



President's **FOCUS**

Monthly Report to the Board

September 2014

Closing the Achievement Gap: Student Demographics

To empower our students to change their lives, we must make a renewed commitment to eradicate the achievement gap.

I am committed. With all my energy, all my passion, I am committed.

For too long, our nation has not been able to eliminate the differences in academic achievement among different racial groups and among different socioeconomic groups, the so-called “achievement gap.” This gap can be found in all levels of education—primary, secondary, and college. It’s time we fix it. It’s time we do whatever it takes to raise the achievement of every group, every race—indeed every student. It was Einstein who said that insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” We’re not going to keep doing the same things at Montgomery College.

That is why I am so proud of the group of more than 80 individuals from across the College who formed the Closing the Achievement Gap Task Force last year and made numerous recommendations to do things differently, to face the achievement gap head on, and to take actions that will make a difference. We are now preparing to implement those recommendations.



In this report, my first of the 2014–2015 academic year, I begin a series focusing on Closing the Achievement Gap. Each report will feature a different aspect of the issue, what is happening in higher education, and what is happening at Montgomery College. This first report looks at demographics of our students. As our mission statement says, we empower them to change their lives. But who are we talking about?

Before I get into the details, I must address two important issues: race and individuality.

Race. There, I said it. To have these conversations, we must all be comfortable inside our own skin and willing to be frank with one another. In too many places in our world and in our country, race is something that can divide people. Misunderstandings and misguided thinking lead to overt unfairness, racial profiling, and even abuses by those in authority. Let me be clear: we have to acknowledge those misunderstandings and find common ground. I, for one, have never seen a shade of skin color I did not like, whether it be brown, black, white, or yellow. Mother Nature did a masterful job creating a beautiful mosaic of human beings. It's the same mosaic that we see on our campuses every day. And it's the same mosaic that I love to see at commencement when I look out at our graduates and see all of those beautiful faces beaming with pride.

The second point I want to make here concerns individuality. Every single person, no matter what race, comes to us with his or her own special characteristics, unique life experiences, and personal background story. They each possess unique strengths and weaknesses. And, perhaps most importantly for us, each individual has a unique academic history.

Why mention this? I want to be clear that when we talk about closing the achievement gap, we are talking about providing the same educational opportunities for all students and making sure that all students make it to the finish line. I am *not* talking about labeling students according to race in any way. Education is personal. We can never assume anything about any individual. But once we know individuals personally, we can address their academic needs in a personal and powerful way.



Now let's talk demographics.

26,088.

That's the number of Montgomery College students who finished credit courses in the fall of 2013. Among these students seeking to change their lives through education, 32 percent were African-American, with 29 percent White, 23 percent Hispanic/Latino, 13 percent Asian, and just under one percent American Indian/Alaska Native and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. What a beautiful mosaic. There is no "majority" race in our student body. The Census Bureau has predicted there will be no majority race in the US in the year 2043. That demographic shift happened at Montgomery College in 1997, nearly a half century ahead of when it is predicted to occur across the nation. And furthermore, there is now no majority race in Montgomery County, which is also leading the nation by decades.

In fact, it is quite stunning to look at the Montgomery College diversity we value, and maybe even take for granted, in comparison with Montgomery County, with Maryland, and with the US as a whole, as shown in the table below. Note how the College and Montgomery County Public Schools are similar in foreshadowing the predicted trends of the future.

	Montgomery College	Montgomery County Public Schools ¹	Montgomery County ²	State of Maryland ³	United States ⁴
White	28.7%	32.0%	47.0%	53.3%	62.6%
Hispanic or Latino	23.2%	27.4%	18.3%	9.0%	17.1%
Black or African American	31.6%	21.4%	18.6%	30.1%	13.2%
Asian	13.4%	14.4%	14.9%	6.1%	5.3%
2 or more races	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%

And behind the College's enrollment percentages are faces of individuals. Individuals who came to Montgomery College for a college education and who are depending on us for a better future: *26,088 faces*—different colors, different shades, all looking to us for knowledge and skills to be productive members of society, for a chance at a better life, for a pathway to the middle class.



