

**PRELIMINARY DRAFT
SELF-STUDY REPORT
ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE**

September 28th, 2022

Submitted to:

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On behalf of:

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and

The Essex County College Board of Trustees



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INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

The College

Founded in 1966, Essex County College (ECC) is one of New Jersey's 18 public, two-year colleges. Serving the County of Essex and located in Newark, New Jersey, the College typically enrolls more than 9,000 students annually seeking to earn an associate's degree or academic certificate and an additional 2,000 students enrolled in non-credit, continuing education programs. Roughly half of students who are pursuing a degree or academic certificate attend full-time, yielding an annual full-time equivalency of nearly 5,000 degree-seeking students each fall semester. The College offers 45 associate degree programs, 22 academic certificate programs, an array of non-credit, continuing education and workforce development programs, as well as a high school dual enrollment program.

The College's student body is comprised of nearly 60 percent women, has a median age of 22 years old, and is the only community college in the State of New Jersey bearing designations as both a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Using the Federal Title III and Title V definitions, over 90 percent of the College's students are minority. The largest racial/ethnic populations among students are African-American (47 percent) and Hispanic (27 percent). Adding to the College's rich diversity, it annually serves approximately 150 international students representing over 50 countries.

ECC is comprised of two campuses with the main campus located in Newark, New Jersey and the West Essex branch campus located in West Caldwell, New Jersey. Roughly 90 percent of student credit hours are taken at the main campus, with most of the balance taken at the West Essex branch campus. The College also has two additional sites located in Newark with small enrollments.

Essex County College predominantly serves students who reside in Essex County (91 percent) with a large portion of students residing in the city of Newark (44 percent). Newark is Essex County's largest municipality, both in terms of land area (24.2 square miles) and population (311,549) and accounts for roughly a third of Essex County's total population (863,728). Newark has a median household income of just \$37,476 and a per capita income of \$20,924 while also having the highest cost of living to income gap among the 19 municipalities that are home to New Jersey's community colleges. Roughly 76 percent of financial aid applicants receive need-based aid in the form of a Pell Grant and those financial aid applicants have a median household income of only \$24,443.

These economic disparities dramatically impact the student learning experience. Just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Essex County College participated in the *#RealCollege Survey* administered by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, at Temple University. According to this study, administered prior to the pandemic, 59 percent of students at ECC experienced food insecurity in the previous 30-day period. This figure is 20 percentage points higher than both the State and National averages for the community college sector.

In addition to these food insecurities, the majority of ECC students experience unstable living conditions with 61 percent reporting housing insecurity in the previous year, a figure 16 percentage points higher than both the State and National averages for the sector, with 16 percent experiencing homelessness in

the prior year. An analysis of these three metrics shows that 75 percent of students are affected by at least one of these economic barriers (food insecurity, housing insecurity, homelessness).

Data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic via *the #RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey*, indicated that ECC students are being severely impacted by the ongoing health crisis. Among students who were employed prior to the pandemic, 42 percent lost their jobs, 27 percent saw reduced hours and/or pay and 47 percent reported caring for a family member due to the pandemic. This data was collected in June of 2020, and it is reasonable to assume employment figures further since then.,

The findings of this research also validated in-house research by confirming the vast digital divide that exists at the College. According to the *#RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey*, 31 percent of Essex County College students reported that they did not have a functional laptop and reliable internet connection at home, which significantly added to the challenge of transitioning to remote learning during the pandemic.

These statistics starkly illustrate why Essex County College must be fully committed to a holistic approach to student support. The College strongly believes that meeting the needs of all students to overcome these socio-economic barriers, is the best way to empower students to reach their full potential and become leaders in their community. This guiding principle permeates the philosophy of Essex County College's Mission, Vision, and Values and the introspective analysis that guides the Self-Study process.

Mission

Essex County College is an open access community college that serves the diverse needs of students through comprehensive educational programs, training, and continuing education. Essex County College is dedicated to academic excellence and the success of its students.

Vision

A Beacon for Education and Knowledge, Essex County College attracts people who seek a better life through education. We transform lives, broaden learning, and empower students to achieve their full potential. Our college community and graduates are change agents and leaders who contribute to the health, vitality, and advancement of society.

Values

- **TEACHING AND LEARNING:** *We affirm teaching and learning as our primary purpose. The College seeks to instill in students general and specialized knowledge, the ability to think critically, and a commitment to civic responsibility. We value academic freedom and support the open exchange of ideas and experiences.*
- **EXCELLENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** *We believe in creating a learning environment that fosters high expectations for achievement. The College is committed to rigorous academic standards, faculty excellence, and responsive support services that enable students to reach their full academic, professional, and personal potential. We*

provide excellent programs that utilize technology, demonstrate innovation, and undergo evaluation to ensure consistent and outstanding performance.

- **COMMUNITY AND ENGAGEMENT:** *We support programs that enhance the economic and social development of Essex County. We value our role as a vital community resource and are dedicated to forging effective partnerships with our many constituencies.*
- **LEGACY AND TRANSFORMATION:** *We honor our history and valued traditions of Essex County College, the City of Newark, and the County of Essex. We also welcome transformative power of education to change lives. Building upon our past achievements, we eagerly embrace the future by pursuing innovations in teaching, administration, and student services.*
- **DIVERSITY AND ACCESS:** *We support programs that enhance the economic and social development of Essex County. We value our role as a vital community resource and are dedicated to forging effective partnerships with our many constituencies.*

Strategic Plan

In 2019, Essex County College unveiled *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*. The Plan is a vision and a blueprint for where the College wants to go over the next several years and defines the strategies that will be employed to get there. The Plan's goals and objectives encompass all aspects of teaching, learning, and student support for our multiple missions – award completion, transfer, and workforce development. Additionally, the Plan acknowledges the full range of challenges that students are faced with, including their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and takes a holistic approach towards addressing those needs. *In response to the COVID-19 pandemic*, Essex County College updated the Strategic Plan (*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0*) with a plan to update the Plan each annually, by outlining the strategic activities planned for the upcoming fiscal year. Following this model, *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1* was released in September 2022.

Institutional Goals

- Re-establish financial stability to ensure a sustainable future for Essex County College.
- Maximize the impact of our academic and non-credit workforce development programs on the local community and labor market by increasing the number of students served.
- Continue to innovate our academic and student support programs to improve student persistence and on-time completion.
- Continue to improve the physical infrastructure of Essex County College to better meet the needs of our students and enhance the student learning experience.

Institutional Priorities

During the past two years, the College has taken a hard and detailed look at itself, not just in relation to the Commission Standards and Requirements, but at everything it does. Reaffirmation of accreditation is certainly one the major goals of this report but improving the experience for students is just as important.

Coinciding with the Self-Study process has been the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing recovery from it. In an unplanned exercise, completed in an extraordinarily short period of time, ECC moved its operations, including most classes, online while continuing to provide all student and public services.

This transition and its aftermath required that the College examine what it does, how it does it, followed by adaptation and change in real time. Along with those actions, it took the opportunity to evaluate how well it was doing. Students were regularly surveyed to determine if their needs were met. Additional references to how the College responded to the pandemic, especially as they related to student needs may be found throughout the Self-Study.

The fiscal challenges were as difficult as the physical ones with the College's three main funding sources – tuition and fees, county allocations, and state allotments – were significantly curtailed. Fortunately, the Essex County Commissioners provided adequate funds until the state and federal governments developed a series of programs and grants that supported students as well as institutions.

While the Strategic Plan, which covers 2019-2024, was in development, attention was paid to the goals that the College considered most important. From that process, four areas were designated as Institutional Priorities and the steps to achieve them are interwoven in this Self-Study.

Self-Study Institutional Priorities

- Eliminate barriers to student success by ensuring sustainable, effective, and efficient organizational structures, processes, and policies
- Increase access through enrollment services initiatives
- Provide support-based retention initiatives to increase enrollment
- Increase completion and articulation through clear and well-designed academic pathways

Essex County College views the Self-Study process as an opportunity to further realize the transformative changes necessary to meet our mission and values, and successfully achieve our vision and strategic goals. These priorities further emphasize the importance the College places on student success and the Self-Study discusses the steps taken to achieve them. The challenges encountered as well as recommendations as to how to overcome them is also an integral part of this report.



STANDARD I: MISSION AND GOALS

The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.

INTRODUCTION

Below is a brief overview of the College, its facilities, students, and programs. A more detailed discussion is available in the *Institutional Overview* (page 1).

Facilities

Essex County College was established in 1966 as the public, two-year community college of Essex County and admitted its first students in temporary quarters in downtown Newark in 1968. At the time, the College was using the former campus of Seton Hall University as its temporary location. In 1976, the College moved to its current permanent site in the heart of the University Heights district of the city, home to both Rutgers Newark and New Jersey Institute of Technology.

In 1978, the College opened a branch campus at the western side of the county. Over the past decades it has grown, both in the number of students it serves and the services and facilities it provides. In 2021, the College broke ground to rebuild the West Essex Campus facility, which will be a state-of-the art sustainable building that continues to embrace the College's mission and vision for student access and success.

Students

When it first opened its doors in 1968, ECC enrolled 3,400 students. In Fiscal Year 2021, there were 10,658 students enrolled in both credit and non-credit courses, with 82 international students from 30 countries. Committed to diversity, ECC is designated as both a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Among 18 community colleges in the state of New Jersey, ECC is the only institution holding this distinction. In fall 2021, 46.7 percent of for-credit students identified as Black/African American, while 27.1 percent of for-credit students identified as Hispanic/Latino.

The College boasts a strong tradition in athletics. Known as the Wolverines, ECC athletes play in NJCAA Division I and Division II sports. To date, at least 32 athletes have participated in the Summer Olympic Games.

Programs

In Academic Year 2021-2022, the College offerings included 67 degree and certificate programs, and there were 260 distinct courses offered. Essex County College also offers a wide range of courses related to Community, Continuing Education, and Workforce Development at different times to accommodate student schedules. In addition to Middle States accreditation, many of ECC's programs are accredited by their professional accrediting agencies. See Chapter 3 for more information on our professional accreditations.

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

The Board of Trustees of Essex County College last affirmed the College's Mission, Vision, and Values Statement on April 19, 2022, through its adoption of Board Policy 1-3 *Formal Adoption of the College's Mission, Vision, and Values Statements*. (I; Revised Mission Statement December 2019) The Mission, Vision, and Values Statements are available to the public on the College's website under the heading Board Policy Manual. The statements are also widely displayed in offices and student areas throughout the College and are typically reproduced in official college publications. The statements are simple and concise, but provide the guidance needed to develop the extensive plans needed to implement them:

Mission: *Essex County College is an open access community college that serves the diverse needs of students through comprehensive educational programs, training, and continuing education. Essex County College is dedicated to academic excellence and the success of its students.*

Vision: *A Beacon for Education and Knowledge, Essex County College attracts people who seek a better life through education. We transform lives, broaden learning, and empower students to achieve their full potential. Our college community and graduates are change agents and leaders who contribute to the health, vitality, and advancement of society.*

Values: *TEACHING AND LEARNING: We affirm teaching and learning as our primary purpose. The College seeks to instill in students general and specialized knowledge, the ability to think critically, and a commitment to civic responsibility. We value academic freedom and support the open exchange of ideas and experiences.*

EXCELLENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: We believe in creating a learning environment that fosters high expectations for achievement. The College is committed to rigorous academic standards, faculty excellence, and responsive support services that enable students to reach their full academic, professional, and personal potential. We provide excellent programs that utilize technology, demonstrate

innovation, and undergo evaluation to ensure consistent and outstanding performance.

COMMUNITY AND ENGAGEMENT: We support programs that enhance the economic and social development of Essex County. We value our role as a vital community resource and are dedicated to forging effective partnerships with our many constituencies.

LEGACY AND TRANSFORMATION: We honor our history and valued traditions of Essex County College, the City of Newark, and the County of Essex. We also welcome transformative power of education to change lives. Building upon our past achievements, we eagerly embrace the future by pursuing innovations in teaching, administration, and student services.

DIVERSITY AND ACCESS: We support programs that enhance the economic and social development of Essex County. We value our role as a vital community resource and are dedicated to forging effective partnerships with our many constituencies.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLLEGE’S MISSION AND VALUES

The original “Philosophy of Purpose” was in effect from 1968 until 1985 when the mission was refined to more clearly articulate ECC’s goals and objectives. In 2001, the College developed a shorter mission statement: a one sentence declaration of the mission accompanied by a separate values statement. The mission statement was subsequently updated, inserting the phrase “diverse constituencies” to reflect the varied demographics of the College population. In March 2002, the Board of Trustees approved this newly crafted Mission Statement and Statement of Values. In 2009, Trustees expanded the 2002 statement to include the words “dedication to academic excellence.” During the development of the 2014 -2018 Strategic Plan, the Vision Statement was created to provide an inspirational capstone that points to the Mission and Values.

The College’s Mission, Vision, and Values address its internal community (faculty, staff, and students) and external partners (public and private, alumni, governmental, and business organizations). Those statements are inspirational and are operationalized through a carefully developed plan: *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*¹ that captures the essential qualities that define the learning core for today and the future as it “retains the spirit of what we value and who we are as an institution but brings that vision into better focus to chart a clearer path forward.” (I; ECC Strategic Plan 2019-2024)

¹ *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* is the title of ECC’s strategic plan. As a dynamic plan, it is assessed, analyzed, and modified every year to reflect that year’s goals. When a specific version is referenced, it will be noted. A discussion of the development of the strategic plan may be found in Standard VI.

The simplicity and inclusivity of the Mission, Vision, and Values have served the College well as executive leadership, demographics, and other factors have changed and has provided useful guidance to ensure that Essex County College consistently seeks to serve its community. The implementation of strategic plans over the years, especially the latest iteration, have dealt with those changes, while remaining true to the standards set in the Mission, Vision, and Values. The College is quite proud that its guiding principles, coupled with a dynamic strategic plan were strong and flexible enough to weather the COVID-19 pandemic and has led to an even stronger institution.

The Board of Trustees has been crucial to the evolution of the Mission Statement by affirming and approving recommended revisions and additions, including the Vision and Values statements. For example, on December 15, 2009, the Mission Statement was expanded to better reflect its long-standing commitment to academic excellence. (I; Revised Mission Statement December 2019)

INSTITUTIONAL GOALS ALIGNED WITH THE MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

ECC uses a mission-driven assessment process where all assessment initiatives are aligned with the institutional and unit mission, educational goals, and institutional (strategic planning) goals. The institutional goals and objectives described in the current strategic plan, derive from the College's Mission, Vision, and Values. To solidify that connection, key phrases were taken from ECC's Mission Statement: "open access," "serves the diverse needs of the students," "offer comprehensive educational programs," "training and continuing education," and "dedicated to academic excellence and the success of its students." The ways the institutional goals directly apply to these key phrases from the mission and the values of the college can be seen in the table below:

Table 1.1 - Institutional Goals Related to Key Concepts in Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission	Values	Institutional Goals
Open Access	Teaching and Learning	Goal I - Re-establish financial stability to ensure a sustainable future for ECC Goal IV - Continue to improve the physical infrastructure of ECC to better meet the needs of our students and enhance the student learning experience
Serves the Diverse Needs of the Students	Diversity and Access	Goal II - Maximize the impact of our academic and non-credit workforce development programs on the local community and labor market by increasing the number of students served Goal III - Continue to innovate our academic and student support programs to improve student persistence and on-time completion

Mission	Values	Institutional Goals
Offer Comprehensive Educational Programs, Training and Continuing Education	Legacy and Transformation	<p>Goal II - Maximize the impact of our academic and non-credit workforce development programs on the local community and labor market by increasing the number of students served</p> <p>Goal III - Continue to innovate our academic and student support programs to improve student persistence and on-time completion</p>
Dedicated to Academic Excellence and the Success of Its Students	Excellence and Accountability	<p>Goal II - Maximize the impact of our academic and non-credit workforce development programs on the local community and labor market by increasing the number of students served</p> <p>Goal III - Continue to innovate our academic and student support programs to improve student persistence and on-time completion</p> <p>Goal IV - Continue to improve the physical infrastructure of ECC to better meet the needs of our students and enhance the student learning experience</p>

As evidenced in Table 1.1, *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0* outlines the College's goals and objectives that have been established in furtherance of the Mission, Vision, and Values. The College identified seven Key Performance Indicators to help measure the effectiveness of the strategic planning and the impact of our strategic planning efforts. They serve as overarching measures for the College's improvement and are used to quantify the degree of impact from the planning efforts. There are four institutional goals, identified in the strategic plan that are briefly discussed below. A more detailed analysis may be found in Standard VI.

Institutional Goal I - Re-establish Financial Stability

As stated in Goal I, ECC proposed a plan to re-establish financial stability to ensure a sustainable future (*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0*, p. 6-7). To that end, it:

- Developed and implemented a step-by-step plan to transition to a program-based, monthly/quarterly budget that includes all sources and expenditures of funds
- Organized all revenue and expenses were better reported in relation to objectives
- Reorganized the Finance department in alignment with newly developed budgeting and accounting processes
- Improved the purchasing process with provision of training to all departments on the purchase requisition

Most importantly, the College set a goal of establishing a \$5,000,000 reserve fund and accomplished that in one year.

Institutional Goal II - Maximize Impact of Credit and Non-Credit Workforce Development Programs

In Goal II, the College seeks to maximize the impact of its academic and non-credit workforce development programs on the local community and labor market by increasing the number of students served (*STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0, p. 8-9). The annual target for FY 2021 was to increase enrollment yield from 43.7 percent (actual) in fall 2020 to 46.7 percent for fall 2021 and to increase total student credit hours by 7.5 percent from 143,588 (actual) in FY 2021 to 154,357 for FY 2022. While the plan's annual target was a 7.5 percent increase, the actual increase was 1.3 percent. However, the target to increase total non-credit clock hours by 10 percent from 104,241 (actual in FY 2021) to 114,665 in FY 2022. This target was far surpassed as ECC reached a total of 140,871 non-credit clock hours in FY 2022 and represented a 35.2 percentage point increase.

Institutional Goal III - Innovate Our Academic and Student Support Programs to Improve Student Persistence and On-Time Completion

Goal III calls for a plan to innovate academic and student support programs to improve student persistence and on-time completion (*STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0, p.10-11). The Plan specified an annual target to increase the one-year retention rate from 51.4 percent (actual) for the fall 2020 FTFTDS cohort to 55 percent by fall 2021. This target was successfully surpassed when ECC achieved a 61.0 percent retention rate for the Fall 2020 FTFTDS cohort, an increase of 9.6 percentage points. To achieve the goal, a College-wide academic advisement/mentorship program, incorporating the Progressive Retention Initiative, was initiated and is discussed in further detail in Chapter 4. Additionally, the College implemented a new developmental education model and First-Year Experience course to improve student acclimation and increase retention while also employing new software platforms that enhanced student services and retention, also discussed in Chapter 4.

Institutional Goal IV - Improve the Physical Infrastructure of ECC

In furtherance of Goal IV, the College developed a plan to improve the physical infrastructure of ECC to better meet the needs of its students and enhance the student learning experience (*STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024: Version 2.0, p. 12-13). The College targeted the completion of the following projects by the end of FY 2022, all of which were accomplished:

- West Essex Campus Phase I - Complete the demolition of the old structure;
- West Essex Campus Phase II - Complete the design and bidding process;
- West Essex Campus Phase III - Begin the main construction
- Gymnasium Renovation Phase I - Complete the main interior: walls, lights, floor, etc.
- Complete the renovation of all the Newark campus restrooms
- Renovate all concrete sidewalks/Clara Dasher bridge
- Renovate the IT area
- Renovate the Center for Technology (CFT) Staff/Faculty area

ASSESSMENT OF MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Essex County College's extensive assessment processes, which include Program Learning Outcomes and Course Learning Outcomes assessment, assist the College in re-evaluating its goals, which are linked to its mission and values, with the objective of improvement and growth. The information gathered through these processes serve to inform the institution of whether its mission is being met and its goals achieved. The most direct source of relevant information is through the strategic plan which has several levels of assessment. With the strategic plan being derived from the Mission, Vision, and Values, analysis of implementation results serves as an assessment of the effectiveness of the Mission, Vision, and Values and may lead to change or reaffirmation as appropriate. Rather than the typical five-to-ten-year review of a college's mission, ECC evaluates its efficacy annually.

As with any plan, the success of the strategic plan is contingent upon the ability to implement it. While the first version of *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, was developed with an implementation plan that would be coordinated by a Strategic Planning Committee made up of over 25 members of the College, the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a more efficient and effective means for oversight of the implementation process. The process was reorganized, and the goals and objectives were updated and refocused. Annual activities were identified, which charted a more transparent course for how the institution intended to meet its vision.

For each annual activity, designated reporting officers were identified and, using Strategic Planning Online (SPOL), the College's planning and assessment software platform, a budgeting plan, targets, and quarterly updates are captured on an ongoing basis. In addition to these quarterly reports, area heads (who are also Cabinet members) and unit leaders (Deans, Chairs, and Directors) were asked to include updates on these strategic activities in their monthly reporting. When the plan was updated in August 2021, the decision was made to include the annual activities directly into it and it will be updated on an annual basis in alignment with the annual budgeting process.

A strategic planning calendar was developed in conjunction with the annual budgeting cycle so that cabinet officials could ensure their budget requests were aligned with strategic priorities and action-plans for the upcoming year. The annual planning calendar was also designed to inform the budget adjustment and reallocation process so resources could be strategically deployed with formally identified institutional priorities in mind. This calendar is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES REFLECT CHANGES IN THE COLLEGE'S ENVIRONMENT

ECC's direct response to the changing environment was to create an updated version of the strategic plan, resulting in *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0*. The main purpose of the reorganization of goals and objectives (from five goals and 21 objectives to four goals and 17 objectives) was to reflect the recognition that the reporting requirements and other factors were cumbersome and did not provide the needed guidance as to how to proceed from year-to-year. The need to modify the plan can also be attributed by the enormous changes brought about by the pandemic.

Since the initial version of the strategic plan was based on an environmental scan conducted in 2017, the pandemic had drastic and rapid changes to the learning communities and labor market. Therefore, ECC

conducted a new environmental scan to reflect the reality and the needs of all constituencies. The College continues to use the information obtained by this report in its decision-making.

Additionally, with an emphasis on boosting enrollment and retention, the College President has established a Progressive Retention Taskforce (I; 100 First Days Accomplishments of Dr. Boakye's Presidency, p.3) to guide these efforts. The College has also created a "One Stop Shop" Welcome Center, as well as many other initiatives in support of achieving the four institutional goals. Many of these will be discussed in Standard IV.

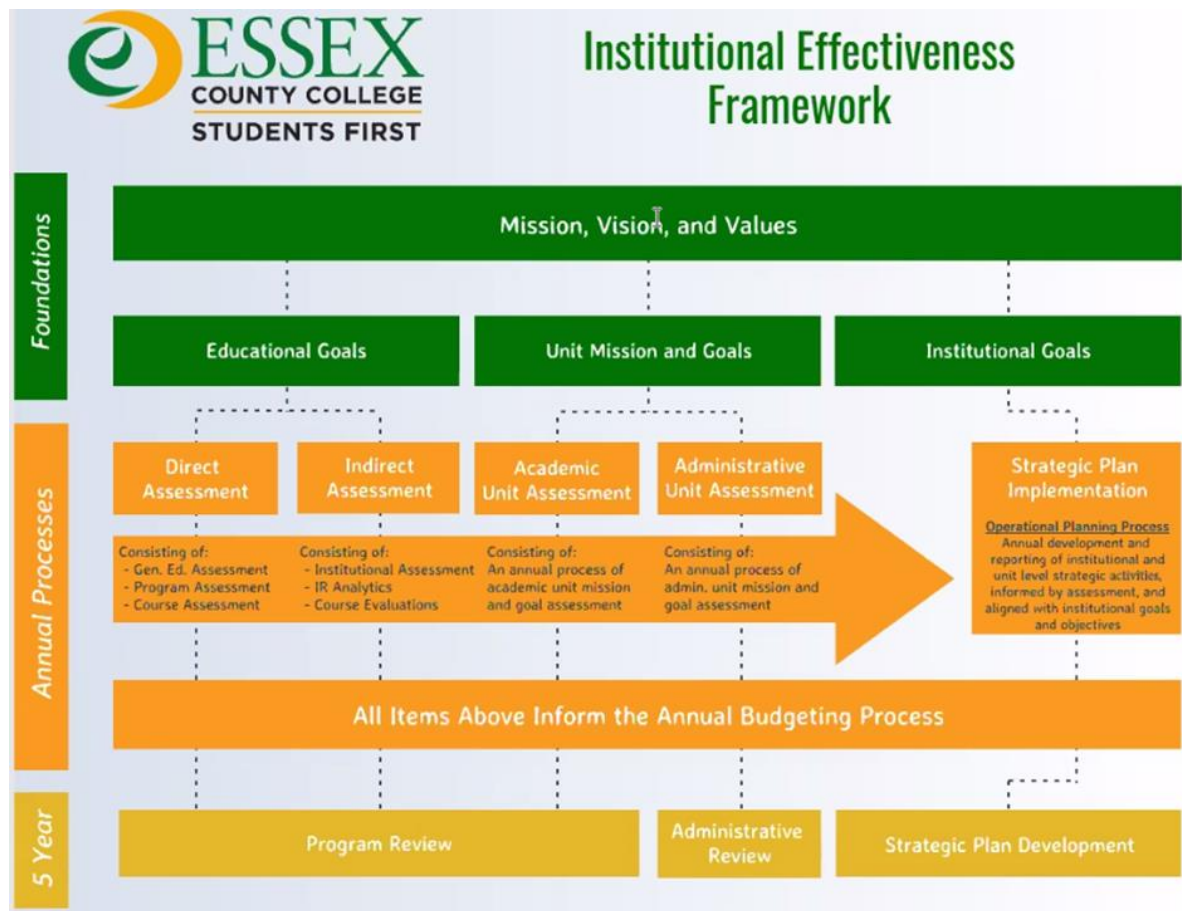
COMMUNICATING MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

The College's Mission, Vision and Values Statements are memorialized in Board Policy 1-3. These Statements define the College's purpose as an open access community college and provide guidance as to the direction the College intends to take to serve its students. To ensure disclosure to all stakeholders, the College gives high visibility to the Mission, Vision, and Values Statements in as many places as possible.

The Statements are consistently displayed on the College's website and available to internal and external stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, the local community, and the public at large. The website display is mirrored in high traffic areas of the College's Megastructure, including Academic Divisions, where Mission, Vision, and Values posters remind stakeholders of the common purpose that unites them and helps to build engagement. In addition to the high visibility displays on the website and in campus buildings, the Mission, Vision, and Values Statements are also a part of key messaging in internal documents like the College's *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan, Version 2.0*, the Course Catalog, and the Annual Fact Book, and in external documents like grant applications.

Seen graphically in Table 1.2, the Mission, Vision, and Values are the foundation of ECC's entire institutional effectiveness framework. As can be seen in the table below, all of ECC's planning, assessment, and budgeting activities are designed to attain the College's mission, vision, and values.

Table 1.2 - Institutional Effectiveness Framework



CONCLUSION

Essex County College owes its existence to the vision of those in state and county government who saw the value of establishing a community college in Essex County. More than 50 years ago they gave the College the resources and direction needed to thrive and grow. The College has assumed the responsibilities that go with that charter and developed its own statements of Mission, Vision, and Values that have slowly evolved over the decades. Those aspirations and qualities are reflected in everything it does and plans to do.



STANDARD II: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.

INTRODUCTION

Essex County College provides an environment that supports academic freedom and fosters a culture of respect at all levels of the College, including administration, faculty, staff, and students. When disputes arise, the College is able to seek resolution through its grievance policy that allows for all parties to be heard and a reasoned decision made. Additionally, the College is able to rely on policies to avoid conflicts of interest and to provide for fairness and impartiality in hiring.

As to both internal and external constituents, it is truthful with public announcements and complies with all federal, state, and commission reporting policies. The College promotes affordability and accessibility and in furtherance of its Mission, Vision, and Values and conducts periodic assessment of ethics and integrity policies and practices in furtherance of its goal of continuous improvement.

