

# inside Bergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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## Friedman at Five

President has Bergen flying high after five years on the job

When President Eric M. Friedman arrived for his first day five years ago, the silence on campus was deafening.

A pandemic will have that effect.

Taking the reins of the state's largest community college in January 2021, Friedman faced a multi-faceted challenge in establishing a foundation for his presidency and stabilizing the institution. With unemployment soaring, the fear of illness tethering people to their homes and an immediate pivot to virtual operations, enrollment tumbled at community colleges across the country. Once hubs of energy for their local communities, campuses paused their on-ground activity, hushing the vibrancy that make community colleges community centers.

These challenges complicated Friedman's arrival – and now he had the responsibility for navigating Bergen through them. But before work could begin on addressing these issues, he would need to address a more fundamental problem: con-

necting with the trustees, the students, the staff, the faculty and the community stakeholders.

With Bergen operating remotely, Friedman could not introduce himself to the College community in a traditional sense. Absent were the face-to-face town halls, lunches with students and hallway conversations with faculty that he had once envisioned. Instead, he would make his debut from his office via a webcam. No matter how effective the technology, it could not close the distance between the president and his college.

These virtual interactions reinforced what Friedman already knew: a community college is defined by the community it builds and the community it serves. Community colleges thrive when they become centralized hubs for learners, industry partners and community members. Their campuses feature an unmistakable energy driven by the diverse tapestry of the people they serve. Connectedness became another victim of the virus.

*Continued on page two.*

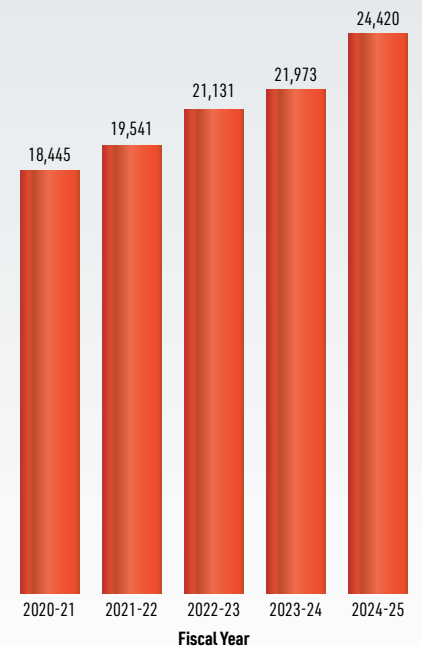
## BY THE NUMBERS - Friedman at Five: A Transformational Time at Bergen

President Eric M. Friedman arrived at Bergen in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic with student enrollment retreating to levels unseen at the College since the late 1980s.

Creating a potential financial crisis due to the impact enrollment has on the College's finances, the new president knew Bergen would need to take immediate action to reverse the trend. In response, President Friedman led strategic planning efforts to completely remake the College's enrollment operations, assisted by dedicated faculty and staff who shared the same goal of helping students achieve their goals of a college education.

The result? Enrollment under President Friedman has risen every year since he took office. It represents, perhaps, the most important transformation at the College during his five-year tenure.

**Total Credit and Non-Credit Student Enrollment**



This teaser primes readers for the complete long-form feature on President Eric M. Friedman currently spotlighted on [Bergen.edu](http://Bergen.edu) and a future cover story in Meadowlands Magazine. To read the complete feature, scan here.



### Friedman at Five, continued

As a first step in a world racked by the daily uncertainties of COVID-19, Friedman sought to connect with his community in any manner he could. He immediately launched what he called a “listening tour,” standing six-feet apart from faculty, staff, students, government officials, business leaders and community members to learn about his new institution, its needs and the people it served. He took time to develop these relationships, whether masked and armed with hand sanitizer, on the phone or remotely behind a webcam. Feedback remained essential as he not only navigated the College’s operations during the pandemic, but how he would lead the College through the crisis and position it for success on the other side.

“That’s how communities thrive,” he said. “When we listen to each other and work together in support of common goals.”

