Evaluation of the Participatory Governance System
Academic Year 2015–2016

Montgomery College
July 2016

Executive Summary

The evaluation of the fourth year of governance included survey responses from three groups, senior leaders/leader liaisons ($N = 3$), exiting council members ($N = 15$), and the College community ($N = 601$). Here are the top findings from each survey:

Survey of Senior Leadership

- Senior leadership viewed governance as helpful overall, although the degree of usefulness varied according to the issue and council.
- Governance enhanced the decision process more by enhancing clarity regarding who should be involved, the process for moving forward, and the process for resolving issues, rather than providing a specific solution or specific input on a specific decision.
- Senior leaders desire shared understanding with council chairs about when they can speak during a council meeting.

Survey of Exiting Council Members

- Validation and feedback from leadership that decision input from council was meaningful is the most significant factor in council member satisfaction. Dedication of fellow members and friendly/open communication were secondary factors.
- Majority of council members surveyed viewed their experience in governance as enriching.
- When asked what they would have liked to have known better when they were new to governance, council members indicated more clarity for how issues moved through the system.

Survey of the College Community

- More of the College community is beginning to have a basic level of interaction and familiarity with governance.
- Individuals with higher level involvement were more likely to have favorable views of governance impact. Individuals with medium involvement had the least favorable views of impact. Individuals with low involvement were more likely to be unsure of impact.
- Decisions relating to administration and operation were more frequently cited as noteworthy compared to decisions relating to academic and student success. This distribution corresponds to the types of issues that have been brought to governance and presents an opportunity for growth by focusing the diverse expertise of the various councils on student and institutional success.
- Three groups need additional consideration for full inclusion. These are staff members whose jobs make meeting participation prohibitive, part-time students, and WD&CE students in courses that do not readily fit the semester sequence.
- The most important ways to improve governance are to enrich opportunities for leader's decisions to be informed by input from governance, to clarify the level of engagement

desired by decision-makers, and to communicate the impact of governance on decisions.

- A greater proportion of faculty and students indicated that processes and outcomes were understood and valued than administrators and staff.

Table of Contents

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To evaluate the fourth year of the participatory governance system, the perspectives on governance were collected from samples of the following groups: (1) senior leaders, (2) exiting council members, and (3) College community members. The assessment data are qualitative and quantitative. The purposes of the evaluation are to support the ongoing improvement of governance and to assess the performance of the system based on its objectives. This evaluation includes the following sections:

- Hallmarks of effective governance
- What was evaluated
- Description and results summary of surveys
- Discussion of results, recommendations, and planning for the coming year

Hallmarks of Effective Governance

One of the issues identified in the assessment process last year was a need to agree on the hallmarks of effective governance. A description was developed in accordance with the policy and purposes of the College's participatory governance and best practices in public participation. This description was refined through a consensus process involving the Senior Administrator Leadership Team (SALT) and the College Council's ad hoc committee on governance assessment.

Governance is effective when:

- There is inclusive opportunity to share perspectives
- Senior leadership communicates how input has informed decisions
- Councils demonstrate responsiveness to constituents, but not seen as primarily a "help desk"
- Council efforts are directed at clarifying and sharing representative perspectives to inform decisions, and inspire problem solving
- Participation in governance leads to expanded understanding of and appreciation for diverse perspective
- Pathways for participation are clear for community, councils, and leadership

These hallmarks provide a context for evaluating governance and a direction in which to improve both governance and the evaluation of governance in years to come.

What Was Evaluated?

1. The process, structure, and tools used to implement governance
2. The outcomes of governance

Survey of Senior Leadership

Survey Description
A sampling of senior leaders serving as leader liaisons to councils, and their associate vice presidents, if applicable, were invited to share their views of governance related to the decision-making processes. These leaders were asked five questions with regard to the councils they liaised with and the governance system as a whole:
1. What were the top three topics or issues you asked the council/s to consider this year?
2. Was input from the council/s useful on these issues or other issues brought to your attention through governance?
3. How did the input contribute to better overall decisions or to better decision-making processes?
4. What was the biggest frustration in working with governance this year?
5. What worked well about governance this year?
6. How would you describe the role of the leader liaison?

