



**Formative Evaluation of ACES Program:  
First Year of Implementation  
at Montgomery College**

**Office of Shared Accountability**

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## Executive Summary

The Office of Shared Accountability in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is conducting a multiyear evaluation of the Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) program. The ACES program is a collaboration between MCPS, Montgomery College (MC), and the Universities at Shady Grove to create a seamless pathway from high school to college completion. ACES serves students who meet one or more of the following risk factors: member of an underrepresented race/ethnicity group in higher education (such as Black or African American or Hispanic/Latino students); low income or single parent household; first generation college student; students receiving special education services; immigrant or child of immigrant parents; homeless students or those living in unstable conditions. A central element to the ACES program is the presence of coaches at each institution. School year 2014–2015 was Year Two of the ACES program and the first year with students at MC. These students participated in Year One of ACES as 12<sup>th</sup> graders and graduated from MCPS in 2014.

As one of a series of reports about Year Two of ACES, this document concerns the first year of participants at MC and addresses the following formative evaluation questions:

1. What are the demographic and academic characteristics of ACES students at MC?
2. To what extent are ACES program processes and activities at MC implemented as proposed in the program design? How consistent is implementation across MC campuses?
3. To what extent do ACES students at MC participate in program activities and offerings?
4. How do ACES students and ACES coaches at MC perceive the ACES program?

### *Summary of Methodology*

This study utilized the following data sources: program documents, downloads of student level records, interviews of all three MC coaches (i.e., one at each MC campus), and an online student survey. A total of 98 students (34% response rate among ACES students enrolled for spring semester) completed the survey about their experiences and perceptions of ACES. The evaluator compiled quantitative information and used content analysis for qualitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to answer all questions.

### *Summary of Findings*

**Question 1: Student characteristics.** During the 2014–2015 school year, 329 ACES students enrolled in MC. The majority were female and identified themselves as first generation to go to college; one half were Hispanic/Latino, and one third were Black or African American. At the beginning of their senior year at MCPS, over one half of students received Free and Reduced-price Meal System services, almost one quarter were current or prior recipients of English for Speakers of Other Languages services, and one eighth received special education services. Among students who took any of the standardized tests (i.e., ACT, SAT, ACCUPLACER) that MC uses for course placement, more than one third had scores at the college-ready level in English, and one sixth had scores at a college-ready level in mathematics. The ACES students at MC studied a range of areas; the most frequent program of study was general studies, which included almost 3 out of 10 students.

**Question 2: Implementation at MC.** In interviews, all three MC coaches reported communicating with students via e-mail and phone calls and meeting with the majority of students during spring semester 2015. (Coaches did not report on meetings during fall semester, because two coaches did not start until December 2014.) Two coaches reported sending group e-mails. As expected, each coach reported holding monthly group meetings on a variety of timely topics, assisting students with financial aid applications and also selection and registration for courses, and helping students to plan for their time at MC. With respect to case management, all MC coaches reported tracking student academic progress, especially course grades and academic restrictions, and referring students to services inside MC.

**Question 3: Student participation.** Based on survey responses, almost all students attended at least one ACES workshop or meeting at MC; the majority participated in workshops or meetings related to completing financial aid or scholarship forms and to selecting or registering for courses. Further, the majority of student respondents reported meeting in person with an ACES coach during each semester. However, program documents indicated that one fifth or fewer of students attended group workshops or group meetings.

**Question 4: Students' perceptions of ACES.** Based on survey responses, almost all students had positive experiences with the ACES program. Respondents were most positive about help with financial aid/scholarships and very positive about several experiences related to course selection and planning their time at MC and afterwards. Almost all respondents reported positive experiences with their coach; when reporting their favorite thing about the program, students indicated the coach most frequently. Respondents also gave very positive ratings for their overall experiences and overall satisfaction with the ACES program. Given a list of potential challenges, more than two thirds of respondents identified the scheduled times for the ACES workshops as a problem. Far fewer respondents identified any other challenge. The most frequent suggestion for improvement related to times for workshops or meetings; the second most frequent suggestions were for more contact from coaches or more motivation for students.

**Question 4: Coaches' perceptions of ACES.** In interviews, all three MC coaches shared positive perceptions of the ACES program. All coaches were clear or very clear about the goals of the program, about their role and responsibilities as an ACES coach, and about decisions and changes to the implementation of the program. The MC coaches were satisfied or very satisfied with the following supports: professional development they received as ACES coaches, on-site resources for the program, and support from ACES and other staff at MC. All MC coaches agreed that the program had successfully met the needs of ACES MC students during this school year, in particular for navigating the systems at MC and for receiving financial support.

### *Summary of Recommendations*

The above findings indicated several areas of success for the ACES program at MC. The following recommendations concern only areas for improvement:

- Make workshops accessible to more students, by offering them more frequently and at a variety of times (especially in the afternoon or evening), providing some workshops online, and experimenting with providing more on the Rockville campus.
- Increase efforts to motivate students to participate in the ACES program.

- Ensure that all MC coaches send group e-mails regularly with reminders and timely information.
- As some students enter their second year at MC, put more emphasis on transferring to a four-year college after MC, by both providing information and communicating to students that information is available.
- Put more emphasis on communicating to students that coaches are tracking their academic progress.
- Fully develop and deploy the database for collecting information about ACES activities. Set expectations for MC coaches to regularly enter data on student participation, including attendance at individual meetings and activities other than group workshops.
- Increase support to MC coaches by implementing their suggestions to provide the following:
  - More clarity on certain processes and events that require students to complete specific actions (e.g., students need to actually accept a scholarship)
  - More clarity on whether coaches can require a certain level of participation in the ACES activities in order to continue to receive ACES scholarship money
  - More information in a more timely manner about processes at MC
  - Permanent (as opposed to temporary) support staff in the ACES office



## **Formative Evaluation of Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success Program: First Year of Implementation at Montgomery College**

Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) is a collaborative effort among Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Montgomery College (MC), and the Universities at Shady Grove (USG). According to a Memorandum of Understanding between the three institutions, MCPS will lead the design of research protocols in consultation with all partners to evaluate the effectiveness of the program (MCPS, MC, & USG, 2013). Consequently, the Office of Shared Accountability in MCPS is conducting a multiyear evaluation of the ACES program. The principal goal for the evaluation is to provide valid and reliable information on the ACES program implementation processes and outcomes. As one of a series of evaluation reports about Year Two of the ACES program, this document addresses the formative evaluation questions for the first year of participants at MC.

### **Program Description**

MCPS collaborated with MC and USG to create the ACES program. Using a case management approach, the ACES program seeks to create a seamless pathway from high school to college completion. This free program focuses on identifying and supporting both students who come from backgrounds that are underrepresented in higher education and those who would be the first in their family to attend college.

