

MCC joins national group to improve colleges

The roadmap project aims to lift graduation rates, boost student achievement

BY NATE DOUGHERTY

Monroe Community College is joining a group of 10 community colleges selected to create a system to improve academic support and share best practices, one expected to improve student achievement and improve graduation rates.

The Developing a Community College Student Roadmap Project was put together by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. MCC is the only New York school included. The program aims to help colleges create strong programs of academic support that better engage students.

The project would connect varied student academic support programs, with an emphasis on success in life beyond college.

This program is important for MCC, where the services available to help students have not always been evident to them, said Michael McDonough, MCC provost and vice president of academic services.

As the college's enrollment has expanded, the number of students in need of academic support has grown, McDonough added.

"There are a growing number of students who are coming to us not quite college-ready," he said. "Our challenge is to get them to the point where they can earn a degree or be ready to transfer to a four-year college."

"To do that, we want to align all of (the) support services. There are lots of things we do on campus that may not be evi-

dent to them. We assume they know what (something) like a bursar is, and many of them don't know what we have or what to do to access that help available to them."

The colleges selected to take part in the project had to undergo a rigorous application and evaluation project, AACU officials said. Leaders chose community colleges with "constructive plans designed to improve student learning outcomes and create pathways to student success through evidence-based interventions and programs."

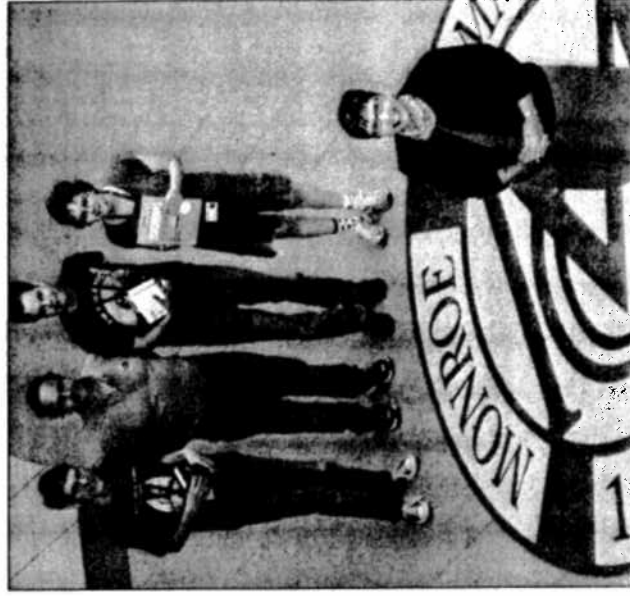
Other institutions involved include the Community College of Baltimore County in Maryland, Alamo Colleges in Texas and Chattanooga State Community College in Tennessee.

The program fits with MCC's goal of raising the level of academic performance among its students. After reaching record enrollment levels in the past few years, the college's annual report for 2011 set new goals of improving student outcomes.

Anne Kress, MCC president, said increasing the college's graduation percentage would be a priority. This focus on academics also will play a key role in the college's push for a new downtown campus, she added.

In December, the Monroe County Legislature voted to issue \$28 million worth of bonds for a downtown campus, but the vote was not site-specific. Kress and the MCC board of trustees want the campus to be on property owned by Eastman Kodak Co. at State Street and Morrie Silver Way, which MCC officials have argued would provide a better setting for academics.

The campus itself will be tied closely to student achievement, as the "best way to continue that is to have a place where students want to be and where they will have



File photo by Kimberly McKinzie
MCC president Anne Kress said increasing the college's graduation percentage would be a priority.

the best learning environment," Kress said.

With its new program, MCC also will be able to improve academic achievement by sharing best practices with the other institutions involved.

"One of the greatest benefits of this project has been the knowledge sharing among a community of educators not only dedicated to asking the difficult questions but also to implementing change as a result of inquiry and reflection," said Tia Brown McNair, AACU senior director for student success. "The Roadmap institutions demonstrate a sustained commitment to completion and quality."

The ability to share strategies with other

institutions will be especially valuable because such dialogue has been unavailable, McDonough said.

"We will get access to all of their experiences, and it's immediate," he said. "In the past we could read articles about what other colleges had done, but they would be published two to three years after it happened. And we also want to know what doesn't work, which wasn't discussed before."

The program also builds in research from the AACU's Liberal Education and America's Promise initiative, including research on education practices proven to increase persistence, completion and achievement among traditionally underrepresented student groups.

"MCC has long been a provider of access to education to all groups, but if that doesn't lead to well-thought-out outcomes, then it doesn't mean very much," McDonough said.

If the college is to reach its own goals of improving academic achievement—and meet President Barack Obama's goal of increasing college graduation rates to 60 percent in 10 years—initiatives like the Roadmap Project will be pivotal, McDonough added.

"If we ever want to meet those goals, we've got to be doing more things like this," he said.

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