

# AAUP NEWSLETTER

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Montgomery College Chapter

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## PRESIDENTS CORNER

Rose Sachs

As the close of the academic year is barreling down on us, I would like to briefly look back, determine where we are now, and think a bit about some of the areas of focus for the Executive Committee come next fall semester.

### LEARNING COLLEGE

This past year has been particularly notable for the unfolding of the Learning College and the somewhat unprecedented endemic and unified reaction of the faculty. Meeting after meeting, chairs, councils, the Academic Assembly, not to mention the ice-cream socials, have focused on the Learning College. In response to the sentiments expressed in those meetings and by individual faculty members in writing, the administration has forsaken the pillars in favor of a five-pointed star with *Student Learner* in the center (the star, one would assume, representing our universe). Although the packaging has changed, faculty still have concerns that, because the five initiatives and the rhetoric are almost exactly the same as before, the content and depth of the interpretation of the initiative has not changed.

Those of us who actually did a bit of research on the philosophy of the Learning College and its application, nationwide, have discovered that, despite the unfortunate name (one that seems to inflame faculty regardless

of content), this initiative is not without some sound theoretical underpinnings. As with most, if not all visions, the need for unity is critical; top-down visions simply do not work. Far more problematic than the actual initiative have been the process employed by the administration to adopt and develop the initiative, a process that almost wholly excluded and ignored faculty (not to mention staff and students), and the on-going lack of clarity as to how the philosophy is and will be operationalized. In an effort to rectify this situation and promote some ownership by the faculty, a decision was made, jointly, to invite interested faculty to fashion and provide the faculty perspective of this, our Learning College. It would seem logical, in that learning and teaching are not mutually exclusive (if they were, we would really only need students OR faculty - saving the College a fair amount of money perhaps - but, I digress) that faculty be major architects in structuring an initiative that focuses on learning. Rather than forming a joint committee, we envision this group to be comprised of faculty members who serve in an advisory capacity. Unlike the joint committees that were established during this past year, this issue is not a direct condition of employment; therefore, the involvement of the Executive Committee will be more limited. We will be working with the in-coming Faculty Council chairs to put together a faculty group and, possibly, to apply for an *Innovative Grant* to support the group. Please let the Council chairs and/or me know of your interest. Despite my rather vocal concerns about the initiative, I believe we have an opportunity to create a unified vision that will include a thorough examination of the ways in which the institution's practices, policies, and processes of decision making

CORNER Continued on Page 3

## TO THE EDITOR

Response to the Letter Submitted by Professor Tammy Peery (February 2006)

### THE LEARNING COLLEGE INITIATIVE AT MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Thank you for your thoughtfully written letter to the editor regarding the Learning College initiative. I am pleased that this critical topic, student learning, has generated so much interest and discussion in the College Community. I appreciate the opportunity to bring these issues into an environment of collegial debate. Within institutions of higher education, energetic and analytic dialogues are invigorating and useful in completing and understanding a vision for implementation.

This initiative, an umbrella that strives to incorporate many significant instructional and academic programs already thriving at Montgomery College, got its impetus from several sources. Greater Expectations, published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) in 2002, encouraged those of us in higher education to recognize the needs of the “new learner,” to focus on practical yet rigorous core competencies, and to develop intentional, flexible and engaged learners. The Learning College philosophy, originally articulated in the writings of Drs. Barr, Tagg and O’Banion, outlines an approach to learning that puts learning at the center of institutional decision making, stresses learning outcomes, and recommends a number of ways to enhance the learning process: increased faculty/student interaction, learning communities, community involvement and multiple strategic approaches to instruction. Our Learning College initiative has as its goal to build on the learning centered culture of Montgomery College, and to put the support and enhancement of learning at the center of all institutional endeavors. This, I am pleased to tell you is happening – with our students, our faculty and our staff. The Learning College provides a vocabulary and vision that can unite the many extraordinary efforts already underway at the College.

I do regret the concerns you expressed about the way we have characterized the teams. Any new campaign needs to generate some attention and interest, and this one chose to be colorful, pictorial, and a bit whimsical. Our mission statement urges us to put students at the center of our universe, but also urges us to tend our internal spirit, have a sense of humor, and put some fun in the process. Nevertheless, I surely do not wish to have the message overwhelmed by concerns about packaging and format. The concepts and ideas are where we need to focus our discussions. Beginning next week, both Dr. Shartle-Galotto and I will be meeting with governance groups such as Academic Assembly and Faculty Councils, to solicit feedback on how to refocus the Learning College initiatives to serve students and faculty more directly.

When we first began exploring the concept of expanding the learning centered culture at Montgomery College, and focusing on both “learning” and “learning outcomes,” faculty, deans, Vice Presidents and staff were invited to participate. It was originally a small group of 30 or 40 individuals who attended that first retreat in February 2004. The intent was to expand these original groups to include more faculty and to grow the teams as the activities expanded. I’m really gratified to see the many faculty that are interested in joining these initiatives.

Academic Area Review and Outcomes Assessment are at the heart of the Learning College initiative and our own self-regulation. We want to ensure that our curriculum is as rigorous and current as it can be. Moreover, we want to document that our students are receiving what we think that we are providing. Faculty are playing a pivotal role in both initiatives. With this level of introspection and attention to detail, without a doubt, we will be prepared for the scrutiny of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education when a team visits in spring 2008. As a result of concentrating on assessment and accountability at the student, programmatic and institutional levels, we will be ready. Pressure continues to mount on institutions of higher education to document learning outcomes. The central principle of the learning college model is

that students will be changed by their learning experiences, and that change can be demonstrated in measurable learning outcomes. "Higher Education cannot drag its feet," says Lee Shulman, president of the Carnegie Institute. "It is time for us to do comprehensive, multifaceted assessments of what students learn."

