

insideBergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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What's In a Name? Much More for a Hispanic-Serving Institution



Staff member Gloria Cevallos led a parade of flags during Hispanic Heritage Month last fall.

When President Eric M. Friedman arrived on campus in 2021, he quickly learned that students, faculty and staff prized the College's standing as a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). It was a point of pride in Bergen's overall identity. With more than 40 percent of Bergen students identifying as Hispanic, the College easily surpassed the 25 percent benchmark for institutions to earn the designation. Though HSIs gain access to opportunities such as specific federal grants, Friedman saw even more potential in the designation for Bergen.

"A college becomes an HSI based on a percentage of an enrollment," he said. "But the real conversation starts when colleges embrace their status as an HSI to provide customized supports for their Hispanic student population. Being an HSI means so much more than a number – it's a promise to our Hispanic community."

As a central focus in Friedman's commitment to championing initiatives related to diversity, equity, inclusion and belongingness, he worked with members of the College's Hispanic community to develop a comprehensive strategy of tailored initiatives. Among them, Bergen has deepened its ties to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). The advocacy organization provides access to programs, initiatives and funding for Hispanic students, including a range of internship programs with federal government agencies. To connect students with the Hispanic National Internship Program, HACU executive director Dianna Vasquez has personally visited Bergen in each of the past three years, hosting an information session at the College's main campus.

"Bergen is a pillar in New Jersey for championing Hispanic success," she said during a visit. "What's wonderful about an institution like Bergen is that by its design, the institution is doing it every day in an effortless way."

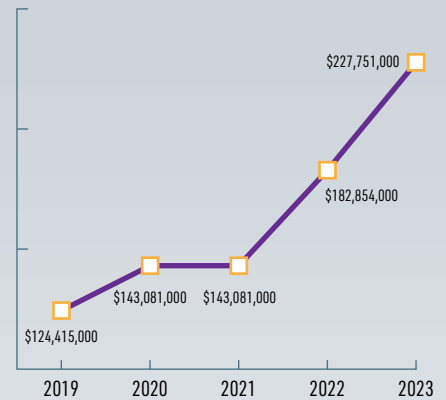
Two Bergen students have secured internships as part of the program: Askar Mirza, whom HACU placed with the United States Agency for International Development within the Office of Management, Policy, Budget and Performance, and Edgardo Aguilar, who will soon intern at the U.S. Department of Justice. Aguilar, a finance major who recently graduated from Bergen, credited Friedman and College leaders Gloria Cevallos, Amparo Coddling and Cesarina Vinas for extending their assistance.

"Their dedication to fostering real-world learning environments has had a profound impact on my academic journey," he said. "Thanks to their support, I feel empowered to apply my knowledge in such a meaningful and impactful setting at the Department of Justice."

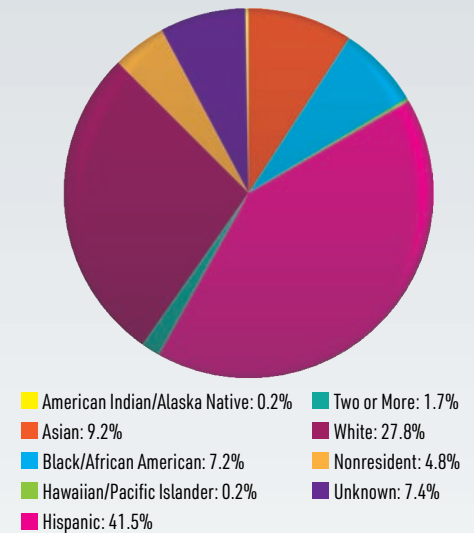
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BY THE NUMBERS - The HSI Advantage

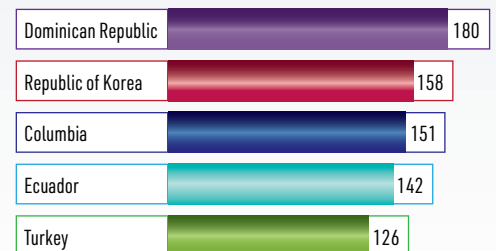
Total Title V Grant Allocations by the Federal Government for HSIs



Bergen Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity



Bergen Students Top 5 Non-U.S. Countries of Citizenship



Grad Gets \$55k/Year Scholarship



As one of 60 high-achieving community college students selected for the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation's Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, recent graduate Ricardo Santana will receive up to \$55,000 per year from the organization to complete a bachelor's degree. The highly competitive national scholarship drew nearly 1,700 applications from over 380 community colleges across the nation.

