCA/HLC evaluation team visitation, managing the self study budget, conducting meetings and retreats with the Steering Committee, supervising and maintaining the self study timeline, interacting with the NCA/HLC representative, and maintaining a two-way communication on self study activities with the greater College community. In addition, the Co-Chairs were accountable for the overall process.

Supporting the Self study Co-Chairs was a larger team representing an extensive organizational matrix created for the goal of completing the Self study. The initial organization of the self study team included a Steering Committee of twelve individuals from across the College. The Steering Committee was accountable for acting as an advisory group for the five Criterion Chairs, maintaining a general flow of self study activities, sharing responsibility for criterion-chair output, developing a plan for the overall structure and design of the Self study report, and communicating about self study activities to the College and its constituent community.

The structure also included five criterion teams, each with its own pair of co-chairs, to conduct research and provide evidentiary-based reports on how AWC was meeting the five NCA/HLC established accreditation criteria. Each of the committees for the five NCA/HLC criteria was assigned two co-chairs for continuity, given the possibility that one of the chairs might need to retire from these duties. Additional members of the self study team were added later, including a College promotion/events team, and an informational resources team.

The College considers the self study process to be an integral part of its function. For three years, the Self Study has been listed and focused on as a yearly college-wide objective. With this focus, the college identified funds for investing in the self study, providing for team members to travel to the annual NCA/HLC meeting in Chicago, and providing additional clerical support for the various tasks required for the process.



The College believes strongly that the self study should be institution-wide process, and invested in several ways of involving the entire college community. Initially, the self study co-chairs met with several staff and student groups in 2006 to recruit members for the criterion groups. To better understand the purpose of the self study, the criterion groups wrote a script, subsequently produced as an instructional video by the College television production crew to describe the meaning of accreditation and the five criteria to the College and its constituent communities. This video was shown on the College television station and at various staff meetings, and is now on the AWC accreditation website page. Additionally, the self study team conducted several surveys, including a student-involvement survey and an on-line survey for employees.

The process of the study culminated during spring of 2009 with the final draft of the report published, campus and community awareness highlighted through various means, the resource room and documents prepared and organized for viewing, and scheduling of the visiting team members finalized.

The Accreditation Criteria

Criterion 1: *Arizona Western College operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve board, administrators, faculty, staff, and students.*

The Arizona Western College mission documents demonstrate the College's clear sense of purpose, and the ideals promoted in them. The mission, vision, and values are fulfilled through structures, policies, and processes at the College with an emphasis on meeting the needs of a two-county District. The words in these documents are realized through AWC's commitment to lifelong learning, student access and success, strategic planning processes, community partnerships, and compliance with legal standards and codes of ethics. All College governance documents are consistent with, and help to accomplish, the mission, purpose, values, vision, goals, and objectives articulated for AWC.

Strengths

- The 6E Decision-Making Model of Excellence, Equity, Efficiency, Effort, Effectiveness, and Ethics improves annual processes such as Strategic Management of goals and objectives, procurements, faculty appraisal, technology services, and assessment of student learning outcomes among many other cyclical systems. The model serves as a guide for expanding or eliminating certificate and degree offerings. It guides decisions concerning campus events such as diverse cultural, literary, music, art, athletic, environmental, and political events among many others.
- Each year, the President works with staff and faculty to establish A Vision in Progress, which articulates all strategic planning for the next 5 years, as it stems from the mission statement. The Vision includes College-Wide Objectives, which are approved by the District Governing Board.
- AWC values a sense of community and recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
- AWC is ranked among the top 100 Hispanic Serving Institutions for awarding associate degrees and certificates by Community College Week.



