



## President's Report to the Board

June 2013

One of my mantras for this year has been to be mindful about the moment, while maintaining a sense of strategic urgency for the future. As the academic year comes to a close, it usually is a time to reflect on our current state—to take stock of our successes and our challenges—and yet, I want to spend this report talking about the future and about emerging issues that may impact the College in the months and years ahead. My senior vice presidents and various College leaders helped shape this report with their thoughts on what could be part of our everyday vernacular in the near future. One year ago, we had never heard of MOOCs; today, our College is in the process of creating them! Of course, it is impossible to predict the future, but I hope this month's *President's Report* prompts us to contemplate a few of the ideas on the horizon in higher education.

### Technology

If past is prologue, we know that technology often is the genesis of mass change. As I mentioned in my State of the College in April, revolution is underway in our country, led in part by changes in technology.

The New Media Consortium has released its annual [Horizon Report](#) detailing a number of ways technology is changing higher education. While there are many emerging issues detailed, I want to focus on a couple issues that seem particularly relevant for our College.

I have often talked about intrusive, personal, one-on-one academic support and advising. Perhaps finding ways to adapt consumer technological tools to the academic environment is one way to meet this goal. The concept of personalization through technology can fit the needs of our students. Social media expert [Sima Dahl](#) has said, “we have left the Information Age. This is the Age of Referral.” With so much—too much—information available at our fingertips, we now rely on the advice of friends, friends-of-friends, online acquaintances, and sometimes, even strangers. In other words, we seek a personal connection to help filter the massive amount of information around us. On Facebook, you can see what your friends are reading; on Amazon, you can see what other similar shoppers have bought; on iTunes, you can see music like what you have bought in the past. The question is: how can we apply similar methodologies to the learning environment? Can we explore personalizing our registration process? If we know that a student has registered for a number of early-morning courses, can we automatically populate similar options for that student? If we know that a student must take a certain course in order to complete, can we



automatically provide the available options for the semester ahead? Using personalized technology also may be a way to help students once they are in the classroom. For instance, can we create an assignment application for mobile devices that automatically pushes notifications of an impending assignment due date? Perhaps we can create a personalized application that walks students through the different ways they can complete their intended degree program.

Technology is seeping into higher education classrooms in other ways. For instance, there is software that not only allows students to collaborate remotely on a project, but also tracks the amount of work completed by each student. Professors receive a complete picture of the work put into a group project. Additionally, new computer programs allow professors to better streamline their own grading and feedback process. While technology *never* will replace the wisdom of a professor, it can help remove some of the time-consuming tasks. For instance, if a software program can do a first pass and identify some structural and grammatical weaknesses, the professor then can take the time to apply more personalized feedback to the student. There also is the concept of electronic textbooks, which we have heard about for some time. But this idea could go beyond an electronic version of an existing textbook; perhaps there will be a way for professors across our campuses to collaborate on building an electronic textbook specifically for Montgomery College students that includes the scholarship and explanations most relevant to their needs. Of course, there would be copyright issues and potential hurdles to address, but this serves as an example of the ways that emerging technology could change, and even embolden, higher education.

### **Accountability**

We know our accreditors are holding us accountable and demanding we prove that students are learning what we say they are learning, but we expect stringent accountability to be an ever-increasing reality for higher education. In *Academically Adrift*, authors Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa find that nearly half of the 2,300 undergraduates in two dozen higher education institutions did not show any significant improvement in fundamental skills, such as critical thinking and writing, during their first two years of college. There is little doubt in my mind that this kind of disconnect between teaching and learning will no longer be acceptable at any higher education institution, especially community colleges.

