

OPENING MEETING  
AUGUST 27, 2012

# Being in the Moment

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A Speech by  
Montgomery College President  
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

Good morning!

It is my pleasure to welcome you back to your College.

If you're like I am, your summer included time for some important Rs – rest, relaxation, rejuvenation, and reflection.

While I still had a full plate this summer, I took some time to do of the above, even exploring the spiritual world of yoga. You know, I have to say it took me a while to really get what this world is all about—I'm still trying to decipher the meaning behind words like practice, mindfulness, intention.

One of my favorite aspects of yoga is the very intentional act of embracing certain thoughts, while letting others go.

Think about how easy it was for a picture to enter your mind...and then for it to disintegrate.

Carry that lesson forward.

You have control over your thoughts. You are the conductor of your mind's opera. You can choose to channel your mind towards constructive thoughts, or deconstructive ones.

Deepak Chopra has explained:

“If you have a problem, you are living in a contracted state of awareness at that moment, which means you are living in fear, you are feeling separate and that is where the problem starts. When you are connected with other people, with the web of life, which is the beginning of spirituality that is when solutions occur...”

That really sums up the reason why I think it is so important for us all to be mindful...as members of a critical institution, we must all find a way to connect with each other, to become one, so that the creativity can flow freely. We must reach a stage of mindfulness where we are able to live in the moment in order to be able to think beyond it. It seems like a contradiction, doesn't it? To live in the moment. Yet, to think beyond the moment.

And yet, that is exactly what one of my personal and professional goals. It is something I think about and focus on daily.

For example, today is a big day in my family. As we speak, my son, Myles, is embarking on one of the biggest adventures of his life, and ours: his first day of Kindergarten. It is a momentous day. And, yet, this is a critical day for our College as well. This is the start of what will be a central year for our College as we implement a Common Student Experience, restructure academic affairs, face our accreditors, and more.

So I am here...and I am here enthusiastically. I am all in. I am in this moment. While it could be easy for me to focus on what I am missing with Myles, I embracing this experience instead. And, you know what, Myles and I already have a celebration planned tonight when I can fully be in that moment with him. Instead of being in a situation where my mind is split, where I am not fully devoted to the moment at hand, I have created two separate moments where I can be 100 percent present.

That is mindfulness.

There is a great amount of clarity that comes from being in the moment. It's like grounding the static that surrounds our everyday life so that we can focus what is truly important. But, this emphasis on the present cannot mean a de-emphasis on being prepared for the future. We must balance focusing on today with maintaining a sense of urgency for tomorrow.

That is what today's meeting theme is all about: preparing today for tomorrow with clarity and perspective.

Interestingly, the American Association of Community Colleges' 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges also has had a set of Rs on its mind –

Specifically challenging us to:

- **Redesign** student's educational experiences.
- **Reinvent** institutional roles, and
- **Reset** the system to create incentives for student and institutional successes.

At our College, by focusing on these Three Rs, we will achieve fourth: becoming the most **relevant** community college in American.

### Reflecting Back

As you know, we actually already started on these Rs before the AACC laid out the keys to success.

We started last year focused on our new mission, vision, and core values statements. We have used them as touchstones as we strengthened our foundation. We defined a Common Student Experience and began to create 7 Truths our students should be able to expect from our institution. We revamped our governance system. We renewed and are wrapping up our renewed classification and compensation review. We have united as One College in many ways, including in our school colors, chosen by our community in support of reinvigorating our athletics program. The list goes on. These changes helped build the groundwork on which we will rest our future.

I am so very proud of who we are in this very moment. I ended last year focusing on the radical gratitude I have for all of you and for our ups and downs. Today let me say I am radically proud of our organization. However, pride alone cannot sustain an institution into its future.

We owe it to our students to have the courage to make difficult decisions now for the future. Did you know that in 2012, only 45 percent of our student's graduate or transfer within four years? The success stories of our students are phenomenal, but the numbers illustrate the difficult and critical work that lies ahead. They also indicate that we must continue to adapt to remain great and become greater.

Our strategic report, *Montgomery College 2020*, sets bold expectations of what our College will look like in eight years and what tangible steps we will take to get there. Unlike plans that have come before, this one looks to the future with the highest aspirations and expectations for the College's students and employees. In fact, it marks the first strategic plan approved by the Board of Trustees, which happened last month. It will guide our institution for the decade to come. We will align our resources with these goals. It will serve as the lens through which all of us will judge institutional budget, operations, and policy and procedure decisions.

Before I go even further, let me express my radical gratitude to the taskforce that worked on the strategic plan and the staff that supported the process. This was a labor of love...at least most of the time...and I cannot thank you enough for your hard work.

