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Montgomery College Partners with the University of Maryland Baltimore County and Three Other Maryland Community Colleges Ensure More Transfer Students Succeed in STEM Fields
Program funded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) announced recently a \$2.6 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to build a national model for ensuring more transfer students earn degrees in science, technology, engineering and math. Montgomery College, Anne Arundel Community College, the Community College of Baltimore County and Howard Community College will work with UMBC on the “STEM Transfer Student Success Initiative.”

Supported by a three-year grant from the Gates Foundation, this project will not only serve as a national model, but also stands to directly benefit more than 1,500 Maryland students in the next few years and thousands more in years to come.

This new work grew out of a shared recognition that the United States has a critical need for more scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians – and that community colleges are a lynchpin in growing that pipeline. Almost half of American undergraduates now start their postsecondary education at a community college and, in Maryland alone, about 12,000 transfer to four-year colleges each year. At UMBC, transfer students from community colleges now account for 38 percent of new students in the STEM fields each year.

“We recognize that universities and community colleges must work more closely together if we are to help more students from all backgrounds succeed in the STEM fields,” says Philip Rous, the grant’s principal investigator and Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at UMBC. “Doing so is critical not only for those students’ futures, but also for the economic future of the United States.”

The foundation’s grant will allow UMBC and its community college partners to:

- Better align their STEM curricula, reducing lost credits and the need for students to retake courses.
- Improve academic and career advising, heavily utilizing online tools.
- Create programs, such as peer mentoring and transfer seminars, to better support students during the transition from a two-year to four-year college.
- Develop a robust “Transfer STEM Scholar Pathway” that lays out a clear program of study, from community college to university to graduation.

- Disseminate guiding principles and best practices to the national higher education community.

The work will focus on high-impact interventions that can be scaled to reach the broadest number of transfer students possible, with the goal of ensuring all students have the tools and support needed to succeed.

In less than ten years, jobs requiring postsecondary education or training will account for more than 60 percent of all new jobs in the United States, and demand for workers in the STEM fields will be particularly acute. Accordingly, Maryland has set a goal of raising the proportion of the state’s adults with college degrees to 55 percent by 2025, with an added emphasis on STEM degrees. The state’s goal mirrors a national one supported through the work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“The need for highly skilled professionals in the workforce has never been greater,” said Daniel Greenstein, director, Postsecondary Success, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “Today, and increasingly in the future, the brightest career prospects will be for those with STEM degrees. We are pleased to support this project because it will create a pathway for transfer students – many of whom are nontraditional students – to enter these professions.”

The STEM Transfer Student Success Initiative recognizes that shaping the transfer process to better support students is crucial to meeting the nation’s education goals. The initiative builds on the Gates Foundation’s existing postsecondary work, as well as UMBC’s longstanding commitment to helping students of all backgrounds succeed in the sciences. The university’s highly-successful Meyerhoff Scholars Program, for example, serves as a national model for sending students on to earn Ph.D.’s in the STEM fields.

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Montgomery College is a public, open admissions community college with campuses in Germantown, Rockville, and Takoma Park/Silver Spring, plus workforce development/continuing education centers and off-site programs throughout Montgomery County, Md. The College serves nearly 60,000 students a year, through both credit and noncredit programs, in more than 130 areas of study.

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