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COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Graduation Caps 2023 at Commencement Exercises



More than 7,000 graduates, families, friends, faculty, staff and special guests watched the Bergen class of 2023 receive their diplomas at the College's 54th annual commencement exercises on May 16 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford. The 1,000-plus graduates who took part in the ceremony included students who completed their studies in August and December 2022 and May 2023. Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Brock Fisher served as emcee and congratulated the graduates throughout the ceremony.

"It's truly inspiring to not only see the sheer number of students graduating today, in spite of so many odds, but the incredible diversity of our students," he said. "Community colleges represent open access and inclusion - and it's truly apparent when looking at the class of 2023."

Valedictorian Mana Mehdizadeh delivered remarks as valedictorian, the top student in the class of 2023. (See page 2 for a profile.)

"Despite our differences, what we all have in common is that we are college graduates and it changed our lives for the better by attending Bergen Community College," she said. "It's important to remember that despite all of our experiences here being different, we still came together on this fateful day to celebrate our accomplishments as Bergen graduates."

Meanwhile, attendees heard Megan Lee, Panasonic Corporation of North America Chairwoman and Chief Executive Officer, deliver the keynote address. She focused her remarks on maintaining curiosity, saying her own remained responsible for her ascension from a human

resources professional to her current executive position.

"Curiosity helped me to take one step at a time when the future was not so positive or certain," she said. "As I stand here today, I see myself in you - 30 or so years ago - and I hope you see yourself in me many years from now."

In what has become an annual tradition, the Bergen Community College Foundation surprised graduates by awarding three \$500 scholarships for those in attendance - including one personally sponsored by President Eric M. Friedman, Ph.D. Richard Boada Maldonado, Alexandra Sofia Romero and Mariajose Silva (top photo) had their names randomly selected to receive the ultimate "parting gift" for completing their degrees.

Commencement - Continued on page 2.

BY THE NUMBERS - the Class of 2023



2,065 Total Graduates



67 4.0 GPAs



139 High School Students Earning Associate Degrees



Commencement - Continued from page 1.

The class of 2023 also included 16 members of the Turning Point Program for adults with intellectual disabilities, members of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and local high school students who have earned degrees through Bergen's dual enrollment program. Graduate Shannon Medina opened the ceremony by performing the national anthem, while Student Government Association President Amanda Kulesza closed it by leading her peers in the traditional turning of tassels, signifying their status as college graduates.

Retiring professor Dallas Gray led the procession of invited guests as grand marshal, while Board of Trustees Chair Dorothy Blakeslee and President Friedman spoke at the ceremony as well.

Representing the special guests in attendance (see page 4 for a full list) Bergen County Executive James Tedesco III and Bergen County Commissioner Vice Chair Germaine Ortiz provided remarks on behalf of county government.

The College ranks No. 1 in New Jersey for associate degree graduates. ■



Student Spotlight Mana Mehdizadeh, Valedictorian

Among her many accolades, Mana Mehdizadeh has earned a 4.0 GPA while becoming a Coca-Cola Academic Team Gold Scholar and member of the New Jersey All-State Academic Team. As a general studies major, she aspires to study government and politics at a four-year university and attend law school. Mehdizadeh serves as vice president of service for Phi Theta Kappa, a tutor/academic coach at the Cerullo Learning Assistance Center and an intern for New Jersey State Representative Shama Haider (D-37). She also performs advocacy work on behalf of first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students, providing individualized mentorship, networking and employment opportunities. ■

In Her Words

Exerpts from Mana's valedictory address.

"Be proud that you received a degree from Bergen Community College and the fact that you're now part of a supportive alumni community."

"It is important to celebrate who you are today but also who you were in the past."

"Don't be afraid of what's to come."

"Despite our differences, what we all have in common is that we are college graduates and changed our lives for the better by attending Bergen Community College."

