



# President's **FOCUS**

## *Monthly Report to the Board*

September 2017

### **Integrated Strategic Planning: Planning to Plan**

The *Montgomery College 2020* plan has played a central and invaluable role in the College's work since its adoption in 2012. Its vision has helped the institution to build an architecture that empowers students to achieve their goals and serves the community. We created ambitious goals for the institution and for our faculty, staff, and students, and have worked to support them in meaningful ways. Guided by this plan, we have achieved some extraordinary accomplishments.

But *Montgomery College 2020* is nearing its end. It's time to begin thinking about our next strategic plan. We will develop the next plan in earnest during fiscal year 2019, and we will spend this current year, FY18, planning how we will plan. The timing is purposeful in order to dovetail with the Board of Trustees' Envisioning the Future effort begun in FY17 when trustees identified three major goals for the College: educational excellence, fiscal sustainability, and community engagement.

The Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) recommends a model it calls integrated planning, one that involves every aspect of the institution in a deliberate and open fashion. According to SCUP authors James Young and Margaret Baker, "Institutions that adopt integrated planning can better navigate complex operating environments, bridge disparate and insular institutional subcultures, and combat the structurally baked-in resistance to change so common in higher education." That sounds like helpful advice for an institution as large as ours, where the



complexities of operations can inadvertently create silos. As each division dives deeply into its own work, it can be easy to lose sight of the collaborations that are needed to maximize the progress of the larger body.

Young and Baker write that essential strategies in developing an integrated plan include balancing creativity and discipline, connecting choices to underlying values, developing planners across the institution, and bridging pragmatism and ambition to foster sound implementation.

Three important priorities have emerged from our careful attention to the successes and challenges of *Montgomery College 2020*. Specifically, they are (1) making data easily accessible, (2) creating a comprehensive calendar of planning processes, and (3) assuring that planning is transparent and integrative. By sharing data sets, synchronizing our planning across the institution, and creating more transparency in decision-making, I believe that the College will be able to accelerate progress towards our goals. Working collaboratively on budget decisions with accurate, common data and clear lines of authority will increase our efficacy as an organization. So, how do we get to that point?

I appointed a collegewide group of planning leaders to an integrated planning group in August 2017 to review our efforts and practices and prepare the College for the next strategic planning process. This group will plan to plan, and do so with an integrative vision.

Creating systems for the release of data at certain times, as well as access to shared data sets, should create consistency across the College. Improved training of faculty and staff around this is vital, and our E-learning and Innovative Teaching Excellence (ELITE) will be active in the process. The group will also push for alignment among priorities and themes so that decision makers—particularly senior leaders—are all speaking the same language. Leaders will be asked to create a framework for decision-making, so that their processes are systematic and consistent. Ultimately, all of these changes will improve our budgeting process, and make it easier to align expenses more closely with priorities.

Developing a comprehensive calendar of all the planning processes at the College is also in the beginning stages. Some cycles are mandated by law or the budget process; for example, the state requires a capital budget and Facilities Master Plan. Several offices have developed master plans or are in the process of developing them—for example, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Information Technology, Community Engagement, and Equity and Inclusion. These master plans



will form the foundation for the strategic plan. Synchronizing planning dates with regard to the various master plans will help develop a stronger planning “rhythm.”

Once a comprehensive calendar has been established, divisions will be able to collaborate on shared priorities and share information that impacts budgeting decisions. One of the goals of such coordination is to help us to identify priorities that are going to have the biggest impact, ensure that they are not duplicative, and highlight areas for increased budget efficiencies.

As the College works toward a transparent, integrative planning process, an important goal is to provide clarity about who makes decisions: when, how, and why. By making these processes transparent, it is easier for members of the College community to influence the planning process more effectively. Such accessibility is important, for example, if a major decision is envisioned—a decision to change an academic program or to construct a new building. Each of these takes years of lead time and has impacts within the College, with the local community, and with the College’s state and local funders.

A factor that will serve such decision-making is the significant strides made by the College in the past several years towards creating an evidence-based culture. The creation of the Student Success Score Card has encouraged a new awareness of our graduation and transfer rates, as well as the leading indicators that influence those rates. New attention has been drawn to the achievement gaps that persist, motivating further innovation in our classrooms. MC’s senior leadership has worked to encourage this attention by referring frequently to the Score Card as a barometer of our success in serving students. Our leaders have also drawn attention to external bodies that regularly use College data to assess our value and justify their investment in our programs. Over the summer, I encouraged faculty and staff to read the Office of Legislative Oversight’s report entitled, *Montgomery College Metrics*, which made specific requests for even more data about student success and College spending. It is an annual practice of mine during advocacy season to use metrics around the College’s contributions to the local workforce and economy to justify the county’s continued investment in our programs. Fortunately, our work with Achieving the Dream (ATD) has trained more College personnel in the collection and use of data for program analysis. This year our ATD Data Team will be producing a “Metric of the Month” publication, which will be distributed to the College community and included my *Monthly Outlook* reports to the board.



By attending to these three elements—data, calendar, and transparency—the College will create a more integrated system for assessment and decision-making. This systematization of operational functions should free up more time and attention for strategic ones, which should, in turn, increase student success.

This year's *President's Focus* reports will focus on the planning that has been going on across the College, both in our divisions—Academic Affairs, Administrative and Fiscal Services, Advancement and Community Engagement, Student Affairs, and Office of the President—and in areas within the divisions, such as Information Technology, Equity and Inclusion, Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management. Each of these fields has been engaged in creating its own master plan. These will serve the College in providing a roadmap for the future and in integrating our planning processes to reflect the board's goals of educational excellence, fiscal sustainability, and community engagement. Furthermore, the launching of the strategic planning process will coincide with the conclusion of the College's reaccreditation process. Lessons learned through our Self-Study, team visit, and Middle States Commission action can be incorporated into the next strategic plan. The timeline in Figure 1 demonstrates how these various pieces fit together on a monthly schedule (where JFM... stand for January, February, March...). The end result will be more thorough, more collaborative, and more strategic work towards our shared vision for Montgomery College students and our community.



**Figure 1.** Timeline of development and implementation of new strategic plan.

