

State of the College Address
Christopher M. Reber, President
College Service Day
Wednesday, August 22, 2024



Good morning! It is wonderful to be back together again with all of you as we begin a new academic year and a new chapter in the life and story of the College.

I thank all who have planned today's activities, with special thanks to Dr. Darryl Jones, Dr. Paula Roberson, and all of the members of the 2024 College Service Day Planning Committee. Thank you, Joe Caniglia, Jennifer Christopher, Dr. Chris Cody, Sharon Daughtry, Dr. Heather DeVries, TaraLyn Dugan, Linda Guastini, Dr. Darryl Jones, Dr. Ara Karakashian, Matt LaBrake, Deseree McFarlane, Ken Melewski, Amaalah Ogburn, Dr. Paula Roberson, Willie Shirer, Katie Sweeting, Richard Walker, and Elana Winslow!

For anyone I've missed, thank you also! We extend our sincere gratitude to all involved in planning this wonderful day together!

I would like to thank the 2024-25 officers and leaders of our All College Council and our Professional Associations, with whom my colleagues on the Cabinet, President's Executive Council, and all of us work closely and collaborate for the College community's welfare. We thank these colleagues for their leadership and support, and look forward to our shared contributions to the College's participatory governance process in the coming year. Colleagues, please stand as you are able.

From the All College Council, we thank Dr. Christopher Cody, Raffi Manjikian, and Sarah Teichman. From the HCCC Professional Association, we thank Michael Ferlise, Dr. Sirhan Abdullah, Bernard Adamitey, Karen Hosick, and Heather Connors. From the Academic Administrative Association, we thank Christine Petersen, Dr. Chris Conzen, Dr. Jose Lowe, and Angela Tuzzo. From the Support Staff Federation, we thank Patrick DelPiano, Felicia Allen, Tess Wiggins, Marta Cimillo, and Jacky Delemos. And from the Adjunct Faculty Federation, we thank Nancy Hynes Lasek and Qamar Raza.

Valued colleagues, thank you all for your dedicated and caring leadership!

I also thank members of the Cabinet, with whom I work so closely. To a person, these colleagues offer unceasing, caring, and inspirational leadership and support. Please stand when I call your name.

I thank Dr. Nicholas Chiaravalloti, Patricia Clay, Dr. Heather DeVries, Dr. Lisa Dougherty, Nicole Johnson, Dr. Darryl Jones, Anna Krupitskiy, Lori Margolin, Dr. Yeury Pujols, Alexa Riano, John Urgola, and Veronica Zeichner.

Thank you, senior leaders and valued colleagues!

And I thank all members of the President's Executive Council, who lead and support our community conscientiously and with the greatest caring and skill. Will members of the President's Executive Council please stand and accept our thanks!

The theme for today is "Empowering Faculty: A Day of Academic Challenge, Learning, and Reflection." What an appropriate theme for our time together today as we all take stock of the past year and beyond, and look forward to the coming year and our future! Thanks to the engagement of everyone, HCCC continues to achieve excellence in the delivery of our mission.

Today, I am sending my "2023-24 Annual Report of Goals and Outcomes Under My Leadership" to the Board of Trustees and the HCCC family. Very importantly, this is a report of *college-wide* initiatives and outcomes in service to our overarching priorities of student success; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

In my introduction to the report, I quoted Japanese writer Ryunosuke Satoro, who said, "Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."

Together, members of the HCCC family have reached and surpassed significant milestones on our collective journey to serve students and our community. Along the way, our College has enjoyed unprecedented recognition for excellence and best practices at the local, state, and national levels. Together, we celebrate a collective vision and shared values across the College that have helped us achieve outcomes greater than the sum of their parts.

Allow me to review some highlights of the last year and our shared aspirations for the new year and going forward. I'd like to celebrate a number of outcomes over the last year and beyond that are strong examples of the HCCC family's commitment to our shared mission, vision, and values in serving our students and communities.

There is so much to say, and not enough time to say nearly everything! I have chosen examples that illustrate a broad range of best-practice initiatives and outcomes – *across the college* – that we celebrate today. Please forgive me for the many outstanding achievements that will not be mentioned purely due to time constraints. They are all highly meaningful.

To begin, a central point of pride: In May, we celebrated 1,532 HCCC graduates at Red Bull Arena, a record number of graduates in the history of the College!

This is the culmination of our shared commitment to the overarching priority of student success that is the outcome of everyone's efforts. Our ATD *Dream Team*, led by Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Assessment, Dr. Heather DeVries – and colleagues and students across the College – continues to advance and achieve the goals of the HCCC Student Success Action Plan and beyond.

We celebrate phenomenal accomplishments in our continued development and expansion of the “Hudson Scholars” program. Under the leadership of Associate Dean for Advisement, Dr. Gretchen Schulthes, and Associate Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning, John Urgola, and with the engagement of colleagues throughout the college, Hudson Scholars has had an unprecedented impact on the retention of all students, and, particularly, on students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Outcomes of the program continue to grow.

For example, first-time, full-time Hudson Scholars students from the first fall 2021 program cohort achieved a 20% *two-year* graduation rate, surpassing even the highest three-year graduation rate in college history.

Approximately 40% of Hudson Scholars who began in the program’s first cohort in fall 2021 have graduated within three years, a significant increase over the college’s historic completion rates that did not reach this level of success even after a six-year period!

Thanks to the support of our Professional Association, we added to the College’s capacity to continue scaling the Hudson Scholars program model through the Faculty Mentor project that debuted last year. We thank and celebrate fourteen faculty who served as Faculty Mentors for third-year Hudson Scholars students last year.

