

Report to Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, Students
of
Montgomery College
Campuses Located at Germantown, Rockville, Takoma Park/Silver spring, MD

Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report

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Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of Montgomery College

I. Introduction

Montgomery College is a public, open admissions community college in Maryland with campuses located in Germantown, Rockville, and Takoma Park/Silver Spring, all serving key geographic locations in Montgomery County, a large suburban county adjacent to Washington, DC. The Germantown Campus is located “up county” in an area that still serves rural and emerging suburban neighborhoods and a growing technology corridor. The Rockville Campus is located centrally in the county’s capital city. The Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus is “down county” and adjacent to Washington, DC. In addition to the College’s transfer, nursing, science, mathematics, and technology programs, Montgomery College provides many developmental programs as it serves the county and College’s neediest students. The College also offers Workforce Development & Continuing Education (WD&CE) centers as well as off-site programs throughout Montgomery County, Maryland. Montgomery College serves more than 60,000 students a year (or 21,957 FTEs – Full-Time Equivalents), through both credit and noncredit programs in more than 100 areas of study.

The Periodic Review Report (PRR) provides readers with a comprehensive overview of the institutional progress since the College’s last decennial self-study and team visit and its subsequent progress report. The PRR is clearly written with appropriate support documentation. The report demonstrates a commitment to making the self-study report a working document that was intended to lead to improvement. The PRR was shared openly with the College community and it is clear commitment that significant changes and progress have taken place at the institution since the team visit. The institution is to be commended for the quality and completeness of the Periodic Review Report.

II. Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation

This section summarizes the College’s responses to all of the recommendations made in the self study. Montgomery College received no recommendations from the accreditation visit; however, they internally generated 120 recommendations to which they responded in general fashion in the PRR. The PRR recommendations section was presented by standards and this report follows that same format. According to the PRR, Montgomery College has addressed 73.3 percent of the recommendations. Twenty five percent of the recommendations are in progress and 1.7 percent have been “shelved or discontinued.”

Standard I Mission and Goals

Montgomery College has addressed the Self Study recommendations which focused on student centeredness of mission, communication of the mission, and the utilization of data to determine whether these goals have been met. A new mission was created in spring of 2011 by a highly inclusive process and is prominently displayed and data is utilized measuring success.

Standard II Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

The College made seven recommendations regarding this standard relating to inclusivity. It appears that they have made significant progress on six of the seven and will begin the academic master plan revision in the near future. The College reviews its goals and objectives annually and has begun to utilize TracDat for tracking recommendations for institutional renewal. Dissemination of the budget process is well-communicated among constituencies.

*The readers **suggest** that the College continue to revise the academic master plan as they had recommended in their Self Study and implement performance indicators as a means to assess achievement.*

Standard III Institutional Resources

The College successfully implemented the recommendations in the Self Study to develop a new classification system for positions, particularly technical positions. Additionally the recommendation to pursue alternative funding was addressed by the \$25 million capital campaign in 2009.

Standard IV Leadership and Governance

Seven internal recommendations were made regarding leadership and governance focusing primarily on communication and structure. A new governance structure has been completed as of 2012, and faculty governance appears to be communicated through orientations and other dissemination methods. Students have also been given a role in governance. One of the recommendations centered on the Learning College which is no longer relevant as the Learning College has been reorganized into other areas.

Standard V Administration

The Self Study included 10 recommendations in the area of administration. Primarily jobs were in need of being more clearly defined and classified. In addition, there had been a significant number of faculty taking on administrative functions. The College has created a new classification system and with that a new compensation program. Vacancies appear to be filled and the College utilizes a new talent management system (Taleo). In addition, most of the faculty-filled administrative positions were eliminated as a result of finances. The Academic Affairs division has reorganized and made several changes with clearly delineated lines of reporting. A compensation plan was proposed by a committee and adopted with some modifications. It appears that the College needs to continue to address administrative positions in terms of the creation of new positions; however, all areas of this standard appear to have been successfully addressed.