In the recently revised *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1* (II; Students First Strategic Plan Version 2.1) a new Goal was added to: “Develop a leadership team with representatives from all areas of the College to ensure that all practices and policies involving our interactions with students, prospective students, employees, and the community at large are in alignment with the institution’s values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Essex County College upholds academic and intellectual freedom; freedom of expression; respect for intellectual property rights in research, publications, and professional activities; and the rights of faculty to free speech in publication. The attendant principles are described in the faculty collective bargaining agreements [ECC Faculty and Adjunct Faculty Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs, <http://www.essex.edu/hr/>]. Academic freedom and free speech, and publications in the exercise of such rights, are not subject to institutional censorship or discipline. In addition, faculty understand their obligation to present to the public an image of the College that is fair, and at all times respectful of the opinions of others.

The College requires that all employees and students adhere to the ethics and integrity practices outlined in College Regulation 6-10: Academic Integrity. Under this guidance, the entire College must adhere to the five fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility (College Regulation 6-10). These values encapsulate principles of behavior that enable academic institutions to translate ideals into action, and to foster a climate and culture of respect, diversity, and inclusiveness.

The College administration is responsible for making academic integrity an institutional priority, and for providing faculty and students the resources necessary for understanding and addressing issues of academic integrity in academic programs and support services. Additionally, the administration is responsible for establishing equitable and effective procedures to deal with violations of academic integrity. The rights of employees are outlined in the Employee Handbook which is updated periodically and accessible from the College website. (II; REG 6-10 Academic Integrity)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY OF STUDENTS

The College preserves the ethics and integrity of the institution by dis-allowing plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty. All faculty share the responsibility for educating students about the importance and principles of academic integrity. Individual faculty also have the responsibility to inform students of the expectations regarding academic integrity within individual courses, including permissible limits of student collaboration, and, where relevant, recognition of the research of others. Academic integrity is included in course syllabi, specifically that plagiarism, cheating, and fraud are strictly forbidden. The rights of, and judicial process for, students are described and disseminated in the Student Lifeline Handbook. (II; Student Handbook- Lifeline)

To support academic integrity and prevent plagiarism in student work, the College utilizes a plagiarism checking tool called *Turnitin*, within the learning management system Moodle. The College also uses Respondus, a custom lockdown browser for online proctoring of exams. By checking against plagiarism, both tools help to ensure that the student is producing his/her original work.

Student violations of academic integrity are sanctioned within the framework of actions identified in the Student Code of Conduct/Student Handbook and described in the course syllabus distributed in each class. Sanctions for acts of academic dishonesty include the resubmission of an assignment; failure of the test/exam; failure of the course; probation; suspension from the College; and even expulsion.

ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

Leadership and oversight of academic matters at Essex County College is provided by the College Board of Trustees through academic policies, and by the administration through College regulations, all of which are codified in Board Policies and By Laws, and College Regulations at [<https://www/essex.edu/academic-policies/>].

The College operates on a system of representative and participatory shared governance in academic matters. Faculty, staff and students participate with the Board of Trustees and the administration in decision-making about academic issues.

The College's Standing Academic Governance Committees are the framework for faculty oversight and input into the leadership decision-making process on academic matters. (II; REG 6-2 Standing Academic Governance Committees) Per Regulation, there are six Committees: Academic Computing Advisory Committee (ACAC); Academic Development Advisory Committee (ADAC); Academic

Policies Advisory Committee (APAC); Academic Standards & Assessment Committee (ASAC); College Curriculum Committee (CCC); and Faculty Development Committee (FDC). The structure also includes the College Promotion Committee (CPC) which makes recommendations for faculty promotions to the Executive Dean for Faculty and Academics/Vice President for Academic Affairs. Regulation 6-2 codifies the responsibilities and membership for the committees and equitable representation. Further discussion of the academic governance committees may be found in Standards III and VI.

CLIMATE OF RESPECT

Essex County College fosters a climate of respect among its community and administers separate annual Campus Climate Surveys for both students and employees annually to ensure it maintains a positive and welcoming climate. The Student Campus Climate survey presents 10 statements to students that serve as indicators of a positive campus climate and asks them for their level of agreement. As Table 2.1 below illustrates, in the fall 2021 survey which was completed by over 800 students, more than three-quarters of student respondents agreed with all 10 indicators. As can also be seen in Table 2.1, results in fall 2021 showed an improvement in 9 out of 10 indicators. These improvements can be in-part attributed to the Customer Service Training conducted throughout Spring and Summer of 2021. This training was administered through dozens of small groups sessions, and was delivered to all departments at the College. Training focused on creating a culture of care and climate of respect for all ECC students.

Table 2.1 - Data from the Fall 2021 Student Campus Climate Survey

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	Percentage of students who agree with statement*	Year-over-year Change
I feel safe at Essex County College	84.71 percent	+ 6.2 percent
There are sufficient support resources available	77.39 percent	+ 6.8 percent
I believe my differences are embraced and valued	77.07 percent	+ 1.4 percent
Discrimination is not tolerated at ECC	81.66 percent	+ 1.2 percent
Harassment is not tolerated at ECC	83.57 percent	+ 1.4 percent
ECC works hard to prevent discrimination and harassment from happening	76.43 percent	- 1.3 percent
Racial and cultural differences are celebrated at ECC	84.87 percent	+ 1.2 percent
I feel a sense of community and belonging at ECC	74.81 percent	+ 3.6 percent
Campus police and security protect us from harm	74.92 percent	+ 5.0 percent
ECC provides sufficient programs and resources to foster the success of a diverse population	77.72 percent	+ 1.2 percent

* Includes students who “strongly agreed” or “agreed”.

An Employee Campus Climate Survey is also administered annually. Results in fall 2021 revealed that employees feel they are valued by their supervisors and treated with respect by their colleagues. As Table 2.2 illustrates, more than 80 percent of employees “strongly agree” or “agree” with the statement

that they feel respected by their colleagues, while only 8 percent of employees cited they “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. When asked if they felt valued by their supervisors, nearly three quarters (72.6 percent) reported that they “strongly agree” or “agree” while 12.7 percent “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed”.

Table 2.2 - Data from the Fall 2021 Employee Campus Climate Survey

Please rate your level of agreement with the following items:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
I am treated with respect by my colleagues	40.2 percent	40.7 percent	11.1 percent	4.5 percent	3.5 percent	100 percent
I feel valued by my supervisors	41.6 percent	31.0 percent	14.7 percent	4.6 percent	8.1 percent	100 percent

While the data from the Employee Campus Climate Survey showed that a climate of respect exists among employees, the College always utilizes assessment data in its pursuit to continually improve. As such, findings from the Employee Campus Climate survey were a factor in the decision to increase the frequency of the Cabinet Retreat from an annual to a bi-annual event with a focus on team building within each area head’s respective areas. Additionally, these results factored into the decision to incorporate the following FY 2023 strategic activities into *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan: 2019-2023, Version 2.1. (II; Students First Strategic Plan Version 2.1)*

- Goal II. Obj. A. iv. - Develop a leadership team with representatives from all areas of the College to ensure that all practices and policies involving our interactions with students, prospective students, employees, and the community at large are in alignment with the institution’s values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Goal I. Obj. D. v. - Develop and implement a succession planning process that will help the institution better identify, fill, and train for key positions while fostering a culture of commitment and long-term planning in all areas of the College.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Regulations and Policies

The College adheres to fair and impartial employment practices as provided in its Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Regulation and Non-Discriminatory Policy. (II; RG 4-16 Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Act) The Offices of Human Resources and the General Counsel work collaboratively to ensure compliance with institutional guidelines and legislative mandates at the federal, state, and local levels. Regulations, policies, and procedures are formulated, documented, and implemented at multiple levels of the organization from the Board of Trustees as Board Policies (II; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022) at the institutional level as College Regulations 4-2, 4-6, 4-8, 4-10, 4-11, 4-20, and 6-7 (II; REG 4-2 Employment of College Employees, II; REG 4-6 Position Descriptions, II; REG 4-8 Employee Recruitment, II; REG 4-10 Compensation Adjustments, II; REG 4-11 Personnel Employment Actions, II; REG 4-20 Employment of Grant Funded Employees, II; REG 6-7

Adjunct Faculty) and at the employee level in the Employee Handbook (II; ECC Employee Handbook) and the union collective bargaining agreements. (II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs) Regulations are updated periodically and accessible from the College website. Board Policy is reviewed and updated on a biennial basis as provided in Board Bylaws. (II; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022)

Practices and procedures for the hiring, retention, and separation of employees vary based on employee and position classifications agreed to by and between the College and the respective collective bargaining units. Human Resources oversees the process for regular full-time employee classifications (i.e., administrative, faculty, police, professional, security, and support staff). Recruitment and selection of adjunct faculty, temporary and part-time staff are conducted by the hiring divisions and departments. The requisition, recruitment, and selection of all positions undergo a multi-level approval process that includes the review, clearance, and approval by the area heads, Finance, Human Resources, and the College President with Board of Trustees approval only required for regular full-time employee classifications.

Approved vacancy requests are posted for a minimum of two weeks on the PeopleAdmin talent management system. Applicants for regular full-time employee classifications are screened through one or more levels of interviews with administrator, director, and faculty positions conducted via search committees. Final candidate selection and appointment requires approval by the Board of Trustees and the appointment is contingent upon clearance through a background check.

ONBOARDING, TRAINING, AND SEPARATIONS

The onboarding of regular full-time employees includes a formal new hire orientation conducted by Human Resource. During the onboarding process, the new hire's position appointment is confirmed, benefits reviewed, collective bargaining unit affiliation introduced, and the Employee Handbook, Harassment Policy along with a New Hire Checklist of institutional policies and guidelines are addressed. A signed acknowledgement of the document review is maintained in the new hire's official personnel file.

To ensure the orientation and adequate training of employees, new hires and existing employees are expected to complete several training courses (e.g., ADA, Cleary Act, Customer Service, Diversity and Inclusion, Email Messaging, Ethics, FERPA, Title IV, Title IX) administered online through the SafeColleges compliance training system. Employee completion has slowly improved from an average of 28 percent since the launch of SafeColleges to averaging over a 55 percent completion rate for 2021-2022. Hybrid training methods implemented in 2021-2022 for the delivery of Customer Training garnered an average 65 percent completion rate. These rates of compliance are not adequate and additional changes in delivery and enforcement are being developed.

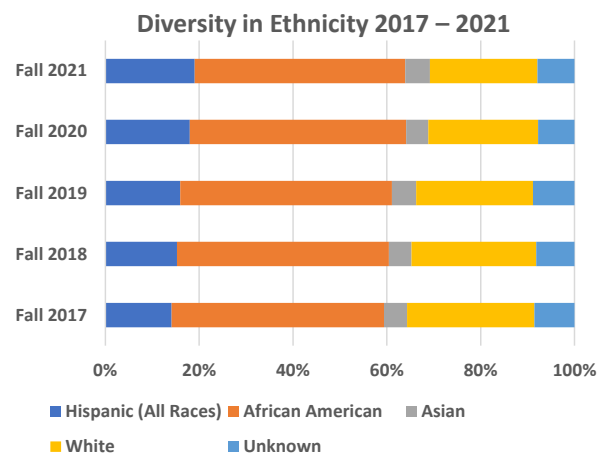
Formal meet-and-greet sessions were introduced in 2021 to provide the three to four-month cohort of new hires the opportunity to meet the College President, and other administrators of the college. The College had an 80 percent participation for the first two sessions with a drop to 58 percent for the third session due to the time of day held. Future sessions will be held at a more time that is more convenient to most new employees. Orientation on the assigned job, department area, and introduction to senior

administrators has and continues to be conducted informally at the department level for all employee classifications. Involuntary separations are discussed below.

CHANGES IN STAFFING

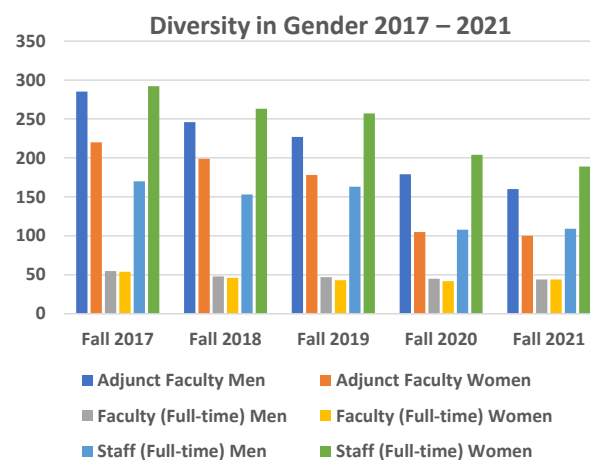
The College, as did many higher education institutions, experienced a decline in enrollment in the last five years, 2017-2021 resulting in a reduction in staff, full-time and adjunct faculty. Despite the downturn, from 2019 to 2021, the College posted 58 position vacancies for an average of 46 days with a total response of 3,265 applications from a combination of internal and external applicants. Practices have served to maintain a proportionate level of diversity in gender and ethnicity over the five-year period 2017 - 2021 as shown in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 below.

Table 2.3 - Employee Diversity in Ethnicity Fall 2017 – Fall 2021



* Source: IPEDS Human Resources Surveys

Table 2.4 - Employee Diversity in Gender Fall 2017 – Fall 2021



* Source: IPEDS Human Resources Survey

EVALUATION PROCESS

Policy and procedures for fair and impartial practices associated with the evaluation, promotion, and discipline of employees are outlined in the Employee Handbook and the union collective bargaining agreements. The performance rating scales, and timetable vary for each of the collective bargaining units as described in the Performance Evaluation Rating Guides. (II; Performance Evaluation)

The evaluation process is initiated with one-on-one meetings with supervisors at the department level followed by a review and sign-off by area heads. Employees are provided the opportunity to prepare a self-evaluation for discussion at the meeting that serves as an addendum to the written evaluation. Performance evaluations are to be conducted annually for regular full-time staff and non-tenured faculty. Human Resources compiles and tallies completed evaluations and sends repeated reminders and requests for completion. However, the College continues to experience a low response rate in completion and even a lower rate during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Human Resources, the General Counsel, and the Compliance Officer are coordinating ways to improve the process.

Employee compensation increases after hire is through annual salary increments, and periodic longevity payments, as contractually set by the collective bargaining units. Merit awards/incentives are contractually available and recommended annually by the collective bargaining units for approval by the President.

The Employee Handbook and the union collective bargaining agreements contain the policy and outlines procedures for discipline and both involuntary and voluntary separations. The College adheres to a progressive discipline approach that provides employees the opportunity to improve through both informal and formal stages of the process. The stages of the process vary by collective bargaining unit. Informally, department heads are urged to meet with the employee to address any problems in behavior and performance. Formally, verbal warnings, written warnings, and subsequent placement on 60-day, or extended additional 30-day probation status are the steps that are taken to provide an employee the opportunity to improve before recommendation for dismissal. Employees receive notice of adverse actions or impending involuntary separations and are advised that they may seek union representation if applicable and so desired. Separations of regular full-time employees are presented for review and action by the Board of Trustees, and exit interviews are conducted by Human Resources.

Despite the uncertainties and remote nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of employees reported a positive climate during the pandemic, averages from the 2020 and 2021 Employee Campus Climate Surveys revealed that employees were able to perform to their full potential (76 percent), felt highly valued by their supervisor (72 percent) and coworkers in their departments (77 percent) and were treated with respect by their colleagues (81 percent). Employees believed supervisors have a genuine concern for their wellbeing (65 percent) with providing adequate support to manage a work-life balance (73 percent). However, on average only 50 percent of the surveyed employees felt they received recognition when it is earned (53 percent), that their department had adequate resources to achieve its goals (51 percent), and that the College was providing sufficient opportunities for training and professional development (51 percent). Although these survey results were taken prior to a considerable improvement in finances, Human Resources and senior leadership continue to work under the President to improve employees' sense of security and recognition as well as their work-life balance.

GRIEVANCE POLICY

Employee Grievances

ECC has policies, and procedures in place to ensure prompt, appropriate, and equitable handling of grievances raised by students, faculty, and staff. Complaints and grievances, with the exception of harassment and sexual misconduct, are addressed by designated staff and departments based on the nature of the complaint and the grieving party (e.g., student, staff, faculty). Complaints of sexual harassment or misconduct are addressed by the Title IX Coordinator. Policies and procedures are documented and disseminated through various forms of communication and are accessible via the College website (www.essex.edu). Procedures allow for the anonymous, informal, and formal reporting of complaints and can be placed via phone to the ECC Compliance Reporting Hotline. On average, 80 percent of employees as compared to 70 percent of the students, when surveyed in 2020 and 2021, felt that discrimination and harassment were not tolerated, and the College worked hard to prevent discrimination and harassment from happening at ECC.

The Office of General Counsel is responsible for all grievances/complaints of a legal nature and is involved with any formal grievance/complaint that has the potential to escalate to a legal matter. The Compliance Reporting Hotline was initiated in fall 2108 allowing anonymous and non-anonymous complaints to be reported via phone to a third-party call service. The contact information and nature of the complaint are provided to the OGC who forwards it to the appropriate ECC department for follow-up. The number of hotline complaints vary from semester to semester. For the spring 2022 semester, there were a total of five employee and no student calls received to-date (Jan – Mar. 2022). From April 1, 2020 until January 2022 there were only four calls, two calls from students, a call from an external individual and an employee test call.

Employee complaints (e.g., performance, employment, compensation, conduct, harassment, discrimination) are addressed by Human Resources and the respective Department and Area Heads. The discrimination and harassment policies of the College are stipulated in College Regulation REG 5-23: Anti-Harassment Policy and the Non-Discrimination Policy. (II; REG 5-23 Anti-Harassment Policy) These policies are disseminated through the Employee Handbook and posted on the website.

The policy and procedural process for raising complaints and grievances are outlined in College Regulation (II; REG 4-5 Employee Complaints and Grievances), the Employee Handbook, and the respective collective bargaining agreements. Employees are encouraged to address their complaints directly with their supervisor/department head before proceeding with their complaint to Human Resources. The ECC Complaint Form (II; ECC Complaint Form Revised 08-2022) is used for the filing of a formal complaint. A formal grievance is initiated by employees and their respective union and is addressed with the involvement of Human Resources and managerial personnel (Department Head, Area Head, the College President, and Board of Trustees) through a progressive set of steps as outlined in the respective collective bargaining agreements. Contractual unresolved grievances after all steps have been exhausted may proceed to arbitration.

Human Resources receives complaints from staff and faculty across all employee classifications and position titles on a variety of concerns. While most complaints are resolved after one or two discussions with the employee and, when needed, with the department, there are a few over the years that have

escalated to grievances. Typically, one to three grievances per year may rise to the level of the President and Board of Trustees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the College experienced a rise in complaints centered around employees' concerns with the mandate to return to work on campus and the denial of specific accommodation requests to continue working remotely. Rarely has a grievance reached the level of arbitration. However, one case has escalated into a lawsuit against the College. As of May 26, 2022, there were at least five open grievances.

Student Grievances and Appeals

Students' academic related complaints (e.g., course assignment, instruction, grades) are addressed by Academic Affairs through the respective Division Coordinators, Chairpersons, and Deans as set out in the Lifeline Student Handbook. (II; Student Handbook- Lifeline) College Regulation 6-9 stipulates the policy for grade appeals with procedures disseminated through the student handbook. (II; REG 6-9 Student Grade Appeal) Complaints about student support services (e.g., conduct, enrollment, finance, athletics, disability accommodation, personal) are addressed by Student Affairs through the respective departments. Policy and procedures on the student financial aid grievance process are documented on the financial aid forms. (II; Financial Aid Counseling Tips for Students FACTS)

ECC has an Academic Grade Appeal which is a fair and respectful process. The academic divisions have Grade Appeal Forms (II; Grade Appeal 2021) for students to complete which, with supporting documentation, are then submitted to the Divisional Grade Appeal Committee. They are available on the ECC website and in the student handbook. It is through the Divisional Grade Appeal Committee that a resolution is reached regarding the change of grade. If a student is not satisfied with the result, they can then appeal the decision with the Collegewide Grade Appeal Committee. Student advocate representatives and academic affairs personnel are on the committee and seek to ensure a fair outcome.

Procedures on disability related complaints are outlined in the student handbook and are addressed by Student Affairs through the Student Development Center (SDC). College Regulation 5-22 regarding disability services (II; REG 5-22 Differently Abled Support Services) is being revised and a plan to better support students, services and awareness is in development as is a regulation for service animals. Also, as part of the Voluntary Compliance Plan for the Methods of Administration process through New Jersey Department of Education, the Compliance and General Counsel Offices have provided training for accommodations of students with disabilities. The offices are also working to strengthen and train the 504 and Title IX Coordinators in addition to other student support services, programs, and areas.

Compliance and Office of General Counsel are conducting training for and accommodations for students with disabilities. With this training, a new manual will be created for Title IX and a revision of the process and procedures of accommodations for students with disabilities. This is an opportunity to strengthen existing policies and procedures as well, and to create new policies and procedures if necessary. Title IX related complaints of sexual harassment and misconduct by students, staff, and faculty are addressed by the Title IX Coordinator with the Deputy Title IX Coordinator and other members of the Title IX team. Policy and procedures are outlined in College Regulation 4-3: Sexual Harassment and Title IX Policy (II; REG 4-3 Sexual Harassment) in compliance with the most recent federal Title IX regulations. This policy is disseminated to students in the student handbooks and to employees in the Employee Handbook.

Over the last five years, the College averaged four to five complaints per year. Complaints comprised a combination of student/student, student/employee, and employee/employee cases with no cases rising to the level of student expulsion or employee termination. A decision not to rehire was the outcome of some cases involving temporary employees. As of March 2022, there was one student/student open case.

A major challenge with grievances is the tracking of them. At this time, Human Resources is putting a system in place to track student grievances in regard to all things outside of grade appeals, Title IX complaints and student conduct cases. Additional training and a new website platform are needed so that student service areas and support services can track complaints and grievances.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A number of measures are undertaken by the College to ensure students, employees, and Board of Trustee members know their responsibility to conduct themselves and College business in a manner that reflects the highest standards of ethical conduct, without conflict of interest, and in accordance with institutional guidelines and all federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Trustee compliance is in Board Policy 1-4, (II; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022) employee compliance is in the Employee Handbook and College Regulation 2-24 (II; Reg 2-24 Institutional Ethics & Code of Conduct), and student compliance is in the Code of Student Conduct. (II; Student Handbook- Lifeline)

Trustees and employees are informed through the set of standards that they are not to have any interest, financial or otherwise, direct or indirect, in any business transaction or professional activity which is in substantial conflict with their duties to the College. They are also not to use their official positions to secure unwarranted privileges or advantages for themselves or others. Employees are also guided by the Media and Communication Policy and Whistle Blower Policy of the College. During new hire orientation, employees must provide written acknowledgement of being informed of the policies, regulation, and codes, which is maintained in the employee's personnel file. During student orientation, students are informed of the Code of Student Conduct and the areas of conduct that are considered inappropriate behavior and subject to disciplinary action.

In compliance with New Jersey State's ethical code, the College has achieved 100 percent compliance regarding managerial employees and trustees' annual filing of the New Jersey Financial Disclosure Statement (II; NJ Financial Disclosure Statement- Local Finance Notice 2022-06) [www.fds.nj.gov]. The College's Purchasing Department ensures that purchases and contract awards for goods and services are compliant with New Jersey contract laws and threshold levels. The bidding and contract award process is open and transparent, and unsuccessful bidders have exercised their rights through an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request to verify whether a specific contract was awarded to the lowest bidder. To ensure ethical practices without conflict of interest, consulting services, honorarium fees, and employee compensation supplements have threshold limits and require approvals at multiple levels (i.e., Area Head, Comptroller, General Counsel, and the President) as required by College Regulation 3-1. (II; REG 3-1 Consulting Fees Honorariums and Employee) Bids, contracts, consulting services, honorarium fees, and employee compensation supplements exceeding thresholds are reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees to ensure fair practices. Trustees will recuse themselves when their votes could be

perceived as a conflict of interest. Recusals are recorded in the minutes of the Board of Trustees public sessions as required by College Regulation 3-5. (II; Reg 3-5 Purchasing)

In 2022, the College formalized its existing Institutional Review Board (IRB) with College Regulation 6-14. (II; Reg 6-14 Institutional Review Board) The IRB has and continues to promote responsible research and ensure the privacy, welfare, and protection of students and employees as human subjects for research conducted by internal and external researchers. The College typically gets one to two IRB applications per year, and for 2022 has received three applications to-date.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

The College has a Public Communications office for announcements, media, advertisements, graphics, and marketing. Internally, Public Communications publishes the *Students First Daily Blast* (II; Students First Daily Blast (09-01-22) where messages are communicated and disseminated to students and the College community. The messages include upcoming activities, text messaging alerts, Town Hall virtual and on-campus meetings, electronic posters, calendars, and inspiring messages from celebrities such as Maya Angelou, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Oprah Winfrey.

Externally, there are outreach efforts utilizing 1) local, city, county, and state entities, 2) public radio and TV stations [e.g., WBGO, WBLS, NJ News12], 3) print publications such as newspapers, Positive Community magazine, and Local Talk, and 4) social media including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

The College seeks to be honest and truthful in public communications, announcements, advertisements, recruiting, admissions materials, and all data reported to the public including federal and state reporting requirements. The College's Institutional Advancement Office requires that all printed and online materials be approved through its office, and ensures it is communicated accurately, both internally and externally. The College Catalog is particularly scrutinized so that all information is accurate and up-to-date. The College is responsive to the needs of the students and has opened a new Welcome Center that coordinates recruitment and admissions activities, providing an additional outlet for communications.

PROMOTING AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Financial Literacy

Essex County College is committed to promoting affordability and accessibility to students as well as enabling them to understand funding sources. The College assesses tuition annually and from 2017-2021, tuition did not increase. Financial information is communicated, and available resources are distributed to prospective, new, and existing students through multiple internal and external avenues in and around the College community. The Welcome Center serves as the College's hub for the recruitment and enrollment of prospective students. The Center, distributes information about resources, provides advisement, workshops, on and off campus Open House events, and hands-on application assistance for the dissemination of information about financial opportunities and requirements.

Financial Aid informs students (prospective, new, and continuing) of funding opportunities, types of aid, instructions on how to apply for aid, and one-on-one, in-person, or virtual assistance with the completion of enrollment and Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) applications. The Financial Aid Officers conduct FAFSA workshops, attend Open House sessions and virtual information sessions, and hold standing weekly virtual sessions, by appointment or “walk-in”, for prospective, new, and continuing students.

Tuition and fee costs can be found on the website as well as via financial aid personnel, departmental brochures, the Net Price Calculator on the College webpage, department orientations, information sessions, and print materials. This information, accessible through multiple means, is meant to empower students by making them aware of funding options and the cost of college. ECC is devoted to assisting students with financial literacy initiatives to help alleviate costs and equipping them with financial resources. A Food Pantry was created where all students can obtain nutritious food. Additionally, the College created a Community Resources Guide that is found under the student main portal page. Within the guide are resources to help assist with housing, transportation, childcare, financial assistance, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). (II; Document Forthcoming) Financial Literacy programs and workshops are conducted throughout the year by the Financial Aid Office.

Sources of Funds, Student Options, and Cost

Essex County College administers federal and state student aid programs and provides those funds to eligible students in accordance with general eligibility and program specific requirements. These programs include the Federal Pell Grant program, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, and the Federal Work-Study program. Additionally, New Jersey student aid programs available for eligible students include Tuition Assistance Grant, NJ STARS, Governor’s Urban Scholarship, World Trade Center Scholarship, New Jersey Survivor Tuition Benefits Program, Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Scholarship, Governor’s Industry Vocations Scholarship for Women and Minorities, New Jersey “Dreamers,” New Jersey Foster Care Scholars, and the Community College Opportunity Grant.

The State of New Jersey’s Community College Opportunity Grant program is a “last dollar” program for students with a federal Adjusted Gross Income of up to \$80,000 and enrollment on at least a half time basis in the fall and spring semesters. This program is helpful for students who receive federal and/or state aid but still have a remaining balance due or who may not qualify for federal and/or state student aid but otherwise meet the program eligibility requirements. Students receive this information and other funding sources via flyers, mails, brochures, meetings, and the website.

