

**Summary of Proceedings
Regular Meeting of the Board of Trustees
Tuesday, February 24, 2026
5:00 p.m., via Zoom**

Trustees Present: Edward DeFazio (Vice Chair); Frank Gargiulo; Stacy Gemma (Secretary/Treasurer); Roberta Kenny; Jeanette Peña (Chair); Christopher Reber; Joanne Rivera (Student Alumni Representative); Silvia Rodriguez; Lissa Santiago; Harold Stahl; and Frances Teabout.

Trustees Absent: Vincent Lombardo.

Comments from the Public: There were no comments from the public.

1. Student Government Association President's Report

Student Government Association President Rifaya Dubash Khajamohideen offered the following report.

Hello, everyone. My name is Rifaya Dubash Khajamohideen, and I'm the Student Government Association (SGA) President for this academic year. It is my honor to submit this monthly report on behalf of our students.

This month has shown what Hudson County Community College students can accomplish, from advocating on Capitol Hill to representing our college at national conferences.

Last week, I joined 115 other community college students and more than 1,000 community college presidents and trustees in Washington, D.C. for the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) National Legislative Summit, in partnership with New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC).

I had the privilege of representing HCCC alongside President Dr. Chris Reber, SGA Senator Pius P. Cor Jesu, and Student Alumni Representatives Joanne Rivera, Lisa Fernandez and Keisha Taylor.

The summit brings together community college leaders and student advocates from across the country to meet with federal lawmakers and discuss policies that affect students. We met with Senator Cory Booker, Congressman Robert Menendez, and Congresswoman LaMonica McIver.

During these meetings, we shared the experiences of our students and discussed the challenges many of them face. A major focus was protecting and strengthening the Pell Grant program.

Representing HCCC at this national platform was a meaningful experience. It reinforced that student voices matter and that change can happen when leaders listen to the people most affected.

The HCCC Model United Nations Club attended the Harvard National Model United Nations 2026 conference under the guidance of Advisor Joseph Caniglia. The delegation included Neivi Nunez, Yadhira Moranchel, Matias Faundez, Pallav Verma, and Kaysan Deodat, who represented the country of Chile after six weeks of preparation.

As one of the few community colleges present, they participated in debates, drafted resolutions, and worked with students from other colleges. Their preparation and focus reflect the support and guidance they receive at the College.

Campus organizations continue to provide opportunities for students to get involved. The Animal Wellness Club will host a movie night; Latin Society will present Beyond the Stereotype: A Dominican Independence Night; and the Student Programming Board will start their spring semester kickoff at the North Hudson campus.

SGA, in collaboration with Student Life and Leadership and the Office of Institutional Engagement and Excellence, will host a student roundtable luncheon. Additionally, the American Chemical Society and the Society of Physics Students are collaborating on the Weather Balloon Project and planning a botanical garden trip with the Art Club.

In closing, I am very proud of our students. From advocacy in Washington, D.C., to participating at Harvard, to creating activities on campus, they continue to show leadership and commitment.

I am grateful to the Trustees, President Reber, and our faculty for your support. Thank you all for your continued encouragement.

2. All College Council Chair's Report

All College Council Chair Benny Youssef offered the following report.

Good evening, Trustees. It's good to be back in the swing of the spring, though, judging by the snow-apocalyptic conditions outside, I imagine we're all dreaming of the warmer days to come.

To quote the great Leo Tolstoy, "Spring is the time of plans and projects." I'm excited for the various plans and projects the All College Council (ACC) will undertake this spring semester.

It's so good to be back in the building, to see the halls filled with students eager to learn.

Earlier this month, the Children on Campus policy and the syllabus statement governance recommendations reached a quorum and passed. I want to extend my gratitude to all those who collaborated in creating, revising, and ultimately passing this, with a special shout-out to Dr. Kade Thurman and the Senate, as well as Dr. Peter Cronrath and Dr. Lisa Dougherty.

As Chair of ACC, I'm happy to support policies that offer greater equity for our entire community, and the Children on Campus policy does just that.

Revising the ACC Charter has been one of the primary goals of my tenure as chair thus far. The Charter Revision Task Force of faculty, staff, and administrators has been meeting twice a month since the fall semester. I want to extend my gratitude to them for their continued hard work and support. I also want to thank Dr. Yeury Pujols and Dr. Christopher Cody, who have been meeting with me regularly to collaborate in organizing and writing the new charter.

At the March ACC meeting, we intend to share the revised charter with the community for comments and feedback. We then hope to bring a finalized version to a vote at the April ACC meeting. Additionally, I look forward to presenting the revised charter to the Board here in April.

