

**To:** Montgomery College Community

**From:** Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard, President

**Subject:** **Scheduling of Spring 2021 Classes (Update #76)**

**Date:** August 24, 2020

Although fall classes have not yet begun, the College is already planning for winter and spring sessions. With this update, I am sharing important information about the structure of the spring semester. The College has decided to develop winter and spring class schedules that serve students most thoroughly, while prioritizing health and safety. The schedules will be a bit different than in previous years but will continue to propel student success.

In this challenging time, I know each of us is eager to organize our lives as much as possible to manage the complexities of the pandemic. I have spoken before about the importance of honoring students both as learners and as consumers and honoring our employees as colleagues. Many of us are managing family life while working and studying from home and all of us are planning finances. Neither our students nor our employees are well served when we do not make clear decisions about operations. In addition, the circumstances of the pandemic have hastened a reflective examination of certain “orthodoxies” of higher education, including the student experience, administrative operations, as well as the academic calendar. For these reasons, the College has decided to make operational plans public for the winter and spring sessions now, helping our community to meet its own needs with more thorough planning.

Our summer enrollment trends, in addition to nationwide data, have shown that shorter term structured remote classes and distance learning courses are more attractive to students in the midst of COVID-19 stressors. These offerings enable students more flexibility to manage work schedules and family needs. Therefore, in spring 2021, we will decrease fifteen-week offerings and primarily deliver instruction in seven-week courses through the structured remote format. This will be the plan for the first seven-week session of the semester prior to spring break, and possibly the second seven-week session after spring break, depending on local health conditions. The College will offer the same extended winter session (which is a five-week, online session) that has been offered for the last three years, but will not offer a three-week in-person and online session, which has been our practice.

Due to health and safety concerns, the winter and spring schedules will keep our instruction largely structured remote until the end of spring break in March 2021. We will re-evaluate closer to spring break, with preparations already in progress for a return to face-to-face instruction, if health conditions allow. In this critical time, the College must ensure that it will offer courses in formats that attract students and offer them maximum flexibility and support for success. Although these changes may require some adjustments by faculty and staff, research around block- and shorter-session scheduling at the college level links them to stronger student success metrics. We will provide the necessary professional development and support to faculty and staff to prepare everyone to succeed in this format. The more intense focus required for

these classes appears to elevate student performance. Making these changes will also help to preserve the College's enrollment at a critical time.

As MC continues to respond to the pandemic in a student-centered manner, class scheduling and structured remote learning are two areas in which we can positively impact health and safety in addition to academic progress. Treating everyone with the dignity they deserve means planning carefully and communicating early about changes. I am grateful for the continuing adaptations by our faculty and staff to the unprecedented constraints faced by our students and our community. Thank you in advance for your continuing commitment to our mission and to our students.