Thank, you, Professors Robin Anderson, Jonathan Cabrera, Sharon Daughtry, Dr. Nadia Hedhli, Dr. Gabriel Holder, Dr. Jerry Lamb, Raffi Manjikian, Craig McLaughlin, Dr. Jihan Nakhla, Dr. Josue Perez, Dr. Rafaella Pernice, Laura Samuelsen, Jeremiah Teipen, and Elana Winslow!

By all accounts, the Faculty Mentor experience was appreciated by all and highly successful. Based upon surveys and other input of Faculty Mentors and students, the number of Faculty Mentors for the coming year is increasing to 22.

We welcome new 2024-25 Faculty Mentors: Claudia Delgado, Issam El-Achkar, Michael Ferlise, Joseph Gallo, Daniel Ondieki, Dr. Angela Pack, Sovi Pujols, Dr. Fatma Tat, Susannah Wexler, and Dr. Benedetto Youssef. Thank you, valued faculty colleagues!

And we thank Vice President Nicholas Chiaravalloti, Senior Vice President Lisa Dougherty, and their colleagues for their successful application for \$1 million in federal Congressionally Directed Spending to support and further scale the Hudson Scholars program.

The Hudson Scholars program now engages 21% of all HCCC matriculated students, and that proportion will increase significantly beginning this semester, when it is estimated that 60% of fall 2024 incoming students will be served through the Hudson Scholars model, including all entering first-time, full-time students.

The Hudson Scholars model is based upon four pillars inspired by those of our Educational Opportunity Fund, or EOF program:

- Personal and intensive academic advising, coaching, and mentoring;
- Financial stipends awarded for achievement of specific monthly academic milestones;
- High-impact educational experiences such as undergraduate research, internships, field trips, student leadership, and many others; and,
- Systemic use of an early alert system to inform advisors, mentors, and coaches of concerns and student accomplishments as soon as they surface.

Last year, with the support and guidance of Dean of Student Success Dr. Bernadette So, EOF Director Dr. Jose Lowe and his team achieved continued growth and success of the EOF program, serving over 300 students, a 50% increase over the prior year. Remarkably, the EOF program's annual retention rate last year was 87.9%!

Hudson Scholars and EOF have become the centerpiece of our Student Success Action Plan. And we have achieved the multiple-year goals of the Student Success Action Plan one year early. We thank Dr. Heather DeVries for her inspirational leadership of our Achieving the Dream and college-wide student success and strategic planning initiatives!

Last spring, our student success outcomes led to HCCC's recognition as an *Achieving the Dream Leader College of Distinction*, a recognition held by only a select group of Achieving the Dream network colleges. Hudson County Community College's Leader College of Distinction recognition comes one year after HCCC received Leader College status from Achieving the Dream in 2023. HCCC received both Leader College and Leader College of Distinction status on the earliest timeline possible.

We thank Dr. Heather DeVries and colleagues in our schools and across the college in their leadership and support of college-wide assessment and accreditation.

We celebrate the reapproval of HCCC's Nursing Program by the New Jersey Board of Education, and reaffirmation of accreditation by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing. Our Nursing Program's accreditation was reaffirmed for a full eight-year term. Congratulations, Dr. Catherine Sirangelo, Dr. Lori Byrd, and all nursing colleagues!

Our Associate of Applied Science in Paramedic Science program, offered in conjunction with Robert Wood Johnson/Barnabas Health, was reaffirmed for a five-year term by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs. Congratulations Dr. Sirangelo, Program Director Evan Schwarz, and their colleagues.

Our Associate of Science in Radiography Program received eight-year reaffirmation of accreditation by the Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology. Congratulations and thank

you, Dean Sirangelo, Director of Radiography Cheryl Cashell, Instructor of Radiography Inez Cruz, and Administrative Assistant Kathey Rodriguez.

We also celebrate the successful three-day visit to HCCC of the American Culinary Federation Education Foundation, which conducted a comprehensive analysis of the college's Culinary Arts and Baking & Pastry programs. Full seven-year reaffirmation of *exemplary* accreditation was awarded to the AAS in Culinary Arts; AAS in Culinary Arts Baking and Pastry Option; Certificate in Culinary Arts; and Certificate in Baking and Pastry programs. Congratulations Dr. Ara Karakashian, Assistant Professor Courtney Payne, Instructor Marissa Lontoc, and Administrative Support Specialist Sharon Moise!

We celebrate college-wide engagement in the development of HCCC's 2024-29 Strategic Plan that is currently underway. Led by Associate Vice President Dr. Heather DeVries, we are again working with strategic planning facilitator Dr. James Davy, who leads Rutgers University's Center for Applied Appreciative Inquiry and is a Distinguished Practitioner in Residence at Rutgers. Dr. Davy also worked with the College during the writing of our 2021-24 *Hudson is Home! Strategic Plan*. Dr. Davy uses a strengths-based approach in facilitating strategic planning. He uses the acronym SOAR, standing for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results, to describe this appreciative inquiry approach. Engagement of the entire college community is integral to this process.

Dr. DeVries is currently assembling a cross-functional Core Strategic Planning Team and we are preparing for robust participation of internal and external stakeholders at college-wide open fora. As part of this comprehensive work, we are finalizing three sub-plans. The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan; the Academic Plan; and the Student Success Action Plan are foundational to the larger college-wide plan. We are working to ensure there is alignment between the three sub-plans and the college-wide strategic plan. Thank you for your stellar leadership, Heather!

