

To: Montgomery College Community
From: Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard, President
Subject: **Changes to the Spring Semester and Higher Ed (Update #77)**
Date: August 26, 2020

I hope faculty and staff are all enjoying professional week so far. If you weren't able to tune into the Fall Opening Meeting, you can view the [hour-long meeting](#) or enjoy a short clip of [my message](#).

Yesterday's talk by Jeff Selingo, author and former editor of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, touched on a number of themes that motivated the College's changes in the spring class schedule. Selingo stressed that colleges should base operational and service decisions on student data. The primary driver of the College's shift to more seven-week classes in spring 2021 has been student demand. Registration for shorter classes rose 11 percent in summer 2020 compared to last summer and is trending up significantly for the fall. Fall registration for shorter classes is up more than 15 percent over previous years, while registration for 15-week classes is down about 15 percent compared to the previous fall semester.

This trend in fall enrollment could portend an even lower enrollment in spring 2021, since the spring semester's enrollment is historically lower than fall's. What we are observing is a direct result of the pandemic in which student employment is uncertain: 41 percent of our working students lost jobs due to COVID-19 and 33 percent have experienced income reductions, according to the Hope Center survey of MC students.

Students appear to be drawn to shorter academic terms or possibly reluctant to commit to longer terms. There are surely many individual reasons for their education decisions, including employment, finances, and living situations, all of which are made more challenging in the absence of a COVID-19 vaccine or treatment that may allow for greater flexibility. In addition, family responsibilities that many students are experiencing—due to virtual schooling for K-12 or increased care for other home-bound family members—have created complex situations. As students manage these realities, they may find that they can devote shorter, more intense periods to study, which they are reluctant to spread out over a longer term.

By providing flexible pathways to earning credits, the College is serving our students in ways that prioritize their needs. Since seven-week classes have always been a part of our academic calendar, the College is not changing anything fundamental about the education or services being offered. In the spring, only classes that have been previously offered in the seven-week version will be offered in the shorter format. We are adapting to student needs in the face of unprecedented economic and social disruptions. These are also changes that—as Jeff Selingo mentioned—are sustainable for College operations. As I mentioned, fall and spring enrollment trends are related. The College has historically had about an 80 percent retention rate from fall to spring. In order to mitigate any additional impact on that figure, the College is working to offer

classes in formats that students are embracing. This benefits student progress and is a sustainable solution for the College and our employees.

I am grateful for the work of chairs, deans, and vice president/provosts this summer, who are working with faculty to design winter and spring schedules with these realities in mind. Enrollment management decisions that impact finances must be made strategically and collaboratively in this era of economic contraction. Reduced enrollment will impact our workforce.

We have all made adjustments during the pandemic for health and safety, and now for reasons of scheduling. I appreciate that faculty and staff may have to make changes that are new to them, but our institution has prided itself on our agility during this extended crisis. As we did this summer, we will provide the necessary professional development and support to faculty and staff to prepare everyone to succeed. Making decisions early about the spring semester positions the College optimally to help students and employees to plan for the best outcomes.

Thank you in advance for your commitment to student needs. The College stands eager to empower students as we respond proactively to the evolving circumstances of the pandemic and to the social and economic conditions that surround them.