The website lists extensive information including financial aid counseling and tips, getting help to complete the FAFSA, applying for aid, paying for college, types of aid (e.g. CARES, ACT, CCOG), student aid programs, financial aid videos, and scholarships for new, existing, and graduating students.

COMPLIANCE WITH ALL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment maintains various annual and calendars pertaining to institutional reporting responsibilities and external reporting requirements. They include:

- The annual IPEDS federal reporting calendar
- The New Jersey annual SURE reporting calendar

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment has a track record of submitting 100 percent of all Federal IPEDS and State SURE Reporting on-time. In addition, the individual departments and offices within the College are responsible for ensuring submission of and compliance with various State and Federal reporting requirements that fall within the offices' area(s) of operation. The respective departments and offices maintain internal calendars and/or systems pertaining to institutional reporting responsibilities and external reporting requirements.

With recent changes in administration and personnel in various offices throughout the College, the College is currently assessing its existing processes and procedures for internal controls, to align its reporting and compliance practices to ensure consistency in timely and accurate reporting.

CONCLUSION

Essex County College is fully committed to the concepts of ethics and integrity and has operationalized that philosophy by its actions – all infused with its motto, STUDENTS FIRST. Despite tremendous progress in these areas, and the emphasis on developing an organizational culture that encourages ethical conduct and compliance with legal and institutional policies, guidelines, and practices, the College is still experiencing low response and completion rates from students, faculty, and staff with some evaluations and compliance training. However, the College is making great strides through the implementation of the various initiatives discussed throughout this chapter.



STANDARD III: DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all programs, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.

ACADEMIC OFFERINGS OF THE COLLEGE

Essex County College offers a wide range of associate degree and certificate programs through six academic divisions and departments: Division of Biology, Chemistry and Physics; Division of Business, Division of Humanities and Bilingual Studies; Division of Mathematics, Engineering Technologies, and Computer Sciences; Division of Nursing and Health Sciences; and Division of the Social Sciences. In addition, there are credit and non-credit programs under the umbrella of the Community, Continuing Education, and Workforce Development.

The College offers Associate in Arts (A.A.), Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.), Associate in Science (A.S), and certificate programs. The A.A. and A.S. degree programs are specifically designed to prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Under New Jersey's Lampitt Law, graduates from A.A., and A.S., programs may be eligible to transfer a maximum of 66 credits to four-year institutions in the State.

The A.A.S. degree programs are designed to prepare students for immediate employment upon program completion, though many of the credits earned are transferable. The Certificate programs are meant to provide employment skills in one year or less of full-time study. They enhance or supplement existing skills or offer preparation for a new career path. Certificate programs include those offered through various divisions and the departments of Community and Continuing Education and Workforce Development. ECC offers 17 A.A. and 21 A.S. degree programs, 17 A.A.S., and 22 Certificate programs.

The College's recognition of the changing marketplace is evidenced by the contracting of Terra Firma LLC for environmental/labor market scanning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such environmental scans also address the need to develop new programs that prepare students to compete for entry-level positions in high-demand careers such as supply chain, allied health, and the computerized information fields. In addition to the development and support of new programs, the College also recognizes its legacy and commitment to the communities it has historically served. Several programs are focused on serving the local community. Such programs, designed for students who desire a broad academic foundation to serve the community include Human and Social Services, Education, Africana Studies Program, and a degree in Social Sciences.

Particularly since the pandemic forced the cancellation of most face-to-face activities, the College has built a strong online presence, both in the delivery of course material, and in providing extensive services to students. This expansion allows ECC to serve its constituencies in furtherance of its Mission, Vision, and Values even better than it had been.

RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

Essex County College's one-year retention rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students as per Federal Integrated Post-Secondary Education System (IPEDS) definitions, saw a sizable increase in the most current cohort. As can be seen in Table 3.1 below, the retention rate for the most recent cohort increased 9.6 percentage points over the prior year.

Essex County College's three-year graduation rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students as per IPEDS definitions, has increased annually for the past four consecutive academic years. As can be seen in Table 3.2 below, the graduation rate has increased 2.1 percentage points over the prior year and 5.7 percentage points over the last three years.

Table 3.1 - One-Year Retention Rates Over the Past Three Years

Year Cohort Entered*	Retained in:	Retention Rate	Year-over-Year Change
Fall 2018	Fall 2019	52.5 percent	+0.9 percent
Fall 2019	Fall 2020	51.4 percent	-0.9 percent
Fall 2020	Fall 2021	61.0 percent	+9.6 percent

* Includes first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students.

Table 3.2 - Three-Year Graduation Rate Over the Past Three Years

Year Cohort Entered*	Graduated before:	Graduation Rate	Year-over-Year Change
Fall 2017	Fall 2020	11.0 percent	+0.3 percent
Fall 2018	Fall 2021	14.6 percent	+3.6 percent
Fall 2019	Fall 2022	16.7 percent	+2.1 percent

* Includes first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students.

A 9.6 percent increase in the one-year retention rate from fall 2020 to 2021 in Table 3.1 is somewhat extraordinary but can be explained by examining the various initiatives undertaken by the College leading to improvements in student persistence and completion.

- The overhaul of the developmental testing model comprised of a shift from the exclusive use of standardized testing with Accuplacer to a multiple measures approach.
- Significant changes to the developmental education course sequencing utilized by the College which enabled transitioning from a pre-requisite model to a co-requisite model for the courses. These changes are aligned with *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan Version 2.0 and 2.1, Goal III, Obj. A, iv. “Continue to evaluate the efficacy of the newly designed accelerated developmental English and Mathematics courses.
 - Students who would have otherwise been placed in ENG 085/085T and ENG 096/096T took the ENG 099/101 combination.
 - In terms of Math developmental sequence, non-STEM major students who were placed in MTH 092 had the options of taking either MTH 101/091S or MTH 103/093S. The English remedial course change has been effective and has been rolled out to scale, whereas the Math co-requisite model is still under pilot studies with mixed results.
- Several changes and enhancements in advising services also played a significant role in providing students with improved online services for registration and financial aid.
- The creation of a Welcome Center and other student services. The College also hired student support specialists and advisors for every division. A detailed discussion of the wide range of online and in person student services may be found in Standard IV.

LENGTH AND RIGOR OF PROGRAMS

Courses are delivered in “packages” of specific length, typically 42-45 class hours for a three-credit course, spread out over 14 or seven weeks. While all credit courses at ECC meet that standard, the real question is whether that is the *appropriate* length for the course. Initially, that determination is made by the faculty who design the course. Their conclusions are vetted through several levels of review before being offered to students. Moreover, all credit courses offered conform to the federal definition of a credit hour as established by the U.S. Department of Education. As discussed in detail in Standard V, courses and programs are assessed to determine whether objectives are being met, and any needed modifications are made. The objectives themselves are established with an eye towards transferability and, especially in major courses in A.A.S. programs, to prepare students to enter careers.

The success rates of the graduates who transfer to four-year institutions suggest that the curricula for the programs they graduated from were rigorous and of appropriate length. Using the National Student Clearinghouse database, the College was able to ascertain that for the past five years, more than half of graduates (50.8 percent) transfer to a four-year institution within one year of receiving their degree from Essex County College. Querying this database also reveals that over the past five years, among Essex County College graduates who transferred to a four-year institution within a year of graduating, 44.0 percent earn a degree from their four-year institution within 3 years.

There are some programs with licensing and testing requirements that provide additional objective evidence on the effectiveness of those programs. Examples include a 93 percent NCLEX pass rate in the Nursing RN program, a 97 percent licensure pass rate in the Physical Therapy Assistant program, and 100 percent licensure pass rates in the Vision Care Technology, Radiological Technology, and Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) programs in the 2020 academic year.

Number of Awards (A.A., A.A.S., A.S., Certificates, etc.) from 2017 to 2021

The total number of awards including A.A., A.A.S., A.S., and Certificates for all divisions of the College for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 are depicted in the Table 3.3 below. Given the efforts made to ensure the suitability of the objectives in each program, and the rigorous review that programs are subject to, it is fair to say that the more than 1,000 individuals who receive degrees and other awards each year are solid evidence that the College is achieving its Vision of producing “graduates who are change agents and leaders who contribute to the health, vitality and advancement of society.”

Table 3.3 - Number of Awards (A.A., A.A.S., A.S., Certificates, etc.) from 2017-2021

Fiscal Year	Number of Associate Degrees	Number of Certificates	Total Awards	percent Change from Prior Year
2019-2020	918	34	952	-13.9 percent
2020-2021	1,069	30	1,099	+15.4 percent
2021-2022	1,090	36	1,126	+2.5 percent

FACULTY ROLE IN THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF CURRICULUM

Faculty Qualifications

The faculty play a vital role in teaching and learning activities across all academic and education programs offered by the College, and they are heavily involved in the design and pedagogy, including curriculum planning and instruction. The term “faculty” comprises full-time as well as part-time individuals who are involved in the student learning experience across all divisions. All new faculty members must meet the standards set by the New Jersey Administrative Code (III; NJ Administrative Code 9A1) concerning educational qualifications of that faculty member. A review of information regarding the faculty’s academic qualifications from ECC’s Department of Human Resources, the Faculty Association Contract, Essex County College’s Regulations Manual, and the College’s Academic Master Plan was undertaken.

The College adheres to regulations and guidelines established in College Regulation 4-2 (III; REG 4-2 Employment of College Employees) as well as the guidelines in the ECC Faculty Contract (III; Faculty Contract 2002_2006) in hiring full-time faculty, and the College Regulation 6-10 for hiring adjunct faculty. (III; REG 6-10 Academic Integrity) The regulations require having at least a master’s degree in

the field in which they are appointed, if such a qualification exists (recognizing that some technical and occupational specialties offer no such degree), or equivalent qualification in the field in which they are appointed.

For adjunct faculty, the statute provides that: “Adjunct faculty shall possess the same qualifications as full-time and part-time faculty. When appropriate in the judgment of the institution, compensating preparation or experience may be considered in judging whether an adjunct instructor is academically qualified to teach a particular course.” (III; NJ Administrative Code 9A1)

Sufficiency of Faculty

The full-time faculty are heavily involved in all pedagogical matters. In addition, they spend time teaching and helping students during office hours, are engaged in college-wide governance committees, work on curricular matters, and extracurricular activities. The office hour policy requires them to be available to students five hours every week besides being available through email appointments for four hours. They also work on other matters that directly impact student retention, especially one-on-one academic support and mentoring by serving as faculty advisors in student-organized clubs.

Table 3.4 - Number of Full-Time Faculty and Student-to-Faculty Ratio

Year	Number of FT Faculty	Student-to-Faculty Ratio
2018	94	1:19
2019	90	1:23
2020	87	1:22
2021	88	1:21

Table 3.5 indicates the number of full-time faculty from all Divisions. The student to faculty ratio in fall 2018 and fall 2019 increased from 19 to 23 suggesting that the reduction in the number of faculty played a role in increasing the number of students per faculty member. However, since the enrollment of students across all Divisions from fall 2018 to fall 2021 declined from 7,514 to 6,029, the reduction in the number of faculty was justified for financial stability reasons and that the current roster of full-time faculty maintains the longer-term student/faculty ratio. That does not negate the fact that it should remain a goal to increase the number of full-time faculty.

Currently, there are two Lecturers, 14 Instructors, 29 Assistant Professors, 25 Associate Professors, and 18 Professors across all disciplines. The number of full-time faculty declined from 94 in the fall of 2018 to 88 in the fall of 2021, due in large part to retirements of senior faculty members and a reduction in force of non-tenured faculty members occurring in 2018, during a period of fiscal exigency. However, progress has been made pursuant to the current Academic Master Plan objective to recruit and retain high quality faculty, with particular attention on disciplines experiencing shortages of sufficient faculty. In Fiscal Year 2022, ten full-time faculty positions were posted with eight filled. In Fiscal Year 2023,

fifteen full-time positions are posted in anticipation of September 2022 appointments. Of those, twelve offers of employment were made and nine accepted their appointment.

Table 3.5 - Full-time Faculty by Division and Percent from Fall 2017 to Fall 2021

	Fall 2017		Fall 2018		Fall 2019		Fall 2020		Fall 2021	
	N	percent	N	percent	N	percent	N	percent	N	percent
Biology, Chemistry, and Physics	15	13.8	13	13.8	14	15.6	16	18.4	16	18.2
Business	10	9.2	8	8.5	8	8.9	6	6.9	6	6.8
Humanities and Bilingual Studies	26	23.9	22	23.4	22	24.4	21	24.1	19	21.6
Math, Engineering Technologies, and Computer Sciences	26	23.9	26	27.7	24	26.7	22	25.3	24	27.3
Nursing and Health Sciences	17	15.6	14	14.9	12	13.3	13	14.9	14	15.9
Social Sciences	15	13.8	11	11.7	10	11.1	9	10.3	9	10.2
Total	109	100	94	100	90	100	87	100	88	100

Adjunct Faculty

While the adjunct faculty are equally qualified in their specialization and are excellent teachers, their availability for interaction with students and participation in curricular and extracurricular activities is limited by the nature of their contract. An adjunct faculty member is defined as any instructor who is not a full-time faculty. Therefore, if a full-time employee other than a full-time faculty (e.g., chairperson, counsellor, librarian, etc.) is teaching a course or two, then the person is considered an adjunct faculty. Data also show that a significant portion of the course offerings in the fall 2021 semester were taught by adjunct faculty (285 adjuncts).

Table 3.6 - Adjunct Faculty by Division and Percent from Fall 2017 to Fall 2021

	Fall 2017		Fall 2018		Fall 2019		Fall 2020		Fall 2021	
	N	percent	N	percent	N	percent	N	percent	N	percent
Biology, Chemistry, and Physics	67	13.9	63	14.9	59	15.2	58	18.9	48	16.8
Business	64	13.3	57	13.5	44	11.4	29	9.4	39	13.7
Humanities and Bilingual Studies	158	32.7	128	30.3	111	28.7	76	24.8	80	28.1
Math, Engineering Technologies, and Computer Sciences	91	18.8	80	19.0	78	20.2	70	22.8	55	19.3
Nursing and Health Sciences	19	3.9	19	4.5	25	6.5	22	7.2	17	6.0
Social Sciences	84	17.4	75	17.8	70	18.1	52	16.9	46	10.2
Total	483	100	422	100	387	100	307	100	285	100

Table 3.7 - Percent of course sections taught by full-time versus part-time faculty

Year	Taught by Full-time faculty	Taught by Part-time faculty
Fall 2017	32.8 percent	67.2 percent
Fall 2018	33.7 percent	66.3 percent
Fall 2019	32.6 percent	63.1 percent
Fall 2020	34.5 percent	61.2 percent
Fall 2021	35.8 percent	61.1 percent

Design and Delivery of the Curriculum

The design of the curriculum is informed through a comprehensive local needs assessment that includes periodic consultations with discipline specific advisory boards, workforce development partners, industry representatives, four-year college and university representatives, and internal and external environmental scans. Such a needs assessment helps administration and faculty identify areas where targeted growth can lead to increased opportunities for access and helps faculty identify curriculum changes that are necessary to keep the curriculum current.

Environmental scans are particularly useful in that they provide the administration and program faculty with information regarding opportunities for new program development or information about programs that are no longer in demand. For example, the College recently contracted with both EMSI and Terra Firma to provide Program Demand Gap Analysis data to research the future of the College's program offerings, including online programs. The EMSI and Terra Firma data indicated which programs are in demand within our immediate region and determined whether the College was meeting those demands.

Action on curriculum changes or new curriculum directions as suggested by the comprehensive local needs assessment is initiated by the faculty at the divisional level through submission of one or more proposals, such as a new course proposal, change in course proposal, new program proposal, or a change in program proposal. Each Division has a Curriculum Committee that is responsible for evaluating the efficacy of the proposal, then upon divisional approval, the resulting proposal is forwarded to the College Curriculum Committee for review and approval, then to Academic Affairs for approval, then to the President and Board of Trustees for approval. Should the proposal fail at any point in the process, it is returned to the originating division for any deficiencies to be addressed. Should all approvals be secured, all student information systems and college catalog are updated, and various departments such as the Registrar and Financial Aid are notified of changes as appropriate.

At a granular level, the faculty are involved with the design of the curriculum and the overall course blueprinting including mapping content to learning objectives. The design also includes developing a course outline and building the course. Each learning objective has assessment strategies, exercises, and subject matter analysis. Moreover, each program offered by the College has stated goals that are developed by the faculty. A more detailed discussion may be found in Standard V.

Delivery of the course material is accomplished through multiple modalities: face-to-face, in a hybrid format, virtually, and online via the Moodle platform. The PowerPoints, videos, and other materials for the course chapters are posted in the Moodle Learning Management System using a variety of formats and students are provided with training on how to use Moodle. The syllabi for the courses are in digital and PDF formats so that students can access them, even when using a smartphone.

EFFECTIVENESS AND EVALUATION OF FACULTY

The effectiveness, flexibility, and ability of faculty to innovate was clearly demonstrated in March 2020 at the onset of the pandemic when the College transitioned to nearly 100 percent remote learning in just one week of downtime. Faculty were given training on Zoom, the platform used for remote teaching, as well as a Remote Learning Questionnaire which was administered to students during the transition to fully remote learning at the onset of the pandemic to measure their ability to learn. The College administered three questionnaires: one during mid-semester of spring 2020, the second at the end-of-semester in spring 2020, and the final one in fall 2020. The questionnaire allowed students to rate and describe their experience with the online delivery for each of their courses. The questionnaire asked students to rate the quality of five aspects of the online delivery: Learning, Engagement, Expectations, Communication, and Technology. Each category was rated using a scale where 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree. The instrument questions are outlined below:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Question</u>
Learning	I am learning the course material. <i>Material is being delivered in a way that allows me to learn.</i>
Engagement	I am engaged in the course. <i>This course allows me the opportunity to be an active participant in the learning process.</i>
Expectations	There are clear expectations. <i>The expectations of what I need to do to succeed in this course have been made clear.</i>
Communication	The communication process is effective. <i>Communication is clear and I can reach out to the instructor and get a response when needed.</i>
Technology	Technology is being used effectively. <i>Technology is being used effectively to help me learn and stay engaged.</i>

The results, shown in the table below illustrate that students rated their experience highly across all five categories. The results also strongly indicate that faculty made a large improvement in their effectiveness to teach remotely from the onset of the pandemic in Spring 2020 to Fall 2020.

Table 3.8 - Remote Learning Questionnaire Results

Semester	N	Learning (Mean Score)	Engagement (Mean Score)	Expectations (Mean Score)	Communication (Mean Score)	Technology (Mean Score)
Spring 2020	1,771	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.7
Fall 2020	3,470	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.4

The Systematic Evaluation of Faculty

Except for those with tenure, all faculty, both full and part time, are evaluated annually by the Division Chairpersons or their designees. Tenured faculty are reviewed every three years, as provided for in their collective bargaining agreement. The evaluations are recorded and shared with the faculty member. In addition, faculty members are evaluated by their students in the classes they teach. All evaluations are guided by the Essex County College Faculty Association (ECCFA). When the College moved to virtual learning in 2020-2021 and because of COVID restrictions, the College adopted the online software package SmartEvals so students could more easily evaluate faculty remotely. The same process continues in 2022.

In the overall student evaluation of faculty, the scale used ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent. The table below illustrates that faculty are rated highly by students in all categories.

Table 3.9 - Student Evaluation of Faculty – Aggregate Results Fall 2020 and Fall 2021

Semester	Diligence and Punctuality	Preparedness	Clarity and Organization	Interest in the subject	Clarity of assignments	Availability after class
Fall 2020	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.7	4.5	4.3
Fall 2021	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.6	4.4	4.2

Survey results are shared with the faculty members through email by the Department of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment. Evaluations are used for corrective actions and promotions, tenure, and faculty appointments as well as retention and renewal of adjunct faculty. Where needed, conferences are held between faculty and their supervisors to develop an improvement plan. Non-retention of tenure track faculty, rejection of promotions of full-time faculty, and cancellation or non-renewal of the adjunct faculty contract are some of the remedial actions that could be taken by administrators but are reserved for extreme cases where remediation has not been effective.

Professional Development

All faculty are encouraged to participate and engage in professional development by participating in conferences, workshops, and webinars. ECC has recognized that it needs to invest time and resources into the development of faculty and is endeavoring to include a system to encourage faculty to enroll in the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) seminars which can enhance teaching skills and recently signed a contract with ACUE for two years. ECC currently has 22 faculty members enrolled in the ACUE's Effective Teaching Practices (ETP) course which focuses on improving student retention and achieving more equitable outcomes through quality teaching.

One of the six College-wide governance committees, the Faculty Development Committee (FDC), is spearheaded by a full-time faculty member. The FDC provides programs and resources for enrichment such as brown bag lunch programs, workshops on technology, and a newsletter, *Professional Opportunities UPDATE*, which circulates news of academic conference and educational activities,

especially those that are free or of low cost. In a recent expansion of the program, faculty are now offered reimbursement for expenses to attend selected outside academic programs.

Faculty are engaged in continuing education and professional development activities in their own areas of specialization by attending and presenting in meetings, conferences, conventions, and participating in panel discussions. Faculty who teach in programs that prepare graduates for licensure are required by respective Boards (e.g., New Jersey Board of Nursing) to participate in continuing education and earn 30 contact hours, before the renewal of licensure. It is worth noting that many of ECC's full-time faculty are sponsored to pursue higher level degrees, predominantly consisting of PhD and EdD degrees.

COMMUNITY, CONTINUING EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Essex County College is a comprehensive community college that addresses the dynamic educational needs of a diverse county population through both credit and non-credit offerings. It is also a leading contributor to the revitalization of the greater Newark workforce through its Division of Community, Continuing Education and Workforce Development area (CCE & WD). The CCE & WD area is served by an administrative team headed by the Dean of Community Continuing Education and Workforce Development is comprised of the Adult Learning Center, Corporate and Business Training, Educational Opportunity Fund, On Campus Non-credit Programs and Extension Centers, Pre-College Readiness and Early College/Dual Enrollment, and Training, Inc.

In FY 2022, ECC served 5,143 non-credit students, essentially doubling the number of students served in FY 2021 (2,573). While this increase is a positive step, ECC has not yet fully bounced back to pre-pandemic non-credit student numbers (9,166 non-credit students served in FY 2020). The programs offered include basic skills instruction, ESL instruction, job readiness instruction and placement, customized short-term training, vocation training courses, courses geared towards youth, and cultural and recreational activities. Recent emphasis has been on computerized business office skills and allied health programs such as Nurse's Aide, Certified Clinical Medical Assistant and Patient Care Technician.

For over ten years, ECC has worked with county-wide school districts to enroll high school students in college courses. The program has helped to allay student fears of college and has given them an opportunity to enter college with credits. All credits earned by high school students are transferable to both State and private colleges and universities. In June 2021, two high schools, East Side High School, and Essex County Schools of Technology – Newark High School, graduated a total of 60 students with a high school diploma and Associates Degree in Liberal Arts. In June 2022, another 95 students graduated from the program. Students then transferred directly into four-year universities both in and out of state. This is a prime example of how the College lives its Mission, Vision, and Values as implemented through *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*. (III; Students First Strategic Plan 2019-2024) One of the key Values in the Plan states "We support programs that enhance the economic and social development of Essex County. We value our role as a vital community resource and are dedicated to

forging effective partnerships with our many constituencies,” and this success demonstrates how that Value drives what ECC does.

The College through CCE & WD also offers courses off-campus at its FOCUS Extension Center. The College’s FOCUS Extension Center offers credit courses offered in Spanish to meet the educational needs of its Hispanic communities. Offerings include English as a Second Language, History, Mathematics, General Psychology I, Child Psychology and Development, Art, and Computer Information Science courses. A full array of student support services, such as counseling, financial aid workshops, and tutoring, along with extracurricular activities, completes the student’s educational experience at the extension center. Also, CCE& WD collaborates with community agencies and local non-profits as well as local unions.

Beginning in fall 2021, during the rebuilding of the branch campus, located in West Caldwell, NJ, the College partnered with Essex County Schools of Technology- West Caldwell Technology High School, (located blocks from the branch campus), to use their location to offer credit courses to the residents of the western part of the county in the evening from 3 pm to 10 pm. This will continue through the duration of the reconstruction so as not to lose the connection to the community and to meet the needs of the student body.

The Adult Learning Center was created to meet the needs of county residents in achieving high school equivalency, literacy skills, technical skills, English Language Learners (ELL). Since the Adult Learning Center opened in September 2001, it continues to meet more student needs, enhance program services, and address the New Jersey Department of Labor’s objectives for literacy. The Center has been the lead entity at the College for the combined Essex County College Literacy and the Jewish Vocational Consortia. For FY 2021, the combined entity has successfully obtained its eighth year of WIA Title II funding in the amount of \$2,329,980. Students are encouraged to attend classes on a long-term basis until academic goals are achieved which includes obtaining the High School Equivalency GED. In addition, an array of support services is available to ELL and ABE students including counseling, tutoring, and workshops that pertain to job readiness.

Corporate and Business Training is an integral part of the College’s continuing and community education mission. Targeting “employed, career-aspiring adults” seeking re-training and/or advanced instruction in technology, communications, and professional development to meet the demands of an ever-changing labor market, the College collaborates annually with approximately 20 local companies to provide training and educational opportunities to approximately 1,800 employees.

The Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program, funded by the State of New Jersey, facilitates access to higher education for students from economically and educationally disadvantaged communities. EOF offers counseling, tutorial services, cultural activities, forums, workshops, and financial grant assistance. Each summer, EOF presents a six-week college preparatory program – The Pre-Freshman Summer Program (PSP) – for 70 new college students of all ages and backgrounds. Students have an opportunity to earn college credits and learn about college life before their first formal semester. The program also

provides support to students who enroll in both Winter Session and spring semesters together propelling them toward completion and graduation. Traditionally, the EOF program has a higher retention and graduation rate than the College overall rates but with the pandemic these numbers declined since the students were the most social and economically challenged. In addition, CCE & WD has offered programs to reentry students from local halfway houses assisting them to transition from serving years in prison to returning home with education and employment skills that ultimately prevent recidivism.

Under the auspices of CCE & WD, Training, Inc. offers a learning environment that enables trainees to develop their abilities and enrich their personal and professional lives. The program provides a wide variety of day and evening job training services at no cost to educationally and economically disadvantaged men and women seeking initial entry, re-entry, or upward mobility in the workforce. Given recent economic trends, Training Inc. has focused its curriculum on Allied Health Programs (Certified Nurse's Aide, Certified Clinical Medical Assistant, Patient Care Technician, EKG, and Phlebotomy) and Supply Chain Management. Training, Inc. embraces community outreach through partnering with local organizations including Blessed Ministries Inc. (a faith based non-profit), Urban League, and 1199J (local healthcare workers' union).

Last year, Training, Inc. was able to pilot a Community Health Worker program in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Health and successfully trained 74 apprentices. A non-credit to credit pathway was also developed. Training Inc. also successfully worked on an Apprenticeship program with RWJ Barnabas Health, providing training in Patient Care Technician to 15 of their employees. This is just an example of how CCE & WD can pivot its programs to meet the needs of the students and employers in the area.

Community, Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CCE& WD) at Essex County College plays a critical role in establishing pipelines in the community by working closely with Community Based Organizations, business, and government agencies. It is through these programs that many students initially come in contact with ECC, prior to commencing their degree seeking education. Academic Affairs and CCE & WD are working closely together to ensure the smooth transition of students into degree seeking programs as well as transfer and employment opportunities. Tables 3-10 and 3-11 show the total number of registrations, headcount, and total clock hours for Community, Continuing Education and Workforce Development over the past three fiscal years.

