

Opinions / Editorials

Our Responsibility to Solve the Tuition Crisis

By Alexander Short

With each passing election hailed as the most important of our lifetime, new conglomerations of campaign trail concerns hide among speeches riddled with hope, often disguised as simple problems, requiring equally simple solutions. Indeed, one qualm I have with politics is that candidates often generalize issues, and then fail to address the problems facing our country with proper precision. It is up to our generation to take a new approach to politics, one of honesty and hopefully, of effectiveness. Our generation, now coming of age, will clearly have a unique set of problems to overcome during our reign as the electorate (and

maybe leaders) of the free world.

One problem new to our country, unique to our generation, and finally gaining attention from the candidates and media alike, is that of the increasingly unaffordable price of attending college in this day and age. Readers of this issue of *The Montgazette* represent a piece of the population well versed in the astronomical price tag of an education. Some of us could not afford the more traditional approach to a college degree--four years at the same institution. Indeed, as college costs continue to increase, the option of attending community college becomes more and more enticing to middle and lower class students.

According to an October 30 ar-

ticle in the *Los Angeles Times*, a recent report by the College Board cautioned, "The average price of attending college rose nearly 6% this fall, but education officials warned that the widening economic crisis might push tuition bills sharply higher next year." Although the six percent rise only narrowly exceeds the inflation rate, the report also indicates that the "average debt was 18% higher than it was six years ago." This pointed rise in college tuition in recent years reflects the economic unrest and the growth of college-bound students in the last decade.

I had the honor of speaking with Dr. Kathrine Swanson, MontCo's Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Enrollment Management, who is regularly faced with the strain of tuition costs for community college students. She spoke to me about the increased interest in community colleges, financial aid, and the economic struggle that so many students face upon graduating high school. MontCo, in particular, has worked to keep tuition costs as low as possible, such that "since 2005-07, we have raised our tuition only three dollars a credit hour, cumulative over three years." Dr. Swanson mentioned that this can be attributed to "our president, Dr. Stout, [who] is very good at working with local, state, and federal legislators to find other sources of funding so that we can keep tuition as low as possible."

Dr. Swanson spoke about a large segment of students at MontCo, who are not here as a result of dismal financial aid packages, but instead see community college as an option for students who are the first in their family to attend college. She noted, "We

just recently started collecting data on first generation students, and 24% of our students this year are the first in their families to go to college."

Indeed, those who attend community college represent an economic and academic diversity not found at many four-year colleges. Although many of the students at MontCo will transfer to another school or enter the world of work, they all can certainly agree that Montgomery County Community College has provided them with the education they deserved, whether or not they had originally planned to attend here.

Moving forward, our generation must acknowledge the importance of community colleges, as well as the problem of the tuition crisis in the United States. President-elect Barack Obama has addressed both issues, promising a \$4,000 tax credit for all students and the creation of a Community College Partnership Program, which his website plans will "help schools determine what skills and technical education are needed to help local industry; [...] expand new degrees for emerging fields; and [...] reward schools that graduate more students." Whether or not these are the foundations for fixing the tuition crisis, it is certain that they are a step in the right direction.

Ultimately, it will be up to our generation, those who understand this issue firsthand, to step up and ask our leaders to solve the tuition crisis that cripples so many qualified students every year. With the audacity to address a problem of such magnitude, hopefully we can pave a way for our children, and their children, to pursue an education of any caliber without having to first check their wallets.

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