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Heart of Hudson



HUDSON COUNTY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FOUNDATION

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From Starting Over to Standing Out: HCCC Valedictorian Marlon Peña Crespo is Headed to Columbia University



Horizon Blue Cross
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Student Golf Clinic



Message from the
Hudson County Executive
Craig Guy

Letter from the Vice President

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I hope you are enjoying the start of summer and the conclusion of another remarkable semester at Hudson County Community College. One of the highlights of the year was celebrating our 49th Commencement ceremony at Sports Illustrated Stadium, where over 1,700 graduates walked across the stage to receive their diplomas on a beautiful day shared with family, friends, faculty, and staff.

Looking out at the sea of smiling faces was a strong reminder of why we do this work. Every diploma awarded represents perseverance, achievement, and the promise of a brighter future. Moments like Commencement bring our mission to life and reaffirm that every investment in our students yields a better return than the stock market.

The success of this year's graduating class reflects the dedication of our faculty and staff, the generosity of our donors and community partners, and the determination of our students.

Thank you for being part of the Hudson County Community College family. Your support helps make these achievements possible, and I look forward to sharing more stories of student success and institutional progress in the months ahead.

Nicole B. Johnson, Vice President for Advancement and Communications and Executive Director of the HCCC Foundation



Founded in 1997, the Hudson County Community College Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization that exists solely to support the priorities of Hudson County Community College.

From Starting Over to Standing Out: HCCC Valedictorian Marlon Peña Crespo is Headed to Columbia University

HCCC students start here and go on to incredible places. Just ask Marlon Peña Crespo, HCCC's Class of 2026 Valedictorian.

Not only will Marlon attend Columbia University this fall, but he will do so on a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Scholarship.

This highly competitive scholarship was awarded to just 60 community college students out of more than 1,300 applicants nationwide and provides recipients with up to \$55,000 per year for up to three years to complete their bachelor's degrees.

Marlon, a West New York resident, studied Computer Science at HCCC, earning an A.S. degree with a perfect 4.0 GPA. The Cuba native was also a member of the Educational Opportunity Fund program and HCCC's Beta Alpha Phi chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. He was one of just five students selected statewide for the AI for Impact New Jersey Community College Fellowship, a program designed by the New Jersey Office of Innovation to identify and develop emerging talent at the intersection of innovation and public service at community colleges.

Upon his arrival in the United States from Cuba, Marlon navigated a new language,

culture, and educational system. Speaking at HCCC's 2026 Commencement ceremony, he reflected: "Only three years ago, I arrived in this country from a small town in Cuba with just a backpack. I didn't speak English, and I had no guide to tell me what came next, so I had to start over completely."

He went on to explain: "It's not just the language that's hard – it's leaving everything you know and love behind. Your family, your friends, your home, and in some ways even your own identity. I come from a place where speaking your mind, or having a different opinion has consequences, where if you have a different idea, you'll learn very quickly to stay quiet, but all of that changed when I walked into HCCC."

At HCCC, Marlon found a supportive, inclusive, and intellectually engaging environment that welcomed his ideas and perspectives for the first time. He recalled that in one of his first classes, Principles of Macroeconomics, "... People started debating real opinions, and someone asked me, 'what do you think?' Nobody had ever asked me that in a classroom before. In that moment, in that class, I realized,

this is why I came here. Not just to get a degree, but to be in a place where my ideas mattered. Hudson is where I finally got to fully be myself ... For the first time in my life, I didn't have to leave any part of me at the door. That's why Hudson is not only a school... Hudson is Home."

Marlon credits his time at HCCC with helping him achieve his goals of becoming valedictorian and earning admission to Columbia. He stated, "What I learned at Hudson goes beyond academics. I learned that success is less about where you start and more about continuing to show up. I learned that growth doesn't happen all at once. It comes from consistency, pushing through challenging moments, and believing in yourself even when you're not sure."

Stories like Marlon's are a testament to what is possible at HCCC. By supporting the HCCC Foundation, you can help more students access the opportunities, resources, and education that empower them to excel academically, become leaders on campus, and pursue their dreams at prestigious institutions like Columbia University.

Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield Sponsors Student Golf Clinic

Thanks to a generous \$10,000 donation from Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield (HSBC), which sponsored the HCCC Foundation's student golf clinic for the second straight year, a new group of HCCC students learned the great game of golf for the very first time—an experience that might not have otherwise been within reach for many. HSBC's support ensures that students are not only introduced to the sport, but also welcomed into an environment that encourages growth, connection, and confidence.

The five-week clinic took place at Skyway Golf Course in Jersey City, where students were guided through the fundamentals of the game by experienced instructors. Students learned essential skills such as driving, chipping, and putting, and gained confidence with each visit.

