Impacts: Change at Montgomery College

Change has come to higher education. And it has come to Montgomery College. The last decade has seen extensive changes in higher education—perhaps more change than occurred in the previous century. We are familiar with the themes that have our nation's attention, including:

- the completion agenda,
- closing the achievement gap,
- accountability and data,
- strengthening standards for accreditation,
- performance-based funding,
- federal education regulation,
- state education laws and regulations,
- tuition costs,
- financial aid,
- online learning,
- open educational resources, and
- campus safety and security.

All of these factors and more have had stark impacts—dare I say "disruptions"—on the operations and student experience at colleges and

universities across the country. And the changes caused by these factors are still far from complete or over. I know that the higher education system my son will enter in 2026 will likely bear little resemblance to higher education of today—let alone any resemblance to the college environment I entered nearly 30 years ago.

We have made numerous changes at Montgomery College in recent years. Some have been internally-driven, in response to student needs, but all have been made with a view to the external forces affecting and shaping the landscape of higher education. My *President's Focus* reports this year will review some of these changes and, especially, the **impacts** each has had on the College—its operations, its employees, and its students.

This month I present an overview of the reports coming this year.

Impacts of Major Organizational Changes (October). An organization's structures drive its successful work: decisions are made, new programs are implemented, and customers are served. The College has adapted each time it has grown. In 2010, our accrediting organization, the Middle States Commission on a Higher Education, recognized the College as a single college with a single accreditation. This change elevated the importance of cohesion in the One College model. Many of our organizational changes have had this motivation at their core—to be One College operating fluidly on all cylinders to help our students change their lives.

Impacts of Participatory Governance (November). Involving faculty, staff, and students in a college's decision-making process is a time-honored tradition in higher education. Montgomery College has always had some form of employee and student groups to provide input and feedback. They have operated under different names over the years and they have functioned differently. After the Board of Trustees passed a new policy on participatory governance in 2010, I established a Blue Ribbon Taskforce to lead a collegewide conversation on designing a new system based on the principles of participation by all College constituencies. What emerged were our set of councils: four campus councils, four constituency councils, four functional councils, and one College Council. The participatory governance system is now in its fifth year and has created a robust space for discussion and debate of topics as they arise.

Impacts of the Office of Compliance (December). The Office of Compliance was created in 2012 in response to an extraordinary growth in higher education regulations. In fact, since 2008 federal higher education regulations have increased more than 50 percent. Monitoring compliance can no longer be an "add-on" to a person's job. Compliance needs the full attention of the institution. Federal and state laws around higher education exist for good reasons— the protection of students and employees, and the use of tools and practices that assure that public investments are achieving intended outcomes. Our Compliance Office is responsible for oversight, monitoring, and coordination of all regulatory compliance. Without such efforts the College could—by omission or ignorance—violate one of the hundreds of statutes to which it is responsible. By monitoring risks, creating deadlines for disclosure, and informing the College community about new and evolving rules, the office is able to prevent problems before they become more serious.

Impacts of Facilities Improvements (February). The facilities in which teaching and learning occur set the stage for student success. Facilities need to be well-designed, adaptable to changes in technology, inviting for students and employees, clean, and well-maintained. Our capital budget—supported equally by the county and state—provides funding for new facilities and for renovations. In addition, the Montgomery College Foundation has assisted the College in acquiring several buildings and constructing a parking garage through bond financing. Each campus has opened brand new buildings in the past decade and each has seen major renovations. In addition, Central Services will be moving to a new location (not a new building) this year through the help of bond financing by the Montgomery College Foundation with the support of Montgomery County. This move will help provide more space on all three campuses by shifting certain activities to the Mannakee Building that are now on campuses.

Impacts of Community Engagement (March). In addition to having world-class facilities on campus, the College needs to be in neighborhoods to meet people where they are. With locations that are increasingly accessible, the College gives more people the opportunity to be exposed to the idea of college in general and to Montgomery College in particular. In these local sites, counselors can answer questions that may arise, provide information about the College, and even teach classes. The creation of two community engagement centers has brought the College to the community in a

very physical sense: reaching over 5,000 new people with courses and consultations in their own neighborhoods.

Impacts of ACES (April). The Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) program was launched as a partnership of Montgomery College, Montgomery County Public Schools, and the Universities at Shady Grove in 2012. It has grown to serve 1,700 students in 10— soon to be 13—high schools. Its signature system of providing academic coaches and a pathway from high school to a baccalaureate degree has propelled students, especially those who might not have considered college, to apply to college, attend, and be successful. The attention the program has garnered has inspired donors to support the program and its students with over $3 million in donations dedicated to ACES. This is the first year that ACES students who attended Montgomery College will move to the Universities at Shady Grove to continue on their educational paths.

Impacts of Achieving the Promise (May). Our 2013 research by the collegewide Closing the Achievement Gap Taskforce inspired the College community to rally around a commitment to every single student's success. We realized that success was not equally distributed when we looked at data disaggregated by race, gender, and other characteristics. With this information in hand, and a commitment to what we have termed our "at-promise" students (not "at-risk"), we established our own effort to make a difference—Achieving the Promise. We developed a College Student Success Score Card with disaggregated data to track progress and hold ourselves accountable. Today, there is widespread knowledge across the institution of our student success rates. Deans, department chairs, and faculty are examining individual courses to look for areas needing improvement and are acting on them. This year we joined Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national network of colleges committed to closing the achievement gap. We are hopeful that the experiences and expertise that ATD brings will enhance our efforts to Achieve the Promise for all our students.

Questions for Discussion:
1.   Which area(s) of impact impress you the most for their innovation or ambition? Why?
2.   Are there areas of impact that are not covered here which the College should address?
3.   Which areas of impact strike you as the most challenging and why?