A central element to the ACES program is the presence of coaches (at each institution) who mentor, advocate, and support ACES students in four areas: college planning, academics, career development, and personal/social. Coaches are expected to plan and provide activities and workshops, make referrals to other services, and work one-on-one with students. ACES coaches also should build ongoing support between the students and counselors, faculty members, and peers across educational institutions to sustain students throughout their educational experience.

The ACES program begins in high school, when students apply to the program in the fall semester of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Each participant meets one or more of the following risk factors: member of an underrepresented race/ethnicity group in higher education (such as Black or African American or Hispanic/Latino students); low income or single parent household; first generation college student; students receiving special education services<sup>1</sup>; immigrant or child of immigrant parents; homeless students or those living in unstable conditions. At each high school, approximately 60 students enter the program during Grade 11 and continue into Grade 12. For students who attend MC and eventually USG, the program continues until they graduate.

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<sup>1</sup> Special education services provide specially designed instruction that involves modifications to the curriculum itself, to the way the curriculum is taught, or both, in order to meet the specific needs of the student. Students may also receive other special education-related services (e.g., speech and language therapy or occupational therapy) (MCPS, 2015).

## College Component

School year 2014–2015 was the first year that ACES students attended MC. These students participated in Year 1 of the ACES program as 12<sup>th</sup> graders and graduated from MCPS in 2014. (More detail on the high school component of ACES is in Wolanin and Modaressi, 2015.)

The ACES coaches at MC, in collaboration with other staff at MC, were expected to provide the following activities for ACES students:

- Summer orientation for all students, including sessions at each MC campus
- Regular communication from MC coaches to students through e-mails and phone calls
- Workshops throughout the year on a variety of topics
- Tracking student progress and recommending referrals (e.g., internally for counseling or externally to social services)
- Identification and support in overcoming barriers to program completion (e.g., transportation, finances, housing, health)
- Individual meetings between coach and each student, at least once per semester
- Assistance in completing financial aid and scholarship application forms
- Visits to USG and other University System of Maryland campuses/access to activities

ACES students may take advantage of tutoring at MC, guest matriculation (i.e., permission to enroll) at USG while completing a degree at MC, and guaranteed admission to a University System of Maryland institution with an Associate of Arts or Sciences degree. Students who attend USG after MC will continue to receive support from an assigned ACES coach.

The program's goal was to have one full-time ACES coach assigned to each of the three MC campuses: Germantown, Rockville, and Takoma Park/Silver Spring. However, the coach at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus, who started in June 2014, was the only coach hired until December 2014, when coaches started at the other two MC campuses. Once three coaches were hired, they divided their case load of students as follows. The coach at the Germantown campus was responsible for all ACES students who took at least one course at that campus. Similarly, the coach at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus was responsible for all ACES students who took at least one course at that campus. Lastly, the coach at the Rockville campus was responsible for all ACES students who took courses only on that campus.

## Expected Student Outcomes

In the Memorandum of Understanding, MCPS, MC, and USG (2013) identified three goals for each student in the ACES program: 1) admission to a college or university; 2) if admitted to MC, success and then graduation from MC, and 3) completion of a bachelor's degree

Measures of interest for student progress include credit hours at college, retention (e.g., from first year to second year at college), and grade point average (GPA). Measures of success at college include transfer from a 2-year to a 4-year college and graduation from college within six years of high school graduation.

## Scope of the Current Study

The evaluation has two major goals: 1) to provide formative information on the extent to which the ACES activities were implemented as designed and 2) to analyze the extent to which the ACES program achieved its expected outcomes. Specific evaluation questions were developed in collaboration with ACES program administrators. This report addresses formative evaluation questions with respect to the first year of the ACES program at MC, during 2014–2015.

1. What are the demographic and academic characteristics of ACES students at MC?
2. To what extent are ACES program processes and activities at MC implemented as proposed in the program design? How consistent is implementation across MC campuses?
3. To what extent do ACES students at MC participate in program activities and offerings?
4. How do ACES students and ACES coaches at MC perceive the ACES program?

## Methodology

To answer all evaluation questions, this study utilized a multi-method data collection strategy, including student level records, surveys, and interviews. Based on the year one evaluation of ACES and program materials, the evaluator, in collaboration with ACES program administrators, developed instruments and analyses to address the ACES program's components and activities.

### Study Population

This formative evaluation included all ACES coaches and ACES students from the three MC campuses. Specifically, the students included in this report met the following criteria: participated in Year One of ACES as 12<sup>th</sup> graders, graduated from MCPS in 2014, and enrolled at MC for at least one of the following terms:

- summer term 1 2014
- summer term 2 2014
- fall semester 2014
- winter term 2015
- spring semester 2015
- summer term 1 2015

### Data Collection Activities

#### *Student Level Records*

Data from appropriate MCPS databases were downloaded to provide student level data for ACES students at MC to answer evaluation question 1. MC staff provided additional data for question 1

concerning ACCUPLACER scores, students' program of study at MC, and students' status as first generation to go to college.

To answer questions 2 and 3, MC was to provide a database about the ACES activities offered to students at MC, along with student participation. However, the database was under development and so was not available for this report. As described below, other data were used to answer questions 2 and 3.

### *Document Analysis*

To answer questions 2 and 3 about ACES activities for students, ACES staff at MC provided descriptions of group workshops at each MC campus along with the number of attendees.

### *Interviews and Surveys*

The following primary data collection activities were designed and conducted to answer evaluation question 4. Because the database about the ACES activities offered to students at MC was unavailable, data from the following activities were used, as noted below.

**Coach interviews.** To gain information about how MC coaches perceive the ACES program, the evaluator interviewed each MC coach in June 2015 for about one hour using a structured instrument. The interview concerned coaches' experiences, opinions, and perceptions of the ACES program. Interview data also was used to answer question 2 on implementation.

**Student surveys.** To collect information about MC students' perceptions of the ACES program, including the coaches, activities, and overall experiences, surveys were used. The surveys also captured both positive aspects and areas for improvement for the ACES program. Because the survey also addressed participation in ACES activities, survey data also was used to answer question 3 about student participation in those activities. In mid-April (before final exams), ACES students who were enrolled at MC for the spring semester received an e-mail invitation to complete this confidential, online survey. To increase the response rate, several reminders were sent to students along with one e-mail request to MC coaches that asked them to remind students about completing the survey. Out of 289 students enrolled for the spring semester, 98 completed surveys for a response rate of 34%. An e-mail invitation to complete a slightly different version of the survey went to 23 ACES students who completed the fall semester but did not return for the spring semester. Despite three reminders, only one of those students responded, and so, this report does not include any findings from that survey.

As seen in Table 1, the majority of the respondents to the survey described themselves as full-time students (85%). The primary campus was Rockville for more than one half of the respondents (57%), Germantown for about one third (32%), and Takoma Park/Silver Spring for about one tenth (11%). Three out of 10 respondents (30%) reported taking classes at more than one campus.

