

English Transcript for *Montgomery County Community College: Part 1: Getting to Know You*

[BLANK\_AUDIO] We're here today with Dennis Barrera, assistant director of admission for Montgomery County Community College. And we're going to be speaking with Dennis today about Montgomery County Community College specifically, as well as community colleges in general. So, Dennis, thank you for joining us today. >> Well, thank you for having me, Eric. >> So, Dennis, you represent Montgomery County Community College. >> Yes. >> But before we talk about your college specifically, can you explain to us what is a community college? Well, a community college is a publicly funded. Mostly two year institution and we have, there are almost about 1100 that are scattered across the United States. Student enroll in community colleges because of the ease of enrollment relative to a lot of competitive universities, as well as the reasonable price situation compared to those four year schools as well. So it provides It's a great option for a lot of students who may not necessarily be headed towards the four year path, but still want a good quality college education. >> So a wonderful and very important feature of community colleges is that they work on what's known as open enrollment or open admission. When it comes to being accepted at the college. Can you explain what does it mean to be open admission? >> Open admission is something that's very different from the selective admissions that most universities and colleges practice. Open admissions basically states that if you meet the minimum criteria usually of just having the equivalent of a U.S. high school diploma probably completing secondary education usually about 12 years of that, that you could qualify for study at a community college. Most community colleges will have their own internal placement test. So, one of the things that they do, is the test determines whether or not you need to take some kind of developmental or pre-college education first. And then, once completing that, go into what we call freshmen level courses, classes that will apply towards graduation or can be transferred to another school. Or, if you're already at the freshman level And then can just start on a track to graduate with an associates degree, the degrees that we confer in two years. >> So you mentioned the term, associates degree, and Montgomery County Community College you, you provide several different types of associates degrees including. And Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Associate in Fine Arts, and Associate in Applied Sciences. >> [INAUDIBLE]. >> As well as others. So what exactly is an Associate degree and what does it do for a student? >> It can do two things. If you look at a lot of our programs, we have the Associates like you said in Applied Sciences. >> Mm-hm. >> Most of those are career driven. The education is very practical. A lot of learn by doing. Some examples of that are things like nursing, dental hygiene computer networking as well as early childhood education. A lot of these programs have components where students are working in the field, in nursing for dental hygiene they're actually cleaning teeth. For early childhood education we actually have our own children's daycare center where the students do they're observation right there on campus. So with this practical approach The objective is to get their first post-college job with just the two-year Associate's degree. >> Mm-hm. >> The other objective of an Associate's degree, and this you'll see with the Associate's in Science, Associate's in Arts, even the Associate's in Fine Arts, >> Mm-hm. >> Is that it's really much more theoretical learning, a lot of book learning, as they say. What this is, is designed to do is put a student in a four year program at a university, but as a third-year student. So, in essence they're doing their freshman year studies as well as their sophomore year studies, completing their general education requirements and then taking the specialized courses once they transfer to the destination school. >> Using your college as an example, how would the day to day experience or education differ at a community college than it would at a four year college or university? >> I think the only real difference and this is common with a lot of community colleges as well. >> Mm-hm. >> Is that there is no on-campus housing. So the campus experience outside the classroom is much more

different. >> Mm-hm. >> Most of our students are. Well, all of our students live off campus. >> Mm-hm. >> And some are still living at home with their families if they're locally based. But the community colleges still provide the same quality education, >> Mm-hm. >> We still have the same qualified professors. >> Mm. >> We still have all the resources for things like tutoring, research, all of those are directly on campus to help our students succeed. Because we're also regionally accredited These are, this is a definitely a bonafide quality college education that the students are getting. Even with that we even have about 50 different student student clubs that are on campus, student organizations that are on campus. So there is a component to student life with that, it just ends after a certain hour in the evening. >> Another important feature of community colleges, and it's something you, you touched on briefly already, is the low cost of attendance. So how much does it cost an international student to attend Montgomery County Community College. >> Currently it's just over \$10,000. Per year to attend the college. When you compare us to your average state school, which can charge an international students as much as 18 to \$20,000 a year, and a lot of private institutions that can range anywhere from 33 to almost \$60,000 a year not including dorm expenses. >> Mm-hm. >> Students are saving a lot of money by choosing us first. So that is pretty much the, the niche that community colleges have, especially Montgomery County Community College, because it allows a student to, with relative ease, enter into college. If they need to work on. English skills, math skills to get up to college level, they can do that. They can enroll in those developmental courses I mentioned earlier. Once they're at the freshmen level, they can start earning that college credit that will count towards graduation, were they could use to transfer to another school. And it allows a student to really find an alternative means to fulfill their educational goals here in the United States. >> So, Dennis, with a lower cost students might think that the school is of a lesser quality. How does the cost affect the quality of the education and the experience? At the community college. >> I'd have to say it really doesn't. One of the things that community colleges have is that they're publically funded. So Montgomery County Community College is funded by places like the federal government, or state government, and even our local county, or which is like a type of prefecture body, just within the state of Pennsylvania. >> Mm-hm. >> With that being said, this subsidized education and savings are passed along to the student, but the resources are all still there. Case in point, just about all of our professors have a Master's degree, 25% of them have a PhD. >> Mm. >> Some also teach at major four year institutions here in the Philadelphia area. And then a lot of our facilities are considered, what we consider state of the art. So 75% of the facilities that we have on both our campuses in Blue Bell Pennsylvania as well as Pottstown, Pennsylvania have either been refurbished, renovated or built new outright in the last six years. So with those update facilities the students are still getting that quality education. >> When I speak with international students I regularly get the question when I, when I try to talk to them about the community college branch of things they ask the question why. So why would a student attend a community college? >> Because I believe it provides that alternative that as opposed to just entering a university as a freshman student through that four year path. A lot of students can do that, and there are many students who will put together an application profile that is competitive. That four year colleges will gravitate towards and they'll get admitted to a lot of different schools. For the students that need that training, perhaps their [UNKNOWN] may not be high enough, their essay may not be as eloquent, or their transcript doesn't show a grade point average to the liking of the school. This alternative means helps the student, number one, save money. With the reduced tuition but the ease of enrollment allows them to like I said fulfill their educational goals of obtaining a bachelor's degree or practical two year diploma. So the students attend a community college because we, we accommodate and we work with every student that we get.

