Milestone Moments: BUILDING FOR STUDENT SUCCESS


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Montgomery College’s Principles on Building for Student Success

The icons represent the principles of the College’s Building for Student Success efforts.

- Beginning Foundation
- Build High-Quality Learning
- Provide Comprehensive Student Supports
- Monitor Student Success
- Prioritize Student-Focused Operations
- Build Strategic External Partnerships

**May 2010**

**Montgomery College’s Ninth President**

The Montgomery College Board of Trustees names Dr. DeRonnie P. Pollard as the ninth president of the College and introduces Dr. Pollard to students, faculty, and staff. The College inaugurates Dr. Pollard as its new president in October 2010. At 39, she is one of the youngest community college presidents in the nation.

**September 2010**

**One College Model**

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education approves the accreditation of Montgomery College Germantown Campus, Montgomery College Rockville Campus, and Montgomery College Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus as a single institution, Montgomery College, with three campuses.

**October 2010**

**Innovation Fund**

Dr. Pollard announces the creation of the Innovation Fund, an investment in College faculty and staff to encourage the proposal of intentional, sustainable, and systemic improvements for the enhancement of student education and services. The fund is a resource that supports cutting-edge ideas and helps them become a reality for the benefit of students.

**December 2010**

**Governance Policy**

The Board of Trustees approves the College’s Governance Policy on December 13, 2010. In doing so, the Board authorizes the President to develop procedures to implement the policy.

**June 2011**

**New Mission, Vision, and Core Values**

The Board of Trustees adopts the newly crafted statements that reflect, in an inspiring way, what Montgomery College is as an institution and why it is so dedicated to its students and their success.

**September 2011**

**Rockville Campus Science Center**

The College dedicates the new building that brings much-needed lab space to the campus for an increasing number of students studying science, engineering, and mathematics. Montgomery College has the largest engineering program of any community college in the nation. The building’s 29 new laboratories include 14 biology labs, nine chemistry labs, and six physics/engineering labs.

**October 2011**

**Office of Compliance**

The College creates the Office of Compliance, which encourages and promotes ethical conduct and commitment to compliance with the law at the county, state, and federal levels, as well as monitors the implementation of adequate internal controls and quality assurance processes.

**December 2011**

**Life Sciences Park**

A major milestone occurs for the Life Sciences Park when the groundbreaking ceremony for the future Holy Cross Germantown Hospital takes place December 11 at the Germantown Campus of Montgomery College. Now known as the Hercules Pinkney Life Sciences Park, the park is an integrated academic, business, and research campus.

We are a $250 million business with more than 3,000 employees. We have very complex facilities. Our campuses are large. How do we make sure that we are good stewards of the resources the public invests in us, while having an impact on the community we serve?

Q: The College is halfway through the strategic plan. What are some of the College’s greatest achievements of the past few years?

A: More and more of our students were traveling among our three campuses, and they were asking very specific questions. “Why do I have access to those resources at this campus, but I don’t at that campus?” The curriculum has similar frameworks, but the teaching and learning are completely different at different campuses.

Q: When you started the strategic planning process, we first revised the College’s vision statement, and we identified a set of values that would frame the way in which we do our work. I think about mission as what we do; vision is how we do it. That was actually the longest part of the process. After that, we spent a lot of time thinking about how we will assess the plan. We had a broad-based, participatory process that engaged everybody in the College community, and we articulated bold and ambitious ideas about what the College will look like in 2020.

Q: Anybody who knows community colleges knows Montgomery College is well regarded and considered the flagship community college of Maryland. It has been in The New York Times list of best community colleges in the country, so I know there is something special here. I know the College had a good relationship with the school system and great support from the county government and business sector. The other aspect I thought was very interesting about Montgomery College was the diversity of its faculty, staff, and students. The College was already a majority minority institution.

Q: In 2011, you began the strategic planning process, which led to the creation of the MC 2020 Strategic Plan. What are some of the most important aspects of this plan?

A: When I started the strategic planning process, we first revised the College’s vision statement, and we identified a set of values that would frame the way in which we do our work. I think about mission as what we do; vision is how we do it. That was actually the longest part of the process. After that, we spent a lot of time thinking about how we will assess the plan. We had a broad-based, participatory process that engaged everybody in the College community, and we articulated bold and ambitious ideas about what the College will look like in 2020.

Q: In 2010, at 39, Dr. Pollard was named president of the nation’s youngest community college, Montgomery College. Now she serves her sixth year as president of Montgomery College, to discuss the College’s achievements of the past five years and how they have formed a foundation for student success.

Q: What were your perceptions about Montgomery College prior to your arrival at the College?

