

# MONTHLY OUTLOOK

*A Meeting Preview with Data Insights and Strategic Topics*

September 2021

## September Meeting Highlights—What to Expect and Why

The Board of Trustees will meet for their first monthly meeting of FY22 on Monday, September 20, 2021. The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom. Following are major items and topics planned at this time.

*This monthly publication will outline Board topics to help prepare Trustees for the upcoming meeting, as has been the practice. This year's page 2 will focus on data investigations related to the impact of COVID on metrics of student success and institutional health. Page 3 will be devoted to the strategic plan, Montgomery College 2025, with updates on progress toward the institution's strategic goals.*

**Oath of Office.** The clerk of Montgomery County circuit court, Karen Bushell, will administer a ceremonial oath of office to Trustees as you begin a new year.

**Workday Implementation Update.** The Board will hear a status update on implementation of the new enterprise management system, Workday.

**FY21 Fourth Quarter Financial Summary Report.** This report will examine the College's financial activity during the fourth quarter of last fiscal year, which ended on June 30, 2021.

**Performance Accountability Report.** The annual Performance Accountability Report comes to you for your consideration. In addition, new benchmarks will be presented for approval. Benchmarks are updated every five years. Upon your acceptance of the report and the new benchmarks, they will be submitted to the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

**FY22 Capital Budget Fund Transfer.** In accordance with county fiscal procedures, the Board of Trustees is authorized to transfer funds among College projects within the capital budget, as long as the transfer does not exceed 10 percent of the total appropriation. Therefore, this action is to authorize a fund transfer from the site improvements project from the roof replacement project.

**Sole Source Award of Contract.** The design and buildout of the Macklin Business Institute Finance Lab is being funded by the Montgomery College Foundation through donations. This action is to fund the remaining balance related to the purchase of the rise display for the Macklin Business Institute Finance Lab's internal and external tickers.

The following items are on your consent calendar:

**Personnel Actions Confirmation Report.** This report reviews the personnel actions taken during the months of May, June, and July 2021.



***Ratification of Summer Graduates.*** Before student graduations become official, the Board must ratify their completion status. Fall and spring graduates are ratified in advance, but summer graduates must be ratified after the fact since the Board does not meet in July and August.

***An Award of Bronze Medallion.*** This action provides a recognition to a retired employee for outstanding service to the College.

## Data Focus

As Montgomery College moves into its third fall semester with COVID constraints, attention to the impact of COVID on enrollment, labor markets, and student success has some comparative history now. Looking at these data critically may now yield some new insights.

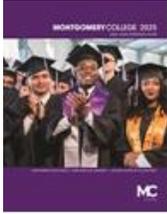
This year's *Monthly Outlook* will begin with the trends in local COVID metrics: while the number of infections per 100,000 residents fell significantly from January to mid-July 2021, the surge of the delta variant appears to have reversed those numbers, returning Montgomery County to the level of high transmission in August. The Return to Campus Advisory Team (RTCAT) is watching this and other variables—test positivity rates and percent change in new cases—along with reports by employees and students on campuses that they have contracted the coronavirus. These pieces of important data, along with guidance from the county's health officer and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continue to inform College decisions about how much activity in classrooms and offices is face-to-face.

A related topic is enrollment, which we all realize has been depressed, as it has been in most of community colleges. Balancing safety and educational opportunity is a delicate act these days. Our closer look at enrollment in October will examine efforts to increase enrollment through vaccine and testing protocols, outreach to lapsed students, distribution of Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) to students in need, and more. The College is attending carefully to student preference for course length—seven week versus fourteen week—as well as preferences for in-person versus remote learning. This issue will explore the data around these decisions, and what they might teach us about strategic enrollment management in the long term.

In December, we will examine the data around students and employee COVID vaccine and testing. These data will undoubtedly prove valuable in setting up more permanent systems to keep our campuses healthy in the future. The cost of these processes will be a consideration moving forward, so keeping careful track of what works successfully and what might need to be altered will inform selections of vendors and internal designs of such systems.

Throughout the pandemic, the College has kept a careful eye on labor markets, to ensure that we are preparing students for in-demand jobs locally. Some job categories have risen in importance—health care workers, information technologies workers, and truck drivers—many of them following pre-pandemic trends. Other segments of the labor market have diminished quickly, largely due to the risks of exposure to the coronavirus—hospitality management, tourism, and arts and entertainment, among others. The January report will assess these trends and the economic impact of MC graduates on the local economy.

One of the most obvious changes to the student experience at MC during the pandemic has been in the settings of their classes. For more than a year, almost all classes were offered only in structured remote learning due to the higher risk of COVID infections from in-person experiences. The advent of successful vaccines has not produced the complete reversal we had hoped—due in part to delays in producing vaccines, vaccine hesitancy, and breakthrough infections from the delta variant, which still



limits the safety of in-person classes. The February issue will explore the patterns of student enrollment in face-to-face, remote, hybrid, and distance learning classes, for information that may serve our management strategies. Will some students who were forced into remote learning choose to stay there? And if so, how will the College compete with institutions that are entirely devoted to this structure?

