



Pizza for Your Thoughts – Fall 2019 Summary

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Over 400 students attended the Office of Equity and Inclusion's (OEI) Pizza for Your Thoughts at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring, Rockville, and Germantown campuses. Montgomery College students stopped by to grab a slice of pizza and a cold beverage while they talked about equity and inclusion on their campus with other peers, the OEI staff, and PACEI members. They were excited to learn about what the OEI office was doing at the College and how their voices mattered. Sharon Bland sat down and had one-on-one conversations with several students about their experiences with faculty, student services, and the College's culture.

Students juggle various responsibilities that require time management, prioritizing, and support. Students are trying to get good grades, help their families and make ends meet. During Pizza for Your Thoughts, students talked about how they felt on campus and expressed their opinions freely. The majority of these opinions were positive with students feeling as if MC was a diverse and understanding place; that MC did a great job when it came to inclusion; and that students are treated with respect. Students also said that staff went out of their way to help them and that they felt welcomed on campus. Some of the positive remarks were:

- "I feel like MC is a diverse and understanding place."
- "I feel as if MC has done a great job about being inclusive to all the students. Professors set time for students to meet with them for more help."
- "I like MC because they care about mental health, the classes are small, and there are many clubs I can join."
- "I feel happy to see that in my education classroom there's more Hispanic women. When I was younger I didn't see any Latinas being teachers."

A day in the life of a student means understanding student's busy schedules, and multiple responsibilities. The decision of picking a community college often comes from a place of responsibility where students know that it is on them to make the best decision not only for themselves but also for their families. Going to school is one of several tasks that they have on their plates. They work long hours; they drive family members to and from places; they translate for their families at doctor visits and school meetings; they cook for their families and then they have to find ways to pay for their expenses and for their tuition. These comments reflected students' busy lives:

- "Science Center should open on the weekends including Sundays since some of us work on weekdays."
- "Equity and Inclusion for the most part is greatly and vastly available in most areas. One specific issue however it stands out to me. The tutoring session hours neglect to consider and represent the working students because the session ends at 5pm on Fridays (Rockville) and 3pm on Saturday. Students who work on the morning do not get the help they need. The bus schedule

also makes a difference. The buses are not available on Saturday and additionally stop traveling around 6:00pm. This makes it challenging for students who need to have class or late study sessions.”

- “I think MC does a good job with being inclusive and open to all students. I would like for them to have more opportunities for non-traditional students, such as seminars on how to balance work and school and keeping the library open longer because some students have to work in the day. Thank you.”

Reading our students comments opened our eyes to idealism, strength, and hope. Despite all of the challenges that an MC student may have to face, the best part of it is that they do not give up. They put in the extra hours at the library, the extra hours at work, and the self-care is left last but at least now more than ever, it is acknowledged. MC has put mental health at the forefront and students feel free to talk about anxiety, depression, mindfulness.

Some of the critiques were:

- “An area where MC can improve is the attitude towards people with mental or physical disabilities. Especially the professors.”
- “There are a lot of programs and organizations which are very helpful but most students don’t know about them. We should advertise more.”
- “I think MC does a good job with being inclusive and open to all students. I would like for them to have more opportunities for non-traditional students, such as seminars on how to balance work and school and keeping the library open longer because some students have to work in the day.”
- “It is a pain to change your registered name in the MC system. As a transgender student I find it difficult to have to email all my professors at the start of the semester to be able to be called by the correct name. Likewise, we should be able to change the Ms./Mr. label.”
- “By having security not start encounters because they “assumed” someone was trouble.”
- “I think MC would be more welcoming by pushing for more diverse activities to promote the vast student body of cultures. So everyone from everywhere can be appreciated and feel welcomed and have opportunities to meet groups of diverse people in clubs.”
- “Make sure that all students from all cultures are fully recognized. A multicultural center should have information about cultures from many people of different cultures. I think MC does a good job overall.”

One student talked about his journey at MC and how he had to make better decisions and choose education rather than crime; another student talked about juggling family responsibilities, work and school; another student spoke up about being disabled, its challenges, and what she needed to do to succeed. Each student has a story, they appreciate being heard, being seen.

We are working through the powerful questions below. Our charge is to find the missing pieces that our students need.

- How do we become more inclusive so that all students (LGBTQ+, students with disabilities, non-traditional students, etc.) feel welcomed here and not just our traditional students?

Office of Equity and Inclusion

- How do we continue the conversation on equity and inclusion so that students and employees continue to be heard?
- How do we create empowering spaces that allow students including feel safe, accepted, and free to grow into their greatest potential?