

# inside Bergen

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CONNECT. NJ's most social community college. 60,000+ followers. Join the conversation.



## Bergen Lands Significant Federal Grant

The federal government has awarded Bergen a \$2.97 million grant to develop support programs that will help students remain enrolled and positioned to earn associate degrees. College officials expect to assist more than 10,000 students through the program's initiatives during the five-year grant lifecycle, with specific emphasis on improving outcomes for Hispanic, underrepresented, and low-income students, which account for a majority of Bergen's students.

The U.S. Department of Education officially announced the recipients of the "Developing Hispanic-Serving Institution" competitive award program this month. The grant aligns with many of the College's most important objectives in the recently approved five-year Strategic Plan and President Eric M. Friedman's goals, including those related to student retention, persistence and completion.

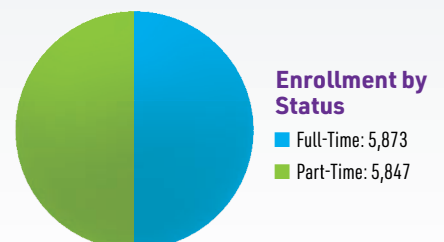
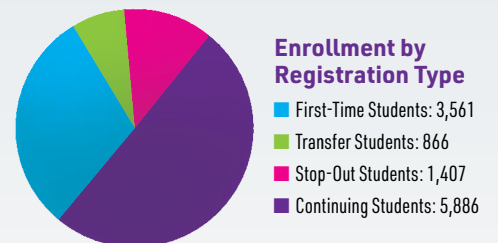
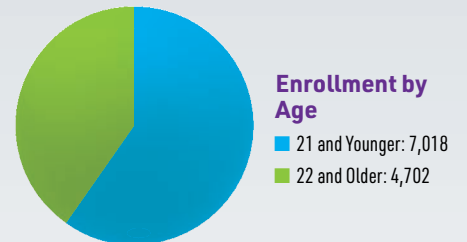
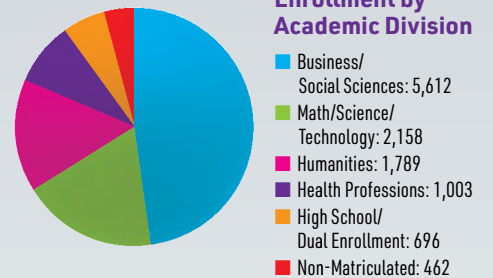
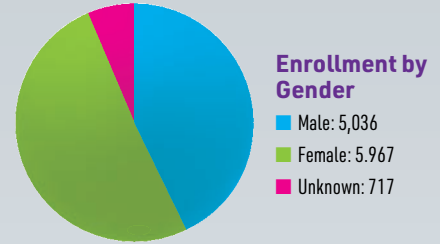
"Research shows that students engaged with hands-on and holistic support services have better outcomes," he said. "They remain enrolled and they graduate. The 'Developing Hispanic-Serving Institution' grant will not only allow us to add resources to support students on a daily basis, but will also improve our institutional capacity to provide additional hands-on services."

Under the "Bergen Rebounds: Assist, Advance and Achieve" initiative, the College seeks to accomplish three goals: 1) increase retention and graduation rates among the targeted student populations; 2) expand services that contribute to degree completion; and 3) improve the knowledge base of faculty and staff through professional development. To achieve the goals, the College will redesign its new student orientation program, embed tutors into online courses, and create a new financial literacy initiative.

The College will soon hire a project director to lead a staff of two full-time professional staff members, three part-time staff members, 20 peer leaders, five success coaches and five tutors. Activities related to the program will began this month and continue through 2029.

Only federally-designated Hispanic Serving Institutions such as Bergen remain eligible for "Title V" grants such as Bergen's \$2.97 million award. Student populations at HSIs account for at least one-quarter of their enrollment; 44 percent of Bergen students identify as Hispanic/Latino. ■

### BY THE NUMBERS - Fall 2024 at Bergen



# "More than One Story" on Immigration



Faculty at the College recently concluded a two-year project that compiled the accounts of Bergen County residents and their immigration experiences during a verbatim theatre performance. Verbatim theatre features the actual words, narratives and testimonies from first-person submissions by combining them into a single creative work. Student actors offered testimonies from more than 200 oral histories during the Bergen Institute for the Creative Arts' "More Than One Story" performance in September.

