PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT

Chapter 5
Assessment Processes and Plans

Organized and Sustained Processes to Assess Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning

Since the last self-study, Montgomery College has continued to institutionalize the culture of assessment. The conscious inclusion of assessment ranges from the College mission to the analysis of student learning outcomes in individual courses. As an example, Montgomery College's new strategic plan, *Montgomery College 2020*, has integrated carefully articulated strategic themes and their planned assessment. The five themes that comprise the MC 2020 strategic plan derive directly from the core mission elements, allowing the College to assess both strategic theme attainment and mission success. Each theme in the plan has its own set of institutional-level key indicators of progress tied directly to measuring achievement of the theme. As part of the College Area Review (CAR) process, all academic areas and administrative units are asked to match their recommendations to these themes. These will serve as the overall institutional measures of success (see chapter 6 for a thorough discussion of strategic themes and indicators).

Assessment initiatives at Montgomery College ensure that assessment practices reach every corner of the institution. The CAR process is systematic, comprehensive, and on-going. This self-evaluative process is planned, useful, organized, and inclusive of all academic areas and administrative units at the College (see Appendix. 5.1, College Area Review Ten Year Overview Report). The process engages administrators, vice presidents and provosts, deans, faculty, staff, and students. In addition, the College Area Review Committee, consisting of 20 college stakeholders, serves as a cross-sectional review team to the CAR process. The Outcomes Assessment process, which specifically addresses student learning outcomes, is coordinated by a faculty-led team, the Collegewide Outcomes Assessment Team (COAT), which works to ensure that courses and programs are assessed appropriately and monitored for improvements to teaching and learning. The primary goal of this process is to ensure assessment practices yield both institutional and student learning improvements that align with the College's mission and resources.

Collegial suggestions for improvement from the visiting team in 2008 in the area of assessment have been taken into account in developing and refining institutional processes and practices. Internal feedback and suggestions are gathered yearly to further refine and adjust these processes to ensure that they are effective and reasonable. As situations and College mandates change, there is still work to be done.

Developments Specific to Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment) Since 2008

In terms of institutional assessment, the team report in 2008 concluded that Montgomery College demonstrated characteristics of "an institution moving toward developing a culture of assessment that is consistent with the essence of Standard 7." Institutional assessment at Montgomery College is integrated in the CAR process, which began in the 2002–03 academic year reviewing all academic areas, special programs, and student services. In 2007, the process expanded to include all administrative units. That effort continues and assessment has become an essential component of initiatives across the institution. Collegewide standing committees are discussing ways of including self-assessment as an integral part of their activities. As an example, see the initial charge for the Task Force on Governance in chapter 2.

The CAR process continues to solicit involvement from all College stakeholders as well as a review of institutional data. For the academic areas, key benchmark data regarding faculty/student ratios, full-time/part-time faculty ratios, faculty release time, student enrollments, program awards, and transfer summaries are provided to each discipline. The review process includes the examination of academic areas' curricula, assessment activities, licensure, articulation agreements, advisory committees, enrollment in courses and degrees, faculty needs, and the strengths and opportunities of each discipline. All administrative units are asked to engage in self-assessment to determine the alignment of their unit's goals, mission, and functions with the College's mission and goals. Administrative units also examine the strengths, challenges, and opportunities, determine the resources needed to function as a unit, and provide benchmarks for unit

effectiveness (see Appendix 5.2, College Area Review Administrative Area Review Report). At the conclusion of each academic and administrative review, recommendations for improvements are approved and implemented within a five-year review cycle.

Regular reviews have resulted in the implementation of recommendations that have led to institutional improvements and enhanced student learning. Examples of implemented recommendations include the Math Redesign Project, the College Printing Cost Initiative, and the alignment of the American English Language Program with Workforce Development & Continuing Education offerings. Appendix 5.3 provides the College Area Review Master Plan, showing the collegewide schedule for all academic and administrative units. Highlights of College Area Review implemented recommendations by year are available in Appendix 5.4. On the CAR website, a full description of the CAR process is available for the general public, and the recommendations for academic areas and administrative units are available to the College community on a secure site that can be reached from the CAR website.

Current Practices/Ongoing Initiatives—Processes and Findings

Since 2008, there has been a greater emphasis on the review of the data to generate improved assessments of academic areas and administrative units that permit the areas and units to link new and ongoing initiatives to objective information. Summary data reports are provided to all academic units. The administrative units are asked to submit assessment benchmarks and measures of unit effectiveness. The College has also initiated a customer service feedback survey to assess the effectiveness of administrative units. Academic areas and administrative units are encouraged to limit the number of recommendations to those that are of the highest priority, that are measurable, and that can be implemented within the given five-year period. Greater emphasis is placed on monitoring all recommendations to completion, and yearly status updates are requested. Starting in 2012, updates have been entered into MC's assessment database.

