

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE CLOSING MEETING
MAY 18, 2011

Where We Are, Where We're Going

A Speech by
Montgomery College President
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

Dr. Pollard closes out the 2010-2011 school year at the annual Closing Meeting.

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Good morning! And congratulations. One of the best parts of working for an academic institution is that every year you get to experience that end-of-the-year exhilaration—the feeling that you have accomplished so much and that, after a few quieter months, you have the chance to do it all again!

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And what a year this has been! It marked a new chapter in my life as I became a member of your community. Thank you for your warm welcome.

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It also has been quite a year for the College. We have weathered some changes and some challenges, but we have also experienced tremendous milestones and successes. This year,

Dr. Deborah Stearns was named Maryland Professor of the Year; Professor Susan Bontems became one of the USA Science and Engineering Festival's Nifty Fifty; two of our sports teams took home the regional trophies; our Macklin Business Institute students rang the closing bell at NASDAQ; two of our students received Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarships; and our students won statewide competitions in math and ethics. We also celebrated the groundbreaking for our new Bioscience Education Center in Germantown and hosted the Community College Virtual Symposium. Phew!

Looking back, I am confident that we are a stronger community today than when the year began.

While we're all together, I want to take this opportunity to discuss changes I have made since becoming president—the priorities, the progress and the plan for the future.

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So let me start with a little story to which I think you all may be able to relate. It wasn't too long ago that I was the proud owner of my first home. And I did what any woman would...go to work on redoing the bathroom! But, I had no idea the price tag that comes along with renovating your house. So when the first contractor came and gave me an estimate, I said....

“goodbye.” My bathroom would have to wait.

But then my next-door-neighbor, who moonlighted as a contractor, told me he could do it for half that price. Plus, I could use the bathroom throughout the work. It was a no brainer...(pause)...meaning, in the end, I did not used my brain in this decision.

The work took months. I was out of my bathroom for much of it. When he was finished, it became clear he never laid a

proper foundation and everything was crumbling around it. And I even had to hire that first contractor to re-do the work that should have been done in the first place.

So why do I share this story? Well, we are in the process of a renovation. Or more appropriately, a revitalization.

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At Montgomery College, our bones are strong. Our foundation is solid. But, like any institution, there are cracks and holes that need a little TLC. Yes, the process can get messy. But sometimes, you just need to roll up your sleeves and do the necessary work to make the whole structure stronger.

You see, when I first started here at Montgomery College, I wanted to skip straight to building an addition. Quite simply, I wanted to build on our successes without touching the work that

came before. But I found that before we could pile on new responsibilities, we needed to reinforce our foundation. I needed to tackle some difficult issues. But, I did not go it alone.

One of the best ways to create innovative ideas is to bring together a diverse group of smart people....and then leave them alone for a while! I did not want change to come solely from Mannakee. Change needed to come from you—the College community.

With each of the priorities that I laid out nearly one year ago, I gathered together a diverse group of people who have their hands on the pulse of our College community. The progress has been remarkable. Working together, we did it! And our hard work will enable us to build that addition after all.

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So let's talk about what's taken place:

First, we are currently in the process of deciding the direction for an improved participatory governance process for the College.

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When I arrived, we did not have a seat for everyone at our governing table. We had many different tables for our many different groups—one for our staff bargaining unit, another for full-time faculty, another for our part-time faculty, and still more...

We are *one* college and we must make sure our governing structure adequately supports that. We must create a policy that allows for a well-defined collegial governance system with clear responsibilities.

I formed a Blue Ribbon Task Force and tasked the members to ensure all appropriate groups at the College have a voice in shaping our future. I am pleased to report that after five months of brainstorming and hard work, the task force has provided me with a report filled with solid recommendations. They did phenomenal work, and have created a model that creates a forum for all employee constituent groups, campus constituent groups, and also the major functional areas of the College. I have accepted their recommendations, which will go to the board in June, and I look forward to the start of implementation in the fall.

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Second, we focused on completion, completion, completion. It had been discussed for some time among

community colleges, but we had not yet decided what completion meant for *us, for Montgomery College*.

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There are many critics that say completion centers on a deficit model—the need to rebuild a broken system. But, that is not what completion should look like for us.

The community college model is stronger and more essential today than when we began decades ago. We must conceive of our own model—centered on how we can improve and remodel, *not* rebuild from the ground up. Our foundation may need reinforcement, but it is *not* broken.

I have engaged with College leaders about defining our idea of completion. But, I firmly believe, like any good idea, our definition cannot come from the top down. I need to listen to

you—our faculty, staff, and administrators who know our students best and know what will increase their college success.

In this era of accountability, we are not relying solely on external data and proposed solutions. For the past eight months, an internal team has worked on defining completion for us and on developing College-specific goals. I am proud to report that the team has presented me with a number of recommendations that will serve as the building blocks for our future. I will share these recommendations with our new senior vice presidents to assist them in setting their own goals.

In addition, a different group of faculty has been working non-stop for the last several years on assessing Student Learning Outcomes at the College. The group will submit its latest report to the Maryland Higher Education Commission in June. The faculty members who make up this group—as well as the faculty

who have participated in this initiative—do not always receive the recognition they deserve for their hard work, so let me say thank you for engaging in the hard work that must be done to ensure our students meet our completion goals.

But, you know me, I'm always going to ask for more! So, for all you faculty who have not engaged in the Outcome Assessments project, I implore you to get involved!

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Third, I set the goal of filling the senior leadership positions. No one wants to start a new job without a strong support staff in place. I have wonderful administrators around me now, but they wanted to move on to the next stages in their careers or start retirement.

