

inside Bergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Applied Technology High School students (left to right) Elizabeth Mazur, Briella Biggins and Skylar Melis have the opportunity to enroll in college-level classes and pursue an associate degree from Bergen.

High Schoolers Get a Head Start on College at Bergen

Last year, 53 students from the Applied Technology High School (ATHS) on Bergen's main campus completed their studies and graduated with associate degrees ... one month prior to earning their high school diplomas. The graduates represent the latest members of a growing nationwide cohort of high school students who simultaneously enroll in college-level classes while working toward a high school diploma.

According to the federal government, high

school students now account for more than 20 percent of all community college enrollees. Locally, Bergen maintains partnerships with schools such as Cliffside Park High School, Garfield High School, and the aforementioned ATHS to provide students with access to college classes. President Eric M. Friedman said the programs remain popular for a reason.

"Ambitious high school students and their families remain incredibly excited about the oppor-

tunity to earn college credits – or a full associate degree," he said. "Students have an opportunity to grow as learners through advanced coursework and potentially enter college with a significant number of credits already completed. Of course, this saves both time and money for the student. The incredible growth of our high school partnership programs reflects our community's support of the competitive advantage we have developed for local students."

Bergen has become a regional leader in establishing college-high school partnerships, creating a portfolio of offerings that serve students regardless of their individual goals. Early college programs, like Bergen's arrangement with ATHS, offer high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to enroll in classes at the College where they can attend in-person or online. Meanwhile, the dual enrollment program allows students to earn college credits at their home high school, taught by a Bergen-approved instructor. Rounding out the offerings, Bergen also offers a non-degree option for juniors and seniors and a grant-funded preparation program for seniors planning to articulate into the College. Collectively, 2,962 students from 53 high schools participated in one of the four programs last year. Growth has continued unabated since the College first launched the high school partnership initiative more than a decade ago, according to Bergen Director of College Readiness and Early College Programs Laura Madera.

"We're opening doors of opportunity for students that might otherwise remain closed for years," she said. "This good work is only possible through a robust collaboration with our partners: superintendents, principals, guidance supervisors, department deans and professors. We are grateful to have such dedicated partners by our side."

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BY THE NUMBERS - High School Partnerships at Bergen



53

High School Partners



2,962

Enrolled



188

High School Students Earning Associate Degrees in 2024

Grants Help Seed Farmer's Market

In the latest initiative as part of grant-funded programs centered on sustainability, agriculture and food insecurity, the Bergen Cares Center, Phi Theta Kappa and grant personnel collaborated to create a free "farmer's market" that allowed students to select complimentary produce provided by local farms. The event took place before Thanksgiving as part of Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week, which also featured numerous other awareness-building activities.

The College has received numerous grants to support initiatives such as the farmer's market and to develop sustainability/agricultural-based academic programming, including a:

- \$4.5 million "From Learning to Leading: Cultivating the Next Generation of Diverse Food and Agriculture Professionals Program"



(NEXGEN) grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture;

- \$996,252 "Food and Agriculture Science Education Pathways" grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its award programming for Hispanic Serving Institutions such as Bergen.
- \$37,000 grant from the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education to support initiatives through the Bergen Cares Center that combat food insecurity. ■



International Students Celebrate First Thanksgiving

More than 400 years after the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth, Massachusetts, the International Student Center and Office of Student Life collaborated to create a similar experience for the College's international students. The dinner introduced them to the American holiday. International student counselor Amparo Coddling has organized the event for the last two years.

"Students enjoyed the event and the opportunity to get together and learn about this tradition in a fun way," she said. "We hope to continue this tradition for years to come."

Approximately 100 international students, faculty and staff attended the celebration. The College sponsored the meal prepared by its hos-

pitality services partner, American Dining Creations, which, of course, featured turkey and all the trimmings. Students also learned about the origins of the holiday and played Kahoot. Winners also received special chocolate turkeys.