Response Summary
Responses were compiled by question and summarized (see Table 1).

Table 1. Senior Leadership Survey Responses

Question	Response Summary
1. What were the top three issues?	**Issues varied** and included redesign of faculty and staff awards, proposed sick leave bank, helping to address bookstore transitions, website and branding, and feedback on policies and procedures.
2. Was input useful?	**Yes, and** the degree of usefulness varied according to the issue and council.
3. How did the decision or process benefit?	**Better understanding** of who should be involved, what some issues might be going forward, and ways to resolve issues.
4. What was the biggest frustration?	**Need for clarification** regarding when it is okay for a senior leader to speak at a Council meeting and what that process should be.
5. What worked well?	**Consensus that open communication channels, a more equitable and clear process for identifying people to serve on some task forces and committees, and ability to obtain representative feedback worked well.** Seems to be more understanding in governance regarding the different roles of management and governance.
6. How would you describe the role of leader liaison?	**Facilitate and guide.** Facilitate information sharing so they have the information they need. Cut red tape. Assistant when they are going "down the wrong road" and help guide them back to their purpose.

Key Findings

- *Senior leadership viewed governance as helpful overall, although the degree of usefulness varied according to the issue and council.*
- *Governance enhanced the decision process more by enhancing clarity regarding who should be involved, the process for moving forward, and the process for resolving issues, rather than providing a specific solution or specific input on a specific decision.*
- *Senior leaders desire shared understanding with council chairs about when they can speak during a council meeting.*
- *The leader liaison role is to facilitate information sharing and to guide councils in fulfilling the purposes of effective governance.*

Survey of Exiting Council Members

Survey Description

Council members whose term of service ended this year were invited to respond to an online survey about their perspective on governance. Items 1, 9, and 10 were open-ended questions designed to identify areas for growth. Items 2, 3, 7, and 8 were yes or no questions designed to address whether expectations about processes and outcomes were met. Items 4 and 5 used a Likert scale (e.g., very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied) to assess satisfaction with individual contribution and council contribution respectively. Item 6 was designed to help identify factors that tied to satisfaction with participation.

Survey Results

A random sample of exiting council members were invited to complete an exit survey. 15 council members completed the survey. Responses to the open-ended questions, items 1, 9, and 10, were categorized and then analyzed based on frequency of response for each item (see Table 2).

Table 2. Exit Survey Open-Ended Responses

Question	Category/Frequency
What do you wish you had known when you started your term as a council member?	Role and scope of governance/3 **Processes for moving issues through system/4** Processes for conducting business/2 Role of officers/2 Goals for College and campuses/1 Time commitment/2 Familiarity with other members/1
If you could make one change to governance next year to improve it, what would that change be?	**Ensure councils know how leaders utilized their input/5** **Clarify process and ensure timely responses/4** **More input, less updating/4** Clarify councils' scope of responsibility/2
What other feedback or suggestions would you like to share about governance?	**Enriching experience/6** Clarify Academic Services vs Student Services Councils and Staff vs Employee Services/2 Less overlap of councils/2 Need opportunities to practice/2 Nothing/2