I invite you most warmly to upcoming Learning College events that are designed to embrace the College community in dialogue and deliberation. I will also be attending the Academic Assembly, Chairs' meetings, and Faculty Councils as I did during the fall semester to respond to concerns and to hear varying points of view. Also, I encourage those who haven't read the Learning College Monograph to do so. It lays out a vision for the full implementation that focuses on coordination of programming options, open communication, and inclusion of all members of the Montgomery College family.

I believe we are already united in purpose as an academic community in working for the success of our students. I sincerely hope that you will continue to share your feedback and reflections, and I welcome the opportunity to continue this important discussion. Again, thanks for articulating and sharing your comments.

Clarice Somersall  
Vice President for Learning and Academic Effectiveness ♣

CORNER Continued from page 1

impact the lives of our students.

Before leaving the subject of the Learning College: The article written by Professor Tammy Peery that appeared in the last issue of the AAUP Newsletter generated a good deal of both written and verbal responses from faculty. Overwhelmingly, the faculty expressed that the sentiments voiced are those of the majority of faculty. Faculty also expressed a sincere desire that the publication of those sentiments result in some meaningful dialog between faculty and administration. We appreciate the time and care taken by faculty to comment and hope that you will continue to voice not only your responses, but your ideas as well. The article also prompted responses from the administration. On behalf of the Executive Committee, I want to thank those administrators who seized an opportunity for collaboration, and David Sears and Clarice Somersall, in particular. David Sears, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, met, at his request, with the Executive Committee in an effort to better understand the needs of our students and the needs of the faculty and to offer the support of his office. Clarice Somersall, Vice President for Learning and Academic Effectiveness, responded with a comprehensive and thoughtful letter that we have published in this current Newsletter. Please take the opportunity to read her thoughts.

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### **MONTGOMERY COLLEGE CHAPTER**

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	Tim Kirkner - (R)	279-5049
At-large Member	Abby Spero - (G)	353-7753
At-large Member	Trudy Cohen - (TP)	650-1412
At-large Member	Ken Weiner - (R)	279-5203

## JOINT COMMITTEES

Unlike the committee on Distance Learning, which is on-going, the Chair/Coordinator ESH Committee and the Faculty Leave Committee are time-limited and had been charged with establishing recommendations. These two committees are still in the process of examining and discussing very complicated and sensitive issues. As a member of the Pay/Progression Committee, a committee that has been meeting since, I believe, the turn of the century (this or the one before), I understand the requirement of time and attention to the myriad of possible repercussions for each scenario to craft balanced and equitable solutions. Whether any of these three committees will have reached completion and agreement in the next few weeks is not predictable at this time, so it is likely that one or more of these issues will continue to be a focus during the fall semester.

## 12-MONTH FACULTY MEMBERS

During another conversation and context, that of Division Chairs/Associate Deans, the faculty voiced a very strong and uniformed opinion that 12-month, non-teaching, non-counseling, non-advising, non-bargaining faculty are, indeed, not faculty; 12-month, non-teaching, non-counseling, non-advising, non-bargaining employees are staff, directors, administrators. And yes, the administration took our opinion to heart and the Associate Deans were hired as Associate Deans, not as faculty. One can only imagine our surprise to learn that the position of CTL Director had been posted as a 12-month, non-teaching, non-counseling, non-advising, non-bargaining faculty. We are a bit disappointed that the administration was unable to generalize and predict our reaction based on our past reaction to the same issue; we hope that someone will help us understand in what ways the new position of 12-month, non-teaching, non-counseling, non-advising, non-bargaining CTL Director fits the definition of a faculty member.

## ELECTIONS

At the May 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, we will elect the Chapter officers for the coming year. Please take the time to

vote and please attend the meeting.

## NEGOTIATIONS

This coming year is the final year of our most recently negotiated salary enhancement. Next fall, we begin negotiations. Please email me any issues that you think might be of value to examine during these negotiations. We are currently putting together the negotiating team; if you are interested in participating, let your campus VP or me know.

## APPRECIATION

As I vacate the position of President after two years to go back to negotiations, I want to personally thank all of the members of the Executive Committee for the tremendous outlay of time and energy and for their constant support. I also thank the editors of the Newsletter for their patience and the members of the on-going joint committees. As teaching and counseling faculty, our time is pretty much filled with our students; the willingness demonstrated by these individuals to go so far above and beyond to enhance our community is testimony to the faculty commitment. I thank our President, Dr. Nunley, and our Executive Vice-Presidents, Mary Kay Shartle-Galotto and Bill Campbell, for providing the faculty a forum for discussion, the Governance Group Meetings, and for their candor and concern. I thank Jim O'Brien for coordinating those meetings and for always being the quintessential historian and resource. I thank Harry Zarin and Ken Weiner, past Chapter Presidents, for their guidance and humor. I thank Tim Kirkner for the compassion and good sense he has demonstrated as our new Grievance Officer. And lastly, I struggle to find the words to thank Don Day, who is retiring after many years at the College, many years representing the faculty as a member of the Executive Committee, and many years promoting a mutually respectful relationship between faculty and administration. Given the complexity of our institution, to be treasured by students, faculty, and administrators is, indeed, no small accomplishment. ♣