



President's **FOCUS**

Monthly Report to the Board

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Integrated Strategic Planning: Academic Planning

As the College prepares to launch its next institutional strategic planning process in FY19, it has been carefully considering how to best to integrate each aspect of the College's work into the process so as to improve on the central purpose of student success. Best practices in strategic planning for institutions similar in size to the College stress that integrated planning across the sectors that make up the institution is essential. At Montgomery College, the divisions that make up the College—Academics Affairs, Students Affairs, Administrative and Fiscal Services, and Advancement and Community Engagement—have all made considerable progress with the goals of *Montgomery College 2020*. They are each prepared to continue to move the College forward into its next strategic plan and build on the successes of *Montgomery College 2020*.

Empowering students to change their lives through education is, at its core, an academic endeavor. The Office of Academic Affairs has developed a comprehensive, ambitious Academic Master Plan (AMP), informed by its faculty and staff, as well as in consultation with all other divisions of the College. The process of its development is a model of transparency and inclusion. First, the drafting and editing of the plan was done with the participation of dozens of faculty, staff, administrators, and students representing all areas of the College. The steering committee held open meetings and campus forums to discuss the plan's content and solicit feedback from stakeholders. Second, it contains objectives that are clearly defined and linked to specific metrics and a timeline. Finally,



its attention to student success is focused but it acknowledges the essentially collaborative role of other divisions in the architecture of that success.

The Academic Master Plan is also attentive to demands that are external to the College: legal requirements of the Maryland College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013, (CCRCCA), regulatory requirements from the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), and accreditation expectations from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education are all forces that were incorporated into its planning and processes. The AMP is also responsive to the limitations of the College's financial model: the capacity of the Montgomery County Council, for example, to continue funding the institution at the same rate; the constraints of keeping tuition low enough that students can afford to attend; and the rising costs of services on which the College must rely. The plan also attends to local market demands for certain types of training (growth in health care demands and cybersecurity, for example) and projections of national hiring and technology trends that may influence academic offerings at the College (the surge in STEM positions over the past several years). The AMP identifies several impediments to enrollment, progress, graduation and transfer, and articulates practical steps to reduce their impact including changes in course scheduling, embedded classroom support, expansion of the developmental education pilot, and consideration of revenue-generating programs.

In planning for the FY19 collegewide strategic planning process, the AMP's structure allows easy connections among divisions, and acknowledges the necessity of collaborating thoroughly and communicating seamlessly with all College offices. For example, the success of closing the achievement gap depends heavily on support programs in Student Affairs—the most notable being Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES)—and an approach to advising that is “intrusive.” Assessing which of the many student support initiatives at the College are active and measuring their impact on the academic progress of diverse students is a process with deep roots in Student Affairs.

Communicating with Student Affairs about any academic changes on the horizon is an essential dynamic—changes in class scheduling, testing, and meta-majors, among others. These changes will impact how Student Affairs counselors advise students, an essential element of the guided pathways model. The addition of academic advising that takes place within academic departments is another effort that can benefit students with increasingly specialized input into their



course planning from faculty in the field. The expansion of academic advising will be successful through deliberate collaboration with Student Affairs.

Strategies aimed at increasing recruitment also require close coordination between Academic Affairs and Students Affairs, as well as decisions about changes to developmental education. You will recall that the College's recent pilot placement program showed that many students were being under-placed by the Accuplacer exam and could actually be successful in credit-bearing classes at the College. As the College works to make its student body more diverse and its classrooms more inclusive, academic challenges may arise that require planning for new spaces (collaboration with the Office of Facilities), new faculty training (collaboration with Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management), or increased scholarship funding (collaboration with the Advancement and Community Engagement Division and the Montgomery College Foundation). On the information technology front, close planning with Academic Affairs allows the Office of Information Technology to select the software and systems that optimize several types of digital interactions: students with counselors, counselors with faculty, faculty with students, and MC systems with external partners such as MCPS and the Universities at Shady Grove. Planning for such choices requires collaboration that is meticulous as the Office of Information Technology learns precisely what digital interactions are envisioned by Academic Affairs, and Academic Affairs learns the capacities and limitations of different systems. Detailed input from Student Affairs is also vital since much of its staff is on the front lines of interacting with the most vulnerable students.

The inclusion of all of these groups in the AMP planning process means that the Academic Affairs team has already held detailed conversations centered on most of these topics. Collaborating with the newly formed Office of Equity and Inclusion should strengthen the Academic Affairs plan even further, as it delves more deeply into cultural and structural barriers to student success.

The Academic Master Plan articulates a series of initiatives through 2021 that aim to accomplish several measurable goals: increased rates of graduation and transfer, reduced time and cost to completion, and better alignment with transfer institutions and industries. Each of these initiatives requires targeted partnering with units closely involved in implementation, and, thus, careful consideration by *their* internal planning units. For example, embedded classroom support will rely on help from the Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management and Student Affairs to provide support from tutors, librarians, student learning assistants, and community volunteers,



who can work in the classroom to aid teachers. Long range planning for such personnel is required to make it a reality. Similarly, offering alternative scheduling and delivery of instruction in the evenings and weekends necessitates specialized scheduling, which may require new technology, as well as communication with faculty and staff.

Placing students more accurately in credit classes when appropriate and assessing them for prior learning will rely heavily on the Office of Information Technology, Student Affairs, and Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management, for technology and personnel. Customizing credentials will incorporate processes that need input from Office of Information Technology, Student Affairs, and Administrative and Fiscal Services. The design and implementation of guided academic pathways will call on personnel and expertise from almost all divisions as the structure of academic planning becomes more comprehensive—and collaborative. Enhancing student pathways from MCPS and to USG with earlier communication with high school students and earlier assessment of their college-readiness will be ventures driven by personnel who mentor and instruct students (Student Affairs and Academic Affairs); software that can securely share academic records (Office of Information Technology and Student Affairs) will be needed; and funding of scholarships for students in need may rise (Office of Advancement and Community Engagement). Finally, as the College works to expand its local and international partnerships in order to align more closely with industry, it will rely on the outreach and planning of Office of Advancement and Community Engagement in collaboration with Academic Affairs to build relationships and attract additional resources. Throughout all of these initiatives, the infusion of equity and inclusion will need to be given increased attention, with implementation of any new strategies from the work of the newly formed Office of Equity and Inclusion.

As you can see, there is a healthy symbiosis between the Academic Master Plan and the work of all the divisions at the College. The AMP provides a vision for academic growth within the boundaries of fiscal sustainability, accountability, and community service, but it is dependent upon the rest of the College to accomplish these goals. The expertise of the many supporting employees of the College—all with deep commitment to students—is vital to the success of the AMP. And given the scope of this plan, its aims will drive the development of other key College master plans, and will play a central role in development of the next Montgomery College strategic plan. With clear goals and focused efforts, we *will* increase success for all students.

