

insideBergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Belongingness Makes Bergen a "Most Promising Place to Work"

For the second consecutive year, Bergen has earned a prized spot on *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* magazine's "Most Promising Places to Work in Community Colleges." Only 18 institutions from across the country earned the designation. President Eric M. Friedman has prioritized the expansion of a culture of belongingness and the college is being nationally recognized.

"In order to live our mission of providing transformative educational experiences for our community, we must first offer our faculty and staff a responsive, collaborative and caring professional environment that allows them to thrive," he said. "I am very proud that Bergen has earned the 'Most Promising Places to Work' award that – for the second year in a row – recognizes our commitment to fostering this type of campus culture."

Focusing on workplace diversity, staffing practices and work environment, the *Diverse* magazine research team partnered with the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) to solicit responses from the near-350 NISOD-member community colleges. Researchers used a web-based survey to examine categories such as

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– President Eric M. Friedman

family friendliness, salary/benefits and professional development opportunities to determine honorees. The magazine will publish the full list in the May 23 edition of the publication and recognize winners at NISOD's annual meeting from May 25 - 28 in Austin, Texas.

Bergen's focus on belongingness has taken many forms under President Friedman's leadership. When combined with Bergen's comprehensive benefits and compensation packages that include health, wellness and tuition reimbursement programs, the College has become a national model for faculty and staff support, according to *Diverse* magazine.

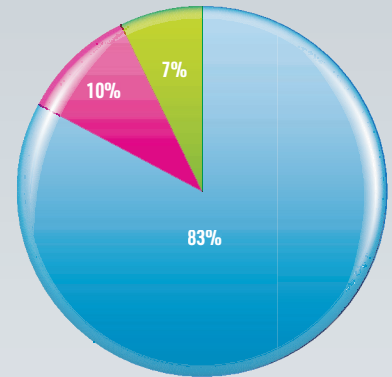
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Among many initiatives, the College's numerous history and heritage celebrations help create belongingness.

BY THE NUMBERS - Belongingness at Bergen

I feel welcome on campus.



Agree/Strongly Agree Neutral Disagree/Strongly Disagree

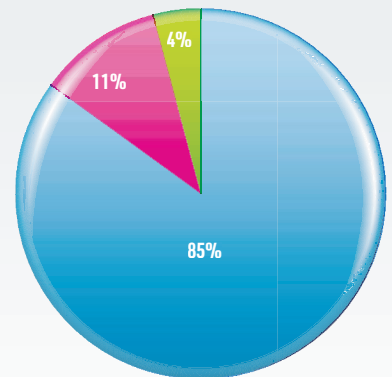
How important is diversity, equity and inclusion to leadership?

Very/Somewhat Important - 83%

Neutral - 10%

Not That/At All Important - 7%

Students treat employees with respect.



Agree/Strongly Agree Neutral Disagree/Strongly Disagree

Sponsored by the President's Advisory Council on Diversity Equity and Inclusion, faculty and staff responded to questions contained in a Campus Climate Survey to discern their thoughts on belongingness at Bergen.



President Eric M. Friedman and Dorothy Blakeslee

The American Association of Community Colleges selected Bergen Community College Board of Trustees Chair Dorothy Blakeslee as a finalist for the "Trustee of the Year" award. The honor recognizes Blakeslee as one of the top three trustees in the nation, celebrating those who make "significant contributions to their college ... including demonstrating exceptional leadership and initiative, contributing to strengthening college gov-

Blakeslee Honored for Board Leadership

ernance, and advocating for their college's data and results-driven student success initiatives." As a finalist, Blakeslee attended a gala event at the AACCC's national convention in April in Louisville, Kentucky.

"I have had the incredible fortune of working with my colleague and friend Dorothy Blakeslee for the past three-plus years as president," President Eric M. Friedman said. "As chair, she has championed efforts that contribute to the institution's continuous improvement and help set aggressive, yet attainable, goals for myself and the College as a whole."