Table 3.10 – Non-Credit Open Enrollment Registrations, Headcount, and Total Clock Hours

Open Enrollment	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Number of registrations	8,167	2,321	3,435
Unduplicated headcount	5,506	1,484	1,912
Total clock hours	233,648	102,321	137,739

Table 3.11 – Non-Credit Customized Training Registrations, Headcount, and Total Clock Hours

Customized Training	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Number of registrations	993	253	382
Unduplicated headcount	664	134	380
Total clock hours	9,463	1,912	3,132

The College recognizes that not all students want to receive an academic degree, and neither are all students “traditional.” Nonetheless, through CCE&WD, ECC reaches all types of students in the community from children to seniors, with a gamut of wrap-around services and training opportunities that leave no student behind. Success in CCE&WD is measured not through IPEDS but in second chances, short term knowledge acquisition and training, personal enrichment, and opportunities for upward mobility in educational attainment.

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION CONCERNING COLLEGE PROGRAMS IN OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

The programs of the College are clearly described in the official publications of the College. The Vision of the College states: “A Beacon for Education and Knowledge, Essex County College attracts people who seek a better life through education. We transform lives, broaden learning, and empower students to achieve their full potential. Our college community and graduates are change agents and leaders who contribute to the health, vitality, and advancement of society.” The latest version of the strategic plan (2022) added a new strategic activity: “Expand and build upon the current mailing to County residents which is currently coordinated by Community, Continuing Education, and Workforce Development to include information on Associate and Certificate programs as well as institutional resources such as CCOG and Recruiting Fairs.” ECC is committed to inform and serve as many members of the community as possible.

The degrees, certificate programs, and programs of continuing education have been created with the needs of the Essex County College community in mind. Accessibility to an affordable college education with convenient scheduling options taught by dedicated faculty have been critical factors contributing towards student success. The Methods of Administration (MOA) and ECC’s Office of Recruitment has established language assistance services to communicate with student of different races and origins. The Financial Aid Office (FAO) employs two bilingual full-time professionals who provide guidance to students in delivery presentations. The FAO has already published the bilingual version of the FACTS (III; Section 2 Std-Aid-Programs-bilingual-rev-April 2022, III; Section 3 Application-Procedures-bilingual-final-rev-April 2022) and is also assessing to create a Spanish-content landing website.

The College’s website houses much of the communication needed for students to navigate their academic career at Essex County College. The programs of study are clearly described in the e-

Catalogue which went live early in 2021. All degrees and certificate program are listed in detail with course descriptions in the e-Catalogue. These offerings include courses offered in Spanish to better serve the diverse populations of the community. Under Academic Affairs, a committee has been convened to maintain the integrity of the process used to update the e-Catalogue on a regular basis. The committee consists of members of faculty, chairpersons, a counselor/advisor and a scribe. The members engage with the governance committees, in particular the Curriculum Committee, for ensuring that courses, certificates, and degrees are fully approved as well as be eligible for financial aid.

Current and prospective students can utilize the College's e-Catalogue to learn about program offerings. The College implemented Degree Works to provide students with degree auditing software that interfaces with its Banner enterprise system. Degree Works provides students with a clear statement that indicates what course requirements have been fulfilled and what requirements remain. Faculty are engaged in regular student advisement and refer students to the financial aid office as needed. When students encounter academic holds, they are referred to the Department of Student Development and Counseling.

Academic Progress in Accordance with the College's Mission, Vision, and Values

Students are accepted to the College regardless of academic backgrounds based on its open-door policy. It serves the academic needs of all prospective students beginning with remediation in English and mathematics. Faculty and administrators reviewed the academic progress of students in developmental math and English and determined that those programs needed to be redesigned to include best practices from peer institutions. See Standard V for a complete discussion of this process. This redesign and streamlining effort took place in spring 2021 to provide students with options that will allow them to complete their developmental coursework faster and along with college level courses. These changes have proven successful. See Standard IV for a more detailed information on the effectiveness of these changes.

For students who do not need remediation, the College offers programs in a variety of disciplines with resources to support their academic progress. Among those resources are faculty with expertise in their field of study with scheduled times to advise students, free tutoring services offered by the Learning Center, the e-Catalogue on the College's website, Degree Works, financial aid advisors, library support services, and transfer counselors. All services are offered virtually and on campus.

GENERAL EDUCATION

Design and Delivery of the College's General Education Curriculum

Essex County College's General Education offerings have been designed and implemented in alignment with those of the New Jersey Council of Community Colleges (NJCCC). Beginning with the College's opening in 1968, there have been general education courses. The goal statements, such as those written in 1983, were broadly defined, while in 2007, more specific and measurable objectives replaced these

broad statements. The 2007 general education goals and objectives followed the recommendations of the statewide General Education Coordinating Committee (GECC). These changes ensure that the general education courses of all community colleges in New Jersey are consistent and transfer in-full to state public four-year colleges and universities. The general education goals address nine foundation goal categories and broad course criteria for each category were adopted by all two-year colleges in New Jersey.

With the support of the incoming president, general education guiding principles were reviewed and revised in spring of 2021 by the College's General Education subcommittee of the Academic Policies Advisory Committee (APAC) at the College. The subcommittee forwarded its recommendations to the entire faculty for consideration, accompanied with a survey. The survey results were reviewed by APAC, which integrated the feedback and approved the final document at its June 1, 2021, meeting. The document was also reviewed by the Board of Trustees Education Policy Committee and embedded in the Academic Master Plan, which was also approved by the Board. The outcome of this process produced the General Education Core Competencies and Goals for Essex County College.

In fall 2019, New Jersey moved to a 60-credit graduation requirement for all community college degrees, with just a few exceptions for some programs that require licensure. To meet this statewide mandate, the faculty for each academic program within each Division was tasked with reexamining the program offerings. In most programs, some classes had to be removed, requiring significant rethinking for those programs. The delivery of the General Education curriculum had to be reexamined in every program to ensure that program revisions did not adversely affect general education course offerings. This process was conducted primarily by the faculty with area expertise within each division. These changes were incorporated into the 2021 requirements as documented in the current College catalog.

The Breadth of the General Education Offerings

Each division has a Curriculum Committee that is responsible for establishing programs and course requirements within the divisions that fulfill the eight general education requirements established by the NJCCC. (III; NJ General Education Foundation 2022) These requirements are written and oral communication, quantitative knowledge and skills, scientific knowledge and reasoning, technological competency, society and human behavior, humanistic perspective, historical perspective, and global and cultural awareness.

At a minimum, students are required to take two college level English or writing courses for the A.A. and A.S. degrees, which are prerequisites to many other courses that require reading and writing.

- These courses fulfill the Written and Oral Communication requirement.
- For the Quantitative Knowledge and Skills, and the Scientific Knowledge and Reasoning requirements in most programs, students can choose to take one math and two lab science classes; or they can choose to take two math and one science course.

- The Technology requirement is, like the Global and Cultural Awareness requirement, in that, there are not specific courses that students need to take in many programs of study, however these skills are acquirable through a diverse selection of courses at the College.
- All students take at least two social science courses which is seen as a gateway to understanding society and human behavior.
- Students will take at least one history course, while those earning AA degrees are required to take at least two.
- Finally, students are responsible for developing a humanistic understanding of the people and events around them. This is accomplished in their literature, music, language, religion, or other similar classes.

ECC Core Competencies

The following core competencies are our Institutional Learning Goals and should, to the greatest extent possible, be embedded in all general education courses. The General Education Learning Goals are derived from the Institutional Learning Goals that are in turn connected to the strategic plan, which is, effectively, the operationalization of the College's Mission, Vision, and Values. Along with budgeting and resource allocation, we see that all major processes reflect the foresight and imagination that declarations of Mission, Vision, and Values are meant to inspire.

Table 3.11 – Alignment of General Education and Institutional Learning Goals

Category	Gen. Ed. Learning Goal	Institutional Learning Goals
Communication	Students will be able to communicate effectively in oral, written, nonverbal, and visual media.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be able to read, write, illustrate, and listen actively, critically, and reflectively and respond logically, informatively, persuasively, and creatively. 2. Students will be able to evaluate and revise their communication, writing and speaking clearly and effectively in standard formal Standard English with use of inclusive language. 3. Students will be able to understand, analyze, and assess nonverbal, cultural, and gender communication in small group and public communication settings.
Critical and Ethical Thinking and Problem Solving	Students will be able to use critical thinking and problem-solving skills in analyzing information in an ethical manner.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be able to distinguish among opinions, facts, and inferences identifying and critiquing underlying and implicit assumptions. 2. Students will be able to thoughtfully evaluate diverse perspectives and alternate points of view by asking informed questions and making informed judgments. 3. Students will be able to solve problems by applying discipline-appropriate methods and standards.

		4. Students will be able to integrate their knowledge, take an ethical position on issues or situations, and defend their stance with logical arguments.
Information and Computer Literacy	Students will be able to recognize when data and information is needed and have the skills to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information for college-level work.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be able to recognize the value of using the information to strengthen arguments and articulate research project questions. 2. Students will be able to identify resources and construct strategies for locating information and data to answer research project questions in their particular study fields, possibly using web search engines and data analysis tools. 3. Students will be able to understand factors that affect the quality of data and information and extract pertinent information needed for specific research questions and integrate it cohesively. 4. Students will be able to respect the privacy, security, and ownership of data and information they use, including ethical considerations focusing on avoiding plagiarism. 5. Students will be able to demonstrate media literacy by accessing, analyzing, and evaluating messages in various media modes, genres, and forms with an appreciation of the impacts of technologies on societies.
Collaboration, Cooperation, Intra-Cultural, and Inter-Cultural Responsibility	Students will be able to demonstrate interpersonal skills required for effective performance and understand the privileges and responsibilities of being a citizen in diverse and pluralistic societies, both locally and globally.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be able to demonstrate communication skills that promote effective functioning and interpersonal relations with individuals and groups, including effective cross-cultural communication. 2. Students will be able to employ strategies, like brainstorming, role playing and consensus building, which promote productive and supportive interpersonal interaction in individual and group settings. 3. Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of the behaviors and beliefs of different social groups with pluralistic societies, including those based on culture, ethnicity, race, religion, creed, disability, marital status, national origin or ancestry, age, gender, socio-economic status, and sexual orientations.

General Education Goals

There are eight General Education Goals with 35 General Education Objectives nested within.

Table 3.12 – General Education Goals

Goals	Description
Goal 1. Written and Oral Communication in English	Students will communicate effectively in both speech and writing.
Goal 2. Mathematics	Students will use appropriate mathematical and statistical concepts and operations to interpret data and to solve problems.
Goal 3. Science	Students will use the scientific method of inquiry, through the acquisition of scientific knowledge.
Goal 4. Technology and Information Literacy	Students will use computer systems or other appropriate forms of technology to achieve educational and personal goals
Goal 5. Social Science	Students will use social science theories and concepts to analyze human behavior and social and political institutions and to act as responsible citizens.
Goal 6. Humanities	Students will analyze scholarly works in the fields of art, music, or theater; literature; philosophy and/or religious studies; and/or will gain competence in the use of a foreign language.
Goal 7. History	Students will demonstrate understanding of historical events and movements in World, Western, non-Western, or American societies and assess their subsequent significance.
Goal 8. Diversity and Global Perspective	Students will understand the importance of a global perspective and culturally diverse peoples.

Design of the General Education Curriculum

The general education curriculum seeks to ensure that students acquire and demonstrate the essential academic skills expected of all graduates of the College. Each Division has a Curriculum Committee that is responsible for mapping course requirements for all their programs. As such, and in alignment with state mandates, each program decides which General Education courses are appropriate avenues of study for each major while keeping in mind the requirements of the four-year institutions to which students may transfer or the workforce they may enter. The resulting proposal is forwarded to the College Curriculum Committee for review and then to the state for final approval. As noted earlier, most programs at New Jersey community colleges must meet a 60-credit limit and some General Education courses were removed or added to meet this goal and the needs of the course curriculum. The standard courses across all curricula include science, history, humanities, math, and English. They may also include world languages.

Throughout the College, the number of General Education courses varies depending on the program and degree. The New Jersey Administrative Code 9A:1-2.3 (III; NJ Administrative Code 9A1) mandates that A.A.S. programs require at least 20 credits in general education courses, A.S. programs require at least 30 credits, and A.A. programs require at least 33 credits. In some cases, the College exceeds that minimum.

Students acquire academic skills by instruction which includes various platforms such as face-to-face lectures and laboratory (and as of late, Moodle and Zoom), and other modalities such as excursions and demonstrations, especially if laboratory is a requirement of the course. Students are then asked to demonstrate academic skill by various methods of assessment, such as by exams, lab quizzes, research papers, class projects, and oral presentations. In some instances, demonstrations may take the form of clinicals/internships. College Biology, for the past ten years, has adopted oral presentations to ensure that students are not only proficient in research methods, but show competency and knowledge of science topics.

General Education Curriculum Assessment

A college-wide assessment process exists which requires that each division and program measure the extent to which students are achieving the skills embedded in the general education curriculum. For a detailed explanation, please refer to the discussion in Standard V and the General Education Assessment Manual. (III; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual rev. 7.20.22) Academic Programs are Characterized by the same Level of Rigor despite Modality.

The College takes academic rigor and discipline very seriously. To this end, courses are structured so that students attending different sections of the same course receive the same content. All course syllabi use master course outlines that have been built by faculty for each course. The same syllabus is used by for all course sections, regardless of modality. Homework assignments are given on a regular basis, and many are graded via online homework platforms (e.g., Cengage WebAssign, Pearson My Lab, McGraw Hill Connect, etc.). Students receive feedback regarding their performances on homework and all other assignments in a timely manner and are encouraged to meet with their instructors during office hours, if in need of additional help. Common examinations, including final examinations are given for some entry level courses that are offered in several sections. For other courses, there is a great level of coordination among faculty to ensure that students are tested on the same topics across the board. In all scenarios, exams are structured to reflect the relevant concepts taught in accordance with the course learning outcomes. Review sessions are held by instructors to ensure that students are well-prepared for examinations. Examinations are proctored by faculty and in many classes, students must sign a pledge upon receiving examination papers, in agreement with our zero-tolerance policy for cheating and plagiarism. Below is an example of such pledge extracted from a common examination paper for one of the courses offered by our Mathematics Division.

Statement of Academic Honesty: Dishonesty disrupts the search for truth that is inherent in the learning process and so devalues the purpose and the mission of the College. Essex County College is fully committed to requiring academic honesty from all students enrolled in any course at Essex County College. Academic honesty means NOT knowingly receiving any unauthorized information from classmates, notes, cheat sheets, etc., NOT giving any aid to other students, and NOT utilizing any cell phones during an in-class test or exam. By signing below, you are affirming that you have been completely academically honest regarding this test or exam.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed nationwide to curb the spread of the virus, all courses were offered virtually through digital platforms including Moodle and Zoom from March 2020 to August 2021. The use of Respondus for the proctoring of exams and Turnitin, to prevent plagiarism, were institutionalized. Faculty received training on how to use those programs and students were provided with all the necessary information and tools to assist them in the transition to virtual learning. They received communication through email, text messages, and phone calls. Virtual office hours were provided by faculty via Zoom while academic advising for students was held primarily with tele-advising. Supervisors of advising offices developed plans that provided for staggered in-person office coverage calibrated to state guidelines to allow for in-person meetings when needed; limited in-person advising of students was scheduled by appointment. In-person interactions employed personal hygiene and social distancing measures. Students had access virtually via Zoom in our Learning Center that provides learning support services in multiple disciplines through tutoring by peer and professional Learning Associates and promotes greater understanding in the tutored subjects and increasing student engagement in the learning process. All these steps made the transition to remote learning seamless and as painless as possible, given the situation. As ECC began transitioning back to normalcy at the beginning of the fall 2021 semester, most courses met on campus following the CDC and the New Jersey public health guidelines.

PLANS MADE AND LESSONS LEARNED

The College has embraced technology in a way that it had not, prior to the pandemic, and stands better prepared to deal with future disruptions. The policies and processes that the College put in place to ensure the delivery of academic content by remote delivery during the COVID-19 outbreak include updated Essex County College illness reporting procedure, contingency instruction plans, and resources for technology and pedagogy alternatives.

In late February 2020, as COVID-19 cases started to emerge, the Chief Academic Officer sent a message to faculty and staff detailing contingency policies and procedures as part of the ECC Emergency Planning for Academic Continuity in the event of an instructional campus shutdown. Faculty were required to submit a plan for instructional continuation to their Department Chair and Dean. An acceptable plan was one that would allow for students to engage with course materials remotely via the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS).

Faculty were also advised to have a backup plan that used more traditional methods to accommodate students who may not have reliable or continuous Internet access at home. Various discussion questions were posted on Moodle and students had to answer and comment on at least two of their peers' input as well. The lesson modules and assignments were posted on Moodle so that students could continue their work at home.

Emergency Planning for Academic Continuity is an ongoing process and there was regular communication between administration, students, faculty, and staff as to how instruction was conducted in each department and course by providing weekly reports of the material covered by faculty to the

Chairpersons. More than 90 percent of our courses were either virtual or online in 2020, in compliance with Governor Murphy's Executive Order 104. (III; Executive Order 104) The College prioritized its planning for in-person instruction, especially for those courses in which the use of infrastructure most benefitted instruction (i.e. Allied Health and Nursing Clinical sections; Biology, Chemistry and Physics Wet Labs; Electronics, Engineering, and Manufacturing Technology labs; Physical Education activity classes).

CONCLUSION

Through the course of the pandemic, Essex County College pressed forward with its unwavering commitment to student success, excellence in teaching, and shared faculty governance. As evidence of our commitment to student success, ECC saw a 9.6 percent increase in the one-year retention rate from fall 2020 to 2021. As evidence of ECC's commitment to teaching excellence, all new faculty members meet the standards set by the New Jersey Administrative Code concerning educational qualifications. With an effective system of faculty governance, faculty are involved with the design of the curriculum and the overall course blueprinting including mapping content to learning objectives. These factors allowed ECC to be successful in its mission during the COVID-19 pandemic as evidenced by the results of the Remote Learning Questionnaire administered to students throughout the period of fully remote learning. With a commitment to continuously improve teaching and learning processes, a college-wide assessment process exists which requires that each division and program measure the extent to which students are achieving the skills embedded in the general education curriculum. Additionally, through CCE&WD, the College reaches all types of students in the community from children to seniors, with a gamut of wrap around services and training opportunities that leave no student behind.

Bearing these accomplishments in mind, the College is working to overcome areas that remain a challenge. The number of full-time faculty declined from 109 in the fall of 2017 to 88 in the fall of 2021, due in large part to retirements of senior faculty members and a reduction in force of non-tenured faculty members occurring in 2018. The challenge is to replenish retiring faculty in the midst of fiscal challenges. In addition, all faculty are encouraged to participate and engage in professional development by participating in conferences, workshops, and webinars. The Institution has recognized that it needs to invest time and resources into the development of faculty. However more faculty members need to take advantage of the training opportunities as the College makes progress in providing these opportunities.



STANDARD IV: SUPPORT OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.

ADMISSIONS

Essex County College's entire admissions process is designed to align with its Mission, which reads in part, "Essex County College is an open access community college that serves the diverse needs of students..." and mostly all applicants are processed maintaining our open-door policy providing guaranteed admission to ECC. Moving beyond admissions, ECC then provides all services required to ensure the academic and career success of its students i.e. access to success.

College Regulation 5-2: Admissions to the College specifies the process for admitting students: ECC "...is to admit any person who is at least 18 years of age or who has earned a high school diploma or High School Equivalency Diploma. (IV; REG-5-2 Admission to the College) This open admissions policy does not apply to persons seeking degrees or certificates from the Nursing and Allied Health programs." Those programs have written criteria for admission that follow their respective accreditation standards. Matriculating, non-matriculating, visiting, transfer, and readmitted students can complete an application to enroll either in-person in Enrollment Services or on-line.

Once the application has been processed, students receive an email message informing them of the next steps to be taken along with information regarding financial aid. Applicants who have incomplete applications receive a message informing them that the application requires additional review. The applicant is contacted by email, telephone or mail to discuss the steps needed to complete the process.

Prior to the pandemic, the processing of admission applications, scheduling of placement testing, and the collection of supporting documents was handled in-person or via webservices through Enrollment Services. In March 2020, a cessation of all on-campus activities required that significant changes be made including moving all student support offices as well as face-to-face classroom activities to online. Despite the changes, Enrollment Services continued to process applications, sending out acceptance packages as well as financial aid and immunization information. Collection of supporting documents was handled in person (Enrollment Services drop box) or by email, depending on the document.

STUDENT SERVICES

To continue to provide student support services during the pandemic, a decision was made by the Enrollment Services leadership team to create and update information webpages. Two distinct

webpages were designed and added to the College website, containing information and forms for Admissions (<https://www.essex.edu/admissions>) and Enrollment Services (www.essex.edu/enrollment). The Admissions webpages contains instructions and forms to assist prospective students with the online/virtual application process and the Enrollment Services webpage contains information and forms to assist current students with accessing web services.

The overall goal was to provide everything a potential or returning students needed as quickly as possible on a 24/7 basis. The focus is to ensure access to admissions and other enrollment services, providing an efficient and effective student support experience. In addition, Enrollment Services staffed a call center remotely from their homes to address student inquiries and had remote access to Banner 9 (the College's administrative computing system), allowing staff to provide students with accurate and detailed information.

To minimize points of contact, and following national trends, in August 2020, a decision was made to open a Welcome Center to assist with providing admission and registration services to new and returning students. It was staffed by Student Support Assistants, provided one-stop onboarding services for all students such as by assisting them in completing the online or paper application, conducting multiple measures assessment to make course placement decisions, arranging testing appointments, advisement, course registration services, and submission of financial aid documents.

The combination of Enrollment Services and the Welcome Center provided new and returning students with two locations for admission and enrollment services and allowed the College to maintain services and provide the community with open-access to higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The College's most recent Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey, administered in Fall 2021 and completed by 1,142 students, revealed that 82 percent of enrolled students were aware of the Welcome Center and its services and 38 percent utilized the new Center. Of those students who took advantage of the Center's services, 89 percent reported that they were either *very satisfied* (47.5 percent) or *satisfied* (41.6 percent) with their experience at the Center.

Attendance

To provide opportunities and a pathway for students to attend classes, the College offers various course modalities designed to accommodate student needs. Every semester, day, evening, and weekend classes are scheduled to address the needs of traditional and non-traditional students with classes in-person, hybrid, virtual, and on-line. If a particular course is not available and there are enough students requiring the course to meet their graduation requirements, independent study courses are scheduled and offered to them. To allow students to take advantage of all the offerings regardless of modality whether or not the student has a computer, the College created a computer loaner program and WI-FI support system, to enable students to continue their education. All students were sent postcards through the mail about the computer loaner program to reach students unable to access email or the ECC website. Schedules for each semester are posted on the College website well in advance of the start of the semester to allow students to plan their schedule to meet their needs.

At the outset of the pandemic, ECC quickly converted 85 percent of its in-person classes to virtual utilizing the Moodle Learning Management System and Zoom to closely replicate the in-person classroom learning experience. Permission was obtained from the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education for the Nursing and Allied Health programs to continue to run classes on campus. Both modalities allowed for continuity in attending classes, and for students to stay engaged in the academic learning experience. In fact, our LPN and Physical Therapy Assistant program, which both started at the height of the pandemic, held program completion ceremonies for these students and had a 90 percent completion rate.

Realizing that a digital divide exists among our students, the College provided students with the ability to attend courses by offering free broadband Internet services in partnership with our local cable television provider, and by creating an Internet Café on campus. To achieve this, the gymnasium was furnished with desks and chairs along with enhanced Wi-fi access that allowed students to come in and use their laptops to attend online and virtual classes. Computer laboratories were made available to students to attend virtual and on-line classes as well to assist students who did not own a computer. In addition, to help students navigate the online learning environment, Moodle training and tutorial sessions was made available to all students. As mentioned earlier, the College also initiated a loaner program to give students the ability to attend classes and take advantage of on-line student support services.

After some of the state mandated COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, in the fall 2021 semester a mixture of 60 percent in-person, 26 percent virtual, 9 percent on-line and 5 percent hybrid courses was offered to students. The focus of these varying course offerings was to ensure students were provided with a choice of different learning modalities to attend classes based on their needs and preferences. Actual enrollment for the semester was 55 percent in-person, 29 percent virtual, 9 percent on-line and 7 percent hybrid both during the day, evenings, and weekends, illustrating the flexibility of the College and the versatility of faculty and administration to meet the immediate needs of students. These efforts have resulted in a nearly 9.3 percent increase in the College's one-year retention rate from 52.0 percent in fall 2020 to 61.3 percent in fall 2021, and a 3.4 percent increase in three-year graduation rates from 11.0 percent in fall 2020 to 14.4 percent in fall 2021.

Completion

Students are advised by their academic department faculty using curriculum guides to ensure that they are making progress toward degree completion. In addition, at the completion of 45 credits, Enrollment Services sends students an email requesting them to complete a program degree audit to determine their graduation status. The Curriculum Advising and Program Plan module in our Banner enterprise system is used to perform the degree audits and students are advised of their progress towards meeting the degree requirements and/or courses needed for completion of their academic programs. The College is exploring automatically sending degree audits for students when they complete 45 credits to further encourage to continue toward a degree.

Improvement of student completion rates has been a focus of ECC to assist students with tracking their academic progress to degree completion. For over 15 years, the Curriculum Advising and Program Planning (CAPP) module, has been used as the academic advising and degree auditing tool. Recently, Degree Works, has been purchased and implemented for those purposes and is expected to enhance advising services. In addition, the College catalog was updated to reflect the new degree requirements and is available on-line through our website for students to use to monitor their academic progress. (IV; ECC Catalog 2022-2023 8-9-22)

A college-wide initiative was launched during Academic Year 2019-20 to increase student completion rates. Academic departments received a list of their students with 45 or more credits for telephone and email outreach to encourage students to visit their academic advisor for advisement and program completion requirements. In addition, our EOF program, with its built-in student support system continues to have a graduation rate that exceeds the College's graduation rate.

All these efforts resulted in a 3.4 percent increase in the College's three-year graduation rate from 11.0 percent in fall 2020 to 14.4 percent in fall 2021. Three-year graduation rates continued to rise in fall 2022 with another increase of 2.3 percentage points, bringing ECC's current 3-year graduation rate to 16.7 percent, the highest in the College's history. This 51 percent growth in the completion rate in just three years is a proud accomplishment of the College as is the fact that 15 students have received the Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship in the past ten years.

Communication of Financial Assistance Information to Students

In Academic Year 2021-22, approximately 69 percent of students received financial aid in the form of federal, state or foundation scholarships. One of the main methods of communicating the availability to financial resources for students is the Financial Aid webpage. (IV; Financial Aid Homepage) During New Student Orientation, the Financial Aid Office provides a general overview of the financial aid process and Student Life and Activities discusses scholarships available.

Student support programs such as the Educational Opportunity Fund Program and Men and Women of Excellence Scholarship conduct workshops and presentations to new students and routinely send email messages and mail letters to student notifying them of the availability of funds as well as program support student services designed to support the student experience.

The Financial Aid Office plays an important role in informing students of the availability of financial aid. Once a student identifies ECC on their FAFSA application, the Financial Aid Office sends emails, letters, and text messages informing them of their financial award or requests missing documents or information needed to correct errors on their application. In addition, telephone calls are made by financial aid officers to students who have not responded to previous messages. Also, during all recruitment events, a section of the presentation is devoted to informing participants about the availability of funds and the entire financial aid preparation process. On the Financial Aid webpage there is a series of videos which inform prospective and new students about completing the financial process. Returning students receive notice at least two months in advance of information about FAFSA

filing dates. This information is announced to student through our “Student First Daily Message” message and from the financial aid officers.

Placement Testing

After students are accepted, they are scheduled to take a placement test to determine the appropriate levels of classes to begin their academic careers. In addition, a placement test helps to ensure that students receive an assessment of their preparation for academic success, identify academic strengths and weakness, and is used to prepare an academic plan and pathway to achieve the goal of earning a college degree.

For over twenty years, the Accuplacer’s series of tests that evaluate students’ basic skills in reading, writing, and math was chosen to assess students’ readiness for college level courses. Once a student completes the placement test, all scores and course placement levels are immediately prepared and shared with them. Another process, Multiple Measures is used to assess a student’s college readiness. Students who graduated from high school within the last three years are assessed for college using multiple measure. In addition, recent high school transcript, GED (General Educational Development) test, TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion) test or HiSET (High School Equivalency Test) report is used as part of this assessment, and students are placed into college-level or developmental courses.

