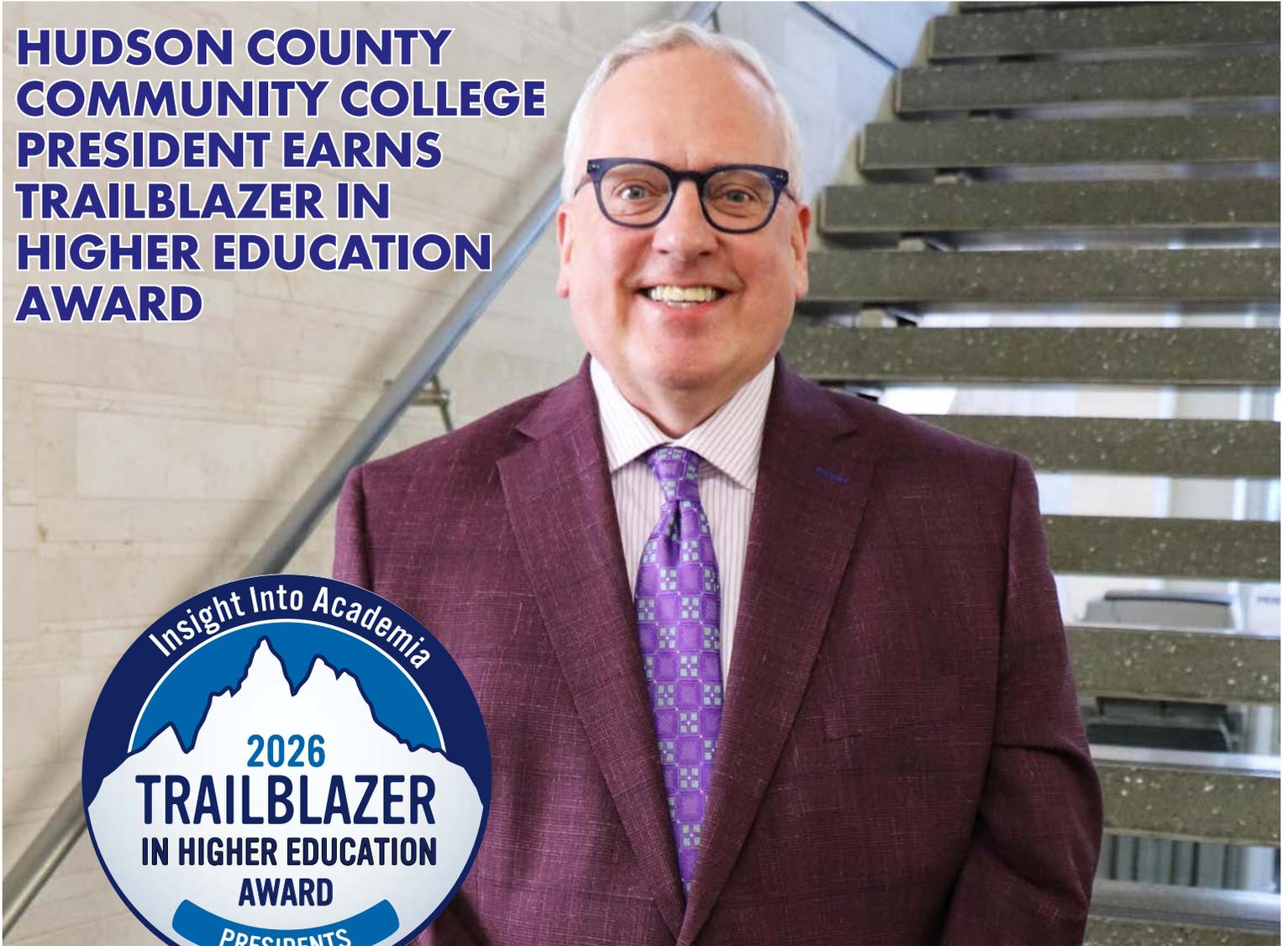


HCCC Happenings

A publication of the Communications Department



HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT EARNS TRAILBLAZER IN HIGHER EDUCATION AWARD



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From the Editor’s Desk

HCCC Happenings is on the College’s website at <http://www.hccc.edu>

Items for the April newsletter are due by Friday, March 13, 2026

Please send your news items, comments and suggestions to:

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**HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
PRESIDENT EARNS TRAILBLAZER IN
HIGHER EDUCATION AWARD**

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) President Dr. Christopher Reber assumed leadership of the College in 2018 with a commitment to expanding transformative opportunities for students and the people of Hudson County. He has advanced a collaborative vision that engages students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and community partners to strengthen access, equity, and student success.

In recognition of this work, *Insight Into Academia* selected Dr. Reber as a recipient of the 2026 Trailblazer in Higher Education Award, honoring leaders who advance institutional excellence, deepen community engagement, and create measurable impact.

“I am deeply honored to receive this award,” Dr. Reber said, crediting colleagues and partners for their shared commitment to student success.

A hallmark of Dr. Reber’s tenure is the Bellwether College Consortium Award-winning Hudson Scholars Program, launched in 2021 and now recognized nationally as a model for community college student success. The program integrates proactive advisement, financial stipends, early academic intervention,

and comprehensive wraparound services through the College’s Hudson Helps Resource Center. Services address food and housing insecurity, mental health and wellness, emergency funding, immigration and technology assistance, career clothing, and more.

Hudson Scholars served 800 students in its first year and more than 5,000 to date, with plans to scale the model to all HCCC students within five years. The program has produced a fivefold increase in two-year completion rates for traditionally underrepresented students, a 37% improvement in fall-to-fall retention, and a 70% reduction in historic equity and achievement gaps. Enrollment and retention gains have made the program financially self-sustaining.

Dr. Reber also serves on numerous boards and leadership councils, including the Business-Higher Education Forum, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and the Community College Center for Student Engagement.

Lenore Pearlstein, owner and publisher of *Insight Into Academia*, said Trailblazer honorees represent the highest levels of strategic leadership in higher education.

ON THE COVER: Hudson County Community College President Dr. Christopher M. Reber is the recipient of *Insight Into Academia Magazine’s* 2026 “Trailblazer in Higher Education Award.”



COLLEGE EVENTS CALENDAR

For the most up-to-date information, please visit <https://www.hccc.edu/calendar>.

Hudson County Community College reserves the right to modify the calendar as necessary.