Table 1  
Student Survey: Descriptors of Responders

Item	Response options	<i>n</i>	%
Full-time status ( <i>N</i> = 96)	Full-time (12 credits or more)	82	85.4
	Part-time (less than 12 credits)	14	14.6
Primary campus location ( <i>N</i> = 98)	Rockville	56	57.1
	Germantown	31	31.6
	Takoma Park/Silver Spring	11	11.2
Taking classes at a second campus <sup>a</sup> ( <i>N</i> = 98)	None	69	70.4
	Rockville	19	19.4
	Germantown	9	9.2
	Takoma Park/Silver Spring	5	5.1

<sup>a</sup> Students could choose more than one response.

## Analytical Procedures

The evaluator compiled quantitative information downloaded from databases (e.g., student demographics) and closed-ended survey responses. For qualitative data gathered in interviews and open-ended survey questions, the evaluator reviewed the comments to identify themes, then categorized comments on similar topics, and generated frequencies. Descriptive statistics were used for all questions.

## Strengths and Limitations of the Methodology

One strength of this study is that all the coaches at MC participated in the evaluation. An additional strength is that the evaluator worked closely with program staff members who are experts on the ACES program to develop the instruments for interviewing coaches and surveying students.

One limitation of this study is the use of self-reports from MC coaches, program staff, and students to evaluate the extent of implementation of ACES activities and student participation in them; it is possible that these responses were self-serving. Further, the response rate for the student survey was 34%, meaning that the majority of students who received the survey did not respond. Therefore, the survey responses may not be representative of all ACES students at MC. Lastly, a limitation of this study is that students' status as first generation to go to college was based on students' self-report on their ACES application.

## Results

### Findings for Question 1: What are the demographic and academic characteristics of ACES students at MC?

The results in this section are based on student level data provided by MC and MCPS.

#### *Demographic and Other Personal Descriptors*

During the 2014—2015 school year, 329 ACES students enrolled in MC for at least one term. The total of 329 represented 59% of the 562 students who participated in ACES as 12<sup>th</sup> graders during the 2013—2014 school year.

As seen in Table 1.1, the majority of ACES students at MC were female (56%). One half were Hispanic/Latino (50%) and one third (33%) were Black or African American. The remainder were Asian American (9%), White (6%), or Two or More Races (2%). Based on data from the beginning of their senior year at MCPS, over one half of students received Free and Reduced-price Meal System (FARMS) services (57%), one eighth (13%) received special education services, and one tenth received English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services (10%).<sup>2</sup> An additional 13% had received ESOL services prior to their senior year. Just over one half of the ACES students (51%) identified themselves on the ACES application as first generation to go to college, based on the following question: Do you have at least one parent/legal guardian who graduated from college in the U.S.?

Table 1.1

Demographic Characteristics of ACES Students at MC		
Characteristics ( <i>N</i> = 329)	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	184	55.9
Male	145	44.1
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
American Indian	0	0
Asian	31	9.4
Black or African American	107	32.5
Hispanic/Latino	164	49.8
White	21	6.4
Two or More Races	6	1.8
<b>Services received in high school as of September 2013</b>		
Current FARMS	187	56.8
Current special education	43	13.1
Current ESOL	33	10.0
Prior ESOL	42	12.8
<b>Other</b>		
First generation to go to college <sup>a</sup>	169	51.4

<sup>a</sup>Student self-reported data on ACES application.

<sup>2</sup> MCPS indicators for services were used because there were not similar indicators from MC.

### College Readiness

All enrollees at MC must demonstrate readiness for college-level, credit-bearing courses in reading, English, and mathematics through test scores from the ACT, the SAT, or the ACCUPLACER test.<sup>3</sup> MC's minimum college-ready score on an ACT test is 24; the minimum score on an SAT test is 550. MC will exempt students from remedial English courses if they attain 79 or above on ACCUPLACER reading comprehension and 90 or above on ACCUPLACER sentence skills. With a score of 45 or higher on ACCUPLACER college-level math, a student, in general, would be eligible to take mathematics courses at MC that are college-level, credit-bearing for certain majors (i.e., humanities, arts, social sciences, and health sciences). Students need to demonstrate college readiness on only one of the three tests.

Table 1.2 presents participation and performance among ACES students at MC on the three tests discussed above. Almost one third of ACES students completed the ACT in both reading and mathematics (32%). However, on the ACT test, only two ACES students attained a college-ready score (as defined by MC) for reading, and only one met it for mathematics. Somewhat more ACES students at MC, almost one half (49%), completed the SAT in both reading and mathematics. But only about one tenth of those students who completed the SAT attained a college-ready score on reading (12%) or mathematics (9%).

Table 1.2  
Participation and Performance on Standardized Tests by ACES Students at MC

Tests in reading	Completed test			Attained scores at college-ready level <sup>a</sup>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	%
ACT	329	106	32.2	106	2	1.9
SAT	329	161	48.9	161	19	11.8
ACCUPLACER <sup>b</sup>	329	237	72.0	237	101	42.6
ACT, SAT, or ACCUPLACER <sup>b</sup>	329	297	90.3	297	113	38.0
Tests in mathematics	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	%
ACT	329	106	32.2	106	1	0.9
SAT	329	161	48.9	161	15	9.3
ACCUPLACER <sup>c</sup>	329	294	89.4	294	42	14.3
ACT, SAT, or ACCUPLACER <sup>c</sup>	329	313	95.1	313	52	16.6

<sup>a</sup>Limited to students who completed the test

<sup>b</sup>Includes scores on reading comprehension and sentence skills

<sup>c</sup>Includes scores on college-level math.

Compared to the ACT and SAT tests, far more ACES students completed the ACCUPLACER tests. Almost three quarters of ACES students at MC (72%) took the ACCUPLACER reading tests. Among these test takers, more than four out of ten (43%) were exempt from remedial English courses at MC. Similarly, almost all ACES students at MC (89%) completed the ACCUPLACER assessments for mathematics. However, among this group of test takers, only about one out of seven (14%) could be eligible to take college-level, credit-bearing mathematics courses at MC.

<sup>3</sup> Some colleges and universities, although not MC, use scores from ACT and SAT tests in their admission decisions. However, the ACCUPLACER test is used only for course placement.

Almost all ACES students at MC took at least one of the three tests (ACT, SAT, ACCUPLACER) in both reading (90%) and mathematics (95%). More than one third of test-takers (38%) met MC's criteria for English on at least one test. Fewer test takers, only one out of six (17%), met MC's criteria for mathematics on at least one test.

### *Program of Study*

As seen in Table 1.3, the ACES students at MC studied a range of areas. The most frequent program of study was general studies which included almost 3 out of 10 students (29%). Other frequent programs were arts and sciences with about one seventh of the students (15%) and business, including accounting and international business, with about one tenth of the students (11%). The remaining programs included less than 10% of the ACES students.

