BOARD PERSPECTIVES
Student Success

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Montgomery College
endless possibilities

Introduction

This past year followed the pattern of recent years at the College—there was progress on existing initiatives, and there were new initiatives; new buildings approached completion, and planning for others got under way. Students and faculty won awards for outstanding achievements, and a record number of students graduated and went on to jobs or more education. From the perspective of the Board, the sense was that the pace of change has continued to accelerate.

Having said that, some things seem to stay the same—the dedication of hard-working and skilled faculty, staff, and administration; the enthusiasm of new students to learn and improve their lives; the close and growing ties between the College and the public school system and the Universities at Shady Grove; the commitment of the county and the state to the role of Montgomery College in providing accessible and affordable education to the community.

During the past year we had particular reason to be thankful for the willingness of the community to provide us with additional resources. After several years of holding back to conserve money, we asked for a significant increase in the level of support from the state and the county. As a result of the level of understanding in both organizations of the College's role, as well as a lot of excellent advocacy by the College administration, the Board, and the students, we were able to secure from the county an increase of $17.8 million—or 18 percent—as well as a $3 million increase from the state for the 2014–2015 school year. Among other things, this increase will allow the College to meet its obligations to provide long overdue salary increases to its employees, as well as to hire new staff for the Nursing program and for STEM programs in the new Bioscience Education Center. It will also allow us to continue our efforts in the ACES program, where we provide coaches and advisers in MCPS high schools to attract capable but under-prepared students or those unfamiliar with higher education, particularly those from under-represented communities, to go on to college.

Student Success

As much as the College has accomplished and has in the pipeline, the needs remain even greater. Perhaps there is no clearer way to see this than to focus our attention on Student Success. There are a number of different metrics for Student Success but, basically, it means that a student succeeds in transferring or in graduating with a degree or certificate in a reasonable amount of time. This, in turn, means that our students can change their lives, go on to more education and better jobs—that is, after all, the core mission of Montgomery College!

The College does many important things but nothing can be more important than ensuring that our students are able to finish what they start and get the rewards of an MC education. Furthermore, focusing on Student Success makes us look closely at many other strategic issues the College faces, including the following.

- *Financial Aid:* We know that many of the students who drop out of degree programs at the College do so because of a lack of money for tuition or fees or books. We need to find ways through private endowments and gifts to supplement the various federal programs and help those needy students. We

also have to continue to find ways to keep tuition and fees from rising faster than inflation.

- *Student Learning and Educational Delivery:* We have known for a while that the learning outcomes by students in pre-college developmental courses, which so many of our under-prepared students take, are not as effective as they need to be. We need to continue to experiment with ways to deliver those courses in parallel with regular college work or as hybrid courses with online components complemented by small face-to-face tutoring sessions. In general, we need to explore best practices in the nation for using technology to enhance learning, but particularly for students at risk of dropping out.

- *Advising and Counseling:* There is good evidence from other schools that "intrusive" advising and counseling can be critical to reaching many of the students who are at risk of not succeeding. These students may need academic counseling to ensure that they take courses that will lead to their goals, especially if they want to transfer to programs at universities. They may also need counseling to help them with personal issues or challenges that interfere with their academic progress.

- *Market and Mission:* One of the best contributions the College can make to the success of its students is to make sure that courses and programs are meaningful in terms of the needs of the marketplace. We have to continue to involve the business community in reviewing courses and in providing internship opportunities for our students in businesses and other organizations in our community. These can all be a strong motivator for student success.

- *College Organization:* Very good work has been started to remold the academic structure of the College and to be a Destination Employer. Those initiatives must continue and be expanded, but they also must be judged in part on how they improve student success.

- *Achievement Gap:* At the end of the 2013–2014 year a task force reported on the remaining achievement gap in student success among different demographic groups at the College. This report represented excellent work by a group of 80 faculty, staff, and administrators. Unfortunately, it showed clearly that Student Success was significantly less likely to be achieved among African-American and Latino students than in the College as a whole. Clearly, we need to focus on specific programs designed to help all students succeed.

- *Data-informed Management:* Interwoven among all of these strategic issues is the need for much more fine-grained data on performance of students and of our initiatives. We need, as an institution and as a Board of Trustees, to settle on a limited number of clear metrics that can be publicly reported on and discussed on a regular basis. This will show how we are progressing to achieve greater Student Success but also how the various initiatives are contributing to that goal.

The Next Year

As the 2013–2014 year comes to an end and we prepare for the start of the 2014–2015 academic year, the Board also has to plan its priorities and activities for the new year. Supporting and measuring Student Success needs to be at the top of the list, along with the strategic goals discussed above that support it.

In order to make its contribution to these goals, the Board also needs to continue to give attention to critical functional matters, as follows.

- The Board will monitor key metrics that measure progress in these and other goals. These will be presented regularly to the Board as a "dashboard" with opportunities to review and discuss progress being made toward them.
- The Board will continue to stay abreast of contemporary issues in higher education in general and in Maryland and Montgomery County in particular in order to understand the needs of Montgomery College. As the College leadership addresses these needs through programs and initiatives, the Board should understand the goals and costs of the various initiatives and be able to monitor how successful they each are.
- The Board encourages and supports College leaders in thinking about the long-term future of the institution. Even as significant changes are successfully taking root, Board members need to keep their collective eye to the future and find structured opportunities—in Board meetings, Board conference sessions, and Board retreats, for example—to deliberate the present and future of the College. The Board is made up of talented members of the community who volunteer their time, their varied experiences, and their energy to make the College better.

Montgomery College is a great institution and the Board believes it has outstanding faculty, staff, and administration, and is led by a terrific president. However, like all of higher education, the College is facing an unprecedented period of change. We all want to see the College rise to these challenges and become even stronger and more effective for its students and the community.