A: Anybody who knows community colleges knows Montgomery College is well regarded and considered the flagship community college of Maryland. It has been in The New York Times list of best community colleges in the country, so I know there is something special here. I knew the College had a good relationship with the school system and great support from the county government and business sector. The other aspect I thought was very interesting about Montgomery College was the diversity of its faculty, staff, and students. The College was already a majority minority institution.

Q: What were your observations after arriving, and how did they influence your subsequent vision for the College?

A: I took a lot of time to get to know the College. I walked the halls. I had lunches. I sat and watched. I started to see several things. We are an institution that has significant resources for our students. Our learning centers are very complex and elaborate, but as an institution—even though we had been accredited as such—we were not functioning as one.

When I met people in the community, they talked about how Montgomery College was this jewel of the county, but they did not quite know what we did. They did not know how we partnered with business and industry. They did not know the special institutes we have. I realized part of what I needed to do was help people understand the breadth of the Montgomery College experience. We serve the immigrant daughter and the native son, the returning veteran, and the working reservist.

And last but not least, I knew we had an outstanding faculty. We have faculty members who, for multiple years, have been named the Maryland Professor of the Year. We have staff members who have grown up in this institution and those who bring talent from other places. We need to make people understand the value of the faculty we bring to the community so they continue to invest their resources in us.
I absolutely love ACES because I was one that needed the help and would have benefited from a program similar to this. Some of the early data is so compelling about these students’ persistence and success at the College.

Why wait until high school? Look at our Kindergarten-to-College program, where we are actually putting College resources into disadvantaged schools. We are working with teachers and staff of those institutions, and now we have kindergartners saying, “When I go to college” or more importantly, “When I go to my Montgomery College.”

We partnered with the county in our Community Engagement Centers. As the demographics change in our county, as the traffic becomes more and more complex, we do not have the luxury to wait for people to come to us. We need to meet them where they are.

Our Community Engagement Centers go into communities. We provide language interpretation services. We have about 160 countries represented at Montgomery College. Our online course offerings have expanded. We are also in the process of getting approval from the state to offer degrees online.

Also for me, the issue of equity is so important, closing the achievement gap. We started Achieving the Promise, a program to ensure every student has the ability to be successful here. It is not just an economic imperative; it is a moral imperative of our time.

Q: One important change has been the creation of the One College model. How has this operational shift helped the College?

A: One of the first things the Board of Trustees charged me with after the strategic plan was looking at a one-college philosophy. Our students do not attend the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus.

They do not attend the Rockville Campus. Their transcript does not say Germantown Campus. Their transcript says Montgomery College.

We are one college, and that is very significant in terms of processes, procedures, and experiences. How do we make sure all these things work together? Our accreditors had already started the work. Prior to our last accreditation, we were three separate institutions or campuses accredited under Montgomery College. That changed—we are now accredited as one institution. We have core processes and systems as one institution and a commonality of the student experience.

The other one is our athletic association. To meet the requirements of Title IX, we looked at how we organized teams and adopted a new (NJCAA) and Title IX, the College implements a new athletics structure in which the College becomes a single, multisport NJCAA member with only one College team for each sport.

Q: “Achieving the Promise” is an initiative you started to increase student success. What can you tell us about it?

A: We are here to ensure that every student—regardless of ability, background, economic status, race, or age—has access to higher education. The challenge with that is we have not focused on equity in success. So while we can talk about completion numbers in general as it relates to all community college students and graduates and transfer facility needs.

Our accreditors, our state legislators, and our county legislators do not look at us and say, “Oh, here are various campuses as they relate to student equity, persistence, and retention.” They look at Montgomery College. Hence, the Montgomery College scorecard, which clearly says, “Here are our institutional milestones, here are our institutional parameters, and these are our goals as an institution.”
students, the reality is our students color and students who come from social economic backgrounds that are challenged perform at a lower level than students who are majority race.

Our job—this is the next level of work for higher education and community colleges specifically—is to ensure that everyone has the ability to be successful in college by redesigning our institutions for those outcomes.

We have created this cafeteria style of how students pick and choose, and ultimately at the end of the day, this is not in the best interest of students. We had a taskforce that worked for more than a year looking at how to close the achievement gap. They looked at the way students come into the College. They looked at curriculum and who is in the classroom in terms of staffing. They looked at how we do professional development for our employees to create welcoming and affirming environments.

Now, we have a plan with about 40 recommendations of how we can improve the College, and this fall we are starting to look at how can we “Achieve the Promise” of higher education.

I am so excited for one initiative we are calling “peer navigators.” The job of these peers is to go out, see students, talk to them, and help guide them through the institution, helping them understand how to be successful here. I love that idea.

