From: The President
To: MC Communications List
Subject: Montgomery College"s Unifying Model for Participatory Governance
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MONTGOMERY COLLEGE
Office of the President

March 2, 2012

MEMORANDUM

To: Montgomery College Colleagues

From: Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard, President

Subject: Montgomery College's Unifying Model for Participatory Governance

As the Task Force on Governance (TFG) approaches the conclusion of its work in designing a new governance system for Montgomery College, I want to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the group and to address some concerns that have recently been raised.

Historic Context

Institutions of higher education are unique in that they have a tradition of stakeholder involvement in planning and making decisions, which does not exist in organizations where decisions are made by a small number of leaders. This tradition of involvement has been honored at Montgomery College for many years and through many administrations.

Involvement has taken different forms, such as faculty and staff senates, faculty councils, student governments, and most recently, Academic Assembly. For full-time faculty members, the focus has always been on academics; national faculty professional organizations recommend that faculty have the leadership role in academic matters such as curriculum, methods of instruction, and determination of degree requirements. At Montgomery College, full-time faculty members do indeed exercise this type of academic leadership.

The formation of the Academic Assembly at Montgomery College in the 1990s represented an important turning point in the College's governance philosophy, in that it brought multiple constituencies together, all committed to collaborate in a constructive manner. The assembly consists of 15 full-time faculty members, one staff member, one representative from Workforce Development & Continuing Education, and four administrators.

When the Board of Trustees enacted Policy 11004, Governance, in 2010, it established—for the first time in College history—a policy statement that speaks to the value the board places on collaboration, communication, and inclusion. This policy also aligns with the leadership and governance standard of our accrediting body, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Middle States addresses the importance of institutions having a governance system in which "decision-makers and goal-setters consider information from all relevant constituencies."

Creation of the Task Force on Governance, Its Charges

Montgomery College is a large institution with many constituencies that operate somewhat independently, without connecting or, in some cases, not even participating within the existing governance system. As the president is charged with implementing policies, I established, in early 2011, a comprehensive task force of full-time faculty, part-time faculty, students, staff, and administrators, and charged the group with achieving the following goals:

1. Examine the existing system of governance at the College and develop a set of recommendations for restructuring it into a system that it is inclusive and participatory.
2. Develop a set of procedures that is in support of and consistent with board policy, and can also be used as guidelines for implementing the restructured system.
3. Identify a set of criteria that could be used to assess the effectiveness of the system.

TFG members were tasked with communicating regularly and widely with members of their own constituent groups. Broad feedback has been sought, and many suggestions for improvements have been incorporated into the constitution and bylaws.

The result of this collegewide, collaborative, and cross-constituency effort is the development of a governance system that will bring every constituency to the table. It is the natural evolution of a vision established at the founding of the Academic Assembly, and it actually creates broader collaboration mechanisms that recognize all constituencies and give voice to all.

Those matters that have long been the purview of full-time faculty will remain so. In addition, the new governance system creates another venue to disseminate, discuss, and debate key issues related to operating the College. The system also allows for the building of consensus within individual constituency, campus, and functional councils, and then ultimately within the College Council.

Concerns Expressed—Their Relation to Policy, Procedure, and Other Guiding Documents

Recently, it has been suggested that full-time faculty should hold a vote on the new governance system. On that point, I disagree. While it is true that the Academic Assembly constitution provided for such a process, the constitution is not the determining document in this matter, and is, in fact, not in alignment with College policy. All College organizational constitutions and bylaws are first subject to policies and procedures, and must be “in consonance” with them, according to 24002CP, Organization Functions, in the Policies & Procedures Manual (P&P). The constitution is in the appendix of the P&P, but it is a supplement, being neither a policy nor a procedure.

Furthermore, a vote by one constituency regarding a system for all constituencies would not be fair. The role of the TFG was to involve all constituencies in the development process so that the final product would represent a consensus model.

College collective bargaining unit agreements provide additional guidance on the development of a governance system. The College has three collective bargaining agreements, but only one of them contains any language about governance. Specifically, the

College's contract with the American Association of University Professors, which represents the full-time faculty, contains an agreement between the College and the bargaining unit that "Management shall establish, in consultation with faculty members, governance and other procedures…" From the beginning of this process, the College has openly consulted with faculty and all other constituencies during the development of the participatory governance system.

The TFG has developed a governance system through a collaborative process, which involved posting its work frequently, presenting reports at collegewide meetings, attending stakeholder group meetings, seeking feedback, and building consensus at every step along the development path. The result is a flexible system to fully realize the vision expressed in the College policy on governance, and also in national professional organizations, as well as in the Middle States standard on college leadership and governance. It has also been built in accordance with College policy, procedure, and bargaining unit commitments. I am encouraged by this inclusive and participatory approach.

Among other concerns that I have heard is a desire for campus-based faculty groups. The bylaws of the councils in the new governance model allow for standing or ad hoc committees to be created. All councils—constituent councils, campus councils, and functional councils—will be able to form such committees. I understand that a remedy to the faculty concern has been reached in a plan to adapt current campus-based faculty councils to serve as committees associated with the new faculty council. In addition, the campus faculty committees will broaden their ranks to include part-time faculty members. This configuration will provide for a network of faculty groups that will not dilute, but concentrate the faculty voice.

Means of Evaluation and Next Steps

The members of the TFG spent valuable time researching governance both externally and internally. A survey was also conducted to learn what is being done at other colleges. As a result, the TFG took a good look at the many committees and groups around Montgomery College and worked diligently to bring them all to the table as representatives to a College Council. This structure is a solid foundation for an open, functional, participatory structure, which assures that each group at the College has a voice.

But it is just that—a foundation. Our new governance system will serve as a basis for open, participatory conversations and advice. And it is meant to be dynamic. I was very specific about an evaluation process, and a mechanism for improving the structure based on feedback from the College community.

I value the communication and guidance from the Academic Assembly and other advisory groups at the College. This new structure will enhance that communication and make room for more lateral communication between and among essential College groups.

Join me in the upcoming nomination and election process over the next month. And then, be an active participant in the new governance system. I know that the institution will benefit and prosper from our individual voices and our collective wisdom.