Being an Anchor

A Speech by
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Happy New Year! Welcome to the spring semester! I hope you all had a relaxing conclusion to 2012, and a rejuvenating beginning to 2013.

As you recall, I started this academic year off detailing the major aspects of our new strategic plan—laying out *what* we would be focused on this year and the next seven years. I talked about the importance of mindfulness, of being present in the moment, while also being mindful for the future: embracing the here and now without losing a sense of urgency for the future. The strategic plan is *what* our institution must become.

I want to spend my time today talking about *why*. Why I believe it is so crucial for us to be in a constant state of renewal and evolution. *Why* as the world changes, I believe we too must continue our change process. This is not an option, it is a responsibility linked to our heritage as a community college. I want to spend today discussing why we exist— a role and significance we must reinforce in order to actualize our vision for the future.

You may have heard me say that I believe community colleges are the reimagined, 21st-century version of the original land grant institutions. It was two centuries ago when the industrial revolution prompted Congress to create colleges and universities that focused on more than traditional liberal arts. The focus expanded to specialized trades, such as agriculture, science, military science, engineering, et cetera.

We play a role similar to the one envisioned for the original land grant institutions: to prepare the workforce, to speak to concerns about a system of higher education that is sometimes seen as unresponsive, and to ensure that the American dream of opportunity remains within reach for everyone.

Nearly a century later, partly in response to the end of World War Two, our country cemented the community college model in American education. With support from the federal government and the Truman Commission, the country established a focus on providing free and universal access to higher education in the form of community colleges.

It is no coincidence that both of these critical creations—land-grant institutions and community colleges— are tethered to major changes occurring in the environment around them. They were direct responses to what the country needed. They were situated in the context of the times.

We are anchored to this idea of being there for our community in the most relevant ways, whether in response to changes in our economy, in our place in the world, or in any other context. To me, this heritage comes with the responsibility to constantly adapt to our surroundings and to be at the forefront of asserting a forward-thinking, productive subtext into the community.

It is with this responsibility in mind that I would attach a third adjective to our college: anchor institution. What do I mean by that term? Anchor institution. Let's start, as I usually do, with the text, the English.

Anchor. Yes, we know it's that big metal object used to secure a ship. But more than that, it is defined as that which "can be relied on for support, stability, or security," a "mainstay." In is no coincidence that Walter Chronkite is often credited with being the very first television anchor. He was a mainstay on which the country relied during some of the most trying times, such as the assassinations of President Kennedy and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

A number of community and business leaders have attached that term to institutions, to describe organizations quote "highly motivated to invest in place"[1] and those that "wield the greatest influence – as employers, as developers, as purchasers of goods and services and as sources of creativity and innovation."

Combining these definitions, I think it's quite clear that Montgomery College is, in fact, an anchor institution. We are a mainstay. We are firmly anchored in Montgomery County and are highly motivated to invest in our county's greatest assets: our people, our community. After all, our success is directly tied to their success. We are a place of support, stability, and security. People turn to us during their times of need. We are a source of creativity and innovation. We are an institution that yields a tremendous amount of influence on our external community. We are an anchor institution.

But if the term anchor institution is the text, the context is the environment in which we operate. It is not enough for us to anchor our community and expect it to adapt to us. No, our role is different. We must listen, adapt, and anticipate the community's needs of today and tomorrow.

Back in the day, higher education institutions could take the time they needed to figure out how to best and efficiently solve a problem. Today, the problem itself may be obsolete if we take that much time to tackle it. Look at the news cycle! The important news that used to take months to spread during the time of our founding fathers, now is outdated within a matter of days, if not hours.

But it's not just time sensitivity that is changing our culture and requires responding with a sense of urgency. Topping the list of highlights of my winter break was the chance to be with

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[1] http://www.ceosforcities.org/pagefiles/behave_anchors.pdf

my son, Myles, and see what he has learned in his first few months as a Kindergartner. Watching

him learn is a truly humbling experience, not only as a mother but also as an educator. It taught

me many things, but one in particular: the game has changed.

What would a DeRionne opening meeting be without a video? Here's a clip of a one-year-old

that really sums up what I mean.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXV-yaFmQNk

Read that last part of the written text - "Steve Jobs has coded a part of her OS."

The operating system of today's kids is coded completely differently than our own.

I must admit I have mixed feeling about this. No one taught that little girl, or my son Myles, how

to use the ipad, how to flip between screens, or push the picture to open the app…no they learned

by doing. Even at one year old, the old way of doing things, in this case a paper magazine, is not

what captures her attention, not how she wants to learn and experiment.

That little girl will be in our classrooms in less than 18 years. Myles in even fewer. Can we really

expect that the pedagogies with which are teaching today will be the best ones to reach them?

Are the ways we reached students ten years ago, five years ago, last year, really the ones that

reach students who grew up in a completely difference context?

I wanted to show you a video from one of my favorite recently discovered shows…The

Wire…but I did not think bleeping out every other word would be the best way to ring in the

semester at the College. Who here has seen the show? Sure, on the surface it is about the city of

Baltimore coping with pervasive crime and corruption. But, it is about something deeper. It is

about how all these disparate parts of one community directly impact one another. The criminals,

the police officers, the journalists, the politicians. They all are inextricably linked. Dare I say, in the words of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., there is a mutuality to their narrative.

