

Tips for Supporting MC Students During this Pandemic by Dr. Debra Bright and Professor Sue Haddad

This COVID-19 pandemic is stressful for all of us, and many of our students are struggling in severe ways. It is imperative that we continue to provide critical, holistic supports so they can excel academically and achieve their desired goals, in spite of our current health crisis. Our counseling faculty are available to meet with students for academic advising and short-term personal counseling via Live Chat, email, or by remote appointment (for more comprehensive advising needs). Students may make an appointment through StarFish or may visit the following website for additional options: <https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/counseling-and-advising/make-an-advising-appointment.html>.

Our three campus-based Behavioral Intervention Teams (BIT) are functioning remotely and are available to support students who may be experiencing anxiety, depression, or other mental health challenges. Additionally, the teams are armed with information about community resources that can help with food insecurity or connect students to online support groups that can aid in mitigating feelings of loneliness and isolation. While the BIT should be notified if a student is experiencing suicidal ideation, please immediately refer any student in crisis to the Montgomery County Crisis Center 24-hour hotline (240-777-4000) first and then contact the appropriate Behavioral Intervention Team for follow-up and subsequent counseling support. Please use the following link to report any behaviors of concern to BIT: <https://www.montgomerycollege.edu/offices/student-affairs/submit-incident-report.html>.

While some students are dealing with personal or mental health challenges, others are having difficulty adapting to remote instruction. These struggles are often exacerbated for students with disabilities. Here are some tips to keep in mind when working with these students:

CONNECT

- While necessary, social distancing may have a significant impact on students with disabilities, as for years people with disabilities have been excluded.
- Reaching out to students by email, one-on-one Zoom conferencing, or chat to provide feedback, be encouraging, check-in, or respond to questions is helpful in maintaining connection and a sense of belonging.
- Let students know that you are open and available to discuss potential learning barriers and work with students to determine possible alternatives and solutions.

BE FLEXIBLE

- As with any change, adjusting to remote learning takes time and can bring with it some new and unexpected challenges. Some students may need additional time to adjust to this way of learning.
- Use flexible approaches in learning assessments. Consider adjusting assignment due dates and deadlines, and adjusting testing windows.
- Recognize that students may ask or need new accommodations such as access to classroom notes. Posting class notes and enabling Zoom meeting recordings will benefit all students, including students with disabilities.

MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

- [Accessibility](#) is not only the right thing to do; it is also required by law. Designing your online course to be accessible for students with disabilities will benefit all students. Make sure your course content is accessible to a variety of users. The simplest way to achieve this is to be

mindful of the content that you are using. Build content within Blackboard, make sure media is accurately captioned, and utilize the built-in accessibility checkers within Word and PDF.

KNOW WHERE TO TURN

- We know you are the expert in your field; we don't expect you to be the expert in all matters relating to accommodations and accessibility. Sometimes it may be best to consult with a DSS representative. We hope you use this opportunity to get to know the [Disability Support Services](#) faculty and staff and the array of services that they provide. They are here for you through COVID-19 and beyond.