

# Montgomery College receives citizenship preparation grant

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Montgomery College was chosen to receive a \$100,000 grant through the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program run by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, administrators announced last week.

With the grant, the college will be able to provide free language skills and government classes to Montgomery County's lawful permanent residents — those immigrants who legally reside in the country — who are seeking to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

“Naturalization is a costly process, and in this economy, folks are struggling to make ends meet,” said Donna Kinerney, instructional dean of the college's Workforce Development and Continuing Education department.

The class aims to raise the English language and literacy levels of immigrants who have little existing comprehension of the subjects, Kinerney said.

Nancy Newton, program director for the Citizenship Preparation Class, said the free program will provide a little peace of mind for lawful permanent residents as they prepare for their citizenship exams and oral interviews.

“The application fee for naturalization is \$675, and if we can help with preparing students for the exam for free, this is one less worry they need to think about,” Newton said.

Newton said the college “jumped on the opportunity” to apply for the grant after a loss of state funding for her existing citizenship classes had made it necessary for the college to charge her students tuition to take the course.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services awarded Montgomery College the funds through its Direct Services Grant Program, one of two separate grant proposal categories designated for funding distribution. The other category, the National Capacity Building Grant Program, awarded grants to groups who sought to make new citizenship services available to communities in need of more and improved citizenship resources.

Montgomery College is one of two Maryland institutions and one of 75 total organizations to receive a portion of the \$7.8 million that Citizen and Immigration Services will allocate for citizenship education and preparation programs as part of its fiscal year 2010 budget. These figures represent an expansion of the grant program from last year, when the agency split \$1.3 million among 13 organizations.

The program is funded through the Department of Homeland Security; immigrant integration was mentioned within the department's appropriations for fiscal year 2010. U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services estimated that grant recipients will help educate and prepare more than 25,000 lawful permanent residents for their naturalization applications.

Newton said Montgomery College's one-year grant will fund daytime, evening and weekend citizenship classes at several locations across the county. The first classes funded by the grant will be up and running in November, Newton said.

Newton said she anticipates that local immigrants of all ages and from a wide variety of countries — including El Salvador and Ethiopia, Honduras and Haiti — will be among those who utilize the free classes.