But you will hear throughout the seasons, the main characters talking about "the game." There are certain rules in running the streets of Baltimore, like the "king stays the king," Sundays are off limits, and in the worlds of the character Omar: "the game's out there, it's play or get played." This is the way things have always been, so that is the way they will remain.

Now, I haven't caught up, so don't spoil it for me, but I have a feeling that the king doesn't stay king and the game doesn't stay the same. Even if the internal dynamics, structure, characters remain fairly constant, there are external factors disrupting the status quo. Rather than play or be played, you must change or be changed. Those in power are the ones who do the changing.

The realities of today's world mean that we have to question the very nature of our work: curriculum, programs, rules, and expectations. We have to examine institutional norms, such as credit hours, tuition, and scheduling, because they may not resonate with today's students. We know we are accountable not only to ourselves but also to the public who helps support us and unfortunately, the external community is questioning the value and expense of higher education. As such, we need to ensure the opportunities we provide are highly relevant to the needs of our community.

In other words…we must change the game.

As an anchor institution, we have that power and that responsibility to be an agent of change—to assert a subtext into our community. Sure, we react to our surroundings, but we must do so in a way that best serves our students, faculty, staff, and administrators, but equally

important is the impact on our external community. Relying on the fact that we used to run the game doesn't matter.

You know as well as I do that new models of higher education are cropping up every day. There are Massive Open Online Courses, AKA MOOCs, changing the way students receive education. There is edX, providing access to free classes at the country's top institutions for anyone, anywhere. There is Coursera changing the way educators charge, or don't charge, students by asking interested employers to pay for transcripts. These ideas are changing the game. They are radicalizing higher education, meaning they have gotten to the root of what some believe education in our country should be—universal, free, and accessible—and have built an apparatus to meet the need. They are trying to find their place on the 21st century land-grant mantle.

I am not saying these specific examples are the best or the most applicable to us. I am not saying we need to adopt these exact ideas- they may not be right to us. I am not saying that all community colleges must offer MOOCs. But, what I am saying is that we should try adapting these new ideas to fit our needs and see if it works for us. If we don't, someone else will do it. I want you all to feel comfortable exploring the endless possibilities. I encourage you all to expand your own comfort zones, and in turn the College's tool box. Apply for innovation funding. Seek out professional development opportunities. Simply put, we can either play or be played. Change or be changed. I encourage you to define the change, rather than react to what others define for us.

Believe me, I know our College already has embraced the power of distance education. In the past decade, our distance enrollment has jumped 191 percent! In the past two years, nearly 20 percent! The numbers don't lie. There is a need, a demand, for distance learning. Just this past

summer, we received exemption from state oversight in 35 states, meaning we can offer courses to students in those states.

But this movement is not just about offering traditional courses online. It is quite literally about flipping our ideas of what is the best way to reach students, and using technology as a supplement.

Just last month, a group of faculty members spoke at a board of trustee meeting about the various ways our current faculty is expanding the boundaries, quite literally, by quote "flipping" the classroom. What that means is turning the method of giving in-class lectures and assigning homework on its head. In the flipped classroom, a professor lectures in an online environment and then has students come to class for the homework portion. For example, in our science discipline, faculty members in chemistry, physics, biology and more are flipping their classrooms too. Preliminary impressions are that the students are better engaged in the learning process, and are working in groups and seeking out help to apply the lessons. That is powerful.

I applaud those members of our faculty who are experimenting with new ways to reach our students. They understand what is required of us as an anchor institution. This experimentation is the only way we will actualize our strategic plan. After all the import of embracing our role as an anchor institution—the text, context, and subtext— is encapsulated in nearly every goal in our strategic plan, specifically within the plan's five themes: educational excellence; access, affordability, and success; economic development; community engagement; assessment and institutional effectiveness. It is no coincidence that two of the five—economic development and community engagement— specifically deal with the interaction between our College and our community. We know our role is not limited to serving our internal needs. And,

as such, we must act deliberately to yield a productive, relevant, and responsible impact on our community. I encourage you to go back and read *Montgomery College 2020*— the *what*—and you will find that much of it is rooted in what I am talking about today—the *why*.

I love our mission as a community college. We must remain true to our heritage as a community college and 21st century land-grant institution, as well as our acquired status as an anchor institution. Our responsibility originates from the gravity of what we do as an institution, what our potential is, and what our community needs from us. I know that meeting the needs of the now is overwhelming, further exacerbated by the simultaneous needs of the future. Yet, we have a duty to ourselves, to our county, state, country, world, to do what we have always done: to be an anchor in the changing tides around us. Our role as an anchor is to be a constant in the storm and the source of strength empowering our community to face the storms that lie ahead. Our mission— empowering students, enriching the community, being accountable for the results—all depend on us being that anchor and exerting a positive, fruitful, forward-thinking influence on the internal and external community. For Montgomery College, being an anchor means more than playing the game as a passive participate…it means helping steer the game, being part of changing the game. Game on!