

☰ **Responding to Disruptive
and Distressed Students:**

**A Guide for
Montgomery College
Faculty**





Main Heading

Secondary Heading

The purpose of a catalog is to sell products or services to a targeted audience, or to advertise upcoming classes or events. Catalogs can be a great way to market your products or services, and also build your organization's identity.

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First, determine the audience of the catalog. This could be anyone who might benefit from the products or services it contains. Next, establish how much time and money you can spend on your catalog. These factors will help determine the length of the catalog and how frequently you publish it. It's recommended that you publish your catalog at least quarterly so that it's considered a consistent source of information. Your customers or employees will look forward to its arrival.

Also consider how you want to print your catalog. You can print it on a desktop printer, at a copy shop, or at a commercial printing service. In addition to your budget, the complexity of the publication—including whether you print it as a black and white or a color publication—will help determine the best method for printing your publication.

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The purpose of this guide is to provide faculty with information about how to recognize and positively interact with students who may be experiencing psychological and/or emotional distress which may affect their academic performance or social interactions. While faculty are not expected to function as mental health professionals or diagnose students' problems, being aware of the signs of distress, having some guidance for dealing with students in distress, and being aware of appropriate referral resources will enable you to be more in control of situations that may present themselves. In that spirit, this guide is offered as a resource for use by faculty in supporting students' learning and personal development.

The guide is divided into two sections. One section deals with *disruptive* students and how to handle their behavior in the classroom. The other section describes *distressed* students, those who may be emotionally troubled or suicidal, and how best to respond to them. While there may be some overlap in the information provided in each section, the two types of students are very different and should each be handled in their respective manner.

The guidelines are intended to supplement existing College procedures and to suggest methods for addressing student conduct in the classroom setting and in online courses. These guidelines are not intended to be exclusive. Faculty members are encouraged to draw on their own experiences, as well as those of their colleagues, and use their best judgment in setting standards of conduct for their classes and taking a reasonable approach in responding to disruptive behaviors.

Montgomery College is committed to facilitating an environment in which students can learn, grow, and change. The Office of the Dean of Student Development is available to support you in creating and maintaining such an environment.

The creation of this booklet is credited to the efforts of the Office of the Dean of Student Development and the Student Issues Committee.

Information was compiled by Jenifer DeHart, Adjunct Faculty - Rockville.



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Disruptive Students

Faculty have the right and responsibility to maintain a classroom environment conducive to the learning process and the College is committed to providing resources and support to enable faculty to carry out this responsibility. Disruptive behavior is a violation of the College's Student Code of Conduct (item X.A.), and faculty are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the College's procedure for handling policy violations.

Examples of Disruptive Behavior:

- ◇ Making loud and distracting noises.
- ◇ Repeatedly answering cellular phones or allowing pagers to beep.
- ◇ Persisting in speaking without being recognized.
- ◇ Repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom.
- ◇ Inappropriate e-mails and continuous persistence.
- ◇ E-harassment is also a form of disruptive behavior. This applies to e-mail, text messages and instant messages. Make sure you save the communication and notify one of the contacts listed in this brochure.
- ◇ Making physical threats or verbal insults to the faculty member or other students.*
- ◇ Exhibiting erratic, irrational behavior.*

*Note: In extreme circumstances when one's personal safety is threatened, contact Safety and Security immediately (240-567-5111).

While there are many factors that contribute to disruptive behavior, the best approach that faculty can take to address disruptive behavior is to create an environment in which it is unlikely to occur. It is important to establish expectations and guidelines for the students *up front*.

Include these issues in your syllabus to inform students in writing about your expectations for classroom behavior and potential consequences for violating those expectations. Devote time during the first class to review and discuss the information.

- ◇ For example, an instructor's preferences and proper academic tone may be set by reviewing ground rules for discussion or questions, tardiness, and safety and decorum concerns. Even outlining your preferences regarding issues such as cell phones or beepers in the classroom is important to include in your syllabus.



