



President's **FOCUS**

Monthly Report to the Board

March 2017

Impacts: Community Engagement

Our mission statement inspires our work every day at the College and its opening line, “We empower our students to change their lives,” rightfully so, receives our utmost attention. The second part of the mission statement, “we enrich the life of the community,” is deeply interwoven into our efforts as well and is equally important to fulfilling our mission. Nowhere is this more evident than in the College’s community engagement efforts where the work of connecting people inside and outside the College has borne fruit in many forms. This edition of *President’s Focus* will focus on the impacts of community engagement over the last six years. With two new centers opened in neighborhoods, new scholarships, and the extensive interface between the College and community members, the fruits of our community engagement work have been extraordinary.

Community engagement is a popular concept in higher education, but especially among community colleges where the mission is integrally tied to the wellbeing of local people and places. Working with diverse stakeholders on issues of mutual benefit is fundamental to this paradigm. Local partners often bring potential students, resources, or information to which the College might not have easy access, while the College can provide interns, facilities, and graduates who are trained especially for in-demand positions.

Community Engagement Centers

The creation of two community engagement centers in Montgomery County is an initiative that has had productive and inspiring results. The



centers, located in the Gaithersburg Library and the Eastern Montgomery Regional Center, allow the College to engage nontraditional and underserved potential students in low income communities with offerings such as workforce development classes, college information workshops, and one-on-one advising through the Educational Opportunity Center. By partnering with the Montgomery County Government, the College is able to utilize in-kind space at both locations including shared office and classroom space. In turn, the College's work helps the county to close the skills gap, improve education levels, and connect residents to important services. Over its nearly three years of operation, the centers have touched over 12,000 people. Some take classes (over 600 people to date) or workshops (nearly 800), while others meet with advisors for guidance on enrollment, financial aid appeals, and career counseling. The centers serve people in multiple languages and employ staffers who speak Spanish, French, and Amharic.

Through the philanthropic efforts of the Montgomery College Foundation and working with donors such as Holy Cross Health and the Washington Area Women's Foundation, over \$40,000 in scholarships has been provided annually to residents to take classes at the centers. Most of the students are low-income and may not have been exposed to higher education and workforce development opportunities. Over the past three years, 192 students have received \$246,000, which has allowed them to attend workforce development classes on one of our campuses.

Engaging the Community on Campus

Bringing people from the community on to campuses for events also has a positive, relationship building effect. Events such as the annual World of Montgomery, the Frank Islam Athaneum speaker series, the Science Bowl, and a variety of cultural performances bring people physically to the campuses where they interact with students and College personnel. These experiences may lead them to view the College as a place for educational experience, both in and outside the classroom.

Dozens of events each year bring K-12 students to the campuses for a variety of learning activities. Sonya Kovalevsky Day brings middle school girls to campus for hands-on activities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The Maryland Science Bowl competition brings teams from high schools around the state for to test their STEM knowledge. Dozens of community organizations also host potential students for their events at the College, including Community Bridges, Crittenton, and the Every Girl Can STEM conference, among



others. Additionally, dual enrollment also brings potential students to campus, with over 700 students taking a class at MC last year.

The youngest members of our community are included, too. Our K-to-College program facilitates visits from elementary-school students to gain exposure to College life: over two years, 77 campus visits were made by students and staff from three elementary schools located near one of the campuses. These visits help inspire aspirations of education in young children.

Taking the College to the Community

Another community engagement paradigm that has produced many benefits to the College is the participation of students, faculty, and staff in the community. For example, MC faculty teach at the Montgomery County Correctional Facility, where we have boosted GED graduation rates up from five individuals in 2015, to 28 in 2016, the first year that MC began instruction there. The Montgomery College Foundation also offers scholarships to inmates who, upon release, want to attend MC.

Another example of community enrichment is the MC-Smithsonian Fellowships program, which has allowed 180 faculty members to participate in a unique pedagogical experience that connects College academics to the rich resources of the Smithsonian Institution.

In our outreach to the Spanish-speaking community, *Mi Escuela es Su Escuela* (“My School is Your School”) is a weekly radio program in Spanish created by MC and broadcast on WACA 1540 AM. With an average of 200,000 listeners a month the show covers topics including enrollment, financial aid, and workforce development programs with its bilingual guests.

One of the deepest forms of enrichment is service. I am proud of our student service-learning experiences offered through our alternative breaks programs, put on by the Offices of Student Life, have allowed students to serve communities in need while building their own skills. Over 11 years of trips, 250 students and accompanying faculty and staff have participated in trips to other regions where they build homes with Habitat for Humanity and deliver other support services with local organizations in underserved regions.

Building Community Connections

Community engagement efforts have also enriched the connection between local business owners and nonprofits leaders and the College’s senior leadership on several fronts. Input from local community decision-makers on topics related to the College’s programs and plans is an



invaluable resource. To strengthen this, I initiated a series called the President's Community Engagement Roundtable, in which community leaders attend informal discussions with me and senior administrators and faculty. These quarterly meetings—seven so far—allow us to build relationships with community stakeholders that benefit students and keep us closely informed about developing community needs. The roundtables include 15 to 20 community leaders with interests in issues related to education, the economy, workforce development, access, and student completion. With the first roundtable held in June of 2015, we have hosted seven so far. A similar program, the President's Business Roundtable, began in 2014 and has held nine sessions with business leaders thus far.

As diversity in the county grows and the economy increasingly demands post-secondary education, we must respond in ways that meet potential students where they are: linguistically, culturally, and financially. The work of the Office of Community Engagement does just that. With events that draw people to our campuses, community engagement exposes people to the College's offerings who might have been previously unaware. This is an important step for students who might not see themselves in college because no one in their family attended or they are immigrants and so barriers of language and culture may be seen as obstacles. As we collaborate more closely with stakeholders in our diverse communities, our efforts to connect successfully are growing. At the same time the fundraising efforts of the Montgomery College Foundation—particularly in the area of workforce development—are providing more scholarship support to needy students than ever. Our community engagement efforts are fundamental to these successes and continue to play a vital role in our mission.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What observations stood out to you in this report?
2. Scholarships for noncredit training are limited. How should the College best sell this idea to donors?
3. Do you see local businesses and nonprofits enjoying benefits from Montgomery College as a result of our community engagement efforts?

