

# State of the College

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A Speech by

Montgomery College President

Dr. DeRionne Pollard

April 9, 2014

*NOTE: This is the written State of the College address;  
changes to the content may have occurred during the delivery of the speech.*



Good afternoon and welcome to my third annual State of the College address. Thank you to those of you watching in person, including Montgomery County Councilmembers Phil Andrews, Roger Berliner, and Cherri Branson, our Trustee Chair Reginald Felton and Second Vice Chair Michael Knapp, and Trustee Blackwell as well as those of you watching virtually.

Thank you to the Workforce Development and Continuing Education and the Gudelsky Institute faculty and staff for hosting me at the Alternative Energy Lab today.

All around me, you can see hands-on teaching tools...truly representative of the relevant and innovative education we provide at Montgomery College. It is in this lab where our students literally learn how to harness the energy of the sun and wind. We also are in the progress of building an alternative

energy park outside this building—those plans are right behind me.

The essence of the alternative energy movement centers on the idea that resources are precious...and that we cannot afford to put anything to waste.

I believe that same thing about human energy.

On NPR recently, I heard President Obama's secretary of labor Tom Perez—a former Montgomery County councilmember!—say there are “no surplus Americans.”

Like the way students in this lab capture the wind and sun and repurpose that energy... we must capture the brain power of every American to propel our country and our county forward.

In today's economy, that means enhancing access, and driving success and completion.

That is what students need...that is **what MC students need**.

The State of our College is strong.

Today I want to center my remarks on what we are doing well... and where we can improve to ensure we are providing MC students with what they need.

I am going to focus on five key student needs:

- **Students need an academic structure that provides a consistent, aligned, and affordable education;**
- **Students need a community devoted to understanding their needs;**
- **Students need faculty and staff who receive the institutional support necessary to focus on providing an excellent education;**
- **Students need a college environment that has the infrastructure in place to support their success;**

- **And students need a college that is willing to meet students where they are and where they need us.**

Let's go through each of these areas.

**A consistent, aligned, and affordable educational experience**

What do MC students need? A consistent, aligned, and affordable educational experience.

The academic restructuring is essential to this goal.

You all have heard about it—and many of you already have been actively involved in it.

Last month, you received the final report and recommendations from the Academic Restructuring Task Force. As you should have seen, I have accepted the recommendations and we will begin implementing the plans in July. The restructure will lead to well-aligned disciplines, leadership by chairs who have the

responsibility and authority to make decisions, and deans and vice presidents/provosts with collegewide responsibilities.

I cannot guarantee every change will be perfect.

But what I do know... is that the new academic structure will enable us to give our students what they need: consistency. Take a look.

VIDEO MULTI-CAMPUS.

### **Collegewide Advising**

We know our students need intrusive help. A collaborative committee is designing collegewide developmental and major field advising systems that we will implement as early as next fall. The goal is that after a student declares a major, we automatically match him or her with an academic adviser with expertise within the specific discipline in which they plan to study. The committee also is developing an organizational

model for the delivery of major field advising, professional development opportunities, recognition of advising, and a comprehensive assessment plan to measure the effectiveness.

### **Alignment/Relevance**

Advising will help students align the classes they choose to take with their major and completion goals.

### **Transfer Relevance**

As you well know, for many of our students that goal is transfer to a four-year institution. They must receive an education at our College that is deeply relevant to what they will need at their new college or university. But the problem is that some of our degree programs are not aligned to what students actually will need in order to transfer. That prompts some students to transfer *without* getting a degree.

For instance, we know students face this predicament in our general education program. In order to receive *any* associate's degree at the College, we require students to complete some gen ed courses that four-year colleges do *not* require for a bachelor's degree. So students are asking: why should I spend the money and the time to earn an MC degree?

I applaud our faculty for proactively choosing to sync our general education requirements with the requirements of other programs and to create a holistic vision for what a well-educated MC student should have learned prior to leaving our campuses. A group of faculty and administrators just received admission to an intense weeklong institute this summer focused exclusively on designing a general education program. The best part is that *faculty* are leading the revamping of our gen ed program.

## **Career Relevance**

Students who are directly entering the workforce also need an education aligned with industry needs.