The first Asian-American chair in Bergen history, Blakeslee has led the institution through an unprecedented period of growth, innovation and prosperity. Selected as chair to coincide with the hiring of President Friedman, the pair have forged a bond rooted in the support of the institution's students, faculty and staff. Among many key initiatives, they have worked together to deepen ties with Bergen County government leaders, launch Bergen's first all-online degree programs through the Center for Online Learning, and create holistic programs that eased pressures on stu-

dents such as a tuition-debt relief initiative. "I am very proud to have received this recognition," Blakeslee said. "Bergen represents an incredibly important part of my life. I hope that I can continue to bring transformational learning opportunities to Bergen County, our students, faculty, staff and community members for many years."

Blakeslee first joined the College's governing body in 2003. Before becoming chair in 2020, she served as treasurer for nearly 16 years. A managing director at Government Strategy Group, Blakeslee remains an active member of many organizations including the New Jersey Housing Mortgage Finance Agency, the Quest Autism Program and the State of New Jersey Family Advisory Council. She currently serves as the chair of the Family Support Planning Council, a statewide network of families living with developmental disabilities. Blakeslee previously served on the boards of the Hackensack University Medical Foundation, the New Jersey Task Force on the Needs of Autistic Adults and the Organization of Chinese Americans. She received her B.S. from the University of Connecticut and holds a master black belt in Taekwondo. ■



Eclipse Throws Shade at Bergen

Dozens of students, faculty and staff descended on the Technology Education Center patio to catch a glimpse of the April 8 solar eclipse. Volunteers from the Emil Buehler Trust Observatory, in conjunction with the STEM Student Union and the STEM Student Scholars Program, hosted a safe direct viewing event with solar telescopes that permitted observation of the atmospheric anomaly at high magnification. ■

Snapshotted



Pianist Edwin Kim Dazzled During His April 11 Event



Veterinary Tech. Students Working with Real Lung Tissue in the Sim. Center



Culinary Staff Made Some Friends at the Child Development Center



Bandit the Bulldog Enjoyed the New Bleachers at the Home Opener



Bergen County Prosecutor Mark Musella Visited Campus to Discuss the Dangers of Fentanyl



Local entrepreneurs who assist students as part of the LatinxCEO program.

Booker Bolsters Workforce Initiative

U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) has secured \$75,000 in federal funds for Bergen’s business accelerator’s LatinxCEO program. It is part of \$191.6 million that he has delivered for in-state initiatives in the 2024 government funding bills. The College will leverage the funding to broaden the scope of LatinxCEO, which offers skill-building workshops, internships and industry-recognized certifications for students. Current funding caps the College’s ability to provide services to only 30 students. The program launched last year and can now expand with these additional funds.

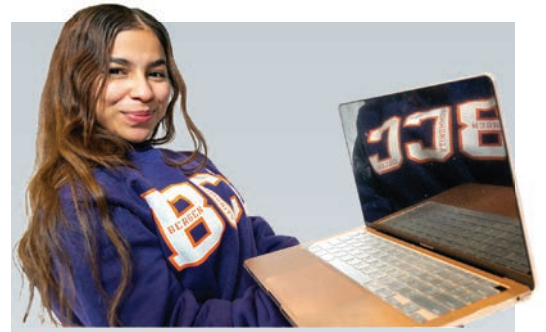
“One of my highest privileges and priorities in Washington is to fight to bring home federal resources to invest in worthy New Jersey projects,” Booker said.

The College launched the LatinxCEO program as a workforce development initiative that targets underrepresentation in the workplace, where Hispanic men and women account for less than four percent of executives at S&P 100 companies. This data, compiled by USA Today, showed that women faced especially disproportionate odds – only two executives among 533 publicly listed corporate leaders identify as a Hispanic female.

LatinxCEO empowers aspiring Hispanic business professionals by providing students with skills, real-world connections and career exploration opportunities. Among the activities, students network with regional executives, meet entrepreneurs and participate in career shadowing, worksite visits and mock interviews. New cohorts begin each semester.

The program combines numerous priorities outlined in the College’s strategic goals such as enhancing workforce development initiatives and supporting programs that foster belonging among students.