Snapshoted

Commencement Edition



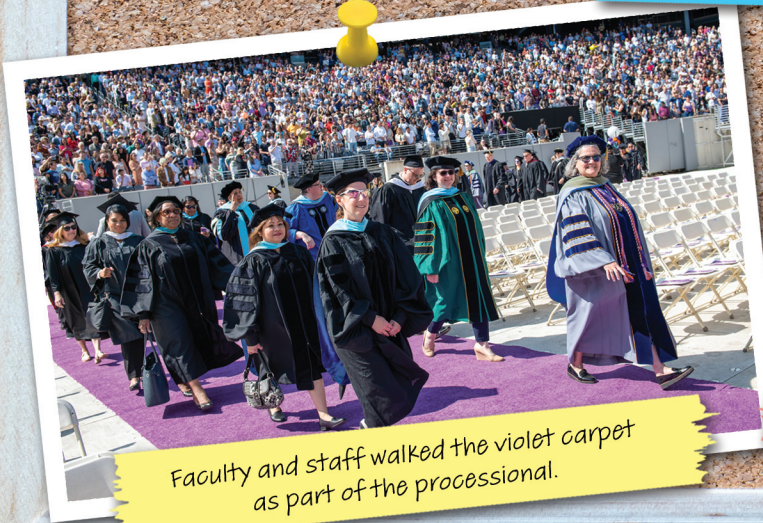
Commencement becomes a generational experience.



Dozens of faculty and staff volunteers helped make the day special for graduates.



Members of the Board of Trustees in Attendance



Faculty and staff walked the violet carpet as part of the processional.



More than 7,000 graduates, faculty, staff, students and guests took part in this year's ceremony.

What a (Platform) Party!

50 special guests, including College officials, government leaders and even student representatives, comprised the 2023 platform party. Here's the full list of luminaries.

- Yoav Aharon, *Student Government Vice President*
- Victoria Ambartsoumian, *Student Government Chief Justice*
- Mary J. Amoroso, *Bergen County Commissioner*



- **Dorothy L. Blakeslee, Board of Trustees Chair**
- Anthony Cureton, *Bergen County Sheriff*
- Cinzia D'Iorio, *Executive Director of Continuing Education and Workforce Development*
- Damon Englese, *Trustee*



- **Dr. Brock Fisher, Vice President of Academic Affairs**
- Patrick Fletcher, *Board of Trustees Treasurer*

- Dan Foley, *Foundation Board Chair*



- **Dr. Eric M. Friedman, President**
- Yessica Garcia-Guzman, *Assistant Vice President of Financial Aid and Compliance*
- Meredith Gatzke, *Vice President of Human Resources and Organizational Development*
- Dallas Gray, *Professor*
- Alicia Guidolin-Hocman, *Alumni Trustee*
- Nishika Gupta, *Assistant Vice President of Information Technology*
- Victoria Jungermann, *Student Government Executive Assistant*
- Dr. Alan Kaufman, *Faculty Senate Chair*



- **Amanda Kulesza, Student Government President**



- **Megan Lee, Panasonic Corporation of North America Chairwoman and Chief Executive Officer**
- Dr. Anne Maganzini, *Professor Emerita*
- Raphael Marte, *Bergen County Commissioner*
- Dr. Tonia McKoy, *Dean of Research and Institutional Effectiveness*



- **Shannon Medina, National Anthem Singer**
- Mana Mehdizadeh, *Valedictorian*
- Dr. Jennifer Migliorino-Reyes, *Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs*
- Ritzy Morales-Diaz, *Trustee*



- **Germaine Ortiz, Bergen County Commissioner Vice Chair**
- Dr. Sheetal Ranjan, *Trustee*
- Dr. Geoffrey Sadock, *Professor Emeritus*
- Nathaniel Saviet, *Vice President of Facilities*
- Ron Spaide, *Chief Information Officer*



- **James Tedesco III, Bergen County Executive**
- Wilton Thomas-Hooke, *Chief Financial Officer*
- Dr. Anthony Trump, *Vice President of Student Affairs*
- Suzanne Wetzel, *Vice President of External Affairs*
- Tracy S. Zur, *Bergen County Commissioner*

PTK Leads the Way

The class of 2023 members of Bergen's Alpha Epsilon Phi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society of two-year colleges, remains one of the most decorated in College history. The graduates secured awards for their chapter, the College and as individuals. Just look at the list!