We celebrate and thank faculty and staff throughout the college in their leadership and support for the development of new short-term, industry-recognized credentials. We thank Assistant Professor of Engineering Science Dr. Clive Li for his development of a Proficiency Certificate in Metalworking that is aligned with strong labor outcomes in the advanced manufacturing and construction management fields.

We thank Associate Professor of Construction Management Dr. Azhar Mahmood for his development of micro-certificate courses offered through the School of Continuing Education and Workforce Development. Successful completion of these courses automatically articulates credit for academic certificates in Construction Management and the Associate of Applied Science degree in Construction Management.

We thank Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences Dr. Alison Wakefield, and Professor of Criminal Justice Cathie Seidman, for their development of two articulation agreements through which individuals who complete the Basic Course for Police Officers, or Basic Course for Corrections Officers, earn credits toward the HCCC Associate of Science in Criminal Justice degree.

And we thank School of Nursing and Health Professions faculty and staff for their leadership to expand HCCC's inventory of clinical and internship sites.

As we continue to move the needle on college-wide student retention and completion, we remain vigilant in our access mission and our goals of growing enrollment in on-ground, remote, *and* fully online modalities, each of which provides opportunities for access and success to different members of the larger community in Hudson County and beyond.

We celebrate the continued expansion of fully online programs. Last year, six new fully online programs were developed, bringing the total number of HCCC fully online programs to 17. Five additional fully online programs will be added soon.

HCCC reached an all-time high in online course enrollment last spring with plans to recruit more fully online students in the coming years. In spring 2024, 36% of HCCC's total student headcount, or 2,439 students, were enrolled in one or more online courses. 13%, or 886 students, were enrolled exclusively in online courses, and 21% of the college's total credit production came from online course enrollment. This growth is a priority in our efforts to increase access to and participation in HCCC educational programs.

And we are immensely proud of the continuous improvement in student success outcomes of Hudson Online and the HCCC Center for Online Learning under the leadership of Executive Director Matt LaBrake and his dedicated colleagues. Last year, student success in online learning, as determined by average course grade, increased by 10% over the preceding year. Students enrolled in online courses are now achieving average course grades that are equal to or higher than their onsite peers in the same courses, eliminating an historic achievement gap between online and on-site teaching and learning modalities. Thank you, Matt and team, and colleagues across the college!

We thank Director of Open Educational Resources Michael Whelpley, Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Darryl Jones, and their colleagues for the development of the College's new Textbook Equity Strategic Plan that will guide efforts across the curriculum and in all modalities to expand the use of OER and the creation of zero-cost textbook courses in which students do not need to purchase a textbook.

Last year, 399 zero-cost textbook course sections were offered that saved students a collective \$640,000. The number of zero-cost textbook course sections increased by 27% last year. We are enormously pleased to have developed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Professional Association to support faculty in the development of zero-cost textbook sections for every HCCC course and program over the next two years. The MOU was recently ratified by the Professional Association and approved by the Board of Trustees just last week.

We all own and take pride in our collective engagement around the overarching priority of diversity, equity and inclusion. To begin, we are proud and grateful for the leadership of Director of

Accessibility Services Danielle Lopez, Coordinator Karine Davis, and Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Dr. Yeurys Pujols.

Last year, the Office of Accessibility Services supported more than 300 students with accommodations and services to promote their academic, personal, and career success. Services include testing accommodations, note-taking services, captioning services, sign language interpretation, and many others.

Danielle and her colleagues have developed a new HCCC Accessibility Advisory Committee charged with supporting continuous improvement in addressing accessibility-related concerns in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act of 1990; the ADA Amendments Act of 2008; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; and Title II of the Civil Rights Act on Public Accommodations. Thank you, dedicated colleagues!

We celebrate our collective efforts to promote growth in employee diversity in order to better align with our student diversity. Of full-time HCCC employees, 38% identify as white, 28% as Hispanic, 17% as African American, and 10% as Asian. New full-time hires last year were 38% Hispanic, 38% African American, and 20% White. New adjunct faculty were 25% White, 22% Hispanic, 20% African American, and 17% Asian. New part-time employees were 43% Hispanic, 24% White, 12% African American, and 12% Asian.

We are very proud of the College's participation in the 2023-24 Racial Equity Leadership Academy, or RELA, a year-long program sponsored by Achieving the Dream and the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center. The program's goal was to identify an area of priority, or a Racial Equity Change Effort, to focus our work. HCCC's RELA team created and conducted surveys and follow-up focus groups of HCCC's Black and African American male students. Team members reviewed institutional data and results of surveys and focus groups to identify equity gaps and interventions. The principal finding was the need to leverage the activities of the Hudson Scholars program to support the retention and completion of HCCC's African American male students.

In the first three years of the Hudson Scholars program, historic equity gaps for Hispanic and African American students has been reduced by 70% for those students participating in the Hudson Scholars program. We thank RELA core team members Dr. Darryl Jones, Anna Krupitskiy, Dr. Yeurys Pujols, Dr. Jeanne Baptiste, and yours truly. And we thank our extended RELA team that also included Dr. Heather DeVries, Dr. Jerry Lamb, Dr. Christopher Conzen, Dr. Lisa Dougherty, John Scanlon, John Urgola, and Dr. Gretchen Schulthes!

