

# insideBergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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## Middle States Matters

After nearly three years of preparation, reflection and collaboration, the College has completed its Self-Study Report, the centerpiece of the institution's periodic Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation evaluation. The College submitted the report to MSCHE and Evaluation Team Chair Deanna Burt-Nanna on February 7.

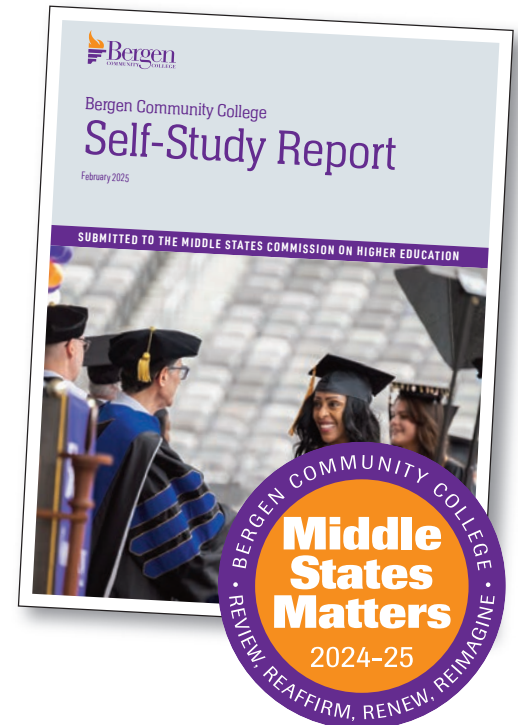
The Self-Study represents a comprehensive narrative in response to Middle States' "Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation." The standards represent the accrediting agency's criteria for institutions of higher education to maintain in order to meet or exceed the expectations of a Middle States-accredited college or university.



Accreditation Liaison Officer Professor Gary Porter reviews the Self-Study Report at an executive summary session.

An eight-person evaluation team of faculty and staff from peer institutions in the Middle States region, led by Chair Burt-Nanna, the president of Monroe Community College, will visit Bergen from March 23-26 to conduct interviews, review evidence, and issue preliminary findings to the College community. The summary findings will identify the College's best practices and opportunities for improvement and will include a recommendation regarding reaffirming Bergen's accreditation status.

President Eric M. Friedman made preparation for the visit an early hallmark of his administration, championing the value of the Self-Study process and frequently discussing the importance of the Middle States Standards during official remarks. The president's consistent emphasis on the Self-Study resulted in extensive opportunities for faculty, staff and students to become engaged, including through joining the Self-Study team, asking questions at town halls and providing feedback on publicly available document drafts.



In recent weeks, the College has hosted a series of executive summary sessions for all faculty and staff to review the contents of the Self-Study and to have the opportunity to ask questions before the evaluation team visit.

Middle States accreditation evaluations take place every eight years. Bergen earned a full reaffirmation of its accreditation, along with 48 areas of the College identified as exemplary, during Middle States' last evaluation in 2016. ■

### BY THE NUMBERS - The Self-Study Report



**420** Evidence Documents/  
Citations



**67** Self-Study Team  
Members



**182** Tables/Figures/  
Glossary Terms



President Eric M. Friedman (center), joined by MSCHE President Heather Perfetti (left), MSCHE Assistant Director for Membership (far right) and MSCHE Chair Davie Gilmour (second from right) met with Bergen STEM students who participated in the poster session at the annual MSCHE Annual Conference in December.

# STEM Success Continues at Middle States

The STEM Student Scholars Program (3SP) has received a \$179,837 grant from the Northern New Jersey Bridges to Baccalaureate to provide new research opportunities and develop connections with four-year institutions. The grant also afforded STEM students the chance to present research at the 16th annual Garden State Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Conference hosted at Rutgers University. Students also presented their research at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education Annual Conference in December and the Society for Integrated and Comparative Biology Conference in January.

"STEM poster sessions provide a valuable platform for researchers to effectively communicate and gain feedback on their work," STEM Student Research Center Director Chris Tully said. "It also fosters interactive discussions with STEM colleagues at four-year institutions and outside stakeholders who attend the conference."

Additionally, the Union College of New Jersey Undergraduate Research Journal published "The Antimicrobial Properties of Essential Oil Phytoncides," work completed by students Mariella Vargas, Naya Batraki, Lily Caramagna and Kaira Gutierrez. Professor Tara Snyder mentored the students. ■



**Now on View**

## "A Cautionary Tale for Billionaires: Paintings by Jeramy Turner"

Gallery Bergen, West Hall  
Open Through Friday, April 4

Monday/Tuesday: 12 - 8 p.m.  
Thursday: 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.  
Wednesday: 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
Friday: 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.