CAR student participation continues via the CAR Student Course survey. From fall 2005 to fall 2010, more than 24,000 students have had the opportunity to participate in the College Area Review process by commenting on the course content of selected courses as it relates to general education competencies. Although student response rates have not exceeded 20 percent over the five-year period, faculty have reported that the students' perspective provides information about their concerns. CAR survey results are available in Appendix 5.5, College Area Review Student Survey Results.

In order to further assess institutional effectiveness, the College administers the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) every two years and results are shared with the College community. Results from the 2010 CCSSE formed the backbone of data for the College's Common Student Experience Taskforce that met during the 2011-12 academic year. A copy of the final recommendations from the task force is attached as Appendix 5.6, Recommendations for Montgomery College's 7 Truths for a Common Student Experience. In addition, Montgomery College participated in the pilot of the Voluntary Framework for Accountability administered by the American Association of Community Colleges, which is developing common assessment measures unique to community colleges.

In 2010, the CAR Summary Report became a part of the CAR process. This report documents the final disposition of a particular academic area based on the comprehensive review of discipline reports and related institutional data. In 2012-13, this report is being further modified, and the CAR process plans to recognize disciplines that meet certain key criteria for their outstanding compliance.

Both CAR and OA are working on better aligning all assessment processes and ensuring the congruence with strategic and educational plans. Montgomery College has shifted its focus on student learning outcomes from course outcomes to program outcomes. This shift has created a greater opportunity for CAR and OA to work together. Starting with the 2011-12 review cycle, discipline faculty, deans, and other college staff participating in the CAR process have addressed the alignment of course and program outcomes by completing curriculum mapping matrices. The full program assessment is conducted by the faculty and coordinated by the Collegewide Outcomes Assessment Team and is discussed below as part of the assessment of student learning.

Developments Specific to Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning) Since 2008

Course Assessment

Montgomery College has made significant progress in building a culture of assessment around student learning. Originally, the College's efforts for the assessment of student learning were focused on courses with the largest collegewide enrollments. The rationale was that strengthening and improving these courses would provide Montgomery College with the greatest return on investment on resources allocated to assessment. The initial centralization of assessment efforts was deemed necessary because learning expectations varied widely from instructor to instructor, a fact that was and is compounded by the College's multi-campus structure and large number of full- and part-time faculty. The strong need for consistent academic experiences led to the formal articulation of collegewide common course outcomes applicable to all sections regardless of the place, time, and mode of delivery.

From 2008 until 2011, each highly enrolled course had a workgroup appointed by the lead dean that followed a four-semester cycle where planning, piloting, full implementation, and recommendations each took a full fall or spring semester. Each course workgroup was assigned a faculty cadre member to be the contact with the COAT. Recommendations had to be specific and measurable and tied to the results of the assessment and the course outcomes. After completing recommendations, course workgroups annually updated the Outcomes Assessment team on the status of the recommendations. Many disciplines report continuing to use the common course assessments created through this initial process. Starting in the fall 2011 semester, the cycle was shortened to a three-semester process by eliminating the piloting semester. In total, 55 courses participated in Outcomes Assessment from 2008 to 2012.

In addition, the college regularly reports to the Maryland Higher Education Commission via the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report (SLOAR). For the most recent SLOAR from June 2011, see Appendix 5.7.

The structure of the COAT has been an important part of the success of the assessment of student learning at the College. Under the direction of the vice president for planning and institutional effectiveness (VPPIE), the COAT has remained a faculty-led body with one or two faculty coordinators supported by a faculty cadre drawn from multiple disciplines, members of the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, and staff from the VPPIE's office. At the time of the *2008 Montgomery College Self-Study*, the COAT had designated administrative support which it shared with the College governance groups until the position was vacated. Lack of administrative support for the Outcome Assessment process has hampered efforts to expand and grow. In addition, assessment processes continue to be challenged by recent limitations on funding for technology needs, such as the adoption of an e-portfolio system, as well as for technical and staffing support and external peer reviews. The College has created a position for a director of student learning outcomes assessment, but due to an unsuccessful search the position remains unfilled. Once filled, this position will still be supported by a team of faculty, staff, and administrators who will advise and help lead outcomes assessment efforts.