Items 2, 3, 7, and 8 were individually analyzed by frequency of yes or no response (see Figure 1). Participants were also able to select an "other" option and provide a comment. The majority of other responses repeated themes expressed in the previous table, such as need for feedback about how input informs decisions or need for clarity about how to move issues through governance.
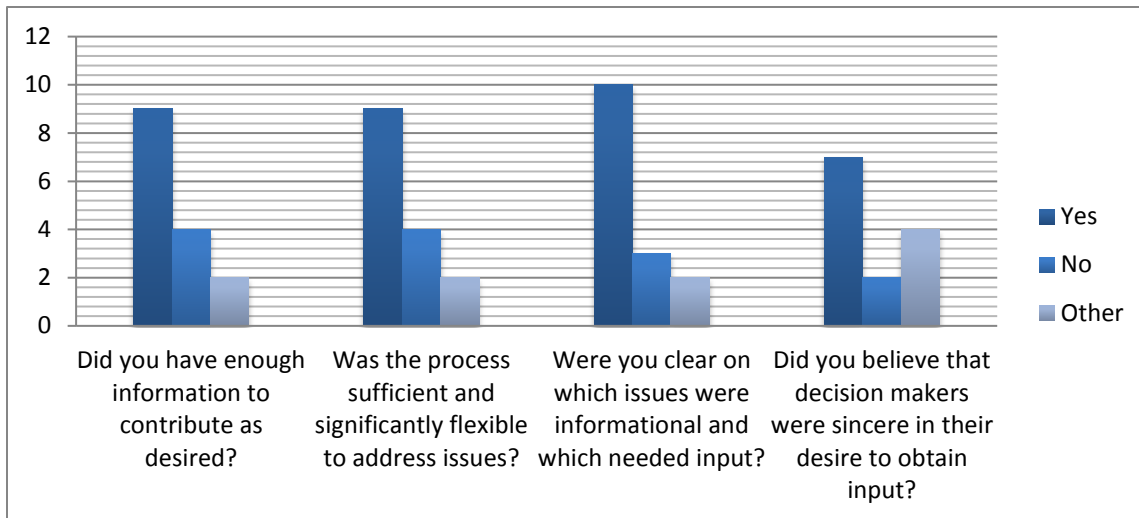

Figure 1. Yes/No frequencies by item

Items 4 and 5 were scored according to the following point system: very satisfied was 2 points, satisfied was 1 point, and dissatisfied was 1 point. An average satisfaction score was then calculated for individual contribution and council contribution (see Table 3).

Table 3. Individual and Council Contribution Satisfaction

Type of Contribution	Average Satisfaction Score
Individual	1.26 = Satisfied (1.25 in 2015)
Council	1.13 = Satisfied (1.09 in 2015)

Responses to item 6 were categorized and analyzed according to frequency (see Table 4).

Table 4. Significant Satisfaction Factors

Factor	Frequency
Validation/feedback that input was meaningful to decision makers	**5**
Dedication of fellow council members	4
Open communication/friendly environment	4
Timeliness of response	2

Key Findings

- *Validation and feedback from leadership that decision input from council was meaningful is the most significant factor in council member satisfaction. Dedication of fellow members and friendly/open communication were secondary factors.*
- *Majority of council members surveyed viewed their experience in governance as enriching.*
- *Council members wished they knew the process of moving issues through the system better when they began their term of service.*

Survey of the College Community

Survey Description

Members of the College community completed a 15-item survey to assess the governance system. Items 1-7 and 13 were the same as in previous years. The other items were changed slightly to better align with assessing the purposes of governance. Items 1 and 2 asked participants to identify as student, staff, faculty, or administrator and to indicate whether they had full-time or part-time status. Items 3-7 measured community engagement with the governance system by asking participants to indicate whether they took certain actions to get information or advocate. Item 8 asked participants to rate their level of involvement. Items 9 and 10 asked participants to share their perspectives about the outcomes of governance on decision-making. Items 11 and 12 focused on access and participation in governance. Item 13 allowed for open-ended comments and suggestions about governance. Item 14 asked if the objectives and processes were understood and valued respectively. Item15 asked participants to describe the first step they would take in bringing an issue to governance.

Survey Results

A total of 601 members of the College community participated in the survey, a 451% increase in participants from last year. Survey items 1 and 2 collected information regarding role (e.g., faculty, student, staff, or administrator) and employment or enrollment status (e.g., full time or part time). Participants included 232 students, up from eight last year, 179 staff, up from 49 previously, 161 faculty, compared to 20 last year, and 24 administrators, increased from seven last year. The additional survey respondents did not identify their role at the College.

Survey Items 3-7 Table 5 shows the responses for Items 3-7 for 2014 through this year by percentage of respondents. Subtotals by constituency as well as employment status are provided. Numbers in bold indicate whether yes or no was a more frequent response within each constituency category and employment status category. The percentages indicate how much each category contributed to the total yes or no responses. Note that percentages were calculated using the number of participants to the question, but not every respondent answered every question.