Sample Syllabus Statements on General Classroom Conduct

<i>Example 1:</i>	<i>Example 2:</i>
<p>General Rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cell phones, pagers and other electronic devices must be turned OFF when in class. If one is found to be on, on vibrate, etc, you will be asked to leave class and will be counted absent. ● There will be no eating during class time. Drinks (soda, coffee, water, juice) are permitted. Please clean up your trash! ● Be respectful of each other – and the instructor – while in class. We are all here to learn! Any disrespectful or disruptive behavior may result in your being asked to leave the class, and may result in your dismissal with a grade of “F,” and/or a referral to the Dean of Student Development. ● The instructor reserves the right to amend this syllabus as appropriate throughout the semester. Students will be notified of any such changes. 	<p>General Rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No eating in class (drinking soda, water, etc. is permitted) ● This class will engage in some open discussion – all students are to address one another, the panelists, and the instructor with respect and courtesy, this includes speaking when recognized by the person with the floor or the instructor. ● Any disrespectful or disruptive behavior may result in your being asked to leave the class and may result in your dismissal with a grade of “F,” and/or a referral to the Dean of Student Development. ● All cell phones, pagers, etc. are to be OFF or SILENCED (not on “vibrate”) during class. All cell phones are to be put away – in a purse, backpack, book bag, etc. during class. If a cell phone rings during class time, you may be asked to leave the class and/or counted absent. There is NO text messaging, web-browsing, etc. during class. Failure to adhere to this rule may result in your being dismissed from class and/or an academic penalty. ● The instructor reserves the right to amend these rules as necessary throughout the term.

- ◆ Involve the students in your discussion about your classroom expectations. Invite the students to comment on these expectations and have them offer suggestions. Students will know the boundaries and can make informed decisions about their own behavior based on that information.
- ◆ If you begin to notice instances of disruptive behavior, remind the class of the standards of behavior that were discussed during the first class meeting. It may be necessary to offer some repeat reminders.
 - ◇ For example, “OK, we’re going to start class. Please turn off your cell phones.”
- ◆ Serve as a model by demonstrating appropriate, respectful, and responsible behavior in your interactions with students.

Responding to Disruptive Students

- ◆ Deal with disruptive behavior immediately. Ignoring it will likely result in continued or even increased incidents.
- ◆ A general word of caution regarding the problematic behavior, a warning directed to the entire class rather than singling out a student, may be effective in eliminating the behavior.
 - ◇ For example, “We have too many private conversations going on at the moment. Let’s all focus on the same topic.”
- ◆ If the behavior is irritating/annoying but not necessarily disruptive, try to talk with the student in private before or after class or during a break.
- ◆ When you need to speak directly with a student about his or her behavior, avoid publicly humiliating the student as this may escalate the situation unnecessarily. If possible, ask to speak privately to the student following class.
 - ◇ When an instructor meets with a student one-on-one, refer to the particular behavior the student is displaying and how it impacts the instructor, the class, and/or other students. Clearly request that the student stop the behavior. The instructor should also identify any academic consequences that may be imposed or that may have already been assessed based on the statement in the syllabus.
 - ◇ Through the informal conference, the instructor and student should strive to reach a general understanding that will put a mutually satisfactory end to problems stemming from the student’s behavior. The instructor and student may also wish to explore the reasons behind the behavior and perhaps to identify acceptable alternatives.



- ◆ If you are uncomfortable meeting alone with a student for any reason, you may request that your Department Chair attend the meeting. If desired, a member of the Dean of Student Development's Office can also attend the meeting.
- ◆ If it is necessary to address the student's behavior in class, inform them that their behavior is disruptive and ask that they stop. Focus your comments on the undesirable behavior rather than on the student.
 - ◇ For example, rather than, *"Paul you are being very disruptive,"* try, *"Paul, when you hold conversations with other students when I am lecturing, it's very distracting. Please don't talk while I am talking."*
- ◆ If disruptive behavior continues during the present or a future class, provide the student with a warning. Optimally, this is best done in private if possible. Include in your statement to the student the potential consequences if they continue the disruptive behavior. However, don't offer a consequence you are not willing to implement; not following through on warnings can be interpreted by a student to mean that you are not serious about the situation. All statements to the student should be mature, respectful, direct and clear.
 - ◇ For example, *"Paul, I have asked you in the past not to hold conversations with other students while I'm lecturing, as it is very distracting. If you continue this behavior, I'm going to have to ask you to leave the class."*
- ◆ If the student continues with the disruptive behavior despite your warning, they should be asked to leave the class. If they fail to do so voluntarily, you should contact the Safety and Security Office to request their assistance (240-567-5111).
- ◆ Suspension for more than one class period requires disciplinary action and a report must be filed with the Dean of Student Development's Office.
- ◆ Keep your Department Chair informed of any out of the ordinary situations including situations in which you have asked a student to leave the classroom.
- ◆ It is VERY IMPORTANT to document such occurrences with the Dean of Student Development's Office.