"When I consider all of my future academic endeavors, affordability plays such a huge role, and in some cases, forces me to consider turning away from wonderful opportunities," Santana said. "Being selected as a 2024 Jack Kent Cooke Scholar has broken that barrier for me, I feel that now I can truly shoot for the stars."

Santana majored in political science and aspires to become an attorney. He will attend Williams College this fall.

At Bergen, Santana served as co-president of the Bergen Honors Association for the Judith

K. Winn School of Honors. As a peer writing tutor and academic coach at the College's Cerullo Learning Assistance Center, he earned the College Reading and Learning Association's 2023 Rick Sheets Outstanding Tutor Award, making him the top tutor from more than 1,200 accredited tutoring programs across the country. Santana tutored students at all levels of writing, psychology, and criminal justice. He also trained writing center tutors at Teaneck High School and has assisted with facilitating in-class tutoring and academic coaching presentations.

In his hometown, Santana founded Bogota Helping Hands to increase teen involvement in local community affairs. For his efforts, he received the Martin Luther King, Jr. Award for academic excellence and community involvement in Bergen County. He also participated in a two-month internship in the Bronx District Attorney's Office and has interned in the legal field since high school.

Bergen's Alpha Epsilon Phi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society of two-year colleges, assists in connecting students with scholarships such as the Jack Kent Cooke award. Twenty-two Bergen students have received the award during the last 11 years. ■



Adjunct faculty member Caitlin Kolmer outside the paramedic science ambulance.

No Helicopter, No Problem

Health professionals always have a plan B.

In May, Interdisciplinary Center for Simulation Director Dennis Kruk worked with the New Jersey State Police to coordinate a medical evacuation—"medevac"—helicopter simulation exercise for Applied Technology High School (ATHS) health professions program students. The helicopter would land on Bergen's baseball field and take students through the steps of a paramedic-to-helicopter exchange of patients.

But an early morning fog at the helicopter's headquarters in Bedminster grounded the chopper, thereby scrubbing the exercise.

The hiccup did not stop Kruk and Paramedic Science Program Director Joanne Piccininni from teaching the students about being adaptable to any situation when working in a health profession, as this change of plans served as the perfect learning opportunity.

"We have to think outside the box," Piccininni said.

Instead, students participated in a simulation with the College's paramedic science ambulance. Kruk remained positive, saying the exposure still benefited the students.

"We took the opportunity to show the ninth-grade students all of the different health professions we have and all of the pre-certification classes here on campus," said Kruk.

The ATHS is a full-time technical education program located in Ender Hall. The school combines career-based learning, high school academics and Bergen's college courses. A health professions track allows the students to explore each of the College's health professions programs, speak with professors and work in labs. ■



Bergen's True Colors

Students, faculty, staff and Bergen County government leaders put pride on display during a pair of June events. A Bergen delegation from the PRIDE Club participated in the annual Jersey Pride parade and festival in Asbury Park, while the club also sponsored a flag raising at the Paramus main campus, which featured attendees such as Commissioner Tracy Zur. ■

Snapshotted



Dean of Multicultural Services/Activities
Deb Manning at the Juneteenth Flag Raising



An Evening Event Celebrated Bergen
Institute for Creative Arts Students



Members of the Inaugural Direct
Support Professional Program Class



Commissioner Mary Amoroso Spoke
at the Women Veterans Day Ceremony



Specialized Services Trained Dental Hygiene
Students on Neurodiversity

Study Abroad: Summering in France



(Top, left to right) Brianna Miller, Victor Minetto, and Joseph Liberti; (bottom, left to right) Amelia Urena and Micaela Sterling.

Six students will study abroad in France during a two-week summer program as part of the Community Colleges in France Bootcamp initiative. Offered through the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States, students receive high-quality experiential learning opportunities tailored for those attending community colleges. The French Embassy annually sponsors the two-week summer program for U.S. students to study

abroad at French universities. Students learn about nature and sustainability, network with others, take trips and create a group project.

Students Victor Minetto, Brianna Miller, Daniel Gajee, Joseph Liberti, Amelia Urena and Micaela Sterling received a \$1,400 scholarship from the French Embassy and additional scholarship funds from the Bergen Community College Foundation to support their study abroad experiences. Each of the students will attend programs at different locations and dates.