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

2026 COMMENCEMENT

Tuesday, May 19, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.
Sports Illustrated Stadium
600 Cape May Street, Harrison, NJ 07029

HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE BIOLOGY PROFESSOR EARNS DALE P. PARNELL DISTINGUISHED FACULTY RECOGNITION

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) Professor of Biology Dr. Nadia Hedhli received the prestigious Dale P. Parnell Distinguished Faculty Recognition from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). The AACC will honor this year's recipients at a reception during its annual conference on April 12, 2026, in Seattle.

HCCC President Dr. Christopher Reber praised Dr. Hedhli as a dedicated alumna and nearly 20-year faculty member who mentors and advocates for students and the community. He noted her leadership in advancing STEM education and inspiring thousands of students to pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics careers.

Dr. Hedhli has launched new courses and programs throughout her tenure. She developed curricula for in-person, online, and hybrid STEM offerings, including

Molecular Biology for the Biotechnology program, Anatomy and Physiology, Human Biology, and Environmental Studies. She also created the blueprint for STEM pathways in HCCC's Early College Program, recruited and mentored students—particularly women in STEM—delivered engaging community presentations, and secured internships for students at four-year universities.

She serves as Coordinator of the Environmental Studies Program and contributes to the Curriculum and Instruction and Online Learning Committees. She also co-chairs the College's Middle States Self-Study.

An active researcher, Dr. Hedhli studies in-vitro and animal models in cardiovascular medicine, lymphoma, and retinopathy. She has published in peer-reviewed journals, including collaborations with Weill Cornell Medical College faculty.



She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and completed postdoctoral fellowships at UMDNJ and Yale University. In 2014, she received the NISOD Excellence in Teaching Award.

NEWS FROM HUDSON COUNTY EXECUTIVE CRAIG GUY

Hudson County Executive Craig Guy and The Board of Commissioners Announce Measures to Protect Communities in Hudson County

As Hudson County Executive, Craig Guy has prioritized protecting every Hudson County resident. With recent events in our county— withholding federal funding for food stamps or environmental initiatives, cancelling funding for the Hudson Gateway Tunnel Project, ICE agents in our neighborhoods—Guy is taking steps to protect our community.

County Executive Guy will always do what he can within his governmental power to ensure the safety and well-being of Hudson County residents. Last month, he signed an executive order banning federal immigration authorities

from county-owned property. And this month he issued an additional executive order establishing the Safe Communities Committee, a group that will develop policies and protocols regarding federal immigration practices, ensuring that all county offices operate with a unified approach to community outreach and information sharing.

Craig also applauded the county's partners at the Hudson County Schools of Technology (HCST) for putting safeguards in place to protect students. As HCST Superintendent Tom Macagnano noted, front office and security staff are trained to ensure that no outside agents are granted entry to schools without an immediate

review by district leadership. Schools should be havens for learning, developing skills, and spending time with friends. Children should not have to live in fear in classrooms and parents should not have to worry that their son or daughter will return home safely.

Protecting our community from this awful federal overreach is a team effort. Hudson County is partnering with law enforcement, residents, and advocates to ensure our community is welcoming for all.



MILESTONES

*Congratulations to the following
on their anniversaries with
Hudson County Community College!*

FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

One Year

Nancy Ackerman
Jaime Pardo
Anna Zielinski

Five Years

Qua'fayshia Ransom
Maria Lita Sarmiento

10 Years

Ilya Ashmyan
Aycha Edwards

PART-TIME EMPLOYEES

One Year

Taryne Castell
Eman Dasouky
Hisani Dubose
Christian Johns

5 Years

Keiry Hernandez

SAVE THE DATE

Women's Panel for International Women's Day

March 6, 2026 | 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Culinary Conference Center, 161 Newkirk
Street, Scott Ring Room, E211,
Jersey City

Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day (TODAS)

April 23, 2026 | 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Cross Campus Event

Special Thanks and Recognition (S.T.A.R)

April 27, 2026 | 12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Culinary Arts Conference Center,
Banquet Room, Jersey City, NJ
By Invitation: Full-time and Part-time
Honorees, Recent Retirements,
Supervisors, and Guests.

Administrative Professionals' Day

April 29, 2026 | 12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.
STEM Building, 263 Academy Street,
Multipurpose Room, Jersey City, NJ

For Recruitment and Job Opportunities visit:

<https://www.schooljobs.com/careers/hccc>

EMPLOYEE PERKS

National Institute for Staff and
Organizational Development
<https://www.nisod.org>

*Did you know our EAP assists employees
with Professional Development?*

Employee Assistance Program
<https://eap.ndbh.com> (company code: HCCC)

LinkedIn Learning
<https://library.hccc.edu/linkedinlearning>

Working Advantage
<https://hccc.savings.workingadvantage.com/home>



National Nutrition Month: Discover the Power of Nutrition

March is National Nutrition Month, a time dedicated to building healthier habits through informed food choices and balanced eating. This year's theme, "Discover the Power of Nutrition," encourages everyone to explore how nourishing foods support energy, focus, physical activity, and overall well-being. From planning balanced meals to choosing nutrient-rich snacks, small daily decisions can make a meaningful difference in long-term health.

APPOINTMENT OF FULL-TIME STAFF

Estefany Ferreira, Assistant Director, Student Accounts - Effective February 25, 2026

Donna Weber, Director, Accounts Receivable - Effective March 2, 2026

APPOINTMENT OF TEMPORARY FULL- TIME STAFF

Kadiatou Camara, Admissions Advisor - Effective December 1, 2025 to April 30, 2026

Daniela Galvez, Internship Coordinator - Effective February 25, 2026 to January 31, 2027

Mark McCarthy, Coordinator, Academic Support Services Center - Effective January 26, 2026 to June 30, 2026

Cristina Vazquez, Program Coordinator, Continuing Education - Effective February 25, 2026 to February 25, 2027

Practical Nutrition Tips to Share

These evidence-based ideas can help your readers take simple, sustainable steps toward healthier eating:

Create balanced meals — Aim for a mix of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Planning ahead can reduce stress and support more consistent choices.

Incorporate movement — Nutrition and physical activity work hand-in-hand. Fueling well supports exercise, and regular movement helps regulate appetite and energy.

Explore new recipes — Try new

Continued on page 9

APPOINTMENT OF TEMPORARY FULL- TIME FACULTY

Maria Daniel, Instructor, Criminal Justice - Effective February 25, 2026

*Semester start January

Amr Khalil, Instructor, ESL - Effective February 25, 2026

*Semester start January

Masudur Rahman, Instructor, ESL - Effective February 25, 2026

*Semester start January

PROMOTIONS

Matthew LaBrake to Associate VP for Digital Learning, Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies

Mildred Vera-Match, Accountant*

*Salary increase

HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS COMPLETE INAUGURAL AI FOR IMPACT NEW JERSEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE FELLOWSHIP

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) students Marlon Peña Crespo and Sachin Shrestha served in the inaugural AI for Impact New Jersey Community College Fellowship, an experiential learning program created through a partnership among the New Jersey Office of Innovation, the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC), and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA). InnovateUS supported the fellowship by facilitating professional development and training in collaboration with the State's Office of the Chief AI Strategist.