With that, the students are still getting that American college experience. Another advantage to that is there are a lot of different [SOUND] transfer options. So we have preset dual admissions partnerships and articulation agreements with a lot of 4 year colleges that are out there,. Their dual admissions partnerships now with 28 colleges and universities here in the Philadelphia area, and even one in South Korea. So, dual admissions basically states that if they progress through our program, maintain a minimum grade point average, they can be automatic, nearly automatically accepted. To the partners school. With the articulation agreements the credits are guaranteed to transfer to that particular school so that they start as a third year student. At the end, at the end of the four years, at the conferral of their Bachelors degree, they ce, they receive the same diploma that every student gets. There's no fine print that says you started at a community college and that you're less of a competitive graduate because of that. So, we have students right now who are graduating from institutions like Temple University. Even now, we have partnerships with Lehigh, with Widener Universities. We just signed an agreement with St. Joseph University. We now have Drexel offering programs right on our campus. So we have students graduating From these institutions who never really submit an SAT, never really submitted a [UNKNOWN], never wrote a college essay, never had to provide a recomde, recommendation, are all those things that make college admission such an anxious process. >> So, Dennis, you've, you've done a great job explaining to us what an associate's degree is, and you've also mentioned that. In most community college students won't stop at an associates degree. So how did community college use their experience to go on for a bachelor's degree? >> What we've done over the years is we've created new programs and initiatives. That really ease a transition from a community college to a four year institution. We give our, our graduates the inside track to getting a Bachelor's Degree. So as the years have gone on through our experience we've created more dual admissions partnerships with more schools. A few years ago we only had about maybe 20 now we're up to 28 And we're still counting, we're still negotiating agreements with other schools. The articulation of program to program agreements. Basically guarantee the transfer of credits from one, from our institution into the next. We may not have a dual admissions partnership with them but, there is at least that guarantee that those credits will transfer over. One of the great examples of this is with Cornell University for their engineering program. Naturally Cornell is a very selective institution so we don't have a dual missions partnership with them, but for any student that starts in our engineering transfer program If they progress well, and they meet the admissons criteria at Cornell. Cornell will take those transfer credits in. So, and then with that, there's even more options that are out there. There are a lot of I'm sorry. There are also a lot of scholarship programs that we have. So, international students can pertake in a program called, The Jack Kent Cook Bucknell Scholars Program. About every year, we send five to six students to Bucknell University, on a full scholarship. >> Mm-hm. >> International students can qualify for this particular program. So, I'm sorry. A few years back we had an alumni who was accepted into the Jack Kent Cooke Scholars Fund. >> Mm-hm. >> And she's now earning here masters in engineering at Bucknell University. So, we've had students that have started with us. Started with ESL, progressed through the program, and are now at some of the top institutions here in Pennsylvania earning a Bachelor's. And then even going on and getting a Mater's degree. >> So, you've mentioned, another term. That international students might not be. Really familiar with and that term is articulation agreement. So, can you just take a minute to really define what an articulation, [LAUGH] [COUGH] Let's try that again. [COUGH] You've already mentioned a term that international students might not be as familiar with. And that term is articulation agreement. Can you just take a minute to really define what an articulation agreement is? And again. How it can help a student or what a student should look for