*The readers **suggest** that the College develop a plan for funding of administrative positions*

Standard VI Integrity

The College provided three recommendations regarding Integrity in the Self Study. One was to keep up with legal compliance which they continue to do. In addition, the College felt that they should discuss and provide education and development around plagiarism which they have accomplished through the website and open discussions. The Self-Study also recommended that assessment information be more readily available, and this has been accomplished by a posting on the website and regular communication to the community.

Standard VII Institutional Assessment

Montgomery College had few recommendations regarding Institutional Assessment in 2008 except to streamline the process and try to ensure consistency across departments. In addition, the College was seeking a way to organize all of the data and demonstrate clear lines of responsibilities. This has been addressed through the new TracDat assessment software system. The College will need to configure this in an effective manner which will likely be addressed given the planned hiring of a new director of assessment. The College has streamlined a number of assessment processes under the College Area Review, which incorporates institutional assessment with periodic reports. The College has demonstrated their responsiveness to the use of data specifically in their reactions to CCSSE data. Montgomery made improvements in all areas in response to the 2004 data and saw results that were above the national average in 2006.

Standard VIII Student Admission and Retention

The College has made strides in this area primarily in their restructuring efforts in counseling, advising, and student support assigning college wide responsibilities to deans of student services. The College has addressed the recommendations of the Self-Study making significant improvements to the advising system and addressing the appeals process for dismissed students. The College continues to make improvements in this area and it is emphasized in the 7 Truths for a Common Student Experience. The College has paid particular attention to Hispanic and African American students through initiatives such as the College's Boys to Men mentoring program and Latino outreach efforts.

Standard IX Student Support Services

All of the College's internal recommendations have been addressed and ongoing improvements are being made. To briefly summarize the College purchased a tracking system StarFish and initiatives are in place to improve student access to counseling, testing, and tutoring services through online services. The Advising Steering Group has engaged in National Research of Best Practices and has been making recommendations for implementation.

Standard X Faculty

Faculty at Montgomery have received numerous awards regarding their teaching and scholarship. Perhaps, most notable in the area of faculty is the unionization of the part-

time faculty which occurred following the Self-Study in 2008. This may solve some of the issues regarding attracting and staffing of part-time faculty to cover the many courses and sections offered due to increased enrollment. Montgomery has clearly addressed the part-time faculty needs by providing more opportunities for College-wide participation in departmental, campus, and college wide task force, councils and committees and increased the ability to receive professional development funding.

The College implemented Taleo, a recruitment system, which has helped to streamline the faculty hiring process for full-time faculty as the Self-Study had identified this as an issue. At the same time, this has assisted in the recruitment of part-time faculty as well. The College also revised the evaluation forms as recommended in the self-study.

Standard 11 Educational Offerings

The College has responded to the Self Study recommendations regarding educational offerings which focused primarily around alternative scheduling and consistency in course offerings regardless of the timeframe offered. Most notable was the purchase of the schedule management software package, CollegeNET, which has allowed the department to improve classroom utilization and to better adjust to the increased enrollment demands

Standard 12 General Education

All recommendations regarding General Education were addressed and implemented. In addition the College has a revised timeline and plan for the assessment of general education which has been implemented. The College appears to have a plan for the assessment of general education and has been completing the assessments per the timeline established.

Standard 13 Related Educational Activities

Most of the recommendations from standard 13 are being examined although not fully implemented relating to placement instruments; however, the College has been diligent in working to improve this area. A pilot is in place that was to have occurred in the spring 2013 semester which was not analyzed at the time of the PRR

The College seeks to closely align non-credit workforce needs to the credit programming at the College and has made significant strides. Montgomery has launched Career Coach, an online tool that presents both credit and noncredit program offerings linked to occupations.

The College also has developed two online programs which met with Middle States approval, with some follow-up regarding general education. It appears that the College is actively addressing the general education concerns and is ensuring that the general education program is widespread and incorporated in all programs. The College has adopted Quality Matters Peer review and has already had 69 faculty participate in training. The College has also adopted the online readiness tool, READI, as of 2009. All recommendations in the Self Study have been fully addressed.