The fellowship paired community college students with professional advisors from the New Jersey Office of Innovation to address government challenges and advance public-sector innovation. Eighty-nine students statewide applied for the Fall 2025 cohort; only five were selected, including Crespo and Shrestha. Eligibility requirements included completion of at least 30 college credits and a 3.0 GPA.

The New Jersey Office of Innovation has helped 65,000 entrepreneurs launch businesses faster, modernized state call centers to reduce wait times, used advanced data to enroll 100,000 children in social safety-net programs, and redesigned the unemployment insurance application process.

During the four-month fellowship, students focus on human-centered, data-driven project management and in-depth artificial intelligence exploration. Fellows collaborate with Office of Innovation teams to understand agency needs, conduct qualitative and quantitative research, close communication gaps between state agencies and residents, develop responsible AI solutions, manage AI-enabled projects, utilize leading AI platforms and tools, and present their work to public audiences. While completing the program, Crespo and Shrestha continued their studies in Computer Science and Business Administration, respectively, working 20 hours per week and earning stipends.



Hudson County Community College (HCCC) President Dr. Christopher Reber joined students Marlon Peña Crespo and Sachin Shrestha at the report-out and recognition event recently held at the New Jersey Council of County Colleges offices near Trenton. The students presented their work as mentees of the first AI for Impact New Jersey Community College Fellowship cohort.

“We are proud of Marlon and Sachin for their contributions to this inaugural AI cohort designed to help New Jersey address complex societal challenges,” said HCCC President Dr. Christopher Reber. “The experience they gained using emerging technologies in a public-sector context underscores the value they bring in helping improve government operations.”

NJCCC President Dr. Aaron Fichtner noted that the fellowship demonstrates the power of collaboration among higher education, state government, and economic development partners by connecting students with real-world projects that strengthen technical and professional skills while expanding New Jersey's AI talent pipeline. Acting NJEDA CEO Mary Maples added that the initiative supports workforce development in emerging industries and prepares students for high-demand, well-paying careers.

HCCC continues to expand AI literacy and applied learning opportunities through its Artificial Intelligence Strategy and Governance Council, AI Spark Grants, and a GenAI Professional Learning Community that supports students, faculty, and staff.

B2B STUDENTS EXPLORE ANIMAL BEHAVIOR AT THE BRONX ZOO



Students in participating Northern New Jersey Bridges to Baccalaureate (NNJ-B2B) community colleges traveled to the Bronx Zoo to expand their knowledge of animal behavior research.

This winter, Daniel Ondieki, Assistant Professor, Mathematics, accompanied students from the B2B program at Hudson County Community College, Passaic County Community College, and County College of Morris to participate in an experiential learning visit to the Bronx Zoo in New York City.

The visit served as a hands-on extension of a recent workshop on animal behavior research methods. Students practiced collecting observational data across different animal species, applying techniques such as recording movement—or the absence of movement—at set time intervals. These methods are commonly used in behavioral science research.

One highlight of the visit was a live demonstration featuring a three-banded armadillo, during which students closely observed and documented its behavior under the guidance of a presenter. Students engaged directly with the research process in a professional, real-world setting.

After completing their data collection, students refined their individual research topics, integrating their field observations with concepts learned in class.

Foundation Art Collection

The Hudson County Community College Foundation Art Collection of 2,200+ works is installed in the public areas of campus buildings. The entire College is an educational art museum. This Collection reveals aspects of America's and New Jersey's rich artistic and cultural history from the Hudson River School period to today. In recent years, the College's acquisition efforts have focused on strengthening its American and New Jersey modern and contemporary collections.

Each month, this page in *HCCC Happenings* provides updates on artists whose works are in the Collection, and new additions to the Collection.

DONOR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to artists Frances Barth and Vincent Baldassano for recent donations of catalogues of your work. Donations of catalogues go into the Foundation Archive for research and student study. Please email ASiegel@hccc.edu if you'd like to take a look at these lovely works.

ARTIST NEWS

If you like **Kiki Smith's** work on the top floor of the STEM Building, you might enjoy this short video about how the artist makes sculpture: Turn Into Anything: Kiki Smith (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4fvQzoNjjY&t=214s>) at the Foundry (It may look like she's carving an owl in chocolate, but it's wax.) She talks about taking an owl sculpture on the subway, and a foot breaking off: "You can think something is a disastrous mistake, and you've ruined everything, but in reality it just gives something more energy when you put it all back together again." Words to live by.

The artist **Robert S. Neuman**, whose print work, *Pedazos del Mundo No. 8* can be seen on the fifth floor of the Gabert Library, would have been 100 years old this year. In his honor there are exhibitions at the Throne-Sagendorff Gallery in Keene, NH, and the Savage Godfrey Gallery in Norwell, MA. If you can get to New Hampshire, all eight of the *Pedazo* prints will be on display. The Foundation Art Collection has two: (<https://tinyurl.com/36jkv9m3>). Neuman made both paintings and prints in the *Pedazos* series. According to his website, "Begun in 1961, the *Pedazos del Mundo* series pays homage to our world's breathtaking cultural diversity. Circular forms evoking our own earthly home are the basis of the series, with cascading,



Bruce Davidson, *Protest March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, USA, 1954. Photography. 6" x 6"*

vibrating, and at times explosive shapes crowding their interior. Works in the series are crafted using an array of techniques, from painting and stamping to layering masking tape and other found materials. Each piece interacts with the others to build a vivid, bewildering world unto itself that prompts us to reflect on the pieces that make up our own."