Regional Chapter

- Most Distinguished College Project
- Distinguished Honors in Action - Fourth Place
- Distinguished Chapter - Fourth Place
- Pattie Van Atter Servant Leadership Award

Regional Individual

- Most Distinguished Chapter Officer Team - Kim Gastelu, Deborah Regan, Petar Petroski, Umar Sultan Kahloon, Yuval Kipnis, Grace Romitelli
- Distinguished Chapter Officer - Kim Gastelu, Umar Sultan Kahloon
- Distinguished Chapter Member - Rachel Malmstone

- Outstanding Leadership Award - Deborah Regan, Saki Kogawa, Yuval Kipnis
- Outstanding Service Award - Liangy Gomez, Karla Santamaria, Kathy Zumba

International Chapter

- Top 100 Chapter
- Beta Alpha Continued Excellence Award
- Distinguished College Project

International Individual

- Distinguished Chapter Officer Team - Kim Gastelu, Deborah Regan, Petar Petroski, Umar Sultan Kahloon, Yuval Kipnis, Grace Romitelli
- Distinguished Chapter Officer - Kim Gastelu, Umar Sultan Kahloon

- Distinguished Chapter Member - Rachel Malmstone
- Honors Case Study Challenge Winners - Deborah Regan, Mana Mehdizadeh

Phi Theta Kappa Scholarship Recipients

- Petar Petroski - Coca-Cola Academic Team Gold Scholar
- Mana Mehdizadeh - Coca-Cola Academic Team Gold Scholar
- Matthew Paccione - Oberndorf Lifeline to Completion Scholarship and Guistwhite Scholar
- Marie Eng - New Century Workforce Scholar

2022 NJ All-State Academic Team

- Petar Petroski and Mana Mehdizadeh



Mrs. Rodriguez Goes to Washington

Alumna Kezia Rodriguez ('22) served as an invited guest of the White House this spring, providing an introduction for President Joe Biden during a Rose Garden executive order signing. The White House hosted the event to spotlight the president's announcement of new programs that expand care and assistance for children, seniors, people with disabilities and caregivers.

At the signing, Rodriguez shared her story regarding the importance of childcare assistance, which she benefitted from at Bergen. Using federal pandemic relief funds, the College offered tuition-free childcare in the on-campus Child Development Center early learning program for student-parents pursuing degrees during the pandemic.

"I am so thankful for all of the support I received, including funds provided under the

American Rescue Plan that allowed me to have access to free childcare while working toward my associate's degree," she said at the signing. "I was able to complete my degree all while my daughters were being cared for. All you need to start a fire is a spark; for my family, that spark was free childcare."

Federal officials, including First Lady Dr. Jill Biden and Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona visited Bergen's main campus in January 2022 to recognize the creative efforts the College took to support students during the COVID-19 crisis. During that event, Rodriguez introduced the First Lady before providing her remarks. Impressing the First Lady so much, Rodriguez received an invitation to the 2022 State of the Union Address as well. She now attends Felician University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in nursing. ■

A Most Promising Development



Bergen has earned national distinction as one of only 20 "Most Promising Places to Work in Community Colleges." Sponsored by Diverse: Issues in Higher Education magazine and the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), and administered by Do Good Work Educational Consulting LLC, the award recognizes colleges that have prioritized diversity and inclusion in their organizational structures, strategic commitments and workplace environments. Program administrators evaluate colleges on items such as employee demographics, professional development opportunities and initiatives that encourage diverse experiences for personnel.

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. The annual survey solicits responses from the near-350 NISOD-member community colleges. The twenty honorees include colleges from coast-to-coast.

"This recognition represents a tangible validation of our commitment to creating a model workplace – one driven by an ethic of care, equity, wellness, and collaboration," President Eric M. Friedman, Ph.D. said. "I am truly proud of this recognition, which once again places Bergen as a national leader among our peers."