WDCE \*shines\* in this area. For example, we are offering a new course in solar and wind technologies designed specifically around the national electrical code requirements. Students are learning the exact skills they need to perform their trade.

We must mimic this type of alignment outside of our workforce development curricula. A good example is cyber security, which is a critically important and booming industry for our county.

From consumer data at Target to student data at the University of Maryland, news reports alone show the need for skilled cyber security workers. The College has responded. Our computer science faculty is collaborating with colleagues at the University of Maryland to ensure equivalent and current courses. We are part of CyberMontgomery, working with industry partners to

meet the needs of federal and private business. We are aligning the degrees we offer with the skills needed in this industry.

## **Experiential Learning**

Not only is the substantive information we teach aligned with student needs, but so is the way we are teaching. Faculty and staff members are thinking outside the box—or in this case outside the classroom. There are academic competitions, internships, service learning, study abroad, undergraduate research, and so many other innovative teaching opportunities. Alternative teaching allows students to gain not only academic knowledge, but also “soft skills” like personal connections and cultural awareness. They are interfacing directly with partner institutions. For instance:

- An internship with the National Alliance for Mental Illness empowered one of our students to personally start an in-

school presentation about mental health in our county. She now serves as the program's coordinator.

- A student member of our chapter of Engineers Without Borders just returned from Panama, where she surveyed a potential site for the construction of a community center and explored possible energy sources such as solar, hydro, wind, or methane since they do not have electricity.

We are not teaching FUTURE entrepreneurs, psychologists, engineers, or scientists—they are CURRENT entrepreneurs, psychologists, engineers, and scientists. We are empowering students to actually work in their field from before day one. That is relevant. That is an aligned curriculum.

### **Online Learning**

We also are expanding the type of *online* learning we offer.

Starting this fall, the College is planning to offer two *degrees*

online: computer information systems and business. For some time, we have had most of the required courses online but have not focused on packaging them together as a degree. That is changing.

This will create an opportunity for people who cannot come to a campus, whether they work or have family obligations, to get a degree completely at a distance. Online degrees are not for everyone, but, for some of our students, they may be the best and *even only* option. This type of learning isn't a gimmick. It is a real way to boost completion...to provide students with the access they need to complete a degree more quickly...at less cost.

### **Affordable Education**

We have a responsibility to protect affordability for our students.

Already one-quarter of our students receive Pell grants. Our

applications for financial aid have grown by 60 percent in the last five years.

MC students need an affordable, locally provided postsecondary education.

We, like many other institutions, are evaluating our tuition policy to see if there are other ways to structure student costs.

For instance, should we charge more for high-cost courses and programs? Or should we charge a flat fee for degrees or academic semesters? Should we create a fast-track program for some students? Should we offer a discount to students who take classes during less utilized times? We don't have the answers.

But we do have the understanding that just because our current tuition model is what we've always done—doesn't make it the *only* way or the *best* way.

We typically think about affordability through the lens of tuition. But consciousness about affordability must be pervasive.

For example, for the past six years, College bookstores have focused on affordability by offering digital, rental, online, used, and competitively priced instructional materials. This academic year, we have increased the availability of rental textbooks from 20 percent last year to 85 percent of all titles this year.

But we also need to consider alternatives to traditional textbooks. We encourage our faculty to explore open educational resources—course content that is available for free online. This requires a different mindset as professors would draw assignments from a variety of sources, rather than from a single textbook. I understand about half of the courses at University of Maryland already are doing this. We still are in the brainstorming process...but we need to listen to students like

Grace and DAR-pan and Faith who just told us in that video that they need us to be more deliberate in choosing course materials.

(PAUSE)

*The State of our College is strong.*

**A community devoted to understanding the needs of**

**individual community college students**

But what else do MC students need? A community devoted to *actually* knowing and understanding the needs of each *individual* student.

At MC, the “non-traditional” college student is, in fact, our *traditional* student. From age to race to ethnicity to place-of-origin to socioeconomic status...there is no single majority *type* of student on our campuses. But perhaps the single uniform characteristic of our students is that they have more on their plate than the average college student. Take a look.

## VIDEO –Brenda Isaacs

Getting students to that cap-and-gown day requires our College invest in them as individuals.