"I wanted to learn how to be more aware of how to reduce the amount of pollution and waste we generate as humans," Miller, a psychology student, said.

For three years, international student advisor and study abroad advisor Amparo Coddling has helped groups of Bergen students secure the scholarships.

"I think it's a life changing experience because many of our students haven't had a chance to travel abroad," she said. "The length of the program, the activities, the bootcamp projects, and the availability of scholarships makes it very attractive." ■

On the Sports Page

Student-athletes finished the spring season strong, with members of the track and field, baseball and softball teams earning honors. Among the accolades for the Bulldogs, three members of the track and field team each finished in the top 10 of their meets at the national tournament, while three baseball and softball players made all-region teams.

At the NJCAA Division III Outdoor Track and Field Nationals, first-year athlete Hannah Otterstedt finished third in the discus and sixth in the shot put. Fellow first-year Bulldog Joseph Henderson finished fourth in the 1500-meter and fifth in the 800-meter event. Sophomore Kevin Ramirez took seventh in the 200-meter event.

Meanwhile, on the diamond, sophomore Ian Scalabrini slugged seven home runs en route to all-Region XIX third team honors and sophomores Melody Peralta and Brandi Shortway each made the all-Region XIX second team. Peralta



Hannah Otterstedt

hit five home runs during the spring campaign, while Shortway compiled a .613 on-base percentage, which ranked sixth in the nation. ■



NJCCC President Aaron Fichtner, Board Chair Dorothy Blakeslee and NJCCC Chair Sheetal Ranjan.

Blakeslee Secures Second Honor of 2024

The New Jersey Council of County Colleges selected Bergen Board of Trustees Chair Dorothy Blakeslee to receive the organization's top honor for trustees. Chosen from nominees submitted by the state's 18 community colleges, the NJCCC's executive committee selected Blakeslee for the Ronald D. Winthers Community College Trustee Leadership Award, which honors an individual who "exemplifies visionary trustee leadership at the local, state and national levels." The NJCCC recognized Blakeslee during an awards dinner as part of the organization's New Jersey Community College Opportunity Summit in Atlantic City.

"The council is honoring you for your vision, leadership, and unwavering support of community colleges, including your service to Bergen Community College as well as your service to the numerous organizations that make a positive difference in the lives of the people of Bergen County and the State of New Jersey," NJCCC President Aaron Fichtner said in a congratulatory letter to Blakeslee.

The NJCCC honor represents the second of the spring semester for Bergen's board chair; the American Association of Community Colleges selected Blakeslee as a finalist for the "Trustee of the Year" award as part of the organization's annual Awards of Excellence program. The honor recognized her as one of the top three trustees in the nation.

Blakeslee first joined the College's governing body in 2003. Before becoming chair in 2020, she served as treasurer for nearly 16 years. ■



President Eric M. Friedman has prioritized belongingness and inclusivity. Events celebrating Cinco de Mayo and artist Frida Kahlo represent two of many recognizing Hispanic heritage.

and recognition events occurred only during October's Hispanic Heritage Month.

"Hispanic culture remains an important thread in Bergen's identity," he said. "We do not just celebrate Hispanic culture, or any other culture, within the confines of a single month. We embrace and celebrate our diversity every day – it's woven into who we are."

The LatinxCEO initiative, which offers skill-building workshops, internships and industry-recognized certifications for students, also reflects the institution's focus on Hispanic outreach. The College launched LatinxCEO as a workforce development initiative that targets underrepresentation in the workplace. Bergen leaders work closely with members of the Statewide Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, which maintains its headquarters at Bergen Community College at the Meadowlands, to create learning experiences as part of the program. The Meadowlands location also houses the College's Hispanic-focused business incubator that targets assisting early-stage entrepreneurs in the region.

What's in a Name? Continued

College leaders and students such as Aguilar have also deepened Bergen's relationship with HACU by attending the organization's annual conference. The events, held in San Diego and Chicago the last two years, provide an opportunity for attendees to present on best practices, network with colleagues and learn how colleges can best support Hispanic students. The Bergen Community College Foundation sponsored scholarships to enable students' attendance.

"National conferences open doors for students, exposing them to learning opportunities and networks they would not otherwise have access to," Friedman said. "Colleges have a responsibility

to pursue these types of initiatives if they seek to live their mission."