Escalated Situations

If you sense that a disruptive situation is escalating and that the student may pose a physical threat to you or other students:

- ◆ Maintain a safe distance, and do not turn your back to the student.
- ◆ Unless you are being attacked, do not touch the student or the student's belongings – this may be interpreted by an agitated student as an assault on him or her.
- ◆ Avoid escalating the situation – avoid threatening, humiliating, or intimidating responses. Generally, it is not a good idea to “pull rank” and assert your authority unless you are certain of the student's mental health issues.
- ◆ Use a calm, non-confrontational approach. Speak in a lower tone of voice than that being used by the student.
- ◆ Do not use the threat of disciplinary action or police intervention (even though these may occur).
- ◆ If the behavior is occurring in a class, and the student has threatened you, other students or him/herself, immediately dismiss the class. If you fear a physical altercation, violence, or a criminal act, call 911 and/or Safety and Security (240-567-5111). If you call 911, Safety and Security should also be notified.
- ◆ Use good judgment to protect your safety and the safety of others. Do not attempt to keep the student in the area if he or she attempts to leave.
- ◆ Notify your Department Chair and the Dean of Student Development.

Disability Concerns

If a student has presented an Accommodation Letter from Disability Support Services (DSS), contact the DSS counselor who signed the letter or contact the DSS Office at 240-567-5058, 122CB.

If a student discloses that he/she has a disability, contact the DSS Office and encourage the student to identify to DSS.

Please note that regardless of disability, all students are expected to adhere to the behavior standards delineated in the Student Code of Conduct.



Suggestions for Responding to Specific Disruptions

Talking and not paying attention

- ◆ Make direct eye contact with the student who is talking.
- ◆ Ask a question of a student sitting next to the talking student.
- ◆ Move to the area where a student is talking, and “hover” in that area for a while.
- ◆ Speak to the student(s) privately after class, during break, or before the next class. Explain that student conversations not only distract you, but they prevent the person the student is talking with from being able to concentrate on material that is being presented.

Arriving Late to Class

- ◆ Establish a contract with the class – they come to class on time and you start and finish on time.
- ◆ If you have an attendance policy, follow it. Inconsistent application will lead students to believe you’re not serious.
 - ◇ For example: Two tardies equals one absence
- ◆ Take roll at the beginning of class – this establishes that you are monitoring attendance.
- ◆ Intervene early when you notice a student beginning to consistently arrive late – problematic behavior that is not addressed will tend to increase. Discuss it in private with the student.

Challenges to authority

- ◆ Avoid the tendency to become defensive – explain but don’t defend your assignments, tests, etc.
- ◆ Avoid arguing with a student in class. Let the student know that you are interested in discussing the situation with them, but would like to do so outside of class.
- ◆ Avoid humiliating the student as this will tend to escalate the situation.

Disruptive Students in an Online Environment

The lack of face-to-face presence may increase the tendency of students to act in ways they would not if they were in an on-campus classroom. Disruptive behavior may be directed toward the instructor or other students. It may be overt such as students sending abusive e-mails, or it may be disguised such as a student posting comments that he/she may not consider sexually aggressive, but you or other students might find offensive.

At Montgomery College, prohibited misconduct extends to any misconduct that may have an adverse effect on the College and specifically, “disruption or obstruction of the educational processes of the College.” Therefore, the College’s Student Code of Conduct is applicable to students in all courses that use online instruction with or without face-to-face interaction.