## ACES

That means getting to know them *before* they become our students and creating a clear pathway from kindergarten to retirement. I know you have all heard about our ACES program.

I must say it has exceeded even our highest hopes. In our first year alone, we have nearly one thousand participants across 10 county high schools. We will welcome more than 400 ACES students to our campuses this summer, and more than 300 to the College in the fall.

Our ACES coaches customize services to what students need: whether preparing for the Accuplacer and SAT; completing college applications and financial aid forms; or even learning

how to manage time or find available scholarships. Basically, they teach the skills, not just the knowledge, required to go to college. For first-generation college students who might be maneuvering the college-going process on their own, this could be life changing.

We plan to continue to expand ACES into more high schools and maybe one day have coaches in every single MCPS high school. This is a powerful way for us to partner with MCPS and USG to enhance access to college.

And we're not waiting until high school. Beginning next year, we will bring a college experience to MCPS students as early as kindergarten. Our new K<sup>2</sup> College program is planning a half-day career event at the College for elementary school students.

There also are plans to bring Montgomery College right into the

kindergarten classroom through partnerships with local elementary schools.

But we all know that there also are adults who need our help.

Part of our strategic plan is to target the way we educate adult learners and we already have developed specific programs with

this age group in mind. For example, the Educational

Opportunity Center serves older community residents who are

low income, and also may be the first in their family to go to

college. Last year, the Center worked with nearly 900 adult

learners in our local community. Of those who received their

GED or high school diploma during the program, 91 percent

immediately enrolled in college, mostly at our institution.

### **Welcome Centers**

Once at our College, students can connect with a Welcome

Center staff member who shepherds them through the College

process and helps minimize procedural barriers to success. Since my last State of the College address, we have opened Welcome Centers on our Germantown and Rockville Campuses and in the Mannakee building. We have a temporary Welcome Center desk on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus, and will open an official center there soon. So far, our centers have logged more than 11,000 visits! We hope to expand our service hours and increase the depth of services. We want the Welcome Centers to be an ingrained way of life for people in our county.

### **College Readiness and Completion Act**

Understanding what students need is not only our duty to students...it also is our duty to the state. All of our hard work will help the College meet the requirements of the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013, which the Maryland General Assembly passed in April.

Even before the bill passed, we started to institute necessary changes to boost completion. For instance, we now require all degree-seeking students to complete an advising questionnaire prior to registering for classes so we can track a students' progress from day one. In fact we place a hold on a students' account until that questionnaire is completed.

- We also require students to participate in a mandatory academic orientation program and/or a one-on-one advising session so students immediately are empowered with information about course placement, degree and education plans, and the functionality of the Starfish Retention System—the online portal that both students and counselors use to track progress.
- We have established benchmarks or progress points that we track and monitor at various intervals. We hope to begin

using Starfish Alert in the near future for early warning and electronic tracking of student progress.

- We also are working to build each student a unique and personal success network, so students know who is available and eager to help them meet their goals.

### **Closing the Achievement Gap**

In addition to knowing our individual students, we also must understand and appreciate the patterns and trends related to particular *groups* of students. Tragically, statistics show that educational attainment is segregated along demographic lines—with groups typically underrepresented in higher education failing to complete at the same levels as the rest of the student populations. Our data shows that only two groups of students fall below the College's average completion rate: students who identified as African American and as Hispanic/Latino. This is

unacceptable. Our Closing the Achievement Gap Task Force has provided recommendations that we hope to start implementing right away.

This will require a collegewide effort. The recommendations focus on creating an intrusive educational environment and making sure we have employees who reflect the diversity of the student body. I want to thank the members of this task force for creating a thoughtful, thorough, and honest report of the institution's current achievement gap, and how we can work to eliminate it.

(PAUSE)

*The State of our College is strong.*

**Faculty and staff who receive the institutional support necessary to focus on providing an excellent education**

But what else do MC students need? A faculty and staff who

receive the institutional support necessary to focus on providing an excellent education. That is not to say that we aren't currently providing an excellent education—we are! In fact, the Aspen Institute recently selected our College as one of only 150 colleges to apply for the [Aspen Prize](#) for Community College Excellence, a \$1 million signature prize awarded every two years. We will learn if we are one of the top ten finalists in the fall. Regardless of the outcome, it is clear that we—you—are changing lives, often the lives of our county's most fragile populations.