Bergen County Executive James J. Tedesco III and Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey President and CEO Carlos Medina each supported the College’s funding request to Sen. Booker by submitting letters of recommendation. The Hispanic Chamber maintains its headquarters at Bergen Community College at the Meadowlands – the site of the business accelerator – and works closely with entrepreneurs at the site. The College’s Bergen for Business Director Linda Caruso worked with Vice President of Continuing Education and Workforce Development Cinzia D’Iorio to create the LatinxCEO program. ■



Student Spotlight Mariely Rodriguez

When asked what has made her successful at Bergen, student Mariely Rodriguez credits the Sidney Silverman Library, the professors, the counselors and her peers. Seemingly under the care of many, it’s no surprise she wants to return the favor as a professional. Studying health science, Rodriguez hopes to become a certified registered nurse anesthetist.

“As a nurse, I would like to make a positive impact on other’s lives,” she said. “I feel like this profession would also consistently present opportunities for learning and growth, which I am passionate about.”

She expects to graduate in 2025. ■



College/High School Partnership Expands

Members of the North Arlington School District met with College officials to discuss the expansion of the “early college program.” The program offers high school students the opportunity to earn Bergen credits – and even associate degrees – before they graduate. Seventeen of the district’s early college program students earned degrees from Bergen last year. ■

Middle States Matters

By Gary Porter, Accreditation Liaison Officer



The College has initiated contact with Middle States Commission on Higher Education Liaison Judith Sciple and identified the chair of Bergen's visiting team. Chairs typically serve as community college presidents in the Middle States region, which includes Delaware, Maryland, New York and Pennsylvania. Chairs cannot share a state with the college being evaluated in order to avoid potential conflicts of interest. President Friedman will now schedule a welcome call with the visiting team chair.

In late March, the chairs of the seven standards working groups made detailed presentations to the College Cabinet regarding the progress made on their narratives for the Self-Study. A fruitful exchange of ideas occurred between the chairs and the Cabinet, which included suggestions on additional evidence for possible inclusion in the chapter narratives. The collection of evidence will continue

throughout the summer and fall semesters.

The work groups plan to complete the analysis of the chapters and internal recommendations by May 7. Additionally, a special meeting of the Board of Trustees Strategic Planning Committee took place in April where the Trustees reviewed the draft of the 2024-2029 strategic plan. ■



Professor Steven Fischer, and PTK students Micah Mendoza and Liliana Hopkins.

Walkway Honors Environmentalist

On Thursday, April 11, the Biology and Horticulture Department joined with members of the College's Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) honor society chapter to host a dedication of the new "Rachel Carson Inspirational Walkway." Longtime Horticulture Program Coordinator Steven Fischer led the creation of the walkway that commemorates the life of environmentalist and author Rachel Carson. Carson passed away in 1964. She authored "Silent Spring," a book considered a seminal work on environmentalism that led to a public awakening on the negative effects of pesticides.

The dedication event for the walkway – located at the College's main campus on the patio outside of Ender Hall – featured student speakers and PTK members Liliana Hopkins and Micah Mendoza, who read from Carson's works and offered insights into her work.

"In my thoughts these shores, so different in their nature and in the inhabitants they support, are made one by the unifying touch of the sea," Hopkins read before discussing how Carson's journey through being a woman in science and her battle with the pesticide industry and breast cancer provides a significant source of inspiration for her.

"Through her writings, Rachel has taught me something more than scientific jargon and theory," she said. "She has taught me how to see."

After cutting the ribbon on the new walkway, Fischer unveiled a plaque with Carson's name and "Silent Spring" engraved to dedicate the space. Attendees received daffodils, which were planted in both remembrance of Carson and to leave their own mark on the College.

The unveiling signaled the beginning of Bergen's Earth Week events. ■



Promising, Continued

Continued from page 1.

