



May 6, 2016

Dear Students, faculty and staff:

Last fall, citing improvements to access and success in post-secondary education as the appropriate response to the large disparities in health, education, employment, income, and incarceration, a group of courageous students, staff, and faculty wrote a letter to the Minneapolis Community and Technical College community. The letter was a call to action demanding transformation of campus culture, policies and practices, to significantly improve retention and graduation rates, most acutely for members of marginalized communities of color and Native American communities.

The letter was disseminated electronically across our campus, becoming a guide for the work of the President's Leadership Council and college committees. The authors of the letter sparked conversation furthered by a student panel presentation on February 26 at our College Conversation Day. A survey assessing the efficacy of the day revealed that the panel was the most impactful part of the day. Furthermore, the survey results indicate that more time needs to be devoted to addressing the concerns raised by the student panel as well as the letter. Consequently, the college will engage in follow-up staff and faculty discussions centering on the issues raised in the student letter during our May community gathering.

Word also spread to other Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) campuses, inspiring the crafting of similar letters on other campuses. Ultimately, the letter was read at a meeting of the MnSCU Leadership Council this past winter. After the reading, the Presidents of two and four-year MnSCU institutions requested that the letter be sent to them. The work of our courageous students, staff, and faculty has rippled throughout the System, inspiring community activism and change.

In the letter, MCTC students identified a set of approaches that would better align institutional culture, policies and procedures with the needs of the student population. I organized the list of approaches into seven categories. Following each category you will find an update indicating what the college is doing or plans to do relative to the recommended approach.

The responses below do not capture all the efforts currently underway to improve student success and close the opportunity gap in education, employment and earnings between communities of color/Native American communities and White communities. The responses found below primarily address the specific items that appeared in the letter to the community.

### **1. Human resources/staff and faculty development**

- ***Mandating cultural competency training for all MCTC employees and embedding cultural competency within employee performance reviews***

The Office of Human Resources is establishing a professional development program that will identify various training and development needs across the college. Funds are being requested through the college budget process to add a professional development specialist to the HR department who will work with supervisors and staff on addressing skills gaps development needs such as customer service and cultural competency skills. This program will work in close collaboration with the Executive Director of Diversity to ensure that every employee participates in ongoing cultural competency training. The program will also ensure that each employee's position description continues to include cultural competence as a key competency and that performance reviews are used to help identify gaps in this area. This position is also expected to work closely with the Center for Teaching and Learning in identifying development opportunities for faculty, including cultural competency training.

The college leadership will be consulting with faculty over the coming months about ways to make culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum a central focus of faculty professional development efforts at the college going forward. Furthermore, the college is exploring the creation of a position for a dean of equity and instruction, and a focus of that individual's work will be to expand the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum across the college.

- ***Establishing diversity within all offices and departments of the college and ending MnSCU patterns of cronyism***

Over the past 18 months, the college has piloted a new hiring model that focuses more on competencies, skills, talents and values and focuses less on degree completion and work experience. In doing so, we have been able to consider a much broader pool of applicants and have made most of our staff positions associate degree friendly, thereby creating a pipeline for our current MCTC students to gain employment at the college. During the initial 12-month pilot period of this new hiring model, nearly 50% of all new hires were people of color and the college has retained 97% of those new hires. We will continue to use this new hiring model and refine and make improvements as necessary to ensure that MCTC is continuing its commitment to creating a diverse workforce across all categories of employees, including faculty, staff, and administrators. The goal is to have an even distribution of diversity across the institution.

## 2. Equity and inclusion

- *Creating a Title 6 and Title 9 student assessment panel empowered with the Diversity office to enforce policy changes and establish a proactive diversity plan*

The college's Strategic Diversity Plan Committee has been developing a strategic diversity plan supporting student retention and success. The plan will be completed by June 1, as required by the Charting the Future work plan. A draft of this plan will be shared with the college community prior to being finalized so that stakeholders may provide their input.

Additionally, over the next academic year, the college will launch a thorough policy review process, driven in part by a recommendation by the Strategic Diversity Plan Committee, which will include a review of its policies to identify barriers to inclusion/equity. The policy review will occur during the Fall Semester 2016.

A student advisory panel will be created at the beginning of the 2016 Fall Semester to work with the Executive Director of Diversity in the implementation of the Strategic Diversity Plan. The goal of this work is to end those practices having disparate impacts on our low-income students, students of color and American Indian Students.