In fact, there is a very real possibility that the state will move to performance-based funding in the near future. While a number of states already have implemented performance-based funding (PBF) models, Maryland remains in the midst of formal discussions about creating such funding models. At this time, it does not appear that the state intends to immediately link *all* funding to results, but a [budget analysis](#) provided by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) of the Maryland General Assembly, for the 2013 session, indicates a desire to connect some of the *enhanced* funding that colleges and universities receive to performance metrics. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), based on a report provided by the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, suggested seven metrics to assess two-year institutions, including student progression, certificates and degrees awarded, transfer students with 12 or more credits, and full-time equivalent students in noncredit workforce training. The report calls for an appreciation of progress—persistence and retention—in addition to completion. It



suggests rewarding institutions for achievement of “certain progression milestones,” such as completing a certain number of credits. Based on DLS recommendations, the Maryland General Assembly directed MHEC by October to “revise and refine the framework to ensure the metrics are appropriate, are easily understood, and are difficult for institutions to game,” and to test metrics for a year to establish a baseline prior to any implementation. Given this continued interest by state legislators, some of our funding likely will one day be tied to proving student success. In other words, our funders, as well as our accreditors, will find additional tools to hold our College accountable.

## Connected Learning

I anticipate that the push for connected learning—where skills learned are directly connected to the skills needed—will intensify. A recent [article](#) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* focused on the frustration of businesses that perceive a lack of transferability of skills learned in college with skills needed in the workforce. More and more businesses are requiring students to have practical knowledge and experiences to supplement academic credentials. According to [research](#) by *The Chronicle* and American Public Media's *Marketplace*, “employers weigh internships most heavily—more so than applicants’ college, their grades, or their major.”

Our Workforce Development & Continuing Education programs, and some of our science-based programs such as biotechnology and nursing, are paradigms for this kind of connected, hands-on learning. But it becomes more challenging to create these kinds of opportunities for students in other program areas. We must continue to explore how we can adapt our offerings to expand *how* our students learn rather than focus on the subjects they learn. For example, is there a way to leverage our business incubator in Germantown to create a student-run business as part of our Hillman Entrepreneurs Program? That is part of what is motivating the College to set up regular meetings between our employees and the human resources representatives at some of our county's top employers. Part of the mission of the Office of Advancement and Community Engagement centers on supporting learning opportunities outside of the classrooms to ensure our students leave the College with tangible skills. This includes exploring the ability of our students to earn transferrable credits for hours logged learning practical skills in the workplace.

The idea of connected learning does not start at the college level. The entire education sector is focused on how to connect learning *before* college with the skills needed *during* college and *beyond* college. The Maryland General Assembly recently passed the [College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013](#), which requires testing of high school students no later than their junior year in hopes of boosting college enrollment and completion, and then there is the [Common Core State Standards Initiative](#), a nationwide effort focused on creating “a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce.” School boards at the state and county level are developing curricula that meet the stated requirements and assessment tools to measure curricula competency. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has launched a new Common Core curriculum in the elementary grades called Curriculum 2.0. The new curriculum is built around developing students’ critical and creative thinking skills and preparing them to pass a more rigorous series of tests, which hopefully will align with higher education’s gauging of college readiness. This may be implemented as early as



next year. We can expect that the changes at the MCPS level will have a very real impact on our future students.

There is a national movement afoot about defining—or I should say *redefining*—how to measure and assess college readiness. An *Education Week* [article](#) suggests that using alternative indicators of college readiness indicates that fewer students may require remedial education than currently believed. The article cites a study of an unnamed urban community college, and found that three out of four students placed into a remedial course. The US Department of Education sent out a [newsletter](#) highlighting the potential “over-prescription” of remedial education, and pointed to some ways that higher education organizations are working to address the concern. For instance, an [article](#) about Long Beach City College, a community college in California, indicates that the college will use high school transcripts, rather than standardized testing, to determine college readiness. This begs the question—is the Accuplacer the right tool to judge college readiness? Other institutions of higher education are asking similar questions in regard to whether the SAT or ACT are appropriate tools for College admission. A recent [survey](#) finds that 850 institutions no longer require these standardized tests. The idea of connected learning at all stages of the education journey is all around us, and it is paramount that we continue to play our role as the bridge between high school, a baccalaureate degree and beyond, and the workforce.