Other test instruments that are used for initial placement as part of the Multiple Measures include:

- AP (Advanced Placement) test
- PSAT (Grades 10 and 11)
- SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)
- ACT (American College Testing)
- CLEP (College-Level Examination Program)
- College Algebra or College Math or Calculus or Pre-calculus
- IELTS Academic (International English Language Testing System)
- TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)
- PTE Academic (Pearson Test of English)

Course grades that are also used for initial placement using the same rubric method include:

- AP course grades (Calculus AB or Calculus BC or Statistics)
- English (High School Grades 11 and 12)
- Mathematics (High School Algebra II and III)

Students are then scheduled for academic advisement in our new Student Advisement Department and to meet with Student Support Assistants who review the placement scores and prepare a three-semester academic plan. If students are placed in developmental courses, they are also scheduled for a mandatory

tutorial course designed to supplement in-class instruction. In cases where a student's assessments indicate a lack of readiness for college-level courses, he or she is provided a co-requisite support course paired with the college-level course to ensure success in the college-level course. In addition, students are encouraged to take advantage of in-person tutoring in our Learning Center and academic departments. Moreover, student support programs such as the Equal Opportunity Fund and Men and Women of Excellence Scholars Program have programmatic services such as tutoring and year-round academic counseling and mentoring designed to provide high-touch and personal support for students.

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

For nearly fifty years, Essex County College has had two or three levels of developmental mathematics, English, and reading courses. The challenge has always been to get students to college level in the least amount of time. Although the College used standard practices, the promise of open-door access has effectively become a revolving door. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement administered in 2018 showed that students are put off by taking developmental courses, resulting in high attrition rates and low graduation rates.

Recent changes

Faculty members within the English and mathematics departments have spent years teaching developmental courses, observing outcomes, tracking cohorts, adjusting strategies, and getting a feel for what works. A mix of benchmarked strategies that have worked in other urban settings and some locally proven strategies have yielded promising models that link together developmental and college level courses. These approaches may minimize the stigma some students attach to traditional standalone developmental classes. Beginning in spring 2021, a First-Year Experience (FYE-097) two credit course was developed leading to a "new direction" in developmental education course offerings. Starting with the summer 2021 semester, Essex County College no longer offers standalone developmental-level English courses. In their place, ECC now offers the ENG-099/101 accelerated combination. The combined courses provide students with a double period of English to help them earn college credits in their first semester and removing one level of remedial course work. Similarly, the accelerated mathematics combinations MTH 091S/ MTH 101, and MTH 093S/MTH 103 courses were launched in the fall of 2021 to accelerate students into the college-level experience and propel most students to the next level of their studies within one semester. Student were identified as eligible to register for these courses based on their major and placement test according to the Development Mathematic Flow Chart created by the Mathematics, Engineering Technologies, and Computer Sciences Division. (IV; Document Forthcoming)

By going from a pre-requisite developmental education model to a co-requisite model, more students are given the opportunity to take a college level English and math courses, and therefore reduce time to completion. Research on national best practices also strongly indicate that earning English and math credits in the first year, is associated with higher levels of retention and completion.

It is expected that the combination developmental/college level courses will yield much lower attrition rates and higher success rates than our historical approaches to developmental English and Mathematics. Research on national best practices strongly indicates that earning English and Math credits in the first year are associated with higher levels of retention and completion. An analysis on the efficacy of the English 099/101 co-requisite model conducted at the conclusion of the fall 2021 semester revealed that:

- The new model enables more students to earn college-level credits in English than the prior one. Over two-thirds of students are earning college level credits without failing any English courses (67.1 percent). Under the old model, slightly more than half of students earned college level credits without failing any English courses.
- The new model enables students to earn college-level credits in English quicker than the prior developmental model. Now, all students with zero or one developmental requirements, who pass, earn college level English credits after one semester. Under the old model it took students 1.76 to 1.81 semesters on average to earn college-level English.
- Additionally, in fall 2021, students who placed into the 099/101 co-requisite course passed ENG 102 at a slightly higher rate than those who placed directly into ENG 101 with no ENG dev. ed. requirements (68.8 vs 68.1 percent).

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

First-Year Experience Course

Though new student orientation has long been a part of the ECC portfolio of services, in July 2021, the First Year Experience (FYE-097) course was made mandatory for all newly entering students. The course recognizes changing student needs and is designed to prepare students for their college life by offering critical information. and continuous support. Considering the changes brought about by the pandemic, in the first week of classes students are taught about online learning and how to use the College's various online platforms. Students are advised about the importance of a syllabus and to expect to receive one in each course taken. In the second week, students learn the advantages and the responsibilities of attending college. This course provides students with critical path skills such as time management, goal setting, self-assessment, note taking, active listening, memory, test taking, critical thinking, analytical thinking, emotional intelligence, communication, diversity, reading effectively and academic planning.

During the semester, FYE students are introduced and given access to campus and college resources through meetings and interaction with college services such as the Dr. Martin Luther King Library, which offers a session with a librarian concerning information literacy and completing data base searches. Student Development and Counseling explains the various student support services offered by the department. State and grant funded student assistance programs including the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund and the Men and Women of Excellence Program are discussed. Advisors meet with students, go over their Curriculum Guides, Degree Evaluations, and a list of advisors by department who will assist the students with course registration for the upcoming semesters.

Among students in the fall 2021 first-time, full-time, degree seeking cohort (n=834), roughly 40 percent (n=330) took FYE 097 in their first semester. Of those taking FYE 097, 77.6 percent were retained in the spring 2022. This is slightly higher than the rest of cohort in which 75.2 percent were retained in Spring 2022. Ongoing efforts are taking place to improve the efficacy of the FYE 097 in acclimating students to college and the ECC community.

Table 4.1 - One-Semester Retention Rate of First-Time, Full-Time, Degree-Seeking (FTFTDS) Students (Fall 2021 to Spring 2022)

	Enrolled in Fall 2021	Returned in Spring 2022	Fall to Spring Retention Rate
Fall 2021 FTFTDS Students taking FYE 097	330	256	77.6%
All Fall 2021 FTFTDS Students	834	627	75.2%

Academic Probation Counseling

During the summer of 2021 the Office of Student Development and Counseling (SDC), began an initiative to retain 330 students who were identified as being on Academic Probation (defined as a cumulative combined GPA of less than 2.0) in spring 2021 and summer 2021. Two part-time counselors were hired to assist with this effort and a counselor from the West Essex Campus was relocated to the SDC office. The goal was to retain the students who were on academic probation and get them registered for the fall 2021 semester by raising student awareness of services available to them. Some of the responses from student indicated that they learned about services available and enhanced their sense of success. Survey data indicate that respondents were checking their student emails more to learn about additional or upcoming services or campus events. As of September 2021, 190 or 58 percent of the students on academic probation were registered with the assistance of the SDC personnel or on their own.

New Student Orientation

New Student Orientation (NSO) is designed to inform students of the supportive services available and is aligned with the College's Mission of seeking to ensure student success. This also follows the College's Strategic Plan, specifically Goal III Objective B, "Enhanced Learning Support Systems and Wrap Around Services to Promote Student Success." (IV; ECC Strategic Plan 2019-2024)

The Student Life and Activities Office (SLAO) conducts NSO prior to the fall and spring semesters for all incoming students (full-time and part-time students on all campuses). There is a detailed program of events and presentations that includes:

- Student Life and Activities
- Office of Financial Aid
- Student Development
- Counseling Department

- Bursar
- Academic Departments
- Athletics Department
- Office of Public Safety
- Learning Center
- Hands-on training on how to access their student email accounts, webservices student portal, and Moodle, our Learning Management System.

In June 2020, SLAO began offering a virtual orientation using the on-line program SafeColleges. Feedback from the NSO survey indicated students felt the information presented were “useful” and that they were “glad they attended.”

Equal Opportunity Fund Program

The longest standing student support service offering at ECC is the Equal Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program. Funded through the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education of New Jersey, EOF provides academic and personal support services for approximately 1,250 students annually.

The mission of the EOF Department is aligned directly with the College’s Mission, Vision, and Values: “The mission of the Educational Opportunity Fund Program – “EOF,” at Essex County College is to assure access to and success in college for New Jersey students of a low-income background. This is accomplished by providing a comprehensive program of academic, personal, social, and financial supports, throughout the student’s college years.” This mission, and the successful strategies pioneered by EOF are being incorporated in many other support programs.

These services include a pre-freshman summer program for full-time, first-time degree seeking students, (FTFTDS), tutoring, individual and group counseling sessions, and academic departments presentations. Other support services include FAFSA preparation workshops, career planning workshops, and an EOF Forum covering various topics such as graduation preparation, transfer pathways, relationships, and money management. All program and services are designed to provide a pathway for student retention and graduation.

The fall 2020 EOF cohort had a 73.5 percent one-year retention rate while the College’s one year retention rate was 61.3 percent. This significant difference demonstrates that the EOF program has a positive impact in terms of retaining students. Some of the ongoing service that EOF provides to students are academic and personal counseling, monthly workshops and forums, and tutoring services. These services are promoted through our monthly EOF newsletter which is emailed to students and highlights events that are happening in the EOF Department and throughout the College. The EOF is one of the College’s premier programs and successfully provides a wide range of services to those who need it most.

Men & Women of Excellence Scholar Program

One of the College’s most recent initiatives designed to increase retention and promote completion is the Men and Women of Excellence Scholars Program (MWE). It is funded through the Scaling Up College

Completion Efforts for Student Success (SUCCESS) MDRC grant. The objective of this grant is to improve the post-secondary outcomes for men and women of color by utilizing multiple coaching sessions each month, full-time enrollment encouragement, a robust management information system, and financial incentives on participant members compared to control groups. The MWE program employs a research-based approach with a two-year study that will compare a control group of students with a cohort of students in the program.

To assist with the program's success, MWE staff lessened or eliminated barriers to student success by providing a clear academic road map and connecting students with various resources. These resources included financial aid assistance, counseling services, dispute resolution with professors, the food pantry, housing security connections, and more. While awaiting results from MDRC's impact analysis, ECC compared outcomes for the 300 MWE participants to the overall College and MWE participants had a 74.3 percent retention rate, 13 points higher than the college-wide retention rate.

Summer Bridge Program

Another support service offered to incoming students is the Summer Bridge Workshop. It is designed to help students move from developmental education into college level courses for the fall semester. Students participate in developmental mathematics and English courses in a four-week format, with tutoring provided. At the end of the program, students take the academic department's final exam to determine if they can register for college level courses in the fall semester. A review of Summer Bridge 2021 data for Math 086 and 092 shows 70 percent passing rate for MTH 086 and 93 percent passing rate for MTH 092. Both groups moved up to the next level of mathematics.

Move-Up Workshop

Move-Up Workshop is offered by The Learning Center to assist "M" grade students review and retake their final exam for Math 086 or Math 092. An "M" grade is given to a student if they "marginally failed" their course so as not to interfere with the students' financial aid. Students who missed passing their course with a minimum score of 65 percent on their final exam are then referred to the Move-Up Workshop by their instructor. The workshop is offered for ten days and reviews all topics covered in the regular course. On the tenth day, students are administered the final exam of the course. The final exams for the workshops are provided by the Math and English departments. A review of Summer I 2020 Move-Up outcomes does shows 87 percent passing rate for MTH 086, 88 percent passing rate for MTH 092, 100 percent passing rate for ENG 085 and 100 percent passing rate for ENG 096.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Students must maintain satisfactory academic progress (SAP) to be eligible for any financial aid. To maintain SAP, students are required to earn at least 67 percent of all college level credits attempted with a 2.0 or better Grade Point Average (GPA). Students who do not maintain the GPA are placed on warning and receive a letter from the Financial Aid Office. If students do not gain SAP in subsequent semesters, they are denied financial aid and must complete the SAP process, which is fully explained on

the College website to have their financial aid restored. (IV; Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy)

During the fall 2021 semester, 330 students were encouraged to complete the SAP process to continue their course work. Letters, emails, and text message were sent to students which explained the SAP rules and ways to proceed. To date, 212/330 (64 percent) students on Academic Probation from spring 2021 were registered for the fall 2021 semester.

Student Success Coaches

To enhance onboarding and academic experiences, Student Success Assistants help students with those activities. These Student Success Coaches, all ECC graduates, received training in basic academic advisement to include a review of academic curriculum guides, financial aid, placement testing, and the registration process to provide a one-stop experience during onboarding. In addition, Student Success Assistants were assigned to academic departments, based on their respective academic major and ECC degrees, thereby providing first-hand insights of their academic experience. Analysis indicates that they have had a positive experience with the Student Success Coaches and have developed a working relationship that extends well into the semester.

Counseling

Supporting the student experience means meeting the needs of students where they are in their academic and personal lives. Our counseling services are designed to provide wrap-around services to address life challenging issues and to remove barriers to success. Five full-time faculty counselors are available to students on an appointment or walk-in basis and a mental health counselor has recently been added to the staff. Some of the academic counseling services are academic forgiveness applications for student who did not maintain adequate grade point averages, financial aid probation appeals, course withdrawals, and probation counseling where student develop an academic plan to improve their classroom/course performance.

Personal counseling is available for students who just need someone to talk with to discuss life issues and needs. Counselors can then refer students to on-campus student support services like our food pantry to address food insecurities, childcare, and transportation. In addition, mental health issues are addressed by two full-time mental health counselors to assist students experiencing depression, stress, anxiety, suicidal ideation, grief from loss, homelessness, and domestic violence. Students experiencing severe trauma are referred to established community agencies/services for long-term assistance as part of our trauma informed care. All services are provided either in-person or virtually.

Student Advisors/Mentors Initiative

Assigning mentors/advisors to students early in their college career supports student engagement and persistence. “Recent data from the Center for Community College Student Engagement suggest that students who receive more advising—more time with advisors and more in-depth discussions in their sessions—are more engaged.” *Show Me the Way: The Power of Advising in Community Colleges, 2018*

Annual Report. (IV; Show Me the Way - The Power of Advising in Community Colleges 2018 National Report)

The ECC Advisor/Mentor program, launched in the fall 2021 semester, assigns one Advisor/Mentor to each academic division to form a partnership with students entering the College for the first time. The mentors advise and track the student's progress from enrollment to graduation. They serve as liaison between the student and campus resources. Their key responsibilities include identifying opportunities and guiding students to campus-wide wrap-around services such as financial aid processing assistance, counseling and advisement, information about student support services, scholarship opportunities, and academic support services.

The goal of the program is to increase student retention by:

- Following the correct programmatic sequence of courses
- Increasing student engagement with the campus community
- Graduating on time

This initiative has yielded a slight year-over-year increase in one-semester retention for the fall 2021 first-time, full-time, degree-seeking (FTFTDS) cohort. Students from the fall 2021 cohort were retained in the spring at a rate of 75.7 percent, a slight improvement over the 72.9 percent one-semester retention rate achieved by the prior fall 2020 FTFTDS cohort.

ECC POLICIES FOR CREDIT TRANSFER

College Regulation 5-18, "Transfer of Credit and Evaluation" specifies the process for evaluating and accepting credits that originate outside the College. (IV; REG-5-18 Transfer of Credit and Evaluation) ECC accepts transfer credits based on the statewide "Comprehensive-wide transfer agreement" adopted by New Jersey's President Council in 2008. (IV; Presentation: College Transcript Evaluation, p. 6, Document Forthcoming) The College also awards credits based on established articulation agreements. The transcript evaluation procedure requires that the student supply Enrollment Services with an official transcript documenting courses taken at other accredited higher education institutions.

Department Chairpersons, who are faculty members, are consulted to ensure that incoming transfer credit course content matches the ECC course content or equivalencies. Only courses with a grade of "C"/2.0 or higher will be considered for transfer. Enrollment Services will then evaluate the transcript and ensure that any transfer equivalencies match the courses to add the proper credit. Transfer credits become part of the student's permanent record. Transfer students must complete a minimum of 30 credits, including half of their major course requirements at ECC. Re-evaluations are needed if students change their major, submit an updated transcript or when the student files an appeal regarding an initial transcript evaluation (IV; Presentation: College Transcript Evaluation, p.14, Document Forthcoming).

College Credits for Military Services

According to College *Regulation REG 5-18*, “Transfer of Credit and Evaluation,” Credit by Examination will be granted for all United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI) transcripts as specified in “A Guide to the Evaluation of Education Experiences in the Armed Services,” published by the American Council on Education (ACE) -- which provides credit recommendations for USAFI courses and tests. In addition, ACE provides quality assurance and policy guidance for the Joint Services Transcript (JST) used by the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard.

STUDENT LIFE AND ACTIVITIES

Essex County College is committed to providing a well-rounded experience for students through imaginative and interrelated projects. The Student Life and Activities Office (SLAO) heightens and enhances student life by planning and coordinating a variety of social, cultural, intellectual, and recreational programs. SLAO publishes and distributes the LIFELINE student handbook and other promotional publications. It also coordinates the sales of discount tickets to area cultural and sporting events, handles code of conduct affairs, manages clubs and organizations on campus, operates the food pantry, and serves as advisors for Student Government and Student Clubs.

The Office of Student Life and Activities has continued to provide orientations, tutorials, and forums to help students navigate the online support systems. The department has, and continues to host Virtual Cafes, teaching students how to access their online web portals, to provide scholarship workshops, and cover other relevant topics such as when the College’s reopening plan was put in place. We have more than 100 videos uploaded to YouTube since beginning the Virtual Café series in April 2020.

Student Government and Student Clubs

Student Government and Student Clubs help serve as student support by allowing safe spaces for student expression and socialization to acclimate students to the college environment. More than 20 clubs have been active throughout the 2021-2022 Academic Year hosting meetings open to their peers on campus, both in-person and virtually. Each club has representative who serve on the Inter-Club Council which meets twice a month during the fall and spring semesters to provide club updates and to foster collaboration. Our clubs engage in various forms of community service including tutoring, park cleanups, and fundraising for charities. Clubs have been active donating to those in need in the form of clothing and toy drives hosted by Student Government, Gaming Club, and Student Nursing Organization.

On September 27, 2019, Student Life and Activities launched the LGBTQIA Safe Zone in the Dasher Student Center to provide a safe space and resource for the LGBTQIA community. The Safe Zone has served as an area for faculty and staff safe zone training, the meeting area for the LGBTQIA club, and has resources for the LGBTQIA community. College-wide staff participated in Safe-Zone training and

at the completion of this training was provided with a sticker to place on their office door designated them as a Safe-Zone for students.

GRANT FUNDED INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING

S-STEM Grant

ECC is participating in a five-year National Science Foundation (NSF) grant program, The Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (S-STEM). S-STEM is geared toward financially needy, academically talented students majoring in the STEM fields. Fulltime Essex County College students enrolled in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Associate degree programs are eligible to apply for this grant which awards students \$2,000 per semester. The S-STEM grant provides students the additional funds that financial aid does not cover and is funds they can use for any educational purpose. To date, 51 ECC students have received the scholarship awards.

LSAMP

The Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) is designed to increase the quality and number of students from under-represented minority groups who complete undergraduate degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). This program is funded by the National Science Foundation with the long-term goal of increasing the number of under-represented students who enter STEM professions and who earn doctorates in the STEM fields. LSAMP Alliances across the country are designed to provide support services at many levels to help interested students succeed in STEM majors and careers and to provide networks with other LSAMP Scholars.

Through the LSAMP Program at ECC, students are given the opportunity to interact in the scientific community. These opportunities include research experiences in science labs both at ECC and at the research science laboratories of several New Jersey universities, Summer STEM Internships which will give students hands-on experience in their field, Mentoring Program for students in STEM courses and participation in science conferences where STEM majors are able to meet and network with other students and present their research projects to the scientific community.

MAPS Program

In the summer of 2021, ECC was awarded a new grant, New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education - Opportunity Meets Innovation Challenge called Mentoring, Alignment, Preparedness, Support (MAPS).

This project aims to build a pilot program that streamlines students' transition into the College and first-semester experience in ECC. MAPS is inspired by the ethos of concierge services, and building on existing dual enrollment program models, it is structured to address three barriers to students' success:

Mentorship for students/faculty/staff, High School (HS) to College Course Alignment, student preparedness, services to support transitioning students.

MAPS is designed to be an active guide for HS students as they embark on their journey to higher education. The vision for this project is to give HS students the resources they need to confidently enroll in college after graduating HS, the staff and faculty of M.A.P.S. will be personal resources for students. Mentors who pay attention to details, are experts in the process, and are empowered with information as well as resources to help students solve problems and remove as many barriers as possible. This project MAPS objectives, and identifies the following deliverables:

- Student mentorship that includes addressing students' needs and barriers on a case-by-case basis.
- A robust holistic dual enrollment program and first-semester experience.
- Ensure that students are college-ready by creating a community of practice between faculty and staff.
- Align college resources to acclimate students as they transition into the College to foster academic success.

Phi Theta Kappa

Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) is the leading national honor society for student attending two-year colleges. In addition to academic opportunities, PTK offers leadership training and the development of other skills that will be helpful in their academic and professional careers.

To join Phi Theta Kappa, a student must have accumulated a minimum of 12 college-level credit hours and have a grade point average equivalent of not less than a 3.60. To retain membership, a student, must maintain a cumulative grade-point average of not less than a 3.25, and have no grade lower than a "C" on their academic transcript. In the past 15 years, nearly 700 students have been inducted into ECC's 5-Star, award winning chapter.

Child Development Center

The Essex County College Child Development Center (CDC) was established in 1975 and immediately began to stand out as a leader of high-quality early childhood care in Essex County. The Center's initial focus was on caring for children ages 2 to 5 years old. From the start, the strategic plan for the Center was continuous growth and development to meet the growing needs of early childcare. In October 1999, a major expansion of the Child Development Center took place, which allowed for the enrollment of an additional 55 children.

In 2011 another major development took place. The Child Development Center began enrolling toddler children, 13 months to 24 months old. In 2012, the following year, the Center began offering infant care for children 3 months to 12 months of age.

Our center works with two community-based organizations to provide childcare services to our students and surrounding community. Our preschool services are offered through our collaborative relationship with the Newark Day Center. This preschool program operates September through June and is open to residents of Newark with 3 and 4-year-old children. Children must be 3 years of age before October 1st to register for the program. Next, is our partnership with Union Township Community Action Organization, Inc. (UTCAO) to operate an Early Head Start Program. This is an infant toddler two program offered year-round to families of children ages 12 months to 2.5-year-olds. Families must meet the Early Head Start eligibility requirements to participate in this program.

Other services offered by our CDC includes wrap-around childcare before the instructional portion of the day from 7:30AM-8:30AM and at the end of the instructional portion of the day from 3:05PM-5:15PM which give working parents time to drop off and pick-up their children, a Preschool Summer Enrichment Program operates in the months of July and August. The program is open to preschool age children 3 to 5 years old and has a partnership with Program for Parent whereby students who successfully completed the non-credit CDA course requirements through courses taken at P4P, obtained their CDA Credential, are admitted into ECC Education Program, and successfully pass three prescribed credit-based courses, will be awarded nine additional college credits that can be applied to the Education A.A. degree program.

Essex County College Athletics

Essex County College offers a total eight intercollegiate athletic sports as a member of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA): Women's Soccer, Men's Soccer, Women's Cross Country, Men's Cross Country, Women's Basketball, Men's Basketball, Women's Track and Field, and Men's Track and Field. In addition to being a member of the NJCAA, the Essex County College Wolverines compete in the Garden State Athletic Conference and as a member of NJCAA Region 19, which includes two-year colleges in the states on New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

The Essex County College Athletic Department provides a holistic approach to the development of the student-athlete academically, athletically, and personally. This approach provides foundational core values learned through non-traditional classroom learning to supplement the high academic standards and dedication to academic excellence at Essex County College. The athletic department strives to provide a high level of academic, athletic, and personal development to each student-athlete in preparation for success after Essex County College. As a segmented cohort, Essex County College student-athletes are held to a high standard of academic excellence through accountability measures developed by the department to align with the college's mission, vision, and values. Academically, student-athletes are expected to maintain an overall GPA of a 2.50 and are required to maintain full-time enrollment each semester to remain academically eligible to participate in an Essex County College athletic program.

In addition to setting academic standards above the institutional requirement, the athletic department provides an atmosphere of academic support and accountability through the *Essex County College Athletic Department: Student-Athlete Academic Monitoring Initiative*. Beginning with the 2018-19 Academic Year, the Athletic Department introduced a comprehensive academic monitoring initiative to hold student-athletes accountable for their academic success and progress. The initiative includes mandatory study hall hours, progress reports, intrusive advisement, coordination of tutoring, and accountability measures. Through this plan, the department monitors the progress of each student-

athlete, implementing individual plans for a student-athlete that needs assistance, indicated by progress reports from each professor and mandatory meetings with the Assistant Athletic Director.

Our student-athletes are also supported through athletic scholarships with cover tuition and fees and housing through the two-year program. Both international and domestic students are eligible to compete for these scholarships.

CONCLUSION

The diversity and scope of our student and academic support services show a firm commitment to our students and their needs. To ensure student success, the delivery of our services starts with a caring staff that endeavors to provide high quality service in every student encounter. Through these support services, the College strives to ensure that students receive the best experience possible during their educational journey while providing access to services that lead to student success and completion.



STANDARD V: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.

REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT AT ECC

Four years ago, Essex County College (ECC) celebrated 50 years of service to the community. It has an extensive history of delivering education services and assessing the efficacy of these services. As a community of shared governance, the College routinely undergoes an iterative exercise to determine whether the system of academic offerings is effective and meets current standards of best practices. As such, the structure of learning competencies and goals have evolved over the years as a result of changes to state mandates, revisions to professional and regional accreditation standards, national best practices, and ECC's ongoing commitment to continual quality improvement.

Prior to 2012, ECC's assessment of student learning was focused on course level assessment. Instructors collected data aligned with "Measurable Performance Objectives" (MPOs) which were mapped to course level outcomes. In 2012, the focus of our systematic assessment process shifted from course level to program level assessment. The prior institutionalized course level assessment process, which utilized Scantron forms, was cumbersome, limited assessment modality, and was not embedded into courses in an organized manner. This placed an unsustainable workload on faculty and presented significant challenges to an administration trying to capture assessment data in an organized, systematic fashion across the institution. In 2012, the College underwent the formal process of reviewing the program learning outcomes and developed and documented programmatic curriculum maps. The resulting programmatic goals were memorialized in the 2014-2019 course catalog. (V; Document Forthcoming)

In August 2018, the State of New Jersey mandated a maximum of 60 credits for all associate degrees. This mandate was the result of NJ Rev Stat § 18a:62-57 (2018), which established the standard number of credits unless an exemption was requested. (IV; REG-5-18 Transfer of Credit and Evaluation) This mandate took effect in fall 2019. This legislation created a chain reaction, including a programmatic review, to reduce the number of credits if the degree required more that allowed. All programs at the College conducted a review of their programmatic goals, course requirements, and general education requirements for their majors during this analysis. The analysis sought to maximize the educational efficacy of each degree; based on the credit reduction, many programs required new curriculum mapping.

The State mandated reduction in credits also affected general education requirements for degree programs. In response, in late spring 2019 the Academic Policies Advisory Committee (APAC) voted to create the APAC Subcommittee on General Education (SGE) to examine the issue of general

education. The SGE of the APAC was charged with redeveloping ECC's general education goals to ensure continued compliance with changes in State policy. The College used this as an opportunity to also develop institutional learning goals which had been absent.

In 2020, ECC adopted a new program assessment process that addressed many of these issues. (V; ECC 2020-2024 Program Review Manual) The process included a comprehensive review of all program goals and previously developed curriculum maps. Any changes to program outcomes or curriculum had to be approved by the Division and College Curriculum Committees in accordance with the College policy. The new process also included a simplified data collection system that is overseen and maintained by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA), as well as an annual review of program outcomes, curriculum, and curricular alignment, the collection and reporting of assessment data, and a systematic process for developing and capturing action-plans.