## 3. Student support/outreach

- *Establishing a women's center on campus including support for mothers (i.e. child care, space for breast feeding)*

The college has established a new Student Parent Center – Lactation room on campus to provide a space where student parents can be on campus while they are with their children and to provide services designed to support student parents. This space, in T-1000, offers computers for student use, individual and group workspace, a children's learning/play area, a conference room, a lactation area, parent support and discussion groups, access to child-care grants and other resources, presentations on topics of interest, and walk-in counseling services.

- *Advertise and provide full student support programs for undocumented students*

We are partnering with Navigate Minnesota to improve outreach, resources and support for all Latino community members including those living in the community without documents. Navigate is housed on the MCTC campus and collaborates with Student Affairs in outreach and support activities.

In addition, the MCTC Foundation has increased the number of scholarships in the STAR Scholars from 17 to 50. The Star Scholars program is a scholarship program meant for undocumented students. Modeled after the Power of You program, which serves recent high school graduates, the STAR Scholars program provides undocumented students with scholarships and supportive services including advising. The program will continue to grow as the Foundation fund-raising efforts grow.

- *Reducing student debt and providing financial literacy training*

MCTC is pursuing several strategies to help reduce student debt. The Financial Aid Office and TRIO Educational Opportunity Center are currently offering financial aid literacy trainings and FAFSA Labs. In an effort to reach more students with financial aid support and financial literacy skills we are examining a technology called Campus Logic, which assists students through the financial aid verification process and making financial literacy instruction part of the FYST course.

The African-American Empowerment Program (AME) has developed a train-the-trainer model with multiple work-study student leaders who are now able to offer peer support in completing financial aid. Additional peer-to-peer, train-the-trainer efforts may also aid in the effort to improve financial literacy.

Partnerships with community organizations like Impact that also offer free financial literacy trainings using a train-the-trainer model will be explored.

MCTC has significantly expanded the number of college courses that are offered at Minneapolis high schools and other community venues. This expansion offers multiple benefits for students. In addition to increasing high school completion and college-going behavior, such dual-credit options reduce the cost of college attendance by enabling Minneapolis youth to earn college credits tuition-free while still in high school.

We are also carefully examining the outcomes of our academic programs including the level of debt and ability to repay debt as performance measures via our program prioritization process. Programs that produce poor outcomes are asked to improve. Failure to improve outcomes leads to program suspension.

The cost of textbooks is also a significant contributor to the high cost of college and high levels of debt among students. Therefore, a newly launched Traditional and Alternative Educational Materials Committee is exploring the adoption of Open Educational Resources (OERs) and electronic textbooks. Full adoption of these alternatives to traditional textbooks will reduce the cost of higher education significantly. A pilot adoption project is being undertaken this coming Fall Semester to test the efficacy of OERs and electronic texts in MCTC classrooms. In addition, MCTC received a \$25,000 grant from MnSCU to support the ability of MCTC faculty to develop and use OERs.

#### **4. Academics and policies**

- *Ending certificate and degree requirements that will not transfer to 4-year institutions*

Over the past few years, the college instituted an annual program and course prioritization process to evaluate academic offerings. This process is used to determine which courses and programs the college should offer and which it should not. Transferability is one of the key criteria that academic deans use when determining the priority for offering courses. Additionally, the college is preparing

for the introduction of transfer degrees as part of the MnSCU-wide Transfer Pathways initiative that will create two-year degrees that will transfer to any MnSCU university.

- *Connecting advisors to the student support programs and better prepare advisors to guide students to efficient, cost effective, degree and certificate completion*
- *Making popular program transfer requirements available as DARS reports in e-services*

Academic, financial aid, and transfer advising will become part of the FYST course curriculum. The University of Minnesota and other four-year partners are coming in to train advisors on what courses students should take in order to simultaneously complete the MCTC credential and transfer successfully reducing the number of credits that do not transfer or are only accepted as university electives.

In addition, MCTC is committed to developing a Baccalaureate Center on the campus, a place where advisors from four-year institutions can be available to MCTC students on a regular basis.

Four-year degree completion will be possible on the MCTC campus through partnership with Metropolitan State University. Selected (popular) degrees will be available for dual admission early in the students' academic career at MCTC and completion will be possible without leaving the MCTC campus.

- *Requiring all faculty of all disciplines to establish culturally relevant classroom pedagogy by offering more course content focusing on the experiences of the communities our students are from*

The college faculty continue to expand course offerings that focus on the experiences of MCTC students, a practice that is encouraged by the college's academic deans. For example, the Philosophy Department takes a global perspective; drawing from a wide breadth of schools of thought and offering such courses as African American philosophy, Feminist Philosophy, and an Asian Philosophy course that includes Islamic philosophy. The English Department stopped offering British literature courses and began offering such courses as Introduction to Literature of the African Diaspora, African, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Latin Literature, as well as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Literature. We see these same types of efforts to expand the curriculum taking place across many disciplines, including Woman's Studies, Communication Studies, Global Studies, and American Indian Studies.