We celebrate Associate Professor of Business Elana Winslow in her application to, and acceptance to participate in, the December 2024 Yad Vashem Seminar for Campus Educators in Jerusalem. Yad Vashem is the leading Holocaust memorial, research, museum, and educational center in the world. Elana is one of just 20 citizens globally to have been selected to attend the all-expenses-paid Yad Vashem Seminar for Campus Educators. Discussions will focus on how Holocaust education can help

students contextualize current events and the particular circumstances on our campuses. Congratulations, and thanks for all you do, Elana!

Late last fall, HCCC faculty, staff and students began the strategic planning process for a new five-year DEI Action Plan. Those involved are everywhere! They include staff of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; the President's Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; representatives of the Offices of Academic Affairs, Institutional Research and Planning, Human Resources, Student Life and Leadership, and many others.

The planning process is again informed by a recently administered college-wide institutional climate survey completed by more than 800 members of the HCCC family. These and other processes have informed the development of goals, objectives, and our collective vision going forward. We thank Vice President for DEI, Dr. Yeurys Pujols, and his team; PACDEI co-chairs Raffi Manjikian and Diana Galvez, and so many others.

We celebrate the phenomenal success of HCCC's third annual Teaching and Learning Symposium on Social Justice in Higher Education held in March 2024. Under the leadership of Dr. Paula Roberson, HCCC again achieved record attendance of over 1,400 participants in the four-day symposium, representing 31 states, four foreign countries, 114 four-year colleges and universities, 47 community colleges, and 43 civic and governmental organizations. More than 230 HCCC trustees, students, faculty and staff participated in sessions led by 62 presenters.

This virtual national convening has become a hallmark of the college's celebrated commitment to DEI. Thank you, and congratulations, Paula!

We celebrate the initiatives of the HCCC Latino Advisory Council and the African American Community Outreach Committee. Dr. Nicholas Chiaravalloti is organizing a similar council of Muslim and Asian community members.

We thank Board of Trustees Vice Chair Pamela Gardner for her leadership of the African American Outreach Committee, including her leadership for planning and offering HCCC's 2024 Juneteenth Celebration that included dance, song, spoken words and other special remarks. And we thank our friend and colleague, Wendy Martinez, for her leadership and support of the HCCC Latino Advisory Council, including the second annual Hudson Es Su Casa Educational and Community Fair held at the North Hudson Campus last October. We also thank North Hudson Campus Executive Director Joe Caniglia and his team for their support of this and so many other successful events. Approximately 500 people have attended this program over the past two years.

We thank Director of Continuing Education and Workforce Development Chastity Farrell and her School of Continuing Education and Workforce Development colleagues for their leadership of HCCC's 11th annual Girls in Technology Symposium held in March 2024. This event brought together more than 200 students and teachers for a full day of engaging activities designed to spark curiosity and ignite a passion for technology in young women.

We thank Vice President for Human Resources Anna Krupitskiy, the All College Council, Professional Association, and colleagues across the college who are leading the development and refinement of college policies and procedures designed to promote and ensure HCCC best practices. During the past year, these included the Institutional Data Governance Policy, Policy on Student Code of Conduct, Position Review Procedure, Demonstration and Protest Policy, Amended Lactation Policy, Amended Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy, Amended Sex Discrimination and Title IX Policy, and Student Mental Health Leave policy. The HCCC Employee Handbook and Faculty Handbook are also being updated.

We thank Dean of Financial Aid Sylvia Mendoza and her team in their growing initiatives to assist students in securing employment to finance their education. During 2023-24, nearly 200 HCCC students were successfully placed into work-study positions, a 30% increase in placements. The students earned nearly \$500,000 in collective allocated funds representing a 12% funding increase over the previous academic year.

We are enormously proud of the number of financial aid opportunities offered to nearly all of our students. Last year, 1,307 students benefitted from the Community College Opportunity Grant, or CCOG, receiving a collective \$3 million in disbursed funds. HCCC continues to lead all New Jersey community colleges in the number of students served and dollars awarded through CCOG.

Sylvia Mendoza and her dedicated colleagues in the Office of Financial Aid distributed more than \$33 million in all forms of aid, benefitting approximately 6,000 students during 2023-24. This represents a 9.74% increase over the previous year. More than \$21 million in Pell grants assisted approximately 4,700 students, representing a 9.64% increase. And over \$8.2 million in state grants benefitted more than 4,000 students, representing an 11.6% increase in support.

Approximately \$4.8 million in NJ Tuition Aid Grant, or TAG funding, was disbursed, a 19.11% increase, and there was more than a 21% increase in NJ STAR scholarship funding distributed last year to HCCC students. The Office of Financial Aid processed 10,711 FAFSA applications last year, an 8% increase over the previous year. Wow! Thank you, Financial Aid colleagues!

We celebrate the continued growth and development of HCCC's participation in the New Jersey Pay It Forward Program, a first-of-its-kind program that provides no-fee, no-interest loans for students. A principal goal of the program is to narrow equity gaps among members of historically marginalized communities.

Last year, 79 HCCC students received a New Jersey Pay It Forward loan amounting to a collective \$626,000, marking a significant increase from the previous year. Both the number of students participating, and the total funding provided through certified loans, experienced remarkable increases of 70% and 71%, respectively. In 2023, 19 nursing program graduates participated in NJ Pay it Forward, increasing to 34 graduates this year.

We are excited and grateful for the leadership of HCCC's inaugural Director of Veteran and International Student Services Jamilah Moudiab, who is leading the expansion of activities to recruit and retain Veterans and international students going forward. You're already making a huge impact, Jamilah! Thank you!