That is where the attentions of our employees must be...on our students.

But we know that there are real external stresses.

The amount needed to make ends meet for a family of four in Montgomery County is \$82,877—that's 371 percent of the

equivalent federal poverty level. And, that's just to make ends meet.

Devoting a life's work to educating the county's students—shouldn't come with the inability to live in this county.

Yet...sometimes it does. Take a look.

VIDEO- ANDREA FOSTER.

### **Compensation**

We must compensate our employees in a way that minimizes focus on commute time...or gas money...or a lack of sleep...and maximizes the ability to focus on what students need.

We cannot expect faculty and staff to take pay cuts due to furloughs—which we already have had to do—or to go years in a row without salary raises—which we already have had to do.

That is why the compensation and collective bargaining aspects of our FY15 budget will comprise a significant portion of our resources. We already have committed to giving all employees a salary increase. I am pleased that the county executive has recommended \$11 million in new funding to cover increased compensation and benefits costs.

### **Non-monetary Benefits**

But this is not only about money.

We currently are in the process of analyzing the College employee experience and how we can become a Destination Employer – benefiting not only new hires, but also existing College employees. A Destination Employer continuously invests in our faculty, staff, and administrators, and supports them as they do meaningful work.

We established the Office of the Ombuds to help College employees resolve workplace concerns.

We are taking full advantage of technology tools to streamline work processes. Additionally, we are working with human resources to expand the ways we improve quality of life by enriching bodies and minds! For instance, we are increasing the amount of funds available through our Educational Assistance Program. Hundreds of employees took advantage of our tuition waiver for MC courses this year, as well as for wellness-related expenses, not to mention a plethora of free fitness classes. This year we offered more than 500 instructor-led professional development trainings, which more than 75-hundred employees completed. More than a thousand others completed e-learning opportunities.

We hope to expand these type of offerings. We are talking about launching an experientially-based leadership program led by me...as well as a new program called "Crucial Conversations" to help us all develop better skills in holding more effective, meaningful, and civil conversations.

We are committed to making Montgomery College a destination where talented employees want to work and grow throughout their careers as they focus on providing students with an excellent academic experience.

(PAUSE)

*The State of our College is strong.*

**A college environment that has the infrastructure in place to support student success.**

But what else do MC students need? A college environment that has the infrastructure in place to support student success.

Students today think differently. They learn differently.

## **Facilities**

The College has embraced this challenge, and created state-of-the-art buildings. But we still haven't quite kept up to provide these learning environments for *all* of our students. Take a look.

### **Video: Science Labs**

*We cannot wait.*

That is why it is imperative that we continue to work with our local legislators to ensure that we have the staffing necessary to open and operate the Bioscience Education Center in Germantown.

But facilities changes are also happening elsewhere on our campuses. We expect to begin construction on the renovation of

Pavilion 3 on the Takoma Park/Silver Spring this fall, with an anticipated opening one year later. The building will provide students with six brand-new, and much-needed classrooms.

The planning of the Rockville parking garage is well on its way and we are optimistic that we will begin hiring construction companies by the fall. This is a project that students have wanted—and needed—for years. The garage will be seven levels and provide spaces for up to 800 cars, including spots designated for electric vehicles. We expect construction to begin next summer, with the garage opening in summer 2016.

There is more work to do.

We know that students need a transportation infrastructure that accommodates trips to and from campus, as well as among campuses. While we have partnered with Ride On for some time to provide our students with a cost-effective way to

get to the College, we also are looking at ways we can ease inter-campus transportation. We are actively exploring whether an inter-campus shuttle is a service that we can provide our students and anticipate having an answer next month.

We also know that our libraries are not up to the standards of 21st-century colleges. We need to commit the resources to creating library environments that meet our students' needs.

This year, our libraries are beginning to undergo refurbishments—the first major change in the libraries' physical plant in many years. But it's just a start. The library staff has partnered with a number of other College departments to position us as one of only three community colleges in the country doing an in depth ethnographic study of student preferences for library- and information-related services. This

will inform not only the physical environment, but also the programs and services, to create flexible and technology rich libraries that better support 21st century education.