On the fourth floor of the Gabert Library is a small photograph by **Bruce Davidson**, *Protest March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, USA* from 1965. Magnum, the famed international photographers' cooperative, has an online "book club" where they review photography books. Recently, they discussed Davidson's book, *East 100th Street*. Davidson used "documentary photography as a tool for social change." His photographs of what was then the most impoverished neighborhood in the city were later used to argue for greater attention to be paid to



Serena Bocchino, *Simpatico, 2002, Lithograph, Silkscreen with Pochoir and Blind Embossing, 28" x 34"*

support the residents of the area. Here's a link to discussion of the book: Magnum Book Club: *East 100th Street* (<https://tinyurl.com/f8fbez49>)

If you like **Serena Bocchino's** work on the first floor of 870 Bergen Avenue, and you're interested in how she makes her painting and sculpture, you might enjoy this short film called, *Rhythm Pulse*. It explores the artist's work in relationship to jazz music. *Rhythm_Pulse* on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/1090976102>). In the film, when she talks about her process, she discusses Jazz musician Charles Mingus: "He used to say, when he sat down at the piano to write music, 'Something would just take over.' He'd get totally swept up in it. And I get that... when I'm deep in my own creative process, I lose track of time, of everything around me. When I'm creating, when I'm truly in the zone, the world fades away. The work becomes everything... I'm not guiding the process, I'm being guided by it." May we all enjoy our own creativity in the "flow" of life.

We welcome anecdotes and information about the how the Foundation Art Collection benefits our community. If you have enjoyed using the Art Collection in your teaching, studies, or everyday life, let us know! Contact ASiegel@hccc.edu and tell us your story.

A collection like this requires ongoing maintenance and professional stewardship to ensure that it stays in condition to inspire students for years to come. Please support the Collection by making a gift at www.hccc.edu/community/foundation/index.html or email foundation@hccc.edu for more information.

To donate artwork, find detailed information here: www.hccc.edu/community/arts/foundation-arts-collection/index.html. Explore the Foundation Art Collection using our new online searchable tools! Go to www.hccc.edu/community/arts/foundation-art-collection/category-collection-search.html



The Office of Cultural Affairs' *Fifty Years of Excellence* exhibition closed on March 7 at the Museum of Jersey City History. The exhibit was viewed by almost 1,000 visitors and provided multiple programs. The show will be reimagined for the North Hudson Art Concourse, opening at the end of March and remaining displayed until December 2026.

The Benjamin J. Dineen III and Dennis C. Hull Gallery turns 10! Currently featured in the Gallery is the print and paper collection donated by Dineen and Hull. Iconic artists highlighted include Miriam Schapiro, Susan Rothenberg, Chakaia Booker, Will Barnett, and Leon Golub, amongst others. The show will close with a birthday celebration.

On Friday, Feb. 27, the Office of Cultural Affairs' also hosted the Black History Month celebration at the Culinary Conference Center. "Fine Whine", in partnership with Student Life and Leadership and Art Fair 14C, was presented by Asha DaHomey, the celebrity tap dancer who performed at Hudson's most recent Juneteenth event. She curated a live drumming and DJ experience, open to all ages and free to the community.

February 5 - April 10
Benjamin J. Dineen III
& Dennis C. Hull Gallery
71 Sip Avenue, 6th Floor
Jersey City, NJ 07306

HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOUNDATION ART COLLECTION RECEIVES MAJOR DONATION OF 35 WORKS BY PROMINENT WOMEN ARTISTS

The Hudson County Community College (HCCC) Foundation Art Collection announced a major gift of 35 artworks from prominent collector Douglas Maxwell, significantly expanding a Collection that now includes more than 2,200 pieces. Maxwell's donation emphasizes works by women artists, many of them locally and nationally recognized, and strengthens the Collection's long-standing commitment to representation and access.



Summit by Emily Eveleth, 2000, Oil on canvas, 28" x 28"

A psychoanalyst and former New York University professor of contemporary art, Maxwell developed a deep interest in feminist art while curating the exhibition Development of the Female Self. The project inspired his focus on second-generation feminist artists whose work explored identity and self-representation—an interest that shaped his collecting philosophy and ultimately led him to HCCC.

The Foundation Art Collection provides a meaningful platform for women artists at a time when their work remains underrepresented nationally. According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, only 13% of artwork in U.S. museums are by women. At HCCC, women's art is woven throughout the campuses. Of the Collection's more than 2,200 works, at least 767 are known to be by women.

Continued on page 10

Hudson County Community College cares about you and wants to help.

Are you experiencing stress, depression, or anxiety?
 Difficulty adjusting to the College environment?
 Dealing with mental health and wellness?

Please complete the General Concern Form
 Click here: <https://tinyurl.com/HCCC-Care> or scan the QR code. The form is NOT monitored 24/7.

A member of the CARE team will respond to your request during regular business hours. If you need immediate help call or text 988 or visit <https://988lifeline.org>

HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE RECOGNIZED AS NATIONAL FINALIST IN SIX AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE CATEGORIES



Advancing Institutional Equity and Belonging
Hudson Helps Resource Center



Outstanding College Corporate Partnership
HCCC and New Jersey Reentry Corporation



Faculty Innovation
Joseph Gallo
Professor of Theatre Arts



Rising Star Manager
Amaalah Ogburn
Director of Employee
and Labor Relations



Rising Star Executive
Dr. Heather DeVries
Associate Vice President
for Academic Affairs



**Faculty Member
of the Year**
Karen Hosick
Assistant Professor
of Exercise Science

For the second time in three years, Hudson County Community College (HCCC) programs, faculty, and staff are finalists for six of the 10 American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) 2026 Awards of Excellence. AACC will announce national winners at its Annual Conference, April 10–14, 2026, in Seattle, Washington.

HCCC earned recognition in these categories:

Advancing Institutional Equity and Belonging — The College dedicated resources that produce measurable, equitable outcomes; fostered an inclusive environment; and implemented forward-thinking practices.

Faculty Innovation — Professor of Theatre Arts Joseph Gallo created HCCC's Theatre Arts Program; integrated his Off-Broadway and Kennedy Center playwright experience into instruction; redesigned remote classes into interactive experiences; advised students through an open-door

approach; designed a new 100-seat black-box theatre now under construction; established Playwrights Festivals and a paid internship program; and arranged for more than 2,000 students to attend New York City theatre productions.

Outstanding College Corporate Partnership — HCCC and the New Jersey Reentry Corporation created academic and career pathways for formerly incarcerated residents. Since 2021, more than 1,000 students enrolled; 83% completed classes, and 70% earned credentials, continued their education, or secured employment. Fourteen received proficiency certificates, and 72 enrolled in GED programs.

Rising Star Manager — Director of Employee and Labor Relations Amaalah Ogburn strengthened engagement, identified inefficiencies, and refined processes that improve the student experience.

Rising Star Executive — Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Heather

DeVries, led return-to-campus efforts, advanced retention and graduation gains through Achieving the Dream, and co-lead the Justice-Involved Undergraduate Success and Training (JUSTice) Program.

Faculty Member of the Year — Assistant Professor of Exercise Science Karen Hosick integrated evidence-based strategies into instruction and helped develop the Personal Fitness and Exercise Science programs.