Many of the same tips provided for dealing with disruptive behavior in a traditional classroom can be adapted to the online environment. While there are many factors that contribute to disruptive behavior, the best approach that faculty can take to address disruptive behavior is to create an environment in which it is unlikely to occur. Taking preventative measures can go a long way to ensure a secure online environment. Some suggestions include:

- ◆ Set the tone from the beginning that you have expectations about student behavior. Include a statement about etiquette and inappropriate online behavior on your syllabus to inform students in writing about your expectations for online behavior, and include potential consequences for violating those expectations. If you begin to have concerns over a student’s behavior, you can then refer him/her to that information on your syllabus.
- ◆ Be clear and give some examples of behaviors that you will not tolerate along with an explanation as to why the behavior is considered disruptive.
- ◆ Inform students that all College policies apply to students in online classes. This also includes the College’s academic integrity policies.
- ◆ Serve as a model by demonstrating appropriate, respectful, and responsible behavior in your interactions with students.



Responding to Disruptive Online Students

- ◆ Deal with disruption immediately. Ignoring it will likely result in continued or even increased incidents.
- ◆ Posting a general word of caution regarding the problematic behavior for the entire class may be effective in eliminating the behavior.
- ◆ When you need to communicate with individual students about their behavior:
 - ◇ Do so in a private e-mail to the student.
 - ◇ Let the student know how his or her behavior is negatively impacting others. Focus your comments on the undesirable behavior rather than the student.
 - ◇ For example, rather than *“Paul, you have been very rude,”* try *“Paul, some of the people find the use of profanities offensive. Please refrain from using profanities in your postings so that others are not offended.”*
- ◆ Consider asking the student to come in to discuss his/her behavior with you in person. If you are not comfortable meeting with the student alone for any reason, ask your Department Chair to attend the meeting. If desired, a member of the Office of the Dean of Student Development can also attend the meeting.
- ◆ If the disruptive behavior continues, provide the student with a warning and include in your warning the potential consequences if they continue the disruptive behavior.
 - ◇ For example, *“Paul, I have asked you before not to use profanities in your online discussions. The discussion you posted this morning contained a number of profanities. If you submit any further discussions that include profanities, I’m going to have to delete your postings, and you will not receive credit for submitting them.”*
- ◆ However, don’t threaten a consequence that you are not willing to implement; not following through on warnings may be interpreted by the student to mean that you are not serious about the situation. While you are likely to preserve all e-mail correspondence between you and the student, be sure to keep copies of the student’s disruptive postings on your course website (or discussion board) before deleting them.
- ◆ Keep your Department Chair and Dean of Student Development informed of any out of the ordinary situations including situations in which you have asked a student to leave the classroom.

How to Request Assistance/ Report Disruptive Behavior

While most incidents of disruptive behavior are able to be resolved by the faculty, incidents of seriously disruptive behavior requiring intervention beyond the faculty member are to be reported to the Dean of Student Development. Upon receipt of the report, the Dean of Student Development or designee will work with the faculty and student to develop an appropriate course of action including potential disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct.

Responding to an Imminently Dangerous Situation

Situations may arise when faculty have concerns that a student may represent a danger to others. Some examples of behavior which could involve imminent danger include:

- ◆ Possession of a weapon
- ◆ Physically violent or aggressive behavior
- ◆ Verbally aggressive or threatening behaviors

At times, these behaviors may be the result of, or are exacerbated by, mental illness and/or substance abuse. Faculty should take appropriate action to protect both potential victims and potentially dangerous students.

- ◆ If you fear a physical altercation, violence, or a criminal act, call 911 and/or Safety and Security at 240-567-5111. If you call 911, Safety and Security should also be notified.
- ◆ Maintain a safe distance, and do not turn your back to the student.
- ◆ Unless you are being attacked, do not touch the student or the student's belongings – this may be interpreted by an agitated student as an assault on them.
- ◆ Avoid escalating the situation – avoid threatening, humiliating, or intimidating responses. Generally, it is not a good idea to “pull rank” and assert your authority unless you are certain of the student's mental health issues.
- ◆ Use a calm, non-confrontational approach. Speak in a lower tone of voice than that being used by the student.
- ◆ Do not use the threat of disciplinary action or police intervention. (Even though these may occur.)



- ◆ If the behavior is occurring in a class, and the student has threatened you, other students or him/herself, immediately dismiss the class. If you fear a physical altercation, violence, or a criminal act, call 911 and/or Safety and Security (240-567-5111). If you call 911, Safety and Security should also be notified.
- ◆ Use good judgment to protect your safety and the safety of others. Do not attempt to keep the student in the area if he or she attempts to leave.
- ◆ Notify your Department Chair and the Dean of Student Development.

