

OPENING SPEECH
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One College

A Speech by
Montgomery College President
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Good morning and Happy New Year! It is my pleasure to welcome you back to campus. I hope you return relaxed, rejuvenated, and resolved to make 2012 a year of great personal accomplishments, growth, and innovation. I am looking forward to a fruitful semester for all of us, and our students.

Now, I want to transport you to another college. A community college that looks like ours: a multicampus urban college that sits in a large city.

Harrison College

The book, *Community Colleges on the Horizon*, presents profiles of fictional institutions based on real life ones. One—

Harrison College— serves as an example of how a community college can adapt, innovate, and unite to create a better and stronger future for its students, faculty, and staff.

Harrison College has weathered a recession and slashed funding, yet still remained a “model of excellence.” How? By:

- Employing innovative practices;
- Encouraging active leadership across all levels;
- Forming cutting edge partnerships with local businesses;
- Using “focused programming and extensive collaboration;”
- Clearly articulating its vision and direction;
- And, being transparent in its actions.

Our Own Harrison College

During the past 18 months, we have undergone similar initiatives.

- We started the Innovation Fund to encourage out-of-the-box thinking.
- We are transforming our governance system to encourage active leadership across all levels of the College.
- We have formed rewarding partnerships with local businesses.
- We have started collaborating across campuses to create a focused, individualized Common Student Experience.
- We have instituted new mission, vision, and core values statements that clearly articulate our goals.
- We have revamped central services to be consistent and transparent – even launching a renewed classification study after receiving your feedback.

We have undertaken *many varied and diverse initiatives*.

Recently, one of our talented faculty members asked me:

“listen, most of us get the importance of all these disparate initiatives, but what is the big picture?”

In fact, she said *that* is exactly what I should focus on today: connecting the dots, explaining the method behind the seemingly disparate initiatives.

So in the spirit of that wise advice—since I know many are interested in “who I listen to,” I want to talk about the big picture.

The why.

The answer is that we are all creating an organization tightly coupled, relevant, to the needs of our students, our employees, our community.

We are becoming One Montgomery College.

History

Many years ago, this College decided to have multiple campuses all individually responsible for student development, counseling, advising, support services, and more.

I know that every one of our campuses serves our students with excellence and I know all of you take great pride in that. Thank you.

And if we work together to create One true College, our individual campuses will be better positioned to provide our students with a common experience and opportunities to excel.

Unique But Blended

As I mentioned in the fall opening meeting: I do not want any campus to be a cookie cutter version of another. We are committed to honoring the unique strengths that thrive on each of our campuses and locations. But, we will be stronger as a whole, when we are united around our common purpose.

Let's look in our own backyard for a strong model of blending consistency AND uniqueness. I know that we are not a business, but a proud Montgomery County business—and strong College partner—shows how to provide dependable service without sacrificing personality: Marriott. Their lobbies look different, their geographical locations differ, their rooms have different layouts, and yet you know what to expect when you walk into a Marriott. In fact, its website says the company seeks to reach quote “across cultural borders to embrace the unique gifts and talents of the communities where we live and work.” Embracing

uniqueness while providing consistent, ideal service. THAT is our goal.

And it is the *key* to innovation.

The Medici Effect

In his book *The Medici Effect*, best-selling author Frans Johansson introduces a life-changing way of thinking about the “intersection of ideas, concepts, and cultures,” where diverse experiences produce exceptional ideas. ” He finds that not only *can* we learn from each other, but we also *must* learn from each other in order to innovate.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKGY6Eyv3sY&feature=related> (4:19-5:14)

As an institution of academic excellence, we are in a prime position to combine disparate parts.

Reverse Assumptions

But I want to go back to the beginning of Johansson's lesson when he said: "we have to reverse our assumptions."

Reverse our assumptions.

That directly connects to how we can be successful at blending our campuses.

No matter how well intentioned, a multi-campus model can operate on certain assumptions yet never achieve a common student experience. I want to talk about three such assumptions that we must reverse to truly become One College.

Assumption One

Assumption one: we are holding ourselves accountable even when we are inconsistent in our approach to services and

academics across campuses. Our assumption is incorrect; we are not accountable when we lack consistency.

I want to stress how crucial it is that we create workable ways to hold ourselves accountable in all ways. In fact, our very accreditation depends on it.

A senior reviewer from Middle States recently informed us that the College is facing problems complying with four of the Commission's 14 standards. She says quote "this is a significant proportion, and these four standards address the heart of Montgomery College: the quality of its academic offerings."

What does this mean? Our College has to answer some hard questions about our institution for our accreditors.

That is why we currently are in the process of developing a March report to address Middle States' concerns, some concerns

that speak to very way we have operated for some time. There are a number of progress items the report will include, but I just want to touch on one of them.

At some of your discipline meetings and in the next few weeks, you will be hearing more about how the College is documenting our General Education Program—how to assure that students are engaging with all of the program competencies, and how we assess those competencies and use the results to improve student success. Middle States wants direct evidence of student learning. We also must have a plan in place to review *every single one* of the courses in the General Education Program. This is not optional. This review will affect 240 courses—a quarter of all of our courses.

I know this will mean hard work. But I also know we are capable of meeting and even exceeding their expectations—and demonstrating evidence to support our actions.