“We congratulate these outstanding colleagues and partners,” said HCCC President Dr. Christopher Reber.

In 2024, HCCC was also a finalist in six AACC categories and won national awards for Student Success, Faculty Member of the Year, and CEO of the Year.

HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO ONE OF THE LARGEST SOIL MICROBIOME MAPPINGS IN THE UNITED STATES



Hudson County Community College students and alumni contributed to one of the largest soil microbiome mappings in the United States. Pictured here, from left: HCCC Instructor of Chemistry Raffi Manjikian, and students Katerin Marquez, Ashley Medrano, Alketa Muja, Zoe Canizares, and Aadil Ishtiaq.

Lincoln Park, one of Hudson County's treasures, spans 150 acres of athletic fields, playgrounds, a track, golf courses, and kayak rentals along the scenic Hackensack River. While statues honor Abraham Lincoln and other historic figures, the park's soil holds an even deeper legacy. As part of Earth's most biodiverse habitat, soil supports more than half of all known species—yet its microorganisms have remained largely unexplored.

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) students, guided by Instructor of Chemistry Raffi Manjikian, spent a week collecting soil samples in Lincoln Park

for one of the largest soil microbiome mapping projects ever undertaken. Students and alumni Ashley Medrano, Alketa Muja, Zoe Canizares, Katerin Marquez, and Aadil Ishtiaq—majoring in Biology, Nursing, Chemistry, Education, and Business—participated through Biodiversity and Informatics for Genomics Scholars (BioDIGS) and the local American Chemical Society chapter. They joined the BioDIGS consortium, a collaboration of about 150 researchers across more than 40 institutions nationwide.

Researchers gathered samples from farmlands, forests, hiking trails, parks, and

Superfund sites, sending them to Johns Hopkins University for DNA sequencing and genome analysis. Their findings, published in *Nature Genetics*, catalogued more than 1,000 newly discovered bacterial strains and revealed insights into arthropods, annelids, nematodes, plants, fungi, bacteria, archaea, bacteriophages, and other microbes.

As a faculty fellow of the Genomic Data Science Community Network (GDSCN), supported by the National Human Genome Research Institute and the National Science Foundation, Manjikian provided students with hands-on genomic research experience.

“My participation in the BioDIGS project began with a simple curiosity about the soil in Lincoln Park,” said Aadil Ishtiaq. HCCC President Dr. Christopher Reber praised the team's contributions to advancing STEM education and data science while deepening understanding of the soil microbiome's impact on plants, animals, and humans.

MSCHE LIAISON VISITS HCCC IN PREPARATION FOR SELF-STUDY



Dr. Suzan Harkness (right), Vice President for Institutional Field Relations of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, visited Hudson County Community College on Tuesday, Feb. 17 to meet with members of the College community, learn more about HCCC, and provide feedback on the College's Self-Study Design. Pictured from left are Dr. Terence Peavy, MSCHE Lead Vice President for Institutional Field Relations, and HCCC Self-Study Co-Chairs Dr. Heather DeVries, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Assessment, and Dr. Nadia Hedhli, Professor of Biology.



THE HUDSON IS HOME WELLNESS SPOTLIGHT

Continued from page 4

ingredients or cooking methods to make healthy eating more enjoyable. Registered dietitians often share simple, nutrient-dense recipes designed for busy schedules.

Practice smart snacking — Choose snacks that combine protein and fiber—such as nuts, yogurt, or veggies with hummus—to stay satisfied between meals.

Learn about food's full journey — This year's broader focus includes understanding where food comes from, how to shop mindfully, and how to store food safely at home.

Resources:

8 Tips for healthy eating: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-eat-a-balanced-diet/eight-tips-for-healthy-eating/>

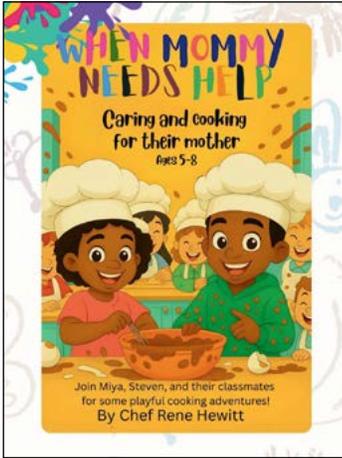
Healthy Eating Tips: <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/features/healthy-eating-tips.html>

Healthy eating, nutrition, and diet: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/healthy-eating-nutrition-and-diet>

YouTube: TedxTalks: How to make healthy eating unbelievably easy – Luke Durward: <https://youtu.be/Q4yUJv31Rk?si=x6zxtSDXNAvC-QW3>

Hackensack Meridian Health: 4 Essential Nutrition Tips - <https://youtu.be/MjXlwHfGVik?si=xANxqug0eX8aVX3>

PROFESSIONAL NOTES



Chef Rene Hewitt recently released a children's book, "When Mommy Needs Help: Caring and Cooking for Their Mother."

Chef Rene Hewitt wears many hats—culinary educator, HCCC alumnus President, community leader—Fruit Jam CEO maker, and now, published author.

His debut children's book, *When Mommy Needs Help: Caring and Cooking for their Mother*, was released this month. The story follows siblings Miya and Steven as they step up to help at home and in the kitchen when their mother isn't feeling well. Blending storytelling with interactive elements such as recipe-making templates and a coloring section, the book serves as both a children's activity book and beginner-friendly cookbook, emphasizing

empathy, teamwork, and the joy of caring for family.

Designed for readers ages 5–8+, the 76-page color book encourages children to build confidence, responsibility, and meaningful connections through cooking alongside an adult. Rene is now working on part-two of the series that will be released by mid to late summer.

In Rene's words: "I felt a lot of adults get the attention when it comes to cookbooks. However, children are our future and many of them love to cook. So, why not grab them, put an apron on them and start the process of teaching them the art of cooking."

When Mommy Needs Help is available on Amazon in hardcover, paperback, and Kindle eBook formats.

Raffi Manjikian, Instructor of Chemistry, represented Hudson County Community College via his participation in the "Building Leadership Capacity to Support Two-Year College and Disciplinary Society Collaborations" workshop series sponsored by the National Science Foundation, Carleton College, William & Mary, and Glendale Community College. The workshop brought together 51 two-year college (2YC) faculty and disciplinary society representatives from 11 disciplines.

The Hudson County
Community College
Foundation

**24th Annual
Golf Outing**
Monday,
June 22, 2026

**Brooklake Country Club
Florham Park, NJ**

Set upon 150 beautiful acres,
Brooklake's championship,
USGA rated course offers a tradi-
tional, challenging course
with undulating greens.