## Financial Aid

In the past five years, our financial aid applications have increased by 80 percent. As higher education becomes even more essential to secure employment in today's economy, we can expect this trend to continue. There are a number of financial aid discussions occurring across the country, but one of the issues particularly relevant to our College pertains financial aid availability for vocational training.

We know there is a national emphasis on creating a skilled and trained workforce, ready for the jobs of the future. For some students, that may mean a “traditional” pathway in the form of associate's or bachelor's degrees, but for other students it may mean taking courses to learn the skills they need to obtain employment. The reality is that being industry-ready may depend more on the skills, rather than the certificate or degree, received. Yet, federal financial aid regulations governing program eligibility does not necessarily support this type of training.

Receiving a federal Pell Grant—a need-based scholarship—depends upon a student being enrolled in a for-credit program, at the end of which he or she receives a certificate or an associate's degree. This creates a significant gap for a number of students who turn to community colleges. For instance, our apartment maintenance technician certification program follows an industry-based curriculum and provides students upon completion with an industry certificate, as well as an essential HVAC certificate. There are lucrative job opportunities in this field and most successful graduates of the program obtain gainful employment within two weeks of completing the class. Yet, this vocational program is not eligible for federal and state financial aid. Likewise, students in this program do not qualify for federal or state loans. The same predicament arises for individuals who turn to our College for specific needs, such as GED or English-language training. Even some of our credit courses do not qualify for federal grants,



despite meeting industry standards. The bottom line is that unless these individuals can afford to pay for such programs or courses out of pocket, or find private funding support, they cannot receive the skills they need to compete. This is troubling since the individuals who would benefit the most from these courses also are the ones who likely have the least ability to pay.

There is a national dialogue occurring as we speak about how to redesign the financial assistance students in our country receive. For instance, the College Board is "[Rethinking Pell Grants](#)," and exploring whether it makes more sense to create two types of requirements, one for young high school graduates, and the other for older adults. Under each paradigm, there would be different requirements; for instance, older adults "would be able to use their Pell funds at their own pace, registering for as many credits and as many terms per year as is appropriate for them." Additionally, the Department of Education recently released a "Dear Colleague" [letter](#) about experimental programs underway that would reshape Pell Grant eligibility, including for those students enrolled in short-term vocational programs.

While hope may be on the horizon for change, there are students here *today* who cannot wait. That is why it is critical for our Montgomery College Foundation to continue the phenomenal work it does in supporting our students financially. Additionally, there are emerging ideas that could impact, and inspire, the way our College distributes private scholarship funds. For example, any student who attends a Pittsburgh public high school and meets certain requirements will receive a \$10,000 annual scholarship to pursue an education at a post-secondary institution. That is a powerful idea and one that the College's senior vice president for advancement and community engagement, director of development, and director of government relations are exploring for implementation here in Montgomery County. Another idea being explored by the MDRC, a nonprofit education and social policy organization, is [performance-based scholarships](#), where the amount a student receives is directly tied to how well the student is achieving his or her goals. There are financial challenges, yet also tremendous opportunities, on the horizon for how we help empower our students to afford to change their lives through higher education.

## Globalization

As I have mentioned many times, the world, in many ways, is getting smaller. We are able to interact with and learn from individuals around the world. Our College has benefited greatly from the increased diversity we see on our campuses and in our county. The blending of borders is a reality that the College must embrace and, in doing so, we can greatly benefit our students and our entire community.

There are a number of possibilities for how we can integrate the world into our classrooms by an internationalization of our curriculum. For instance, we currently work closely with business partners in our community to create programs highly relevant to their needs, and the needs of our students. Perhaps we can scale this type of work to an international level. We could collaborate with our colleagues at educational organizations in other countries to simultaneously teach a course where the professors and students can interact with each other. For example, if an art history course focuses on a piece of Spanish art, why not have a Spanish art history professor provide that cultural perspective and component of the course?