One participant, Mariano Mejias, who picked up the game for the first time during last year's clinic, discovered he had a real passion for the game (as well as a knack for it) and continued to play frequently throughout the year. On the impact of the student golf clinic, Mejias, who will attend Kean University this fall, stated, "Before joining the student golf clinic, I always thought golf was inaccessible and unaffordable for some reason. Over the



past year, through weekly practice and the support of the program, I discovered that when you truly want something and are willing to put in the effort, opportunities can open in ways you never expect. Golf has taught me discipline, patience, confidence, and continuous improvement. As a recent graduate, I'm now planning to try out for a college golf team, something I never would have imagined before. This experience has shown me that with dedication and hard work, almost anything is possible."

Beyond learning the mechanics of the game, the clinic also traditionally fosters a strong sense of community among students. As they bond and take on the shared challenge of learning a new skill together for the first time, these students build friendships, develop camaraderie, and expand their personal and professional networks. Last year's group of student golfers became particularly close and many

stayed connected after the event.

Equally important is the exposure the clinic provides to the broader culture of golf. Often seen as a space where professional networks are built and maintained, the clinic also provides students with valuable social capital. When a future manager or business contact invites one of our students out for a round of golf, they will be able to confidently accept the invitation.

The student golf clinic concluded at HCCC Foundation's 24th Annual Golf Outing on June 22nd at Brooklake Country Club, where student golfers enjoyed a lesson with the club pro and mingled with participants. Net proceeds from the Outing directly support scholarships for HCCC students.

A Message from Craig Guy, Hudson County Executive

Hudson County Executive Craig Guy would like to sincerely congratulate the Class of 2026! Opportunity starts with education, and Hudson County has always believed that every resident deserves the chance to succeed. Hudson County remains committed to working together with HCCC to make higher education accessible, affordable, and attainable for everyone who wants to pursue it. Your friends, family, and teachers are proud of you. And Hudson County is proud of you.

County Executive Guy also wants to recognize HCCC's educators, faculty, counselors, and staff here. Thank you for the work you do every single day to guide, inspire, and support these students. The impact you make reaches far beyond the classroom. Together – the students, educators, administrators, and families

– you help make Hudson County stronger, more compassionate, and more successful.

Graduates, wherever life takes you next, never forget where you came from and never forget your Hudson County pride. Continue giving back to your communities. Continue lifting others up. Continue striving to make a difference. Because this county needs leaders like you.

Additionally, County Executive Guy would like to welcome Dr. Lisa Dougherty as HCCC's Interim President. With the support of my Administration, the Board of Trustees, the Unions, and faculty, we know that Dr. Dougherty will maintain the access to opportunities and support our students have always enjoyed at HCCC.



We are here to serve you.
For any questions, comments,
or concerns, you can reach us
at 201-795-6200
or hcexecoffice@hcnj.us.

HCCC Foundation Introduces Three New Board Members



Andrew Campbell



Cheryl Moo-Young



Shawn Harwood

The latest additions to the Board represent a broad range of professional expertise and community engagement as each brings a unique perspective shaped by their work and dedication to service, but what they all have in

Apprenticeship Program, is Founder and President of Eastern Millwork Inc. (EMI), one of the nation's leading manufacturers of architectural woodwork for commercial, institutional, and corporate projects. Ms. Moo-Young is Chief Operating Officer of Avatar Tech and Managing Member of AvaTech, a leading fiber technology company based in Newark. Mr. Harwood is the President and CEO of Square Parking, and a longtime supporter of HCCC and its students.

The HCCC Foundation Board welcomes new leadership and a jolt of fresh energy as three distinguished new members join its ranks. **Andrew Campbell, Cheryl Moo-Young, and Shawn Harwood** bring diverse skill sets, extensive experience, and new perspectives to the Foundation's longstanding mission of ensuring that HCCC students are given the opportunity to pursue a college education regardless of their financial circumstances.

common is a strong commitment to expanding educational access and opportunity. The new talent looks forward to building on the achievements of current and past Board members while contributing new perspectives and helping to advance the Foundation's continued growth and impact.

Mr. Campbell, a longtime partner of the College through the Holz Technik Registered

Together, these dynamic new additions bring a shared passion for education, collaboration, community impact, and equipping students with the skills needed to succeed in today's evolving workforce that will further strengthen the HCCC Foundation's mission.



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Make a powerful impact on the lives of HCCC students by donating today.



There is no better investment than the one you make in a student's education.

Online: Give online quickly and conveniently via debit card, credit card, or PayPal at <https://www.hccc.edu/community/foundation/index.html>

Check: Send a check to the HCCC Foundation, 26 Journal Square, 14th Floor, Jersey City NJ 07306.

Endowment/Planned Giving: Start the conversation about making a legacy gift that will generate an impact for years to come.

Sponsorship: Sponsor dynamic events at HCCC to support great causes while connecting with over 50,000 students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community leaders.

To find out more about any of these options, please contact us at foundation@hccc.edu.

