# MONTHLY OUTLOOK
*A Meeting Preview with Data Insights and Strategic Topics*

**May 7, 2021**

## May Meeting Highlights—What to Expect and Why

Your next meeting takes place on Monday, May 17. Following are major items and topics planned at this time.

***Conference Session.*** A brief conference session will be held to discuss activities related to the 2021 virtual commencement ceremony.

***Report on Single Audit.*** You will convene as the Audit Committee prior to the Board meeting to hear a report of the College's Single Audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, presented by the external auditor, Clifton Larsen Allen, LLP. The Audit Committee is a committee of the whole, chaired by the First Vice Chair. Later, in the Board meeting, you will vote on accepting the audit.

***Board of Trustees Scholars.*** The guest speakers at the public meeting will be the 2021 Board of Trustees' Scholars and Apprenticeship Scholar. Recognized as outstanding students from each campus and from the Workforce Development and Continuing Education program, Board Scholars must maintain a 4.0 GPA and undergo a competitive selection process before being chosen for this prestigious academic award.

***My Monthly Written Report***. This month's written report is a compilation of the COVID topics explored during the year, with an assessment of essential lessons for the College. Higher education has been disrupted, certainly, but such dynamics have opened some new windows of opportunity to which MC will be attuned.

***Supplemental Appropriation Request.*** This request is for approval of a supplemental appropriation request to the Montgomery County Executive and County Council. If approved, this action will increase the FY21 Federal, State, Private Grants, and Contract Fund appropriation by $2.3 million to account for federal and state grants to the College related to COVID-relief.

**The following items are on your consent agenda:**

***Personnel Actions Confirmation Report.*** This is a review of personnel actions taken in March.

***Award of Contract.*** This is a competitively bid contract for ongoing refuse and recycling collection services is needed to maintain clean, attractive campus environments.

***Multiple Awards of Contract.*** This is a competitively bid contract for continued infrastructure support to be provided by multiple vendors and is needed for support of the collegewide enterprise network, academic applications, and telecommunications.

## Data Asset Management

The College is focused on building a culture of evidence and inquiry among our employees where data is seen as a fundamental asset. The "routine practice of using data-informed decision-making," according to Achieving the Dream is critical "to close achievement gaps and improve student outcomes in a continuous cycle of improvement"—a goal towards which we are striving.

***A Data-Driven Institution.*** The large quantities of data that the College collects supports the College's mission and vision. The purpose of the data asset management program is twofold: to define how we collect, store, secure, and analyze data; and to use this data to build an environment in which decisions are informed by relevant and accurate metrics. The data asset management program also strives to engage key College stakeholders and constituents in the development of strategies to enhance our culture of evidence and to enhance data literacy across the College.

***Pre-pandemic Work.*** Fortunately, prior to the pandemic, the College had already begun assessing the state of data through an independent third-party consultant, iData, Inc., which specializes in data management in higher education. The assessment was launched to help the College create and formalize a process to ensure our data and information regarding students, employees, finances, facilities, alumni, and financial aid are developed, processed, and shared in a timely, accurate, and reproducible manner. The summary of iData's recommendations is shown in *Figure 1*. The information and recommendations received from iData form a solid foundation for the development of this program. The College is engaged in implementing the iData recommendations, a process that will likely take several years. As we do so, we are continually strengthening our data protocols in ways that enhance our use of data.



**Figure 1.** iData recommendations for data management.

***Pandemic Impacts.*** Due to the coronavirus pandemic, organizations across industries are experiencing unprecedented challenges, enhancing the critical need for accurate and timely data. Gartner, a leading global IT research and advisory firm, indicates that "[g]iven the shift in how organizations are working,

consistent and reliable flow of data across people, teams, and business functions is crucial to survival." In a recent survey conducted by *Inside Higher Ed*, only 23 percent of higher education institutions indicated that they are using data very effectively to inform campus decision making, whereas 61 percent rate their efforts as somewhat effective.

From an operational perspective, data will enable Montgomery College employees to work, think, and act more effectively and strategically achieve objectives. Data asset management will contribute to the College's competitive advantage and contribute to the development of the College's post-COVID-19 business model.

## Strategic Topic of the Month

### *Changing Nature of Work and the Workforce*

COVID has changed the way most people at the College work in some capacity. The extent to which those changes may be permanent for employees who are not faculty, and how the College will navigate such changes is being carefully considered, as it is in many workplaces today. Several recent articles in the Education Advisory Board's *Daily Briefing* and in the *Harvard Business Review* have contributed some insights to discussions at MC. This review speaks to a few of these topics, all being addressed currently.

***How might the College decide whether staff members need to return to face-to-face workplace attendance?*** Much of the literature on this topic stresses that the nature of the employee's responsibilities is a primary factor to consider. Another important element is interactions with colleagues, which often produce the best desired outcome. Many people in the knowledge economy have some combination of duties that may require distinct levels of teamwork, not just independent production. What a group needs from an interaction might be the primary driver of whether its members need to be in person to accomplish it: is it collaboration, innovation, acculturation, or dedication? The human resources field is filled with strategies about how to consider these plans, many of them encouraging some hybrid models to start. In addition, there is growing attention to what challenges there are to entirely remote work: teams with technical communications barriers, or ones with new employees, or ones whose members may have home lives not easily be adapted to full-time work.

***Are there any surprises in the current thinking about returning to work?*** Two ideas are notable here. Many supervisors and staff have been surprised by how efficiently they work from home and how successful virtual communications using Zoom have been. This might not have been the case if smaller numbers of workers had adopted Zoom, but since the workforce did so en masse, it leapfrogged over what might have been resistance. Second, although some workers enjoy working from home, they are also cognizant of what they miss about office settings—the comradery, informal discussions, the sharing of celebrations—and mourning of losses. Sharing emotion with coworkers is recognized as an element that can help teams bond, contributing to productivity. The community element of common work spaces has been noted in almost every division at the College. The cost of time and transportation are also elements employees are raising in discussion about home/work lives.

***Can the College continue to build a culture that is more customer-centric while permitting some work-from-home?*** This depends largely on whether students revert to in-person learning, tutoring, and counseling.  If the College is to continue to serve students optimally, it will need to follow their

preferences closely. Certainly, employees will be impacted differently, depending on their roles, but keeping students at the center of such decisions will be critical. A related issue is the need for staff to further enhance their skills with technology. MC training courses will be essential here as we train and continue to skill-up our workforce to be digitally enabled and proficient.

***How does equity factor into this equation?*** A careful consideration of how remote work impacts student success is already in progress. Managers are actively considering how an employee's physical location might create a barrier to thorough customer service. On the other hand, student participation in certain College activities, has risen during the pandemic. In particular, students with heavy extracurricular responsibilities—work and child care being primary—report that remote access to student events during the pandemic has increased their ability to participate. As distinct services at the College adapt to demands—virtual tutoring, for example, shifted some hours to weekends and evenings in response to student needs—the College is learning more about what functions to students' advantage and what is possible from an employee perspective. Student access to technology will continue to be a variable in the assessment of remote working possibilities for staff.

The transition to the post-vaccine work world has many questions, but they are all being considered through the lenses of student success, equity, and fiscal sustainability. Leaders across the College and in the Office of Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management are working comprehensively across divisions to collect data and anecdotes that help them plan for the College's future. I have no doubt that their work will enable the College to take advantage of some new workforce assets created by pandemic changes and strategize around new challenges.

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Be well,

DeRionne P. Pollard, Ph.D.

*We empower our students to change their lives, and we enrich the life of our community. We are accountable for our results.*