Scan QR for details



HCCC FOUNDATION ART COLLECTION

Continued from page 7

Collection Coordinator Dr. Andrea Siegel notes that artwork by women at HCCC is "integrated and everywhere," reflecting the College's inclusive curatorial approach.

Maxwell's gift features primarily large-scale photographs, along with works in other media, including sculpture by New Jersey artist Kiki Smith, a portrait by renowned photographer Cindy Sherman, a painting by April Gornik, and *Summit* (2000), Emily Eveleth's oil-on-canvas depiction of two donuts, now prominently displayed in the Gabert Library in Jersey City.

HCCC also collaborated with Maxwell to share additional works with partner

institutions, including Bergen Community College and Rutgers University. This cooperative model reflects the Foundation Art Collection's distinctive philosophy: rather than storing art out of view, HCCC transforms its Journal Square and North Hudson campuses into living museums. The vision, championed by former President Dr. Glen Gabert and advanced by current President Dr. Christopher Reber, has influenced colleges statewide and beyond.

Students encounter professional artwork daily, enriching academic life and fostering pride and belonging. "What drew me to HCCC was the understanding that these works would be displayed for all to enjoy and used to teach both art and curation," Maxwell said. President Reber

added that the Collection is "one of the College's great sources of pride," made possible through the generosity of partners like Maxwell.

In order for future generations of students to benefit from this enrichment, the HCCC Foundation Art Collection needs investment to fund the conservation, installation, and preservation of this artwork to ensure long term stewardship and lasting educational impact. If you'd like to help support the Foundation Art Collection, please donate at <https://www.hccc.edu/community/foundation/index.html> or contact us for more information at foundation@hccc.edu.

CONFERENCE COVERAGE

HCCC Delegation Advocates for Community Colleges at 2026 ACCT National Legislative Summit in Washington, DC

Seven members of the Hudson County Community College (HCCC) community represented the College at the 2026 ACCT National Legislative Summit in Washington, D.C. from February 8–12, 2026.

Students and staff joined community college leaders from across the nation to hear about higher education policy and advocacy from a range of speakers. The delegation also met with members of the federal legislative delegation on Capitol Hill, including Sen. Cory Booker and Rep. Rob Menendez, to discuss issues impacting community college students and institutions.



Congressman Rob Menendez (second from left) with members of HCCC’s delegation at the ACCT National Legislative Summit. Seated: Lisa Fernandez. Standing from left: Pius Cor Jesu, SGA President Rifaya Khajamohideen and Alumni Representative to the Board of Trustees Joanne Rivera.

The HCCC team included Trustee Emeritus Bakari Lee; Assistant Director of Student Life and Leadership Keischa Taylor; Alumni Representative to the Board of Trustees Joanne Rivera; and HCCC students Pius Cor Jesu, Lisa Fernandez, and SGA President Rifaya Khajamohideen.

Through their participation, the HCCC delegation strengthened the College’s voice at the national level and reinforced its commitment to student advocacy, civic engagement, and access to higher education.

HCCC Earns ‘Best in Showcase Award’ at 2026 Bellwether Futures Summit



The College received a Best in Showcase Award in Planning, Government, and Finance.



HCCC President Dr. Christopher Reber introduces a keynote speaker during the Bellwether Futures Summit.



Pictured from left: Matthew Fessler, Dean of Enrollment; John Urgola, Associate Vice President, Institutional Research; Dr. Christopher Reber, HCCC President; HCCC Students; Kaysan Deodat, Yadhira Moranchel; and “Lady Liberty.”

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) won the “Best in Showcase Award” for the Planning, Government, and Finance category at the Bellwether College Consortium’s 2026 Bellwether Futures Summit for its

innovative Summer Enrollment Program.

A delegation from the College – including Dr. Christopher Reber, HCCC President; John Urgola, Associate Vice President, Institutional Research;

Matthew Fessler, Dean of Enrollment; and students Kaysan Deodat and Yadhira Moranchel – presented before a panel of national judges and peer institutions at the Futures Summit.

Collaborative Leadership: Engaging Our HCCC Community

This workshop provides some necessary leadership tools to enhance engagement and collaboration at the College.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Qualities of a collaborative leader
- Promoting innovation
- Delegation with Input
- and More

Training is open to all students and HCCC employees.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2026
 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
 Gabert Library
 71 Sip Avenue, Room L413
 Jersey City, NJ
 Light refreshments will be served.

RSVP by March 24 by sending an email to rwalker@hccc.edu

PHI THETA KAPPA HONOR SOCIETY NEWS

Community College Transfer Pathways Institute

On February 6, representatives from across the state gathered at Princeton University for the Community College Transfer Pathways Institute, hosted by the University's Program for Community College Engagement and Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity.

The Institute convened student affairs and academic advising professionals from all 18 New Jersey community colleges to explore strategies that expand access to high-graduation, low-debt selective universities for community college students. Participants engaged in meaningful dialogue about strengthening transfer pathways, improving advising practices, and removing barriers that can prevent students from successfully transitioning to four-year institutions.

The institute underscored a shared commitment to equity, opportunity, and



Beta Alpha Phi co-advisor Prof. Ted Lai and Luz Tellez, Career and Transfer Specialist (as well as (past Beta Alpha Phi Vice President of Service and HCCC alumna) represent HCCC at Princeton University's Community College Transfer Pathways Institute on Feb. 6.

student success. By fostering collaboration between community colleges and selective universities, the event advanced efforts to ensure that talented students—regardless of starting point—can access transformative educational opportunities and achieve their academic goals.

HARVARD NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS (HNMUN)



Dr. Joseph Caniglia (left) and student leaders of HCCC's Model United Nations Club at the 72nd Annual Session of the Harvard National Model United Nations.

From Feb. 12 to Feb. 16, Dr. Joseph Caniglia, Executive Director of the North Hudson Campus, and a distinguished delegation of students from Hudson County Community College proudly represented the College at the 72nd Annual Session of the Harvard National Model United Nations, hosted at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

During the four-day international simulation, HCCC delegates engaged in rigorous debate, diplomacy, and collaborative problem-solving alongside peers from around the world. Participants deepened their understanding of the structure, procedures, and mission of the United Nations by researching complex global challenges, drafting resolutions, negotiating policy positions, and building consensus across diverse perspectives.

The experience strengthened students' leadership, public speaking, research, and critical-thinking skills while fostering a deeper appreciation for international relations and multilateral cooperation. Their participation reflects HCCC's commitment to academic excellence, civic engagement, and preparing students to contribute thoughtfully and effectively to the global community.