Table 5. Items 3-7: 2014-2016 College Community Engagement # of Yes/No)

Item	Response	Total	Administrator	Faculty (FT)	Faculty (PT)	Staff	Student
	Yes	121	14	34	9	44	19
	No	464	10	65	50	131	208
	Yes	82	*9*	28	*7*	27	11
	No	511	15	72	50	158	216
	Yes	192	**20**	67	**33**	33	*9*
	No	324	5	33	26	155	218
	Yes	180	19	61	13	69	18
	No	467	5	39	44	108	214
	Yes	214	19	**72**	20	**76**	**27**
	No	378	5	28	38	103	204

Data from this table can be used to determine how specific groups of constituents gain information and engage with governance. The top selection for each constituency for each year is in bold. The item with the lowest total yes responses is italicized for each group. This knowledge can be used to select better communication channels for raising awareness. For example, the governance website is more important to employees than students. Full time faculty preferred informal discussions with peers. Part time faculty valued access to supplemental material. Students primarily engaged through e-mail.

Key Findings
- *The most frequent choice for administrators and part time faculty was reading council materials.*
- *The most frequent choice for full time faculty, staff, and students was discussing an issue brought to governance with a colleague or peer.*
- *The least frequent choice for all groups except students was emailing a council member.*
- *The least frequent choice for students was reading council materials.*

A limitation of this portion of the survey is that it does not allow us to determine the number of times a person engaged in these behaviors. For example, a faculty member who attended multiple council meetings is reflected in the data identically to someone who attended one meeting. It is likely that someone who was interested enough to attend multiple meetings would also discuss governance with colleagues or engage in other behaviors. Therefore, the data allow us to roughly estimate the level of engagement for each constituency.

One of the ways that community engagement can be considered is by assigning point values to the different behaviors based on the amount of engagement. Basic behaviors to stay informed would be counted as one point. Intermediate engagement, such as attending a council meeting, could be counted as two points. Advanced behaviors focusing on advocacy and sharing information, such as e-mailing a council representative or discussing governance issues with colleagues, and could be counted as three points (see Table 7).

Table 7. Behaviors by Level of Engagement

Basic (1 point)
>   Did you read council agendas, minutes, and/or ancillary materials?
>   Did you visit the governance website?

Intermediate (2 points)
>   Did you attend council meetings?

Advanced (3 points)
>   Did you discuss governance issues with colleagues?
>   Did you email council representatives or chairs?

Figure 2 shows the distribution of engagement by level of behavior for the most recent three years. Series 1, 2, and 3 are the labels for Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced engagement levels respectively.
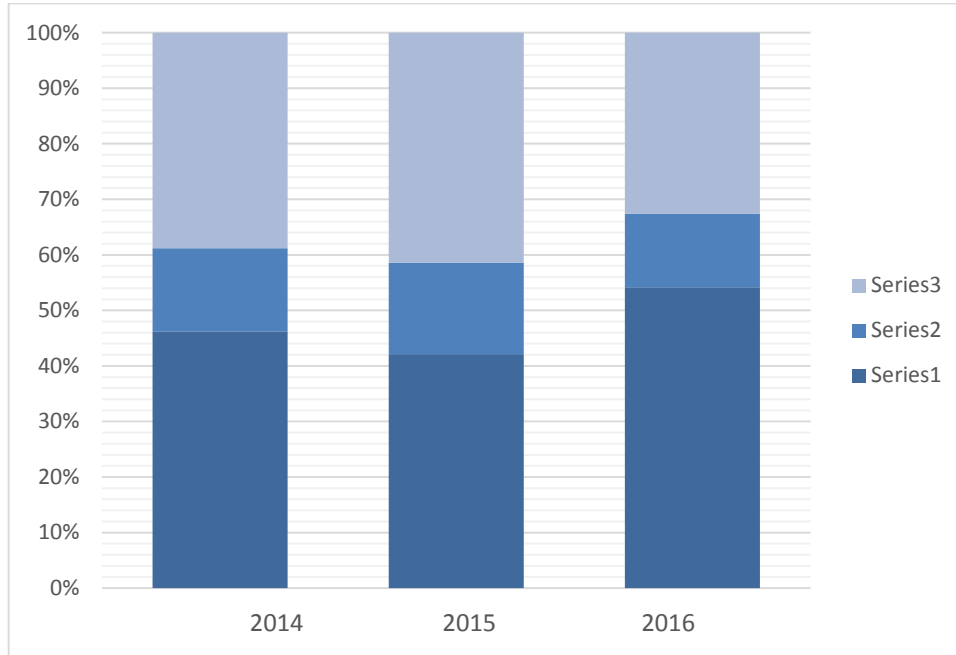
Figure 2. Distribution of engagement levels by year.

