



President's **FOCUS**

Monthly Report to the Board

May 2016

Pathways Out of Montgomery College: Into the Workforce

I have spent much of this year writing in *President's Focus* about pathways into and through college. The unspoken goal of these pathways, of course, is employment. Preparing our students for skilled jobs in the knowledge economy requires effort both inside the classroom and beyond. Our partnerships with industry are vital links to understanding changes in technology and skill-demand, and inform our curricular designs and job-preparation strategies.

Although the economic outlook has improved greatly, remnants of the 2007–2009 recession still constrain the market with fewer jobs and stagnant wages in many fields. Many who returned to school for training and education during this period are better prepared, but face growing technical demands and net fewer positions than in the pre-recession era. This means that community colleges that are truly committed to the success of their students must create services and tools that help students connect with competitive jobs.

Making Job Connections

Creating pathways to employment is a core element of Montgomery College's student success model. Given the wide breadth of degrees and certifications that Montgomery College offers, these pathways can look quite different, but all students have access to the same valuable tools and services to aid in their job searches. Each of our campuses has a career services office with a dedicated job



opportunity coordinator. More than 4,000 students each year get personalized assistance with career exploration, resume-writing, interview practice, and job search strategies. The coordinators also help employers post positions on the MC e-jobs website: last year 2,200 employers posted positions on e-jobs and 5,000 students registered and uploaded their resumes. The job opportunity coordinators also set up on-campus recruitment visits: 300 employers participated in such activities last year. Job fairs on campuses are an additional source of connection. A recent MC job fair drew 1,200 students and 75 employers—45 of them federal agencies. This year alone, more than 5,700 students participated in at least one employment-related service offered by MC's career services. Career fairs, workshops, and one-on-one job search assistance are other offerings available.

Internships can also be a path to part- or full-time employment. Some academic departments have their own informal internship programs. Montgomery College's Cooperative Education & Internship Program is a collegewide academic partnership with employers that places students in full- and part-time jobs related to their major. The program is often called the "co-op," and serves students who are trying to connect their academic studies with an internship experience, and build a resume for future employment. Students register for this three-credit course, then are matched with a paid internship in business, government, or industry where they work 15 hours per week at the work site—for a total of 225 hours in the semester. Throughout the course, students reflect on what they are learning on the job and how it relates to their growing academic knowledge. This process can be useful for students who are trying to determine the best career fit for their skills or exactly what the job market demands of workers in their area of interest. Employers also benefit by getting a closer look at potential future-employees without a long term commitment. Just a few of the hundreds of employers who have participated in the co-op at MC in a few popular fields include health sciences employers—the National Institutes of Health, Celera Genomics, and the American Red Cross; engineering and technology employers—Lockheed Martin, IBM, and NIST; communications employers—WRC-TV, Voice of America, and the *Washington Post*; and government agencies—the US Congress, Department of Justice, and the Montgomery County Police Department.



Knowing the Labor Market

For many MC students, an innovative online tool provides a wealth of career data for consideration. This tool, Career Coach, is a cutting edge program that serves students—as well as community members—by detailing the knowledge, skills, and academic requirements for specific jobs and how those can be satisfied at MC. Montgomery College was the first college in Maryland to adopt Career Coach, which also links directly to departmental websites once a student identifies a specific career interest.

Career Coach also uses real-time data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics to provide students with the salary range of specific jobs, along with job availability in Montgomery County and the Maryland region, and predicted job growth in individual fields in the coming decade. All of this information is presented in a clear, accessible format that allows students to easily sort data about the job market in meaningful ways: by salary level, geography, and education level. Career Coach also has a built-in career assessment tool that can help show students which occupations match their strengths and preferences. For those users who are career ready, Career Coach includes a professional resume builder that uses industry-specific language to help users create a resume. Providing so many options to students is an advantage since different students may have distinct priorities to their work lives: long-term growth potential in the field, proximity to their home, salary, or time necessary to train for a job. All of these factors were included in the design of Career Coach, which averages 2,000 users per month. Its usage has tripled since its inauguration three years ago.

Industry Partnerships

Several disciplines at the College have advantages in helping students find employment because their programs were designed specifically around industry standards in discreet fields. In areas like cybersecurity, health sciences, biotechnology, auto repair, and apartment maintenance, the College is often approached by industries and contracted to provide instruction and training that meet industry requirements.



Our CyberAdvantage program, for example, was only created two years ago in response to a dearth of workers in the cyber security industry. Montgomery College's leadership of the \$15 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant from the US Department of Labor has enabled us to create the CyberTechnology Pathways Across Maryland Consortium (along with 14 other community colleges), which is providing innovative job training in cybersecurity and information technology. Biotechnology companies in Maryland regularly approach the College to recruit workers for their evolving needs. More than 200 MC alums are currently working in the Maryland biotechnology sector, at firms such as BioReliance, Human Genome Sciences, and MedImmune. Health sciences have also evolved over the years, with medical imaging specialties, for example, expanding as technology advances and demand grows. Graduates of our medical sonography program, for example, enjoy an 85 percent job placement rate. Two years ago MC began offering classes in hybrid electrical vehicle maintenance, in response to growing demand in the auto industry.