What will become of these students? Nothing would make me happier than to shake the hand of every single one of them as they walk across the commencement stage, beaming with pride, to claim their degree or certificate—all 26,088 African Americans, American Indians, Asians, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, Whites.

However, if, as an institution, we do not make significant progress in closing the achievement gap, I won't be able to do this.

As we know, many of these individual students, of all races, will excel academically and complete a credential or transfer to a four-year institution, but students in different racial groups may not succeed *at the same rate*. And rates are telling. They reveal equality or inequality, evenness or unevenness. The different rates of achievement in different races demand our attention. They demand we ensure we are not leaving anyone behind. They demand that we do things differently, lest we continue the insanity of continuing to do the same things, while expecting different results.

The rates that have my strongest attention are student success rates. I support an inclusive approach when defining success, one that relies on four indicators: (1) the student has graduated; (2) the student has transferred; (3) the student has completed 30 credits; or (4) the student is still enrolled in the College after four years. Using that broad definition, our overall College success rate for all races is 73 percent. White and Asian students are at 77 percent and 85 percent, respectively. African-American and Hispanic/Latino students are at 67 percent and 68 percent, respectively.

However, we know that the state of Maryland and the federal government look at student success through different lenses than we do at the College. The federal government has perhaps the narrowest view of success in that it looks only at first-time full-time students, that is, those students who are just starting college (“first-time”) and who are attending full-time. For Montgomery College, that is typically less than 10 percent of the student body. The federal government counts success among these students if they graduate within three years



after beginning at Montgomery College. On this scale, our overall rate of student success is 17 percent, where White students are at 19 percent, Asian students at 20 percent, African-American students at 11 percent, and Hispanic/Latino students at 15 percent. Nationally, the overall rate for public community colleges is 20 percent. Many students at all community colleges across the country transfer to four-year institutions *before* earning an associate's degree. Therefore, our student success rate, using the federal definition, is similar to other community colleges' success rate.

To close the achievement gap means that we raise the academic success rate of the racial groups that are behind the overall average. At Montgomery College, that means working diligently and deliberately to raise the success rates of African-American and Hispanic/Latino students. It means striving to assure that every student of every race has an educational opportunity—and the academic support, coaching, and mentoring—to succeed. In an institution that is perhaps the most diverse in the country, we stand ready to be national leaders in eradicating the achievement gap and indeed of raising the achievement level of every racial group, of every single student.

It is time we call for a new standard, a new benchmark for Montgomery College. If my inclusive definition of success stands at 73 percent overall today, let's aim for 80 percent—where every race achieves at the same level. When we hit 80, let's aim for 90. And when we hit 90, let's go the distance! If, using the federal government's definition, our overall rate is 17 percent, let's aim for 25. When we hit 25, let's aim for 50. Wherever we have benchmarks—for ourselves, for the state, for the federal government—let's make them the same for every racial group and then marshal all of our resources for the sake and success of every single student.

We will always monitor numbers and hold ourselves accountable, but we must also always look each individual student in the eyes in order to better understand his dreams, her aspirations—and the experiences they bring, their backgrounds, their strengths, and their weaknesses. And then we must make education personal. It is personal for me, and I know it



was personal for the Closing the Achievement Gap Task Force, and it is personal for all of us who have committed our professional lives to education.

Together, we will eradicate the achievement gap.

With all my energy, all my passion, I am committed.

Discussion Questions

1. What data stands out for you in this report?
2. What are the social consequences of the achievement gap?
3. How might our county, our state, our nation be different when the achievement gap no longer exists?

Sources

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- ¹ <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/>
 - ² <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24/24031.html>
 - ³ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24000.html>
 - ⁴ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/24000.html>