**Q:** Economic development is another important theme for the College. How is the College supporting and promoting economic development in the region and the nation?

**A:** Community colleges have long been in the business of economic development. Our mission dictates that. We are providing a pipeline of talented, prepared workers to step into industries in the communities we serve. There is great data out there that suggests 80 percent of the jobs in the future will require some form of postsecondary education, whether a short-term certificate or an associate’s degree.

So we have a responsibility to make sure our curriculum is aligned to industry standards, and our faculty is prepared to teach students the skills they need to be competitive in the workforce of the future. Workforce development is economic development.

Our job is to make sure students think critically, have the skills that allow them to be mobile within industry, are able to assess what they know and do not know, and understand where to continue their education. We need to make sure we have programs that provide licensure and certification, and that we maintain our accreditation to do that. We need to constantly evolve.

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**August 2013**

**Welcome Centers**
The College establishes Welcome Centers at each campus in August 2013 to facilitate student services information. The centers assist with information about admissions, registration, textbooks and pricing, placement tests, financial aid, and payment information.

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**August 2013**

**Diversity Plan**
The College releases an updated diversity plan after a three-year, committee-based process. The new plan aligns with the MC 2020 strategic plan.

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**September 2013**

**Starfish Retention program**
The College acquires the Starfish retention system to create an online student success environment and facilitate access to counseling and advising services. Students are able to use the Starfish system to view service availability and schedule appointments online to meet with a counselor in person.

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**September 2013**

**College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act**
The College implements the requirements of the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act, which, through a series of measures and efforts, aims to increase college completion in Maryland.

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**November 2013**

**The Raptor**
The College reveals its new mascot, the Raptor.

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**December 2013**

**Closing the Achievement Gap Report**
The fall 2013 closing meeting features the announcement that work will begin for a plan and a committee will be formed to address the achievement gap at the College. Subsequently the task force’s final report is published in December 2013.

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**January 2014**

**The Office of Community Engagement**
The College creates the Office of Community Engagement to take Montgomery College beyond the campus and into the community through Community Engagement Centers, partnerships with nonprofits, events, regular communication, and grass roots outreach. The office’s primary job is to help under-served and under-represented communities connect with Montgomery College.

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**July 2014**

**Academic Restructure**
Dr. Pollard approves an academic restructuring plan in March 2014 that would take effect in July 2014. The plan was crafted by nearly 200 faculty and staff representatives, chosen by their governance groups and the academic deans, who collaborated to restructure the College’s academic units to enhance collegewide consistency and cooperation, and support student success.

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Montgomery College revealed its new mascot, the Raptor, in November 2013. Our job also is to help students continue lifelong learning so their work skills continue to evolve. The Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant, about $1.5 million dollars for the state of Maryland, creates career lattices that allow a student to get short-term training at college and go into the world of work to get work-based experiences. They then come back to us for more training. This creates career mobility. The worst thing that happens in poverty is that we give people access to entry-level jobs, and we never help them move up the career ladder. That changes the quality of life for them and their families.

We received another grant to help underrepresented populations in science, technology, engineering, and math [STEM] fields, providing them with support services that help them navigate a very complex curriculum. The grant allows us to provide professional development for faculty to meet the needs of those students, and connects students to businesses and transfer programs. We are seeing exceptional outcomes.

The last thing I will mention is we produced a wonderful document that chronicles the work we do in workforce development. Now when I go to the county or the state, I have something I can show leaders about the work here at Montgomery College and how we support economic development. Our Life Sciences Park is an example of economic development. We partnered with the county and state to bring the first new hospital to the county in the many years. We created an environment for innovation and technology. It is going to be remarkable to watch what we do with that space in the next decade.
The College celebrates the reopening of the Science East building, which opened in 2012. The renovation was the second of three phases of creating one large science complex on the Rockville Campus. The final phase will be complete with the Science West building renovation in 2016.

We have two Community Engagement Centers formally partnering with the county. We have one informally at the Montgomery County jail, where we’ve been delivering GED courses, English, and technology courses for years. Education is the only thing I know that can change the trajectory of a family or an individual.

We are a large institution, so for a lot of people the idea of going to college is overwhelming. But if we give them a little yellow brick road to follow to get through this institution and talk to them about financial aid opportunities, adult basic education, ESOL classes, we can help them look at their lives differently and think about the future, not just for them but for their children. That is what those Community Engagement Centers are.

Technology is changing. I remember my first e-mail account, and this was in the late 1990s. My eight-year-old son now has his own e-mail account. His whole classroom—they have no books. They do everything on tablets. So what happens when that generation comes to our colleges? How do we design facilities that are going to meet these changes in the future?

