Subject: Updates on College Advising Model and Next Steps
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MC MONTGOMERY COLLEGE   Memorandum

To: Montgomery College Divisions of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs

From: Dr. Deidre Price, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs/College Provost
Dr. Ed Cabellon, Interim Senior Vice President for Student Affairs

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Decades of research have demonstrated the critical role that advising serves in supporting student success, especially at community colleges which often serve a more vulnerable student body. Advising can help students identify their strengths and interests, access resources to support their academic success, and plan their educational journeys. Montgomery College has always understood this charge and has a long history of being committed to excellence in advising. As we strive to increase the access, completion, and post-completion success of our students, we understand that we must pursue the most effective and efficient ways to proactively and holistically advise students along their academic journeys. The strategic plan identifies the utilization of a common advising technology as a key strategy in this and one that will lead to increased equitable student retention and completion.

The journey to implementing such a technology began at MC in 2012 when the presidential Advising Steering Group developed a Developmental Advising Plan which included, in part, the recommendation to adopt a technology for documenting degree plans and tracking benchmarks to comply with the College and Career Readiness and College Completion Act of 2013. Subsequently, in Fall 2013 the Starfish system was launched which, in addition to supporting students' degree plans and tracking of student progress, allowed for shared advising notes to enhance communication between areas.

In the decade or more since then, Starfish has been used at MC to document tens of thousands of student encounters, track and monitor students' use of services, schedule appointments, and document academic plans. Moreover, in that same decade, Starfish as a software tool has continued to develop and expand its functions and capabilities to offer tools to streamline processes and workflows for everyone at the College working with students, including, for example: early alerts based on course-based student behavior such as attendance, missed assignments, or low grades; the ability to provide targeted feedback (including positive feedback!) and personalized messaging to students on a larger scale; easy creation of cohorts based on multiple criteria to support targeted messaging and interventions; and support network, services functions, and referrals that easily allow a student to access and request the help they need and for those working with the student to more effectively collaborate. In addition, the system is now even more flexible in how it is configured for different roles at the College, allowing for different

user experiences including different types of appointments, notes, and referrals, and access to information about the students that is needed to support them.

We believe that a full adoption of Starfish is the most efficient means to achieving the strategic plan goal of implementing a common advising software. The Starfish of 2024 is neither the Starfish of 2012 nor just an advising software; it is a single approach to tracking a student's engagement with MC and a powerful student success solution that can meaningfully advance progress toward our institutional priorities of access and completion.

We acknowledge that full adoption of the system will not happen quickly or perhaps uniformly. For example, there are decisions to be made for how to best utilize aspects of the system at MC for which we need your voice. As we as a College work over the coming months to review all of the functions Starfish now offers, evaluate how best to scale up those which we have successfully been using, and implement those we have not been, we need your help! We need your input on how to configure features for MC and what you need to be able to best leverage your use of the system to support our students. We will have a number of forums to allow for your participation in this process as well as, in time, professional development and support opportunities provided by our partners and EAB.

We have sought here to provide some answers to what we anticipate may be common questions but please keep in mind some questions do not yet have answers because they rely on your feedback and engagement in the process.

Who is EAB?
EAB, or Education Advisory Board, is a company that helps schools, colleges, and students achieve their goals by providing services such as student success and retention technologies, data and analytics services, research and advisory support, and enrollment solutions. Starfish is one of EAB's student success platforms.

What happens next?
Teams in both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs will be reviewing the Starfish functions and, with input from you, will be drafting an implementation plan for broad adoption at the College. Most immediate next steps will be a visit by EAB which will provide an opportunity for everyone at the College to be introduced to the system and its current capabilities. There will be additional opportunities for input in the spring and throughout the implementation process.

How can I learn more about Starfish on my own?
Check out this video for a few highlights! https://vimeo.com/386584837

How are other schools leveraging Starfish?
You can check out some examples here: https://eab.com/why-eab/partner-stories/starfish-case-studies/ including many community colleges that are using it for early alert, collaboration and communication, and student tracking/intervention. As a result, these schools have seen greater growth in graduation rates and exceeded their retention goals.

How is Starfish different from other student systems in common use at MC (e.g., Banner, Blackboard)?
Just like how we see different medical professionals for different reasons and need all of these to be as healthy as possible, Starfish is part of a team of systems that serve different but related purposes. Starfish draws information from Banner (which is our SIS) and it can also integrate information from Blackboard (our LMS) making it a one-stop-shop for information about a student. Systems like Maxient and Accommodate serve specific functions for student information that is of a particularly sensitive nature and/or has compliance-related requirements. One strength of Starfish is the ability to configure the user experience for different roles at the college and to

devise actionable workflows e.g. referring students for tutoring or counseling.

Who will be expected to use Starfish?
Advising is carried out differently depending on your role(s), level of training and relationship with your students. At MC, this work is most often carried out by faculty and staff with titles such as program advisors, instructional faculty, counseling faculty, department chairs, coordinators, coaches, mentors, and many others. The strategic plan envisions this work carried out in some form within a common advising technology.

In addition, to help support the work of those advising students, instructors have the ability to use an early alert system, make referrals, and otherwise raise concerns for students who need intervention.
Advising is not the only purpose of Starfish and we hope in time that anyone who works directly with students will find ways to leverage the system in their work.

How much time will this add to my workload?
Starfish is designed to help make things easier for everyone and so, after some initial time to review and acclimatize to the system, it should not add any time but rather will support efficiencies so we are all working smarter not harder.

What are next steps, and how can I participate?
Representatives from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs will serve on an Advising Task Force whose charge will be organizing next steps to implement previous cross-functional recommendations that will catalyze progress on a collaborative advising model. This group's work will commence this month and end with a report at the end of February.

An important piece of this work will include a visit from EAB on December 6. Representatives from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs will receive an invitation to attend division-specific and cross-divisional meetings to see Starfish in action and to contribute to planning next steps. A key purpose is to evaluate future uses of the platform to meet needs in and beyond advising at MC. If you are interested in attending one of these meetings to learn more, please contact your supervisor. This is the beginning of a process with many and varied connection points for faculty and staff to engage with redefining the advising journey and updating our support infrastructure for all students.

Thank you for your engagement—past, present, and future—with advising projects at MC. We are excited about embarking on these collaborative conversations together as we lay important groundwork across our divisions to support every student at MC.