President Friedman has prioritized inclusivity during his first two-and-a-half years in office, making the idea a strategic focus area. Among the initiatives developed, President Friedman created the President's Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, which has sponsored projects such as a collegewide climate survey to uncover how Bergen could further enhance its inclusivity efforts. The themes of diversity, equity and inclusion also appear in the institution's newly recast mission, vision, value and goal statements. The College's first DEI action plan will receive approval at an upcoming Board of Trustees meeting. ■



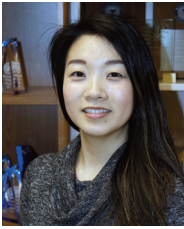
Center for Online Learning

New programs added!

Enroll now in fully accredited programs in **business administration, criminal justice, information technology, professional studies, and psychology.**
Bergen.edu/col

Students Stacking Awards

From scholarships to leadership positions and even a prestigious publishing credit, students have racked up individual awards this semester.



Student Marie Eng will receive a \$1,250 Phi Theta Kappa scholarship as a 2023 New Century Workforce Pathway Scholar. She represents the only student from New Jersey

to earn the award; more than 2,000 applied. The Association of Community College Trustees will honor her in October at the group's Leadership Congress in Las Vegas.

Pursuing two degrees (dental hygiene and veterinary technology) at Bergen, Eng hopes to work in both fields. In fact, she also holds a bachelor of music in music industry with a major in voice from Syracuse University ('08). She has performed with the Oratorio Society of New York at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Also making headlines, student Mateo Armas will serve as president in the PTK North District for the 2023-24 academic year. In the role, he will represent Bergen at community colleges on the regional level, which spans the mid-Atlantic states. As an elected regional officer, Armas will lead regional meetings and help guide PTK chapters through leadership events. He marks the first Bergen student to hold the position.



A computer science major and NJ STARS student, Armas contributed to the "Bergen Routes" project, which mapped internal hallways and rooms on the College's campus. After graduating, he plans to continue his education in the field of computer science or cybersecurity.

Finally, alumnus Jae Kwon's literary work, "Just a Sandwich," was selected for publication in the 28th edition of PTK's *Nota Bene* anthology literary journal. With more than 800 works submitted, PTK officials only selected 24 for publication.



Kwon earned a spot in the journal for his one-act play, which portrays a mixed-race couple addressing power dynamics. With an academic interest in exploring the connections between Korean and American popular literature and cultures, Kwon seeks to examine the individual along with cultural and social norms.

Originally from Seoul, South Korea, Kwon grew up in New Jersey with a dream of becoming a writer or an author. After working in marketing, tutoring and as a restaurant server, he now works as the curriculum director/developer and supervisor in charge of teacher training at Step By Step English School, a nonprofit offering free or low cost ESL programs in six countries. He also attends Columbia University. ■

Middle States Matters



Accreditation Liaison Officer Dr. Gary Porter reports that work on the Self-Study will continue through the early summer as the seven working groups meet and collect evidence. Some preliminary writing has occurred, though drafts will not take shape until the fall. Groups will, however, submit preliminary reports on the compliance status of individual areas by June 30.

The steering committee will meet on Wednesday, June 14 at 2 p.m., where working group chairs will report on their teams' activities. The fall will mark the beginning of biweekly meetings for the steering committee. ■

Summer Vibes

Register for summer classes and get ahead!

[BERGEN.EDU/SUMMER](https://bergen.edu/summer)

Denim Day Unity

In honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and in keeping with enhanced programming around key issues that require our collective attention and awareness, Bergen joined millions of people worldwide on April 26 in observing Denim Day. Developed by Peace over Violence, Denim Day asks people to wear jeans on the last Wednesday in April as a visible way to highlight misconceptions surrounding sexual violence. Members of the College, including the management team (photo, right), joined in solidarity with survivors and victims of sexual assault by wearing denim.



Denim Day recalls the case of a rape conviction overturned by the Italian Supreme Court in 1999 on the grounds that since the victim wore tight jeans, she must have helped the perpetrator

remove them, thus making the act consensual. Women in the Italian Parliament, enraged by the verdict, protested the next day by wearing jeans to work and a movement began. ■