The implementation of this new program assessment process began in January of 2020 with a cohort of 19 programs. The first cohort was halted and put on pause for nearly a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic as faculty and administration alike were forced to deal with the sudden transition to fully remote learning. The first cohort of implementation resumed in January 2021 and programs in this cohort were fully implemented by the close of the spring 2021 semester. Implementation resumed with a second cohort of 13 programs in fall 2021 which were fully implemented by the close of the semester. A third and final cohort onboarded the remaining degree programs in spring 2022 with three exceptions. General Science, Health Sciences, and Social Sciences are generalized programs more amenable to a portfolio assessment approach. IEPA will be working with these programs in fall 2022 to implement a portfolio assessment process with these programs.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPETENCIES AND GENERAL EDUCATION GOALS

The institutional competencies and learning goals of Essex County College adopted by the the Academic Policies Advisory Committee in 2021 consist of five competencies with 15 goals nested within. (V; ECC Core Competencies Proposal APAC Approved 10.5.21 updated) The general education goals were approved at the same time and include eight general education goals with 35 nested objectives. These objectives are mapped to general education themes in a comprehensive cross-walk. The process is discussed below and memorialized in the Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual which guides all assessment of these areas. (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual rev. 7.20.22) Further context on the process of how these goals were created may be found in Standard III. Table 5.1 illustrates how the various levels of ECC's learning goals are structured and interrelated.

Table 5.1 Institutional Learning Goals Model, 2021 (Evidence Inventory)



ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL AND GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING GOALS

Guided by our Mission and Values

Upon the College-wide adoption of the ECC Competencies and General Education Learning Goals developed by the SGE in 2021, the institution turned its focus towards developing an effective and sustainable process to assess these learning goals. There were three main driving principles behind the development of the process, all of which were directly derived from our institutional Mission, Vision, and Values. (V; Change in Mission Statement 4-22-2022)

The first was to develop a process that is intended to honor our institutional value of Teaching and Learning, which states “We affirm teaching and learning as our primary purpose. The College seeks to instill in students general and specialized knowledge, the ability to think critically, and a commitment to civic responsibility.” The resulting process is an acknowledgment by the institution that it is accountable first and foremost, to ECC’s students in the delivery of an academic experience aligned with our mission and values.

Secondly, the assessment process was developed in accordance with our institutional value of Excellence and Accountability to ensure that ECC “provides excellent programs that utilize technology, demonstrate innovation, and undergo evaluation to ensure consistent and outstanding performance.”

The third driving principle, is again based on ECC’s institutional value of Teaching and Learning, with a specific focus on ensuring that the institution “values and supports the open exchange of ideas and

experiences” and ECC’s value of Legacy and Transformation specifically “building upon our past achievements, we eagerly embrace the future by pursuing innovations in teaching.” These institutional values were the inspiration behind the decision to encourage the collegial sharing of ideas and best practices among faculty, making it a principal component of this assessment process.

The development of the assessment plan was a collaboration between the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment, Academic Affairs (AA) leadership, the Chair of the APAC Subcommittee on General Education (SGE), and the two faculty chairing the Standard V. Working Group for ECC’s ongoing self-study. The composition of this team not only serves as an example of a productive and synergistic partnership between administration and faculty, but also serves as one of many examples of the way in which ECC has truly embraced the Self-Study process as a vehicle to drive institutional renewal and continuous improvement.

Four Annual Assessment Themes

The assessment of ECC Competencies and General Education Goals is accomplished by focusing on a distinct assessment theme each year, within a cycle that repeats every four years. The themes are:

- Forms of Expression
- Reflecting on our Past and Present
- STEM
- The Individual and Society

The table below shows the timeline of when each theme will be assessed, who will lead the annual assessment team, and the ECC Competencies and General Education goals that comprise each assessment theme. A more detailed overview including the institutional learning goals within each ECC Competency and the objectives within each General Education Goal are outlined in the Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual.

Table 5.2 Overview of Annual Assessment Themes

Assessment Theme	Years Assessed	Team Leader(s)	ECC Competency Assessed	Gen. Ed. Goals Assessed
Forms of Expression	AY 2020, AY 2024	Chair, Humanities and Bilingual Studies	Competency A: Communication	Goal 1. Written and Oral Communication; English Goal 6. Humanistic Perspectives; Humanities
Reflecting on our Past and Present	AY 2021, AY 2025	Chair, Humanities and Bilingual Studies Chair, Social Sciences	Competency B: Critical and Ethical Thinking and Problem Solving	Goal 7. Historical Perspectives; History

Assessment Theme	Years Assessed	Team Leader(s)	ECC Competency Assessed	Gen. Ed. Goals Assessed
STEM	AY 2022, AY 2026	Chair, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics Division Chair, Mathematics, Engineering, Technology, and Computer Science	Competency C: Information and Computer Literacy	Goal 2. Quantitative Knowledge & Skills; Mathematics Goal 3. Scientific Knowledge & Reasoning; Science Goal 4. Technology or Information Literacy; Technology
The Individual and Society	AY 2023, AY 2027	Chair, Humanities and Bilingual Studies Chair, Social Sciences Chair, Business	Competency D: Collaboration, Cooperation, Intra- and Inter-Cultural Responsibility	Goal 5. Society & Human Behavior; Social Science Goal 8. Diversity and Global Perspective; Diversity

The Collection and Reporting of ECC Competency Data

Coordinated by IEPA, competency data is collected on an annual basis for all five competencies. The focus in this process is on the first four competencies as the fifth competency is addressed through the program assessment process in coordination with each program, discussed below.

Through the data collection process, the College measures the extent to which faculty are able to integrate the first four ECC Competencies into our General Education courses. A short video announcement and interactive PDF introduced the ECC Core Competencies and General Education assessment process launched prior to the initial data collection. (V; Document Forthcoming) The seven-minute video showed the development of these competencies and goals and explained faculty's role in the development of the goals and the assessment process. There were over 90 views of this video in the first 24 hours of the roll out.

The data collection is designed so that when a faculty member reports that they were able to integrate an ECC Competency into their teaching of the course, they are then asked to describe how it was integrated, whether and how they were able to assess this competency, and finally asked to discuss any best practices they would like to share with other instructors teaching this course.

The data collection process delivers results to the annual Assessment Team along with both written instructions and a live demo on how to interpret the report and examine a number of critical questions:

- To what degree is each ECC Competency and its associated goals integrated into ECC's General Education courses?
 - Which courses integrate each competency? Which are not?
 - Are all Goals within the competency being sufficiently integrated into our General Education program?
 - For courses where instructors successfully integrate and/or assess each competency, what best practices can the assessment team compile and share with faculty to increase the rate of successful integration and/or assessment?

IEPA collects data on each ECC Competency every semester, however, the annual Assessment Team only focuses on assessing one competency each year, therefore each competency is assessed in a cycle once every four years (Table 5.2). Each summer, IEPA and Academic Affairs reviews the ECC Competency data collected throughout the academic year. This review is not an in-depth assessment, but rather a mechanism to check that any concerns that need to be addressed do not go unabated until that Competency is scheduled for its next review by an annual Assessment Team.

The annual Assessment Team compiles best practices for the ECC Competency that was assessed and drafts recommendations to the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics and the Division Chairs. The annual Assessment Team uses the assessment results to develop appropriate Action-Plans and the recommendations and best practices are compiled and shared with faculty.

Some examples of best practices and recommendations that were shared in the Team's report to the Dean and faculty are shared below:

SOC 101 Integration summary: 100 percent reported integration with 92 percent response rate.

Best Practices (for faculty):

- Add appropriately themed videos for all classes on the focus of critical thinking and problem solving.
- If case studies from the textbook are recommended or required to be used, a framework for doing so should be circulated to all instructors.

Recommendations (for administration):

- Create course-wide rubrics for use in examining class discussions and critiquing writing assignments and critiquing oral presentations.
- Incorporate a required public speaking component into the curriculum.

The Collection and Reporting of General Education Assessment Data

General Education goal data is collected on an annual basis from sub-sets of courses that have been identified in the cross-walk document as the courses with a primary focus for each General Education goal. (V; Document Forthcoming)

At the conclusion of each semester, the Office of IEPA uses the General Education Assessment Schedule (Table 5.3) to send General Education data collection forms to instructors teaching courses aligned with the goal(s) scheduled for assessment in that year. For example, in the year that the assessment theme "Forms of Expression" was scheduled to be assessed, instructors teaching courses aligned with Goal 1 - Written and Oral Communication in English and Goal 6 – Humanities, were asked to submit data. (Table 5.2).

The data collection form asks instructors which objectives they were able to assess within each General Education Goal. It then asks each instructor to describe the assessment measures that were used to assess each Goal, and to report how many students were assessed, along with how many achieved a score of 75 percent or higher, the institution's threshold used for defining achievement of mastery for a learning outcome.

The General Education Data Collection process was designed to deliver quantitative results to the annual Assessment Teams with clear data on the degree to which General Education objectives are being assessed in courses designated as primary focus courses for each Goal. The collection and reporting of data are also designed to provide evidence to the annual Assessment Team on the degree to which students are achieving mastery of each of the General Education Objectives.

IEPA provides both written instructions and a live demonstration to the Assessment Team on how to interpret assessment results and develop action-plans in response to the following critical questions (V; Document Forthcoming):

- To what degree are each of the General Education objectives being assessed?
- According to assessment data, what percent of students are demonstrating mastery of each General Education objective?
- How can we use this data to improve teaching and learning regarding General Education?
- How can we use this experience to further improve our assessment process?

Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment distributes a template to the annual assessment team for them to report assessment results. A copy of this template, including actual findings from the assessment teams are available to view in the Evidence Inventory. (V; Final Assessment Results and Action Planning AY 2021 – 2022)

Upon delivery of assessment results to the annual Assessment Team, IEPA also provides an Action-Planning form with instructions and a live Q&A session with the annual Assessment Team. The annual Assessment Team explores the assessment data together and develops the appropriate action-plans. Results are distributed and shared with faculty at the annual Fall Convocation. Additionally, the Chair(s) of the annual Assessment Team is asked to provide annual updates on the action-plans each year until the assessment theme is re-assessed four years later. Copies of the Action-Planning template, its corresponding instructions, and actual action-plans developed by the annual assessment teams are available to view in the Evidence Inventory. (V; Final Assessment Results and Action Planning AY 2021 – 2022)

Action-Plans Put into Action

The inaugural annual assessment team for Theme 1 – Forms of Expression included several explicit actions to be undertaken. This included broader actions to be implemented for all courses with a primary focus on the General Education goal being assessed, as well as course-specific actions. For

example, the annual assessment team developed the following broad actions for all courses with a primary focus on General Education Goal I:

- Development of protocols to ensure instructors provide specific and proper feedback to students
- Development of protocols to maintain regular contact with students (including one-on-one meetings)
- Development of protocols to ensure that course syllabi are properly constructed and distributed to students on the first day of the semester
- Development of annual norming/training sessions for instructors, especially within the same discipline as well as biannual to triannual curriculum review sessions

Course-specific action plans were also developed. Examples include:

- ENG 101 – General Education Goal I Action-Plan:
 - Faculty will be trained to better understand and implement the Best Practices Guide that was developed for this course.
 - A process will be developed for students to earn extra credit for attending sessions at the Learning Center.
 - Library visits will be formalized as an experience in this course. should be planned.
 - Faculty Development will reinforce that rhetorical grammar approach is the cornerstone of instruction aka students will learn mastery by reading and writing on a regular basis.
- ART 101 – General Education Goal VI Action-Plan:
 - Interactive student engagement will be achieved by incorporating more modern digital art platforms into the instruction of the course.
 - A proposal to the Curriculum Committee will be developed to ensure ENG-099/101 is taken either prior-to, or concurrent with ART 100.

Annual Assessment Timeline

IEPA collects data annually in January and May and the assessment process begins in May of each year. It starts with the selection of the Assessment Team and is followed by an orientation conducted by IEPA, Academic Affairs, and the SGE. Additionally, IEPA in conjunction with Academic Affairs, coordinates the collection of annual updates from the Assessment Team Chairs. Table 5.3 illustrates this annual timeline.

Table 5.3 - Annual Timeline for General Education and ECC Competency Assessment

Month	Step in the Process
May	Chairs leading the Assessment Team will select their team members
January and May	IEPA will collect data on ECC Competencies and General Education Goals
May	Data reports for the ECC Competency and General Education Goals being assessed in this year are generated by IEPA
Late May/ Early June	IEPA, Academic Affairs, and the General Education Subcommittee of APAC will conduct an Orientation with the Assessment Team. In the Orientation, IEPA shares and reviews assessment results with the Assessment Team and trains the Team on how to complete the Action-Planning Form and update Targets for the next assessment of the assessment theme.
July and August	The Assessment Team completes the following items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compiles best practices for the ECC Competency that was assigned to review and distribute to faculty and drafts recommendations to the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics and the Division Chairpersons. Examine the General Education assessment results and develop appropriate Action-Plans.
July and August (off cycle years)	The Assessment Team Chair will submit an annual update on the progress of the Action-Plans that they developed. The collection updates will be coordinated by IEPA in conjunction with Academic Affairs.

Evaluation of Institutional and General Education Assessment Processes

Each year IEPA conducts a process evaluation survey. The survey is distributed to the members of the annual Assessment Team to gather recommendations for improving the assessment process going forward. Results of this survey are reviewed annually by IEPA, Academic Affairs, and SGE of APAC to facilitate continuous quality improvement of our assessment processes.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

As previously noted, Competency E is discipline-specific and therefore assessed through a separate process.

“Competency E: Students will matriculate through a major curriculum and demonstrate achievement of that program’s learning outcomes upon completion of the program.”

Essex County College typically enrolls more than 10,000 students annually seeking to earn an associate degree or academic certificate, and an additional 9,000 students in non-credit, continuing education programs. ECC offers 52 associate degree programs, 21 academic certificate programs, an array of non-credit, continuing education and workforce development programs, and a high school dual enrollment

program. Out of the 32,370 graduates from Essex County College, 58 percent transferred to a four-year institution after graduation, with 66.3 percent of those students eventually earning a bachelor's degree.

Among the students who transferred to a four-year institution after graduation, 16.67 percent earned a master's degree, and 1.68 percent earned a doctoral degree. Compared to the national average of 31 percent, Essex County College graduates transfer to four-year institutions in larger numbers (58 percent) and about two-thirds of those who transferred earned a bachelor's degree—well above the national average of “less than half” who earn a bachelor's degree within six years. (V; The Chronicle of Higher Education the New Generation of Students)

Program Goals Development

Program goals were established based on an alignment between ECC's Mission, Vision, and Values, and the degree type (AA, AS, AAS, and certificates). They provide a comprehensive educational framework for academic and career advancements upon completion of the program. In addition, the program goals integrate the knowledge and skills necessary that students must achieve upon completion of a degree to provide an opportunity for seamless transfer to four-year institutions or immediate entry into the workforce.

The majority of the program learning outcomes are the product of a College-wide process that occurred while implementing the Strategic Plan. Goal III, Objective F of the Plan is to “Foster institutional improvement through assessment, evaluation, and evidence-based planning.” and includes annual activities on completing the ongoing implementation of the Program Assessment process and implementing the newly revised assessment process for the ECC Competency and General Education assessment processes.

Faculty members serve as Program Coordinators and provide oversight of the program along with Division Chairpersons. Each program has learning outcomes that serve as key elements of assessment via a methodical approach. The program learning outcomes (PLOs) are specific to each degree program offered at the institution, e.g., an associate of science degree in the Biology/Pre-Medicine program has PLOs that are specific to that degree. The degree's major course requirements serve as the baseline for PLO assessments and all subsequent improvements or action planning processes. The PLOs are officially communicated to all prospective and current students through the College's catalog. (V; Program Learning Goals Retrieved from Catalogue Essex County College)

Program Assessment Process

Program Coordinators are asked to examine their program learning outcomes, curriculum map, and curricular alignment as part of the annual program assessment process. (New Program/Change in Existing Program Process). To ensure proper oversight if revision is needed, the Program Coordinators are required to go through the appropriate College Curriculum Committee (CCC) faculty governance process. This is the first layer of program assessment in the new process—ensuring that program learning outcomes are relevant and reflect what is being taught in the classroom and that program learning outcomes continue to reflect the Mission of ECC, which includes the College's dedication to academic excellence and the success of its students. It also confirms that they are aligned with the *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024, particularly Goal II. Objective F: Foster Institutional

Improvement through Assessment, Evaluation, and Evidence-Based Planning. (V; Student First Version 2.0)

Each of the 52 associate degree programs has goals that were developed by faculty, based on the program's mission, and following the College Curriculum Committee's (CCC) guidelines for initiation of a new program. (V; 2019 ECC College Curriculum Committee Bylaws) In addition, the program goals were revised over the years based on program objectives and an alignment of concurrent educational and career advancements. The revision of the programs also follows the CCC guidelines.

The College's program assessment process has evolved over the last ten years, with each iteration contributing to the current refined and sustainable workflow. The current system is reflective of long-term college-wide growth to embrace collaborative, collegial, centralized, and sustained academic program assessment. (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual rev. 7.20.22) Prior to 2014, program assessment was subject to review by the Standards Assessment Advisory Council (SAAC) and the Instructional Advisory Council (IAC). These councils were tasked to uphold academic, instructional, and academic assessment standards. In 2014, the governance councils were restructured, and oversight of new programs and deactivation of programs fell to the College Curriculum Advisory Council (CCAC).

The institution adopted various software applications from 2010 to present with the intended purpose of each application to centralize the institution's academic assessment reporting process at the program and course levels. Doing that helps the end-user to access, report, and retrieve data as part of evaluation and continuous improvements. The first applications used was WEAVE from (2011 to 2019). SPOL was acquired in 2019 with the goal of being used for strategic planning and the various forms of assessment e.g. administrative unit assessment, program review, and student learning assessment. To ensure that all these processes work together according to the Institutional Effectiveness Framework, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness developed its own customized internally built process that makes use of several software solutions such as SPOL, SharePoint, Qualtrics, and SmartEvals. (V; IE Framework Process Graphic revised 11-3-21)

Periodic Review of Academic Programs

ECC has implemented dual comprehensive program review and program assessment processes based on a regular schedule. The program review process is performed on a five-year cycle, and reviews the academic program as a whole, including programmatic mission and objectives, labor market needs, personnel and facility needs, as well as curricular needs/changes. A further discussion of the program review process can be found in Standard III.

In addition to the program review process, the program assessment process is performed on an annual basis to assess student learning outcomes and their mastery. Beginning in 2019, all new and existing academic programs were reviewed in a revised program assessment process. As mentioned in this Chapter's introduction, this process was delayed during the 2019-2020 academic year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Academic programs from Cohort 1 were onboarded in spring 2021, Cohort 2 was onboarded in fall 2021, and Cohort 3 was onboarded in spring 2022.

Onboarding for each cohort was initiated with a detailed Orientation. (V; Program Assessment Orientation Cohort 3) The Orientation was followed by a series of one-on-one onboarding meetings between the Executive Director of IEPA and the Academic Program Coordinator. The program learning outcomes were examined by the Program Coordinator and aligned to the major required courses for each program by examining the course-level outcomes for each course. Program Coordinators were tasked with ensuring that each PLO was appropriately introduced and reinforced, as well as assessed, with an expectation of mastery prior to program completion.

When courses are identified as “mastery” level, IEPA collects PLO mastery assessment data on a semester basis. Course instructors are required to report, using a program assessment data collection form, how many students demonstrated mastery of the PLO(s) that were determined to be mastery level in their specific courses. (V; ECC Blank Program Assessment Template) Measurement tools varied across the academic departments, and included the use of case studies, research papers, oral presentations, rubrics, lab reports, midterm exams, and final exams. (V; Document Forthcoming)

At the beginning of each academic year, the Office of IEPA creates a new annual assessment template for each program. This template is pre-populated with the program’s mission, curriculum, outcomes, and curriculum map from the prior year. Program Coordinators then review their template and confirm with IEPA whether any changes to these items have been made. If there are changes, IEPA will work with the Program Coordinator to make sure the faculty governance process has been followed and work with the Program Coordinator to update the assessment template. If there are no changes, IEPA proceeds with repeating the annual process of collecting data, compiling assessment results and distributing results to faculty, and guiding programs through a documented action-planning process.

ECC’s program assessment model, described in further detail in the ECC’s Program Assessment Manual, consists of Program Coordinators working with IEPA to create a curriculum map that shows how the level of instruction and expected learning increases as student progress through the curriculum. Program Coordinators identify which courses introduce and reinforce each program outcomes, as well as identifying the courses in which students are expected to demonstrate mastery of each outcome. An example of an ECC Curriculum Map can be seen in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Sample ECC Curriculum Map

Environmental Science A.S.

I= Introduced

R= Reinforced

M= Demonstration of Mastery

		CHM103	GEO101	GEO102	CHM104	MTH118	BIO220	BIO210	BIO230
PLO 1	Students will be able to describe the fundamental concepts of Geology and Environmental Science, including the origin, composition, and evolution of the Earth, and how the Earth system responds to internal and external forces, including the forces of humans.	I / R	I / R	I / R	R		M		M
PLO 2	Students will be able to effectively communicate and critically evaluate scientific observations, analyses and ideas.	I / R	I / R	R			R	M	M
PLO 3	Students will be able to scientifically collect, analyze, and interpret geologic, geoscience, and earth systems data.	I / R	I / R		R	R	M	M	

Once a curriculum map is built by the Program Coordinator, he or she ensures, with the assistance of IEPA, that each PLO is effectively introduced in at least one course, reinforced in at least one required course, and demonstrates mastery in at least one course. The Program coordinator and IEPA also systematically ensure curricular alignment between the curriculum map and the individual course outlines. For example, if the curriculum map indicates that a particular course introduces Program Outcome 1 and reinforces Program Outcome 2, the Program Coordinator confirms that this is reflected in the course objectives stated in the departmental outline.

Data Collection

All faculty teaching one or more sections of a course where an expectation of mastery is designated on the curriculum map receive an electronic form from IEPA for the collection of assessment data. Figure 2 illustrates how the curriculum map drives the data collection process. Examples of data collection forms can be found in the program assessment manual.

IEPA collects and aggregates data from each mastery course every fall and spring semester. At the conclusion of the academic year, the aggregated data is compiled into an annual results summary for each program and disseminated to the Program Coordinators. In addition to the aggregate analysis in the results tab of the annual assessment template, the Program Coordinators also receive the disaggregated individual section results in a separate file so they can determine that the assessment measures used are suitable indicators for the associated PLO. A copy of the results template, as well as actual results can be viewed in the Evidence Inventory.

Action-Planning Process

Upon receiving their annual assessment results, Program Coordinators form small assessment committees consisting of three to five faculty members from each program. This committee examines the percentage of students who mastered each PLO and suggest courses of action. When 100 percent of students master the PLO, the committee assesses it and determines if it is still an appropriate PLO, or should be revised. If the percentage of mastery is below 100 percent, the committee, using the curriculum map, assessment data, and their classroom experience to develop solutions to increase the level of mastery.

Action-Planning Examples

Preliminary results from Cohort 1 of the program assessment process resulted in this action-planning process resulted in changes at the course level, e.g., “A review of the accounting concepts will be provided to students at the beginning of the semester prior to the completion of projects,” was an action that would be implemented the following semester in order to increase the number of students who mastered a specific PLO in the Accounting (A.S.) program.

In the Mathematics (A.S.) program, the following was determined to be an actionable change at the mastery course level: “For the fall 2021 semester, the students in MTH 222 will be given access to all lecture notes and the solutions to the included problems at appropriate times. Since they will not need to

write down any of the problems, they can use that time to pay more attention to the discussed material and ask questions when in doubt. The final exam will once again be used to determine whether this action will improve PLO 1.”

The action-planning process can also result in program-level changes, such as a change to the required major courses, based on student degree of mastery. Examples of specific program-level changes are collected, as are year-over-year data for applicable programs. The effectiveness of the action-planning process will then be examined.

The program assessment and action-planning process is used for academic programs to assess their effectiveness on a year-to-year basis and systematically provide data to make timely improvements. Academic program’s effectiveness and viability are assessed on a five-year basis by faculty members and college administrators in a separate but related process, the Academic Program Review process, discussed in the next section. Program Learning Outcomes are evaluated annually by a team of faculty subject matter experts and during those annual meetings adjustments are made to the Programmatic Action Plan.

Program Improvement, Policy Improvement, and Decision Making

If the program requires further modification or revision, the Program Coordinators will follow the change process set forth by the “Essex County College - College Curriculum Committee Bylaws.” (V; 2019 ECC College Curriculum Committee Bylaws)

During the initial phase of the program assessment, changes that are necessary are identified and revisions made. The Divisional Curriculum Committee (DCC) then reviews the revision proposals, and, if approved, advanced to the College Curriculum Committee (CCC), as well as institutional leadership for further review/approval.

For example, utilizing the program assessment process, the Bio/Pre-Med program identified courses that are aligned with the PLOs, where each PLO is linked to a course(s) that is “Introduced,” “Reinforced” or at the “Mastery” level. During that process, the Program Coordinator, faculty members from the respective division, and the IEPA Department identified various major courses that students have the option to choose from. They were BIO 211, BIO 220, BIO 225, BIO 228, BIO 230, and BIO 237 where students can select any two courses. However, there were various courses that were not offered on a regular semester(s) basis, such as BIO 220, BIO 225 and BIO 237, which may not fulfill the intended purpose of assessment of the graduates based on the established PLOs.

The intermittent scheduling of these courses did not allow consistent assessment of the program’s outcomes. Therefore, the Program Coordinator, faculty, and DCC recommended the revision of the Bio/Pre-Med program after a review of the program’s major course requirements. The proposal was to eliminate courses from the program that were not offered regularly. The revision proposal was approved at the division level and then was submitted to the College Curriculum Committee (CCC) for review. The CCC approved the program on 05/06/2020.

The newly revised Bio/Pre-Med program will be effective as of fall 2022 and will assess graduates more effectively since courses that are identified as “Mastery” will have a direct link to the PLOs. Additionally, these courses will be periodically evaluated to ensure that graduates meet the pre-established criterion set forth for the Bio/Pre-Med program.

Evaluation of the Program Assessment Process

While the focus of the Assessment committees is on student learning, faculty are encouraged to simultaneously evaluate the assessment process itself. In the Action-Planning Guide that is sent to the assessment committees with their annual results, faculty are encouraged to consider two types of action plans: programmatic and process. (V; Action Planning Guide) While programmatic actions focus on improvements to either the teaching and learning process or curricular improvements, process action-plans include continually assessing the components of the assessment process such as the quality of the PLOs being measured, the accuracy of the curriculum map, and if the assessment measures being used are appropriate indicators of student mastery.

Programmatic action plans may consist of various changes including course re-alignment, possible standardization of course deliverables, curricular changes, updating of PLOs, and in some instances changing teaching and learning materials i.e. textbooks. Action plans are entered into the corresponding page of each program’s annual assessment template.

Action plans resulting from program assessment are created yearly by each academic program. Once the template for the academic year has been fully completed (results calculated, action plan entered), the template is stored in a SharePoint Drive that is accessible to the program coordinator so they may review historical templates if needed.

Assessment of Externally Accredited Programs

The programs listed below are all accredited or approved by an external, program-related accreditation body. While it is understood that each academic program that is accredited by an external accreditor must undergo rigorous assessment of their program, each academic program is also responsible for taking part in ECC’s annual assessment process, as described above. Each externally accredited program, such as the Nursing program, has PLOs that are used for both internal assessment and external accreditation processes, to ensure that each program is meeting the standards of both ECC and its external accreditor. Externally accredited/approved programs are welcome to use the results of the ECC assessment process as part of their application/reaffirmation process for their respective external accreditor.

