



## President's Report to the Board

September 2012

ACES. A single word and, yet, it carries so many positive meanings. In school, it means a student has received the highest score possible on an exam. In sports, it represents perfection, whether an unbeatable serve in tennis or a hole-in-one in golf. In the skies, it is a fighter pilot exceptionally skilled in his trade. In a deck of cards, it is a versatile tool, allowing players to adapt to the moves of those around them. For Montgomery College, ACES defines a new future for our institution and for our students.

ACES, which stands for Achieving College Excellence and Success program, will target students who need us the most, at the time when they most need us: in high school. Right now, the program is still under development, but the goal is clearly defined—to create an educational pathway from high school to community college to university for underrepresented, minority, first-generation college students. The program touches the very heart of who we are as the community's college—an institution that offers every member of our community access to higher education and the opportunity for success—and its impact will be felt for generations to come.

You likely have heard me say that an education is the most critical tool for a family to break the cycle of poverty. Education is not a luxury; it is a necessity. But so many students struggle early in their educational journeys and veer off course. This is unacceptable in the 21st century, particularly in a country that was founded on the very ideal that the American Dream is attainable for all.

ACES is one way Montgomery College will help reclaim the American Dream for those students at greatest risk of failing to begin or even achieve a college degree. We know that students who have one or more risk factors are less likely to complete. They may face limited financial support, unfamiliarity with the college process, or even discouraging parents. First-generation college students may not understand the importance of due



dates for financial aid or the steps needed to complete the process. They may not be aware that community college is a tenable and positive option.

While it is impossible for us to eliminate risks out of our control, ACES will attempt to mitigate them so they no longer serve as barriers. How? We will work with program participants starting in the 11th grade and continuing until they have completed their goals. We will work with institutional partners, Montgomery County Public Schools and the Universities at Shady Grove (USG), to provide extensive services in the academic, financial aid, and student support areas. We will embrace a case-management approach, meaning each ACES participant will receive individualized, one-on-one services. Much like an athletic coach, an ACES academic coach will serve as a critical mentor throughout the student's journey—helping to guide training, provide inspiration, and encourage during challenging times.

It will be akin to our Common Student Experience goal of providing our students with their own GPS—Guidance Path System—including personal, turn-by-turn instructions for their instructional journey. We want all participants to have access to College services, including academic planning and advising, tutoring, leadership development, College visits, financial aid counseling and scholarship assistance, and transfer counseling. Not only will ACES participants have access to Montgomery College services while on our campuses, they will have support once they transfer to institutions located at USG. In other words, once in ACES, always in ACES.

As we considered our ACES program, we looked closely to a successful program at our neighboring community college—Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). Since 2005, its Pathway to the Baccalaureate program has focused on providing Northern Virginia high school students with access and success to a higher-education degree. It targets those students who have “the desire and capacity” to achieve a degree, but whose likelihood of success would dramatically improve by receiving “special support and structural guidance.” The program starts in high school and goes through community college and university. Specific interventions include one-on-one meetings and workshops to prepare for the transition to college; dedicated financial aid funding for program participants and designated counselors, who provide “one-stop, case management model and intrusive advising,” guiding students throughout their college process. According to research from NOVA, “Pathway students are outperforming their peers on measures of retention, grade point average, and graduation rate.”

Implementing a similar program will enable our College to actualize one of our key themes in the Montgomery College 2020 strategic plan: Access, Affordability, and Success. If you recall, strategic action under this theme included increasing outreach opportunities in Montgomery County communities that have limited numbers of residents attending college, and providing students in those communities with specific information about the enrollment process. This fall, we will be conducting new parent orientation sessions at all three campuses to demystify the enrollment process. ACES will enable us to implement a similar strategy at an earlier, and critical, time in a student's life.



To participants, ACES will mean a changed life. It will mean an opportunity to explore dreams never before considered possible. It will mean a chance for students to fulfill their potential, what I would call ACES in the academic world. Montgomery College ACES will be prepared for college life, and whatever challenges follow, thanks to a dedicated and committed support system. I look forward to inspiring Montgomery County high school students to become part of Montgomery College. I look forward to sharing more about ACES as we move further along in the process.

**Board Questions:**

1. What aspects of the ACES program do you believe will be essential to helping produce the next great generation?
2. How do you see this program advancing *Montgomery College 2020*?