Daniel Ruiz Lince, an international student studying information technology, said the event helped students learn about an important custom of the country in which they now reside.

"The International Student Center doesn't realize how many people they are helping with these kinds of events by gathering everyone together," he said. ■



Bergen Has it Covered



Bergen secured some prime real estate in the Sunday Record newspaper this month, with a story on the state's nursing shortage featuring commentary from faculty, staff and students. The spread also featured photos of students learning in the Interdisciplinary Center for Simulation located in the Health Professions Integrated Teaching Center. The online version of the story also included a video piece on the College's health professions programs. Scan the QR code to watch! ■

Snapshotted



The "Operation Christmas Child" toy drive supported those in need throughout the world.



Students at "Pizza with the President" had an opportunity to meet with President Friedman.



Alumnus LJ Hickman returned to perform the one-man show, "Backwards Forwards Back."



The annual faculty and staff holiday celebration featured festive foods, friends and good cheer.



Interactive Day celebrated the thrill of engagement!



The College's first "Sikh Heritage and Culture Event" included a turban tying activity.



Garfield Students Visit Bergen for Annual Discovery Day

For the past three years, Bergen has hosted “days of discovery” for Garfield High School students to visit the College and explore its diverse academic programs. The initiative represents an offshoot of the dual enrollment program, which provides the opportunity for Garfield students to earn college credits through advanced placement high school courses.

Fifty-six Garfield students toured classrooms and facilities that house Bergen’s biology, health professions, aviation and engineering programs. From using flight simulators to touring medical simulation and health professions

classrooms, the students showed eagerness to learn and engage. Biology and horticulture professor Coleen Kennedy organized the visit.

“We have created a nice relationship with Garfield high school, and offered a visit to the campus for those students participating in dual-enrollment courses,” she said. “The students are eager to talk about what they aspire to do in their careers. In terms of community outreach, this event is a perfect example of building bridges between the Bergen Community College campus and the youth who will be our next generation of students.” ■

Bergen Bytes

The Edison Job Corps Academy recognized NJ STARS Coordinator Julia Gibson with its Community Activism Award for her work with her local NAACP chapter. • Senior Dean of Humanities Adam Goodell recently earned his Ed.D. in higher education administration from St. Peters University. • The Turning Point Program and the Office of Specialized Services earned the Bergen County Department of Human Services “Salute to Champions” award for their commitment to belongingness and inclusivity. • Nursing professors – and sisters – Diana and Joana Constantino earned nominations for the New Jersey League for Nursing “DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurse Educators.” • The Torch student newspaper earned second place honors in the Society of Professional Journalists’ “The Liberty Awards” for the best election print edition. ■



Sharing is Caring for Student

Respiratory therapy student Karsen Griffin has earned one of six \$1,000 health science scholarships from the NJ Sharing Network Foundation recognizing students dedicated to careers that support organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Griffin, of Teaneck, represented the only community college student to receive one of the inaugural awards, which NJ Sharing Network employees funded through a donation campaign.



“These remarkable students inspire us with their dedication to making a difference in the lives of others,” Sharing Network Foundation Executive Director Amanda Tibok said. “Their commitment underscores the importance of NJ Sharing Network’s mission, and we are thrilled to support their journey. We are confident that each of these scholarship recipients will contribute significantly in their future careers in healthcare.”

Describing Griffin as “smart and savvy,” Respiratory Care Program Director Amy Ceconi offered her congratulations.

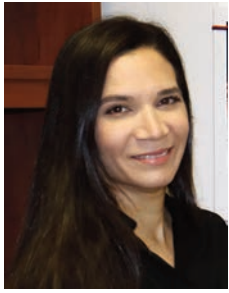
“This is a great reflection on the program and I am so proud of her,” Ceconi said.

Griffin, who expects to graduate from Bergen in May 2025, said the scholarship will make a difference in her life.