1. Paralegal Studies - American Bar Association (ABA)
2. Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering - Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)
3. Business Administration, Accounting, Finance - Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP)

4. Nursing RN - Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN)
5. Nursing LPN - Certificate New Jersey Board of Nursing (NJ BON)
6. Physical Therapist Assistant - American Physical Therapy Association's Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE)
7. Vision Care Technology - Commission on Opticianry Accreditation (COA)
8. Radiography - Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology (JRCERT)

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IEPA PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In keeping with continuous evaluation and ongoing improvement of the assessment process, two surveys were distributed to Program Coordinators. The first in fall 2021 and a second in spring 2022. (V; Document Forthcoming) These instruments asked the program coordinators to identify ways to improve the program assessment process and the feedback was used for that purpose. For example, an instructional and interactive presentation entitled “Keeping Our Promises” was created and distributed in advance of spring semester data collection, to explain and clarify the process. The feedback also informed changes to the on boarding process and orientation for cohort three.

At the end of the academic year, program coordinators are invited to attend multiple group discussions with the Executive Director of IEPA and the Assistant Director of Institutional Effectiveness. Program coordinators are asked to share their thoughts on the program assessment process, including what they liked, what they did not like, how the process assisted them in improving their programs, and any recommendations they had for improvement. The discussion group is recorded and documented for reference as IEPA further develops the program assessment process based on feedback from program coordinators. All the Program Coordinators from cohorts 1 and 2 were invited, with three sessions scheduled to accommodate their schedules. Approximately 75 percent of the invited Program Coordinators attended at least one of the three sessions. These sessions were very productive and very positive.

Key Findings:

- Program Coordinators reported that the program assessment process has helped them think critically about their program's curriculum and has led several programs to make improvements. Several programs made formal changes to their program learning outcomes and/or curriculum through the formal faculty governance process and several others made changes to key course assignments that are measures in courses that assess for student mastery of program-level outcomes.
- Program Coordinators expressed a strong interest in building on the current process by formalizing the action-planning process into Division-wide annual meetings, convocation workshops/presentations, and an annual institution-wide assessment summit.
- Program Coordinators expressed strong support for the creation for a faculty-led Assessment Committee to be added to ECC's current faculty governance structure.

Attendees made recommendations that ultimately resulted in specific programing during Convocation that permitted the division wide and institution wide sharing of best practices. The Executive Director of IEPA captured the recommendations from faculty and met with the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics to begin putting the recommendations into action. Detailed information concerning the Feedback Sessions can be found in the Evidence Inventory. (V; Document Forthcoming)

CONCLUSION

Essex County College has made deliberate efforts to strengthen the culture of assessment at the College while putting assessment processes in place that will lead to sustainable quality improvements. The institution successfully implemented a college-wide program assessment process for all programs offered. It is a comprehensive process based on the collaborative efforts of Program Coordinators, full time and adjunct faculty, the Office of Academic Affairs, and of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA). Action planning is supported and informed by evidence-driven data and the 90 percent participation rate in data collection shows that faculty are engaged and supportive of the process.

Essex County College strong faculty governance structure resulted in the creation of ECC's institutional learning goals (ECC Competencies). The development of the ECC Competencies were faculty-driven and included the work of faculty governance committees and college-wide opportunities for feedback from all faculty members. Academic Affairs, the President and the Cabinet were fully supportive and encouraging of this faculty-driven process.

One of the defining characteristics of these new assessment processes, is that they are designed to be faculty-friendly and sustainable. Faculty are not required to engage in data collection or sustain elaborate mechanisms that are not part of the ongoing teaching and learning process. Instead, faculty use existing assignments and instruments to document mastery of program learning outcomes and report the results in a simple and sustainable format.

There were many challenges that ECC faced in onboarding faculty to these changes. In the early stages, participation in data collection suffered due to prior history of continual leadership turnover. In the past ten years, ECC had five presidents, each with varying strategic plans designed to progress the College forward in its vision. Fortunately, there is confidence that the current leadership brings stability, commitment, and dedication to the process.



STANDARD VI: PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.

INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES

Essex County College (ECC) is currently in the third year of its strategic plan titled *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*. (II; Students First Strategic Plan Version 2.1) The Plan was initially developed over a series of four phases from July 2017 to its launch in September 2019. The first iteration of the Plan contained 5 goals, 21 institutional objectives, and served the College well during the COVID-19 pandemic providing guidance for difficult decision-making during uncertain and unprecedented times. For example, it was influential in shaping ECC's equitable and need-based approach to the distribution of Higher Education Emergency Relief Act (HEERF) COVID Relief Grants. Similarly, the strategic plan was used to guide the delicate balance between teaching and learning and the health and safety of our students and staff when developing and executing COVID-19 policies such as our dynamic Re-Start Plan. (ECC Pandemic Restart Plan Response Final 8-11-2020)

While *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* was critical in navigating the pandemic, it was clear that the pandemic had altered landscape of higher education. Faced with new realities in the areas of student needs, learning modalities, faculty development, labor market demands, and with evolving enrollment trends at the national, local, and sector levels, ECC developed *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0* in July of 2021. (VI; Students First Strategic Plan Version 2.1) This updated version of the original strategic plan retained the same student-centric approach as the original version, but re-oriented the plan into 4 goals and 17 institutional objectives that were more aligned with the post-pandemic world. Evidence of ECC's commitment to enhancing its financial health is evidenced by the first goal of *STUDENTS FIRST* which is "Re-establish financial stability to ensure a sustainable future for Essex County College."

STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0 included the following enhancements:

- Explicitly outlined annual targets for each goal
- Clearly outlined annual strategic activities for FY 2022 under each institutional objective
- Enhanced accountability through a more robust quarterly reporting process for all annual strategic activities
- Better integration with the annual budgeting cycle
- A process for annually updating strategic activities in forthcoming versions of the Plan (Version 2.1 (VI; Students First Strategic Plan Version 2.1) in FY 23 and Version 2.2 in FY 24)
- A new environmental scan of the labor market through partnership with Terra Firma LLC.

Decision-making at all levels, from the President/Cabinet level down to expectations of staff to student interaction, is guided by the strategic objectives of the College. A key example at the President/Cabinet level is the re-allocation of over 2.5 million dollars from ECC's institutional allotment of HEERF funds that were diverted directly to students with extraordinary need, through COVID Hardship Grants and balance forgiveness initiatives. At the other end of the spectrum, *STUDENTS FIRST*: Version 2.0 included a strategic activity, which was successfully executed during FY 22, for the provision of Customer Service Training to all areas of the College to ensure all students at the College are treated in a climate of respect outlined in ECC's Mission, Vision, and Values.

AREA AND UNIT OBJECTIVES

Essex County College's institutional strategic plan serves as a touchstone for several additional satellite strategic plans. These plans, which are all in alignment with the institutional one, are area-specific, and drill down on corresponding College operations. These plans are:

- The Academic Master Plan, 2022-2025 (VI, Document Forthcoming)
- The Enrollment Management Plan, 2022-2025 (VI; Document Forthcoming)
- The Marketing Plan, 2021-2024 (VI; Document Forthcoming)
- Technology Master Plan, 2019-2024 (VI; Document Forthcoming)
- Facilities Master Plan 2019-2024 (VI; ECC Facilities Master Plan 2019-2023)

In addition to the strategic objectives outlined in these plans, each area of the College worked with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA) throughout FY 21 to develop area mission and objectives. They were uploaded by each area into ECC's electronic planning platform, Strategic Planning Online (SPOL), where monthly reports on achievement of mission and objectives are entered. In addition, an annual assessment report is submitted by each area which must contain:

- An annual report on the achievement of area mission and objectives;
- A report on what assessment was conducted that year in the area;
- A report on how assessment results led to action-plans and what changes were made.

More information on the Administrative Unit Assessment process can be found in Standard VII.

ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES

In the first two years of implementing the institutional strategic plan in FY 20 and FY 21, a strategic planning committee oversaw the activities. During these two years there were nearly 100 strategic activities (outcomes) from all areas and units throughout the College that were entered into SPOL and reported on. This resulted in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Annual Operational Reports. (VI; Document Forthcoming)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in FY 21, demands on College employees increased substantially, particularly during the transition to fully remote learning. As a result, participation in the

reporting process for the strategic plan implementation waned, highlighting a need to systematize the reporting and transition into a more sustainable process. In 2020, the new Acting/Interim President (now fully appointed) worked with the Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment to develop a new accountability process for the implementation of *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0* which would be more effective, efficient, and sustainable. This process includes quarterly reporting in SPOL for each of the annual strategic activities to the responsible area head. This centralization of the responsibilities from the area heads, and then directed down to the unit leaders was a vast improvement in efficiency over the prior Strategic Planning Committee model. The FY 22 Annual Report on the strategic plan shows that ECC accomplished several of its key annual goals. (VI; Document Forthcoming) A few highlights of the FY 22 Strategic Plan targets that were met include:

- Increase the financial reserve by \$5,000,000 or more by close of FY 2022
- Increase the enrollment yield from 40.8 percent (actual) in fall 2020 to 46.7 percent for fall 2021 (Actual: 47.9 percent in fall 2021)
- Increase total non-credit clock hours by 10 percent from 104,241 (actual in FY 2021) to 114,665 in FY 2022 (Actual: 151,705 in FY 2022)
- Increase the one-year retention rate from 51.4 percent (actual) for fall 2019 FTFTDS cohort to 55 percent for the fall 2020 cohort (Actual: 60 percent for the Fall 2020 cohort)
- Increase three-year graduation rate from 11.1 percent (actual) for fall 2017 FTFTDS cohort to 12 percent for the fall 2018 cohort (Actual: 14.6 percent for the fall 2018 cohort)
- Completion of the following capital planning projects:
 - West Essex Campus Phase I. Complete the Demolition of the Old Structure
 - West Essex Campus Phase II. Complete the design and bidding process
 - Gymnasium Renovation Phase I: Complete the main interior: walls, lights, floor, etc.
 - Gymnasium Renovation Phase-II: Complete the Design Drawings and bidding process
 - Complete the Renovation of the most of the Newark campus restrooms
 - Repairs of the Concrete Sidewalks & Pedestrian Bridge adjacent to the Clara Dasher Bridge
 - Renovation of the IT Department
 - Renovate the Center for Technology staff/faculty space
 - Exterior Doors Replacement project completed
 - Cafeteria Renovation: complete the design and the bidding process
 - HVAC Improvement project: complete the design and bidding process.
 - Bookstore Phase- I: Complete the Interior Renovation, Phase-II: design of the new Main Entrance to the Bookstore complete. The construction is scheduled to be completed in FY 2023.

Institutional Objectives Are Linked to Institutional Mission

The institutional objectives of the *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1* (II; Students First Strategic Plan Version 2.1) are derived from the institutional mission and values of Essex County College. Table 6.1 shows some key examples of this alignment.

Table 6.1: Alignment of Mission to Strategic Objectives and Activities - Key Examples

Institutional Value:	Aligned Institutional Objectives and Strategic Activities:
<p>Teaching and Learning: We affirm teaching and learning as our primary purpose. The College seeks to instill in students general and specialized knowledge, the ability to think critically, and a commitment to civic responsibility. We value academic freedom and support the open exchange of ideas and experiences.</p>	<p>Objective II.A. Develop and implement strategic retention initiatives. Related FY 2022 activities: i. Implement a college-wide academic advisement/mentorship program incorporating the Progressive Retention Initiative. ii. Implement our new First-Year Experience course to improve student acclimation and increase retention. iii. Strategically expand our capacity to offer multiple learning modalities to best accommodate all learners. iv. Continue to evaluate the efficacy of the newly designed accelerated developmental English and Mathematics courses. Objective III.F. Foster institutional improvement through assessment, evaluation, and evidence-based planning. Related FY 2022 activities i. Complete the implementation of the revised program assessment process by providing effective processes, leadership, and guidance to Division Chairs, Program Coordinators, and faculty. iii. Develop a process for assessing the General Education curriculum aligned with the new General Education goals and objectives.</p>
<p>Excellence and Accountability: We believe in creating a learning environment that fosters high expectations for achievement. The College is committed to rigorous academic standards, faculty excellence, and responsive support services that enable students to reach their full academic, professional, and personal potential. We provide excellent programs that utilize technology, demonstrate innovation, and undergo evaluation to ensure consistent and outstanding performance.</p>	<p>Objective II.C. Design and implement professional development and training for faculty and staff. Related FY 2022 activities: i. Implement a comprehensive customer service training program. ii. Implement a comprehensive safety compliance training program. iii. Implement a comprehensive classroom technology and management program to support faculty. Objective II.F. Foster institutional improvement through assessment, evaluation, and evidence-based planning. Related FY 2022 activities: ii. Continue the implementation of an administrative unit assessment process that reports on the annual achievement of area/ unit mission and goals.</p>
<p>Community and Engagement: We support programs that enhance the economic and social development of Essex County. We value our role as a vital community resource and are dedicated to forging effective partnerships with our many constituencies.</p>	<p>Objective I.C. Strategic Activities: ii. Coordinate with Alumni to increase active membership. iii. Coordinate with alumni to develop strategies for increased scholarship fundraising. Objective II.B. Strategic Activities: ii. Design recruitment activities targeting both local high school graduates and adult learners. iii. Coordinate with the local high schools to engage students with college readiness into our dual enrollment program. vi. Develop linkages between credit and noncredit offerings for the purpose of creating learner centered pathways. Objective III.E. Strategic Activities: i. Redesign advisement processes to ensure a smooth transfer process from ECC to four-year institutions. ii. Coordinate and renew articulation agreements between ECC and four-year institutions. iii. Develop a sustainable system for tracking ECC graduates, beginning with the Class of 2021.</p>

Institutional Value:	Aligned Institutional Objectives and Strategic Activities:
	iv. Develop and implement annual transfer events which include transfer fairs and opportunities for individual consultations.
<p>Diversity and Access: We embrace the rich diversity of our student population and our employees. We recognize the historical, intellectual, and artistic contributions of all cultures, and promote an atmosphere in which critical examination of perspectives is accepted and encouraged. We believe all people should have access to affordable, quality higher education that will prepare them to succeed in a dynamic world.</p>	<p>Goal II.A. Strategic Activity: iv. Develop a leadership team with representatives from all areas of the College to ensure that all practices and policies involving our interactions with students, prospective students, employees, and the community at large are in alignment with the institution's values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Objective II.C. A Streamline and revise the student onboarding process to ensure equitable access and a smooth transition to Essex County College. Related FY 2022 activities: i. Design and implement new onboarding processes and provide cross-functional training to improve the enrollment yield.</p>
<p>Legacy and Transformation: We honor our history and valued traditions of Essex County College, the City of Newark, and the County of Essex. We also welcome the transformative power of education to change lives. Building upon our past achievements, we eagerly embrace the future by pursuing innovations in teaching, administration, and student services.</p>	<p>Each and every strategic objective and strategic activity outlined in <i>STUDENTS FIRST</i>: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 was written in pursuit of innovations in teaching, administration, and student services while honoring the history and valued traditions of Essex County College, the City of Newark, and the County of Essex.</p>

THE ANNUAL PLANNING AND BUDGETING CYCLE

Over the past three years, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Effectiveness has better integrated assessment processes into the annual planning and budgeting cycle. The Finance Department has better integrated the review and control processes into the budget cycle. While the cycle is dynamic and steps often run concurrent to each other, the following overview lays out the key steps in the process. The FY 2023 Budgeting Manual contains each step in the process. (VI; Document Forthcoming)

The Finance Department has a significant role in developing the budget. The review, analysis, and control of the budget is an ongoing process occurring throughout the fiscal year and includes coordinating budget activities among operating units and constituent groups, preparing the budget for presentation to the governing board, and maintaining a system of budget control and analyses. These activities typically begin early in the fiscal year, with a review of actual revenues and expenses for the prior fiscal year, followed with estimated revenues and expenses for the upcoming year.

DEVELOPING THE OPERATIONAL BUDGET

The development of the College's annual budget operationalizes provisions of the Mission, Vision, and Values and Strategic Plan by minimizing tuition and fees increases while providing for salaries and benefits and other operating revenues and expenses. The Governor and legislature determine the full amount of aid to be shared by the community colleges. The amount allocated to each institution is based on a specific funding formula while the county contribution is estimated with the understanding that such support ultimately depends on actions of the County Administration and Board of Commissioners. Tuition and fees amounts are projected based on current economic factors and trend analysis of previous years. Salaries and wages are reviewed with regards to contractual obligations and position vacancies. Other revenues and expense items are determined based on past and current trends. Discussions with state and local officials, other external stakeholders, and internal groups continue through the adoption of the College's next budget, usually in early spring of each fiscal year.

This process has served the institution well over several years with only a few minor changes required. Of course, the pandemic, with the attendant massive loss in revenue from several sources, and the gradual recovery interfered with some of the details but the latest budget was developed following the procedures set out in the Budget Manual.

Budget Control

An essential element of successful budgeting is the establishment of effective budget controls. A principal purpose of budget control is to ensure that expenditures do not exceed revenues or deviate significantly from policy. The Finance Department has the responsibility for overall institutional budget control, including calling attention to major departures from budget allocations and to take appropriate follow-up action. Area heads have primary responsibility for control of expenditures within their budget unit.

Budget control, and the budget transactional detail, are an integral part of the College's accounting system. The use of budget reports is a significant tool to maintain control of the budget and there are two levels of budget reporting. The first is an online departmental level tool with access to the Banner system and related online reports and up to date budget and expense information. The second is on the institutional level, where online budget inquiries and reports assist in the tracking and analysis of budget related activity. Monthly reviews of budget versus actual revenue and expenses are performed by the Finance Department staff. This information is shared with the Budget Planning Committee to determine if budget revisions are necessary.

Post-Performance Review

The Finance Department analyses several elements in addition to budget versus actual amounts for revenues and expenses, including evaluation of budget revisions, and participation in the quarterly review of SPOL strategic activities. These reviews are also ongoing throughout the fiscal year as well as part of post year-end work in preparation for the annual audit. The review of budget versus actual

amount, and the resulting variances allows for examination of the reasons for the variances. This information is useful in assessing financial estimates contained in the College's planning documents and in making more realistic budget estimates for subsequent budget periods. As discussed below, budget development, implementation, and analysis are all closely related to the strategic planning process.

Initiation of Departmental Budget Requests

In April of each year, area heads are distributed departmental budget request forms for their respective units. The budget request forms were re-designed in FY 2022. The revised forms include two distinct sections: funding requests required for the unit to successfully meet its unit mission and objectives, and funding requests that directly support new or ongoing strategic activities that directly support a strategic planning objective in *STUDENTS FIRST* (Cite copies of the revised Departmental Budget Request Forms in the Evidence Inventory). Unit managers discuss and formulate these departmental budget requests with their area head over the course of the next several months.

Sharing of Assessment Results

The Office of IEPA conducts an annual suite of institutional assessment reports that touch on each stage of the student lifecycle. It includes:

- The Non-Enrolled Applicant Report
- The New Student Questionnaire
- The Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey
- The Non-Returning Student Report
- The Student Campus Climate Survey
- The Employee Campus Climate Survey
- The Graduating Student Report
- The Alumni One-Year-Out Survey

From April to June of each year, the Executive Director of IEPA, presents the key findings from these institutional assessment reports to the President and the Cabinet to better inform area heads on their proposals for strategic activities for the upcoming year. IEPA also presents additional assessment findings relevant to institutional-level planning. This includes assessment results from participation in external research studies e.g., the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), Program Assessment, General Education Assessment, Program Review, and Administrative Unit Assessment processes. (VI; Document Forthcoming)

Identification of Strategic Activities for the Upcoming Year

In May of each year, the Executive Director meets individually with each area head to discuss the strategic activities that will be proposed to the President and Cabinet for final approval. This discussion includes which strategic activities from the current ending fiscal year need to continue and roll-over to the next fiscal year, which strategic activities are completed and can be removed in the upcoming fiscal year, and what new strategic activities are being proposed. Both new and continuing strategic activities need to be included in the departmental budget forms if they require funding.

After discussions, the President reviews and finalizes the list of strategic activities for the upcoming year and items that are approved as strategic activities are included in the upcoming budget. Items that do

not rise to the level of institutional-level strategic activities may still be included in the final budget, but institutional strategic activities receive funding priority.

Annual Update of the Strategic Plan

When *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0* was released, it contained the annual strategic activities for FY 2022 aligned under each institutional objective. In July 2022, *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1* was released with FY 2023 strategic activities replacing the FY 2022 activities. Similarly, in July 2023, Version 2.2 will be released with FY 2024 strategic activities replacing the FY 2023 activities. The President also communicates the directions and the strategic goals with the Board of Trustees and updates them throughout the year.

Ongoing Accountability

Once the annual strategic activities for the upcoming fiscal year are determined and updated in the strategic plan, the reporting area heads are required to define their targets and timelines for the project as well as quarterly updates on each activity.

These reports on strategic activities are generated for the President and are discussed extensively in Cabinet to ensure that the College is continually making progress on the implementation of the Strategic Plan. An annual report is also prepared in July of each year which gives an update on each of the Targets (Key Performance Indicators) in the plan as well as the compilation of quarterly updates for each activity.

Ongoing Reexamination

Essex County College has embraced the idea of living documents to become more responsive and adaptable to an ever-evolving environment. As part of this approach, the President organized a Budget Planning Committee (BPC). In addition to developing the annual budget for the approval of the Board of Trustees and the Board of School Estimate, the BPC is charged by the President to serve as an advisory body to the President and Cabinet for strategic budget re-allocation throughout the fiscal year. The BPC is comprised of representatives from both Cabinet and non-Cabinet members who are tasked with thinking outside of their respective areas to identify and propose strategies to best leverage college resources to achieve the objectives of the Strategic Plan.

PHYSICAL AND TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE ARE ADEQUATE TO SUPPORT ECC'S OPERATIONS

The College ensures the institution maintains adequate physical and technical infrastructure through the Facilities Master Plan and the Information Technology Master Plan, as well as several funding sources independent of student tuition. Furthermore, the College undergoes an annual budgetary development process where personnel and non-personnel requests are made to meet the operational needs of each department. Department supervisors and area heads determine operational needs through a variety of sources, including the previous years' expenditures and needs, the Academic Master Plan, outcomes from the ECC Core Competencies (V; ECC Core Competencies Proposal APAC Approved 10.5.21 updated) and General Education assessment process, (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual rev. 7.20.22) and collaboration with faculty governance bodies such as the Academic Computing Advisory Council (ACAC). The budgetary requests are mapped to the master plans, as well as the strategic plan.

Having access to Chapter 12 (a state and county collaboration to provide money for capital improvements) funds, designated Minor Capital funds, and opportunities for grants ensures that large scale projects do not impede the operation of the College, yet ensure that the College meets both operational and programmatic needs and goals.

Physical Infrastructure

Aligned with ECC's Strategic Goal IV: "Continue to improve the physical infrastructure of Essex County College to better meet the needs of our students and enhance the student learning experience" - the College moved forward on several Major Capital Projects based on the Capital Planning set forth followed by priority and resources. Over the past six years (2016-2022), ECC made vital improvements to its physical infrastructure. In the past two years, improvements included the planning of a new state-of-the-art Academic Building with a multi-level parking deck and sports field at the West Essex Campus site in West Caldwell, New Jersey. This project is currently under construction and is scheduled for completion in July 2023.

Challenges with Physical Infrastructure

ECC's aging infrastructures result in constant and recurring challenges for the College. These range from failing basic systems such as plumbing and electrical systems and leaky roofs to structural damage. For example, findings in the Facilities Master Plan 2019-2024 include deteriorating piping in the mechanical room (p. 50) and varied issues in every building structure of the College. A current and considerable example is the eighty-year-old building with environmental problems at the West Essex Campus, which meant a tremendous need for upgrading and costly maintenance. The pursuit for funding to build a new academic building captures ECC's commitment to ensuring a safe, effective, and welcoming learning environment for students. In the same way, the closing of the West Essex Campus caused the College community to mobilize staff, offices, course offerings, equipment, furniture, and supplies in a remarkable demonstration of resilience and collaboration of the students, staff, and faculty.

Technological Infrastructure

ECC's efforts on technology initiatives needed for achieving its strategic objectives coincide with the Technology Master Plan 2019-2024. The plan delineates the College's future vision of its technology resources. Thus, it serves as a dynamic, working document, regularly updated to respond to the needs of the College community and changes in technology. Information Technology (IT) constructs annual goals and targets for planning college-wide technology projects, upgrades, and maintenance, including strategy, adoption, expenditures, and implementation, based on advice and support from the Academic Computing Advisory Committee, College President, and Cabinet. IT annual goals and targets are established at the beginning of the fiscal year and aligned with the College Strategic Plan and the Technology Master Plan. An Annual Status Projects Report is released to the institution at the end of each fiscal year as a clear and detailed summary of IT's performance and influence during the fiscal year. (VI; Document Forthcoming) The report is also added to the annual Institutional Profile.

COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR FACILITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY

Facilities and Infrastructure

To optimize its potential and resources, the College must address the priorities outlined in the *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0*. Here the College developed four specific goals, including re-establishing financial stability to ensure a sustainable future and continuation of improvement projects, to operate proficiently in the service of its Mission, Vision, and Values. Through annual targets, the following areas address this purpose: fiscal processes and management, performance impacts, academic innovations, and an effective physical infrastructure. Some aspects of the four main goals are within the Facilities Master Plan 2019-2024.

The College Facilities Management and Planning Department and Executive Leadership sought to develop a suitable Capital Projects plan. In early 2018, Posen Architects was commissioned to create a five-year Facilities Master Plan for the College's Main Campus. The goal of the study was to serve as the planning tool for the College to use for program expansions and as a road map to guide in planning facilities improvements and modernization. The recommendations included work in:

1. STEM / Health Services
2. Enrollment Services
3. Physical Education/Student Activities/Day Care Center
4. Aesthetic, Security, and Lighting Upgrades
5. Infrastructure Upgrades (Facilities Master Plan 2019-2023, 2018 p.4).

The vast array of recommended projects forced the College to set priorities in continuing capital renewal initiatives to bring the facilities to a state of good condition and improve health, safety, security, facilities preservation, and code issues. There was also a need to complete technology projects, infrastructure upgrades, and the acquisition of new equipment. Further, focusing on improving and strengthening the College's identity in the urban context was very important.

Of course, while prioritizing the list of recommended projects, the College had to consider financial challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic effects on college operations and resources opportunities. In the summer of 2021, it reexamined the *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*. Revised in September 2021, the new *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0* included a prioritized list of projects expected to be completed by FY 2022.

In pursuing external funding resources and assistance programs, the College applied to the PSE&G Business Energy Program and received \$603,000 in material and installation work through an IDA Incentive LED Retrofit Grant for installing energy-efficient LED fixtures throughout the classrooms and hallways at the main Campus. For some time, ECC had been replacing light fixtures with LED bulbs for energy efficiency in a few infrastructure sections. The grant allowed RMC Energy Brokers' firm to collaborate with college staff and complete the retrofit in four weeks during May 2022.

Technology

All technology planning is urged, at the top level, from the College's Strategic Planning. Comprehensive and specialized planning occurs within each Information Technology sector (Network, Systems,

Academic Computing Services, Instructional Support Services, Technology Support Services) to help project the annual budget needs. In focusing on meeting its goals, ECC restructured the campus infrastructure over the last five years with funding assistance from the Foundations for Instructional Technology (FIT) grant. This includes expanding the Wireless network, implementing a virtualized server and desktop environments, and bringing a college-wide core network infrastructure upgrade to closure. The College aims to create a more innovative and reliable digital environment in the next five years. Under this model the College was able to adapt quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic, local, state, and federal mandates, the College acted on and adopted the following strategies:

- Acquisition and set-up of Zoom system for the College, as well as training of staff
- All technical requirements for remote learning and teaching for all staff, students, and faculty
- Provided technical support for remote learning throughout the pandemic
- Loaner program for students and staff – Provided computers, laptops, headsets, and web cameras
- Support and set-up of Cloud Call Center for Admissions and Enrollment Services
- Technical Support and equipment for on-campus COVID-19 vaccination site
- Moodle upgrade to support remote teaching and learning
- Upgrade of cabling infrastructure for the GYM (the Physical Education Building served as a Covid-19 testing and vaccination site)

In support of the College's Strategic Plan Version 2.0, Goal III. Objective D (technical infrastructure), the Information Technology area, has directed its efforts on the required software platforms to enhance student services and retention.