Responding to Potentially Dangerous Students

At times, faculty and staff may have concerns that a student could potentially be dangerous although they do not feel in imminent danger. This concern may stem from observation or report of the following types of behavior.

- ◆ Threatening e-mails, letters, or phone messages
- ◆ Threatening or violent material communicated in assignments or exams
- ◆ Harassment, including sexual harassment and/or stalking
- ◆ Aggressive or hostile verbal or written communication

While no two situations are exactly the same and the response will vary depending on the unique nature of the situation, it is important that potentially dangerous situations be evaluated. If you are not sure of how to handle a situation, any of the following can provide guidance:

- ◆ Your Department Chair
- ◆ Counseling and Advising Office (240-567-5063)
- ◆ Safety and Security (240-567-5111)
- ◆ Dean of Student Development (240-567-5052)



How to Report Potentially Dangerous Behavior

To report a potentially dangerous situation, faculty should call Safety and Security to create an incident report (240-567-5111). The report will be forwarded to the Dean of Student Development. The Dean or designee will coordinate with appropriate offices on campus to investigate, assess the dangerousness of the situation, and develop an appropriate course of action including potential disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct.

Distressed Students

College can be a stressful time and students may occasionally experience problems, the most common of which are related to depression and anxiety.

Depression

While many people become depressed from time to time, the existence of multiple symptoms and the persistence of symptoms over a period of time may be an indication that the individual is experiencing a depressive episode. The symptoms of depression include:

- ◆ Changes in sleep patterns – either difficulty sleeping or excessive sleeping
- ◆ Reduced ability to concentrate
- ◆ Changes in appetite – either poor appetite with possible weight loss or excessive eating
- ◆ Decreased ability to experience happiness or pleasure
- ◆ Apathy, loss of interest in friends or previously enjoyed activities
- ◆ Poor personal hygiene
- ◆ Loss of self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness
- ◆ Excessive feelings of guilt and need for punishment

Anxiety

While many students experience high levels of stress while in college, anxiety becomes a disorder when the symptoms become chronic and interfere with the daily lives and ability to function. Students may develop panic attacks or specific phobias. People suffering from chronic anxiety often report the following symptoms:

- ◆ Muscle tension, physical weakness
- ◆ Poor memory
- ◆ Sweaty hands
- ◆ Fear or confusion
- ◆ Inability to relax, constant worry
- ◆ Shortness of breath, palpitations
- ◆ Upset stomach
- ◆ Poor concentration

Unusual Behavior

Students experiencing psychological and/or emotional problems may exhibit changes in behavior from what would be considered socially appropriate to behavior that is considered strange or unusual. In some cases, unusual behavior may be a result of drug or alcohol use/abuse. It is important to note changes from a student's prior behavior which could include:

- ◆ Repeated or excessive disruptions
- ◆ Antagonistic or hostile behavior
- ◆ Inappropriate or exaggerated emotional reactions to situations, including lack of emotional response to stressful situations
- ◆ Obvious loss of contact with reality, including rambling or incoherent speech, inappropriate laughter; disorganized thoughts; visual, auditory, or tactile hallucinations

When students are experiencing some type of psychological and/or emotional difficulty, they may exhibit changes in their academic behavior apparent to the faculty member:

- ◆ Poor academic performance or a significant decline in academic performance
- ◆ Unusual or changed interaction patterns in the classroom
- ◆ Drop in class attendance
- ◆ Frequent attempts to obtain extensions on assignments or postpone test taking

How to Help

While there is no one "right" way to respond to students experiencing emotional distress, the following suggestions may prove helpful. In addition, the Counseling Department can provide you with guidance on possible ways to intervene with a student (Room 215, CB Building, 240-567-5063).

- ◆ Talk with the student and let him/her know you are concerned.
- ◆ You should NEVER make a promise of confidentiality to a student.
- ◆ Be accepting and non-judgmental. Try to help the student identify what the problem may be.
- ◆ Commend the student for sharing his/her situation with you – talking with others about our difficulties is often difficult.
- ◆ Know your limit as a source of assistance. If you do not feel able to provide adequate assistance, let the student know that obtaining professional assistance is a positive step he/she can take and that you can help to connect him/her to assistance.

