

PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

December 2011





As we near the end of 2011, I asked College leaders to reflect on some of the unexpected challenges faced by our faculty and staff this semester. Certainly we all face challenges, but what is most telling is how we choose to handle them.

There was one common refrain: Finding adequate space for our programs is difficult. For solutions, our faculty and staff have turned to creative scheduling, hybrid classes, locating new spaces, and working closely with our facilities and IT offices to renovate existing space for more effective use. Behind every example was a genuine commitment to our mission of access, ensuring as many students as possible can enroll in the classes they need.

What is equally heartening is the College community's commitment to ensuring success for our students. When the natural sciences faculty and staff at the Germantown Campus encountered underprepared students, they rolled up their sleeves. Working with the Science Learning Center staff, they prepared a handout, "How to study so you get stuck less often." The learning center staff members are developing video tutorials that will help students study for science courses, and they are providing intense guidance in how to read for content and understanding. Faculty members are collaborating and adapting their teaching styles to find new ways to engage more students in and out of the classroom. For example, Dr. Meg Birney is proposing to link her biology class with a study skills class, which will permit a counselor to identify students who lack necessary study skills and to provide intervention. In addition, the academic history and placement of our students is currently being examined, including discussions with high school science teachers about preparation for college-level courses.

Challenged by the need to increase retention and speed up the time it takes to move students toward completion, the English discipline at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus is working hard to realign composition courses, from developmental to transfer courses. Part of this realignment will include proposals to help accelerate progress into credit-level courses, while making sure that students maintain College standards. Collaboration with the Writing, Reading, and Language Center is deemed essential to this effort.

The Rockville Campus has seen an increase in the number of students needing disability support services. To support instructional faculty and to be more inclusive of all students with disabilities, the College Access Program is refocusing resources and shifting from a classroom-based program for students with specific learning disabilities to an academic support program, which can provide services to more students with disabilities.

What impresses me is the desire to tightly couple academic coursework with essential support services, from disability support services to the learning centers. As one campus shared, "Managing this challenge is a huge collaborative undertaking that requires teamwork, creativity, a willingness to take risks, and openness to new ways of doing things."

I could not have said it better myself. As a next step, I am eager to learn how our challenges have become opportunities that we can replicate across the entire College to create the most relevant community college in the country.

Board Discussion Questions

1. How do you find your efforts to overcome challenges improved by working with others?
2. As we move into 2012, what challenges do you see in the future for Montgomery College?

Addressing the Academic Needs of our Student

In general, older students who are returning to college lack the knowledge and skills needed to fully benefit from twenty-first century educational practices that rely heavily on electronic resources. In the spring, the Rockville Campus Office of Student Support Services will offer a technology workshop for these students.

Community colleges are contacting the College to learn more about the course redesign of developmental math. The College Developmental Math Task Force, the College community—Facilities, Information Technology (IT), Admissions and Enrollment Management (AEM), and Student Development—collaboratively addressed the many issues that had to be resolved prior to collegewide implementation of Mathematics Prep (MA 094). In addition to shortening the path for developmental math students, these efforts may shorten the path to implementation for other institutions.

Challenged by the need to rethink how to increase retention and speed up the time it takes to move students towards completion, the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus English discipline is working hard to realign composition courses, from developmental to the transfer courses EN102/109. Part of this realignment will include proposals to help accelerate our students' progress into credit-level courses, while making sure that students maintain College standards.

Maximizing Classroom Space

Increased enrollment and the shortage of classroom, office, meeting, and student activity space are the dominant challenges at the Rockville Campus. Specifically, there are too few large and medium-sized gathering spaces on campus. The campus addresses this through increasingly creative scheduling and course revisions (for example, hybrid classes, which combine on-campus with online components). Additionally, when appropriate, new spaces will be incorporated into design plans for new and renovated buildings. Opportunities for larger space may be possible with the new student services complex.

The demand for grant-funded training in the Adult English Language and GED program continues to increase based on county demographics. As a result, a classroom shortage has occurred at high-demand times among the existing locations. With an adjoining vacant space at the Westfield location, the College annexed the office space and moved office functions from two classrooms into the new office areas. Two additional classrooms increased capacity by 20 percent to support the expanded grant-delivery expectations.

High enrollments and limited classrooms continue to be a challenge for the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus. Courses in the major science branches (biology, chemistry, and physics) are examining new ways to keep up with the demand in the absence of additional laboratory space. Biology is offering more blended courses, especially in program-supporting courses such as Human Anatomy and Physiology I and II. Chemistry is experimenting with larger class sizes and the revision of course times to better utilize existing lab space. Ongoing discussions to move the Science Learning Center (SLC) out of Science North and into P4, once the Refugee Training Center moves into the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Arts Center, are aimed at expanding the SLC facility, which supports the educational needs of over 2,000 science students.



Plans are to renovate the rooms currently occupied by the SLC into two additional biology labs, temporarily easing space constraints.

This fall, the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences area had many more students than seats in the weeks approaching the start of the semester. Art and Communications led the list of departments needing to make fast and creative adjustments to meet student demand. Chairs, faculty, and our campus scheduler responded to this challenge by collaboratively finding space; adjusting course caps, schedules, and times; and utilizing waitlists to open roughly a dozen sections, including offerings in AR 101, SP 108, and late-start offerings in American English Language and World Languages. The success of these efforts demonstrates the commitment of all to MC's philosophy of access and service to our community.

Meeting the Needs of Unique Student Populations

New National Junior College Athletic Association rules prohibit students at multi-campus community colleges from crossing campuses to play intercollegiate sports. For the 2012–13 season, in every sport sponsored by the College, there will only be one collegewide Montgomery College men's team and one Montgomery College women's team, where appropriate. Before deciding on where teams will reside, the athletics reinvention effort has involved surveys of and forums with the College community.

The College's Student Development areas have seen an increase in mental health issues in students. Departments have responded by providing Mental Health for First Aid Training for all full-time counselors, by continuing to improve the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) process and referrals, and by seeking a stronger connection with the Crisis Center. On November 17, BIT invited Jean Burgess from the Montgomery County Crisis Center to speak about their services and how the Crisis Center and the College can work together.

Finding Financial Support

Tough economic times continue to mean a hardship for students and employers. In response, the College has provided additional Workforce Development & Continuing Education (WD&CE) scholarship funds this year to students who apply to the WD&CE programs and demonstrate financial need. Additionally, employers wishing to underwrite business training have been referred to the City of Gaithersburg Economic Development Toolbox program, as well as the Maryland Business Works training fund, that underwrites incumbent worker training.

Meeting the Technical Needs of our Students

Workforce Development & Continuing Education has also made significant strides in streamlining the online registration process for its noncredit classes through a collaborative partnership with the Office of Information Technology and the noncredit student registration unit. A vendor provided solutions to address the unique client requirements of a typical "shopping cart" experience that many comparable continuing education providers use. Two WD&CE discipline areas will pilot this online registration format this spring.