For the "More Than One Story" project, Professors Christine Eubank and Leigh Jonaitis received oral histories from first- and second-generation Bergen County immigrants through an open submission call last year. The professors compiled the submissions, organized experiences by themes, and then created a compelling narrative. The process took 14 months. The faculty developed the project as part of Bergen's 2023-24 Common Read, which encouraged students, faculty and staff to read the same book: *A Map is Only One Story: Twenty Writers on Immigration, Family and the Meaning of Home*, edited by Nicole Chung and Mensah Demary.

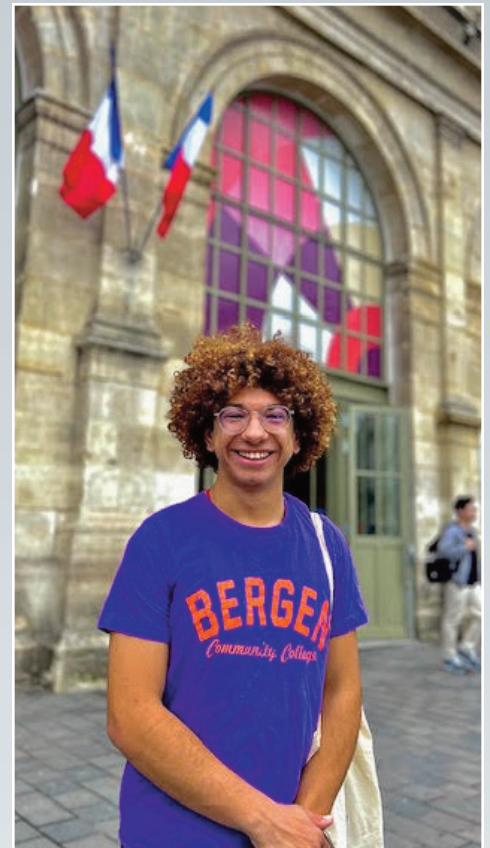
"In weaving those stories together, creating 'More Than One Story,' we're able to share those voices with the community and, perhaps, foster a deeper and more humanistic understanding of the past and the present," Eubank said.

The two professors have worked together on other verbatim theatre projects at the College, including *The Ancestor Journeys: Coming to Jones Road* (2023), which appeared as part of the *Coming to Jones Road* Project that spotlighted the work of Englewood artist Faith Ringgold. The overall project won the 2023 Stanley Katz Prize for Excellence in Public Humanities from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities.

"I find these stories to be compelling – not only for those who identify as an 'immigrant,' but for anyone who has ever seen themselves as an outsider," Jonaitis said. "These stories are important. They deserve to be heard."

The project reflects an important strategic theme for the College: creating belongingness through inclusivity. In an email to Professor Heidi Lieb, student Maria Rojas said the event achieved exactly that.

"The beautiful and motivating stories from other immigrants in the theater made me feel even more grateful for the amazing opportunity to be here and to have the journey of creating the life of my dreams," she wrote. ■



## Student Spotlight Joseph Liberti

Today, Bergen. Tomorrow, Broadway? Student Joseph Liberti believes the College will help get him there.

"I chose to study theatre at Bergen because of the enriching curriculum program that placed me up close and personal with my craft," he said. "I love the closeness between all aspects of my educational department and how we are all a large family."

Those relationships have opened other doors, too. Theatre Professor Jim Bumgardner recommended Liberti for a two-week study abroad experience in France this summer to study sustainability and environmentalism. Part of the Community Colleges in France Bootcamp initiative sponsored by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States, Liberti received a \$1,400 scholarship from the French Embassy and the Bergen Community College Foundation to attend the study abroad experience. He said entering an inactive quarry to learn about the history of mining in the Hauts-de-France region represented a major highlight.