Current Practices/Ongoing Initiatives—Processes and Findings

All course syllabi at the College are required to list both student learning outcomes and general education competencies as applicable. For distance education courses, the Office of Distance Education and Learning Technologies has adopted the Quality Matters peer review process to assure the quality of all online offerings at Montgomery College. All student learning outcomes and the assessment of these outcomes are identical regardless of the modality of the offering and are monitored by the academic departments.

As the College shifted its focus and resources to the assessment of programs and general education competencies, the previous assessment process of focusing solely on high enrollment classes ceased at the end of the 2011-12 academic year. These courses now participate in outcomes assessment as general education courses or as courses that support program outcomes.

Program Assessment

A process to move beyond the assessment of individual courses to the assessment of programs was already underway at the time of the June 2011 visit from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education liaison. One of the tasks for the College community following the self-study was to move toward establishing systemic program assessment. The first necessary step was to ensure that learning outcomes were appropriately articulated for all degrees, certificates, and letters of recognition. This task is complete. These program outcomes are shared widely, most notably being published alongside each degree, certificate, and letter of recognition in the college catalog.

One area of concern is the need to expand program assessment to encompass other academic areas that do not offer degrees, or in which a degree is not the objective. Some programs are easily identified and assessed, such as developmental education and the American English Language Program. These areas are already captured as special programs by the CAR process and will work with the COAT to establish measurable program outcomes and assessment plans going forward.

During the 2010-11 academic year, all disciplines offering degrees, certificates, and letters of recognition were asked to complete a mapping of program outcomes to the courses in the programs. Over 90 percent of the program mappings have been completed to date. As part of the revamped CAR process, workgroups are tasked with completing a more detailed alignment of course outcomes with program outcomes.

After completing this alignment, the faculty in the disciplines work with the COAT to create and implement an assessment plan for their program outcomes and collect data on outcomes in subsequent years. The discipline will create recommendations based on their data and implement them before they come up again in the five-year CAR cycle. This will be the same process followed by programs that do not lead to a credential or degree, with their first step being the creation and approval of program outcomes. This structure maintains the distinct identities of the CAR and OA processes while allowing them to work in tandem on a common cycle. Appendix 5.8 contains a sample of the program and course matrix.

Even without the formalized process in place, assessment of programs has been happening at Montgomery College. As an example, as part of the CAR for the math discipline, a taskforce was created and charged with assessing the developmental mathematics program. This taskforce used data and research on best practices to make recommendations back to the math discipline, which then implemented the recommendations, significantly changing the developmental program. Now, the program is reviewed annually and recommendations for further improvement are made to the math discipline (see Appendix 3.16, The Developmental Math Task Force: Outcomes and Evaluation, referenced in chapter 3).

General Education Assessment

A concern expressed in the self-study referenced the assessment of the general education program. The general education core is comprised of five competencies and two areas of proficiency. The courses are split into four foundation areas and four distribution areas. The Montgomery College general education program is outlined on the website at http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/gened and is in full compliance with the Maryland Higher Education Commission's requirements for general education and with the Code of Maryland regulations specific to general education in Maryland's post-secondary institutions. The program also meets the fundamental elements outlined in Standard 12 in the *Characteristics of Excellence.*

Since the self-study, the College has undergone a review of its general education program and discipline faculty applied to have courses reviewed in order to receive general education status. In the application process, the faculty were asked to identify the two competencies (or one competency and one area of proficiency) primary to each course. After the information was collected from the application process, it was found that two competencies, information literacy and technological competency, were underrepresented. Therefore, in the fall of 2011, a new survey was conducted in which faculty responsible for each general education course were asked to identify to what extent each of the five general education competencies and

two areas of proficiency were integrated into the curriculum of the course and whether they were assessed in the course.

As a result of the fall 2011 General Education Survey, each area has been assigned four competencies that must be taught and assessed in all courses in that area (see Appendix 5.9 for a listing of the competencies by foundation/distribution area). As reported to Middle States in the March 2012 Progress Report, a sustainable approach to general education assessment is now in place and is fully articulated.

Until 2010, general education courses that participated in the outcomes assessment cycle created their own assessment of at least one general education competency. Most courses chose to assess critical analysis and reasoning as their general education competency. Faculty and administrators overseeing assessment and general education were concerned about the lack of consistent standards for this competency and how it could be assessed. Therefore, the outcomes assessment team has worked with faculty teaching general education courses to create collegewide rubrics for all five general education competencies based on the American Association of Colleges and Universities value rubrics. The rubrics for written and oral communication and critical analysis and reasoning were piloted in fall 2011, with a collection of 10 courses that had originally identified these two competencies to be the primary competencies. All future assessments of general education competencies and areas of proficiencies will be required to use these rubrics. Faculty workgroups will have the flexibility to determine how to apply the rubrics to their assessments, but everyone will be using the same categories and measures. Montgomery College's general education rubrics can be found at the outcomes area of the General Education website.

