



Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness

MC Prospective Grads Survey

Analysis Brief

Big-picture takeaways from the survey pilot results.

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Abstract

In years past, regular attempts have been made by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) to solicit feedback from MC graduates. The instrument used most often was the Graduate Follow-up Survey, a formerly (and now defunct) MHEC-mandated instrument conducted by all community colleges in Maryland biennially.

While the Follow-up Survey's goal was righteous, MHEC's administrative instructions all but guaranteed abysmally low response rates. MC commonly received responses from fewer than fifty graduates on this survey. The basic shortcoming was that MHEC's timeline required schools to wait until the year after the grads had left before colleges could survey them.

Now that surveying grads is no longer a state-constrained requirement, the choice and manner in which MC can undertake this is strictly under our control. This spring, OIRE team members, Clary Brown and Arlene Blaylock designed a short, pilot instrument to replace the Follow-up Survey. Like its predecessor, the Prospective Grads Survey seeks input from graduates about their goal achievement, satisfaction, experiences, and future plans.

Most importantly, we can administer it *in medias res*, that is, while the targeted students are still enrolled. We hypothesize that *if OIRE consistently begins the survey cycle before candidates graduate, we can markedly improve response rates, and thus, improve the usefulness of this dataset.*

Methodology

The following observations are based on the 245 responses to the MC Prospective Grads Survey that was piloted online between April 27 and May 31, 2022. The survey was not sampled as MC email invitations were sent to the full universe of 3,333 students who were expected to graduate in the spring 2022 semester. Follow-up reminders were sent out twice, once to the MC email accounts, and the second time to the available home email accounts on record.

Given the final seven percent (7%) response rate, the results are accurate with 95% confidence and a +/-5% margin of error. This means the findings, barring any anomalies mentioned below, are moderately representative of all spring 2022 graduates.

The pilot results are promising. Participation has exceeded that of the Graduate Follow-up Survey fourfold and seven-fold in terms of the typical response rate.

In addition, there is no reason that MC could not push the survey start date even earlier for the next iteration. *The college should test the impact of a start date as early as the semester preceding the one in which students are on track to graduate.* To maximize survey participation, OIRE intends to couple this strategy with a multi-phased, preparatory communication plan. It will center around opening a dialogue about graduation concerns and survey promotion. It will hopefully create an engaging touchpoint with the targeted audience rather than be perceived as eleventh-hour or after-the-fact survey nagging.

Highlights

The full set of survey results can be accessed at [Prospective Grads Report \(2022\)](#). Salient highlights are presented below.

- **Q1. Most Important Educational goal.** The majority of participants came to MC to earn an associate degree or certificate (55%). Thirty-eight percent came to prepare for transfer to a four-year institution (38%).



- **Q2. Goal Achievement.** Nearly all the respondents achieved their goals (96%).
- **Q3-3a. Time to Achieve Goal.** A little shy of two-thirds of the respondents took more than two years to achieve their goals (65%). The top four reasons they gave were...

- Part-time attendance (51%)
- Took a semester or more off (30%)
- Changed majors (27%)
- Financial reasons (26%)

The comments offered by thirty-seven percent (37%) of the respondents in Q3a "Other" add another twenty or so causal factors. These are the most frequent...

- Competing family and job obligations (n = 17, 7%)
- Personal or family illness (n = 13, 5%)
- Lack of or poor advising and counseling (n = 6, 2%)
- English-language challenges (n = 5, 2%)

- **Q4. Why They Enrolled at MC.** The top three reasons the participants chose to attend MC include:
 - Affordable tuition (76%)
 - Campus location (71%)
 - MC's reputation (61%)



The remaining reasons are fairly tightly clustered around a mean of 37%.

- **Q5. Experiential Ratings.** Among the ten metrics gauging their experiences at MC, the majority of participants rated these attributes as either excellent or satisfactory. The most highly rated ones were:
 - Campus facilities including cleanliness, accessibility, availability, safety, etc. (65% excellent)
 - the helpfulness of instructors in their majors (64% excellent)
 - Inclusive, welcoming environment (64% excellent)
 - Quality of your education (63% excellent)



Experience with academic advising received the greatest number of fair or poor ratings at 23% combined.

- **Q6. Satisfaction with Services.** A majority of respondents were very pleased with MC's course registration process with sixty-two percent (62%) rating it as excellent. The majority ends here though as they respectively gave counseling, the financial aid process, and the tutorial center a 46%, 41%, and 39% excellent rating. Again, counseling garnered the most unfavorable ratings with a combined twenty-two percent (22%) fair/poor score.
- **Q7. Extracurricular Activities.** The vast majority of the graduates did not participate in MC's extracurricular activities—perhaps an effect of the pandemic. The College Honors Program garnered the highest degree of participation (19%) followed closely by clubs related to their majors (18%).

