President's Report to the Board
February 2013

Every so often there is a popular culture reference that persists longer than even the original creation. While the television show The Brady Bunch ran only five years, nearly four decades later it still serves as the iconic symbol of the growing pains that can come from merging two families into one. I have newfound respect for that program as we focus on how to retain the fabulously unique traits of our different campuses and our Workforce Development & Continuing Education program, and yet come together as One College for the benefit of our students. Perhaps the area that best illustrates the need to function as One College, as well as the challenges that accompany the process, is in the area of academics. I want to focus this month's report on how we are working to redesign our academic operations to align with our One College initiative.

The Academic Redesign Task Force has been meeting since late last spring to plan how best to undertake such a lofty goal. I charged the group with redesigning our academic operations in a way that supports curriculum uniformity, cross-campus leadership for disciplines, and a common student experience. The task force members have been engaged in a very real, in-depth, and, at times, difficult analysis about our current structure, identifying what works and what falls short. They have started to engage in collaborative problem solving to identify and prioritize workable solutions. They are determined to help create an academic structure that enables thoughtful decision-making and consistent implementations of academic policies and procedures.

The task force expects to release a progress report of its discussion, and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Donald Pearl will travel to every campus to address reactions to the report. While I cannot yet share the full details of the report, I wanted to take this opportunity to touch on the reasons I find this work so critical, as well as some of the challenges we face as we redesign our academics operations.

As you well know, each of our campuses and WD&CE historically have operated independently, working cooperatively with one another but fairly autonomously when it comes to creating academic departments and instructional practices. For our students, this can mean drastically different experiences depending on the campus at which they are taking courses. Sure, there are expected fluctuations among professors, classes, curriculums, and other aspects of receiving an education. But problems arise

when there is lack of consistency in the instructional requirements our students experience depending on which campus they happen to attend.

Very real examples of the way our current structure is negatively impacting our students can be demonstrated. For instance, in a College program with a high population of students, the department at one campus has an entirely different way of defining completion than the department overseeing that program on a different campus. One requires a standard exit exam, while the other does not. In many cases a student taking a two-semester sequence course must take both on the same campus due to the differences among campuses of how the topics are organized. Additionally, when a student on one campus seeks academic support, the process for getting time with a tutor actually depends on the campus, rather than College, practices.

Our very mission statement commits us to holding ourselves accountable, and yet we cannot actualize this goal when there are instances of lack of uniformity among our campuses. This should not happen and, as I discuss below, cannot happen under our new guidelines from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. We must work to align our programs across our campuses to create a common student experience, as well as improve College efficiency, success, and accountability.

While our task force still is hammering out details, we do have some specific goals about what will come out of our redesign effort:

First, we will create academic leadership positions that are *collegewide*. That means rather than have a different dean at each campus for the same discipline, we would have a dean who works with faculty across our campuses in that subject. For instance, one possible model would be to have a collegewide dean of science, a dean of math, and a dean of English, who then work with the faculty on each campus to create uniformity where needed, and encourage creativity and uniqueness as much as possible.

How the roles of academic leaders for the College will evolve is the subject of much debate and research by the members of the task force. The task force will extend that debate to include the entire College community as it is important for any changes to be fully discussed. Whatever the final model is for academic leadership at the College, the deans will have responsibilities that extend across the campuses. We will continue to need a point person for certain campus-related issues, but these leaders will have a primary focus of responsibility to provide collegewide leadership and support for certain areas of study. Ultimately, we hope that such a structure would create a synergy among the campuses and empower the academic leadership to lead and leverage cooperation across campuses and across disciplines.

This organizational change does create many questions and, understandably, it will lead to some hesitancy and concerns among both our full-time and part-time faculty. For instance, how the change would impact the reporting structure on our campuses. Under our current system, faculty members report directly to a dean. That means that on average a dean is responsible for leading and evaluating over 50 full-time faculty members and potentially dozens of part-time faculty, depending on the campus. Due to this high number, it is difficult for the deans to provide the

level of support or supervision that the task force believes is necessary. While each department has its own faculty chair, that chair is not a supervisor and, as such, does not conduct evaluations of full-time faculty. This current system makes it difficult to hold ourselves accountable, both internally and to our external accreditors. I am hopeful that Dr. Pearl, members of our task force, and representatives of our faculty can help devise a solution that would please our constituencies while also enabling greater accountability.

I do want to clear up one large looming concern, which pertains to whether the changes to the organizational structure will cost jobs. The answer is an emphatic no. Let me be clear: no one will lose his or her position or suffer a reduction in salary in this process. It will require some shuffling and flexibility, especially among our administrators, but we expect to retain and perhaps expand the number of administrator positions to facilitate the new structure.

Second, we are looking at specific programs to determine if there is unnecessary redundancy and ways we could maximize our resources. We already do this in some areas. For instance, we are able to offer a state-of-the-art, renowned nursing program with some of the very best technology available partly because we only do so on one campus. The question is: are there other opportunities that would benefit from a streamlined approach? Are there places where similar programs can unite to maximize dollars and, in the end, become stronger? These questions are most relevant to programs that require high-cost equipment and may benefit by being able to share the burden of the costs and reap the benefit of shared resources. Perhaps if we could invest in one piece of equipment, rather than three, we could provide our students with access to a greater number of and greater quality learning tools.

Third, we must align our institutional framework with the expectations of our accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Since the College is now assessed as a single entity, the College needs to redesign academic operations to facilitate this One College analysis. For instance, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education strongly suggested that we increase the rigor of our general studies program by requiring students to take a minimum of 15 hours of coursework at the 200-level. Looking ahead, we believe that this expectation may very well extend to our other programs, so we are proactively reviewing our course numbering system to assure that courses are correctly numbered below the 100 level, at the 100 level, or at the 200 level. Additionally, we are in the process of making a thorough analysis of all of our degree programs to ensure we meet these heightened, rigorous standards.

I submit this report with eyes wide open to the concerns that come with change. There is no doubt that for nearly 70 years Montgomery College has provided students with excellent academic instruction and a quality education. I celebrate our accomplishments and all of our faculty members for their tireless work to change lives. At the same time, I recognize that it is now the time to redesign our academic affairs in order to become One College and to meet the changing expectations of our accreditors, our community, and, most importantly, our students. Growing together can be challenging, but it also can be a rewarding and positive experience. I look forward to the journey, and I am confident it will result in a stronger, more unified Montgomery College.

Monthly Discussion Questions[1]

1. **Institutional needs.** What kind of change, if any, does our institution need?

2. **Context and competition.** Do we understand our institution's competitive position?

3. **Consequences of no change.** What are the consequences if we do not engage in a change process?

4. **Leadership capacity.** As a board and as individual board members, are we able and willing to work with our president to bring about positive change?

5. **Change process and players.** Based on this discussion, what is the right role for the board to play at this time?

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[1] Adopted from MacTaggart, Terrence J., *Leading Change: How Boards and Presidents Build Exceptional Academic Institutions*, AGB Press, 2011 (pp. 21–22).