## **Technology**

Our students need access to technology that supports student success in a 24/7 environment.

We currently have wireless Internet in all of our buildings. Our information technology staff has been working on expanding mobile technology tools for professors and students, such as iPad carts that allow collaborative and interactive learning. They also have created an ADA-compliant smart instructor workstation to ensure equal access to new learning tools.

This is just the start. Our auxiliary services staff conducted a national study on how customer demands will change in the decades ahead. The study found that there is an immediate need

for increased use of online and cloud technology to provide 24/7 access and the rapid delivery of food, books, and other products.

We also have a constant focus on finding technology that helps keep our information secure and our campuses physically safe.

We are in the initial planning stages for mass notification systems on the Rockville and Silver Spring/Takoma Park Campuses. We already have such a system in operation at Germantown. This will allow us, and our emergency response partners, to rapidly communicate emergency messages to an entire campus or to a specific area impacted by an emergency.

We hope to begin installing these systems this fall, with some functionality by the end of the year, and completion in the next few years.

(PAUSE)

*The State of our College is strong.*

**A College that willing to meet students where they are and where they need us.**

But what else do MC students need? A College that is willing to meet students where they are and where they need us.

We must do more than just be accessible. We must actively insert ourselves into the community. Take a look.

Video- Jail Literacy Program

**Community Engagement Centers**

This model of taking the College's teaching into a community in need of our services is something we can replicate across the county. In fact, that's our plan.

We are actively working on establishing Community

Engagement Centers, especially in the zip codes that need us the most.

Our new Director of Community Engagement recently met a

young woman behind the counter at a store in a local mall who mentioned that she was an MC student. She said that new Gaithersburg Library was the only place where she could study. So, why shouldn't it be the place where we teach too?

It will be. We plan to open a community engagement center in the Gaithersburg Library. Additionally, we will be opening an engagement center in the east county regional service center.

Starting this fall, WDCE will actually be teaching a non-credit class, likely a basic computer class, and we are hoping to provide an English class for credit in the semesters ahead.

Bringing our services to the community will broaden who benefits from the College's services.

Being engaged with our students also means speaking their language, quite literally. One of the things we did this year is support phone services in different languages. We weren't sure

how great the need would be...so we did it as kind of a pilot project. Within half a year, our bill was more than double what we projected it would be for the whole year! So, we have requested even more money in the budget to ensure we have phone, web, and tv services in languages our community needs.

### **Communications Audit**

Meeting students where they are also requires changing the *way* we communicate. As a multi-campus institution stretched across Montgomery County, collegewide communication is a challenge. It is imperative that we take a hard look at *what, how* and *when* we communicate. That is why we spent much of this year engaged in an audit by an independent organization of our internal and external communications. We hope to have the internal report in the next few months, and we anticipate the external audit, currently underway, in the coming year.

## **MC 2020 Campaign**

Of course, all of our goals require resources.

That is why we will be launching a \$30 million comprehensive fundraising campaign. We are currently narrowing down our priorities, but we do know the over-arching goal is to alleviate the financial barriers for all who wish to pursue a college education in Montgomery County. The hallmark of the campaign will be the Montgomery College Promise, which will ensure that *all* MCPS graduates are eligible to receive at least a \$1,000 scholarship if they meet certain criteria. We cannot let money stand in the way of our high school graduates who want to go to college. The Montgomery College Promise will require a public-private partnership of resources to keep the Promise sustainable. I am proud to announce that we already have raised 3 million dollars towards the 30 million dollar goal. We have a

long way to go, but with our phenomenal staff, generous donors, dedicated faculty, and inspiring student stories, I am confident we will meet our goal and change the lives of our students, and our county.

(PAUSE)

*The State of our College is strong.*

## **Conclusion**

Today I've focused on what MC students need...but the MC easily could have stood for Montgomery County.

Montgomery County needs each and every resident not only to survive, but to thrive.

Remember that sentiment that there are “no surplus

Americans?” That applies to the county level too. There are no surplus Montgomery County residents. Each and every member of our community has value ...and it is our responsibility as the

April 9, 2014

community's college to empower them and enrich the county around us. The State of our College is strong...and only growing stronger.

Thank you.