"Now having a taste for this new area of study, I believe it will be a lifelong passion," he said. ■



## HACU Partnership Continues to Deepen

Aida Castro-Henix, Bergen's assistant director of the Educational Opportunity Fund, has earned admission into the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities' second cohort of the "Enlace" mid-level leadership program. The six-month program invites individuals dedicated to higher education and ready for advancement to senior level positions to expand their knowledge and skill sets to benefit themselves and their students. Only 54 faculty and staff from across the country earned entry into the program. Castro-Henix's selection represents the latest development in the College's expansive partnership with HACU, as the institution has prioritized the importance of deepening ties with the Hispanic community. Forty-four percent of Bergen students identify as Hispanic/Latino. ■



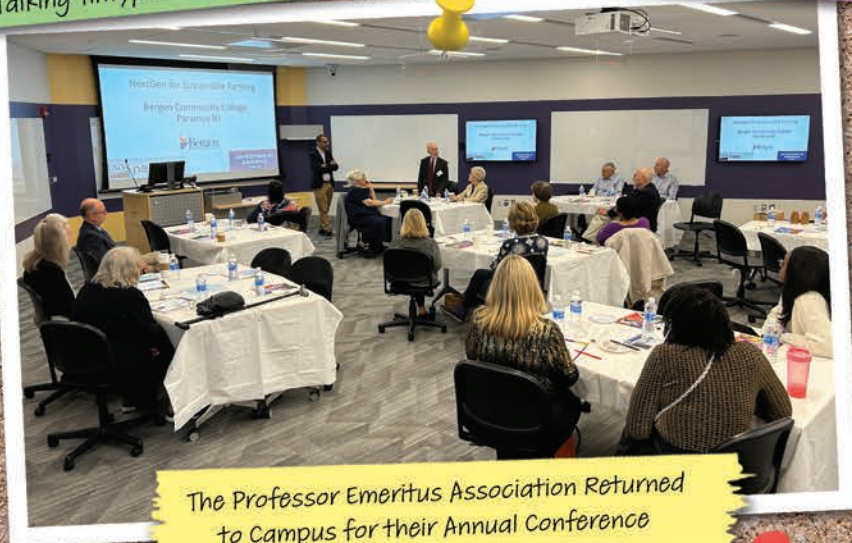
# Snapshotted



Professor Tim Blunk Viewing Artwork and Videos as Part of "Talking Tintypes" in Gallery Bergen



Paramedic Science Students Earned their Pins in September



The Professor Emeritus Association Returned to Campus for their Annual Conference



Club Day Opened Student Life's Programming for the Fall Semester



Students Painted in the Style of Fernando Botero During Hispanic Heritage Month



## Faculty Conference Sets the Table for Semester

The annual faculty conference featured discussions on student engagement, multicultural services, changes in higher education, A.I. and assessment of student learning. The event also included recognitions of recently promoted faculty and an ice cream social sponsored by culinary arts. Pictured: Professor Keith Chu (top), Professor Diana Constantino (bottom left) and Professor Aaron Morrissey and Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost Andrew Tomko (bottom right). ■

## Middle States Matters

Bergen is making itself available for comments from the public about the College in preparation for its periodic evaluation by its regional accrediting agency, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Comments must be in writing and should address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution and its academic programs.

The College will host a visit on March 23-25, 2025, by a team of peer reviewers who have been selected from comparable institutions. The team's charge is to review the institution's ongoing ability to meet the Commission's "Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation." Bergen has been accredited by the MSCHE since 1972.

MSCHE welcomes members of the public to provide feedback on Bergen's diligence in meeting these standards and requirements. Please submit feedback at [msche.org/submit-a-third-party-comment](https://msche.org/submit-a-third-party-comment) through December 1, 2024. ■



## Trustees' Executive Assistant Honored

The Association of Community College Trustees has selected Maria Ferrara, Bergen's executive assistant to the Board of Trustees and president, to receive the "professional board staff member – northeast region" award. The honor recognizes the top board support professional working at one of the hundreds of community colleges in the northeastern United States. Bergen Board of Trustees Chair Dorothy Blakeslee nominated Ferrara for the honor.

"We have nominated Maria not just in recognition of the work she completes on our college's behalf; we have nominated Maria because she represents an unsung member of the community college world that has provided immeasurable support for our sector's mission," Blakeslee said.

Ferrara joined Bergen in 2013. During her 11-year tenure, Ferrara has served as the confidential point-of-contact and liaison between the College's trustees, president and legal counsel. As executive assistant, Ferrara plays a significant role in events such as the institution's commencement ceremony, while leading special initiatives such as the College's "souper bowl" canned goods drive and the first "Black Women's Maternal Health Summit." In recognition of her efforts, Ferrara has received commendations from individuals such as New Jersey Gov. James J. McGreevey and the 2023 Bergen County Italian American Heritage Month Outstanding Community Service Award. She holds a Bachelor of Science in business management from Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck.