when maybe researching articulation agreements? >> Articulation agreements really take on many forms here at the college. Like a, as mentioned before, it could be a dual admissions partnership where if a student meets say the minimum GPA requirements, they could enter an institution like Temple or St. Joseph's University. Usually with just a condensed application indicating what they would like their major to be. The schools then see if how they fit within their curriculum, and then how the credits transfer over. Program to program agreements are agreements that state that if the student is admitted into. The partner school that those credits will definitely transfer over. So the work that they've done in their freshmen and sophomore year while earning their associate's degree at Montgomery County Community College, ensures that they'll start as a junior at one of those major institutions. And even then, some articulation agreements are, could be like our Bucknell scholars program, where if the student qualifies for that. There is a transfer agreement along with scholarship opportunities and we're creating more programs like that with a number of different schools. With the new Drexel program that we have now we're offering five Drexel bachelor's degree programs right there on our campus in Bluebell. Drexel professors come on campus, they teach, teach Drexel courses, the students graduate with a bachelor's from Drexel University. With this new program, there will be a reduced tuition rate. And even then, some students, based on their collegiate GPA from their Associate degree, could also get extra scholarship money from a dean scholarship program. >> So, all of these programs, they're all fantastic, and they all involve students moving from a two year school. Where they get, they would get their Associate's degree to a four year school where they would pursue their Bachelor's degree studies. What help do these students receive when they're on the community college's campus to help understand how they can move from your college? Into a bachelors degree institution. >> Our students success center has trained all of our academic advisors and we do have transfer counsel as well who can sit down with the students and show them that the courses that they're taking can be transferred into a destination school of their interest within the students success center they can actually see how some of the classes are taken, that they'll take at Montgomery County Community College in one column on a sheet, and on the other column, how that equates to the freshman and sophomore courses at the four year college. Another thing that we do is we hold a lot of different transfer fairs. So the transfer fairs are events that we have as similar to a college fair. That the students may be visiting right now. But there are students who sit down with a transfer transfer recruiter, and then they can talk directly to the source to see how those credits transfer over, and what procedures they need to put in place to transition their enrollment from us to the school of their choice. >> So thank you for explaining all of those different aspects of community colleges in general. Now that we know a little bit more about community colleges overall, can you tell us some more about Montgomery County Community College specifically? >> So Montgomery County Community College has two campuses. One is in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania which is located about 40 minutes by car outside the city of Philadelphia. You know, there's our Pottstown campus, which is just over an hour by car outside of the same city. We have now about 100 programs across 44 different areas of study and some of the unique features of our college, for a number of years we were considered one of the most technologically advanced community colleges. In the United States we're one of the few colleges to have Drexel programs being taught on our campus. We also do offer some masters degree programs at our Pottstown campus through the university center and they're offered by institutions like Villanova, Temple, and Albright Universities. we, we, it's a quiet safe suburban campus, and we offer a nursing program that international students in the past have qualified for, but it is dependent on the favorable submission of a petition. >> You mentioned some of the special features that Montgomery County Community College has. Are there any other

features that distinguish Montgomery County from other community colleges? >> So it's, I think those programs that I mentioned before really make Montgomery County Community Colleges unique compared to other colleges. Community Colleges you're going to see, aren't going to offer 2-year diplomas; they'll have transfer programs with 4-year Institutions usually locally based near their own campus. Some of the things that Montgomery County has are the technological the technology I think is unique to it. We have one of the top five college internet radio stations in the country. So Montgomery does something we're definitely very proud of. We're an achieving-the-dream college so we have a nationwide initiative to help our students succeed and progress through with their own educational goals. And we are a beautiful suburban campus that we have and throughout all of the semesters of the area. It looks absolutely picturesque. >> So I'm always telling students that colleges and universities have their own unique personality. How would you describe the personality of Montgomery County >> it's over time could you [UNKNOWN] >> Yes. >> [UNKNOWN] for >> Sure >> and [UNKNOWN]? >> Mm-hm. I'm always telling students that colleges and universities have unique personalities. How would you describe the personality of Montgomery County Community College? >> I would describe it as that older friend or relative that always calls every now and again to make sure you're doing okay. >> Mm-hm. One of the things I always hear from our graduates is, they missed a lot of the personalized attention that they received while they were students through us. So we keep very small classes. Most of our classes are going to max out at anywhere between 28 to 35 students. So they get to know their professors rather well. The same goes with their academic advisors and even our staff who work in our library. Those in the admissions office, such as myself, as well as our faculty liaisons with a lot of our student organizations. So the students really build that network and they kind of receive a helping hand through everything they do through studying. To finding out what colleges that they may want to transfer to or finding that first job. And we even see them there at graduation during the commencement ceremony as they're walking up and getting their associates degrees. Once they enter the larger institutions, they kind of miss that one on one. Conversations that they had been having for those past two years. >> On the student side, what kind of student is a good fit for Montgomery County Community College? Who is someone that would thrive on campus? And who is someone that maybe would struggle on campus? >> I think in comparison to a lot of four year universities out there, it's very elemental. It doesn't follow as strict regimen of if the student tests well, if they have good grades, if they follow a certain philosophy they're a good fit for our institution. >> Mm-hm. >> It goes, it goes down to more basic terms. If the student really is motivated - And persistent. >> Mm-hm. >> It boils down to that. And if they respect the education that they're receiving, they will succeed at our college, if they will put the hard work in to complete their courses, to progress through the program, to utilize all the options that we have on campus. Those students are going to succeed. Some of the students that we That enter the college that don't succeed really don't understand the quality that comes with the education. They see community college as, well it wasn't very competitive to get into. It may, the quality may not be on par with some of the other universities out there. I may not have to take this as seriously as some of my counterparts at some of the major institutions, Joe. >> Mm hhm. >> When they realize that's not the case, through some, through some very hard lessons. >> Mm hhm. >> Many students do not persist to graduation. >> So, according to the college board, Montgomery County Community College enrolls. Around 13,000 students, that number of students places the college in that mid to large size range, so what's it like to attend a community college of your size? >> It's very different from For your institutions of a similar or larger size. Our campus doesn't go on for acres and acres with all kinds of different,uh, lecture halls and residence halls and sports stadiums. It's a much smaller feel. So it doesn't feel like an institution that has