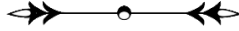
- **Q8-8a. Post-graduation Plans.** Two-thirds of the sample (n = 163) expected to transfer to a four-year college or university after graduation (67%) while another one-fifth (n = 47) will seek fulltime employment (19%). The former group will mostly pursue transfers to the University of Maryland (41%) and the University of Maryland Global Campus (9%).
-  **Q9. Would They Attend MC Again?** Eighty-seven percent of the graduates would attend MC again (87%). The results of this question are highly correlated with overall satisfaction.
-  **Q10. Would They Recommend MC to Others?** Ninety-three percent of participants would recommend MC to others (93%). The results of this question are highly correlated with overall satisfaction.
- **Q11. Parting Comments.** In all, fifty themes emerged in the 103 end-of-survey comments but the predominant ones are summarized below.

Theme	%
General praise and kudos for MC	44
Praise for faculty or academic department	19
Dissatisfaction with faculty or academic department	11
Dissatisfaction with counseling and advising	10
Praise for specific programs and resources	8
Readiness for a career or transfer to a 4-year college or university	6
Dissatisfaction with the service from the Office of Financial Aid	5

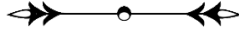
Note that a single comment can voice multiple themes.

A few illustrative comments embody the spirit of the major themes below.

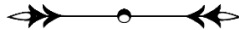
All the professors, staff members, technical assistants, and students at MC are absolutely wonderful and truly were what made these the best two years of my life...



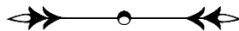
As a working adult, the flexibility and access to online learning was so important! I was able to take all my classes online.



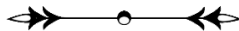
When my dad was dying of a rare cancer only half my teachers seemed to even care in the slightest...my...professor...told me to study more despite letting him know I had to spend time taking care of my dad and couldn't spend more time studying than I already was...



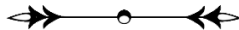
I feel that a lot of the professors could have been more helpful when it came to my accommodations [SIC] and were very rude at times when it came to inclusivity...



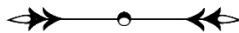
MC should strive to improve how they listen to students, their stories, needs, and hardships. Sometimes the college and advising systems tend to lecture students on what to do, rather than first listening to what is it that students want and need.



...counselors should not be making student schedules (from personal experience). Instead they should refer you to an advisor that knows about your intended major...



MC was truly the best decision I could have ever made to start my higher education...MC prepared me to be a great student for UMD and I feel ready! I am also grateful for the help provided in the transfer process.



...financial aid was not always helpful or knew the answers. Paperwork repeatedly had to be done. No follow up when needed or promised. Financial aid was the only area that lacked.

Survey Questions

1. My **most** important educational objective was to...
 - Earn an associate degree or certificate
 - Prepare for transfer to a four-year institution
 - Prepare for entry into a **first** career
 - Prepare for entry into a **different** career
 - Update skills for current job
2. By graduation, I will have achieved my objective.
 - True
 - False
3. Has it taken you **more than two years at MC** to achieve the main objective you selected above?
 - Yes
 - No

If the respondent answers "Yes" in Q3, pop up...

- 3a. What are the reasons it took you longer than two years? (Please check all that apply.)
 - Attended part-time
 - Changed majors
 - Financial reasons
 - Graduating with more than one major
 - Took a semester or more off for personal reasons
 - Other (please specify)
4. What are the reasons you chose MC? (Please check all that apply.)
 - MC's good reputation
 - Affordable tuition
 - Variety of academic programs and certifications offered
 - Variety of courses offered
 - Course availability
 - Campus location
 - On-campus classes
 - Online classes
 - Hybrid classes (a combo of on-campus and online)
 - Financial aid
 - Recommended by someone I trust

5. Considering **the majority of your time at MC**, please rate the following.
[Excellent | Satisfactory | Fair | Poor]
- Your overall experience at Montgomery College
 - Quality of your education
 - Quality of teaching in your major
 - Quality of the classroom environment (size, seating, HVAC, etc.)
 - Instructors' use of technology in teaching and learning activities
 - Helpfulness of instructors in your major
 - Availability of instructors in your major
 - Your experience with academic advising
 - Campus facilities (cleanliness, accessibility, availability, safety, etc.)
 - Inclusive, welcoming environment
6. Please rate your satisfaction with these services.
- Course registration process
 - Financial aid process
 - Counseling
 - Tutorial Centers (reading and writing lab, etc.)
7. Please indicate all of your MC extracurricular activities.
- Athletic team (swimming, basketball, etc.)
 - College honors program
 - College scholars program
 - Student government
 - Student media
 - Clubs related to your major
 - Other (please specify)
8. What are your plans after graduation?
- Full-time employment
 - Transfer to a four-year college or university
 - Take some time off
 - Don't know
 - Other (please specify)

If the respondent answers "Transfer to a four-year college" in Q8, pop up...

8a. What four-year college or university will you be attending?

9. If I had to do it over again, I would attend Montgomery College.
- True
 - False

10. I would recommend Montgomery College to others.

- True
- False

11. Feel free to share anything else about your educational experience at MC.

