

insideBergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Commencement Concludes Journey for Class of 2024

The 55th class of Bergen graduates received their degrees during a morning ceremony on May 14 at MetLife Stadium. Approximately 1,000 members of class of 2024 attended the annual commencement exercises, which included graduates from August and December 2023 and May 2024. More than 7,000 family, friends, faculty, staff and special guests attended the capstone event. Shiwa Yangzom earned the right to lead the class as valedictorian, the top student in the class of 2024. Her remarks celebrated the ties that united Bergen graduates and offered advice from her grandfather, who traveled from Tibet to see her graduate.

"If you take a look around, every single one of us has come from different walks of life: first generation, parents, high school students, returning students, international students, yet, today, we are united by a common thread: we have all laid down our roots at Bergen Community College," she said before speaking in

Tibetan. "The roots of peace and happiness lie in the soil of compassion and appreciation."

Yangzom earned top billing in the class on the strength of a 4.0 GPA, her work as an academic coach, and standing on the New Jersey All-State Academic Team. She will attend Johns Hopkins University this summer as an undergraduate researcher in their humanities laboratory. Yangzom plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in psychology and economics.

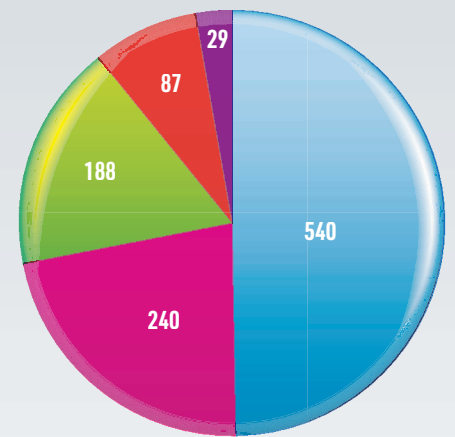
Graduates also included Cat Clayton (pictured bottom right), who performed the national anthem, and Student Government Association President Kaylie Quezada, who led the class of 2024 in the ceremonial turning of their tassels. In total, more than 2,000 students earned degrees and certificates from Bergen over the past year. The College continues to rank No. 1 in New Jersey for associate degree graduates.

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BY THE NUMBERS - The Class of 2024



May Graduates by Degree



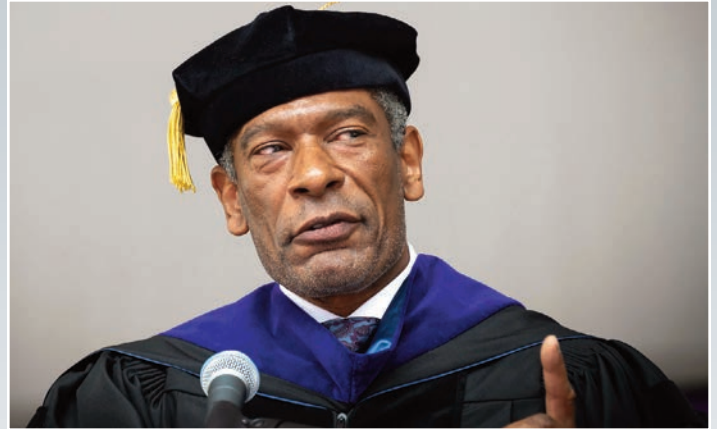
- Associate in Science
- Associate in Applied Science
- Early College
- Associate in Arts
- Associate in Fine Arts/Certificates/Turning Point





Valedictorian Shiwa Yangzom

"We've all taken different paths to reach this milestone and each of these journeys is valid and worthy of celebration. As we move forward, let's remember to honor our beginnings and those who we owe ourselves to."



The Hon. Julien X. Neals

"Choose to listen to those with whom you disagree – agree to disagree – but remain willing to find common ground, rather than insisting on being right. African proverb instructs that a child should not have to burn down a village to feel its warmth."



Bergen County Executive James J. Tedesco III

"Bergen Community College is truly the jewel of our county, offering students opportunity and pathways to success. By earning your degree, you have helped strengthen Bergen County's workforce, playing an important part in ensuring that Bergen County continues to be the best place to live, work, and raise a family."



Bergen County Commissioner Chair Germaine Ortiz

"May your futures be as bright as your dreams."

Snapshotted

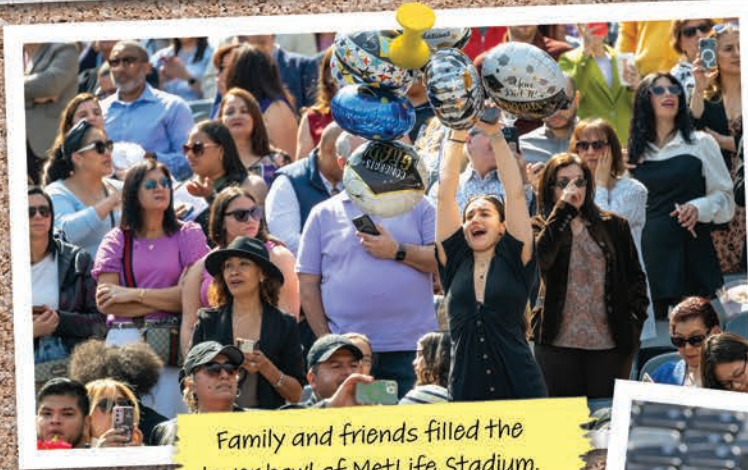
Commencement Edition



President Friedman and Members of the Board of Trustees in attendance.