Standard XIV Assessment of Student Learning

In the area of academic assessment, the College appears to continue to embrace the culture of assessment as most courses and programs are assessed. The PRR states that “the vast majority of academic programs have completed the mapping of outcomes.” The College will need to ensure that all programs complete this process. The College is concerned about the funding needed to sustain some of the critical processes of assessment including the ability to support external reviews. Additionally, the College recognizes that they continue to perform course-level assessment in highly enrolled courses; however, the process for all courses has not occurred due to financial constraints. The College mentions that the focus has shifted to program assessment and assessment of general education; however, this raises a concern or at least some confusion. The College should conduct course-level assessment specifically as it lends itself to the assessment of program objectives and the two should complement each other. The College focus on highly enrolled courses may overlook the outcomes assessment in lower enrolled courses and these courses may constitute a critical component of program objectives.

In the Self Study, Montgomery indicated some concern among faculty that they were uncomfortable in scoring some of the assessment results. The College recommendation was as follows: “Implement further reliability studies and assessment pilots, and encourage disciplines to norm assessments, as appropriate, to encourage consistency of scoring.” There was no mention of this in the PRR.

*The readers **suggest** the College ensure that the assessment instruments are consistently scored.*

*The readers **suggest** the College identify funding that will allow the College to continue the process of external reviews.*

*The readers **recommend** the College complete the mapping of outcomes for all academic programs*

*The readers **recommend** the College actively implement a plan for assessing programs that links program outcomes and course outcomes through a formal assessment plan and demonstrate changes made as a result of the assessment results.*

Response to Commission Actions

Montgomery College acted on the Commission’s request to document the assessment for the new Business Administration program by mapping course and program objectives and developing the assessment plan. This was the result of a substantive change request and the Commission’s request for action as a result. The College had also responded to the general education component of the General Studies degree programs.

III. Major Challenges and/or Opportunities

Montgomery College has been thorough in the analysis of challenges and opportunities by examining every Middle States standard and assessing challenges and opportunities

within the standard areas. Overall the common theme centers on rapid change and growth in a period of limited resources. The College has made strides to improve campus communication and alleviate concerns that naturally occur in a changing environment. The fact that they have more than one campus also complicates matters. The College has focused on creating similar experiences for students and faculty at the additional sites and has had to deal with not only consistencies in processes but also in space issues at these campuses as enrollment grows. The College has invested and implemented a number of technological tools in a number of areas effecting space utilization, human resources, assessment, and online preparedness, as well as other areas. This will likely assist in improving consistency of some of the processes and certainly in the overall effectiveness of operations.

Though strides have been made, the College is not without its challenges as they have identified. They continue to restructure to provide more consistency in the services across all campuses; however, funding is an issue as they try to implement these similar procedures. The College is aware of the need to improve their degree audit, to continue to address advising concerns and other technical issues. At this point a greater concern may be the space issues around housing student services at the Germantown and Rockville campuses. The College is aware of this and is including this need in their capital planning process. Rockville is scheduled for a new student services building with construction expected to begin in 2015

The College has faced significant funding cuts from the county and the state; however, it has been proactive at securing grant funding and appears to be cognizant of the strategic plan and utilize this to drive budgeting decisions. With the growth it has been difficult to maintain their desired full-time/part-time faculty ratio and also to ensure that facilities will be maintained and updated as necessary. The College is in the process of building new facilities and expanding which will require additional funds in order to maintain these facilities; however, they seem to be fully aware of this and have been proactive in planning.

Another overarching area at the College has been the change in personnel. Montgomery has faced this challenge by implementation of a number of organizational restructures. A number of positions were also reclassified and redefined. In addition, great strides have been made in the evaluation forms to ensure consistency.

As the College points out, this can also create numerous opportunities with respect to new ideas and thought processes. The President is new and clearly seems to be leading the College forward. It appears that she along with the Board will need to restore confidence that may have been lost with the departure of the previous President; however, it appears that changes are positive with an increase in shared governance, planning, and transparency. Montgomery seems to be embracing the change and the growth and moving ahead with optimism.

