



## President's Report to the Board

January 2013

It seems no coincidence that the term facility, in addition to meaning the physical infrastructure necessary to provide a service, is defined as “the fact of being easy, or easily done,” and “dexterity of speech or action.” For the College, facilities make it possible for our employees to do their jobs and adapt with dexterity to the needs of our community and students. The better our facilities, the easier it is for the College to fulfill our mission. But, growing enrollment coupled with inconsistent funding places a strain on our facilities, and the result has required an increasing level of flexibility from every member of the College.

In order to have a meaningful dialogue about challenges related to facilities, we must expand the conversation beyond brick and mortar to include topics that intersect with facility use and function, including maintenance, information technology, transportation, and security. It is not easy to ensure our facilities keep up with our demands, as well as the demands of a constantly evolving and technologically-advancing world. We must approach facilities planning with a two-pronged strategy: (1) increasing and updating our physical spaces, while also (2) innovating and expanding our virtual ones. I hope this month's report will explain why I believe being an effective and relevant community college means taking a comprehensive and out-of-the-box view of our College as we plan for our growing needs.

### **Physical Space**

Our physical space considerations include maintaining, renovating, and adapting current facilities, while also exploring opportunities for constructing, renting, or buying new buildings. Our 2006–2016 Facilities Master Plan (FMP) details how our College will respond to the space needs of our institution with significant new buildings and numerous renovations on all of our campuses. Our Facilities Office anticipates that our FMP will be updated following the completion of our academic redesign effort. Aligning the FMP with the direction and purpose of our future development, as articulated in



our academic redesign and in *Montgomery College 2020*, is a paramount task.

One of our top considerations as we devise our long-term strategy, with respect to both existing and new facilities, must be deferred maintenance. The College places an emphasis on deferring only the maintenance that will not impact our ability to keep our facilities open and functioning—largely thanks to financial support from the Montgomery County Council. In the past two decades, the council has allotted, on average, more than \$6.5 million dollars to assist in major maintenance efforts, including elevator modernization, roof replacement and repairs, site improvements, and energy management. Additionally, the facilities portion of the annual operating budget also addresses a number of deferred maintenance issues on all three campuses as part of ongoing repairs and maintenance.

I should note that the term “deferred maintenance” has become a bit of a misnomer in our vernacular; in reality, College maintenance projects may not be deferred in the traditional sense, but rather be strategically, purposefully, and methodically staggered. Yet, that maintenance work still falls under the deferred maintenance category.

I want to outline the framework for the College’s deferred maintenance strategy in terms of three categories: cyclical, compliant, and sporadic.

- **Cyclical** - Cyclical maintenance is how we categorize the usual wear and tear that we can expect every year, such as replacing light bulbs, repairing carpets, and painting walls. This is maintenance that we can anticipate, and also the kind that will not necessarily impact the level of our instruction. Because of these considerations, we can defer cyclical maintenance in a way that makes sense for our bottom line, without impacting our College employees or the learning process. While we previously performed this work on an annual basis, we now divide the tasks into those we must perform every year and those that we can place on a rotating calendar. For instance, we now paint the walls and change the carpet in a cycle of every two to three years. This also includes deferring information technology maintenance, which means how often we replace employee computers. We previously replaced infrastructure for technology every two years, but now we do so every three to five years. Rather than set a predetermined schedule for when everyone at the College will receive hardware and software upgrades, the College embraced a staggered strategy, replacing technology more often for those users who rely on it heavily and less often for those who do not. It is through the College’s concerted and deliberate choices that the College



realizes cost savings with minimal impact to the quality of our facilities, the efficiency of our technology, or the delivery of our learning. It is this cyclical maintenance category in which our College chooses to most often stagger maintenance.

- **Compliant** - The College does not defer any type of maintenance that would impact our Americans with Disabilities compliance or put members of the College community at risk. Therefore, we are proactive about risk management, which includes addressing maintenance such as emergency repair of heating and air conditioning units, cracked sidewalks, and malfunctioning elevators that prevent access to high floors. Not addressing these issues would impact our instruction and expose the College to an unnecessary level of risk.
- **Sporadic** - Thirdly, we have the sporadic upkeep required for larger infrastructure maintenance, such as addressing plumbing emergencies, repairing lighting outages in parking lots, replacing leaking roofs, and fixing malfunctioning security systems. This is the type of deferred maintenance that we vigilantly and proactively monitor and hope to prevent. However, when the unexpected does happen, we try to minimize the impact on the affected College community. For this reason, the College has a fund, entitled Plant Asset Life Cycle Repair, upon which we rely in these instances.