For our Marshall and Robert, I will certainly miss their wisdom and guidance. Most importantly, thank you for your service, and a special thank you to Paula for agreeing to stay on for a little while longer.

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I am proud to report we are on our way to filling three senior leadership positions by early July with individuals who will assist me and the College as we move forward. As you already know, Steve Cain, dean at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus, will serve as my chief of staff.

The search for the other two positions has concluded and I look forward to making those announcements in the near future.

For the fourth search, I took the advice of the search committee to delay hiring the senior vice president for academic

affairs to ensure the candidates have the appropriate breadth and depth for our College. Thank you for your patience in this process. I anticipate that we will re-launch the search in the fall.

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My fourth goal for the College is to develop the foundational building blocks that this institution will need for the next five years. The way to achieve success in the future will be to move forward as one College. One Montgomery College.

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Right now, there are too many differences from one campus to the next. And central administration must be a relevant part of our College culture by working hand-in-hand

with campus administrators, our faculty and staff. Top-down unity—created by central administration—is not the answer.

With this in mind, we formed the Service-Outreach-and-Support—or SOS—Committee to fully examine how we can strengthen the relationship between the administration and the campuses to become the connective glue necessary to become “one College.” SOS is working to make that happen. You may have already seen that we are surveying people who work in or regularly visit Mannakee. And we’re urging you to share your thoughts and ideas with the committee. After all, we are all Montgomery College.

I also want to draw your attention to the process already underway for the periodic review for accreditation by the Middle States Commission of Higher Education. While the review will happen *next* spring, we have to begin the process

this fall so we can do an introspective look at ourselves since the last accreditation. Thank you to Sharon Fechter, who co-chaired our Middle States review and has agreed to co-chair the periodic review with Eric Benjamin. Additionally, Eric will serve as co-chair for the *next* Middle States review. I thank those members of our College community who have already taken the proactive steps to ensure our accreditation success.

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Fifth: create uplifting Mission, Vision and Core Values statements. We are well on our way to completing this goal. We are in the final stages of the process.

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Our Board is excited about the participatory process involved in crafting the mission and vision, and I thank those of

you who dedicated your precious time to contribute to the task force.

I feel confident we will have inspirational mission, vision and core values statements, upon which we can launch our strategic plan. To me, the statements are much more than words; they will be the core of who we are and where we are headed.

I look forward to our Board taking action on the statements during the June meeting. As soon as the board's vote is finalized, I look forward to sharing the final mission with each of you!

Today has been all about our collective accomplishments, and it is now my pleasure to recognize individuals in our community who deserve praise for their innovative ideas. I am proud to announce the five recipients of

the first-ever Innovation Fund from the Montgomery College
Foundation:

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Christina Devlin will expand the mission of Writing in the
Disciplines to include reading, studying and hiking skills.

Gus Griffin will address the need of student retention of
black males with Boys to Men program, a mentoring initiative
specifically designed to foster a greater degree of academic
success and personal responsibility.

Dr. Kristine Lui will create the New Studio Format for
instruction of introductory physics.

Marie Martin-Murphy plans to launch the Advancer Pilot
to expand our current early intervention methods for students
applying to MC.

And finally, **Dr. Esther Schwartz-McKenzie** plans to create an online resource guide for meaningful information for our student veterans and educators.

Our innovation fund awardees deserve a round of applause.
(pause for applause).

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But why stop there? We were so impressed by the incredible ideas that were submitted that we have found a way to fund more projects than just those selected for innovation grants.

Four faculty members will receive financial support from their campuses for their innovative ideas:

Jennifer Capparella, Jason Fuller, Janis Gallagher and Dr. Virginia Lee Miller.

But why stop with campus funding?

The Montgomery College Foundation has also decided to support five additional projects through other funding. Congrats to **Dr. Michael Chase, in collaboration Dr. Antonio del Castillo-Olivares; and also to Dr. Francine Jamin, Dr. Beatrice Lauman, Dr. Michael Mills, and Dr. Aubrey Smith.**

All of these forward-thinking innovative projects are what our College is all about and we all must continue to think outside the educational box. Let's give all the recipients a round of applause.

I am thrilled to see the Innovation Fund finally take off and I look forward to what you will accomplish.

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So you might ask: what's next? I have one phrase for you: common student experience. I started this conversation with you in last fall during my inauguration. You have even heard me talk about this during the Chat and Chews. Many of you have wanted to know what that means. For me, the common student experience combined with individualized student learning plans are essential to being relevant to our students and our community. Delving into this issue is my own homework assignment over the summer! I am still shaping my own ideas, but I do know for sure that I am looking forward to engaging in a provocative and inclusive discussion about how we can create the common student experience for our students.

I believe that we are building upon the solid foundation we have started to reinforce. Remember, first we needed to

reinforce, which is what we've been doing this past year.

Reinforcing our foundation.

And next, we can build. We are building what will sustain our community college five years, ten years, and even twenty years into the future.

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So, when I think about where we are going, I want us all—everyone in this room—to be bold. Eleanor Roosevelt once said “Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.” Let us be innovative. Let us be lofty. Let us not think any idea is too great to do.

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After all, Roosevelt also once said “You must do the things you think you cannot do.” Let us strive to innovate, to renovate,

and to be confident. We must believe that fulfilling our goals is possible, while also understanding that we must be patient. We cannot cut corners. We cannot go the easy way. We must together commit to the knowledge that great ideas, that doing what we think cannot be done, will come with some difficulty. Any renovation project takes patience, but I have no doubt that at the end of our hard work, Montgomery College will be even stronger.

My dream for our College is not mine alone. I do not own it. You do. It is in your hands— *our* hands. I look forward to rolling up our sleeves and building together. I say Let's Go! Have a wonderful, well-deserved summer.

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