“I am so grateful to receive this scholarship, as it will help me to pay for my last semester of school,” she said. “Completing this upcoming semester allows me to come one step closer to beginning my career as a respiratory therapist, and helping my patients.”

Located in New Providence, the NJ Sharing Network is a federally designated nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing lives by connecting patients and organ and tissue donations. The Sharing Network Foundation is dedicated to saving lives through clinical advancement, support and education. Learn more at SharingNetworkFoundation.org. ■

Professor Selected for Spain Scholarship



Professor Cesarina Vinas has received the Don Quixote de La Mancha scholarship from the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), which will facilitate a teaching

experience for her in Spain. Vinas will travel to the University of Castilla - La Mancha (UCLM) in March, where she will connect with local and international educators to advance her Spanish language teaching methods. Vinas has worked as an assistant professor in Bergen's world languages and English-as-a-Second-Language department for 16 years, teaching Spanish I-IV and ESL courses.

"Professor Vinas's scholarship brings distinction to the world languages department and the College," Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost Andrew Tomko said. "It speaks to her dedication to her discipline of world languages, and her commitment to Bergen Community College, particularly in its role as a Hispanic Serving Institution."

According to Vinas, the teaching and pedagogical experience in Spain will provide her with a unique opportunity to further develop her skills as an educator.

"This initiative is all about advancing our ability to teach Spanish language and culture in collaboration with international higher education institutions while showcasing UCLM as an inviting destination for international students," Vinas said. "I am eager to learn new cultural customs and observe social issues that I can incorporate into my curriculum, offering my students a more enriching experience based on relevant and authentic facts."

Scholarship awardees such as Vinas will also venture into the Spanish city of Toledo to visit historical sites and take part in an excursion to Consuegra, the site that inspired Miguel de Cervantes to write Don Quixote.

Vinas' scholarship represents another facet of Bergen's deepening relationship with HACU. The advocacy organization provides access to programs, initiatives and funding for Hispanic students, including an internship program with the federal government. With more than 40 percent of Bergen students identifying as Hispanic, the College easily surpasses the 25 percent benchmark for institutions to earn the designation.

The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, founded in 1986, represents more than 500 colleges and universities in the United States, Latin America, Spain and school districts throughout the U.S. ■



Giving Tuesday Continues During Holiday Season

Joining nonprofits throughout the country on December 3, the Bergen Community College Foundation sponsored its annual "Giving Tuesday" fundraising campaign to support student scholarships, the student emergency fund, and the Bergen Cares Center food pantry. Computer science student Waad Sidahmed, a past scholarship recipient, became the face of this year's fundraising efforts.

"The Bergen Community College Foundation scholarship has helped me throughout my time at the College," she said. "I was awarded the Ciarco Family Endowed Scholarship in my second semester at Bergen, and I feel as grateful now as I did back when I first received the scholarship."

Studying computer science with the goal of working as a software developer, Sidahmed also serves as the vice president of service in Bergen's Phi Theta Kappa honor society chapter. She encouraged others to support the Giving Tuesday campaign to support students like herself.

"Donating to the Foundation will go a long way and foster a meaningful impact on the students at Bergen," she said. "People should donate to Bergen Community College Foundation now more than ever."

To make a charitable contribution to the 501 (c) (3) Foundation, visit [Bergen.edu/donate](https://bergen.edu/donate). ■

Middle States Matters

By Gary Porter, Accreditation Liaison Officer

During the first week of December, the College officially released a draft of the Self-Study to the internal Bergen community. Faculty and staff had the opportunity to identify and report what they believed were any potential errors contained within the report via a web link and QR code as part of an email campaign and open session forums mid-month.

The draft report still requires additional editing before the final submission to Middle States in February.