We must be cognizant of the fact that our deferred maintenance costs are continuing to rise. Local and state finances are strained, and so too are our facilities and our employees. Many of the buildings are reaching their legal capacity as enrollment has increased significantly over the past six years. We have put up walls to create additional rooms; we have taken down others to create larger spaces. This means that in some buildings, the design concepts in the original blueprints no longer mesh with today's uses. For instance, ventilation systems or elevator placement are not meeting our current needs. We have stressed our buildings and, as a result, we have stressed our maintenance budget. Additionally, scheduling the time and human resources around the academic semesters has added pressure to the situation.

To respond to our financial, enrollment, and infrastructure realities, our College must find ways to better utilize the buildings we have, as well as to consider renovation to current facilities and expansion to new facilities.



## Building Utilization

In terms of our current buildings, we must tackle classroom management by continuing to search for ways to effectively and efficiently schedule our building use. We currently are implementing new scheduling software in hopes of creating a clearer picture of the times our classrooms are in use, whether for classes or events or meetings, and how we can maximize the use of our space. For instance, we expect the new software to enable us to close gaps between classes; these small time savings in the aggregate could create a larger block of time for scheduling an additional class or event. The software will also allow us to ensure a full 10 minutes between classes for classroom change over.

More strategically, booking our existing space also may include looking at *when* we teach. Since our College began, we have resisted the traditional mindset of delivering education solely Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. We must continue to look for ways to adjust our scheduling to meet the needs of our students, and our facilities. Thanks to the forward thinking of our Board of Trustees, our College has embraced holding evening and early morning classes to meet the needs of our nontraditional students. In fact, this past fall semester, the College had more than 7,600 students enrolled in courses that met before 9 a.m., nearly 6,000 of whom enrolled in courses that met before 8 a.m. We ran 135 sections of courses on Saturdays, accommodating about 2,300 students. Scheduling even more evening or weekend classes would appeal to our working students, as well as ease the capacity strains in our buildings during the week. Of course, we recognize that summer is often when we tackle our necessary maintenance and renovation projects.

However, when creating “off-peak” learning opportunities, we must be strategic about our academic scheduling. We need to take a comprehensive look at the courses available to our students both during prime time and off-peak hours, with the goal of offering robust course options for each. If a majority of our most popular general education courses are offered during the busiest times, our students have no true alternative. Offering more diverse courses at more diverse times may allow more student schedule staggering and, thus, enable the College to more efficiently use space. New and innovative curriculum may pose an additional challenge to our scheduling process; for instance, courses requiring student access to computers in class limits the number of appropriate spaces available to accommodate those courses.



The College's academic deans, registrar, and facilities leaders must collaborate to determine more creative scheduling, including what courses are offered and the times at which they are offered. Online offerings, which I discuss below, can help alleviate some of the facility pressure. My suggestion is that we continue to look outside the traditional scheduling grid and mentality; readjusting the way we look at higher education includes looking at the actual times we teach, and how we can offer our students more options to better service their needs and the needs of our infrastructure. Of course, any change will come with its own set of expenses, but we must consider the question and determine whether it makes sense for our College.

### **Facility Expansion**

Another way to ease our crowding concerns is to look for new brick and mortar. As you are well aware, this is one reason the College is exploring possible acquisition of additional space. I firmly believe that foremost in our minds as we consider investing in new property is the question of whether that move would enable us to better serve our county by enabling us to better reach underserved areas. In other words, any expansion we consider must align with our strategic plan initiative of access.

Therefore, I would contend that the first step we must take before we consider any new acquisition is to assess what pockets of our community we need to reach, and then how we can most effectively and efficiently reach them. There are a number of options in this category such as leasing, leasing to own, buying, or establishing private-public partnerships. Our College benefitted significantly from locating our noncredit programs in two instructional centers, as well as in numerous other buildings across the county. Additionally, we have relocated some staff offices to off-site leased facilities. The type of building also depends on our ultimate goal. For instance, perhaps rather than investing in a large building, we would better serve those potential students by establishing computer labs where they can tap into online learning, which I will discuss in more detail below.