The COAT and the General Education Committee (GEC) were tasked with creating an assessment plan by which Montgomery College could assess all general education competencies and courses and, at the same time, create a review process by which general education courses would undergo periodic review. As of the spring 2012 semester, College constituencies have agreed on a revised assessment plan and data collection process that would ensure all students receive exposure to and have multiple opportunities to practice the general education competencies. Data collection in all foundation areas under the new plan, as well as in the arts distribution areas, began in fall 2012. The data collected is tied to individual students so that the College can perform a detailed analysis. In particular, it is hoped that analysis of each of the competencies by the number of general education credits taken will reveal that students who are further along in the program will have greater success than those just beginning. In the spring of 2013, the COAT initiated a calibration and reliability study using student artifacts from the fall 2012 general education assessments.

With the dissolution of the GEC in the summer of 2012, the task of creating a review cycle now falls to the Collegewide Curriculum Committee. This change has also generated collaboration between the curriculum committee and the outcomes assessment team to align current initiatives.

Professional Development and Assessment

In-house professional development for faculty at Montgomery College is handled by the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The COAT and CTL have a close relationship, with members of the COAT serving in advisory roles for CTL on all three campuses. See the CTL website for offerings, including the new faculty professional development program. In January of 2013, an Assessment and Learning Marketplace was held that gave faculty and staff across the College the opportunity to share assessment practices, materials, and results to highlight current assessment activities and enhance Montgomery College's culture of assessment.

External professional development has been limited by budgetary limitations; however, the College has recognized a need for professional development in the area of assessment and has paid for webinars and sent a larger contingent to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education annual meeting in December 2011. Additionally, a group of faculty and administrators working on general education assessment attended the February 2012 American Association of Colleges and Universities conference on general education assessment. Furthermore, the community colleges in the state of Maryland have created an affinity group of assessment personnel, and Montgomery College has been an eager participant in these groups as well as in statewide completion summits.

Workforce Development & Continuing Education

The Workforce Development & Continuing Education (WD&CE) unit participates in the College Area Review process, which includes a review of student and program outcomes. Course offerings and activities are evaluated, and adjustments are made to program, curriculum, and related activities by faculty, program directors, and/or program staff as a result of recommendations stemming from the review and evaluations.

Some programs offered through WD&CE, such as CPR and Microsoft certifications, use certification-yielding instruments for the assessment of the program. Ongoing guidance, resources, and support for these assessments are available from the external certifying agencies. In other WD&CE programs, assessments are used as instruments for student placement, pre-testing, targeted instruction, and to document student course progression and completion. Some examples include the use of CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems) Employability tests, which are used as a pre-test in the Entry Health Sciences Career Training programs, including the areas of EKG, dialysis, phlebotomy tech, pharmacy tech, physical therapy and occupational therapy tech. CASAS listening, reading, and math tests are also used for student placement, progression, and completion in the Adult English for Speakers of Other Languages & Literacy - GED (AELG) Program. Programs also employ assessment instruments developed in-house for student placement and for documentation of student learning.

Communication

In 2008, the visiting team suggested that the goals, objectives, and results of assessment be communicated in a manner that can be more fully understood by the entire College community. The institution has made progress in this area. Communication of assessment efforts is periodic and ongoing. Both Outcomes Assessment and the College Area Review (CAR) have robust websites where the broad picture for assessment at the College is available to the public. In addition, each website has a login-restricted section in which any faculty or staff member at the College can see all assessment documentation: CAR reports and recommendations, data information for CAR, outcomes assessment plans, data reports from outcomes assessment projects, and outcomes assessment recommendations. Additionally, regular electronic newsletters are distributed to the College community (see Appendix 5.10 for samples of the CAR and OA Newsletters). Dean and faculty assessment focus group sessions and meetings also serve as a means to communicate MC's assessment practices.

Conclusion

While assessment efforts at Montgomery College have been hampered by a lack of financial and logistical support in difficult budgetary times, it is anticipated that the hiring of a full-time director of assessment with administrative support will alleviate some of the problems. The College will continue to address the need for accountability in all areas of assessment and across all constituencies as assessment practices become further embedded in the institutional culture. Continued collaboration between CAR, OA, the research office, strategic planning, and budgeting is a must. Through the CAR and OA, processes are in place to generate meaningful, measurable recommendations and action items for improvements. As MC moves forward with the assessment agenda, greater focus will be on development and implementation of recommendations and action items for institutional improvements.