- In 2004, the voters of Yuma and La Paz counties passed a \$74 million bond with 68% voter approval to make capital improvements at AWC across the district. Six of those facilities have been opened to date on both the main campus and the South County campus. Two additional buildings will open March 26 of this year in La Paz County.
- AWC secured a \$1.9 million Department of Labor Community-Based Job Training Grant to address shortages of skilled construction workers in our service area, and the AWC Trades Program was developed.
- International Students Program increased by more than 100% in 2007-2008.
- Increased numbers of classified staff are involved in the various recommending bodies.
- According to an AWC survey, 81% of respondents agree that the College upholds its mission.

Opportunities for Advancement

- The District Governing Board By-Laws were updated in 2007-2008. A process should be in place to update By-Laws on a regular basis in the future. An effort should be mounted to convey the parameters of Board conduct and responsibility as defined in the By-Laws to the greater campus community. The Governing Board could explore more creative and innovative technology solutions to disseminate by-laws, agendas, and minutes to the campus community.
- Exploration should continue on finding innovative ways to disseminate the College Mission Statement. Such ideas should include the following: posting the Mission on the College's main webpage, on College vehicles, and in classrooms; broadcasting it over KAWC Public Radio and on the College television station, CAWC-74; and having it added to the AWC letterhead for correspondence and to computers college-wide as a screensaver.

Recommendations

- Recruit and retain a more diverse faculty by maintaining a competitive salary structure.
- Develop a strategy to increase the number of full-time faculty as enrollment increases to continue to offer required courses and programs.
- Research equitable offerings for off-campus sites in technology, student services, and learning opportunities.
- Institutionalize a fully representative body, such as the Campus Workplace Committee or the Blue Ribbon Task Force, which can provide a safe venue for continuously addressing the needs of internal constituents.
- Have all committees, taskforces, and recommending bodies post agendas and minutes in a timely manner on the website using Blackboard so that they are available to internal constituents.

Criterion 2: *Arizona Western College's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.*

Arizona Western College prepares for the future through comprehensive and systemic strategic, operational, and departmental planning processes that occur on an annual cycle. AWC's planning process includes three major levels: institutional strategic planning, college operational



planning through the Annual Planning Process, and departmental planning. Each level informs the others, and all are continuously reviewed and aligned. Plans are informed by student outcomes assessment and evaluation of institutional effectiveness through the program review process; in turn, plans inform budget decisions.

AWC Strategic Goals:

- **Lifelong Learning** to provide lifelong educational opportunities for the diverse communities we serve through excellence in teaching and learning
- **Student Success** to implement a student success model that facilitates student educational goal attainment through efforts in student outreach and recruitment, retention, transfer, financial assistance, and out-of-class learning and engagement
- **Human Resources** to provide innovative human resources to attract, retain, and develop employees who foster a culturally diverse learning centered community
- **Institutional Effectiveness** to continuously improve the systematic and sustainable Institutional Effectiveness System that demonstrates the ability of the College to match performance to its stated mission
- **Technology Support** to provide innovative customer-driven technology solutions in response to the diverse needs of the AWC community and its partners
- **Facilities Enhancement** to provide reasonable access to facilities that house programs and curriculum designed to serve students in Yuma and La Paz counties
- **Public Relations and Marketing** to develop a comprehensive public relations and marketing program that increases student enrollment and advances the image of Arizona Western College on the community, state, and national levels.

Strengths

- A key strength is that AWC uses a 6E Decision-Making Model in conjunction with each planning document to re-focus each year on its core values, its vision for the new year, and its college-wide objectives.
- A system is in place for review of all timelines, resources, and funds required for successful completion of annual tasks or activities.
- Strategic planning is linked to the annual planning process, the College mission statement, and annual goals and objectives.
- The support Arizona Western College receives from the people of the communities it serves in Yuma and La Paz counties. Not only did the members of these counties support a bond issue in 2004 for \$73,850,000, but they also constantly offer support through attendance and participation in Matador athletic events, Family Night, theatrical productions, and job fairs. Many members of the community also provide monetary support through the Arizona Western College Foundation.