*The readers **suggest** the College continue to seek funding for the capital projects at Rockville and Germantown campuses for student services.*

*The readers **suggest** the College develop a viable plan for housing student services while capital projects are planned and ultimately completed over the next several years.*

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends

Montgomery has provided a clear picture of the enrollment trends and the associated finance trends. The College is well aware of the challenges provided from decreased county and state support and have been conservative in their spending. While they have experienced growth in enrollment, spending on operations has not kept pace. Clear and consistent plans have been made to conserve funds without sacrificing quality. Montgomery reaches out to the public schools for their primary source of enrollment and is conscious of mirroring the demographics of the county and the school. While it hasn't exactly mirrored that of the high schools, it appears likely that it may be more in the method of reporting rather than a real difference.

Montgomery has seen growth at all of their campuses and in the distance education offerings; 66.1 % from 2008-2012. The Germantown campus alone has seen a 28% growth increase from 2008 to 2012. These are areas in particular in which Montgomery may need to concentrate.

In addition to the growth in numbers, Montgomery has also seen a significant increase in the number of students receiving Pell grants and in the actual dollar amounts of loans. This is of concern for Montgomery as they are aware of the potential for increased default rates. At the same time as the College faces increased reliance on financial aid, the actual amount of scholarships being granted has decreased. It appears that a number of student service support initiatives have been implemented to increase retention and ultimately prevent default, but it is something that they will need to keep in the forefront.

The College has made great strides in the budgeting process to specifically align with the strategic plan and a strong budgeting process is in place. The College has recently (2012) implemented a cost-to-educate model of budgeting which is further evidence of the keen awareness to the financial implications of a difficult economic situation. With all of the challenges, the College is sound in its financial picture and has seen its operating revenues grow. The College has provided a detailed projection of revenues and expenditures that appears sound and also sees minimal tuition and fee increases.

The College is to be commended for detailed enrollment and financial planning processes that are evidenced by a commitment to maintaining an environment that supports the students and the community.

V. Assessment Process and Plans

Montgomery College has a number of mechanisms in place for encouraging an assessment culture specifically through the CAR process. They have set benchmarks and analyzed their actions and results in relation to these benchmarks. In addition, the College administers the CCSSE every two years and has utilized these results to make changes. The College also participated in a pilot of the Voluntary Framework for Accountability by the American Association of Community Colleges. Feedback is provided to the College community through an improved website, an OA report, and through departmental meetings. Overall the College appears to be in a good position with regard to Standard VII, Institutional Assessment.

The College also is actively addressing Standard XIV, assessment of student learning. They have emphasized a shift from course-level to program-level assessment. Previously the College had focused on highly enrolled courses to affect the greatest number of students; however, the College has moved away from this process. The College has indicated that 55 courses were assessed from 2008-2012. It appears that most of the curriculum mapping has now taken place though it is not clear how many programs have not yet completed this mapping. The College has made a sensible decision to move from exclusive course-level assessment to concentrate on program-level assessment but they will need to be careful not to make these processes mutually exclusive. The College has now tasked workgroups to complete a more detailed alignment of course outcomes with program outcomes. The College will need to make this a formalized process.

The College has made a consistent effort to increase and improve the assessment process regarding general education specifically in regard to consistency across campuses and instructors. While professional development travel funds were cut, the College did continue to support professional development around assessment. The College was unable to fill a position for Director of Student Learning Outcomes assessment which has hampered some of the initiatives along with the cutting of an administrative support position.

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Process

Though the College has indicated that budget restraints may have slowed down this process, they actually responded well to financial constraints and utilized the linkages of planning and budgeting. The College has included numerous stakeholders in the development of the strategic plan and the goals for the College as it moves ahead. The budgeting process is inclusive and transparent and clearly aligns with the strategic plan. Most impressive is the College's Montgomery College 2020 plan which was the result of a yearlong inclusive process to include internal and external representative. The resulting five themes are followed and assessed and are in line with the budgeting process.

The College has provided clear lines of responsibility and overall review to develop a budget which is in line with the strategic plans of the College. As the College continues to implement this plan even with the personnel challenges, they will be able to provide justification for all budget items.

