

# inside Bergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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President Eric M. Friedman speaks at an annual employee recognition celebration.

## Bergen Named a "Most Promising Place to Work"

In his five-plus years as president, Eric M. Friedman has prioritized fostering an "ethic of care" on campus. The ethos has become the guiding principle behind initiatives that support the institution's faculty and staff, including remaking the the College's participatory and shared governance structure, enhancing internal communication and expanding access to health and wellness programs.

External organizations have taken notice.

For the fourth consecutive year, the *EDU Ledger* – formerly *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* magazine – has recognized Bergen as one of the "most promising places to work in community colleges." A joint initiative of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development and the *EDU Ledger*, the "most promising places" program recognizes colleges with best practice professional resources, administrative structures and work environments.

"Bergen's faculty, staff and administrators seek

to uphold the highest standards of institutional excellence supported by an ethic of care for the community, our students and each other," President Friedman said. "We work collaboratively to embrace challenges, practice continuous improvement, and help students achieve success. That's why Bergen has become a professional home for many – a vocation unto itself – rather than a stop on a professional journey: we embrace the *unity in community*."

The College employs more than 1,100 full- and part-time faculty and staff. Friedman said Bergen's commitment to its employees has become a strategic focus area, pointing to initiatives that spur engagement and interaction.

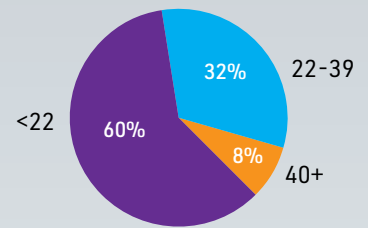
"During the last six years, Bergen has completely revamped its participatory and shared governance structure to ensure open, consistent and clear communication where we can acknowledge challenges and discuss solutions with all voices represented," he said.

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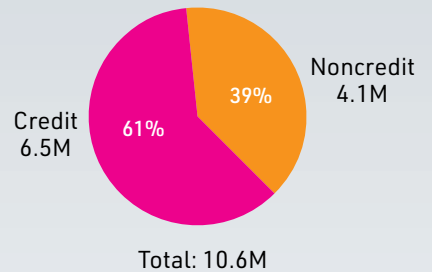
### BY THE NUMBERS - National Snapshot

The American Association of Community Colleges has released new data that offer a window into the nation's community colleges, the communities they serve, and their students.

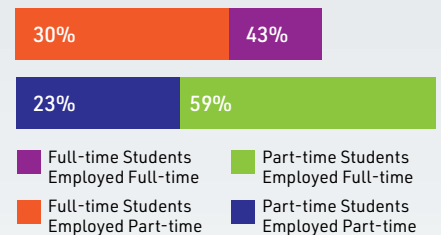
#### Student Age



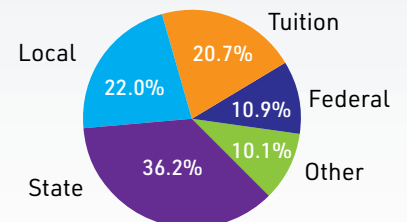
#### Student Enrollment



#### Student Employment Status



#### Community College Revenues by Source





## Promising, *continued*

In addition to regular town halls and “Pizza with the President,” Bergen launched the All College Forum – an advisory body open to all members of the College community. Subcommittees of the larger group discuss policy considerations and make recommendations for implementation.

Friedman believes the “most promising” designation recognizes what Bergen has accomplished in enhancing faculty and staff support and development. He said it also helps Bergen stand out in a competitive employment market, creating an advantage in recruiting prospective faculty and staff.

“Jobseekers understand the ‘most promising’ title,” Friedman said. “It serves as an enticement to explore our college and everything we offer for faculty and staff.”

Friedman said the College has enhanced its collaboration with the institution’s bargaining units to continue to offer fair compensation and benefits, while also launching new health and wellness resources and expanding professional development opportunities. The College has reinstated an annual employee recognition program that celebrates years of service milestones as well.

“We have worked incredibly hard to not only maintain, but expand, our support for faculty and staff during an unprecedented six years in higher education,” he said. “Our faculty and staff represent Bergen’s most important resource. It remains incumbent upon us to support them as we navigate myriad external pressures that impact their professional and personal lives. ■



## Special Delivery: Meals Made for Korean Seniors

The research findings on the Korean community startled Southpole Foundation Board of Trustees member – and Bergen executive professor in residence – Kyung Hee Choi.

“A landmark research project focusing on Korean American seniors, including in New Jersey and New York, highlighted a profound vulnerability regarding financial instability and food insecurity,” she said.