13,000 students. Another key component to that is because is our smaller class size. Like I said before, most of our classes will max out at 28 - 35 students, so that the student has a much closer relationship with the faculty rather than have a very popular course where we could offer ...um, you know, five sections, for 200 students. We really don't have large lecture halls with stadium style seating. We would rather offer 30 sections of the same course, with about 25 students each. And then run the course in that fashion. We feel that helps our students succeed. And then move on to graduation. >> The college board also lists that around 60% of Montgomery county community college students are part-time students. >> Mm-hm. >> What does it mean to be a part-time student? And how does that effect campus? >> So the part-time students that we have on campus are all locally based, and live in within our local communities. >> Mm-hm. Many of them are working also either working part-time or full time, and some will take their courses on say, a Tuesday or Thursday or all in the evening to fit their to fit their schedules. >> Mm-hm. >> This adds, I think, a certain unique element to the educational experience, the classroom experience as well. Most of these students are over the age of 22, so they also bring in some professional experience to the classroom. >> Mm-hm. >> And it adds I think a certain sense of maturity to the academic experience overall. >> You mentioned this a little bit earlier, but Montgomery County Community College is in a suburban setting outside of the city of Philadelphia. What is life like in the suburbs? >> On first impression you're going to notice how quiet it can actually be. >> Mm-hm. >> With the campus even in Blue Bell and Pottstown, it's, it's incredibly quiet compared to a bustling campus like Temple University, and New York University or even the University of Pennsylvania. [SOUND] we see all four seasons here, so it's the flowers that bloom in May to the autumn leaves that fall in October. And with the weather that we've had recently. The snow banks that you see in February. So, even then it's, it's a very beautiful picturesque campus. Our facilities department does a magnificent job making sure that the campus always looks in tip-top shape. Even with that, the suburban campus with its serenity, also comes an element of safety. One of the things I've always seen with the urban campus, me personally, I was educated on an urban campus, is that there's always the hustle and bustle, there is frequent police activity as well. With that, we do have our own campus safety team, but you don't see the frequent police activity that you would normally see on an urban campus. >> And Dennis, something else that you mentioned is that Montgomery County Community College actually has multiple campuses. >> Mm-hm. >> From an international student perspective wh, wh whatat should they look for? What should they ask about, or why would multiple campuses be relevant to the students watching this interview? >> It's relevancy goes into some of programs that we offer. We offer some of our health science programs. That will change in a few years. But we'll be offering our health science programs at the campus in Blue Bell. It is the larger of the two campuses. >> Mm-hm. >> The multi campus approach came about because. We are a commuter college. We do not have on-campus housing. But our communities are so spread out that we still want to remain relatively accessible. So the two campus idea came from that, stemmed from that need. For a lot of our students, even our international students, that are locally based in the Philadelphia area One campus may be closer to them as opposed to another. A lot of our students, they'll have friends or relatives that will live in the local community and they'll get their education, once again, at that relatively low cost. >> Mm-hm. >> And then move on to get their bachelor's degree. But They also save money in their dorm ex, dorm expenses by staying with that pers, that close personal contact that's locally based. >> We're going to take a quick break, but we'll be back to hear from Dennis Ferrara in just a minute. [BLANK\_AUDIO]