The more closely community colleges can map their curricula to industry standards, the better positioned their graduates are to secure work in the field. The College maps its curricula to licensing standards for a host of industry groups and MC faculty also serve on workforce boards and in communities groups, keeping the College tightly connected with workforce needs as they evolve.

Employee Training

Some MC programs are designed specifically with the returning worker or career changer in mind. TechLeap, for example, allows workers to improve their skills in programming, networking, or web design. The three-semester program trains students and collaborates with employers such as Westat and Infosys to connect students to internship and job opportunities. The Clinical Trial Project Management program, which requires entering students to hold a bachelor's degree, builds on their existing skills and connects them to employers such as Amarex and KamTek.

The Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation just announced that it will revive Maryland Business Works, and invest \$500,000 in companies that want to train their



employees, providing them new certifications or new work skills. Montgomery College has previously benefited from state training incentives such as Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) grants for biotech and the transportation industries, recently continued through FY17.

It is not uncommon for businesses to approach MC and request help in training new workers as they build their workforce or improving the skills of incumbent workers. The Washington Area New Automobile Dealers Association (WANADA) and the National Apartment Association (NAA) are two examples of partnerships at MC that are building a skilled workforce for two sectors. WANADA recruits new people who want to begin a career as an auto repair technician, placing them at dealerships four days each week while attending MC training one day each week. MC developed the curriculum for WANADA and participants who pass the Auto Service Excellence certification exam earn an essential credential for working in the auto service industry. MC has also partnered with the National Apartment Association, which developed its own training curriculum for entry level workers, in the area of apartment maintenance technicians, a field in which there is a shortage of workers. Graduates of the MC Certificate for Apartment Maintenance Technicians program can earn \$17–19 per hour starting wages as apartment maintenance technicians. Approximately 70 percent of all the participants in this program gain employment in the industry.

Health Sciences and Education

MC offers programs in 11 areas of health sciences, many of which prepare students for work immediately upon completion and licensure, including nursing, physical therapy, medical sonography, and surgical technology. Most of these areas require a clinical rotation and many MC students are ultimately hired by one of their clinical sites. This is particularly true for MC's nursing program. Montgomery County's acute care facilities regularly hire MC grads, including Holy Cross Health, Adventist Health, Dimensions Health, MedStar Health, and Johns Hopkins Medicine. Our students are also hired by long-term care facilities such as Asbury Methodist, the Greater Washington Hebrew Home, Arcola, and Manor Care, and by ancillary facilities such as Patient First and RadNet. A special immersion program at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring allows MC nursing students to spend a week networking at the facility during spring break, followed by an



official interview. Many health care employers also post positions they are looking to fill directly on MC's e-jobs link. Projections of shortages among health care workers by 2020 are steep, so almost every MC student who passes the national nursing exam (NCLEX) finds employment.

Education is another field in which practicums or internships are often entrées to employment. Many students who earn an associate of arts in teaching at MC and complete a bachelor's degree at another four-year institution, then cycle back to teach in Montgomery County Public Schools. They often end up in schools that they know from a practicum. MC students who complete an early childhood education certificate or a two-year associate of arts or science degree can also step directly in to the labor market, in preschools and early learning centers—some of which they interned in during their field training experiences.

For a variety of jobs that require a four-year degree, transferring to another institution is the next step toward employment for MC grads. As I explored in last month's *President's Focus*, the College's transfer programs are robust and growing. MC advisors are deliberate about counseling students to consider their long-term employment plans as they consider transfer options.

Two factors are increasingly salient in discussions of MC grads' successful transition to the workforce. First, the alignment of skills taught at the College and those most in demand by the marketplace must continue to be a priority. As the US economy continues to rebound from the Great Recession, the proximity of community colleges to the evolving needs of local workforces will continue to be an advantage for students. At the same time, students searching for jobs need support and guidance to appreciate the competitive nature of job searching and the strategic self-marketing it requires.

Thousands of MC students graduate each year armed with a degree or certification that makes them job-ready. Some of them are in fields (nursing, cyber or auto repair) where the demand is great and licensure or certification almost guarantees one a position. As job placement rates become an increasingly popular barometer of institutional success at colleges in the US, MC will continue its efforts to construct pathways to employment as part of its map for student-success.



Questions for Discussion:

1. Are there additional ways to connect MC students with employment that we have not yet engaged?
2. How can we track student employment so that MC has a better feedback loop about the efficacy our job-search support measures?
3. How can we better serve students whose interests or skills do not fall into those categories traditionally associated with internships or practicums?