Table 1.3  
Program of Study for ACES Students at MC

Category (N = 329)	n	%
General studies (AA - all tracks)	96	29.2
Arts & sciences (AA - all tracks, AAS, CT)	49	14.9
Accounting, business, international business (AA, AAS, CT)	37	11.2
Pre-clinical health sciences	30	9.1
Engineering science (AA & AS-all tracks)	27	8.2
Criminal justice (AA & AAS)	22	6.7
Education/Teacher education (AA & AAT)	14	4.3
Computer applications (AA, AAS, CT) (including gaming, graphic design, etc.)	12	3.6
Computer science & technologies (AA), Computer programming (CT)	11	3.3
Communication & broadcasting technology (AA & AAS - all tracks; CT)	8	2.4
Undecided/undeclared	2	0.6
Other programs	21	6.4

Note. AA = Associate of Arts. AAS = Associate of Applied Science. AAT= Associate of Arts in Teaching.  
AS = Associate of Science. CT = Certificate.

### **Findings for Question 2: To what extent are ACES program processes and activities at MC implemented as proposed in the program design? How consistent is implementation across MC campuses?**

Data on the implementation of ACES processes and activities for ACES students at MC came from interviews with the three MC coaches. The coach at the Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus started in June 2014 and was the only MC coach until December 2014. Coaches reported their caseloads for spring 2015 as 100 students for the coach at Germantown, 184 students for the coach at Rockville, and 62 students for the coach at Takoma Park/Silver Spring.

#### *Communicating and Meeting With Students*

MC coaches should meet with each ACES student at least once per semester; this expectation was not met during the fall semester, because there was only one coach at MC. However, all coaches reported meeting with the majority of students for the spring semester. All coaches noted that the frequency of meetings varied across students; some came to see the coach daily, some met with



the coach about twice a week for 20 minutes, and some rarely met but relied on e-mail. Each coach reported that some MC students, despite the coach's attempts to connect with them, never responded to the coach's invitation to meet.

In addition to individual meetings, MC coaches were expected to regularly communicate with students through e-mails and phone calls. All coaches reported using both methods to reach students, and two used text messages, as well. The most emphasis was on e-mails, in part, according to the coaches, to teach students to check their MC e-mail. Two coaches reported sending group emails regularly (i.e., weekly or twice per month) with reminders and timely information.

### *Providing Activities*

As expected, each MC coach reported holding monthly group meetings on a variety of timely topics, such as completing financial aid forms prior to the deadline or getting internships and jobs before summer break. Additional information on group meetings/workshops came from ACES program staff who provided descriptions of each workshop. This documentation indicated that during the fall semester, the group meetings/workshops were concentrated on the one campus with a coach, while during the spring semester, there was a workshop on each campus on each of the following topics: financial aid; supports for academic success (i.e., tutoring, tours of learning centers); transferring; and MC career services, resume preparation, or both.

ACES students should have opportunities to visit USG and other University System of Maryland campuses. However, MC coaches did not report offering such visits; one coach reported that these college visits occur during summer programs.

### *Assisting Students With College Processes*

As expected, all MC coaches reported that one of their primary responsibilities was helping students to complete financial aid and scholarship forms. Each coach described meeting with individual students to complete forms or to solve problems in the financial aid process; coaches also sent reminders and monitored that students were doing what they should and when they should. One coach arranged for a workshop in a computer lab to complete financial aid forms.

Coaches also worked with counseling faculty to provide academic orientation sessions specifically for ACES students; these sessions were live at Germantown and Takoma Park/Silver Spring campuses, but had to be online at Rockville. Further, each coach described providing hands-on assistance and sitting at a computer with some students to complete course registration. One coach followed up with students, after their meetings with counseling faculty, to make sure that the course selection made sense.

As reflected in the above findings on meetings, all coaches noted that students varied in the amount of assistance needed for completing college processes. For example, one coach described three types of students: the majority who just need information, reminders and someone keeping track; a small group (about one out of ten) who may not even need reminders and do well on their own; and a larger group (about one third) who need more labor intensive help for a variety of reasons (e.g., motivation, obstacles like bureaucracy at MC).

### *Helping Students to Plan Ahead*

As expected, all coaches talked about helping students to plan for their time at MC. Coaches mentioned a variety of ways to track the time a student will need: plans that back map from a student's career choice and transfer school, tracking the number of credits and number of developmental courses, plans for completing an Associate's degree, and plans for transferring.

However, there was not as much focus on helping students to explore college majors and career interests. One MC coach noted that students needed help with choosing a major and another chose to direct students to the wealth of resources at MC for these areas.

### *Providing Case Management*

Case management includes several components, such as tracking student's academic progress, identifying barriers to program completion, supporting students in overcoming barriers, and making referrals to services inside or outside of MC.

All MC coaches reported that they track student academic progress, especially course grades and academic restrictions. There was one complaint that the computer system at MC complicated the tracking process, because it was slow and "not all data or all reports are easily available." Only one coach touched on identifying barriers by noting that students are not always forthcoming about their needs. To support students with academic problems, all coaches relied on timely, personal contact; challenges to personal contact included a large caseload or a lack of a previous relationship (i.e., from high school) with students. Individual coaches described their individual efforts to support students, such as personally tutoring students in selected subjects or piloting a support class for student success, as a requirement for students with low GPA.

Although no MC coach described making referrals to services outside MC, all coaches referred students to services inside MC. All MC coaches reported collaborating with MC staff in academic counseling and financial aid about individual student needs. One or two coaches reported collaborating with staff in admissions, advancement (about scholarships), or student life (about joining or starting a club) to address individual student needs.

### Findings for Question 3: To what extent do ACES students at MC participate in program activities and offerings?

There were two data sources for student participation in ACES program activities and offerings: 1) surveys completed by 98 students and 2) a summary on workshops and meetings provided by ACES program staff.

#### *Student Surveys*

Participation in ACES workshops or meetings by student survey respondents varied by topic (Table 3.1). About six out of ten respondents participated in workshops or meetings related to college processes: completing financial aid or scholarship forms (60%) and selecting courses or registering for courses (58%). About four out of ten respondents reported participation in workshops/meetings on time management (40%), study skills (38%), and career exploration/choosing a major (37%). Just over one quarter of respondents (29%) indicated participation in a meeting on resumes or interview skills. Six respondents (6%) wrote about attendance at a workshop or meeting on transferring. Additional analysis revealed that almost all student respondents (90%) attended at least one ACES workshop or meeting.

Table 3.1  
Student Survey: Participation in ACES Workshops or Meetings  
During the 2014–2015 School Year

Workshop or meeting topic	N = 98	
	n	%
Completing financial aid forms or scholarship forms	59	60.2
Selecting courses or registering for courses	57	58.2
Time management	39	39.8
Study skills	37	37.8
Career exploration or choosing a major	36	36.7
Resumes or interview skills	28	28.6
None of the above	11	11.2
Other workshop or meeting: Transfer information	6	6.1
Other workshop or meeting: Tour of learning centers	1	1.0

*Note.* Students could choose more than one response.

