

BOARD PERSPECTIVES

New Beginnings

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Introduction

It was a year of new beginnings.

The 2012–2013 academic year marked the beginning of three key initiatives, each of which touches a core aspect of the institution. Together they represent three major forces at work in Montgomery College today: innovation, internal communication, and external influences. Specifically, the initiatives beginning at Montgomery College this year are: the launch of the new strategic plan, the inauguration of a new participatory governance system, and the implementation of the Maryland Dream Act.

In *Montgomery College 2020*, the strategic plan that the Board adopted in June 2012, every member of the College community—employee, student, and trustee—is united in a common vision of the College nearly a decade into the future. The participatory governance system provides councils and channels for every voice to be heard in two-way communication on matters important to the College community. And, the Maryland Dream Act, with its strong statewide support, makes the attainment of a college degree a realistic opportunity for all of our community’s students.

The Board is pleased that the College, the President, faculty members, staff members, administrators, and students have displayed the courage to blaze these new paths this year. We are pleased with the progress of each initiative, though it is not surprising that each also has come with its own growing pains. We salute the College community for its perseverance in staying the course with these and other major needs.

In 2013, no community college can stand still. The landscape on which all higher education institutions operate continues to evolve at a rapid pace. We encounter dramatic changes in federal, state, and local laws and regulations; in accreditation standards and enforcement; in funding streams from state and local governments; in political expectations about student completion; in market options; and, yes, in competition.

Innovative Forces

It was in this environment and with the knowledge of these forces that the College community spent a year researching, contemplating, and developing the vision of our “preferred future” for Montgomery College in 2020 in a new strategic plan. The College community carefully examined these factors and set a bold path forward. The Board was proud to adopt the strategic plan in 2012, and continues to endorse its vision, and support the President and the institution in its implementation.

Internal Forces

It was with great interest that the Board held its constituent conversations this year with elected members of five of the 13 councils in the new governance system—the Student Council, Faculty Council, Staff Council, Administrator Council, and the College Council—with a focus in each case on the strategic plan. The Board heard thoughtful and inspiring reflections, feedback, and ideas about the College’s future from each of these groups.

In an effort to personally witness and interact with the College community, the Board instituted Trustee Information Days this year to provide Board members with opportunities to visit all three campuses and Workforce Development & Continuing Education, meet with faculty, staff,

students, and administrators, and see classes and services in action. We saw pioneering course delivery, experimental classroom configurations, exceptional use of new technologies, as well as creativity in the arts, and many other exciting efforts in instruction and learning. There is no doubt that the innovative spirit has captured the imaginations of many employees across the institution. The President's weekly newsletter and monthly reports to the Board help to educate and inform Board members, and Trustee Information Days helped the subjects of those communications come to life.

The cumulative impact of these communication efforts by and among the President, the Board, and the College community laid the basis for the College to receive recognition this year by the American Association of Community Colleges as one of five finalists deserving national recognition for Exemplary CEO/Board Relations. This is truly a well-deserved recognition for the entire College family.

External Forces

Following a successful referendum in November 2012, the Maryland Dream Act swiftly went into effect one month later and impacted students' registration at the start of this calendar year. This directly affected all community colleges across the state as they worked to comply with many new statewide processes, rules, and forms. The College's extensive efforts to understand these changes internally and to communicate information externally by reaching out to Montgomery County Public Schools, students and their families, and community leaders resulted in an effective implementation of the new law. The College's workshops, web resources, and press conference helped raise community awareness and understanding of the new law.

New Beginnings in 2013–2014

As the College prepares for a new academic year, these three forces will continue to shape our activities in 2013–2014: innovation, internal communications, and external matters.

Innovative Forces

The launching of the ACES program (Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success), a partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools and the Universities at Shady Grove, promises an innovative approach to preparing high school students, especially those in underrepresented groups, for college. The firm foundation built this year with staffing and program development has prepared for ACES coaches to work with hundreds of high school students in the fall.

Another event in the coming year that showcases the College's innovative spirit will be the planned opening of the Holy Cross Germantown Hospital at the Hercules Pinkney Life Sciences Park. This opening will initiate not only new medical services for this area of Montgomery County, but also will begin a new era in the College's academic partnership with the hospital to prepare students with an unparalleled education experience.

Internal Forces

Internal communications will continue to merit attention, as the College is poised to address its Academic Affairs division after a year reflecting on how it can best manifest a One College philosophy or indeed a One College reality. For nearly all of the College's history, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education considered, treated, and accredited each campus of

Montgomery College individually, and our academic structure reflected the expectations that come with separate accreditations. With the change to a single accreditation in 2010, expectations have changed. As a singly accredited institution, Montgomery College must think, look, and—most importantly—act like a single institution. The Board expects the President to implement systems that support student success and completion for Montgomery College as a single entity.

External Forces

Two new laws, one federal and one state, will be implemented in the coming year and both are likely to have profound impacts on the institution. On the federal level, 2014 will be a watershed year for implementation of The Affordable Care Act. The College has been vigilant in preparing for the law, which re-defines “full-time” employees and their access to healthcare benefits. The impacts of the new law may be far reaching with extensive budgetary and operational implications.

Maryland’s enactment of The College Readiness and Completion Act of 2013 also will have a significant impact on the state’s community colleges’ operations and their relationships with both K–12 school systems and universities. We are encouraged that the required individual educational plans will help to guide community college students on the path to completion. We also recognize the tremendous effort required by College employees to implement this and other components of the law. If the law is as effective as its authors believe, the provisions in it could become national models.

Conclusion

The 2012–2013 year was a year of new beginnings. With the environment continuing to exert forces of change on community colleges everywhere, it is likely these beginnings were the first of many beginnings to come.