The ACCT awards program also recognized the nation's top trustees, equity programs, chief executive officers and faculty. Honorees will travel to ACCT's leadership congress in Seattle this month to receive their awards. ■



## Industry Partner Spotlight: Sanofi Visits with Bergen STEM and Health Students

Building relationships with regional industry partners to create pathways to employment for students represents a cornerstone of the College's external affairs efforts. The latest example of this work occurred when George Coutros, Sanofi director of state government relations (pictured far right), visited campus to explore the STEM Student Research Center, where students and faculty mentors showcased

various projects, and the region's only Health Professions Integrated Teaching Center. Sanofi, a multinational pharmaceutical company with offices in Ridgefield, identified Bergen as a potential partner for developing pipelines to jobs through workforce training programs. The New Jersey Business and Industry Association connected the College with company executives. ■

## Facilities and Safety Upgrades

Since the start of the fall semester, the College has completed, continued, or initiated numerous projects in areas that will continue to build "belongingness" and safety at Bergen.

Among them:

- New skylights in the S-wing have brought much-appreciated natural light into the space.
- Internal testing recently concluded on a radio communication upgrade that will improve first responders' ability to communicate on campus during an emergency.
- American School and University Magazine has named the One-Stop student services center as part of the "2024 Architectural Portfolio for Outstanding Design." As celebrated by First Lady Jill Biden two years ago, the one-stop represents a best practice in community colleges. ■



Vice President of Student Affairs A.J. Trump speaks in the One-Stop.



## LATINXCEO

## LatinxCEO Launches Fall Programming

The LatinxCEO program hosted a fall launch-party to coincide with the College's Hispanic Heritage Month celebration. The event offered students the opportunity to network, and get tips on branding from keynote speaker Red Shoe Movement founder and CEO Mariela Dabbah.

LatinxCEO began in 2023 and hosts various skill development workshops and corporate visits for students, leveraging relationships with more than a dozen partners. More than 200 students participate in the program's events. Linda Caruso, Bergen for Business director, said that the program has grown due to student feedback.

"They told us what types of professional development would be most helpful as they navigate their higher education and career journeys. We've built workshops around those insights," she said.

Student Joanna Molina said the program helped her grow and learn valuable skills she can use after college.

"I think it's just really nice to be in a community where there are people who share those values," she said. ■



## Getting Students to Graduation

Bergen has launched a new initiative that seeks to help students understand the benefits of taking 15 credits each semester. When followed, students taking 15 credits (or more) for four semesters will fast-track their graduation to a period of less than two years. The “Fifteen to Graduate” initiative, spearheaded by the Division of Student Affairs, responds to a growing number of students who enroll “full-time,” but take the minimum 12 credits required to achieve that status. The awareness campaign features social and digital media, printed materials and direct-to-student faculty and staff advisement. ■



## We are the Champions

The Bergen Bulldogs employee softball team completed their season with a championship, outlasting the team from Benjamin Moore 12-11 in seven innings this summer. Led by coaches Stephanie Weise, director of purchasing and services, and Kyran Guerra, public safety officer, the team took home the title as part of an undefeated run through the playoffs. Go Bulldogs! ■



## \$1,000 Scholarship Has Student Shooting for the Stars

Student Joen Concha has earned the 2024 Coca-Cola Military Leaders of Promise Scholar award from Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society of two-year colleges.

Concha, an engineering science student, joined the Army Reserve after graduating from high school and being deployed overseas. His interest in the sciences led to an assignment in the Corps of Engineers within the military branch. Concha hopes to pursue a career in the space exploration industry with NASA, SpaceX or Blue Origin.

“Humanity progresses not by a select few individuals in history, but it is done on the shoulders of those who came before,” Concha said. “Upon being selected as a 2024 Coca-Cola Military Leaders of Promise Scholar, I would like to give my thanks to PTK and my donors in supporting me, so that I may one day uphold someone else on my shoulders.”

The Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program helps new PTK members defray educational expenses while enrolled in associate degree programs. Scholars are encouraged to assume leadership roles by participating in programs and are selected based on scholastic achievement, community service and leadership potential.

The Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation provides \$200,000 in funding for the scholarships, with \$25,000 set aside for members who are veterans or active members of the United States military, including Concha. ■