Join us at the Spring 2026

OPEN HOUSE



SATURDAY, APRIL 11

10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Journal Square Campus

Student Center - 81 Sip Avenue, Jersey City, NJ

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

North Hudson Campus

4800 Kennedy Blvd., Union City, NJ

<https://hccc.edu/admissionsrecruit.com/Apply/Events/EventDetails?eventId=762172de-04fe-4011-8aea-9ee25517d667>

<https://hccc.edu/admissionsrecruit.com/Apply/Events/EventDetails?eventId=848f7b6-95fe-4011-8aea-9ee25517d667>

- Take a tour of our campus
- Complete an Admissions application
- Engage with different academic programs
- Speak with students, faculty, and staff
- Meet with Financial Aid and find out if you are eligible for free tuition



Registration is required!
Scan the QR code or go to www.hccc.edu/openhouse to register!



HUDSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE WELCOMES WINNING BASKETBALL COACHES TO DEVELOP NEW ATHLETICS PROGRAMS



Hudson County Community College has hired Carlos Cueto as Women's Basketball Head Coach (left), and Ethan Nardone as Men's Basketball Head Coach.

Rendering of the full-size gymnasium at the Center for Student Success, currently under construction. Amenities will include a walking track, fitness center, and athletic training facility.

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) hired two accomplished head basketball coaches with strong winning records and a shared commitment to student-athlete development as the College prepares to launch intercollegiate athletics at the HCCC Center for Student Success, now under construction.

"We are excited to have Carlos Cueto and Ethan Nardone working with HCCC Director of Athletics Jonathan Sisk to organize, launch, and lead our basketball programs," said HCCC President Dr. Christopher Reber. "Their experience and passion for academic and athletic excellence will motivate our student-athletes to perform at their best on and off the court."

Carlos Cueto, Head Coach for Women's Basketball, brings extensive experience as both a player and coach. A former University of Richmond point guard, he finished his collegiate career ranked third all-time in assists. At St. Anthony's High School in Jersey City, he earned All-County honors and played on two state

championship teams. Cueto later coached Union City Girls' Basketball to state sectional and league championships and mentored numerous student-athletes who earned academic and athletic scholarships. A two-time Hudson County Coach of the Year, he also led Secaucus High School Boys' Basketball to its first league title in more than two decades. He operates a Union City youth basketball academy and previously taught history and financial literacy at Union Hill High School. Cueto holds a master's degree in Supervision and Administration in Education from Saint Peter's University and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Richmond.

Ethan Nardone, Head Coach for Men's Basketball, is an NBA operations specialist with coaching experience at the NCAA Division I and III levels and in high school programs. He guided the Abraham Joshua Heschel School Boys' Varsity team to its first postseason appearance since 2019 and coached two Yeshiva League All-Star selections. At Iona College, he served as Men's Basketball Video Coordinator, tracking defensive efficiency and managing

scouting and recruiting databases. Nardone also held assistant coaching roles at SUNY Canton, SUNY Potsdam, and Franklin & Marshall College, where he helped rebuild rosters and lead teams to winning seasons. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in History from Stony Brook University and attended St. John's University School of Law.

At HCCC, both coaches will oversee program operations, recruit and mentor student-athletes, monitor academic progress, design practice plans and game strategies, and ensure compliance with NJCAA regulations while promoting integrity and sportsmanship.

The 153,186-square-foot HCCC Center for Student Success in Journal Square will feature a full-size NCAA gymnasium, fitness center, walking track, and athletic training facility, along with classrooms, student services, a black box theater, health sciences labs, offices, and a university center. Under Jonathan Sisk's leadership, the HCCC Office of Athletics plans to begin basketball competition and develop men's and women's volleyball programs in 2027.

*Save
the
Date*

Hudson County Community College Foundation

29th Annual
Gala

Thursday, December 3, 2026 | 6 p.m.
Culinary Conference Center
161 Newkirk Street, Jersey City, NJ 07306
Details to follow!



CONTINUING EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT NEWS



13TH ANNUAL GIRLS IN TECHNOLOGY SYMPOSIUM

Inspiring and Supporting Young Women in STEM.

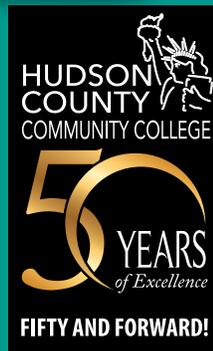
**THURSDAY,
MARCH 26, 2026
8:30 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.
CULINARY CONFERENCE CENTER
161 NEWKIRK ST. JERSEY CITY, NJ 07306**

[Girls in Technology 2026 Volunteer Availability](https://tinyurl.com/GIT-Volunteer)
<https://tinyurl.com/GIT-Volunteer>

High Schools and Middle Schools are invited to attend **at NO COST**. Meals are included.

Program will include: Activities, Panel Discussions, Student Displays, Presentations, Contests, Giveaways and more!

For more information, and sponsorship opportunities please contact Chastity Farrell at cfarrell@hccc.edu.



CONTINUING EDUCATION UPCOMING PROGRAMS

BASIC LIFE SUPPORT (IN-PERSON)

Wednesday, March 18, 2026
9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Price: \$81
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/basic-life-support-bls-certification-winter-2026-dates-tickets-1980006204859?aff=oddtcreator>

EXCEL TIPS & TRICKS: WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER (ONLINE)

Wednesday, March 25, 2026
6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m. | Price: \$35
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/excel-tips-tricks-worksmarter-not-harder-registration-1983454387466?aff=oddtcreator>

BASIC ARABIC LEVEL I (ONLINE)

Mondays | March 30, 2026, through April 27, 2026
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. | Price: \$135
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/basic-arabic-level-ion-line-course-registration-1982230344320?aff=oddtcreator>

PROJECT MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATE PROGRAM SPRING 2026 (ONLINE)

Mondays and Thursdays | March 30, 2026, through May 7, 2026 | 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. | Price: \$1,280
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/toefl-test-of-english-asa-foreign-language-winter-26-exam-preparation-tickets-1980484732147?aff=oddtcreator>

BASIC LIFE SUPPORT (IN-PERSON)

Wednesday, March 25, 2026
9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Price: \$81
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/basic-life-support-bls-certification-winter-2026-dates-tickets-1980006204859?aff=oddtcreator>

BASIC LIFE SUPPORT (IN-PERSON)

Saturday, March 28, 2026
9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. | Price: \$81
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/basic-life-support-bls-certification-winter-2026-dates-tickets-1980006204859?aff=oddtcreator>

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

School of Continuing Education
and Workforce Development

161 Newkirk Street, Room E504, Jersey City, NJ 07306
(201) 360-4224/5358 | CE@hccc.edu

ALUMNI CORNER

Claude Lewis

A.S., Culinary Arts
HCCC Class of 2011

The accomplished Claude Lewis (IG: @chef_claudous) is owner/chef of Rasta Pasta and Salads (www.rastapastaandsalads.com) in NYC and the Freetown Road Project Caribbean Eatery. He is also a private chef, culinary instructor, and a culinary ambassador for Antigua and Barbuda, and a champion on Food Network's popular cooking competition *Chopped*.