The listening tour made clear that connectedness and what Friedman called an “ethic of care” could help drive both the institution’s present and future. This ethos led Friedman to promise that he would make decisions through a lens of equity and compassion that would help students succeed, support faculty and staff through initiatives such as expanded professional development opportunities and community partnerships.

Five years later, Friedman’s vision has come to life – the halls are no longer silent, but the need for connectedness still echoes as a central focus in his presidency.

“Bergen has an incredible academic record,” he said. “We offer excellence in programs usually reserved for four-year colleges. We have a renowned faculty that help our students transfer to the best universities in the world. But it’s something else that makes Bergen especially different: students truly feel like they belong here.” ■



*This teaser only scratches the surface of President’s Friedman’s five years at Bergen. Scan here to read the full feature, which discusses how the president has architected a comprehensive strategic plan to enhance student support services, workforce initiatives, and faculty and staff development; expanded revenue sources through grant programs; rebuilt frayed community and government partnerships; and become one of the state’s leading voices on college affordability and workforce preparedness.*

## Friedman at Five Five Major Moments



**December 22, 2020**  
First Day in the Office



**January 20, 2022**  
First Lady Jill Biden and Government Leaders Visit



**May 4, 2022**  
President Friedman’s Installation Celebration



**November 29, 2023**  
Meadowlands Innovation Center Opens



**December 3, 2025**  
Inaugural Foundation Scholarship Gala

# Friedman at Five

## Five (x2) Photos from the Past Five Years



1. U.S. Senator Cory Booker hosted a town hall at the College in 2025. 2. President Friedman got his steps in at the 2021 Hero 5K. 3. Pizza with the President helped renew Bergen's participatory and shared governance structure. 4. Is that Ringo Starr? 5. President Friedman, surrounded by students at the Meadowlands Innovation Center opening. 6. The NAACP recognized President Friedman with its Booker T. Washington Education Award last year. 7. President Friedman is frequently found toting his favorite beverage: an espresso! 8. Bergen's first couple: President Friedman and First Lady Barbara. 9. President Friedman worked with faculty to launch a major workforce partnership with Volvo, including hospitality services. 10. The Board of Trustees and President Friedman at Commencement 2025.



## Bergen a Bellwether Finalist

The Bellwether College Consortium has recognized Bergen's Turning Point Program, a two-year postsecondary education experience for young adults with intellectual disabilities, as a finalist for the organization's highest honor - the Bellwether Award. Nationally recognized as one of the top honors for community colleges, program officials chose 30 finalists, including Bergen, from 114 submissions.

(Pictured, from left) Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs Jennifer Migliorino-Diaz, Senior Director of Student Access and Transition Services Tracy Rand, Assistant Director of the Office of Specialized Services Teresa Serio and Vice President of Student Affairs A.J. Trump recently traveled to San Antonio, Texas to attend the Consortium's annual conference and present "A Postsecondary Turning Point in Higher Education" as a finalist in the competition. A panel of anonymous judges and community college leaders evaluated teams based on how institutions use innovative practices to address a critical issue affecting community colleges.

Turning Point's status as a Bellwether finalist complements numerous honors for the inclusive program. Most recently, Bergen 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.

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. 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, and partners The College of New Jersey and Georgian Court University, has secured an additional \$5 million in federal grant funding to continue the initiative and fully integrate Turning Point into the College's offerings. ■



## International Acclaim for Student Artist

Student Rhys Pollock received the "International Prize – Universal Genius: Tribute to Leonardo da Vinci" award from the National Museum of Science



and Technology in Milan, Italy for his "Contrast: Signal" artwork. An award ceremony will take place this month in Italy; a companion video exhibition will take place in New York in April. Pollock will receive a bound anthology featuring his work and the submissions of fellow honorees.

"It's nice to have recognition for my work, and it's always surprising to hear about winning out of the blue," he said.

Pollock learned of the opportunity through Bergen visual arts professor Sophia Xinman Wang while enrolled in her illustration course. Wang urged Pollock to submit his piece that draws its inspiration from the Japanese television series "Kamen Rider Zeitz." Pollock's work offers a redesign of the show's titular main character through mixed media – ink, pencil and digital coloring.