In response, Southpole developed the “Home-Delivered Meals” initiative with Korean Community Services of New Jersey, a Tenafly-based organization, to address the critical needs of Korean American senior citizens.

Bergen Phi Theta Kappa students have now joined the effort as well by packing and delivering meals to Korean senior citizens living in Bergen County.

While appreciative of the help, many seniors experienced anxiety due to the language barrier between them and students. Leo (Eun-sung) Seo, who serves as PTK chapter service director, took it upon himself to become an emissary between the seniors and volunteers.

“I felt a responsibility to help because I knew many were experiencing problems with language barriers,” he said. “I am still keeping in touch with them. It has become a lasting relationship beyond just a one-time delivery.”

Choi appreciated the students’ efforts.

“I am particularly proud of how the students have embraced the idea that food is a universal language of care,” she said. “Seeing the joy on the faces of the seniors when the students arrive is the ultimate validation.”

The Southpole Foundation supports community services to underserved populations in New York and New Jersey. ■



## Commencement 2026 Will Rock!

May 15, 2026 | 10 a.m.  
The Prudential Center

We'll see you at the Rock!

# Snapshotted



E. Denise Peoples of the New Jersey Sharing Network discussed organ donation at the College's annual awareness event.



Participatory and shared governance is always on the menu at "Pizza with the President."



Professor Julia Lee-Hong and Asian Heritage Month keynote speaker Edward Song, Komissary CEO and Korilla BBQ creator discuss entrepreneurship.



Nursing students sponsored the "Love Your Heart" event to promote cardiac wellness ...



... and also visited the Kearny School District to encourage healthy habits for elementary school students.



Bergen County government leaders and College Board of Trustees member Ana Marti (second from right) celebrated honorees including student Jensy Jimenez (third from left) at the County's Dominican Day event.

## County Dominican Day Event Celebrates Bergen Student

Bergen County government leaders recognized engineering student Jensy Jimenez with a certificate of commendation for his outstanding contributions to the community as part of the county's Dominican Independence Day celebration in Hackensack.

"Celebrating Dominican Independence Day is always special, but being able to connect with community leaders and celebrate our shared heritage, culture and pride made the evening spectacular," he said. "The energy at the ceremony was inspiring, and I loved being surrounded by so many people who are working to uplift the Dominican community in Bergen County."

The honor recognized a number of Jimenez's community-based initiatives. Among them, he

founded Nexus Verium, a tech startup to facilitate cleaning urban waterways.

Additionally, he has led the Bodega Project in partnership with the Rutgers Business School in Newark to develop stable local supply chains for fresh produce within urban communities. The United States Department of Agriculture and National Institute of Food and Agriculture funded the project.

"I feel incredibly honored and grateful," he said. "It is deeply validating to have my work recognized by Bergen County. As a student, you put a lot of quiet hours into your studies and projects, so receiving this level of support and encouragement from the community motivates me to keep pushing forward and expanding these initiatives." ■



### FACULTY FOCUS

## Graham Elliott

During his career, visual arts faculty member Graham Elliott designed some of the first motion graphics for MTV, illustrated for publications such as *The New York Times* and collaborated with the Rolling Stones. He has worked for Saatchi and Saatchi, Nickelodeon and the School of Visual Arts in New York.

And now he teaches at Bergen.

Gallery Bergen celebrated the artist's career during its latest exhibition – "OMG! Graham Elliott."

"This is such a joyful, exuberant and brilliant show," Gallery Bergen Director Tim Blunk said. "I've never seen so much fun manifested in this gallery."

"OMG!" explores Elliott's creative and engaging professional history with large, colorful and bold installations ranging from tented shrines such as the "Temple of Love" to a mini-replica of Gallery Bergen. Elliott described the exhibit as "eclectic," reflecting his artistic and personal journeys across the globe.

"My work is influenced by a lot of travel, especially to Asia and Africa," he said.

Elliott began his artistic career after deciding against continuing as a pilot in the United Kingdom Royal Air Force. He led a successful career in motion graphics and directed the 2011 documentary, "New York in Motion," which explores the motion design industry in New York City.

Much of the artwork displayed in the recent exhibition came from visual arts students, along with past mentees from the School of Visual Arts, where he taught for 20 years.

"I am utterly inspired by the energy and creativity of my students at Bergen," said Elliott. ■

**ROI Influencers**  
**POWER LIST: 2026**

Congratulations!

Dr. Eric Friedman

President  
Bergen Community College

Higher Education



Eric Garcia signed copies of his book at the event.

## Journalist Alum Becomes the Story

Once he held *The Torch*. Now alumnus Ricardo Montero, '14, holds Emmys.