- ◆ Encourage the student to contact the Counseling Department for assistance (240-567-5063, CB Building, Room 215). Let the student know that there is no cost for service and that the counselor will help the student get connected with assistance in the community.
- ◆ If the student seems accepting of your referral to the Counseling Department, walk him or her down to the office or offer to call the Counseling Department. This will help the department know that the student is being referred for personal counseling rather than an academic concern.
- ◆ Use available resources and know what resources are available. Refer to page 19 of this guide for a listing of available resources.

Students Who May Be Suicidal

If you have a concern that a student may be contemplating suicide, it is all right to him/her if he/she is thinking about killing him/herself. Talking about suicide does not “put ideas” in a person’s head about suicide; many suicidal people are very willing to talk about their thoughts and plans.

When evaluating the potential for suicide, professionals ask the following questions:

- ◆ What is the individual’s plan for suicide – exactly what would he/she do? Does the individual have the means to carry out this plan? For example, if one indicates that he/she would take an overdose of pills, does the individual have access to lethal amounts of pills?
- ◆ When and where does he/she intend to carry out the plan?
- ◆ Has he/she ever attempted suicide before? If so, when and how?

The more specific and lethal the plan, the more recent a previous suicide attempt, and the greater the ability to carry out the plan, the higher the risk of a successful suicide. While your role is not to evaluate an individual’s potential for suicide, knowing the risk factors can help you determine the urgency in getting the student connected to assistance.

- ◆ As a general rule, if you are concerned enough that you would feel uncomfortable if the student simply left your office, you should contact someone. In this case, let the student know that you need to contact the Counseling Department for some advice (240-567-5063). If a student appears to be imminently suicidal, call 911 and/or Safety and Security (240-567-5111). If you call 911, Safety and Security should also be notified.

IMPORTANT: You should NEVER make a promise of confidentiality to a student.

Safety and Security

What they can do:

- ◆ They can assess and determine if other agencies need to be involved, such as our MC counselors, the Montgomery County Crisis Center, or the Police.
- ◆ They can file a report for the Dean of Student Development formally documenting the incident. It is important to remember that Security remains neutral and obtains statements from all parties.
- ◆ They can request the individual to leave the classroom for that day.
- ◆ They can intervene until relieved by a more qualified agency.

What they cannot do:

- ◆ They cannot make an arrest or physically detain someone.
- ◆ They cannot ban the student permanently from class; this is determined by the Dean of Student Development.
- ◆ They cannot take sides. Their job is to remain as impartial as possible.

* When dealing with an escalated situation, it is your choice to call 911 or Safety and Security first. However, if you call 911, please also notify Safety and Security as they are on campus and can report to your location quickly.

Community Resources

Hotlines

Montgomery County Hotline
301-738-2255
(24-hour anonymous listening service)

Suicide Hotline
301-738-2255

Community Crisis Center
240-777-4000, TTY: 240-777-4815
(family crisis, sexual assault, spouse abuse)

Crisis Intervention

Addiction and Mental Health Center, Montgomery General Hospital
301-774-8800
(Psychiatric Emergency Unit)

Montgomery General Hospital
301-774-8888
(crisis intervention day treatment program)

Mental Health

Rockville - Threshold Services, Inc.
301-838-4100

For Information about mental health services in Montgomery County, contact
The Access Team at 240-777-1770

A full listing of community health and human service agencies and resources is available from the Montgomery College Counseling and Advising website found at www.montgomerycollege.edu.

From the front page, click on Counseling/Advising. On the left side of the page under the heading Counseling Resources , click on Local Counseling Resources.



Campus Resources

Counseling and Advising

Counseling and Advising Building, Room 215
240-567-5063 or 240-567-4104

Dean of Student Development Office

Macklin Tower, 6th Floor
240-567-5052

Disability Support Services

Counseling and Advising Building, Room 122
240-567-5058 or 301-294-9672 (TTY)

Safety and Security

Counseling and Advising Building, Room 102
240-567-5111

Evening and Weekend Office

Technical Center, Room 221
240-567-7525



Montgomery College

endless possibilities