With respect to ACES activities other than workshops or meetings, the majority of student respondents reported meeting in person with an ACES coach during each semester, although participation was higher during the spring semester (67%) than during the fall semester (57%) (Table 3.2). This finding confirms the above reports from the MC coaches that they met with the majority of students during the spring semester and also reflects the fact there was only one coach at MC during the fall semester. Most student respondents (59%) reported attending the summer ACES orientation. Fewer student respondents indicated that they visited USG (24%) or other 4-year colleges (6%) through ACES. Additional analysis revealed that almost all student respondents (90%) attended at least one ACES activity from the list in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2  
Student Survey: Participation in ACES Activities During the 2014–2015 School Year

Activity	N = 98	
	n	%
In person meeting with my ACES coach during spring semester	66	67.3
The ACES orientation/Bridge to College Program at MC during summer 2014	58	59.2
In person meeting with an ACES coach during fall semester	56	57.1
Visit to Universities at Shady Grove	23	23.5
Visit to a 4-year college other than Universities at Shady Grove	6	6.1
None of the above	10	10.2
Other activity: Scholarship luncheon	1	1.0

*Note.* Students could choose more than one response.

### Program Summary

ACES program staff provided descriptions of workshop/group meeting for students during spring semester 2015, along with the number of student attendees. As seen in Table 3.3, the most popular workshop/meeting concerned workforce readiness; at each of these meetings, managers from the clothing retailer, The GAP, Inc., taught students about skills required in the workforce, practiced interviewing skills with them, and provided feedback on students' resumes. Although this workshop only occurred on the Germantown campus, one fifth of ACES students (20%) participated. Workshops on all the other topics in Table 3.3 occurred on each MC campus. Close to one fifth of all ACES students (18%) attended workshops or group meetings about financial aid. Somewhat fewer students attended group meetings or workshops on the following topics: career development with a focus on career services at MC, resume preparation, or both (15%); supports for academic success with a focus on tutoring services or learning centers (13%); and transferring to another college after MC (11%).

Table 3.3  
Program Summary: Participation in ACES Workshops or Meetings  
During Spring Semester 2015

Workshop or meeting topic	N = 307 <sup>a</sup>	
	n	%
Workforce readiness with managers from The GAP Inc.	60	19.5
Financial aid	56	18.2
Career development	47	15.3
Supports for academic success	40	13.0
Transfer	33	10.7

<sup>a</sup>Total number of ACES students enrolled for spring semester 2015

Student participation in workshops/meetings on the same topic was higher based on the student surveys than based on the attendance provided by program staff (Table 3.1 vs. Table 3.3). An example is meetings/workshops on financial aid: 60% of survey respondents reported participating compared to 18% on the program summary. Survey rates may be higher for several reasons. Students may have reported participation at individual meetings, as well as group meetings, whereas the program summary concerned only group meetings. Students could report participation at meetings during both semesters, whereas the program summary concerned only the spring semester. Lastly, workshop attendees may have been more engaged in the ACES program than nonattendees and so were more likely to reply to the survey.

## Findings for Question 4: How do ACES students and ACES coaches at MC perceive the ACES program?

### ACES Students at MC

The perceptions of the ACES students at MC are based on surveys from 98 students.

*Educational plans and problems.* Survey respondents indicated their future educational plans (Table 4.1). At least three quarters reported they were very likely to obtain an Associate's Degree (79%), obtain a Bachelor's degree (84%), and transfer to a four-year college in the Maryland system (76%). However, only one out of seven respondents (14%) indicated that they were very likely to transfer to a four-year college outside the Maryland system.

Table 4.1  
Student Survey: Future Educational Plans

How likely are you to do each of the following?	Very likely		Somewhat likely		Somewhat unlikely		Very unlikely	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Obtain an Associate's Degree ( <i>N</i> = 90)	71	78.9	13	14.4	4	4.4	2	2.2
Obtain a Bachelor's degree ( <i>N</i> = 87)	73	83.9	12	13.8	0	0.0	2	2.3
Transfer to a four-year college in the Maryland system ( <i>N</i> = 94)	71	75.5	16	17.0	4	4.3	3	3.2
Transfer to a four-year college outside the Maryland system ( <i>N</i> = 85)	12	14.1	24	28.2	21	24.7	28	32.9

One question concerned whether any of several factors was a significant problem for the student to stay in college or be successful in college. The most frequent problem, for about 4 of 10 respondents (41%), was finances (Table 4.2). About 3 out of 10 respondents indicated that obligations to family (32%) or to jobs (28%) were significant problems. Somewhat fewer respondents, about one fifth, indicated that course work that was too challenging (21%) and transportation (20%) were problems. Less frequent problems included housing (8%), health (1%), and other factors (i.e., interest in class topics, sports, time management) (3%). Additional analysis revealed that across all respondents, 4 out of 10 (41%) did not identify any problem, either by checking none of the above or by providing no answer.

Table 4.2  
Student Survey: Significant Problem for Staying or Being Successful in College

Problem	<i>N</i> = 85	
	<i>n</i>	%
Finances	36	41.4
Family obligations	28	32.2
Job obligations	24	27.6
Course work too challenging	18	20.7
Transportation	17	19.5
Housing	7	8.0
Health	1	1.1
Other	3	3.4
None of the above	27	31.0

*Note.* Students could choose more than one response.

*Experiences with ACES program.* Survey respondents reported on their experiences with specific components of the ACES program at MC during the entire school year. For almost all experiences, at least 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that it was positive (Table 4.3). Respondents were most positive about help with financial aid/scholarships; at least three quarters strongly agreed the ACES program helped with finding financial aid/scholarships (83%) and completing the forms for financial aid/scholarships (76%). Respondents also were very positive about several experiences related to course selection and planning their time at MC and afterwards. Specifically, at least 6 out of 10 respondents strongly agreed that the ACES program supported course selection/registration (68%), development of a plan for the student’s time at MC (66%), exploring college majors and career interests (60%), and exploring institutions to attend after MC (60%). Respondents’ experiences with workshops were mixed. Although 60% of respondents strongly agreed that overall the ACES workshop topics were useful, only about one half of respondents (51%) strongly agreed that, overall, the times for the workshops were convenient. Further, one quarter of respondents (24%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that workshop times were convenient; this item had the highest level of strongly disagree or disagree in the survey.