# Hunger Strikes Out Against Bulldogs

Members of the Bergen Bulldogs athletic teams slam dunked hunger this winter, joining together to sponsor a basic needs drive for the Bergen Cares Center. Ultimately, the athletes shattered previous records for donations, collecting 465 items such as food and personal care items. No strangers to competition, the athletes collected items as part of a good-natured contest. Members of the softball team ultimately secured top honors, collecting 291 items for the drive. ■

## New Student OpenHouse

**Tuesday, April 3**  
3-6 p.m. | Main Campus

[OPENHOUSE.BERGEN.EDU](https://openhouse.bergen.edu)



# Snapshotted



State Senator Benjie Wimberly (D-35) delivered the keynote at the inaugural Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration.



Events such as club day helped engage students as they returned for the spring.



The dental hygiene program provided children with free checkups on "Give Kids a Smile Day."



"Eat This, Not That," explored plant-to-plate concepts and farm-to-table practices.



Pizza with the President once again gave students an opportunity to experience participatory and shared governance in action.



# Paramedic Students Answer the Call

With certification exam outcomes exceeding the statewide average, Bergen paramedic science program students have secured the National Conference on EMS "Director's Award" for the institution. More than 99 percent of Bergen paramedic science students passed their certification and licensing exams compared with 96.7 percent of students across the state. Professor Joanne Piccininni leads the paramedic science program, which features a team of two full-time and 16 part-time faculty members.

"We are truly honored to have our program's effectiveness in preparing students for the paramedic licensing exam recognized," she said. "This acknowledgment reflects the dedication, hard work, and commitment to excellence that our faculty consistently demonstrate in supporting student success."

The National Conference on EMS recognized Bergen alongside other high-achieving emergency medical service education providers at an event in November in Atlantic City.

"You instill the values of compassion, resilience and professionalism in every student who walks through your doors," Director of the New Jersey Office of Emergency Medical Services Candace Gardner said at the event. "Your programs are shaping the future of EMS and your efforts are directly saving lives."

As emergency medical service practitioners, paramedics provide critical treatment and advanced life support to patients en route to a hospital emergency room or medical facility.

Launched in 2014, Bergen's paramedic science program represents one of only five degree-based courses of study in New Jersey. Students learn in a specialized medical simulation education facility at Bergen Community College at the Meadowlands, which includes resources such as a simulated residential apartment, an emergency department receiving area, and an ambulance optimized for classroom instruction. Off-campus clinical rotations at local hospitals provide a practice-based learning environment



to prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce. Program graduates enter a job market projected by the U.S. Department of Labor to grow "faster than the average for all occupations." Graduates of Bergen's paramedic science program earn an associate of applied science from the institution. ■



## Everything Comes Together for NJ STARS Student

Roman Stobnicki arrived at Bergen with an interest in fashion, sustainability and design. While at the College, he found a way to put them all together.

The NJ STARS program, which provides a tuition-free Bergen experience for high-achieving high school students, provided him with the footing to explore each of his interests.

"I chose the NJ STARS program so I can give more time to focus on my studies rather than working to pay for it," Stobnicki said.

Stobnicki's interest in design and architecture began with an experience with a previous employer—New Guild Design, a Goshen, New

York contractor. He learned to appreciate how architecture blended artistic vision with functional design and deepened his understanding of how to create environmentally conscious spaces.

Once at Bergen, and seeking to find creative outlets for his creativity and problem-solving skills, Stobnicki enrolled in the business administration program and joined the fashion club. He also networked with fellow members of the Dr. Judith K. Winn School of Honors and Phi Theta Kappa.

With a network established, Stobnicki brainstormed with them about how to combine their interests into a group project. That work led to

a fashion show in December at the main campus that focused on upcycling—a real-world melding of his diverse interests. Stobnicki collaborated with other students to create outfits from discarded materials, resulting in a creative expression enjoyed by all who attended the show.

As he prepares to transfer to a four-year institution, Stobnicki credits the help of others as the catalyst for unlocking the manifestation of his passions.

"Making friends and meeting people who share the same ambition as me, helped push me and others to achieve greatness," he said. ■



## Inclusive Education Program Notches National Honors

The Turning Point Program, a two-year post-secondary education experience for young adults with intellectual disabilities, has earned a silver "Excellence Award" in the Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice category from NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Only two community colleges, including Bergen, placed in any of the 11 categories. Bergen joins an accomplished group of institutions that earned NASPA honors this year, including Columbia University, New York University and the University of Virginia.

"The Turning Point Program represents an important piece of Bergen's commitment to inclusivity and delivering transformational educational opportunities for the community," Bergen Vice President of Student Affairs AJ Trump said. "The program's recognition by NASPA not only reinforces its work as exemplary, but lauds the many faculty, staff and community partners that have collaborated to build such a successful initiative."