Without further delay, here are my committee reports.

Development and Planning: Under Dr. Cody's leadership, the team held its first spring semester meeting, reflecting on the successful gala. Looking ahead, they have charted their future course of action, including renaming and refocusing the committee, along with charter revisions to better align with current practices.

The committee will also support the Alumni Job Fair on April 21, with outreach already underway, and they will help support the Hudson Helps Resource Center's Fashion Show happening tomorrow, which we are greatly looking forward to.

Technology: On February 5, Dr. Robert Khan's committee held its inaugural Tech Café event, which was an unqualified success. A significant number of students had their technology questions answered. Other positive outcomes from preparing for the event included new collaborations among departments and approved documentation. A similar event will be held at the North Hudson campus in a few weeks, and the committee has already agreed to apply lessons learned and repeat the event in the fall semester.

College Life: Thanks to the leadership of Paula JnoVille Roney and the College Life members, the holiday party was a great success. We had over 220 attendees. We are now planning and looking forward to the end-of-year barbecue party, which I'm sure will build on the success of last year's event. Planning is well underway, with a tentative date of Wednesday, May 6.

Senate: At the February meeting, Dr. Heather DeVries presented to the Senate on the need for representation on the Academic Calendar Planning Committee. Several members volunteered. A request was made for additional clarification regarding the role of this representative, particularly related to add-drop periods.

In addition, the Senate has revisited the purpose and plans of the two subcommittees formed in fall 2025, one focused on attendance and hybrid courses, the other on updating course evaluations. Finally, the Senate has created a third subcommittee to begin drafting the operating procedures document, aiming to complete it by the end of the spring semester.

Space and Facilities: Under Professor Inez Cruz's stewardship, two subcommittees have been formed to address the summer heat concerns at 70 Sip Ave and to coordinate the relocation of offices to the new tower.

Wayfinding Phase 2 is nearing completion with a target date of late February, while Phase 3 will begin with the installation of exterior digital signage on the tower building. Asbestos removal at both buildings was completed over spring break, and repairs to the partitions in the culinary building, banquet, and Johnson Rooms are pending.

Student Affairs: With the goal of strengthening student representation, Ariana Calle's committee has developed and refined a five-question survey designed to gauge interest and increase student participation in campus decision-making processes. They are also working closely with the Hudson Helps Resource Center on tomorrow's Fashion Show. I invite everyone here to consider purchasing a ticket and attending.

This concludes the committee reports. I'd like to thank everyone who made this report possible, including, but not limited to, ACC Vice Chair Irma Williams, ACC Secretary Sarah Teishman, all of the committee chairs and members, Dr. Reber, Cabinet, and the entire college community. I look forward to reporting on more progress at our next meeting.

3. **President's Report**

President Reber offered the following report.

Good evening, Trustees.

I am joining you from San Antonio, TX, where I am participating in the Bellwether Awards competition sponsored by the Bellwether College Consortium.

Participating here with me are Associate Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning John Urgola, Dean of Enrollment Services Matt Fessler, and HCCC students Yadhira Moranchel and Kaysan Deodat. Yadhira and Kaysan are both high-achieving students majoring in Business Administration. It has been an absolute pleasure participating with our team and getting to know our students, whose futures are very bright!

We offered a presentation yesterday about our Summer Enrollment Incentive program, and we participated on Sunday in a two-hour showcase event involving displays and conversations with all 30 Bellwether Top Ten Award Finalists, ten in each of three award categories. I'm delighted to share that, earlier today, Hudson County Community College was presented the 2026 Bellwether Showcase Award in the Planning, Governance, and Finance category.

It has been an invigorating experience as we have learned about best practices across the national community college sector.

Thank you, Rifaya and Benny, for your reports and your leadership.

This evening, I have invited an HCCC alumnus, John Apena Encarnacion, and Professor of STEM, Dr. Issam El-Achkar, to discuss John's recent capstone project in our School of STEM. Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Darryl Jones will introduce our guests and their presentation.

Dr. Darryl Jones offered the following remarks.

Good afternoon, Trustees. Today's presentation is designed to provide an overview of a student experience while engaging in an Electronics and Engineering Technology (EET) capstone project. A capstone experience plays a vital role by serving as the bridge between classroom learning and real world application.

This capstone experience in EET integrates knowledge from across the curriculum, mathematics, engineering principles, and technology into a comprehensive project based experience that challenges students to think critically and solve complex problems.

