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*endless possibilities*

Germantown - Rockville - Takoma Park/Silver Spring

Montgomery County, Maryland



# CONCEPTUALIZING AN AGENDA FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PUBLIC POLICY AT MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

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## BRIEFING PAPER EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## BACKGROUND

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Conceptualizing an agenda for social responsibility and public policy at Montgomery College began with the vision of Dr. Brian K. Johnson and was refined after the articulation of that vision during his inaugural address. Dr. Johnson committed the College to three comprehensive new initiatives. One of these new initiatives is creating and sustaining a College culture of social responsibility, which has as one of its goals developing a plan of action that would “lift up those who have been left out”. Dr. Johnson asked Dr. Michelle T. Scott “to begin the work that will get us moving – and moving quickly – toward this goal”.

To get the College “quickly moving – toward this goal,” several actions have been undertaken. First, comprehensive research on social responsibility and public policy initiatives in corporate America and within higher education has been conducted. Second, based upon this research and other research, a briefing paper was developed for Dr. Johnson titled *Conceptualizing an Agenda for Social Responsibility and Public Policy at Montgomery College*. The briefing paper provides (a) research and perspectives about embedding a College culture to actualize social responsibility and public policy as institutional practices; (b) examination of some opportunities and challenges of such an agenda based on a past College initiative; (c) discussion about the epistemology and pedagogy of outreach, social responsibility, and public policy; and (d) proposal of an organizational structure for establishing an Institute or Center at the College to shepherd a social responsibility and public policy agenda. An executive summary of the briefing paper is provided below. Third, an internal College working group comprised of faculty, staff and students has been formed. This group is actively engaging in the preliminary work of identifying the necessary first steps in building a culture of social responsibility.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF BRIEFING PAPER

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Social responsibility (i.e., Corporate Social Responsibility) is a term primarily used within corporate environments. It is a ‘term of art’ for describing corporate commitment and characterizing corporate practices to strategically and responsibly relate to their communities, to connect with their communities, and contribute to the well being of their communities and society. In practice, social responsibility encompasses a variety of activities, which include embracing diversity and inclusion as a critical and business necessity, establishing strategic community partnerships, enabling employee volunteerism, taking proactive stances and engaging community stakeholders on issues that have a public good and public policy impact. Within higher education environments, the discourse on social responsibility has occurred within an ambiguous range of lexica which include community service, community outreach, community relations, community partnerships, public service, civic engagement, public deliberation, public policy, outreach, and service learning. As such, for the briefing paper the terms engagement and engagement with the community/public are used interchangeably to characterize these phenomena, as well as social responsibility.

At Montgomery College, currently there are several independent, interdependent, and unrelated offices and activities that connect the community and the College. An impact of these units/activities has been establishing community connections, collaborations, and partnerships through civic engagement and outreach; educational, social and cultural programming; early intervention and pre-college programs; and student engagement and service learning. The College is uniquely positioned and has been visible within its communities. A resulting affect has been framing and shaping the communities' perspectives on a variety of local and national public policy related issues, such as the achievement gap, access to an affordable higher education, demographic trends, sprawl, transportation, crime, immigration, workforce development, etc.

Among the primary observations in the briefing paper are— (a) Montgomery College can be an exemplar of social responsibility, community outreach, public policy, and engagement with its communities; and (b) a Social Responsibility, Engagement and Public Policy Institute (SREPPPI) could serve as the umbrella for aligning and optimizing four critical functions that are interdependent—diversity and workplace inclusion; engagement, outreach and public policy; community linkages and partnerships; and service learning. As the “community’s” college, aligning and centralizing these functions will strengthen the College’s capacity to be strategically and proactively responsive to engaging with the community to meet educational and employment needs. For example, the Office of Equity and Diversity; a Center for the Study of Community College Engagement, Outreach and Public Policy; an Office of College/Community Linkages, Alliances and Service (CLAS); and an Office of Student Engagement and Service Learning could conceivably represent some of the organizational units within such an Institute. As a collective, these units can provide the infrastructure and become a catalyst for demonstrating the College’s commitment to broad-based and progressive early connections, collaborations, partnerships, interactions and interventions with the community for the public good. Within this construct, the Office of Equity and Diversity could be restructured and renamed the *Social Responsibility, Engagement and Public Policy Institute*. The Institute would be responsible for providing the administrative leadership and oversight for the strategic planning, budget, personnel/staffing, and facilities support to these units.

The paper also makes strategic and operational recommendations, which include: (a) assigning senior level administrative leadership with oversight of this initiative that reports directly to the president; (b) establishing an infrastructure that centralizes and appropriately aligns related programs and functions to achieve and optimize institutional effectiveness for this initiative; (c) allocating and reallocating appropriate fiscal resources to assure the success and sustainability of this initiative; and (d) assigning adequate staffing to assure the success and sustainability of this initiative. Incorporated in the briefing paper’s recommendations is that Montgomery College’s operational standards for social responsibility, public policy, and outreach be based on well established national benchmarks for higher education institutions and, where available, specifically community colleges. In general, the College’s organizational mission and intent should be to optimize its capacity for teaching, service, and research in these areas. The more specific recommendations urge that the critical operational components to implement an expanded social responsibility, public policy, and outreach agenda at Montgomery College include:

- practices and strategies that expand the democratic mission and civic purpose of the College, which include citizen/public scholarship and action research that contribute to the public good;
- sustained direct two-way interactions between the College and its internal and external communities and constituencies to identify, define, and solve public problems and address societal issues;
- projects and initiatives that enhance the civic viability of the curriculum, teaching and learning;
- projects and initiatives that prepare an educated and engaged citizenry;
- consultations and collaborations between the College and the community, community based agencies, and the County and regionally based agencies for the development, exchange, and application of knowledge, information, and expertise for mutual benefit and the public good; and
- processes for authentic public participation, which seek individual/organizational knowledge to create public knowledge.

An enduring opportunity and challenge for Montgomery College is creating occasions with our communities to make decisions about the world *as it will be, not as it is*. The very idea of pursuing social responsibility opportunities and public policy, based on a philosophy of what is universally possible together, becomes a construct that further supports the notion that Montgomery College's current systems of relating with and to the community should be reframed and expanded. The actions for pursuing an agenda that focuses on institutional social responsibility, community, community service, community building, outreach, engagement, and public policy strategically poises Montgomery College for reclaiming and emulating the democratic and civic purpose and intent of the American community college. As such, our social responsibility and public policy opportunities and challenges are consistent with maintaining the College's democratic mission and civic purpose.