We salute and thank Executive Director of Early College Programs, Dr. Chris Conzen, his phenomenal team, and colleagues across the college for their leadership and support of our growing Early College program. For the first time in the history of the program, all students at a high school – the Hudson County Schools of Technology – are now able to earn an associate degree upon high school graduation.

Twenty-one high school students earned their HCCC associate degree in May in addition to their high school diplomas several weeks later. Most participated in our Commencement Ceremony at Red Bull Arena. Most or all of these students are now beginning baccalaureate study at four-year colleges and universities with junior status. Of these Early College graduates, six students attended Hudson County Schools of Technology, and 15 attended Bayonne High School.

And there are currently 274 students across seven high schools that are following a degree track, with 46 of those students expected to graduate HCCC in 2025, and that number will continue to grow, year after year.

We are enormously proud of the continuously growing and successful initiatives in our HCCC School of Continuing Education and Workforce Development under the leadership of Associate Vice President Lori Margolin with the support of Vice President Nicholas Chiaravalloti.

Last spring, HCCC was awarded a four-year, \$1.75 million U.S. Department of Labor *Strengthening Community Colleges Training Grant*. HCCC was one of only 16 lead community colleges nationwide to be awarded a grant, and the only college from New Jersey. The grant is supporting the continued growth of our award-winning *Gateway to Innovation* program that offers basic support for students through enhanced access to benefits and one-on-one financial counseling; support for HCCC alumni with access to recession-resistant employment and continuous learning opportunities; expanded access to short-term health care credentials targeted at dislocated low-wage workers from retail, service, and hospitality sectors, and low-wage essential workers in communities of color; and creation of projects aligned with recession-resistant industries through deep employer engagement in finance and information technology career pathways.

The HCCC *Gateway to Innovation* program began in 2021 with an \$850,000 investment from JPMorgan Chase that later was increased to more than \$1 million. "It Takes a Village," as we often say, to achieve outcomes like this. We especially thank Lori Margolin, Director of Workforce Pathways Anita Belle, Gateway to Innovation Associate Director Luarice Dukes, Business Developer Dan Brookes, Student Success Coach Evani Greene, Career and Job Placement Manager Maria Lita Sarmiento, Gateway to Innovation Healthcare Coordinator Denisse Carrasco, and many others.

The HCCC JUSTice program, led by Lori Margolin and Dr. Heather DeVries, was recognized last spring as a national Bellwether College Consortium Top 10 Finalist. The program was also recognized with the 2023-24 Innovation of the Year Award by the League for Innovation in the Community College.

Our Academic and Workforce Pathways Program for incarcerated students, led by Director of Workforce Pathways Anita Belle and supported by Student Success Coaches Fabiola Ocean and Karina Arango, continued to enjoy great success during its third year. To date, 256 students enrolled in the degree program have earned a collective GPA of 3.71. Twenty of these students have now been released from jail, and, of these, 12 are continuing their studies at HCCC.

By every measure, HCCC is meeting or exceeding standard benchmarks for this student population, including a 59% completion rate for HCCC incarcerated students compared to 42% nationwide. Incarcerated individuals who enroll at HCCC are immediately connected with academic and support services, with particular support offered through the Hudson Helps Resource Center including food pantry services when needed.

HCCC's reentry student partnership with the New Jersey Reentry Corporation has grown significantly since its inception in 2021. We thank Dr. Heather DeVries for her guidance, planning, and advocacy.

Led by Anita Belle and Student Success Coach Marian Betancourt, nearly 500 students have enrolled in the program to date. HCCC programs offered to reentry students include Culinary Hot Foods Proficiency Certificate, Certified Welding, Certified Phlebotomy Technician, GED Preparation, Summer Training Institute for Court-involved Youth, and Computer Basics. Of the classes attempted, 69% have been completed and 209 students have earned an industry-recognized credential.

In summer 2023 and again this summer, HCCC administered the Summer Training Institute for Court-Involved Youth between the ages of 18 and 28. 230 students participated and nearly all – 96% -- completed the program.

In May, HCCC was honored to host a first-ever Justice Education Summit, entitled, "Education as a Pathway for Upward Social and Economic Mobility." The full-day program featured many speakers and panelists, including Former New Jersey Governor and NJ Reentry Corporation Executive Director James McGreevey, Hudson County Department of Family Services and Reintegration Director Frank Mazza, Hudson County Commissioner William O'Dea, NJ Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz, NJ Assistant Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Dr. Yolanda Allen, NJ Council of County Colleges President Dr. Aaron Fichtner, and others.

Of course, our students are the most important priority for all of us! We celebrate the engagement of hundreds of students in on- and off-campus conferences and activities last year.

These included the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities; Association of Student Governments of America; Association of Community College Trustees National Legislative Summit; Harriot Tubman House Tour; MLK Holiday Luncheon presented by Jersey City NAACP; Phi Theta

Kappa Middle States Region Convention and national Catalyst Convention; National Model United Nations in New York City; NJ League for Nursing; NJ State Nurses Association Convention; THRIVE Conference at Middlesex College, and many others.

HCCC's more than 40 student organizations led and participated in record-breaking engagement and activity during 2023-24. Student clubs hosted more than 300 events and meetings throughout the year, a significant increase over the previous year. Myriad opportunities for student leadership and engagement were offered by academic student organizations, their advisors, and other faculty and staff.

These include the Beta Alpha Phi Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society; Sigma Kappa Delta English Honor Society; HCCC Chapter of the Society of Physics Students; Chemistry Honor Society; American Chemical Society; Computer Science Club; Environmental Club; Art Club; Business and Accounting Club; Culinary Club; Model UN; Latin Society Club; and many others.

