President’s Message
From Dr. Steve Thomas, MC President

Since this is the last edition of the Full Circle for the 2011-2012 academic year, I wanted to share with you a couple of items. The first is in response to the Open Forums that I conducted through the academic year and after my last article, “Moving the Needle,” I have been discussing with Administrative Council several options for implementing better practices for registration, advising, orientation, developmental education completion and effective use of M Power. We will fold these ideas into our operation, and I appreciate all of the comments and feedback I received to address the Student Success Agenda.

The second item involves my work with the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) on the legislative agenda for the 83rd Session. It may seem too early to begin this process, but it is important to tell our story and to build support from our elected officials. TACC is attempting to reframe policymaker’s perceptions of community colleges, and I asked the MC President’s Council to help me develop some talking points around the issues of Value, Economic Growth, Opportunity and Quality. We had a healthy and engaged discussion concerning our potential message, and the following is a summation of the discussion. I will share this paper with TACC, and we will use this to tell our story.

Value

There has never been a time in our state’s history when we have faced a more serious budget crisis at the same time as skyrocketing higher education costs. More people than ever before are seeking access to higher education institutions, and the state has very little funding to support the increasing need. While the state must cut the budget somewhere, higher education should remain a top funding priority. By allocating more of our resources towards education with the hopes of building a more educated population, the state will have less of a drain on various social programs that are accessed more frequently by the low-income, uneducated sector of our society (i.e., Medicaid/CHIP/WIC, the prison system, free health clinics/health care alternatives, and a variety of other services provided by the Health & Human Services Department).

Community Colleges have the unique ability to reach out to and accommodate all sections of our population—especially the lower income bracket and First-Generation-To-College (FGTC) students who may have never had the opportunity to receive a higher education. We can do this, most importantly, because the cost to attend is much lower than attending a 4-year university. In fact, based on 2012 figures, MC costs 1/3 of what it costs to attend a public university in Texas, and 1/5 of the cost of a private institution in Texas.

Furthermore, because community colleges are better positioned (geographically and sometimes politically) to be able to connect with their local businesses, chamber of commerce, and workforce in general, they are better informed and equipped in addressing the needs of the local economy (i.e., the PPDC, Energy Technology program, and others). Community colleges are, therefore, able to provide courses, trainings, degrees and certifications in fields that directly apply to the local workforce needs. These students are able to graduate (or receive a certificate) and immediately
transition into the job market—thus providing a direct impact on the local economy and an eventual (more indirect) impact on the state in general. Therefore, the state gets a much better ROI (“more bang for its buck”) when it invests in community colleges, because the impact of those dollars can be felt almost immediately in our economy.

Economic Growth

We need a new way to calculate Return on Investment (ROI) for Texas community colleges: **How do community colleges make Texas business- and employee-friendly?**

Successful community college students are the human infrastructure of the Texas economy. For example, approximately 5,000 students have graduated or obtained certifications from Midland College’s health-related training programs. Of these, approximately 2,000 have completed one of the college’s rigorous nursing programs, and approximately 1,800 are currently working at Midland Memorial Hospital, area healthcare facilities and local physicians’ offices. Furthermore, during the past 12 years, Midland College has provided state-of-the art computer and technical skills training to over 14,000 high school (MISD) students, college students and employees of Permian Basin businesses.

We provide the foundational skills and knowledge for the state’s university students. During the fall 2011 semester, 1,483 FGTC students attended Midland College, and this semester there are 1,392 FGTC students at MC. Community colleges provide for individuals who often are undertrained and underprepared to begin their higher education pursuits in their own homes, eventually evolving into successful employees and job creators.

If you have needed a computer technician, petroleum technician, nurse, truck driver, plumber, electrician or restaurateur recently, you can thank a Texas community college!

Opportunity

Statistics show that the “Closing the Gap” initiative will not be achieved in the near future. Of all the institutions of higher education in our state, only its community colleges have come close to meeting the “Closing the Gap” goals. If Texas wishes to enjoy a competitive workforce, it must value and adequately support its community colleges, better meeting both formula funding and the growing costs of employee health insurance.

The state’s industry depends on community colleges to supply workers with job-specific, technical training, certificates, and degrees, and less so with graduates having esoteric majors.

The best place to begin higher education for many students is the community college. It is affordable, often close to home, has an open door policy, provides a caring environment and routinely takes people of all levels of intellect. Community colleges are known for their reasonable class sizes and their spirit of focusing on individual needs.

For many in our population, there is a reluctance to leave home to pursue an education, often due to numerous personal obligations. However, the local community college welcomes all people wishing to benefit themselves, their families and their
community colleges serve people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and goals. They help meet both immediate and long-term demands for economic stability, tailoring services for very diverse communities around our state.

The “open door” policy of our community colleges helps to open the doors of opportunity for the future workforce of Texas.

**Quality**
Implicit in the definition of quality and student success is the rigor of programs, part of which comes from the following:

- Establishing learning objectives and standards
- Fostering student engagement and interaction
- Using effective assessment and measurement of standards
- Providing learner support and development

Community colleges do all of these things within a system that both follows the rules of accreditation and uses faculty with the same qualifications as faculty at four-year universities teaching the same level.

Quality and success can be measured by determining whether students
1. Attain the goal they arrived with (e.g., earning a certificate to get a job, earning an associate degree, earning enough credits to transfer to a four-year institution, etc.) and
2. Have been prepared to move successfully to their next level (e.g., employment, licensing, upper level coursework, earning a bachelor’s degree, etc.). Unlike in the case of most four-year universities, not all students entering a community college have the goal of earning a degree from the institution.

**Conclusion**
Community colleges are a true American innovation—a product of twentieth-century American higher education. In 1947, President Harry Truman called for the establishment of a network of public community colleges that would serve as cultural centers, be comprehensive in program offerings, emphasize civic responsibility and serve the areas in which they are located.

Today, Permian Basin residents depend on Midland College to offer academic courses that will transfer to four-year universities, to provide hands-on career and technology training, and to enrich the community through lifelong learning and cultural opportunities. They depend on us, and we will continue to deliver.