For our students, whether transferring to a four-year institution or entering the workforce directly, the capstone provides a culminating demonstration of mastery and readiness. It reinforces confidence, encourages innovation, and allows students to apply theory to authentic scenarios that mirror industry and research expectations.

I now invite Dr. Isam El-Achkar, Professor of Mathematics, Electronics, and Engineering Technology, and a 2026 recipient of the Philip Johnson Excellence Award in Teaching, to come forward to introduce the capstone project class, its goals, and our alumni speaker.

[Dr. Issam El-Achkar and John Apena Encarnacion Presented EET Capstone Project](#)

Dr. Issam El-Achkar offered the following remarks.

Good evening, everyone, and thank you for inviting me.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve our students for the past 33 years as coordinator of the Electrical Engineering Technology program. Over the years, we have graduated many fine students. Many of them became my good friends, and we keep in touch, even those who graduated 20 years ago.

Our program prepares graduates to seek employment immediately after graduation and to work as electronics technicians. They leave with skills to be trainable in virtually any industry. Many of our students go on to work at places such as Verizon, Comcast, Con Edison, PSEG, and even medical centers, where they troubleshoot and maintain medical equipment. They are successful.

For many of them, their dreams get bigger. They continued to the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) to pursue their bachelor's degrees in Electronics and Computer Engineering Technology. They do very well there, and our presenter today, John Apena Encarnacion, is one example.

I have always received very good feedback from the NJIT coordinator and faculty with whom I regularly partner on how well prepared our students are.

The highlight of the program, as Dr. Jones said, is the capstone project, which bridges the classroom and the job or industry.

In this project, students apply the skills they've acquired during their two years with us to build and present a complete project. They are required to conduct research, develop a proposal, and present their plan to Professor Rodriguez, who is also a former graduate of the EET program, and me. Once their proposal is approved, they identify the parts, acquire them, run simulations on the computer in the lab, construct and test the project, ensure everything works properly, and then prepare a PowerPoint presentation and, of course, a poster.

In May, students present their projects and we invite the Dean, STEM faculty, STEM students who are interested, and, most importantly, the freshman students to see what their peers have done and what they themselves will be doing next year.

It is always an emotional day to see students who came to us with minimal or no skills, and, in two years, are now ready to enter the workforce. It's a very proud day.

Of course, when I talk about the program, I might sound like a car salesman trying to sell his product.

That is why it is best to hear from the student. We have here a recent May graduate, John Apena Encarnacion, who is currently attending NJIT and is performing well academically.

John Apena Encarnacion offered the following remarks.

Hello, President Reber, esteemed Board members, Dean Yearwood, and members of the Hudson family. Thank you to Dr. El-Achkar, Professor Rafael Rodriguez, and other faculty members for their mentorship.

My name is John Apena Encarnacion. I graduated last year from Hudson County Community College with a degree in Electrical Engineering Technology. I have now transferred to NJIT to continue my education, and am doing well. My coursework gave me a strong foundation, which also helped me advance to a higher position at my job as an electrician. My employer gave me a raise and additional opportunities.

My project is a cut-wire alarm system. I was able to complete my final project thanks to courses like Circuits 1, Circuits 2, Amplifiers, and the lab exercises.

The capstone project, as the professors explained, is very important because it gave me a lot of knowledge and hands-on experience, and all the tools for continuing my education at NJIT.

My project is a cut-wire detection alert system designed to detect when a wire is cut in a wireless security system, triggering an alarm, alerting authorities or homeowners to a potential security issue or malfunction.

This alarm can be used in several systems, such as electrical alarms, fire alarms, and electrical devices. It can also incorporate additional technology, such as being controlled by phone, with cameras, and other advanced systems. I personally use it as a cable tester in my job.

The cost of the project after ordering some parts was a low \$36.43.

For testing, the system demonstrates that when the wire is cut, the alarm triggers immediately. During testing, I discovered problems. My alarm was not loud, and the LED light was very dim. Through troubleshooting, I found that the resistor value was the problem, and after it was replaced, everything worked properly.

The block diagram shows the power supply, the wire loop, the connectors, the transistor (BC547), which in this case works like two normally closed switches, and then it powers the LED.

In the pictures, you can see the whole process and the finished project.

Now to the pros and cons of the project. The pros were that this project was a great experience for developing electronics skills and learning new things. The cons were not negative. They were part of the learning process. Whenever I had trouble, I learned more by solving it.

These are the parts I used: transistor BC547, the resistors, the buzzer, the LED, and the 9-volt battery.

