

To: Dr. Tracey Smith-Bryant, College Council Chair

From: Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard, President

Subject: **College Council Recommendation 19-11: Course Cancellations Communications**

Date: June 28, 2019

Thank you and all the members of the College's participatory governance system for your leadership in considering issues of importance to the Montgomery College community. I have received and reviewed the College Council's recommendation 19-11: Course Cancellations Communications. The document presented to me by the College Council is attached.

On May 14, 2019, the College Council voted to move recommendation 19-11 forward to the president. This action recommends the College take the following actions regarding course cancellations.

- (1) Develop consistent and timely communication across all academic areas at the college regarding course cancellations
- (2) Create a work group to ensure equitable practices regarding course cancellations across campuses and disciplines
- (3) Conduct a study of part-time faculty hiring for the purposes of staffing short-notice courses

Based on my review, I am referring this recommendation to senior vice presidents Dr. Sanjay Rai and Dr. Monica Brown to investigate, analyze, and offer a response to me by the end of fall 2019 semester.

Thank you for your dedicated service to Montgomery College's governance system and all of the work you do to support Montgomery College's mission and vision. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions or concerns.

Attachment

cc: Senior Administrative Leadership Team
Director of Governance (Administrative Associates)
2018-2019 College Council Chair, Ms. Catherine Giovannetti

Council

Faculty Council

Co-chairs: Shweta Sen and Dan Santore

Date: 5/2/2019

Recommendation Issue/Concern

Each semester and session, academic divisions and departments attempt to achieve an appropriate balance of course offerings. Attention is paid to student needs in all their forms, to timing, to budgetary demands, academic pathways, and many other factors. It is in this context that Deans and Department Chairs, and, to a lesser extent, discipline coordinators, make decisions about the number of course offerings and the cancellation of courses.

Faculty Council, having heard a substantial number of constituent concerns, considers there to be systemic problems with course cancellation and course offering at the College. These problems relate to the rationale of decision making, as well as to the lack of communication of such rationale to faculty.

While recognizing the need for some flexibility in decision making across departments and disciplines, there is nonetheless some damaging inconsistency across campuses and disciplines. Inconsistent policy around course cancellations and offerings can inequitably impact certain disciplines and the smaller campuses.

The Council also notes a high level of concern amongst faculty regarding “85% seat capacity” thresholds for course offering/cancellation decisions. All institutions must confront budgetary realities, but it is crucial to note that there is no academic defense for increasing seat capacity. That is, pursuing higher seat capacities will in almost all instances come at the expense of students’ academic experience. It is also the case that the 85% enrollment goal makes it harder to offer certain general education courses, particularly in the humanities and particularly on the smaller campuses.

The complexity of course decisions is clear, as is the related impact on our students. Faculty Council respects this complexity, and sees a need for more proactive dialogue amongst, and more training for, decision makers.

Thus Faculty Council recommends:

1. That there be formal and consistent expectations that are communicated to deans, chairs and faculty regarding how and why certain strategies and tools (including “85% seat utilization metric,” and Ad Astra) inform course offerings and cancellations;
2. That the process of notification of cancellations for students and faculty be timely;

3. That a work group that includes FT and PT faculty be created to study and develop accountability measures for any unequal or unfair impact of course cancellation procedures on particular disciplines, campuses, and student populations, with emphasis on what happens to students once dropped;
4. That a study of “contingent part-time faculty hiring” be undertaken, for the purpose of staffing short-notice courses.

Student Impact

Students’ opportunities to access necessary, high-quality courses are of paramount importance to the College. To the extent that decisions on course offerings or cancellations are lacking proper clarity or deliberation, we damage our students’ chances to succeed. Nothing can happen “in the classroom” for our students unless there is in fact a course to get into.

Economic Impact

Canceled courses mean a loss of tuition revenue; they also jeopardize our working relationship with employees (largely part-time faculty) bear the brunt of lost work. More generally, a thoughtful, deliberate process of offerings and cancellations can only increase the College’s financial efficiency.