In addition, the role of Executive Director of Diversity will begin a transition this summer to align the college's diversity function more closely with Academic Affairs so that the Director may work with faculty to expand the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum.

This alignment will also allow the Executive Director of Diversity to promote recommendations found in the Strategic Diversity Plan, as well as introduce resources, toolkits and trainings aiding the

further development of culturally competent classroom management strategies. Lastly, efforts will continue to recruit faculty of color across the curriculum.

- *Expanding the add drop window for classes*

Starting in Fall Semester of 2016, the college will be proactively withdrawing all students who register for classes but never attend, after the first two weeks of class. While it is estimated that this will impact the college's budget by reducing revenues by up to \$100,000 annually, the benefit to students in not paying for classes they never attended must take precedent.

- *Establishing attainable course incompletes or safe pauses in study, for students in good standing, to deal with life emergencies*

Developing alternative methods of helping students in good standing deal with life emergencies demands engagement from faculty, staff, and administration. I will ask the college's First-Year Retention Committee to study this issue in the coming academic year.

## 5. Student life

- *Establishing an ethnic student caucus*

The Executive Director of Diversity will be tasked with developing a student of color/ American Indian student caucus. The caucus, together with the Directors of Diversity and Student Life can begin shaping the student panel cited in item #2 above.

- *Offering affordable housing for at a minimum our homeless students*

Minneapolis Community and Technical College is working with community partners such as YouthLink, Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, AEON and Hennepin County Community Action - Student Support Center to find emergency housing and long-term affordable housing for our students. We are also working with Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis to develop additional strategies and resources to help students facing homelessness. MCTC is seeking to have a County housing specialist on campus one day per week. Over the longer term, the college will continue to explore options for partnerships that could provide permanent housing to our students and connect housing to the educational and career goals of our students.

## 6. Facilities and technology

- *Establishing gender neutral restroom facilities*

The Finance and Facilities Division has conducted an audit of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and identified their location. It found that the vast majority of the gender-neutral bathrooms are in the Helland Student Center, while the only building on campus without a gender-neutral restroom is the T-Building.

The college has worked with student leadership to identify and install appropriate signage to improve awareness of existing gender-neutral restrooms. Additionally, two gender-neutral bathrooms will be brought online on the first floor of the T-Building, replacing two traditional bathrooms.

- *Expanding the access to the library to 24 hours*

While the college's library is not open 24 hours, the college has expanded library hours over the past year. The library is open approximately 12 more hours each week this year than last year, and unlike last year when it was closed each semester break, it is now remains open Mondays through Fridays during break.

The college is unable to expand access to the library 24 hours for financial and safety reasons. However, administration is working on expanding access to educational resources at the Helland Student Center by adding study areas equipped with computers with Internet capability accessible through key card entry for students.

- *Seeking to offer affordable computers for students*

The Information Technology Service unit is leading an effort to partner with Best Buy and the Foundation to provide students discounted mobile devices, Internet access and other essential equipment to be successful on campus and remotely. This concept was presented to the Student Senate. The Student Senate expressed strong support. Best Buy would offer education priced computers and services partially subsidized by the Foundation to our students. They would provide technical assistance via their Geek Squad unit as well. Preliminary discussions have begun with Best Buy to allow for a dedicated space to perform computer maintenance on campus.

Additionally, administration is exploring the feasibility of implementing a process to allow students to use financial aid funds for purchasing the mobile devices and services from Best Buy.

## **7. Customer service**

- *Providing customer service training for staff*
- *Requiring front line staff to automatically refer students to student support programs (i.e., AME, UNITE, TRIO)*

As stated above, the college has undertaken a formal Quality Service Initiative. The following service quality statement guides the Initiative:

- *Listening* – We anchor our services in students' needs. We listen to all questions and requests with compassion and without preconceptions; we listen for understanding to students and each other.

- ***Respecting Uniqueness*** – We serve each person, whether student or employee, as a unique human being with their own concerns, hopes and perspectives. We all come to each interaction with personal and cultural experiences that merit mutual respect.
- ***Making Pathways Clear*** – We know that students’ lives and the life of our community can be transformed when each student achieves educational success. Therefore, we help others efficiently navigate their path to make success possible.

Three categories of service quality have been identified: 1) demeanor and behaviors (including cultural competence), 2) job-specific knowledge and training, and 3) knowledge of and ability to refer to college resources.