"I am incredibly proud of Rhys," Wang said. "He is not only highly talented, but also consistently dedicated and hardworking. Rhys's international recognition speaks to the strength of Bergen Community College's visual arts program and its emphasis on creative thinking, professional preparation and real-world opportunities."

Pollock enrolled in Bergen's studio art courses to gain the necessary prerequisites to apply to art therapy graduate programs. His work has also appeared in "2025 Create Tomorrow: Bergen Institute for the Creative Arts Gala." ■



## Robotics Takes Team for a Ride

The Bergen Byte Squad, a robotics team of STEM students led by mentor Yolonda Sheppard, earned the “Judges’ Award” at the VEX-U Push Back Annual Tournament that took place last month at Monroe County Community College in Michigan. The event saw student teams design and assemble a robot to compete on an indoor “field,” seeking to use the robot to move blocks into different areas.

“I was ecstatic, and the entire team was very excited,” student Alejandro Olarte said. “Through perseverance and resilience, we came through and won the Judges Award.”

The Bergen Byte Squad worked hard through

the planning and creation of their robot, forcing them to work until late at night in the STEM Research Center at the main campus. Their mentor, Sheppard, praised their grit.

“The team kept fighting, and the judges saw that there was such determination,” she said. “Just to see their faces after they won, and them jumping up and down was amazing.”

The team kept the mood light by bringing along a stuffed version of Bandit, Bergen’s Bulldog mascot.

“Bandit was the moral support of the team,” Olarte said. ■



### FACULTY FOCUS

## Adjunct Professor Goes Global



Adjunct professor Michael Neiman has a passion for adventure ... and making a difference.

“I became a teacher because I had a genuine interest in supporting my local community,” he said.

But something else called to him from beyond the confines of Bergen County: an opportunity to educate through the United States Peace Corps.

“I have always thrived in a multicultural world,” he said, recounting experiences in the Netherlands, Africa, South Korea, Kosovo and Mexico.

After numerous tours with the agency, Neiman has returned to Bergen for the first time since 2012 to teach English Composition to international students. “The students are diverse and the opportunity to provide them support has always been the gem of my Bergen teaching experience,” he said.

Neiman has now shared his experiences throughout the world. In October, he presented his research “Teaching as an Influencer” at the Congreso Nacional de Formadores de Inglés en Escuelas Normales in Mexico (pictured). The research draws upon Neiman’s time with the Escuela Normal de las Huastecas, which collaborated with him to teach extracurricular English classes. The intercultural courses focused on helping students make their English skills more valuable by learning the language to inspire others to do so. Neiman said this innovative approach focused less on the perfection of grammar and more on the positive interaction of teachers with children to enjoy the learning process.

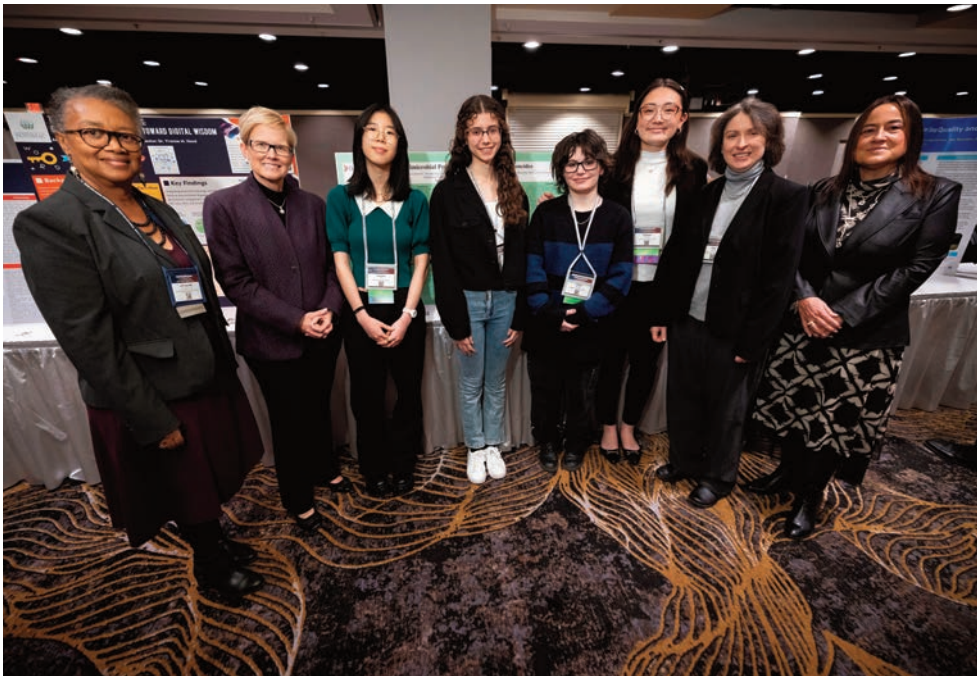
Neiman holds a bachelor’s degree from Skidmore College and a master’s degree in international development with a focus on political economy and human rights from the International Institute of Social Studies, an extension of Erasmus University, in the Netherlands. Neiman has several books available on Amazon that reflect his travel experiences and work overseas. ■