Opportunities for Advancement

- Future funding for Arizona Western College. The state of Arizona is struggling financially. In 2008-09 Arizona Western College's state appropriations were cut by \$1,811,111. As we prepare for future budgets we must plan for additional state funding cuts. This is especially difficult because the building projects based on the 2004 bond will be completed during the present academic year, and operational and maintenance costs for these facilities will increase overall costs of the campus. Another funding concern is related to tax revenue



since Proposition 101 was passed by voters at the general election in November 2006. This proposition changed the way the maximum primary tax levy is calculated. The new maximum levy limit is based on the District's 2005 levy plus 2% and new construction. The College anticipates that this change will have a negative impact on how quickly it responds to growth through restricted tax levies.

- Current and future economic conditions in our area will challenge the College to be certain it offers academic programs that will meet the needs of its community and give its students skills in such fields as engineering, healthcare, and accounting that will provide them credentials for a sustainable career.

Recommendations

- Expand and strengthen AWC's partnerships, especially our partnership with Northern Arizona University (NAU). As NAU expands the number of programs offered in Yuma, there are many opportunities for AWC to serve as a feeder school.
- Improve employee development and satisfaction through implementation of a comprehensive human-resources development model over the next three years to include: Recruiting, Orientation/On-boarding, Retention, Communication, Performance Appraisal, Training, Professional Development, Leadership Development, and Procedures.
- Continue to increase enrollment by utilizing a campus-wide Strategic Enrollment Management Committee and various workgroups to expand dual enrollment, improve retention, reach out to remote sites within Yuma and La Paz counties, and increase distance-learning opportunities.
- Look for opportunities to increase revenue. This includes revenues from newly negotiated indirect rates and revenue generated by external events scheduled in the new College Community Center.

Criterion 3: *Arizona Western College provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.*

Arizona Western College provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness by:

- Assessing Student Learning Outcomes
- Providing Support for Effective Teaching
- Creating Effective College Learning Environments
- Providing Resources for Teaching and Learning

Arizona Western College focuses on assessment of student-learning outcomes through institution-wide, program-specific, and course-based strategies. General Education assessment is reviewed annually through the college's assessment committee and mandatory exams for graduates based on the college's four general education outcomes. College degrees and certificates are assessed annually through departments. Faculty members write course syllabi clearly describing course goals and measurable course competencies, which are then assessed via multiple measures within each class. Although an assessment program has been in place since 2000, the College realizes it could expand and improve its process, and has enrolled and been accepted in the February 2009 NCA Assessment Academy.



Strengths

- AWC has created the position of Director for Assessment and Program Review
- AWC Student Services has a student-learning outcomes program.
- AWC's faculty-driven and faculty-owned general education outcomes assessment assesses randomly selected graduates on an annual basis.
- AWC has a strong commitment to distance education, with comprehensive faculty development and enrollment growth.
- AWC's Curriculum Committee is faculty-driven and faculty-owned.
- AWC has improved academic advising with specific lead faculty advisors and a network of discipline-specific advisors.
- AWC's faculty have increased the student-reported appraisal scores.
- AWC, a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), proactively develops, performs, and evaluates activities that enrich college life and culture.
- AWC has improved the quality and quantity of resources available across multiple sites.
- AWC's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.
- AWC is an award-winning leader in educational technology and often regarded as a leader among Arizona Community Colleges.

Opportunities for Advancement

- AWC has an opportunity to improve at the Higher Learning Commission Academy for the Assessment of Student Learning.
- AWC has an opportunity to increase connectedness and involvement of associate faculty and part-time staff.
- AWC has an opportunity to provide consistent instructional equipment and support in all classrooms across multiple sites.

Recommendations

- Create a comprehensive assessment program that addresses all four outcomes effectively and efficiently institution-wide.
- Develop the assessment of other areas in General Education.
- Coordinate consistent instruction and assessment in all classrooms across multiple sites.