Table 4.3  
Student Survey: Experiences with ACES Program During the 2014—2015 School Year

Item	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	The ACES program helped me to find financial aid or scholarships or both. ( <i>N</i> = 92)	76	82.6	15	16.3	1	1.1	0
The ACES program supported me in completing financial aid forms or scholarship forms or both. ( <i>N</i> = 90)	68	75.6	21	23.3	1	1.1	0	0.0
The ACES program supported me in selecting courses or registering for them or both. ( <i>N</i> = 93)	63	67.7	22	23.7	8	8.6	0	0.0
An ACES coach worked with me to develop a plan for my time at Montgomery College. ( <i>N</i> = 92)	61	66.3	24	26.1	6	6.5	1	1.1
The ACES program assisted me with exploring college majors and career interests. ( <i>N</i> = 92)	55	59.8	33	35.9	3	3.3	1	1.1
The ACES program assisted me with exploring colleges and universities to attend after Montgomery College. ( <i>N</i> = 92)	55	59.8	29	31.5	7	7.6	1	1.1
Overall, the ACES workshop topics were useful to me. ( <i>N</i> = 92)	55	59.8	33	35.9	4	4.3	0	0.0
Overall, the times for the ACES workshops were convenient for me. ( <i>N</i> = 92)	47	51.1	23	25.0	20	21.7	2	2.2

*Experiences with ACES coach.* Survey respondents reported on their experiences with their ACES coach at MC. These questions were limited to the spring semester, because two of the three MC coaches did not start until December 2014. Almost all student respondents reported positive experiences with their MC coach; at least 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with each item (Table 4.4). The first three items in Table 4.4 concerned communication and the MC coach’s role as a mentor. Almost all respondents strongly agreed or agreed to each item, with a majority indicating strongly agree. Three quarters of respondents strongly agreed (75%) that their coach provides helpful information and guidance. About two thirds of respondents strongly agreed that their coach regularly communicates through e-mails or phone calls (71%) and that “I have a good relationship with my coach.” (62%).

Table 4.4  
Student Survey: Experiences with the ACES Coach During Spring Semester 2015

Items on communication	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1) My coach provides me with helpful information and guidance. ( <i>N</i> = 92)	69	75.0	22	23.9	0	0.0	1	1.1
2) My coach regularly communicates with me through e-mails or phone calls. ( <i>N</i> = 91)	65	71.4	20	22.0	5	5.5	1	1.1
3) I have a good relationship with my coach. ( <i>N</i> = 91)	56	61.5	31	34.1	3	3.3	1	1.1
Items on case management	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
4) My coach is available if I need any assistance or information. ( <i>N</i> = 91)	65	71.4	23	25.3	2	2.2	1	1.1
5) My coach understands the things that could make it difficult for me to succeed at college. ( <i>N</i> = 89)	59	66.3	26	29.2	4	4.5	0	0.0
6) My coach helps remove or reduce any barriers between me and my success at college. ( <i>N</i> = 80)	53	66.3	24	30.0	3	3.8	0	0.0
7) When things happen that might affect my success at college, my coach has suggestions for what to do. ( <i>N</i> = 84)	53	63.1	28	33.3	3	3.6	0	0.0
8) When I need help that my coach can't provide (like tutoring), he/she refers me to someone who can help me. ( <i>N</i> = 84)	51	60.7	28	33.3	2	2.4	3	3.6
9) My coach keeps track of my academic progress at Montgomery College. ( <i>N</i> = 91)	52	57.1	30	33.0	8	8.8	1	1.1

*Note.* Students who did not respond or checked "not applicable" for an item are not included.

In Table 4.4 above, items 4–9 concern the coach's role as a case manager who tracks student progress, recommends referrals, and helps students to overcome barriers. Seven out of ten respondents (71%) strongly agreed that their coach is available for any assistance or information (item 4). About two thirds strongly agreed with three items about help with overcoming barriers to college success: item 5 on understanding difficulties (66%), item 6 on removing or reducing barriers (66%), and item 7 on offering suggestions (63%). About 6 out of 10 respondents strongly agreed that their coach makes referrals when the coach can't provide help (61%) and that their coach keeps track of the student's academic progress at MC (57%).

*Overall experiences with ACES program.* Respondents indicated their overall experiences with the ACES program (Tables 4.5). Their responses were very positive; at least 94% agreed or strongly agreed with each item. Further, almost 9 out of 10 respondents strongly agreed with recommending the program to other students (88%). Somewhat fewer, about three quarters, strongly agreed that the program helped them to get through the first year of college (78%) and motivated them to stay in college (73%).

Table 4.5  
Student Survey: Overall Experiences with ACES Program

Item	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
I would recommend the ACES program to other students. ( <i>N</i> = 86)	76	88.4	8	9.3	2	2.3	0	0.0
The ACES program has helped me get through my first year of college. ( <i>N</i> = 85)	66	77.6	14	16.5	5	5.9	0	0.0
The ACES program has motivated me to stay in college. ( <i>N</i> = 86)	63	73.3	18	20.9	5	5.8	0	0.0

Respondents also rated their overall satisfaction with the ACES program (Table 4.6). About three quarters rated their overall experience in the program (78%) and the quality of the program (77%) as excellent. None of the respondents rated their overall experience or program quality as poor or very poor.

Table 4.6  
Student Survey: Overall Satisfaction with ACES Program

Item	Excellent		Good		Average		Poor		Very poor	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
My overall experience in the ACES program was . . . . ( <i>N</i> = 85)	66	77.6	16	18.8	3	3.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
The quality of the ACES program was . . . . ( <i>N</i> = 84)	65	77.4	16	19.0	3	3.6	0	0.0	0	0.0

*Positive aspects of ACES.* In response to an open-ended question to tell their two favorite things about the ACES program, 74 of the 98 respondents replied. For this question, and other open-ended ones on the survey, the evaluator reviewed the comments to identify themes, then categorized comments on similar topics, and generated frequencies. As seen in Table 4.7, the two most frequently mentioned favorite things were the coach, listed by over one half of respondents (53%), and monetary help (financial aid, scholarships, or other) or information about financial aid or scholarships, listed by almost one third (32%). About one quarter (24%) of student respondents described workshops or other events and activities and one fifth (20%) made statements like support, guidance, help, or mentoring. Less than one eighth cited the following positives as their favorite thing: information (12%), always there (10%), motivates students (7%), caring/understanding (5%), and specific help (4%).

Table 4.7  
Student Survey: Favorite Things About the ACES Program

	<i>N</i> = 74	
	<i>n</i>	%
Coach	39	52.7
Financial aid, scholarships, related information	24	32.4
Workshops, events, activities	18	24.3
Support, guidance, help, mentoring	15	20.3
Information (not specified)	9	12.2
Always there	7	9.5
Motivates students	5	6.8
Caring, understanding	4	5.4
Specific help	3	4.1
Other	5	6.8

*Note.* Respondents could identify more than one thing.

Although most students gave very brief comments, one student wrote more expansively, as follows:

“I love how much ACES impacts your life for the better and how it offers many programs and scholarships, how every coach and counselor (sic) does the impossible to help you through your academics and personal life and motivates you to do things you thought you could never do!”