Globalization also may change the business of education. As you well know and support, we have traveled abroad to countries like India and Ethiopia to explore the ways we can lend our education expertise. But this goes beyond a moral duty. We have the opportunity to assist with higher education capacity building in other countries by sharing our wisdom. As I have mentioned, the community college model may be our country's most important export. To support the export, we have launched the MC Global Initiatives, a self-supporting, revenue-generating organization that provides the necessary structure for such outreach.

## Security

Recently, it has felt as if we hear all too often about emergency situations in school settings. This year alone—as we commemorate the sixth anniversary of the Virginia Tech massacre—there have been more than a dozen shootings at colleges and universities, including a number at community colleges. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to be proactive in our emergency planning, as security concerns undoubtedly will continue to be a pressing issue in the months and years ahead.

To better prepare for and respond to contemporary challenges, the College recently reorganized security and emergency management operations to more effectively align the individual facilities units—safety and health, environmental safety, security, parking enforcement, and emergency planning and training operations—with standard best practices that provide appropriate focus on safety. Additionally, the College is working to improve our ability to respond to and recover from high-consequence emergencies, including nonviolent events. For instance, we initiated a collegewide earthquake drill and hosted our annual emergency exercise while classes were in session for the first time. In May, we are hosting the Federal Emergency Management Agency's three-day class, Multi-hazard Emergency Planning for Higher Education, aimed at educating our responders and administrators on emergency protocols and how we might improve on them. We also have developed a tabletop exercise to plan for an active shooter incident. This exercise, to be conducted in September with senior administrators, will provide an opportunity to learn about College and response agency capabilities and to practice critical leadership functions during the response and recovery phases of a major emergency. College representatives recently attended a community forum hosted by the Mental Health Association of Montgomery County and Leadership Montgomery to incorporate the critical mental health component into our preparedness planning.

I am proud of the work we already are doing to boost campus security and preparedness, and the College is being vigilant about exploring measures taken at other institutions and in other public settings. There is much to be learned from other organizations that grapple with the same concerns. For instance, Contra Costa College in California currently is [assessing](#) its security system and adding additional keycard entry systems to the exterior entries at all of its buildings. In light of the Boston Marathon bombing in April, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* posted an [article](#) about different approaches, including increased video surveillance, which universities and colleges are exploring to secure large-scale events, such as commencement. The latest [CIP Report](#) from George Mason University's Center for Infrastructure Protection and Homeland Security focuses entirely on the active shooter situation and provides some outside-the-box



thinking, including applying principles of fire safety engineering to make buildings less susceptible to these types of threats. Drawing lessons from disciplines not normally associated with crime or terrorism is likely to be an important and useful approach in the future. With a national spotlight on campus security, there will be emerging issues, and solutions, that could impact and inspire our College to adapt accordingly.

## **Conclusion**

Of course, setting out to explore the issues emerging in higher education is unrealistic because there simply are too many issues emerging all at once. While this report is by means an all-inclusive or exhaustive look at the national conversations taking place, I hope it serves as a basis of important conversations about what is on the horizon in higher education. Please share any of your thoughts on the ideas in this report, or any other topics you think will be changing the face of higher education in the years to come.



**Monthly Discussion Questions**<sup>1</sup>

1. **Institutional needs.** What kind of change, if any, does our institution need?
2. **Context and competition.** Do we understand our institution's competitive position?
3. **Consequences of no change.** What are the consequences if we do not engage in a change process?
4. **Leadership capacity.** As a board and as individual board members, are we able and willing to work with our president to bring about positive change?
5. **Change process and players.** Based on this discussion, what is the right role for the board to play at this time?

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted from MacTaggart, Terrence J., *Leading Change: How Boards and Presidents Build Exceptional Academic Institutions*, AGB Press, 2011 (pp. 21–22).