Criterion 4: *Arizona Western College promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.*

The Arizona Western College mission, core values, vision, and goals all speak directly to its commitment to lifelong learning. This commitment is evidenced through the College's strategic planning process, professional development for staff and faculty, curricular diversity, and organizational structure. Arizona Western College fulfills Criterion Four by

- Implementing an organizational model of life-long learning
- Supporting professional development and scholarship
- Providing diverse, useful and current curricula
- Ensuring responsible use of knowledge and technology



Strengths

- AWC emphasizes accountability on assessment, including the establishment of a College Assessment Committee, currently named LEAP (Learning Excellence Assessment Process), and has dedicated an administrator to the process.
- AWC emphasizes lifelong learning of employees by providing Educational Growth Credit for faculty, staff, and counselors and tuition grants for college courses.
- AWC has comprehensive community college curriculum and statewide articulation through the Arizona General Education Curriculum (AGEC).

Opportunities for Advancement

- Expand, develop, and train AWC employees for improving and enhancing their skills and competencies in preparing the College for the future.
- Continue to articulate and expand the partnership with Northern Arizona University.
- Provide equitable staffing and resources for comprehensive services at all campus learning centers across the 10,000 square mile district.

Recommendations

- Overcome issues and concerns related to the re-organization of Learning Services.
- Expand the culture of assessment to include all programs and course clusters across the campus.

Criterion 5: *As called for by its mission, Arizona Western College identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways that both value.*

Arizona Western College's mission, statement of purposes, and vision all speak to providing educational service through innovative partnerships to assist students to enhance their lives, achieve success, and access learning. As stated in the College Institutional Values, AWC “. . . will be community centered and partnership oriented” and will “. . . become a significant team member in economic development, cultural enhancement, and societal improvement.” The College both serves and engages its constituents, recognizing the challenge of meeting the needs of diverse and widely dispersed communities over a 10,000-square-mile district. The College regularly seeks feedback from both internal and external constituents to ensure that programs and services are developed in accordance with community needs and priorities.

The College actively seeks collaborative partnerships with the community that increase student access to learning and are consistent with its mission. Community members engage and participate in college affairs in a variety of ways; at the same time, students, faculty, and staff engage with, participate in, and contribute to the community through service learning, volunteerism, service, and governmental organizations. AWC engages and serves its communities, carries out its mission to improve the lives of people in Yuma and La Paz counties, and seeks feedback from its many constituencies.

Strengths

- Community involvement with partnerships is extensive.
- Television and radio stations ensure regular public communication and community-oriented service programs.
- AWC has community service and volunteer activities.



- AWC's diverse communities recognize the College's activities in a positive way.
- AWC has a strong partnership with NAU-Yuma.

Opportunities for Advancement

- Create a uniform definition of "partnership" and categories for such partnerships (e.g., financial, business, community, education).
- Expand the AWC student population based on the growth of Yuma and La Paz counties.
- Redesign campus signage and maps.

Recommendations

- Examine existing partnerships to determine equity, benefit, and financial viability across the entire District in relation to the College's mission.
- Continue to maintain the quality and service to all constituents in the current economic environment.
- Address community concerns about parking, construction, and signage.
- Fully develop and implement a service-learning model.
- Institutionalize regular and formalized community educational needs assessment in cooperation with NAU-Yuma.
- Continue to review how well various training programs fit the stated needs of specific community segments.
- Ensure that new programs are fiscally sound, in addition to meeting community needs.
- Continue to look for opportunities to maintain, present, and reinforce a positive public image of College leadership through collaborative processes to overcome the personnel issues of recent years.

Future Applications of Self Study Findings and Request for Accreditation

Arizona Western College demonstrates and has documented, through a rigorous self study involving all segments of the campus community and the District, that it fulfills the criteria for accreditation set forth by the Higher Learning Commission. The College presents evidence throughout the report that it carries out its mission and actualizes its values of lifelong learning, the 6E Decision-Making Model of excellence, efficiency, equity, effort, effectiveness, and ethics through innovative partnerships to serve the citizens of Yuma and La Paz counties.







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