In conclusion, this engineering project was a great experience in developing an electronic device.

Thank you to Professor Rafael Rodriguez and Dr. El-Achkar for helping me a lot.

Chair Peña offered remarks.

John, I commend you on developing this system and presenting this project. When my daughter was taking physics in high school, there was a simulation to create a circuit, but they wanted them to do it online. She told the professor that she wanted to create it physically, and it took her about three hours. She got home very late that day, but with a sense of pride when she completed it. To see you do this, it's wonderful, because that's what you need. There are so many pros to using computer simulation, but there is nothing like doing it yourself. Congratulations to the professors and to you, John. Thank you for sharing that with us.

Dr. Issam El-Achkar offered the following remarks.

The way we run the courses is three hours of lecture and three hours of lab. Anything we do in theory must be implemented in the lab, where we use commercial software called Multisim, which is used in industry. Students not only learn the theory and run calculations; they also simulate the circuits, take measurements, and report the pros and cons. And then they physically construct everything.

The program is 50 percent hands-on. Even during COVID, I brought students into the lab because hands-on is very important.

Putting it into play is the best part. Three hours pass quickly, and we don't feel it because everybody is busy doing something they enjoy. Thank you again for inviting us.

President Reber resumed and offered closing remarks.

Thank you, Darryl, Issam, and John, for your remarks.

John, best wishes for much continued success! We are very proud of you!

Tomorrow, the Hudson Helps Resource Center will hold its second annual Career Closet Fashion Show, proudly sponsored by Steve Madden, Ltd. This highly successful fundraiser will feature HCCC family members as runway models. It will be a fun celebration of our HCCC culture of care!

Trustees, this concludes my report.

Regular Monthly Reports and Recommendations

1. The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 20, 2026 were approved.

The following actions were taken concerning **Fiscal, Administrative, Lease, and Capital Recommendations** brought forward by the Administration and endorsed by the Finance Committee.

1. Resolution Authorizing Continuation of Technical Operations and Project Management Support Services for the Center for Student Success was approved.
2. Resolution Authorizing Renewal of Website Redesign Content Management System (CMS) Services was approved.
3. Resolution Authorizing Purchase of a College Data Platform was approved.
4. Resolution Authorizing Renewal of Helpdesk ChatBot Platform for the Offices of Admissions, Financial Aid, and Student Services was approved.
5. Resolution Authorizing Special Conflict Counsel Services was approved.
6. Resolution Authorizing Risk Management and Insurance Brokerage Services was approved.
7. Resolution Authorizing Purchase of Commencement Regalia to be Funded by the Student Life Fee (SLF) was approved.
8. Resolution Authorizing Collection Services was approved.
9. Resolution Authorizing Addendum to Existing Agreement Between Hudson County Community College (HCCC) and Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) was approved.
10. Resolution to Terminate All Participation Under the SHBP and SEHBP (Including Prescription Drug Plan and/or Dental Plan Coverage) was approved.

The following actions were taken regarding **Personnel Recommendations** brought forward by the Administration and endorsed by the Personnel Committee.

1. The retirement of an Office Service Clerk, Customer Service, was approved.
2. The resignations of an Instructor, Radiography, Tenure-track; and Associate Director, Career and Transfer Pathways, were accepted.
3. Appointments of Full-time Staff were approved.
4. Appointments of Temporary Full-time Staff were approved.
5. Appointments of Temporary Full-time Faculty were approved.

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6. Authorizations of Part-time Staff through February 2027, as needed, were approved.
7. Appointments of New Hire Adjunct Instructors were approved.
8. The following Modifications to the Staffing Table were approved:

Current Approved Title	New Title/ Classification	Incumbent	Current Salary Grade	New Salary Grade	Current Salary	New Salary	Effective Date
Accountant	N/A	Mildred Vera-Matich	116	116*	\$ 76,785	\$ 83,313	February 25, 2026
Executive Director, Center for Online Learning	Associate Vice President for Digital Learning, Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies	Matthew LaBrake	122	122	N/A	N/A	February 25, 2025

*Salary increase reflects the current responsibilities and additional duties.

The following actions were taken regarding **Academic and Student Affairs** as brought forward by the Academic and Student Affairs Committee.

1. Resolution Authorizing Policy on Graduation was approved.
2. Resolution Authorizing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between Hudson County Community College (HCCC) and Jersey City Economic Development Corporation (JCEDC) for three years was approved.

There was no **New Business**.

The **meeting was adjourned** at 5:39 p.m.

The minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting, upon approval, are available in the College Library, the President's Office, and on the College website.