*Challenges and suggestions.* Given a list of potential challenges, as seen in Table 4.8, 81 of the 98 respondents selected at least one. The most common challenge, identified by more than three quarters of respondents to this question (83%), was the scheduled times for the ACES workshops. Far fewer respondents identified any other challenge. Less than one sixth of respondents had challenges with finding time to meet with their ACES coach (16%), the lack of a coach on campus during the fall semester (15%), or being unsure about whether to go to the ACES coach or someone else for help (15%). Only 10% of respondents found it hard to keep motivated to participate in the program, and none found it hard to contact their ACES coach.

Table 4.8  
Student Survey: Challenges that Students Faced in ACES Program

Item	N = 81	
	n	%
The ACES workshops were scheduled at times I could not attend.	67	82.7
It was hard to find a time in my schedule to meet with my ACES coach.	13	16.0
There wasn't a coach at my campus during the fall semester.	12	14.8
I wasn't sure whether to go to my ACES coach or someone at Montgomery College for help.	12	14.8
It was hard to keep myself motivated to participate in the ACES program.	8	9.9
It was hard to contact my ACES coach.	0	0
Other	2	2.5

*Note.* Students could choose more than one response.

The survey included an open-ended question asking for two ways to change the ACES program to better meet students' needs; 47 of the 98 respondents provided at least one way. The most frequent suggestion, from almost two thirds of the student respondents to this question (62%), related to meeting times (Table 4.9). These suggestions included several for more meeting times and a few to check on students' availability before scheduling workshops, to schedule workshops in the afternoon or evening, and to offer some workshops online. Almost one third of respondents (31%) suggested more contact from MC Coaches or more help in motivating students to participate. Specifically, a few student respondents asked for more community e-mails, mandatory or regular meetings with the coach, coaches to track students' progress, and help in motivating students. (All suggestions for meeting times and for more contact/more motivation are in the Appendix.)

Table 4.9  
Student Survey: Ways to Change the ACES Program

	N = 47	
	n	%
Meeting times: Change, different, more	24	51.1
More contact from coaches, more motivation for students	12	25.5
More social interaction among ACES students	4	8.5
More activities	3	6.4
Topics at meetings	3	6.4
More information on transferring	2	4.3
Healthier snack options at meetings	2	4.3
Other	7	14.9
Nothing	8	17.0

*Note.* Respondents could suggest more than one way.

The remaining suggestions came from four or fewer of the student respondents (less than 10%). They concerned more social interaction among ACES students, more activities, specific topics at

meetings (i.e., survey students to find out, offer more like the GAP workshop), more information on transferring (including out of state), and healthier snacks at meetings. Lastly, there were individual suggestions from seven students and eight students asked for no changes.

### *Coaches at MC*

The data on MC Coaches' perceptions of the ACES program are based on in-person interviews with each of the three coaches.

*Clarity of program aspects.* All MC coaches were clear or very clear on the goals of the ACES program, on their role and responsibilities as an ACES coach, and about decisions and changes to the implementation of the ACES program. With respect to the coach's responsibilities, there was a request for a calendar with deadlines on when to contact students.

MC coaches were somewhat clear on the responsibilities of students in the program, but noted that more clarification was needed to be sure that students were clear. There were requests for more clarity on certain processes and events that require students to complete a specific action (e.g., students need to actually accept a scholarship) and on whether coaches can require a certain level of participation in the ACES activities (e.g., workshops, individual meetings) in order to continue to receive ACES scholarship money.

*Collaboration with school staff.* As expected, the MC coaches worked with other staff at MC. In addition to the collaboration noted above under case management, all coaches reported collaborating with other MC staff as follows:

- Counseling (for academics) to organize orientation sessions
- Learning centers, tutoring, and library about workshops and sessions for summer programs

One or two MC coaches reported additional collaborations with others as follows:

- Advancement staff about coordinating training or celebrations
- Admissions staff about visits to high schools
- Career staff about workshops
- Facilities and catering staff about arrangements for summer programs and workshops
- Testing center staff about organizing ACCUPLACER testing
- Recruitment and welcome staff about setting up tours

*Support for coaches.* All MC coaches were satisfied or very satisfied with the following types of supports: professional development they received as ACES coaches, on-site resources for ACES, support from ACES staff, and support from other staff at MC.

*Program success.* All MC coaches agreed that the program had been successful in meeting the needs of students in the program this school year, in particular for navigating the systems at MC and for receiving financial support for tuition and other expenses. As one coach commented, “Many ACES students need a more intrusive and more hands-on approach to get things done. ACES students typically don’t have a parent who can help, either because the student is first generation or the parent’s first language is not English.” Coaches further believed that due to these supports, the program had been very successful in motivating students to stay in college.

With respect to whether the program helped students to be successful in their first year of college, two coaches believed that the program would help students to finish MC faster, for example, by skipping developmental courses. One coach talked about the value of contacting all students with low GPAs before the start of spring semester to communicate the need to raise their GPAs. However, MC coaches were either not sure of the program’s impact (until grades were final) or felt there was more room for academic success. One weak area mentioned by coaches is tutoring; at MC, students see different tutors each time and have a limited time (i.e., 30 minutes) with the tutor.

MC coaches all agreed that the most effective activity was one-on-one meetings with students, because they are personalized and focused. As one coach said, the meetings “help students learn to communicate, advocate for themselves, and navigate the MC system.”

As seen in Figure 4.1, MC coaches mentioned several positive aspects of ACES that have contributed most to the success of the program and several challenges to implementing the program.

Factors contributing to program success	Challenges to implementing the program
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good staffing, including                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Staff &amp; leadership in ACES office</li> <li>○ High school ACES coaches</li> <li>○ MC coaches working as a team</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Institutional support from top down at MC, MCPS, and USG</li> <li>• Donor money for scholarships to Dreamers and other students</li> <li>• Professional development for MC coaches</li> <li>• Ability for coaches to provide activities (e.g., Summer Program, workshops) and interventions especially for ACES students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Startup challenges for individual coaches: new to MCPS, MC, or Maryland; started in December; only one coach during fall semester</li> <li>• No previous relationships with students before they come to MC</li> <li>• Wide variety of students’ schedules makes it difficult to schedule group workshops or group advisory sessions.</li> <li>• Too many students for timely, personal follow up</li> <li>• Difficult to navigate state website for financial aid</li> <li>• Cannot contact parents to get their help</li> <li>• Office space too limited</li> <li>• MC processes, website, and technology are very confusing to coaches and students (e.g., it matters if students take ACCUPLACER on MC or MCPS license, but it is not obvious to student).</li> </ul>

*Figure 4.1.* MC coach interviews: Factors contributing most to the success of the ACES program and challenges to implementing the program

*Suggestions.* MC coaches identified the following improvements or suggestions for the ACES program to effectively fulfill their positions:

- Have tutors, counselors, and financial aid staff dedicated to ACES students
- More coaches at MC (particularly at Rockville campus) when the second cohort arrives in Fall 2015, especially because many students will be at MC for more than two years because of taking developmental courses
- Provide more information in a more timely manner about processes at MC
- More streamlined processes
- Permanent (as opposed to temporary) support in the ACES office

## Commendations and Recommendations

The findings in this report indicate several successes for the ACES program at MC, along with some areas for improvement, as reflected in the following discussion.