Table 6.2 - FY 2022 Activities

Software Platform	Activity/Status
Implementation of Qless	The program launched and is in operation in the Office of Financial Aid, Welcome Center, and Public Safety.
Implementation of Customer Relationship Manager (CMR)	At the present time the implementation is within the definition stages and scheduled to launch in June 2022.
Implementation of DegreeWorks	IT completed the work development for the system. The supporting company, Ellucian, is expected to finalize the implementation in 2022.
Implementation of E-Transcripts through the National Student Clearinghouse	Implementation and use with the Banner program are complete.
Implementation of Softdocs	Implementation and departmental launch are complete.
Implementation of Elevate	The implementation by IT is complete. The departmental launch is contingent on the respective area head.
Renewal of Touchnet	Renewal of the services have been processed.
Implementation of the Ready App	Banner and Moodle have been integrated with the app. Training is scheduled to commence in May 2022.

Along with fiscal, human, and physical resources, ECC has a comprehensive-services Administrative and Learning Technologies Area. These functions are organized according to the Information Technology and Operations Function Chart. (VI; Document Forthcoming) This delineation of roles supports students and staff with instruction and training and assists in developing assessment methods. For example, there are many Banner 9 (LMS) training sessions, in groups and individually. The College's Department of Information Technology is led by the Executive Dean/CIO of Information Technology and Operations and a team of directors and IT Specialists. Decisions that affect other IT factors or the College, in general, follow a chain of command protocol from area supervisors to the Executive Dean/CIO and, when appropriate, the President's Cabinet.

ECC continues to improve upon its technology infrastructure and resources to ensure it can carry out the College's application of current and new technologies, provide secure, reliable services and facilitate digital accessibility. This includes upgrading software, hardware, and infrastructure that directly or indirectly affect instruction, learning outcomes, and services within the College community. The following list of projects related to telecommunications are completed or in progress and slated for completion at the end of 2022.

- Campus-wide wireless system upgrade
- Upgrade and deployment of 50 percent of all staff computers
- Access Control of classrooms, IT, Computer labs, Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, and Main Entrances
- Technical Infrastructure planning for the new West Essex Campus to include:
 - Access control
 - Surveillance system
 - Network infrastructure
 - Server Infrastructure
 - Classroom technology
 - System Deployment and Network upgrade for:
 - Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence
 - Center for Technology – New Suit
 - Information Commons
 - Information Technology
 - Welcome Center
- Acquisition and Installation of Equipment necessary for Qless functions
- Upgrade of Radio systems for Public Safety
- Installation of systems to support body cameras for Police Officers
- Upgrade of campus police reporting systems
- Technical support and equipment for an on-campus voting site, to include surveillance and video recording
- Office 365 messaging system migration for staff, faculty and adjuncts
- Technical and infrastructural support for new Bookstore vendor
- Network and systems infrastructure upgrade

Through these initiatives, ECC's technical infrastructure serves as a supportive arm for its mission of dedication to academic excellence and the success of its students. It involves keeping pace with the evolving needs of its students, faculty, and staff while dealing with declining resources and staffing shortages. IT focuses on providing the best service possible with existing resources. Thus, despite challenges, no aspects of the processes and services run without proper support.

Processes, Assignment of Responsibilities, and Accountability

Over the past three years, Essex County College's Finance area has been led by two different Chief Financial Officers, each of whom remained for less than one year. Despite this turnover in leadership, the College has found other means of developing stability and consistency in its financial operations. These strategies were introduced by the College's newly appointed President who has a deep background in Business and Economics and formerly served as the ECC's Chairperson of the Business Division. Some of the strategies that were put in place included:

- Hiring a Senior Comptroller to fill the vacant CFO position
- Enhanced budget tracking through the development of more robust monthly reports
- Forming a Finance Council consisting of administrators and charged with identifying and resolving operational finance issues across all areas of the College including billing, fee assessment, disbursement of aid, purchasing, and regular reconciliation of accounts.
- Forming a Budget Planning Committee consisting of senior leaders who are tasked with developing the annual budget for the Board of School Estimate and serving as an advisory committee to the President and Cabinet on strategic re-allocations of funds.
- Working closely with the Executive Director of IEPA to better integrate the Planning and Budgeting process and develop a more comprehensive accountability process for the implementation of the strategic plan. (VI; Strategic Planning Quarterly Reporting in SPOL)

Annual Audit

The issues experienced by the finance areas of the College which were previously noted by the Middle States Commission in 2017 and 2018, were resolved, and, in 2019, it was found compliant with Standard VI (formerly Standard III). Since then, ECC has received unqualified opinions in its annual audit reports, though the latest audit report includes one material (related to financial reporting for grants and also noted as one of the significant deficiencies), and six significant deficiency findings. Most of the College's challenges were compounded by vacancies and changes in the CFO position, especially since they occurred during the pandemic. It is important to note that only two of those findings reflect finance area practices and both have been resolved since the hiring of the CFO.

Three of the deficiencies were federal and state COVID grant reporting problems, relatively common, considering the changing parameters and requirements throughout the various grant fund distributions. The remaining two findings were related to student data. One involved the closeout of the Federal Perkins Loan Program; all required close-out data and reports have since been submitted to the USDOE. Finally, there were student reporting issues to the National Student Data Clearinghouse and the College has taken the necessary steps to address the findings.

EFFECTIVENESS OF PLANNING AND BUDGETING PROCESSES

Essex County College is in an ongoing state of active assessment as it has been challenged by instability in the CFO position, presidential turnover, a major reorganization of its administration, and the financial burdens of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, these challenges have led to positive changes, stronger teamwork among senior leadership, and innovative approaches that have served the College well in the face of financial adversity. As a result of these ongoing assessments, the following changes, many of which have been discussed throughout this chapter, have been made:

- The formation of the Finance Council and Budget Planning Committee to ensure oversight, assessment, and evaluation of financial and budgeting processes continued in the absence of a CFO
- The hiring of a Senior Comptroller to fill the vacant renamed CFO position
- The revision of the Strategic Planning implementation from a committee approach to a Cabinet driven approach
- Better integration of the planning process (identification of annual strategic activities) with the budgeting process and within the context of assessment results
- The addition of annual targets for each of the strategic plan's four goals
- The addition of annual strategic activities, aligned under each objective, added directly into the plan and updated annually
- The implementation of a more systematic and efficient accountability process for the implementation of *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, which now includes quarterly reporting for each activity
- The addition of area/unit mission and goals and monthly reporting by area heads
- The revision of the Departmental budget request forms to better align budgets with area/unit mission and institutional strategic objectives

As a result of these changes, the College obtained a better grasp of its finances beginning in 2021 and met the FY 2022 annual target for Goal I in *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0*, which was for the institution to increase its financial reserve by more than 5 million dollars in FY 2022. Naturally, Essex County College is not immune to the national decline in enrollment that has been experienced by institutions of higher education for the past decade, particularly in the two-year public sector. However, in FY 2022 ECC experienced a 2.4 percent increase in student credit hours. This was the first time the institution was able to achieve a year-over-year increase in credit hours since FY 2014, indicating that planning and budgeting decisions, along with its academic and co-curricular efforts, are steering the institution in the right direction.

CONCLUSION

Essex County College recognizes that fiscal stability is required to support every aspect of the college's operations. In recognition of this, the first institutional goal in *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0 and 2.1* is to increase the College's fiscal reserves to \$5,000,000 by the end of FY 2022. The College was able to achieve that goal. Through the implementation of the annual strategic

activities outlined in each annually updated version of the strategic plan, the College is dynamically working to build financial reserves so that the College may be better able to support its programs and weather disruptions such as that caused by the COVID pandemic. The College is taking active steps to drive all its actions in accordance with the institutional goals, objectives, and strategic activities of *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024, including the implementation of accountability mechanisms. These reporting structures will ensure that the College continues to succeed in reaching its goals and fully realizing its Mission, Vision, and Values.



STANDARD VII: GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, AND ADMINISTRATION

The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.

OVERVIEW

Essex County College is an open access community college committed to academic excellence and student success. For over 50 years it has been dedicated to its mission of serving the diverse needs of all students through comprehensive educational programs, training, and continuing education. The College values the critical contributions of all stakeholders and gives high institutional priority to developing partnerships with a broad and inclusive group of civic and community organizations. Essex County College operates within a system of shared governance. Decision-making is informed by multi-level participation that includes administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. At the apex of the governance pyramid is the Board of Trustees (BOT or the Board), followed by the College President, the President's Cabinet and seven academic governance committees that are discussed below.

Administrative Structure

Essex County College has a well-designed and detailed organization that defines and underscores the role of every department and their respective manager. The College Organization Chart (VI; ECC Academic Affairs Organization Chart 11232020) can be found on the ECC website and shows the chain of command for every administrative position. The current chart was revised after the appointment of the Interim President and was adopted by the BOT on September 22, 2020, revised again on January 12, 2021. Additionally, there are more detailed charts that show the relationships between cabinet members and the area they supervise. (VI; ECC Organizational Chart 2020-2021 (09-2020) 09-13-20 Reorganized Cabinet and Administration with Names)

The College has a three-level governing structure that is composed of the Board of Trustees, the President, and the ten members of the President's cabinet. As discussed below, cabinet recommendations are informed by several faculty and staff driven bodies. The BOT is the ultimate governing body of the institution whose role is to review and make the final decisions on proposals forwarded by the College Administration.

To effectively support the President and supervise subordinates in the organization, administrators meet or exceed the credentials and experience expectations of their respective positions. According to *ECC Board Policy*, clear and definitive lines of responsibility and authority are detailed for each employee (BP 2-3 a). (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022) Intrinsic to these policies is an understanding that administrators will be provided with the necessary data, tools, and programs to assist with their overall job performance.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Membership

The current Board of Trustees at Essex County College is comprised of 9 voting members, although up to 11 are permitted, as provided for in the Board Policy Manual and state statute (BP 1-2; N.J.S.A. 18A:12). (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022, VII; N.J.S.A. 18A-12) The Board Manual, which was revised in September 2022 and approved by the BOT the following month, is available to the public through the College website, Office of the President, Board of Trustees. (I; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022) The Essex County Executive appoints eight trustees with the advice and consent of the Essex County Board of Commissioners. The Governor of the State of New Jersey appoints two trustees. Of the appointed members, two must be women. Additionally, The Essex County School Superintendent serves as a voting member. The President of the College serves *ex-officio*, as a non-voting member. There is one non-voting elected student representative who is a member of the graduating class and is elected by the outgoing graduating class.

According to Article IV of the Essex County College By-Laws, each November, the Trustees elect by majority vote, a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer to serve for a term of one year. (VII; Document Forthcoming) The Chairperson and Vice Chairperson may not hold any other offices. They may also elect other officers as may be needed. Any vacancies which occur during a year shall be filled by the BOT for the expired term following its policies.

Committees

Board members are assigned to committees based on their interest and experience and at the discretion of the Chair of the Board (BP 1-2; N.J.S.A. 18A:64A-8). The Student Representative's Board Committee participation is limited to the Educational Programs Committee. (BP 1-2; N.J.S.A. 18A:64A-8) (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022, VII; Section 18A64A-8 - Boards of trustees) Representatives of constituent units of the College, including employee, student, and alumni organizations, may be invited to provide advice to the Board at any Conference Meeting of the Board, and to any Board Standing or Special Committees. (BP 1-2.1; N.J.S.A. 18A:64A-12). (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022, VII; Section 18A64A-12 - General powers of board) The committees meet as needed and develop agendas and take minutes. (VII; Document Forthcoming)

The standing committees are an Executive Committee, Personnel, Finance, Educational Programs, Site/Facilities/Equipment, Community Relations, and Governance and Policy.

The Board Chairperson, College president and administrative representatives have been providing orientation to newly appointed trustees for several years and New Jersey has just codified the need for that practice. The intention of the orientation process is to address responsibilities, policy making, communications, resources for the trustees, ethics standards, and more. There are also new Trustee orientations through the New Jersey Council of County Colleges in seminars, workshops and printed and electronic materials, and through the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) in annual conferences, publications, and online and face-to-face workshops and seminars. The most current BOT's orientation sessions were held on March 5, 2022.

Responsibilities

The Board satisfies its oversight obligations in line with all local, state, and federal laws and regulations. The Board's role at the policy level is to develop policies that govern the general operation of the College. The Board has authority for the oversight of the quality of educational programs, the awarding of degrees and certificates, the College's financial condition, and policies related to personnel, and the appointment of the president. The Board holds public meetings in accordance with state open meetings regulations, ensuring that the dates and times of monthly public meetings are publicly available and that agendas are developed in advance of the meetings and that a quorum is formed before voting on any action items. To ensure appropriate confidentiality, personnel and certain budget deliberations are not open to the public and are governed by appropriate legal regulations and requirements.

The Higher Education Restructuring Act of 1994 (VII; Legislative History Checklist 1994c48) requires that each county community college shall annually file with the Office of Management and Budget, an audit of the College's accounts, financial transactions, and enrollment (the "audited financial statement"). Upon completion of the audit, the College president presents the audit to the Board for review. (BP 3-3: N.J.A.C. 9:4-3.1) (VII; Document Forthcoming) The Board also has policies addressing reserves that the College should have available.

Ethics and Avoidance of Conflict of Interest

To identify and to eliminate all conflicts of interest, the Board Policy Manual includes a Code of Ethics / Conflict of Interest policy. (BP 1-4: N.J.A.C. 9A:3-1.1/N.J.S.A. 52:13D-12.1/ N.J.S.A. 52:13D-23) (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022, VII; Section 5213D-12 - Legislative findings, VII; Section 5213D-23 - Codes of Ethics) which was updated and affirmed in 2017. These standards provide that trustees may not use their position to secure unwarranted privileges and trustees are forbidden from engaging in transactions that can be expected to impair their ability to act objectively. There are additional provisions that focus on receiving gifts, confidentiality, self-dealing, and voting.

At the time of this document submission, there are no known conflicts of past or present incidents of conflict. Each member of the board is required to file annual statements of compliance with this policy, and they have done so consistently each year.

Assessment

All Trustees must complete a Board approved evaluation to assess personal performance. The evaluation incorporates criteria regarding Board operations as well as criteria that defines the effectiveness of the Board which is in line with the standards of the Association of Community College Trustees. The trustees complete evaluations in February of each year. The results of the evaluations are summarized then discussed at the Board retreat held in April. The retreat discussions are used to review progress on strategic initiatives and to formulate strategic goals for the upcoming year. In 2022, the retreat was held virtually on March 5.

In May 2021, a survey was developed and distributed to the Board of Trustees members inquiring about the frequency Trustees meet with the entities that appointed them. In addition, the survey asked to what extent do their responsibilities as a Trustee conflicted with their business interests outside of Essex County College, and during the appointment process, were they given any direction as to how the College should be run. Copies of the survey and results are available upon request and special permission of the Board General Counsel through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA). The three Trustees who were interviewed (Board Chairperson, Board Vice Chairperson and a third Trustee) by the Working Group indicated an adherence to the conflict-of-interest policy of the College.

In May 2021, a survey was developed and distributed to 11 senior administrators and to the heads of the Administrators and Professional Staff collective bargaining units. (VII; Survey Results - RQ 3 - Admin.) The survey results found that the Board members respect their roles and are not overreaching or interfering in daily college operations and its associated decision-making process. The survey of the administrators determined unanimously that there is no Board interference with daily operations of the College.

PRESIDENT

Responsibilities and Accountability

The President is the Chief Executive Officer of the institution and is accountable to the Board for all matters pertaining to the planning, organization, and implementation, of the College's strategic initiatives as well as oversight of daily operations. The President, with the advice and data provided by the Cabinet, shared governance committees and departmental leadership, develops goals, plans and policies to effectively manage the organizational structure and resources of the College. The President prioritizes initiatives – such as financial stability, compliance with all requirements of accrediting bodies and effective working relationships with collective bargaining units - to insure the stability, productivity, and growth of the College. The Board reviews and comments and makes the final decision on all action items brought to their level for consideration.

Historical Perspective

To fully understand the challenges faced by ECC, a brief history in the evolution of the presidency is useful. With the retirement of Dr. A. Zachary Yamba in 2010 (after 30 years in that position), the College was led by Dr. Edythe Abdullah (2010-2013), and Dr. Gale E. Gibson (2013-2016). In April 2016, the Board of Trustees terminated the President and the General Counsel due to allegations of misconduct.

The Board of Trustees acted immediately to appoint Dr. A. Zachary Yamba, President Emeritus (who had retired in spring 2010) as Acting President. At its April 12, 2016, meeting, the Faculty Association voted unanimously to support Dr. Yamba as Acting President of Essex County College. At its June

2016 public meeting, the Board of Trustees approved and extended Dr. Yamba's contract until June 30, 2017. In addition to extending Dr. Yamba's contract, the Board of Trustees Chairperson also announced that a "Presidential Search Committee" would be formed to conduct a national search for the next President of Essex County College.

At its May 16, 2017, Board of Trustees Meeting, the Board unanimously voted to appoint Anthony E. Munroe, Ed.D., as the College's Interim President, and effective July 1, 2017, through May 31, 2020, the College's eighth President.

On July 21, 2020, Dr. Augustine A. Boakye was appointed Interim President as Dr. Anthony Munroe transitioned to the presidency of the Borough of Manhattan Community College. On November 1, 2021, Dr. Augustine A. Boakye was named the ninth President of Essex County College after a thorough national search, and on May 5, 2022, was inaugurated as President.

Having five leaders over ten years has presented challenges to the College administration, faculty, staff, and ultimately students. There have been many changes in policies and practices that were partially implemented and then abandoned or modified as a new president came on board. Throughout this Self-Study, reference has been made to recent changes that have been made to fully implement current policies and practices. Fortunately, there is widespread support for the path the College is on since the appointment of Dr. Augustine A. Boakye as President.

Qualifications and Selection Process

The process for Presidential searches is codified in Board Policy (BP) 2-1. (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022) The process includes an assessment of institutional needs, the development of criteria approved by the Board, the selection of a pool of qualified candidates, and the creation of a Search Committee that is representative of ECC constituencies, which will make recommendations of suitable candidates for the Board's consideration.

The most recent presidential search was conducted in 2021, leading to the appointment of Dr. Augustine Boakye as the ninth and current President of the College on November 1, 2021. The Search Committee consisted of the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, with two other Board members; the Presidents of three of the collective bargaining units; the elected Faculty Representative to the Board; an ECC alumnus; the Deputy Superintendent of the Newark Public Schools; and the Co-CEO of the Victoria Foundation.

The Committee consulted with various groups within the institution to establish criteria for a Presidential Profile which was approved by the Board of Trustees on May 25, 2021. The position was advertised widely, and a pool of qualified candidates selected. Three final candidates interviewed with the Board, including Dr. Augustine A. Boakye, who had previously been appointed Interim President. He was the successful candidate and assumed the office of President on November 1, 2021.

Dr. Boakye has a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Dundee in Scotland. He has over a decade experience as an administrator and economics professor and as a Chair of the Business Division and an Academic Dean at ECC.

Evaluation

In 2017 the Board of Trustees adopted, and in 2018 amended, a policy calling for annual evaluation of the President; this process has become a standard component of the Board's annual cycle. (BP 2-12) (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022) This policy is reenacted each year and the Board's General Counsel coordinates with the Executive Director of IEPA to annually review and execute this process. Dr. Boakye was evaluated in both 2021 and 2022.

ADMINISTRATION

President's Executive Team and Governance Committees

Members of the President's Executive Team are the Executive Director of Institutional Advancement, Executive Director of Human Resources, Dean of Student Affairs, Senior Comptroller, Executive Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Assessment, Executive Dean/Chief Information Officer, General Counsel, Dean of Community & Continuing Education and Workforce Development, and the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics.

The Organizational Chart shows the Executive Team structure for the College. For public access, this Organizational Chart is available on the College website, located under the heading of Office of the President.

The system of shared governance originated when the College opened and reflects the belief that different perspectives on the development and implementation of the College's strategic goals best serves the Mission and Vision of the institution. In addition to the academic advisory committees mentioned below, the President receives regular reports and updates from Cabinet members who also serve as de facto heads of all administrative departments.

Per College Regulation 6-2, Standing Academic Governance Committees, there are seven standing committees: (ECC 2017 REG 6-2 Standing Academic Governance Committees)

- Academic Computing Advisory Committee (ACAC)
- Academic Development Advisory Committee (ADAC)
- Academic Policies Advisory Committee (APAC)
- Academic Standards Committee (ASC)
- College Curriculum Committee (CCC)
- Faculty Development Committee (FDC)
- College wide Promotion Committee (CPC)

Representatives to committees are full-time members of Academic Divisions and selected to serve through secret balloting within Divisions. Students participate in shared governance committee's as per article 5 and 6 of the regulation. There is a presidential appointee on each committee and an administrator who serves as a liaison to administrative leadership. To allow for maximum participation, meetings are scheduled once per month during the College Hour when few classes are scheduled.

During the worst of the pandemic, all meetings were conducted remotely. While the College has shifted back to in-person operations, Zoom is often used to conduct meetings since that allows greater participation and improves efficiency.

A College Wide Promotion Committee (CPC) is convened for a select number of meetings during an academic year for the sole purpose of reviewing documentation and making faculty promotion recommendations to the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics. Members of the CPC are restricted to full professors, one presidential appointee, a faculty association appointee, and a faculty member at-large elected by the faculty.

Each academic governance committee (except for the CPC committee) makes recommendations to the Academic Policies Advisory Committee (APAC). APAC is organizationally the highest governance body where issues and recommendations discussed and developed by the other six governance committees are discussed, endorsed, or rejected. Governance Committees submit monthly reports with recommendations for action to APAC.

Recommendations approved in APAC are presented to the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics for review and presented at President's Cabinet. CPC makes promotion recommendations to the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics who in turn, will pass on approved recommendations to the President for further disposition.

Evaluation of Administrative Units

The current process for evaluating administrative units has been in place since spring of 2019 as part of *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* (I; ECC Strategic Plan 2019-2024). The College follows a five-year assessment cycle and all administrative units are required to submit monthly reports following a specific format. The workflow design permits reporting into SPOL software beginning with unit reports which then feed into area reports finally concluding with the President. Unit mission and goals are in the forefront of each report. The specific three areas to report on are:

- Status update to include accomplishments of the area,
- Upcoming projects and activities for the area, and
- Challenges the area may be facing and solutions if available.

This is an annual process that culminates with an end of the fiscal year update also broken down into three areas of interest. The report begins with:

- Area Mission and Goals achievement, which is described in detail and include all supportive data. This section asks units/areas to present evidence of how the unit/area met its unit's mission and goals over the past fiscal year. Next is the

- Assessment Process, which is intended for units/areas to describe which of their unit/area goals were assessed over the past year, how they were assessed, along with an overview of assessment results.
- Use of Assessment, where units/areas are expected to identify what was learned through the process and what improvements have been made based on assessment results.

It is not mandatory for each unit to assess all unit/area goals annually, however; each unit/area goals must be assessed at least once within the five-year cycle. At the conclusion of the five-year cycle, there is a planned administrative review. The workflow design permits for continuous review within the hierarchy. Items or areas of concern can be identified prior to the annual review or the completion of the five-year cycle.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

At the outbreak of the pandemic, ECC promptly responded with a variety of safety measures for the College community. Almost all classes were moved to remote formats and faculty and office staff moved to remote services so that daily activities could continue safely. College-wide Zoom accounts for meetings and virtual classes were instituted. Class work was supported with tools such as Moodle and test security with the addition of Respondus, a lock down browser and monitoring for online instructional classes to maintain academic integrity. The Information Technology Department provided support to students, faculty, and staff to work remotely. A computer loaner program was established for students and staff. XP-Pen tablets were made available to full and part-time faculty for remote instruction. Free Internet access was provided to students in partnership with Optimum Wi-Fi hotspot network.

A multiple measures protocol was established for new student placement when in person placement testing became more challenging. More details on these actions may be found in the discussion of Standard IV.

Limited staff, those seen as essential to the on-site operation of the College, were allowed on campus, with most others physically returning by the fall 2021 semester. Students were required to complete an online orientation pertaining to new protocols and resources before returning to campus.

A small subpopulation of students who were in Nursing and Health Sciences were offered lectures by Zoom and laboratory activities on-site at the beginning of the pandemic. The names of students on campus for labs were provided to security weekly, and these students completed health clearance forms each time they arrived. As a result, the students in those programs completed their courses of study and graduated on time.

The College, with support from the Board of Trustees, acquired an array of equipment/devices including those for conducting entry screening and temperature checks, personal protective equipment (such as masks, face shields, gloves, Plexiglas barriers) and hand sanitizer dispensers. These items were broadly distributed to students, employees, and visitors. COVID-19 and social distancing related signage are

pervasive and visible in all college facilities. In March 2020, the College essentially converted to almost 100 percent virtual classes in line with state and county directives.

A committee of faculty, staff, students, and members of the Board of Trustees prepared a comprehensive *Restart Plan and COVID-19 Safety Measures*. (VII; Document Forthcoming) The COVID-19 Task Force no longer meets on a weekly basis; however, it remains a standing agenda item for Cabinet meetings, and periodic updates are provided to the College community as warranted and when CDC and New Jersey State Guidelines require it.

After 18 months of virtual instruction, nearly 50 percent of students opted for in person instruction for the fall 2021 semester. Virtual and online sections of courses continued to be offered as well. Beginning in September 2021, COVID-19 rapid testing was provided on campus where students and staff complete a Telehealth consultation, took a rapid test, and got written results. Protocols and processes were established for course mode conversions and quarantine if needed due to exposure or positive testing so high-quality instruction could continue. For additional information on the quality of education that ECC maintained during the pandemic, see Chapter III and the attached results of ECC's Remote Learning Questionnaires administered in Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. (VII; Document Forthcoming)

An ECC Vaccination/Immunization Portal was established as part of the College's Restart Plan, allowing students and employees to confidentially provide verification of their vaccination status. Those who were granted an exemption from immunization were required to provide weekly COVID-19 test results through the portal. Everyone was required to wear mask/face covering on campus unless a medical exemption had been approved by the College. This policy was amended during the spring 2022 semester, which stipulated that face masks were optional for all persons on campus.

Many other initiatives were developed so that daily activities were not unduly impacted. A campaign to *Eliminate Covid-19 on Campus (ECC)* was launched. Public announcements on the College's public address system, were made several times a day in buildings. COVID-19 Town Hall meetings were held to inform the College community of safeguarding measures taken. The President and Cabinet Officers conduct walk-throughs of buildings to assess conditions and provide support and solutions as appropriate. Facilities are cleaned several times a day and a review conducted of available classrooms to determine capacities that complied with federal, state, and local guidelines. COVID-19 trainings were conducted for students, staff, and faculty. Renovations of bathrooms with touchless features enhanced cleanliness and safety. A *Health Pledge* and a *Special Message from Dr. Boakye* was sent via email daily to all students and employees. The College website prominently posts information on the pandemic including things like COVID-19 information, a vaccination/immunization portal, and COVID-19 testing. A Coronavirus Alert Student Emergency Fund was established to support students.

Human Resources and Student Affairs acts as a liaison between the College community and respective Departments of Health to facilitate timely reporting of new or amended rules and/or guidelines the College is required to execute.

No college could anticipate or fully prepare for the disruptions, and actual physical danger, brought by the pandemic. However, Essex County College, with an active and supportive Board of Trustees, a

smooth presidential transition during the worst of the of the pandemic, a nimble and flexible team of administrators, faculty, and staff achieved the near impossible and is coming through stronger than ever.

CONCLUSION

The governance structure of Essex County College leadership and the policies and procedures that have been put in place enable the College to realize its Mission, Vision, and Values. All levels of leadership and administration from the Board of Trustees, President, senior leadership, administration, and faculty governance structures operate with the same goal of providing the best education and support services to students and best serving its community. After a prolonged period of stability throughout most of the College's history, the College was affected by instability in leadership in the earlier years of the past decade. Over recent years, under stabilized leadership, the College has worked tirelessly towards achieving its Mission, Vision, and Values as evidenced by an increase in retention rates by nearly 9 percentage points (52.5 to 61.3 percent) and a more than 50 percent growth in graduation rates (11.0 percent to 16.7 percent) over the past two years. The College will continue to move in a positive direction as it looks to build on its accomplishments.