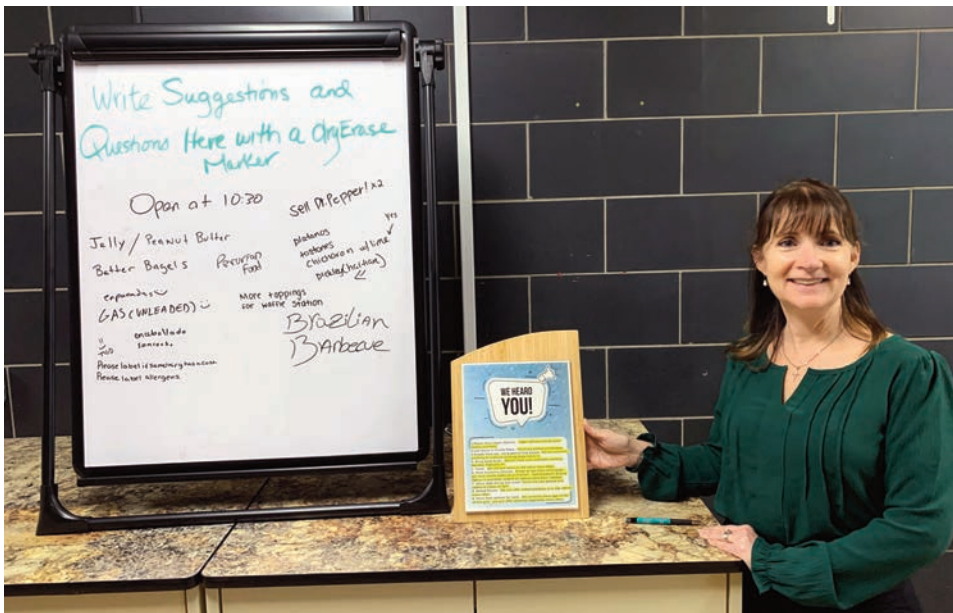
Among the College's initiatives:

- Bergen launched a President's Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion that has sponsored projects such as a college-wide climate survey to uncover how the institution could further enhance its inclusivity efforts.
- The president renewed the College's commitment to shared governance and collaborating with stakeholders. These efforts have helped drive projects such as revised mission, vision, values and goals and the preparation for the upcoming Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation evaluation. The All College Forum now

provides an exclusive environment for students, faculty and staff to discuss College policies.

- Bergen's physical campus has undergone a transformation that promotes inclusivity, comfort and care through creating curated office environments and workspaces, improving technology resources and offering new hospitality options.

The "Most Promising" research study began in 2014 jointly commissioned by NISOD, a community college professional development organization, and *Diverse* magazine, which has covered minority issues in higher education since 1984. ■



Feedback "Well Done" by Dining Partner

American Dining Creations (ADC), the College's hospitality services provider, has a fresh take on the traditional "suggestion box." Channeling Bergen's spirit of seeking continuous improvement and assessment, ADC has installed a whiteboard in the main campus dining room to solicit feedback and develop a mechanism for two-way communication. Peri-

odically, ADC leaders respond to each request, note or question on a separate document placed next to the whiteboard. Not only does this "close the loop" on the feedback, it conveys their appreciation for each student, faculty and staff member who took the time to write them. Now, that's a "well-done" assessment loop! ■



COMMENCEMENT 2024
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Bergen Has a Friend in Ridgewood Resident



Ed Houlihan, Ridgewood resident, has many hobbies in retirement. Among them, he serves as a frequent contributor to news outlets throughout the country, providing commentary on issues of local, regional and national importance. He has penned letters to the editor and op-eds to publications such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and the *Record*, covering topics such as foreign policy, technology, and education. No matter the publication, Houlihan provides passionate commentary on causes he feels strongly about including Bergen Community College.

Houlihan's byline appeared in the Sunday, March 31 edition of the *Record* as part of a letter to the editor in support of restoring the state's \$20 million reduction in funding to community colleges.

In his own words:

Community colleges are one of the pillars of many towns and cities. They provide support for students in transition from high school and new citizens improving their language skills. Community colleges provide an affordable education for individuals with limited financial resources. They provide programs for senior citizens and individuals seeking a career change requiring new skills.

Community colleges have proved their worth. Message to Trenton: Find the funding to ensure that a vital pillar continues to serve our communities.