Item 8 provided validation for the aforementioned behaviors as constituting engagement. High involvement was defined as a yes to four or more of the items 3-7. Medium responses were those with yes on two or three of the items, whereas the majority of those having low involvement had one or fewer yes responses. See Table 8 for percentage of self-reported involvement in governance.

Table 8. Perception of Involvement

Level of Involvement	Percentage
High	23%
Medium	17%
Low	60%

Key Findings

- *More of the College community is beginning to have a basic level of interaction and familiarity with governance.*
- *Involvement distribution is bimodal, with most people having little involvement or high engagement compared to medium involvement.*

Item 9 asked participants what their perspectives were regarding the impact of governance on decision-making. Responses were coded as significant impact, some impact, little to no impact, or unsure of impact. A distribution of this data can be found in Figure 4.
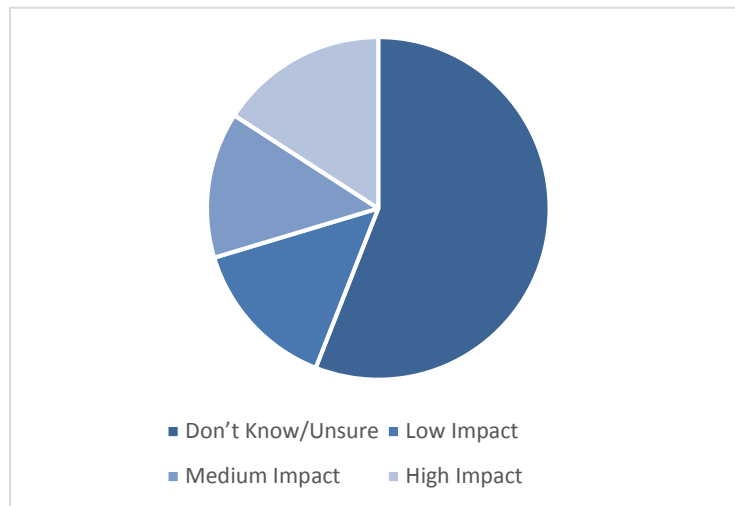
Figure 4. Distribution of perceived impact of governance on decision-making

It should be noted that there was a significant difference ($p < .01$) between groups classified by level of involvement and perceived impact of governance on decision-making based on an analysis of variance. Those with high level of involvement had the most favorable perception of governance making an impact on decision-making. Those with medium level of involvement had the least favorable perception of governance making an impact on decision-making, while those with low level of involvement were almost exclusively unsure or unaware of whether governance had made an impact.

Key Findings

- *The most common response was not knowing the impact of governance. The remaining responses were evenly distributed among appraisals of low, medium, and high impact.*
- *The relationship between level of involvement in governance and appraisal of decision-making impact was significant.*
- *Individuals with higher level involvement were more likely to have favorable views of governance impact. Individuals with medium involvement had the least favorable views of impact. Individuals with low involvement were more likely to be unsure of impact.*

Item 10 asked respondents to specify decisions they believed were improved through governance. Issues identified included general education, campus shuttle, campus safety, College procedures, and awareness of bookstore decisions. The majority of respondents did not identify a specific decision that was improved by governance.

Key Findings

- *Decisions relating to administration and operation were more frequently cited than decisions relating to academic and student success.*
- *This distribution corresponds to the types of issues that have been brought to governance*

and presents an opportunity for growth by focusing the diverse expertise of the various councils on student and institutional success.