VII. Conclusion

Montgomery College has responded well to their own numerous recommendations from the Self Study. Making 120 of their own recommendations initially seemed excessive and cumbersome; however, the readers were impressed that the College seemed to make the Self-study document a working document that they took seriously. The College is to be commended for creating recommendations that guided the direction of the College.

The College has prepared a thorough document which addressed every area of the standards by responding to the recommendations and also by responding to challenges

and opportunities in relation to the Middle States Standards. The College has made significant progress on the many recommendations. The financial challenges have been addressed and the College continues to work on the challenges inherent to a multi-campus, growing institution. The College will need to continue to focus on assessment, specifically in terms of student learning. As a summary, the readers will restate suggestions and recommendations which are stated earlier in the report.

*The readers **suggest** that the College continue to revise the academic master plan and implement performance indicators as a means to assess.*

*The readers **suggest** that the College develop a plan for funding administrative positions*

*The readers **suggest** the College ensure that the assessment instruments are consistently scored.*

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PRR FINANCIAL REVIEW

INSTITUTION: MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

1. What is the institution's overall financial condition?

Montgomery College, a large community College in Maryland, appears to demonstrate a strong financial position as demonstrated by the following indicators:

- Total assets grew by \$32 million in FY12 to \$526.1 million, reflecting a growth in capital assets.
- Unrestricted net assets as of 6/30/2012 were \$73.9 million, reflecting 26% of the FY12 unrestricted expenses. This is a strong ratio at a time when public colleges are seeing sharp spending cuts.
- Current assets outperformed current liabilities by a ratio of 3.3.1. This is sign of financial health
- Cash and cash equivalents increased by \$12.1 million in FY12.

2. In what aspects did the institution's overall financial condition change over the past five years?

The College experienced an overall 12.6% increase in unduplicated headcount enrollment from FY08 through FY12. This has helped to enhance the College's financial position. Unrestricted net assets increased from \$53.0 million in FY08 to \$73.9 million by FY12. This is a sign of improved financial strength.

As with nearly all public community colleges in the Middle State's region, the College has had to deal with a contraction of public funds, requiring a stronger dependence on non-public sources. Montgomery College in its multi-year plan indicates that local support, which has declined in the past two years, is expected to increase in the multi-year horizon. The College has coped with a reduction in funds by undertaking a number of cost savings/cost avoidance measures as described in the PRR documentation.

3. Does the institution have the financial flexibility to weather unexpected changes in its environment?

Yes. As noted above, the College appears to have significant unrestricted net assets that could assist in the case of unforeseen circumstances.

4. Do the assumptions for enrollment and finance projections appear to be realistic?

The College has presented a conservative, balanced budget through FY16 as part of its multi-year financial plan. Montgomery College is projecting small-limited tuition increases during this period along with an increase in county operating support. The College is anticipating a cumulative 7.9% increase in its budget during the period. Enrollment also is projected to be stable.

5. What has been the change in expendable net assets or adjusted equity?

Unrestricted net assets have increased from 53.0 in FY08 to \$73.9 million in FY12.

6. What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the institution's long-term debt, and what impact will this have on the institution's financial condition?

The over the last eight years, the College has entered into three 30-year lease obligations to support capital facilities. These will lead to an annual lease payment of approximately \$4.5 million annually. These commitments have been built into the financial plan for Montgomery College.

7. Did the notes in the audited financial statements identify anything unusual or of concern?

No

8. Do the management letters identify any issues regarding internal financial operations or procedures?

No. There were no separate management letters included. The College indicated that it had not had any findings during the period covered by the PRR.

9. Is this institution controlled by a related entity, and if so, have they submitted Exhibit A?

N/A

10. Are there any other issues related to finance that MSCHE should be made aware of?

No. There were no recommendations related to Finance from the 2008 Self-Study Team. The College has diligently followed up on the suggestions made by the Visiting Team in an effort to enhance its operations. The College also has addressed all of its own recommendations from the 2008 Self-Study. The College is to be commended for presenting comprehensive financial information as part of the PRR process.

Financial Reader: Barbara Pratt, Vice President Finance and Operations
Warren County Community College