We celebrate Assistant Professor of Engineering Science Dr. Clive Li and HCCC students Camila Pazmino Izquierdo and Dillon Singh, who were selected as members of only twelve finalist teams nationwide for the Community College Innovation Challenge sponsored by the National Science Foundation and the American Association of Community Colleges. Dr. Li and his students were invited to participate in the Innovation Challenge Boot Camp held in June 2024 in Washington, DC. Their presentation was attended by United States Senators, members of the House of Representatives, other national leaders, and college and university students, faculty, and staff, among others.

We celebrate many, many research and experiential learning opportunities that engaged HCCC students across the curriculum last year. Examples include:

- Many student trips to New York City museums and galleries led by Professors Laurie Riccadonna and Jeremiah Teipen, including Chelsea Galleries, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, Guggenheim Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, MANA Contemporary, and more.
- Also led by Laurie and Jeremiah was the General Pencil Mural Project. HCCC partnered with General Pencil Company in Jersey City to engage students in creating pencil drawings that were enlarged and printed on canvas, and which are now on display, adorning the factory where the pencils are manufactured.
- Associate Professor Robin Anderson engaged students in our Early Childhood programs in community-based early childhood learning experiences in a Union City early childhood center and in school districts throughout Hudson County.
- Dr. Clive Li and his STEM colleagues engaged local high school students with opportunities to conduct seven-week, hands-on research. Guided by experienced

faculty and staff, students used sophisticated laboratories to solve industrial or fundamental research problems.

- Culinary Arts faculty and staff engaged more than 50 students in visits to upscale restaurants in New York City for a multi-course tasting event.
- And Culinary faculty and staff engaged students in 16 Fridays of Service for the HCCC Foundation Subscription Dining Series last year. More than 50 students and three faculty participated in the delivery of a unique guest experience for HCCC donors and community members.
- Our ESL Resource Center colleagues attended two plays with HCCC students that were presented by the Educational Theatre of New York, a theater company that produces plays specifically for English language learners. Twelve students attended the plays with seven faculty and staff.

Central to our support of students is our HCCC Culture of Care. We celebrate Hudson Helps Resource Center Director Katherine Morales, her staff, and HCCC family members across the college in community partnerships to serve HCCC students. Examples include the Hudson County Department of Family Services, which connects qualified students to state benefits including SNAP, Medicaid, Medicare, WIC, TANF, and more.

HCCC students also receive housing assistance including back rent, forward rent, security deposit, and other related services. Additional community agency partnerships include Hoboken Family Planning, STAR Program, Department of Health and Human Services, Hudson Pride, Bridgeway, NJCU, Saint Peter's University, and others.

From the bottom of our hearts, we thank Director of Mental Health and Wellness Doreen Pontius and her team members in their offering of more than 3,000 mental health and wellness counseling appointments during 2023-24, an increase of 20% over the previous year. We further celebrate Doreen and her team in their recruitment and engagement of MSW graduate students in field experience at the Hudson Helps Resource Center. Fifteen MSW graduate students from Fordham University, NYU, and Rutgers University provided individual case-management services for HCCC students last year.

We thank and celebrate the HCCC Culinary Club and Culinary Arts faculty and students for their continued preparation of nutritious, high-quality meals for the Hudson Helps Resource Center's Food Pantries. Since July 2020, over 20,000 meals have been prepared and made available to HCCC community members. Culinary Club students also provided hot soup on Wednesdays last year, serving over 1,000 cups of soup to appreciative students, faculty, and staff. Thank you, Dr. Ara Karakashian, faculty and staff colleagues, and students!

We are proud of the myriad professional development activities of faculty and staff last year in all parts of the college. We celebrate books, book chapters, presentations at professional meetings, attendance and engagement in professional associations and activities, advanced credential attainment, workshops, speakers, and other outcomes.

During 2023-24, 87 HCCC faculty and staff utilized professional development funding, a 27% increase over the previous year. This included 53 employees pursuing advanced professional degrees, a 15% increase. Of these, 24 faculty and staff utilized professional development funding in their pursuit of a doctoral degree, a 26% increase over the previous year. A total of \$500,082 was provided last year to employees in support of their approved professional development plans, representing a 24% increase over the previous year and a whopping 130% increase over the last five years.

We thank Director of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Innovation Dr. Paula Roberson; Director of Faculty and Staff Development Amaal Ogburn; the President's Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; the Office of DEI; Vice President Anna Krupitskiy and her team in the Office of Human Resources, and many others for their leadership and support of professional development.

We celebrate all faculty and staff who have participated in certificate programs offered by our partner, the Association of College and University Educators, or ACUE.

We celebrate Associate Dean of Career and Transfer Pathways Jennifer Valcarcel, Transfer Pathways Coordinator Rimsha Bazaid, and colleagues across the college in their offering of programs and services to support students who are planning to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. These include presentations, fairs, trips and activities to promote pathways to four-year institutions. Last spring, HCCC hosted two transfer fairs involving 48 colleges and universities and nearly 200 HCCC students.

Under Jennifer's leadership, the HCCC Transfer Council has met monthly for the past three years and has established subcommittees focused on Early College, Student Engagement for ESL, Veterans and International Students, Transfer Agreement Review, and Enrollment. Each subcommittee has developed specific goals and measurable outcomes focused on best practices.