What brought you to HCCC?

For a number of years, I had heard of the Culinary Institute at HCCC and the great classes being offered. Living in Jersey City and wanting to further my education in hospitality, it only made sense that I try it out for a semester.

What made HCCC the right choice for you?

HCCC is part of my home town. It's a community college, but its culinary program rivals those of any of the top schools in the area.

How did you become interested in cooking and in doing it as a career?

My parents are immigrants from Antigua and Barbuda. As a first generation West Indian American, food and culture are a big part of our lives. Both of my parents are chefs, so I've tried pretty much every dish from tripe to conch to stews of goat, oxtail, or chicken. Dishes with flavors like allspice and clove. For years, I've felt that the cuisine of the island could be brought to the forefront and become more than just what you get when you're on vacation in the Caribbean.

How did your time at HCCC prepare you for a successful career in the industry?

Having mentors like the chefs at HCCC has rounded me not only into a great chef, but a great person as well. I worked in the industry for several years before attending HCCC, and I can say that I would not be where I am now if I didn't attend.

What was it like being a *Chopped* champion!

It was a great feeling. The best part is I am happy that I got to be someone that can inspire others to not give up their dreams. I never imagined that I could be on TV, let alone win and represent my city and heritage. It was truly an honor.

Tell us a bit about Freetown Road Project.

Freetown was a nod to my parents. The name is a fusion of the villages that they grew up in on the island of Antigua and Barbuda. My father Ethan Lewis grew up in Freetown village, and my mom Claudette Browne Lewis was from Old Road village. I wanted to show my appreciation to them for all they have done and to represent my heritage. The menu consisted of Antiguan local dishes that are also national dishes like fun gee, ducana, and (Antiguan style) pepper pot.

Tell us about Rasta Pasta and Salads.

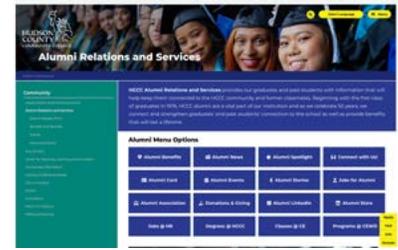
Currently, I'm heading a small concept restaurant near Washington Heights called Rasta Pasta and Salads.

It focuses on a wildly popular dish from Freetown's menu. Unlike the traditional rasta pasta, we serve ours with a scotch bonnet bechamel sauce.

What advice would you give to HCCC students looking to follow in your footsteps?

Explore every opportunity, never be too good to do anything. Integrity is everything. Lastly make sure you enjoy what you do.

What's New?



Updated Alumni Web Pages:

Explore the updates and stay connected—visit the pages here: <https://www.hccc.edu/community/alumni-services/index.html>

Alumni Benefits:



With an Alumni Card, you can take advantage of exclusive benefits and stay connected to the HCCC community! Details here: <https://www.hccc.edu/community/alumni-services/index.html>

Alumni Giving:



You can sponsor events, students, or classes, or make an annual contribution at a level that works for you. Every gift, no matter the size, makes a difference. Giving is easy — visit <https://www.hccc.edu/community/foundation/index.html#ways-to-give> to make your impact today!

**HCCC Alumni:
Get Involved!**

Join, socialize, and network!

For information about the College's Alumni Association and membership benefits, please email alumni@hccc.edu.



**The Alumni Association has
launched its new Instagram page!**

**Follow us at
@hccc_alumni**

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70 Sip Avenue
 Jersey City, NJ 07306
 Phone (201) 714-7100

NORTH HUDSON CAMPUS

4800 Kennedy Boulevard
 Union City, NJ 07087
 Phone (201) 360-4600

SECAUCUS CENTER

Located at the Frank J. Gargiulo Campus of the Hudson County Schools of Technology
 One High Tech Way
 Secaucus, NJ 07094
 Phone (201) 360-4388

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myhudson.hccc.edu
www.hccc.edu

Invest in the education of an HCCC student by making your gift of any amount today.



50 FACES OF ALUMNI

As part of the 50th Anniversary of Hudson County Community College, we introduce and celebrate our 50 Faces of Alumni: Fifty and Forward. This campaign focuses on the importance of Alumni to the College, the workforce, and community by highlighting 50 Alumni in various fields, levels of achievement, and from different backgrounds. Visit “50 Faces” <https://www.hccc.edu/community/alumni-services/50-faces/index.html>

50 Faces of Alumni

“I liked the small classes at HCCC. I remember being part of Student Success. I started out needing tutoring in math and after my first or second semester, I was the one tutoring people.”



Amaka Amakwe
 D.M.D., M.D., Oral Surgeon at Bowling Green and Wauseon, Ohio
 A.S. Science & Mathematics – Biology
 Class of 2010

50 Faces of Alumni

“I really liked the size of the classes at HCCC, how strict the program was, and that it was incredibly hands-on.”



Bruce Kalman
 James Beard-nominated Chef
 Co-owner of Knead & Co
 A.A.S., Culinary Arts
 Class of 1991

Alumni Association 2026 Alumni Meetings

- Tuesday, April 7, 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, July 7, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, September 15, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

All meetings are held at 81 Sip Street, Multipurpose Room, Jersey City, and virtually.

Alumni Association 2026 Events:

Interested in attending these events, please email us at alumni@hccc.edu

March

Saturday, March 21, 2 p.m.
 Alumni Association Broadway Show

April

Tuesday, April 21, 4:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
 Culinary Conference Center
 Alumni Job Fair in partnership with Career and Transfer Services, Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CEWD), HCCC Alumni Association and Alumni Relations

May

Thursday, May 7, 2026,
 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
 Culinary Conference Center
 161 Newkirk Street, Jersey City
 Alumni Reunion

SAVE THE DATE:

Saturday, May 16
 Alumni Association BBQ Networking Event at Washington Square Park
 Jersey City Heights

For more information on alumni events, go to:

<https://www.hccc.edu/community/alumni-services/index.html>

