



E.V. legislators push Polytechnic expansion

[Dennis Welch](#), Tribune

Three of the East Valley's most powerful lawmakers are using their political muscle to push for \$108 million to improve Arizona State University's Polytechnic campus in Mesa.

The money would be used to construct three buildings needed to keep pace with the explosive growth at the satellite campus, which many political leaders say is a key to the future success of the far East Valley.

"I think this will be one of the major hubs in the East Valley for the creation of high-paying jobs and for the development of industry," said Rep. Gary Pierce, R-Mesa.

Pierce, along with representatives Russell Pearce, RMesa, and Bob Robson, R-Chandler, see the campus as a future economic engine, attracting new industries and businesses to the area.

So far, the three lawmakers have been working to convince lawmakers to set aside the money and don't foresee any political roadblocks.

"I think everybody recognizes the importance of the campus," said Robson, regarding his conversations with fellow lawmakers.

Combined, the three buildings would increase classroom and office space by more than 30 percent.

Two of the buildings would add a majority of the classrooms and offices, while a third would provide the campus with an auditorium as well as more laboratory space for research and hands-on experience.

To finance the project, state lawmakers are considering three options.

The first calls for the state to use part of its estimated \$801 million surplus this year to pay for the entire project.

Another option is paying \$7.5 million over the next 30 years.

The third option calls for the state to pay for it over the next three years.

Pearce said he is pushing for that last plan because it doesn't commit the state financially over the next three decades. In addition, he said it would be a bad idea to pay for it all at once because that would use too much of the surplus.

"We have some cash on the table this year, so let's spend it wisely," he said.

Gerald Jakubowski, ASU vice president and provost of the Polytechnic campus, said the school's specialized classes and development and growth in the area have driven the increased enrollment.

He said he hopes to have the new buildings up and open to begin the fall 2008 semester.

Currently, students are attending classes on what was once a U.S. Air Force base.

Since opening up the campus in 1996 with just under 900 students, Jakubowski said the school has renovated nearly every usable campus building. The new buildings, he said, would be a welcome addition.

But he admits if enrollment continues to rise at such a rapid pace, school officials could soon be back to the Legislature asking for more money to build more buildings.

Overall, ASU grew by 3,300 students to more than 61,000. About 1,100 of those new students attend classes at the Mesa campus.

Currently, there are about 5,000 students enrolled at Polytechnic. But school administrators are planning to increase attendance to 15,000 students by 2020.

According to the University's Web site, there are 33 degree programs offered in areas that include business, agribusiness, education, engineering, engineering technology, professional pilot training, and health and wellness programs.