We will have a dramatic growth in the diversity of our community, both in terms of racial and ethnic diversity and socioeconomic diversity. How do we as an institution design ourselves to meet these students in communities where they are and help them be successful?

We will have significant challenges we have not even begun to understand yet, but there are a few easily described. One, we are going to continue to see a change in the economic landscape of not only this county but also of the state and our country. We are going to have to look at efficiencies in how we do things, how we think about the resources invested in us, how we steward them to produce greater outcomes, and how we secure new revenue sources for the institution.

We are going to continue to hear calls for accountability in ways we have not even begun to think about. The federal government has become much more invested, based on the college rating system. With the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013, our state has changed the game, and I can guarantee the state will have another version in the future.

The reality is people are saying, “We have invested a lot of resources in you. The demography is changing; the United States and our competitiveness are changing. How do you demonstrate that students coming out of Montgomery College are able to do the work you say they can, with the skill sets they need to be able to be successful and self-sustaining?”

What challenges do you think the College will continue to face?

I think we will have significant challenges we have not even begun to understand yet, but there are a few easily described. One, we are going to continue to see a change in the economic landscape of not only this county but also of the state and our country. We are going to have to look at efficiencies in how we do things, how we think about the resources invested in us, how we steward them to produce greater outcomes, and how we secure new revenue sources for the institution. We are going to continue to hear calls for accountability in ways we have not even begun to think about. The federal government has become much more invested, based on the college rating system. With the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013, our state has changed the game, and I can guarantee the state will have another version in the future.

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I do not have the answers to all this, but I guarantee you if we do not start asking the questions and engaging in a dialogue, somebody is going to tell us what to do, while we are still saying, “Oh, wait a minute. I am still talking about that.” That is not going to work anymore.
We are halfway through the current decade, and the MC 2020 plan will be completed in five more years. What do you expect the College will have achieved by 2020?

A: I have ambitious and bold goals about what we should be doing. One, students will have clear pathways throughout the organization. There will be advising or support structures that get them to the end. Students of all races and ethnicities will be able to be successful at the institution. We are talking about this idea of a college town. I had this crazy idea when I first walked in—I said that we need to turn Montgomery County into a college town, because I remember what a college town is like. Everything that happens in that community is intimately connected with the institution.

We have to decrease the amount of time it takes to get a degree. Right now, the average student takes about 3.9 years to get a degree from Montgomery College. This originally was designed to be a two-year degree. And I think we will see an increase in the number of degrees we offer.

Q: We recently have been hearing a national dialogue about the value of higher education, its costs, and the unique role that two-year colleges can play. How does this present an opportunity for Montgomery College and our community?

A: We continue to resist whether education is a private or public issue. The reality is it can have both a private benefit and a public benefit. All of us want to live in communities where people are well-educated. We know that where people are well-educated, there is less crime, less dependence on public support, greater voter engagement, less violence, and greater access to parks. All of us should be invested in this question because it is a public issue, not just a private one.

Our work around the achievement gap and workforce development speaks to this. It is a moral and economic imperative that we are looking at issues regarding the achievement gap. Montgomery College became, I believe in 1937, a majority minority institution. We, as a county, as a state, and as a nation, have to have a substantive conversation about poverty, socioeconomic disparities, and the ways these have adverse effects on the individual and the whole. People do not see the connection. If I’m living in a community where there are more have-nots than haves, it creates an environment that ultimately is not healthy for any of us.

There is a squeeze on jobs. There are lots of people who need access to jobs. There are certain types of jobs we want to keep in Montgomery County—well-paying ones that contribute to the knowledge economy. That we do very well here at Montgomery College, but we need pathways and a series of ladders that help families move from the idea of simply saying, “I want this,” to, “This is how I can do it and I’m working to do that.”

Q: How do you see the College continuing to evolve in order to serve the needs of students and our community in the future?

A: Our vision statement says, “With a sense of urgency for the future, Montgomery College will be a national model of excellence, opportunity, and student success.” This means our organization will be characterized by agility and relevance as it meets the dynamic challenges facing our students and our community. All of these things we are going to have to do as an institution. Our nation depends on that.

There is a great quote by Winston Churchill. He said this during one of his famous radio addresses after a victory on the battlefield. He said, “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” That is how I’m thinking right now. This is the end of the beginning of the work. There is a long road ahead of us. The stakes are high. The demands are there. The progress of our nation depends on community colleges. The success of community colleges depends on the support of the community—we serve and our willingness to do the work, challenge ourselves, celebrate when we really do well, and ask ourselves what is in the best interests of our students.