A survey will be launched so that all community members can provide feedback regarding services in the context of the three categories above. The purpose of the feedback is for the improvement of services that we provide to students and one another. It is meant to inform service quality improvements and professional development to staff across the college. Concurrently, a service quality training series was established for front line staff the beginning of March.

- ***Addressing the fear on campus that results in minority students being reported or suspended for minor issues***

As stated above, funds are being requested through the college budget process to add a professional development specialist to the HR department who will work with supervisors and staff on addressing skills gaps development needs such as customer service skills and cultural competency skills. This program will work in close collaboration with the Executive Director of Diversity to ensure that every employee participates in ongoing cultural competency training. The program will also ensure that each employee’s position description continues to include cultural competence as a key competency and that performance reviews are used to help identify gaps in this area. This position is also expected to work closely with the Center for Teaching and Learning in identifying development opportunities for faculty, including cultural competency training.

The college leadership will be consulting with faculty over the coming months about ways to make culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum a central focus of faculty professional development efforts at the college going forward. Furthermore, the college is exploring the creation of a position for a dean of equity and instruction, and a focus of that individual’s work will be to expand the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum across the college.

We are also having the college’s Public Safety Department act in a leadership capacity to ensure that we maintain a comfortable, safe, and respectful community. We are currently seeking student feedback on how best to reach this goal.



We are also asking the Office of Students Rights and Responsibilities to increase domestic violence and anti-bullying programming and to increase transparency by providing statistics on the outcomes of conduct proceedings.

### *In Closing*

Our college has made a commitment to closing the opportunity gap in education, employment and earnings in the City of Minneapolis.

During my first week on the job I was asked to share what I believed was MCTC's "true" mission. I responded by saying that it was to provide privilege to those individuals in the community who have not had access to privilege in the past. To this I added that, whether we wished to accept that notion or not, that this is the "true" mission of every educational institution in our country: Individuals who complete a higher education credential have more access to privilege than those who do not and have the opportunity to build the esteem consummate with their new skill sets and professional roles.

I also indicated that part of our mission is to take collective responsibility for the youth of Minneapolis as well as the City's under- and unemployed residents. Education is about life or death for low-income people, students of color and American Indian students. You have told us that if we are really interested in saving lives, what we would do is to provide you with pathways to success – in other words, pathways to successfully attaining living-wage employment and/or a four-year degree. Therefore, connecting youth as well as underemployed and unemployed Minneapolis residents to living wage, family-sustaining jobs in all sectors of the economy has become a central part of MCTC's work.

In order to operationalize this principle we are using guided pathways to living wage employment and/or further education as the basic structure. The essential elements of MCTC's guided pathways are falling into place. One early result indicating the success of guided pathways is the increase of PSEO and concurrent enrollment by 67 percent over the last year. The students representing this increase are predominantly students of color and students attending high school in one of 17 Alternative Learning Centers from six Metro area school districts. Some of the elements embedded in the guided pathways strategy include:

- Striving to provide tuition-free two-year college for low-income Minneapolis residents by 2019. The MCTC Foundation Board has approved the plan and is taking on the challenge believing they can raise \$10.5 million over the next three years to support this.
- Organizing the college so that all its structures point the way to successful completion.
- Making educational and social wrap-around services part of guided pathways.
- Offering college credits prior to college matriculation via concurrent enrollment, PSEO, and Destination: Diploma to Degree Programs.

- Making career planning, academic and financial aid advising, and financial literacy part of the MCTC curriculum.
- Creating connection to workforce and industry through internships and employment.
- Encouraging faculty to remove unnecessary pre-requisites that could prevent qualified students from pursuing their careers of interest.
- Doing all we can to ensure our students feel welcome, validated, and valued in their experiences on campus.

These ideas will guide our way forward as we reconsider our curriculum, pedagogy and services. While we are addressing many concerns simultaneously, be assured that the primary goal is to improve retention and to close the opportunity gap in education that exists on our campus.

At the same time, we know that low socioeconomic status and being a person of color or American Indian are correlates of academic achievement. In fact, recent research by the college indicates that we can't dismiss the opportunity gap in education as a function of socioeconomic status alone. Instead, this research suggests that the impacts of racial inequity that persist in society as a whole are having an equal if not greater influence than socioeconomic status does on the factors supporting student success. These findings highlight the need for MCTC to make race, equity, and inclusion a priority by focusing on increasing cultural competence of employees, expanding the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum, and further diversifying the college's workforce.

To close the opportunity gap in education, employment and earnings demands long-term sustained effort calling for making equity and inclusion the centerpiece of all of our strategic efforts to improve retention and close the above cited opportunity gaps.

Sincerely,



Avelino Mills-Novoa  
Interim President