Success is a family affair!



Family and friends filled the lower bowl of MetLife Stadium.



Graduates were all smiles with their diplomas in hand.



Retiring Professor Lou Ethel Roliston served as grand marshal.

Commencement, Continued from Page 1



President Eric M. Friedman "Send-Off" Scholarship awardee Myrna Kayal.

The Hon. Julien X. Neals, a federal judge serving the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, provided remarks as the event's keynote speaker. Confirmed by the U.S. Senate in June 2021, Neals earned the distinction as the first federal judge seated during the Biden administration.

"May you know that you're the generation of new leaders to remind us that we can't listen while we speak," he told the graduates. "Through listening to one another and discourse with each other we find truth, at this time, in this moment, today, when we need it most. The truth is: I believe in you and I believe that you are all that and more."

In what has now become an annual tradition at commencement, the Bergen Community College Foundation closed the ceremony by randomly selecting three graduates in attendance to receive a \$500 "send-off scholarship" to help them jumpstart their future plans. Graduates Brandon Oliff, Madison Adrianna Miret and Zachary Carter had their names randomly pulled for the awards. Inspired by the energy in the arena, President Eric M. Friedman spontaneously sponsored a fourth scholarship – awarded to Myrna Kayal – before Foundation Chair Dan Foley and the Hon. Judge Neals did the same, pulling JB Xavier Jopia Abarquez and Robert Anton Pfautsch as the fifth and sixth scholarship winners. When newly installed Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost Andrew Tomko returned to the microphone as the master of ceremonies, the graduates compelled him to sponsor a seventh scholarship. He obliged, pulling graduate Amanda Halliday's name.

Retiring Professor Lou Ethel Roliston opened the event as the grand marshal, with Bergen County Executive James J. Tedesco III and Bergen County Board of Commissioner Chair Germaine Ortiz also providing remarks. ■

Award Winning PTK Honors Chapter

The class of 2024 featured nearly 500 members of Alpha Epsilon Phi, the College's Phi Theta Kappa honor society chapter. Graduates led another award-winning semester for the chapter capturing 26 individual and group awards at regional and international conferences. The awards represent the latest in the chapter's history, which includes becoming the top affiliate of the international honor society of two-year colleges in the world.



Among this year's honors, Mateo Armas earned the \$5,000 Guistwhite Scholar award as one of only eight students selected from 3,000 applicants. Armas was also named to the New Jersey All-State Academic Team along with valedictorian Shiwa Yangzom.

As a group, the chapter secured the REACH, Five-Star and Honors in Action Theme awards recognizing the group's overall quality, membership and community service initiatives.

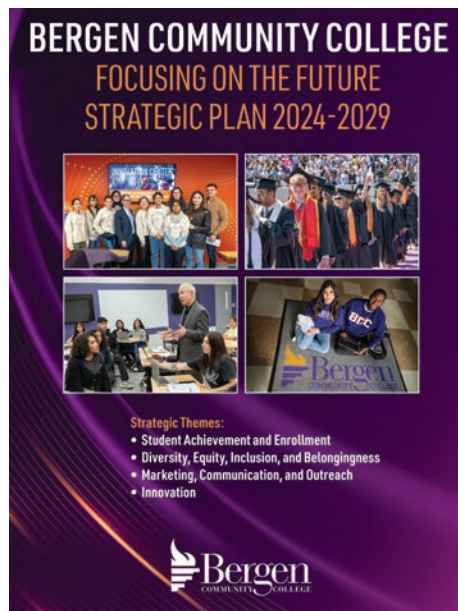
Members of Alpha Epsilon Phi accepted the awards at the organization's annual confer-

ences that took place in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (regional) and Orlando, Florida (international). Honorees from the class of 2024 who received awards at the conferences are: Mateo Armas, Daniela Benitez, Daniel Gajee, Liangy Gomez, Lynne Kim, Amelia Urena and Shiwa Yangzom. ■

Strategic Plan Focuses on the Future

Concluding a collaborative two-year process that included students, faculty, staff, community members and other key stakeholders, Bergen has officially adopted its 2024-2029 strategic plan: "Focusing on the Future." The plan sets a roadmap for the institution's strategic efforts over the next five years.

Led by Dean of Research and Institutional Effectiveness Tonia McKoy and Accreditation Liason Officer Dr. Gary Porter, the process began with the development of new mission, vision, value and goal statements, continued with a series of goal-setting exercises that resulted in the establishment of strategic themes and has now closed with Board of Trustees approval.