Part of this analysis must include the hidden costs in taking on more property. For instance, retrofitting an existing building to comport with our current technology infrastructure can add a significant cost to the endeavor. With a new building, there are a number of additional features to consider, such as the added cost of meeting LEED certification, which is a College goal. Additionally, no matter what type of acquisition or space, any expansion will add to our deferred maintenance calculations, as well as to the pressure on our current facilities staff.



As we consider the best combination of old and new, we must be mindful of the logistical realities of our students. While confronting the rapid growth of enrollment on all campuses and what that does to our buildings, we cannot ignore the requirements, in terms of transportation and transportation infrastructure. Expanding the footprint of our current spaces means more use of our parking lots, more congestion on our campuses. We must consider whether more construction means identifying more parking capacity. And how do we best address the issues of our students without cars? Any course of action we take must take into account the public transportation concerns our students face. If we plan to expand to new areas, we must ask ourselves whether the current transportation options will facilitate our students' success. Actualizing a One College model means our students should have access to courses at all of our campuses, so they can best pursue their dreams. Can we establish a bike share program to facilitate transportation to and from Metro stations? Is there a better way to partner with Ride On? Is there a public-private partnership with a bus company that would allow our students to more freely move among campuses? The decision for how to best to look at transportation cannot be separated from the conversation about how best to utilize our class space; those conversations need to occur in tandem.

## **Virtual Space**

Part of the conversation about physical spaces, and the subsequent transportation challenges our students face, must include the discussion of virtual space. As we strive to meet the needs of a 21st century student, we must realize that the ways in which older generations learn best may not be the same ways in which today's students learn best. When I look at my students, and even my son, I realize they are part of a world where downloading has replaced browsing bookshelves, and e-mailing has replaced handwritten letters. We too must realize brick-and-mortar is not always preferable to point-and-click. While we must provide face-to-face instruction for those who would best benefit from that type of environment, we must realize that some members of today's population will thrive best in an online environment. Without providing robust offerings for both options, we do an injustice to one group of learners and, thus, will not fulfill our mission.

To be sure, virtual solutions will not solve all our challenges; they are not the panacea of higher education. No method of delivery for learning will come without a cost. Online-only education may be a cost-effective way to reach more students, but it comes with its own set of overhead costs. If we want to deliver online learning, we must have the technology infrastructure to do so, not only the College,



but our students as well. Providing access to higher education, even virtually, requires making sure our students have access to technology. We must figure out a way to ensure computer access—and Internet access as well. In order to excel in an online program, students need to have a secure network that is reliable and fast. The question becomes: how do we deliver learning to those students who would best learn in an online environment, but who may not be able to afford the necessary tools to do so? Perhaps the answer is computer labs strategically located across the county. Perhaps it is private-public partnerships. Perhaps it is working with local libraries. The possibilities are truly endless.

While creating virtual environments will help mitigate overcrowding and enable us to reach students who cannot make it to a campus, it cannot eliminate any deferred maintenance issues. Reinforcing our technological infrastructure to handle a more robust online course program will require some upfront costs, as well as significant, continuous maintenance. Any conversation about delivery of learning, whether acquiring new space or putting it online, has to be centered, in part, around infrastructure maintenance, whether it is cyclical, compliant, or sporadic, and what makes the most sense for our students as well as the College as a whole.

Ultimately, the right recipe for our College will require creative and pragmatic thinking. It will require us to take a hard look at the needs of our College community, our financial restrictions, and the current state of our physical and virtual facilities. Ultimately, our facilities must empower our College employees, as well as our students, to change lives and adapt to the needs of our community. In short, our facilities must facilitate the accomplishment of our mission.

### **Monthly Discussion Questions<sup>1</sup>**

1. **Institutional needs.** What kind of change, if any, does our institution need?
2. **Context and competition.** Do we understand our institution's competitive position?
3. **Consequences of no change.** What are the consequences if we do not engage in a change process?

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from MacTaggart, Terrence J., *Leading Change: How Boards and Presidents Build Exceptional Academic Institutions*, AGB Press, 2011 (pp. 21–22).



4. **Leadership capacity.** As a board and as individual board members, are we able and willing to work with our president to bring about positive change?
5. **Change process and players.** Based on this discussion, what is the right role for the board to play at this time?

