

Dear students, faculty, and staff,

It is difficult to discern a single student voice from a campus population of thousands. All too often, however, significant numbers of the students of Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) report feeling unwanted, unvalued, and underserved on our campus. Many students arrive from communities already distrustful of public institutions, and experiencing elevated rates of joblessness, hunger, and homelessness. Members of these communities are also beset by stereotypes blaming them for the condition of their lives.

Yet we as the MCTC community represent an option, perhaps for some the only option for pursuing higher education, and the dream of a career and livable wage. We are the most selected destination to pursue this dream among the students of all Minneapolis high schools. Many of these students believe earning an education is a choice between life and death.

Arriving on campus in hopes of obtaining a degree or certificate and launching a career, far too many MCTC students will leave without a diploma or improved job prospects. Instead they face student loan incurred debt that perpetuates their economic struggle. Frequently we dismiss those that fall to the wayside, the majority of our incoming students, as different, uneducable, uncommitted, or even as problem people. This majority is our institution's life blood, and should be at the heart of our ethical and strategic considerations, rather than dismissed as inferior and inevitable failures.

We are living a myth, a self-protective story of how things are in Minnesota. We cling to old notions that reduce the human condition to individual choices without context. We dismiss much of the suffering and struggles of the people of our state, and particularly of those coming from marginalized communities of color and Native American communities, as a result of their own defects. This absolves us of all responsibility, provides us an excuse to withhold our best efforts, and ensures progress will be sparing. At the same time Minnesota suffers from the deepest collection of gaps measured between people of color/Native American peoples and White people in wellbeing (i.e., health, education, employment, income, and incarceration).

We have a choice to make regarding these conditions. We can continue to wrap ourselves in the ego protecting story of Minnesotan racial progressivism and minority deficiency, or we can take a hard look at how this condition plays out through institutional practices and discrimination.

Realizing our promise at MCTC, to deliver a transformative education, will not be realized through supporting only a small number of students, those already most like us, towards success and exceptionalism. Our promise can only be realized by transforming the culture of our campus. Our graduation and retention rates are intimately related to the kind of experiences students have on our campus. From their first interaction with staff or faculty, student perceptions quickly become assessments. We want these assessments to be that MCTC is a place where students feel valued, supported, welcomed, and empowered.

An institution is only the sum of the individuals that serve within it. The power to transform our campus into a hospitable space conducive towards the learning of students from all sectors of our state, is in our

hands. Ask yourself how do we design our college to better meet the needs of our students, and what do I do each day to make our students feel welcome and supported? Are there types of students I fail to welcome and support? What might the cost of the latter choices be to our students and institution?

If we have one charge in addressing our success it is to realize our path to that success lives in every interaction. Staff to staff, faculty to staff, staff and faculty to students, etc. Do we have the courage to offer the authenticity and accompanying vulnerability requisite in listening (for both understanding and validating students), building trust, and forging meaningful relationships with our students?

The abundance of powerful programming, exceptional classroom pedagogy, and student success stories, are a testament to our collective ability to transform, but can we extend this to every student? Can we offer every student a holistic ally or partner, willing to navigate with them, step by step, through bureaucracy, regulation, and policy, leaving no doubt that our institution and those within it are here to serve them? Can we resist the urges to reduce the experiences of struggling students to a story of their deficiency and our absolution? Can we avoid relationships of resistance with our students born from our inability to validate the real world challenges they face?

Can we create an educational space free of paternalism, dismissal, and micro-aggressions, challenging our students to grow while reinforcing their dignity and self-worth?

Students of MCTC identify the following items as a partial list of approaches that may better fit our institution to our student body:

#### Human Resources/Supervisors

- Mandating cultural competency training for all MCTC staff
- Embedding cultural competency within employee performance reviews
- Establishing diversity within all offices and departments of the college
- Ending MnSCU patterns of cronyism

#### Diversity & Equity

- 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

#### Student Support/Outreach

- Establishing a women's center on campus including support for mothers (i.e. child care, space for breast feeding)
- Advertise and provide full student support programs for undocumented students
- Reducing student debt and providing financial literacy training

#### Academic Affairs/Policies

- Mandating cultural competency training for all MCTC faculty

- Ending certificate and degree requirements that will not transfer to 4 year institutions
- Making popular program transfer requirements available as DARS reports in e-services
- Requiring all faculty of all disciplines to establish culturally relevant classroom pedagogy
- Expanding the add drop window for classes
- Establishing attainable course incompletes or safe pauses in study, for students in good standing, to deal with life emergencies
- Connecting advisors to the student support programs and better prepare advisors to guide students to efficient, cost effective, degree and certificate completion
- Offering more courses focusing on the experiences of the communities our students are from

#### Student Life

- Establishing an ethnic student caucus
- Offering affordable housing for at a minimum our homeless students

#### Facilities/Technology

- Establishing gender neutral restroom facilities
- Expanding the access to the library to 24 hours
- Seeking to offer affordable computers for students

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

Adopting these practices will send the message to our student body that MCTC is here to facilitate student success and present students the opportunity to blossom rather than the likelihood of withering. Every system is perfectly designed to get the exact results it gets!

In an age of social protest, mass incarceration, police brutality, global terrorism, rising tides of Islamophobia, immigrant resentment, economic violence, and wellbeing gaps, can we afford to replicate the world our students experience each day or can we provide a haven for growth, enlightenment, and transcendence?

#### **MCTC Students:**

Abdikarim Omar	Amairani Jonapa-Sanabria	Asli Abu	Attalah Robinson
Brice Okocha	Carla Campbell	Debra Williamson	Eric Williams
Esther Callahan	Gemario Suttles	Grisell Orozco	Jeodaun Lee

Jimmy Vang	Josue Estrada	Juan Davila	Jumondeh Tweh
Karon Harris	Kimberly Anderson	Kyarra Edmond	
LaKeshia Vance-Wilkerson		Lauro Clara-Flores	Lyndsi Skipper
Lucas Teixeira	Marie Harris	Mary Peterson	Michael White
Michelle Jimenez	Mohamed Jama	Robert Ellis, MCTC Student Senate President	
Rodney Williams	Ronnie Russell Bey-El, SAAB President		Rosamond Sturgis
Roy Lee Spearman Jones	Scelena Ross	Shanese Watts	Shayla Rutledge
Stacey Khang	Teresa Kontney	Tia Williams	Timothy Marino
Tyron Searight	Valeria Gomez-Cardenas		
Sarah Sharp, AME Student Coordinator		Muslim Students Association	

**Alumni**

Estefanía Navarro Hernandez, Alumni      Kirk Washington, Jr., Alumni  
 Emilia Gonzales Avalos, Executive Director Navigate Minnesota, Alumni

**Faculty, Staff, & Administrators**

Connie Rhodes, Executive Director, Restoration Incorporated	Ruthanne Crapo, Philosophy Faculty
Lisa Bergin, Philosophy Faculty	Rebecca Marsh, Information Studies Faculty
John Plomondon, American Studies Faculty	Mathew Palombo, Philosophy Faculty
Rosa Shannon, MCTC Chicano/Latino Advisor	
Sharon Fodness, Women's Studies/Anthropology Faculty	
Jay Williams, MCTC AME/SAAB Coordinator	

Whitney Harris, MCTC Executive Director of Diversity  
 Patrick Troup, MCTC Vice President of Student Affairs  
 Avelino Mills-Novoa, MCTC President