We thank Senior Vice President Dr. Lisa Dougherty and her team for their development of the HCCC-NJCU CONNECT program that streamlines the transfer process from HCCC to NJCU, ensuring students can transfer credits seamlessly and without accumulating excess credits. The initiative addresses the common challenge of non-transferable credits by providing a clear, barrier-free pathway and support through a dedicated transfer counselor. HCCC-NJCU CONNECT has become our model for improving transfer pathways to all HCCC four-year and graduate partner institutions.

We celebrate HCCC's continued engagement in the 2023-25 cohort of Generation Hope's FamilyU program under the leadership of Hudson Helps Resource Center Director Katherine Morales. Outcomes to date include an enhanced and modernized lactation policy, better data collection

about student parents, and the recent onboarding of our new Student Parent Fellow, Shanice Acevedo, who is being compensated by Generation Hope to serve HCCC student parents and join our FamilyU core team.

We thank Dr. Lisa Dougherty and her team for their engagement in the Improving Economic Mobility for Adult Learners Initiative, a partnership of HCCC with Jobs for the Future and Achieving the Dream. This is a year-long, grant-funded program that is helping us reach thousands of citizens including former HCCC students who have completed some college credits, but not a degree. HCCC received \$200,000 through this project and the New Jersey *Some College, No Degree* project. The project seeks to simplify and streamline HCCC's prior learning assessment policies and procedures so that students can accelerate progress towards a degree.

We celebrate and thank Dean of STEM Dr. Burl Yearwood; Construction Management Program Coordinator and Associate Professor of STEM Dr. Azhar Mahmood; and their colleagues in their development of articulation agreements with multiple trade unions. These include Bricklayers, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers IBEW 102 and IBEW 269, Ironworkers Local 399, Eastern Atlantic States Carpenters Technical Centers, Sheet Metal Workers Local 25, and International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825.

We of course celebrate the recent groundbreaking of our new Center for Student Success that is expected to open in fall 2026. The eleven-story, 160,000 square-foot, nearly \$100 million facility will house state-of-the-art active learning classrooms and spaces, offices for one-stop student support services, Center for Business and Industry, University Center for four-year university partnership programs, Veterans Center, NCAA regulation gymnasium and wellness center, black box theater, assembly space, and other academic and student life activities.

We thank Dr. Nicholas Chiaravalloti, the HCCC Board of Trustees Capital Projects Advisory Committee, and so many others for their leadership in bringing this long dreamed and planned project to fruition in addition to the now-under-construction new parking lot with multi-level stackers that will open in October!

We further thank Vice President Chiaravalloti, members of the Capital Projects Advisory Committee, Executive Director of Engineering and Operations Ilya Ashmyan, and others in the design and implementation of the HCCC Wayfinding project that includes bold and consistent campus signage, landscaping, and other amenities that will help HCCC facilities and programs be prominent in the emerging transformation of Journal Square. Phase One of this project in the Culinary Arts Center and Culinary Park Plaza has been completed; phases 2, 3 and 4 are planned and will be fully completed before the Center for Student Success opens in fall 2026.

We thank Dr. Chiaravalloti and Dean of Students Dr. David Clark for co-chairing our Athletics, Intramurals, and Club Sports Task Force that has planned our new athletics program to commence with the opening of the new gymnasium in fall 2026. Our Board of Trustees has approved a five-

year plan to eventually develop 10 varsity sports. We expect to search for a new Director of HCCC Athletics during the coming year.

These initiatives and outcomes are occurring in an institution that is also fiscally strong. We thank Vice President for Business and Finance and Chief Financial Officer Veronica Zeichner and her talented team for their leadership of our business and financial operations. Again this year, the College has recorded a positive revenue variance over fiscal year 2024 budgeted revenue; net revenue of more than \$1 million during 2023-24; a projected increase in the college's net position for the sixth consecutive year; and a clean audit report for fiscal year 2023 with no management issues or comments for the eighth consecutive year.

Going forward, it is important to understand that we are planning for increased financial pressures at the county and state funding levels, and continued enrollment management challenges. These are at the center of our planning and leadership, as are those things we *have* the ability to in part control; namely, student enrollment, retention, and external funding through gifts and grants. These have been and will continue to be college priorities that everyone owns and everyone advances.

We thank and celebrate the strong leadership of Dean of Enrollment Services Matt Fessler, all members of our exemplary Enrollment Management Council, and all members of the HCCC family as enrollment is the outcome of everyone's efforts.

You have already heard a great deal about our leadership, support, and outcomes for student retention.

Recruitment initiatives have also been comprehensive and successful. During 2023-24, full-time equivalent credit enrollment – credit hours earned by students throughout the year – increased by an overall total of 4.9%. Total annual credit and noncredit *headcount* enrollment reached 20,257 individual students, an increase of 479 students, or 2.4%.

Very notably, *Early College* FTE enrollment increased by 18% last year, and *new student enrollment* increased by 9.6%. Fall 2023 applications increased by 13.43%, and spring 2024 applications increased by over 22%.

Congratulations and thanks to everyone! It Takes a Village! Let's keep this success going!

With regard to external funding, we are seeing remarkable growth in the College's applications for, and receipt of, grant funding. Nearly \$5 million in grant funding was awarded to HCCC projects in 2023-24, compared to \$2.8 million in the previous year. Allow me to share several highlights.

The National Science Foundation awarded \$600,000 to the College's Cybersecurity Center and program. This is our second NSF grant, with a third grant proposal in development. We thank Dean of STEM Dr. Burl Yearwood, and STEM Professors Faisal Aljamal and Yavuz Guner.