I hope you all have taken the time to go through the report which we sent out to the College community last week. With my remaining time, I want to lay out in broad brushstrokes some of the overarching themes. As I do so, I ask you to think about how you in your own role can contribute to making this plan come to life.

MC 2020 centers on five themes that will drive our strategic planning for the next eight years. For each theme, we lay out our preferred future and our proposed strategies how to make it happen.

I will go through them one by one:

**One: Educational Excellence.**

*Montgomery College will be a national leader for the quality and relevancy of its academic programs.*

How?

Through assessment, implementation of curricula changes, development of a new academic master plan, and strengthened partnership programs.

**Two: Access, Affordability, and Success**

*Montgomery College will provide affordable access for its communities and ensure student success and completion.*

How?

We already have started with the Common Student Experience. We will continue to cultivate, implement, and assess student access and success, as well as a comprehensive systematic approach to assist students in college credential and transfer opportunities.

**Three: Economic Development**

*Montgomery College will promote and support economic development by ensuring that rigorous and relevant regional and national workplace competencies are reflected in programs and curricula.*

How?

The College will align all workforce development offerings to ensure that the College meetings the labor market needs. Additionally, we will infuse labor market data and career options in program reviews, curricular proposals and new course development, and will assess potential gaps that exist.

We already have started, recently implementing an online tool called Career Coach. This service allows *anyone* to enter in a possible career choice and see what offerings our College has in that area, but also data unique to our area about starting salary, expected credentials, whether it is a career that will see job growth, and more.

#### **Four: Community Engagement**

*Montgomery College will foster community building, civic responsibility, and intercultural understanding, and serve as the place for neutral public dialog to advance social justice and enrich the life of the community.*

How?

We will engage with diverse members of our community establish an office dedicated to this goal, and develop a plan as to how to actualize it.

We already have started to establish an Office of Community Engagement, under the leadership of David Sears, who is now our senior vice president for advancement and community engagement, to take these ideas off of paper, get into our neighborhoods, and change lives.

#### **Five: Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness.**

*Montgomery College will ensure institutional effectiveness and sustainability through ongoing assessment and responsible stewardship.*

How?

We will strengthen the implementation of learning outcomes assessment process, maintain accreditation, and improve our program offerings and maximize efficiencies. We will align performance reviews with the renewed classification and compensation study, as well as develop, assess, and refine a process to manage our incredible talent.

This theme is essential in lining up to the third part of our mission statement: we are accountable for our results.

#### Performance Canvas

That brings me to one tool in the strategic report that will enable us to assess our progress. For there is no way to know where we are going without honestly assessing where we are along the way. We acknowledge that there are so many ways to measure success, so we took a hard look at figuring out a small number of key indicators.

Montgomery College 2020 lays out a detailed Performance Canvas, comprised of indicators we will use annually to track our progress. Those indicators vary. There are objective ones, such as headcount enrollment, graduation and transfer rate, the economic impact on our county. There also are subjective indicators, representing rankings and ratings, such as fall-to-fall enrollment growth, percentage of MC high school students enrolled, and national rank on associate degrees and certificates produced. Finally, there are cognitive indicators that reflect the feelings and beliefs about the college, such as recognition by foundations and government agencies, student satisfaction, and employee and student involvement in the community.

### Your Help

So there's the big picture.

But our strategic plan also includes a road map for our first year, this academic year. I know that we are all eager to get on with the day, so I don't want to take up more time going into the FY13 strategic initiatives. However, you will be hearing about them throughout the course of the year, and I urge you to spend some time reading our immediate goals because meeting them will depend on you. Remember these are FY13 initiatives...this part of the strategic plan will change every year. But the themes I shared with you today, those will live on year to year. We will create annual initiatives built around those unchanging goals.

For our vision to take hold, I, we, need your help. We need the complete attention of each and every member of our institution to be focused on this bold plan, and to embrace the agility fulfilling it requires.

I urge you to take some time with Montgomery College 2020. This is our institution. It is the instruction manual that will guide our next decade and our resource decisions. It is so easy in the rush of our everyday lives to get buried in the minutia of today. We must find a way to control our thoughts in a productive way, to expand our state of awareness so we can discover the solutions our students, county, and country are depending on us to implement. I hope Montgomery College 2020 will give us all that laser vision focus, the 20/20 vision, needed to be in this moment so we can to constructively shape the moments to come.

But it wouldn't be a DeRionne Opening Meeting without me including a fun video to leave you on an inspirational note. Although I am working on mindfulness, I must admit that one little bald-headed boy is on my mind this morning, and this one made me think of him...and you...and the journey that we are embarking upon this year.

ROLL VIDEO- <http://youtu.be/yZm0BfXYvFg>