Item 11 asked respondents from their perspective if all the individuals and groups with a stake in governance had been included or had the opportunity to be included. Possible responses were yes, not sure, and no. If no, then the respondent was asked which groups were not included. The majority of responses were yes or not sure. However, there were three groups identified as not equitably included. This included staff whose jobs were not conducive to attending council meetings (e.g., night security officers), part-time students, and WD&CE students whose courses did not fit a semester sequence, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would not be eligible for elections when the ballots were set.

Key Findings
- *Three groups need additional consideration for full inclusion. These are staff members whose jobs make meeting participation prohibitive, part-time students, and WD&CE students in courses that do not readily fit the semester sequence.*
- *The majority of responses were consistent with governance being inclusive.*

Item 12 requested open-ended feedback about ways to improve participation and engagement. More than a third of responses were of the type that participation would improve when impact of governance was shown, especially by senior leaders. Sample responses included:

- I would like to hear from leaders about how they incorporate governance into their decision-making. This is not yet clear.
- It felt like a number of issues were already done deals and were simply brought to governance to inform and check a box. We would like to be given the opportunity for meaningful input and then have the input acknowledged.
- Simply the governance structure. Too many councils.
- Summaries of actions and more advertising.
- More brief stories of success.
- Governance councils need more credibility from senior leadership in order for participation to improve.

Item 13 requested open-ended suggestions for improving governance. The most frequent responses were of this type:

- Decision-makers should indicate how governance helped them. They may communicate this to the councils, but the rest of the College does not know.
- Hard to include part time faculty in extra activities.
- There needs to be some type of feedback mechanism that helps us understand that input was reviewed and considered in decision making. Perhaps the town halls can include this aspect.

Key Findings
- *A key way to improve governance is to enrich opportunities for leader's decisions to be informed by input from governance, rather than to use governance primarily to inform*

constituents of decisions.

- *A related need is for councils and the College community to be informed about how governance helped decision-makers.*
- *These results consistent with best practices of the International Association of Public Participation to clarify the level of engagement desired by decision-makers, increase the level of public engagement with certain decisions where feasible, and to communicate the impact of the engagement on the decision.*

Item 14 addressed whether the processes and outcomes were understood and valued. Responses were categorized as yes or no. Figure 6 shows the response frequencies. Item 15 was used to validate the answer to Item 14.

Table 9. Processes and Outcomes Understood and Valued

	Yes	No
Administrator	9	**10**
Faculty	**72**	65
Staff	62	**75**
Student	**101**	72
	244	222

Key Findings

- *A greater proportion of faculty and students indicated that processes and outcomes were understood and valued than administrators and staff.*
- *Overall distribution slightly favors a yes response to this item.*

Discussion of Overall Results

The responses reveal some significant focal points. The number of respondents increased significantly compared to previous years. This suggests that there is growing awareness of the College's governance system.

Responses also indicate, similar to previous year's results, that a realized strength of governance is improved communication channels among constituents, councils and leaders. Previous assessments indicated the need for councils to have more time to deliberate and share meaningful feedback with senior leaders. However, the results this year indicate that the main desire is to know the value of governance to College leadership. This means having tangible council outcomes and receiving feedback from College leadership as to how the input was used in decision-making, not only to the councils but to the rest of the College community.

Possible ways to address this would be for leader liaisons to identify, at the beginning of the governance term, two to three items where they would value a recommendation or specific input from the particular council, along with a timeframe. Then leaders could communicate to the

College community how governance meaningfully contributed to decision-making on those issues.

Additionally, senior leaders can provide guidance as to the type of feedback preferred (e.g., specific recommendation, range of perspectives, identifying constituency needs and interests) to enrich the dialogue opportunities and manage expectations about information from councils can enhance decision-making. In a number of cases, feedback may not be desired, or it may be welcome but not needed. In such cases, the intent is to provide informational updates to the council. When there are too many informational only issues, the credibility of governance suffers. When input is provided, there must be a closing of the loop by decision-makers and by governance to share with the College community regarding the use of the input. Clarification is important. Moving from a cafeteria-style approach to governance to more defined pathways for how issues move through governance may be of help. Additionally, as the leadership and organizational structure of the College evolves, there is a need to continue to provide clarity about roles and connections with governance.