NASPA, the professional organization for higher education student affairs personnel, recognized

high-achieving colleges in categories such as assessment, civic engagement and enrollment management as part of the group's annual awards program. Honorees will accept their awards at the 2025 NASPA Annual Conference in New Orleans next month.

Turning Point, a full-time, campus-based program, accepts up to 16 students ages 18-30 each year. As part of this program, students enroll in college-level coursework and earn access to the College's on-campus experiences, including clubs, activities and events sponsored by the Office of Student Life. Participants also develop employment skills through a career pathway credentialing course that prepares them for on-campus and community-based internships.

Students graduate with professional industry recognized credentials and a Certificate of Achievement from the College. The Bergen class of 2024 included 12 members of the program; each participated in the College's spring commencement ceremony alongside Bergen's associate degree graduates. After graduation,

most students seek to obtain competitive integrated employment.

Originally known as the "Garden State Pathways to Independence for Students with Intellectual Disabilities Project," Turning Point began in 2010 under a \$2.3 million U.S. Department of Education grant shared with partner Camden County College. Over the last decade, Bergen has secured an additional \$5 million in federal grant funding, with partners from the College of New Jersey and Georgian Court University to continue the initiative and fully integrate Turning Point into the College's offerings. Tracy Rand, Bergen's senior director of student access and transition services, has directed the program since its inception.

"For nearly 15 years, I have had the opportunity to work with an incredible team of dedicated professionals who have made it their mission to serve all members of the Bergen County community, including those with intellectual disabilities," she said. "It is really gratifying to receive the NASPA award that celebrates those efforts of inclusivity." ■





## From Classroom to Cosmos

*Post-graduate student James Falletti submitted the following story, which details a serendipitous once-in-a-lifetime encounter during a fall photography class at the College.*

What began as a typical evening for ART-184: Digital Photography turned into an unforgettable journey into the cosmos, showcasing the profound impact of phenomenon-based learning (PhBL). The class was transformed into a spontaneous comet watch party, sparked by the instructor's plan with conjunction with student and NASA JPL Solar System Ambassador, James Falletti, to step outside briefly to photograph Comet C/2023 A3 (Tsuchinshan-ATLAS). With his signature yellow NASA hat and an educator's enthusiasm, he led the group to the parking lot, turning the night into a unique, hands-on learning experience.

As the students gathered under the night sky, their instructor shifted seamlessly from photography professor to NASA JPL educator. He introduced the class to Comet C/2023 A3, sharing its extraordinary 80,000-year orbit and explaining how this ancient traveler would have last been visible during the time of the Neanderthals. Using the Sky Guide app, the students learned to locate the comet and identify nearby celestial bodies, including the moon and Jupiter.

The evening wasn't just about observation; it was about action. With a mix of cameras, smart-phones, and even a drone pulled out of a student's backpack, the class set about documenting the event. Guided by their instructor, Professor Frank Aiello, they practiced techniques for photographing the night sky, capturing the comet in all its fleeting glory.

This spontaneous adventure was a perfect example of phenomenon-based learning, an interdisciplinary educational approach that engages students through real-world phenomena. By merging astronomy, photography, and digital technology, the experience broke down traditional subject boundaries and fostered a collaborative environment where students became explorers and creators.

Comet Tsuchinshan-ATLAS was the evening's star, both literally and figuratively. Visible in the western sky just after sunset, slightly below the moon and to the right of Jupiter, it was a once-in-a-lifetime sight for these students. With its

### **Editor's Note: Interested in the night sky?**

Weekly, Bergen sponsors complimentary public viewing nights led by astronomy professors in its observatories located in Paramus and Lyndhurst to explore planets, stars and nebula through large scientific telescopes. Attendees can participate in the viewings on Wednesday evenings beginning at 7:30 p.m. in the William D. McDowell Observatory (Richard W. DeKorte Park, 2 De Korte Park Plaza, Lyndhurst) and on Friday evenings beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the Emil Buehler Trust Observatory (College Main Campus, Technology Education Center, 400 Paramus Road, Paramus). The observatories remain open for viewing nights unless rain or clouds obstruct the telescope's view.

rare 80,000-year orbit, the comet offered a tangible connection to both the distant past and the boundless universe. For the students, it was a reminder of the interplay between art and science and a chance to see how their work fits into a much larger picture.

This night was about more than photography or astronomy; it was about the teachable moments that make education come alive. The comet watch party demonstrated the power of stepping outside the classroom and using the world as a learning space. ■



**Save the Date! Commencement 2025**  
 Tuesday, May 13 | 10 a.m.  
 MetLife Stadium | East Rutherford, NJ