The United States Department of Labor awarded \$1.75 million to HCCC's School of Continuing Education and Workforce Development to create career pathways in the financial services and technology sectors. This is a significant and long-sought achievement for Associate Vice President for Continuing Education and Workforce Development Lori Margolin, Workforce Pathways Director Anita Belle, Gateway to Innovation Associate Director Laurice Dukes, and their teams.

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development awarded \$216,000 to our School of Continuing Education and Workforce Development to support pre-apprenticeships in career education; and \$72,000 to support growing apprenticeships in nontraditional sectors. Provident Bank Foundation selected HCCC to receive its largest gift award of \$100,000 last year for the Hudson Scholars program. We thank Vice President for Advancement and Communications Nicole Johnson and her team.

The Aspen Institute awarded CEWD \$50,000 in support of the postsecondary Success for Parent Initiative, and Citizens Bank Foundation awarded \$25,000 in support of the Gateway to Innovation program. The Tepper Foundation, in collaboration with the New Jersey Council of County Colleges, awarded \$80,000 to the Hudson Helps Resource Center to support student basic needs. This project is led by Hudson Helps Resource Center Director Katherine Morales.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection allocated \$109,000 through the Trees for Schools Program for HCCC tree planting and landscaping. This project is led by Executive Director of Engineering and Operations Illya Ashmyan.

And we celebrate an award from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities to launch the Hudson Oral Histories project, led by Associate Professor of History Tony Acevedo, and Assistant Professor of English Dr. Sean Egan.

We also thank and congratulate Foundation Art Collection Curator Dr. Andrea Siegel for her work that received an award from the Jersey City Arts and Culture Trust Fund in support of the HCCC Foundation Art Collection, and many "firsts" for the collection with respect to gifts of art, and recognitions and awards associated with our collection, which now numbers over 2,000 objects.

These and many more outcomes are the result of leadership across the college, and growing partnerships with a diversity of funders including county, state, federal, and private foundations representing a continuing upward trend of collaborations and outcomes over the past several years. We thank Vice President for Advancement and Communications Nicole Johnson, Director of Grants and Sponsored Programs R.M. Stineman, Assistant Vice President for Communications Jennifer Christopher, Director of Strategic Marketing Michael Byrne, and their dedicated colleagues for leadership and support of this important work.

And we celebrate the college's first Employee Giving Campaign launched last year. To date, approximately 50 employees have pledged or donated a collective nearly \$30,000 to support HCCC students and programs. These include recurring employee gifts funded through ongoing payroll

deduction. We thank all of our generous and caring colleagues for supporting our students and mission, and we look forward to the continued growth of our employee giving program this year and going forward.

During the coming year, we will plan for the College's year-long 50th Anniversary Celebration to be held in 2025-26. The anniversary will provide many opportunities to share historic milestones, significant college achievements, and myriad innovative firsts since HCCC opened its doors in 1974 and graduated its first class in 1976. The celebration will also build support for the future by engaging alumni and donors, cultivating new supporters, and making a compelling case for investing in the college's next 50 years.

Nicole Johnson and her team have developed an anniversary celebration communications plan and have assembled a 50th Anniversary Celebration Planning Committee. Board of Trustees Chair Jeanette Pena and County Executive Craig Guy have agreed to serve as honorary co-chairs of the committee, which will meet regularly through the coming year as we plan the 2025-26 celebration of the 50th anniversary of HCCC's first graduating class in 1976. The celebration will kick off a year from now, in fall 2025, and culminate in the opening of our new Center for Student Success in fall 2026.

Colleagues and friends, all of these transformational outcomes and so many other points of pride are owned by everyone. What better way for me to finish than noting many important awards and recognitions last year that acknowledge the HCCC family's inspirational work in supporting our students, our community, and in living and breathing our mission. These include:

- 2024 American Association of Community Colleges Dale P. Parnell Distinguished Faculty Recognition to Associate Professor of Business Elana Winslow;
- 2024 National "Inspiring Programs in Business" Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity Magazine*;
- 2024 "Most Promising Places to Work in Community Colleges" Award from the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) and *DIVERSE: Issues in Higher Education*;
- 2024 "Great Colleges to Work For" Award from ModernThink LLC and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, including Honor Roll Distinction for the Second Consecutive Year;
- Three of the 11 AACC 2024 Awards of Excellence, including the Student Success Award for the Hudson Scholars Program; Faculty Member of the Year to Dr. Clive Li; and CEO of the Year;
- 2024 Designation by Achieving the Dream as an "ATD Leader College of Distinction;"

- 2024 Phi Theta Kappa Shirley B. Gordon Award of Distinction;
- 2024 National Bellwether Legacy Award for the Hudson Scholars Program;
- 2024 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award by *INSIGHT Into Diversity Magazine*;
- 2023 Outstanding HACU-Member Institution Award;
- 2023 ACCT Northeast Regional Trustee Excellence Award to Trustee Bakari Lee;
- 2023 ACCT M. Dale Ensign Trustee Leadership Award to Trustee Bakari Lee;
- 2023 Campus Prevention Network Seal of Prevention; and,
- 2023 “Inspiring Programs in STEM” Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity Magazine*.

We further celebrate other recognitions too numerous to mention that all are points of pride for Hudson County Community College.

Colleagues and students, thank you for everything you do – thank you, each and every member of our beautiful HCCC Family! It is an honor to serve as your President. Hudson is Home! Happy New Year!