College leaders will now begin to operationalize work related to the four strategic themes: 1) student achievement and enrollment; 2) diversity, equity, inclusion, and belongingness; 3) marketing, communication, and outreach; and 4) innovation. ■



STEM Scholar Completes Research

Biology student Liliana Hopkins has completed her year-long participation in the Governor's STEM Scholars Program. The program, an exclusive state-funded education initiative in New Jersey, pairs college mentors with teams of high school students to conduct research centered on issues related to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

"This experience pushed me to be a better leader, mentor and scientist," Hopkins said. "I am so grateful I got to work with a team of talented and hardworking students. I am excited to help them share the data we worked so hard for, and more importantly, to see them experience the thrilling culmination of an intensive research project."

Hopkins directed "The Microbial Fuel Cell" project, which used microbial fuel cell prototypes to produce bioremediation and clean energy in samples collected from the Hackensack River. The team will present their theory, prototype and results at a Kean University conference this month.

While enrolled at Bergen, Hopkins served as the treasurer for the STEM Student Union, mentored students with intellectual disabilities, and published a scientific paper on the method development of plant DNA-barcodes. She plans to study microbiology and biotechnology at Rutgers University before pursuing a Ph.D. and a career in science policy. ■



Building Belongingness Through Celebration

Viva Bergen! The College's Diversity Fest and Cinco de Mayo events showed off Bergen's true colors – a veritable rainbow of flags, cultures and people. Together, the events represent important examples of celebrating diversity and belongingness.





Vice President of External Affairs Suzanne Wetzel, Professor Robert Dill, President Eric M. Friedman and Creamer Environmental Executive Vice President Tracy Straka

Bergen an Environmental Leader

Announced to coincide with Earth Day, the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ) has recognized Bergen for its commitment to stewardship with the "Environmental Leader" award. The organization presented awards to 22 businesses, colleges and nonprofits at an April 19 breakfast event. Bergen has now earned an environmental leadership award from CIANJ in back-to-back years.

"CIANJ proudly recognizes the role these companies and individuals play in keeping New Jersey a safe, beautiful and clean place to live and conduct business." CIANJ President Anthony Russo said.

Working alongside staff and faculty such as Robert Dill and PJ Ricatto, President Friedman has launched a comprehensive campaign to

spur sustainability initiatives. Among them, the College has developed new recycling programs, instituted campuswide composting and secured more than \$5.5 million in federal grants to create student pathways to careers in food, agriculture, natural resources and human sciences.

The grants have forged new collaborations between the College's STEM and culinary academic programs to establish projects in hydroponic/vertical farming techniques.

CIANJ seeks to be the leader in free enterprise advocacy for the purpose of fostering, through education, legislative vigilance and membership interaction, an economic climate that enhances business potential and makes New Jersey a better state in which to live, work and conduct business. ■

Middle States Matters

By Gary Porter, Accreditation Liaison Officer

The College continue to make good progress in its preparation for next spring's Middle States Commission on Higher Education visit. The Self-Study process will reach an important milestone at the end of this month. At that time, subcommittee chairs will have submitted their final drafts in advance of the executive cabinet's review in June. We will then have an introductory meeting with our team chair, Monroe Community College President DeAnna Burt-Nanna. Throughout the summer, we will distill the drafts into a single document that will become the Self-Study. The team chair will receive the draft in mid-August before her visit to the College in September. ■



Previous Bergen Community College Foundation scholarship awardees with Foundation Board of Directors Chair Dan Foley (far right).

Foundation Scholarships Provide a Lifeline

The Bergen Community College Foundation, the 501 (c) (3) nonprofit charitable organization that supports the institution, has awarded scholarships to 241 students for the fall semester. Awarded twice-per-year by the Foundation in amounts up to and including the full cost of tuition, scholarships help students remain enrolled by reducing possible financial barriers to continuing at the College. Donors contribute to the Foundation through one-time gifts, endowments and grants that support student scholarships, educational programs and special initiatives at Bergen.

"I am proud that the Bergen Community College Foundation continues to serve as an important lifeline for high-achieving students who encounter financial challenges to completing their degrees," Foundation Board of Directors Chair Dan Foley said. "The generosity of our donors makes dreams possible. I cannot thank them enough."

More than 900 students applied for scholarships as part of the current awards cycle. Students apply by submitting information such as their program of study, GPA and essays. College faculty and staff and Foundation board members evaluate the applications, score them and match the highest ranked entries with individual scholarship criteria outlined in the donor funds. For example, the Ciarco Family Endowed Scholarship, funded by Lyndhurst residents Phil and Kathleen Ciarco, provides support for students who have completed six credits, possess a 3.0 GPA and exhibit financial need. Other funds assist students enrolled in specific academic programs. To become a Foundation donor, visit foundation.bergen.edu. ■