### Commendations

Continue the MC coaches' success in meeting with and supporting ACES students at MC.

- All MC coaches reported meeting individually with the majority of students and agreed that the most effective activity was one-on-one meetings with students.
- Two thirds of student respondents reported a personal meeting with their coach during spring and almost all agreed or strongly agreed that that their coach provides helpful information and guidance and helps them with overcoming barriers to college success.
- Students' favorite things about the program included the coach and benefits such as support, guidance, help, mentoring, always there, and caring/understanding.

Continue the MC coaches' success in assisting students with selection and registration for courses.

- All coaches described assisting students with selection and registration for courses through workshops and hands-on help.
- Among student survey respondents, almost 60% had a meeting about choosing courses, and almost 70% strongly agreed that the ACES program supported course selection/registration.
- No student respondent had suggestions about improving this area and relatively few indicated that their course work was too challenging.

Continue the program's success in providing financial aid and in assisting students with finding financial aid/scholarships and completing the related forms.

- All coaches described assisting students with completing financial aid applications through workshops and hands-on help.
- Student survey respondents identified finances most frequently as a significant problem for staying in college or being successful in college.
- When asked about experiences with the ACES program, respondents were most positive about help with financial aid/scholarships. Information about financial aid or scholarships was the second most frequent thing on student respondents' list of favorite things about ACES.

Continue the MC coaches' success in helping students to plan ahead for their time at MC.

- All coaches described assisting students to plan for their time at MC.
- Almost all student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that an ACES coach helped them to develop a plan for their time at MC.

Continue to support MC coaches through professional development and clear communication of decisions and changes to the ACES program.

## Recommendations

Make workshops accessible to more students by offering them more frequently and at a variety of times (especially in the afternoon or evening), providing some workshops online, and experimenting with providing more on the Rockville campus.

- Among survey respondents, the most frequent challenge was the scheduled times for the ACES workshops and the most frequent suggestion concerned meeting times.
- Coaches acknowledged that a wide variety of schedules for ACES students made it difficult to schedule group workshops or group advisory sessions.
- The majority of ACES students took at least one class at the MC Rockville campus.

Increase efforts to motivate students to participate in the ACES program.

- When students reported on their experiences with the ACES program, the lowest level of strongly agree was that “the ACES program has motivated me to stay in college.”
- A couple of suggestions from student survey respondents were for more help in motivating students to participate.

Ensure that all MC coaches send group e-mails regularly with reminders and timely information.

- Not all coaches reporting sending group e-mails regularly.
- Student survey respondents suggested more community e-mails with important information.

As some ACES students enter their second year at MC, put more emphasis on transferring to a four-year college after MC by both providing information and communicating to students that information is available.

- Almost all student respondents indicated they were very likely or somewhat likely to transfer to a four-year college in the Maryland system.
- Workshops on transferring to another college after MC had the lowest attendance among workshops according to the program summary.
- More information on transferring (including out of state) was one of the suggestions from student survey respondents.

Put more emphasis on communicating to students that MC coaches are tracking their academic progress.

- All coaches reported that they track student academic progress, especially course grades and academic restrictions.
- When reporting on their experiences with ACES coaches, the lowest level of strongly agree among survey respondents was that “My coach keeps track of my academic progress at Montgomery College.”
- More checking in/tracking progress was one of the suggestions from student survey respondents.

Fully develop and deploy the database for collecting information about ACES activities. Set expectations for MC coaches to regularly enter data, including attendance at individual meetings and activities other than group workshops.

- This database was not maintained for the 2014–2015 school year.
- The program summary concerned only group workshops and indicated much lower participation than what students reported on the survey.

Increase support to MC coaches by implementing their suggestions to provide the following:

- More clarity on certain processes and events that require students to do something (e.g., students need to actually accept a scholarship)
- More clarity on whether MC coaches can require a certain level of participation in the ACES activities in order to receive ACES scholarship money
- More information in a more timely manner about processes at MC
- Permanent (as opposed to temporary) support staff in the ACES office

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## Appendix: Detailed Responses from Student Survey

Table A1

Survey of MC Students: Individual Suggestions on Meeting Time and More Contact/More Motivation

Category	Verbatim suggestions (bold added)
Meeting, workshop time	<p><b>Change</b> the meeting times</p> <p>Make <b>better times</b> for workshops</p> <p>Schedule <b>better</b> workshop times</p> <p><b>Different</b> time meetings</p> <p>Have <b>more meetings</b> during the week</p> <p><b>More frequent meetings</b></p> <p><b>More meetings</b> per month</p> <p>Have <b>more time options</b> for the meetings</p> <p><b>More</b> workshop hours</p> <p><b>More meeting times</b> to ensure my attendance</p> <p>Provide workshops at <b>multiple times</b> so most students can attend</p> <p>There should be <b>multiple schedules for some events</b></p> <p><b>Variation of times</b> for workshops</p> <p><b>Wider range</b> for times</p> <p>Have <b>different timings to meet on a specific day</b></p> <p>Have the meetings on <b>two occasions on different days</b></p> <p>Workshops could be offered at the <b>same time on all campuses</b></p> <p>Fixing the times for the meetings and workshops by <b>asking ACES students their availability</b></p> <p>Students <b>schedule should be checked</b></p> <p>Each student should come for a meeting <b>at his/her free time</b></p> <p>Offer workshops <b>after noon</b></p> <p>Schedule times in <b>afternoon</b> rather than morning</p> <p>Provide <b>evening</b> workshops for the students that work during the day</p> <p>Make some of the <b>workshops online</b></p> <p><b>Online workshops</b></p>
More contact with MC coaches, more motivation for students	<p><b>More community emails</b> with important info</p> <p><b>Email</b> the ACES students</p> <p>Make <b>meetings with coaches mandatory</b> like 2x a month</p> <p>Make <b>individual face-to-face meeting</b> with all students <b>once per month</b></p> <p>Coaches should <b>call us once in a while</b> to see how we're doing to maintain us motivated</p> <p><b>Regularly check in</b> with student personally to see how things are going</p> <p><b>Keep track of student's progress</b> so in case they will need help</p> <p>Have a meeting once a month to check in how we're doing to maintain us <b>motivated</b></p> <p><b>Help motivate</b> students to want to participate</p> <p>Keep students <b>motivated</b> to participate</p> <p>ACES should <b>celebrate with the students on their birthdays</b> for example send an email wishing them a happy birthday</p> <p>Making sure ACES students <b>know about the ACES coach</b> on campus</p> <p><b>Provide office hours</b> to students</p> <p><b>Important information</b></p>