One of the areas in which face-to-face experiences had been considered irreplaceable was student support. Learning Centers, libraries, and programs such as Achieving the Promise Academy, have been traditionally lauded for supporting first-generation college students and those with special academic or social needs. Examining the data around these experiences during the pandemic may have important lessons to teach us about our remote capacities, student use of these resources, and the agility of our employees to provide services in the manner that best suits student needs. Data on remote technology usage and provision of equipment to serve remote needs has some implications for budgeting and planning and may help us to map the costs of future expansions to remote students support.

While credit programs often receive headline attention at the College, our Workforce Development and Continuing Education (WDCE) program enrolls more than 4,000 noncredit, full-time-equivalent students in an average year. This dropped to 3,429 in FY21, due to the unique nature of many WDCE classes—many require hands-on learning that is difficult to accomplish over Zoom. In addition, many WDCE students are accustomed to registering in person and they are not eligible for Pell grants, two factors that created challenges during the pandemic. A closer look at the April 2022 data on WDCE may provide lessons on how HEERF funding may assist in supporting an enrollment rebound and how labor market trends may impact the need for WDCE certifications and training. Data on contract training, youth programs, and Lifelong Learning will also be explored.

Throughout the pandemic, the increased reliance on IT equipment, personnel, and software (such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Blackboard) has been marked. IT staff were also among those that continued to work in-person during the largely remote operations. Data on how the College responded to the sharp uptick in IT capacities will be assessed in May. The College's Office of E-learning, Innovation, and Teaching Excellence (ELITE) will provide insights on how their operations scaled up quickly and what this could mean for future hybrid potential at the College.

The June *Monthly Outlook* will synthesize all of the data discussed throughout the year, exploring any lessons learned from our experiences during the pandemic. Some of the value of this overview is in predictive analytics: what resources would be needed to maintain the hybrid systems and class offerings that came to fruition during the pandemic? What equipment would need to be sent home to employees? Should the College provide students with remote technologies and, if so, how would this be funded? Finally, to what extent have College adaptations to COVID served as a test run for expanded remote operations and what implication do they have for strategic enrollment management?

## Strategic Topic of the Month

Even with the distraction of so many COVID-related adaptations, the College continues to focus on its Montgomery College 2025 goals. Deeply rooted in values that are intrinsic to our mission, the strategic plan has six goals that drive the College's work. This year Monthly Outlook will explore these themes on a monthly basis, providing updates on how specific elements are progressing to advance College priorities.

The October issue centers on time to degree and completion, which is critical to student success. This issue will assess how COVID may have impacted this progress with unemployment among students stalling enrollment for some, but seven-week classes accelerating course progress for others.

MC2025's second goal, related to transformational teaching practices, will be explored through the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) in November. This survey gives us important feedback on how students are experiencing the College, especially during this most recent COVID period.

The Student Success Score Card, a detailed snapshot of student learning and progress will be explored in December, the College's seventh year of plotting detailed demographic information on students with academic achievement. With seven years of data, we now have some significant trends to consider as we enter our first year as an official Hispanic Serving Institution and launch the Presidential Scholars Program to empower men of color to further achievement.

The January 2022 issue will examine the growing trends in dual enrollment and their contributions to strengthening community partnerships with MCPS and other entities. This enrollment has the potential to partially mitigate some enrollment dips among more traditionally aged students as long as COVID conditions continue to allow for in-person learning and vaccination of teenagers continues to be considered safe among parents.

As College employees continue to work hard to buffer the COVID impacts on MC students, the College has not lost sight of another goal: investing in employees. The February issue will explore the Your Voice, Your MC survey to assess how employees are experiencing the institution. The switch to remote work during COVID has required many adaptations in employee working conditions including new technology and remote supervisory relationships. The College has also allowed employees substantial latitude during COVID to enable them to care for school-aged children who were at home and elder family members without alternative full-time care options. At the same time that employees have been asked to master new technology essential to the remote workforce, some of that training has prepared them better for the future of work, further some of the MC2025 goal around professional development. This year's survey promises to be a rich one with so much change in work-life and so many new demands upon employee skills and agility.

Increasing scholarship support for students continues to help protect affordability. The March issue will examine recent support mechanisms through the Montgomery College Foundation as well as federal and state funding that has gone to students through Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds. These financial supports are one factor—among several—in producing equitable outcomes for our students.

The April issue will examine student outcomes through the lenses of race and ethnicity, credits earned, pass rates, retention, student financial need, and scholarships. Since we know that academic success drives economic mobility and fuels the economy, the May issue will examine how these processes continue with MC students even during a period of intense economic contraction. Regional partnerships with employers and educational institutions are critical to the county's success and are important to the College. Ensuring that students have the skills—and the professional guidance—needed to meet workforce demands is the focus on this issue.

Finally, the June issue will tie all of these elements together to convey how the Montgomery College 2025 plan is progressing even in the midst of change and adaptation. Undoubtedly, there are some silver linings in the COVID experience upon which the College is already accelerating change that was originally conceived during the pre-pandemic period. At the same time, we are innovating around some hurdles produced by COVID conditions. Whichever the case, this year's efforts toward the MC2025 goals will be ambitious and dynamic, as we continue to empower students to change their lives, even in the midst of profound societal change.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlene". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'C'.

Charlene M. Dukes, Ed.D.  
Interim President

*We empower our students to change their lives, and we enrich the life of our community. We are accountable for our results.*