To continue expansion of the HACU partnership, Friedman has appointed Assistant Vice President of Financial Aid and Compliance Yessika Garcia-Guzman and Bergen Community College at the Meadowlands Campus Executive Joao Sedycias to serve as official liaisons to the organization.

Meanwhile, Friedman has also embraced the College's standing as an HSI by encouraging leaders to expand on-campus Hispanic cultural programming throughout the year. Formerly, most of Bergen's Hispanic-focused celebration

The embrace of the HSI designation remains part of Friedman's focus on creating an environment of belongingness at the College. The idea appears throughout organizational ethos in items such as the mission, vision, values, presidential goals and strategic plan. The President's Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion leads many efforts related to belongingness, including sponsoring projects such as a collegewide climate survey to uncover how the institution could further enhance its inclusivity efforts. In consecutive years, *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* magazine has recognized Bergen as one of the "most promising places to work in community colleges."

"Everyone belongs at Bergen," he said. ■



Facilities Field Day Fun

The third annual facilities field day offered an opportunity to recognize the College's dedicated custodians, maintenance staff and buildings and grounds crew with a break from their regular responsibilities. Food trucks, activities and even a cross-College softball game highlighted the festivities. ■

Middle States Matters

By Gary Porter, Accreditation Liaison Officer



The College will meet with site visit chair Monroe Community College President DeAnna Burt-Nanna this month to discuss a preliminary site visit scheduled for early October. During the Zoom meeting, Bergen will:

- Introduce the team chair to the institution so the chair can conduct the on-site evaluation visit, scheduled for March 23-26, 2025, efficiently and effectively.
- Ensure that the self-study process and evidence inventory approach will support a useful evaluation team visit;
- Address practical preparation for the visit and determine the institution's readiness to host the visit;
- Discuss the requirements and logistics for a visit to the Meadowlands location; and
- Discuss what the College hopes to achieve from the self-study process.

As part of the visit, President Burt-Nanna will also provide the College with feedback on the self-study document.

Drafts of the completed chapters are currently under review. Copyediting will take place over the summer.

In preparation for the fall, the College expects to outline more linkages between the evidence and narrative. Finally, the College community will have an opportunity to review the draft to ensure reflective voice in the fall. ■



Care for Vets Recognized

For the second consecutive year, Bergen has secured a "Companies That Care" award from the Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ) and Commerce Magazine. Lauding the College's work for supporting military veterans, the CIANJ honored Professor Julie Seda (above) at a May breakfast sponsored by the advocacy organization. Seda, who leads many of the College's initiatives for the veteran community, accepted the award on the institution's behalf. A panel of independent judges reviewed the entries and chose the honorees as part of the CIANJ program, which recognized organizations, companies and colleges for their work in various service categories. Bergen earned the distinction as the state's only community college to receive an award from the CIANJ.

Bergen's student veteran community includes 112 enrollees under the Post-9/11 GI Bill pursuing their education after returning to civilian life. The College takes an active approach to easing this transition by offering numerous holistic and supportive resources for veterans. Among them, the College's veterans committee has sponsored a 5k run/walk since 2016. The event takes place to both honor the sacrifices of veterans, but also to raise funds for veterans' emergency support, including tuition, housing and other basic needs. Drawing 151 participants in its first year, the event now gathers more than 350 runners, joggers and walkers. In 2023, the event earned \$14,945 for the emergency fund. This year's 5K will take place on Sunday, November 3 at 8 a.m. at the College. The College also maintains an on-campus veterans center with access to advising, counseling and academic resources tailored to assisting those who served in the military. ■

A "Rockstar" HR Pro

The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) has honored Talent Development Manager Michael Vivenzio with the National Higher Education HR Rockstar Award. Recognizing an early-career professional who has made a significant impact in higher education human resources, Vivenzio will receive his award at a ceremony sponsored by CUPA-HR this month.

Vivenzio joined the College in 2022 after more than a decade with Huntington Learning Center as a managing director, assistant director of training and center director. He graduated from Rutgers University with a bachelor's degree in psychology. At Bergen, Vivenzio has received

accolades for his work in building relationships during a period of institutional renewal at the College. He has implemented innovative training approaches for new managers and embraced data-informed decision-making to drive improvements in the institution's performance review and compensation-model processes. Vivenzio has also become the "voice of Bergen Bulldog athletics," volunteering his time to serve as the energetic public address announcer for various athletic teams. ■