The College has also received the proposed visitation team roster from Middle States and reviewed the list for any potential conflicts of interest. The next milestone on the path to reaffirmation of accreditation is to "freeze the document" for the time being so that the team can link all of the appropriate evidence to specific points in the narrative. ■





Ninth grade student Davna Ceron builds an autonomous rover as part of her Engineering Design class (1). Students have the opportunity to learn in high-end College resources, including the STEM Student Research Center and the Health Professions Integrated Teaching Center (2,3).

High School Head Start, continued from page 1.

Those partners include the Bergen County Technical Schools district, which operates ATHS. The ATHS model remains especially unique because of its position on Bergen’s campus, giving students a true, on-campus collegiate experience according to ATHS Principal Dennis Montone.

“This experience prepares them not only for the academic rigor of college, but also for all of the supplementary skills that lead to college success,” he said. “At ATHS, students learn how to register for a college class, how to work with the bursar’s office, how to form peer study groups and how to access college resources like the tutoring center and office hours. None of this would be possible without our unique integration and strong partnership with Bergen.”

ATHS blends a high school curriculum, college classes and hands-on technical training in three concentrations: engineering technology, health professions and cybersecurity. The high school opened in 2015 as a joint venture of the College and the BCTS district, facilitated through Bergen County government. BCTS operates under the auspices of county government, while the College receives approximately 15 percent of its funding from county appropriations, making the district and the College “county cousins,” according to BCTS Superintendent of Schools Howard Lerner.

“The joint venture between the Bergen Community College and Applied Technology High School provides an unparalleled opportunity for students to experience college-level coursework and hands-on CTE training while still in high school, setting them on a path to success in both higher education and their

future careers,” he said. “I am immensely proud of our students who have not only completed their high school requirements but also earned associate degrees through our unique partnership. This achievement is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and ambition of our students and their families.”

According to analysis by the National Center for Education Statistics, high school students enrolled in college classes will account for an increasing share of overall community college enrollment due to a declining birth rate and, thus, high school graduates entering higher education. Disrupting the traditional pipeline for community college enrollment, administrators throughout the country have worked quickly to develop partnership programs to stem the loss in enrollees. Bergen notwithstanding, New Jersey has lagged its nationwide peers in dual enrollment programs, with approximately 15 percent of enrollments coming from high school students. Elsewhere, high school students account for more than one half of all community college enrollments (Idaho, 55.4 percent and Indiana, 51.7 percent) or approaching half (Iowa, 43.7 percent and Colorado, 38 percent). Bergen’s President Friedman sees this collection of data as an opportunity.

“I am proud that we have become a leader among our in-state community college peers,” he said. “But we have so much more capacity for growth. It’s not difficult to envision a scenario where every Bergen County high school student has the opportunity to enroll in some type of partnership program with the College. High school partnerships represent the evolution of a foundational goal of community colleges to provide access to higher education. We have a plan to expand and meet the community need.” Students such as Bergen and ATHS class of

2019 graduate Noel Thomas said she never imagined earning a college degree before her high school diploma.

“If you were to tell me that in middle school, I would have laughed,” she said. “It enabled me to be ready on a different level when I entered college – it gave me a different confidence. The program opened my eyes to what college would be like at an early age.”

Thomas parlayed her experience into a degree in chemical engineering from Hampton University in 2023. She now works as a manufacturing supply chain manager for PepsiCo. in New York. She credits the early college program for unlocking her interest in science and technology – she planned to become a school teacher like her parents.

“The best part of my experience was that I not only saw another level of leadership within myself, but I got exposure that I wasn’t expecting,” she said. “This exposure presented opportunities.”

Bergen’s high school partnership program coordinator Madera said Thomas’ story captures the essence of what the College aims to accomplish.

“Whether it’s the chance to observe a K-12 classroom as a future special education teacher, gaining acceptance into an accelerated nursing program, earning a degree at a fraction of the cost, achieving the financial flexibility to buy a home in their 20s or simply becoming more prepared for college and career challenges – our programs are genuinely changing lives,” Madera said. ■