That is accountability. And accountability is a fundamental part of who we are as a College—so much so that it is part of our new mission statement. I believe we cannot fulfill this mission until we create One College with consistent services and academics across our campuses for all our students.

Assumption Two

This brings me to assumption two: *there is equity in the delivery of student services across campuses*. The diversity we prize for each campus results in contradictory experiences for a student who takes classes across campus lines.

As we move forward this spring semester, we are working to realign the academic affairs and student services' units. These changes will help meet a number of objectives including :

- Promotion of collegewide approaches to the delivery of programs and services;
- Academic renewal to respond to the increased use of outcome assessment data and the integration of planning and budgeting consistent with Middle State expectations;
- Resource reallocation;
- A rededication to the research into and incorporation of best practices in instruction and student support to better assure student goal completion;
- And more deliberate and proactive integration between academic affairs and student services activities.

Assumption Three

And finally, a third assumption we need to turn on its head: *our students only attend one campus*. According to preliminary numbers from this past fall, more than eleven percent of fall students took classes on more than one campus. That's more than three thousand students!

Athletic Reinvigoration

The fact that students are not confined to a single campus is one reason it was so important for us to start to look seriously at our athletics program and the recent rule changes made by the National Junior College Athletic Association, or NJCAA. Under the new rules, a student has to take all of his or her courses on one campus to play on that campus' sports team. Think about that. If a student wants to pursue health sciences at Takoma

Park/Silver Spring and play soccer at Rockville, he or she must choose. Our students should never have to sacrifice academic pursuits for athletics. And the reverse applies – a student should not have to sacrifice team competition. So, when we learned about the NJCAA rule change, we decided to take a good, long look at the Montgomery College athletics program. I want to stress that the external rules predicated the need for this examination... or as we call it... a reinvigoration of our athletics program. We wanted to embrace this opportunity to make our teams the best that they can be.

So, how did we decide to reinvigorate athletics? First, we held forums and solicited feedback from students, faculty, and staff on all three campuses. Next, we conducted both a written and an online survey to find out what intercollegiate and intramural sports students wanted.

After taking all this information into account, the College has a new path ahead for its athletics programs for the 2012 – 2013 academic year.

Therefore, listening to your feedback, starting in the fall, we will have the College's intercollegiate men's baseball and women's volleyball teams housed at the Germantown Campus.

We will keep women's basketball, women's softball, men's and women's track, and men's and women's soccer at the Rockville Campus.

And at Takoma Park/Silver Spring, we will have the College men's basketball team, as well as men's and women's tennis.

We are eliminating golf and cross-country.

But we are adding new intramural sports across all three campuses to encourage sports and healthy competition among all students.

Simply put, the multi college approach allows students to cross campuses to play sports. There are more details to talk about and you will all be receiving a memo shortly which goes more in depth about the changes.

What you are hearing today is just the beginning... we will continue to explore the feasibility of bringing other sports—intercollegiate, club, and intramurals—to the College throughout the coming year.

And the One College principle will be evident as we move to one set of collegewide colors and a new mascot, reflecting the *whole* College. I am enthusiastic about the committee and its

work. We have students, faculty, and staff who elected to serve on the committee to plan a new future with more school spirit and even more cheering fans!

Acknowledgement of Challenges

I know I have thrown a lot at you today.

And I have left you with a lot to think about.

I even know that it won't be comfortable in some cases. But, it's a process we have been working toward for decades.

Dare I say that this is the natural evolution of our College? I do know that becoming One College will come with challenges.

But "challenges and threats are seen as opportunities" for the community colleges that thrive. That theme is one of eight highlighted in that book I mentioned in the beginning of this

speech- *Community Colleges on the Horizon*. I will not go in to all eight themes today – I need to wrap up already! – but I do want to mention a few of them to get you thinking. These represent what our end goals should be as a thriving institution:

- “*Internal cohesion* is a driving force underlying enhanced performance.”
- “The administrative structure of the institution is tightly coupled, enabling staff to work *collaboratively* toward achievement of important goals.”
- “Leaders are in place *throughout* the Institution.”

These themes –as well as all of our recent initiatives –bolster a common goal that successful community colleges achieve: to quote “cultivate a clear conception in stakeholders of what the institution is and what it stands for. Their focus is on the *whole*

organization and clear messages about what the organization does for stakeholders.”

We have started to make this idea a reality.

Today, I tried to lay out the broad brushstrokes of a master plan.

But filling out the details will come from you. As I have said before, I do not have all the answers— not even close. I do, however, have lots of questions, and ideas, and smart people around me, like you, to come up with solutions.

I want to know, in the words of *Community Colleges on the Horizon*:

- Is the College “pursuing audacious goals?”
- Does the College “have a capacity for collaboration and partnering that significantly extends its operating resources?”

- “Do leaders and staff share a deep sense of urgency about the future?”

We must be constantly thinking and trying to answer these types of questions. We must be an organization bold and audacious enough to be uncomfortable for a little while because in the end, it will make us stronger.

Reversing assumptions and combining disparate parts can create challenge or even friction. But it also can create magic. It may be the spark we need to become a “model of excellence” – the Harrison College actualized... and an accountable model of excellence at that. We can indeed empower students to change their lives, and enrich the life of our community when we are a strong, united, ONE MONTGOMERY COLLEGE.