In an early journalism career that began with *The Torch* student newspaper, Montero now works as a field producer for ABC News in New York. Over the past decade, he has held various roles at several news networks, including ABC News, NBC News and CNN, winning local Emmys along the way. He credits Bergen with helping him get his start and igniting the passion for journalism.

Montero began at *The Torch* as a cartoonist and staff writer before rising to editor-in-chief. He praised retired professor Lew Wheaton's sage advice.

"Bergen is where I found my passion and profession," he said. "It was the best decision I ever made."

Montero arrived at Bergen after graduating from New Milford High School. He cited his mother's commitment to his education as an inspiration for his success. Montero recalls her dedication as a single-parent Colombian immigrant who did not have the financial means to

afford a four-year institution for her son. Regardless, she worked as a nanny, encouraged him to attend Bergen and learn as much as he could.

"Bergen is the perfect place to plant your future," he said. "You will have the resources to choose a timeline, commit, water it and watch it bloom."

After Montero graduated from Bergen, he attended Hunter College and contributed to many of the college's media platforms while interning at CNN. Once he earned his bachelor's degree, Montero became an associate producer at *Top Story* with Tom Llamas on NBC News NOW, an associate producer and researcher at *Weekend Nightly News*, a news associate at *Weekend TODAY* and a production associate at *Good Morning America*. He won Emmys for his work during Hurricane Milton on *World News Tonight* with David Muir and as an editor and tape producer for a special report during the events of January 6, 2021 at the U.S. Capitol. He has also covered Los Angeles fires, the Sean Combs trial, the Luigi Mangione case, ICE raids, New Jersey wildfires and the United Nations General Assembly. ■

## Common Read Author an Autism Advocate

Eric Garcia, author of Bergen's 2025-26 Common Read selection, "We're Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation," offered this simple guidance during a recent visit to the College:

"What I want people to know is that autistic people live among you," he said. "They are your students, your loved ones, and your peers. They deserve to have a world built for them as well."

Garcia, a senior Washington correspondent for *The Independent*, regularly writes about the politics of disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder as a member of its neurodiverse community. He said for too long, autistic people had to navigate a world where "all the road signs are written in a different language" for them.

"I think we owe it to them to make the world a little bit more of an accepting place," he said.

During his visit, Garcia met with students from the Turning Point Program.

"They wanted to understand more about what it takes to write, what it takes to be a good journalist and what it takes to be a good storyteller," he said.

Coming to Bergen represented a long-distance homecoming for Garcia, who attended Chaffey College, a two-year community college in California.

"Community colleges have a soft place in my heart," he said. "I think that they really are America's best kept secret." ■



Bergen graduates have the opportunity to learn on industry-standard technology at Millersville University.

## A Pathway to the Music Industry at Millersville



Andrew Krikun

Bergen and Millersville University of Pennsylvania have established an articulation agreement that makes the pathway to a baccalaureate degree in music industry easier for Bergen graduates. The agreement also creates opportunities for students to study with music industry professionals.

"We are very excited that the articulation agree-

ment with Millersville University is now in effect," Bergen music professor Andrew Krikun said. "We have been working closely with the music faculty and administration from Millersville University to create a strong curricular partnership."

Beginning in the fall, eligible Bergen students can complete a Bachelor of Science in music industry at a discounted rate at Millersville University's Clair Brothers Music Business Technology program. Named in honor of Millersville alumnus Roy Clair ('67), the program offers concentrations in production, live audio and management.

"This partnership expands regional access to high-quality music industry education, strengthens cross-state collaboration and creates new pathways for students seeking hands-on,

industry-connected training in music production and live audio concentration," Millersville associate professor of music industry Jennifer Jester said.

The agreement represents the program's first agreement with a college outside of Pennsylvania.

"Through a revised fee structure for out-of-state students under the Bergen agreement, Millersville now becomes a highly competitive and financially viable alternative for students," Millersville professor of music industry Barry Atticks said.

Students enrolled in Bergen's Associate of Fine Arts in Music program can transfer to Millersville after earning 60 credits and pay 80 percent of typical costs for in-state students to complete Millersville's Clair Brothers Music Business Technology program.

Students take foundational courses in music industry, recording, production and music and select one or more of the three concentrations. Students have access to a dedicated building for live audio production classes, a partnership with Clair Global that allows them to study live audio at the organization's headquarters with industry professionals, and a 24-week live sound engineering program at the Blackbird Academy in Nashville.

Millersville University of Pennsylvania is a top-ranked public university located in Lancaster County. ■



## Women's History Month Snapshot

The College's annual Women's History Month series of activities spotlighted women as change agents specifically in the area of sustainability. Featured events included a secondhand fashion show with styles created from Threads, the College's career closet providing free clothing for students in need. ■