## Leaders Strengthen Legislative Ties

As part of the Association of Community College Trustees’ annual National Legislative Summit, Bergen leaders traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with federal officials and advocate for community college priorities. Among the visits, Board of Trustees Chair Dorothy Blakeslee, President

Eric M. Friedman and Trustee Ana Marti met with U.S. Rep. Nellie Pou (D-9). Bergen’s leaders have made the annual visit an important part of the institution’s advocacy efforts, attending in each of the last five years during President Friedman’s tenure. ■



## Students Celebrated for Middle States Presentations

Bergen STEM students shined in the poster presentation at the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's annual conference, earning praise from the accreditor's president, Heather Perfetti in a follow-up letter to the College. As some of the only community college students selected to present their research for attendees,

Bergen's students made key contacts with their four-year college peers and impressed observers with their innovative projects. Pictured with Middle States officials, students (beginning third from left) Hannah Cho, Miriam Alchanaa, Jenna Harstead and Hannah Aumack, Professor Tara Snyder and Middle States President Heather Perfetti. ■

## Music Mends Broken Hearts

Student Isabella Barquin of the Music at Bergen Club helped raise funds for the Save the Music Foundation at the Broken Hearts Showcase in the student center last month. She organized the event to coincide with Valentine's Day as a way to give "back through music education that helps spread love to underprivileged communities."

Barquin said music unlocks traits that other activities may not.

"Choir and band were my favorite parts of my K-12 education, and they showed me the true value of music education," she said. "Music builds confidence, creativity and emotional expression."

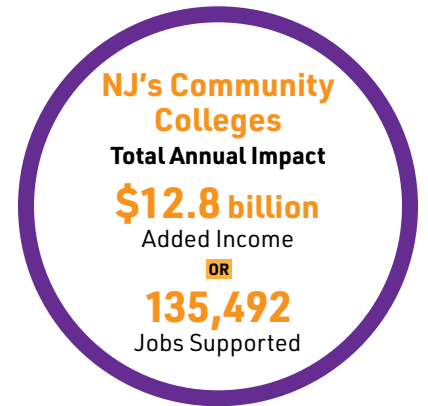
During the Broken Hearts Showcase, the club raised money by having students, faculty and staff try to guess the number of Hershey Kisses in a jar. The winner received the jar. Attendees included President Eric M. Friedman, an accom-



plished drummer, who made sure to show his support for music and the arts. ■

## Community Colleges Spur Economic Growth

According to a new independent economic impact analysis commissioned by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, New Jersey's 18 community colleges add \$12.8 billion to the state's economy annually—a value roughly equal to 1.6 percent of the total gross state product. Lightcast, a nationally recognized economic and data firm, conducted the research. Check the accompanying infographic for a deep dive into data from the "The Economic Value of New Jersey's Community Colleges" study! ■



### Average Earnings by Education Level at Career Midpoint



### For Every \$1...



**Students** gain **\$4.30** in higher lifetime earnings



**Taxpayers** gain **\$2.60** in added tax revenue and public sector savings



**Society** gains **\$8.00** in added income and social savings

