



## SELF-STUDY REPORT

Submitted to the  
Middle States  
Commission on Higher  
Education

February 2023





## MISSION STATEMENT

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 STATEMENT

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 STATEMENT

Essex County College affirms the following principles, values and beliefs:

**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.

**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.

**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.

# **ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE SELF-STUDY REPORT**

**February 3, 2023**

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*Submitted to:*

*The Middle States Commission on Higher Education*

*On behalf of:*

*Dr. Augustine A. Boakye  
President, Essex County College*

*and*

*The Essex County College Board of Trustees*



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## SELF-STUDY TEAM

### Steering Committee

Leigh M. Bello	Associate Dean, Student Affairs and Special Projects	Co-Chair Standard VII Liaison Communications/Hospitality Team Leader
Jeffrey Lee	Faculty, Biology; Program Coordinator, Environmental Science	Co-Chair Standard II Liaison Evidence Inventory Team Leader
John Runfeldt	Executive Director, Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment	Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO)
Germaine Albuquerque	Chair, Business Division	Standard I Working Group Member
Aneliia Chatterjee	Faculty, Librarian	Standard I Working Group Member Evidence Inventory Team
Patrice Davis	Faculty, Criminal Justice; Program Coordinator, Criminal Justice	Std. V Working Group Liaison
Keith Kirkland	Dean, Student Affairs	Std. IV Working Group Liaison Student Outreach Team Leader
Yelena Lyudmilova	Assistant Dean, Online Education and Resources	Standard V Working Group Member Evidence Inventory Team
June Persaud	Associate Dean, Academic Affairs and Special Projects	Standard I Working Group Liaison
Mohamed Seddiki	Executive Dean/CIO, Information Technology and Operations	Std. VI Working Group Liaison
Alvin Williams	Executive Dean, Faculty and Academics (CAO)	Standard III Liaison



**Standard I Working Group\***

June Persaud (Chair)	Associate Dean, Academic Affairs and Special Projects
Germaine Albuquerque	Chair, Business Division
Dora Castro	College Services Assistant
Aneliia Chatterjee	Faculty, Librarian
Michael Doughtie	Director, Athletics
Phyllis Walker	Assistant Director, Financial Aid

\* June Persaud - Steering Committee Liaison

**Standard II Working Group\***

Karen Bridgett (Chair)	Acting Executive Director, Human Resources
Hamid Alouach	Adjunct, Physics
Nessie Hill	Faculty, English
Serrietta Johnson	Technical Assistant, Student Life and Activities
Myrna Scott	Faculty, Nursing
Christine Soto	General Counsel
Korena Stewart	Faculty, Nursing

\* Jeffrey Lee - Steering Committee Liaison

**Standard III Working Group\***

Eunice Kamunge (Co-Chair)	Chair, Division of Biology Chemistry, and Physics
Elvira Vieira (Co-Chair)	Dean of Community, Continuing Ed. and West Essex Campus
Emmanuel Adepo	Faculty, Math
Emmanuel Aouad	Faculty, Program Co-Coordinator, Chemistry
Olalekan Adetoro	Adjunct, Biology
Frank Duroy	Faculty, Program Coordinator, General Science
Ines Figueiras	Faculty, Math
Jeffrey Jones	Adjunct, Math
Akil Khalfani	Faculty, Director, Center for Global Education and Experiences, Africana Institute

Mikal Nash	Faculty, History
Charles Pinderhughes	Faculty, Program Coordinator, Social Science
Sujathra Ramakrishnan	Faculty, Biology
Margaret Stevens	Faculty, Humanities
Leola Taylor-Bandeale	Faculty, Librarian
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Caroline Beretta (Co-Chair)	Associate Director, EOF
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Kathlyn Battle	Faculty, Counselor
Jamil Graham	Director, Student Life and Activities
Patty Howard	Director, Financial Aid
Mirian Ochoa	Student Services Representative, Enrollment Services
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Gennevieue Danville	Faculty, Program Coordinator, LPN Nursing
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Ledawn Hall	Director, Learning Center
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Elizabeth Barkley	Director, Information Technology
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Edmund Akwei	Assistant Bursar
Andrew McCarthy	Adjunct Professor, English
Cheryl Newton-Banks	Director, Enrollment Services, West Essex Campus
Joanna Romano	Director, Educational Opportunity Fund
Brian Shube	Adjunct Professor, Business
Robert Spellman	Faculty, Art
Victor Stolberg	Counselor, Student Development and Counseling, Faculty, Social Sciences
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**Communications Team**

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Lisa Padilla	Senior Assessment Coordinator
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Patrice Davis	Faculty, Program Coordinator, Social Sciences
Ronald Goldfarb	Editorial Consultant
Jeffrey Lee	Faculty, Program Coordinator, Environmental Science
June Persaud	Associate Dean, Academic Affairs and Special Projects
John Runfeldt	Executive Direction, Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment
Alvin Williams	Executive Dean, Faculty and Academics

**Evidence Inventory Team**

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Afshan Ajmiri Giner	Chief Compliance & Equity Officer / Special Counsel
Aneliia Chatterjee	Librarian, Faculty
Yelena Lyudmilova	Assistant Dean, Education and Online Resources
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**Student Outreach Team**

Keith Kirkland (Chair)	Dean, Student Affairs
Leigh M. Bello	Associate Dean, Student Affairs and Special Projects

**Verification of Compliance Coordinator**

Afshan Ajmiri Giner	Chief Compliance & Equity Officer / Special Counsel
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAAC	Academic Assessment Advisory Committee
ABA	American Bar Association
ABET	Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology
ACAC	Academic Computing Advisory Committee
ACBSP	Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs
ACCT	Association of Community College Trustees
ACE	American Council on Education
ACEN	Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing
ADAC	Academic Development Advisory Committee
APAC	Academic Policies Advisory Committee
APAC	Academic Policies Advisory Committee
ASC	Academic Standards Committee
BOT	Board of Trustees
BPC	Budget Planning Committee
CAO	Chief Academic Officer
CAPTE	Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education
CCC	College Curriculum Committee
CCE&WD	Community, Continuing Education, and Workforce Development
CCE&WEC	Community, Continuing Education, and West Essex Campus
CCOG	Community College Opportunity Grant
CELA	Office of Compliance, Equity and Legal Affairs
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
COA	Commission on Opticianry Accreditation
CPC	College Promotion Committee
CRC	Career Resource Center
CRM	Customer Relations Management

DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
ECC	Essex County College
ENG	English
EOF	Educational Opportunity Fund
FAFSA	Free Application for Student Aid
FDC	Faculty Development Committee
FOP	Fraternal Order of Police
FTFTDS	First-time, Full-time, Degree-Seeking
FYE	First Year Experience
FY	Fiscal Year
GECC	General Education Coordinating Committee
GED	General Education Development
HEERF	Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund
HESAA	Higher Education Student Assistance Authority
HiSET	High School Equivalency Test
HSI	Hispanic Serving Institution
IEPA	Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IT	Information Technology
JRCERT	Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology
LPN	Licensed Practical Nurse
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPOs	Measurable Performance Objectives
MTH	Mathematics
MWE	Men and Women of Excellence Scholars Program
N.J.A.C	New Jersey Administrative Code
N.J.S.A	New Jersey Statutes Annotated
NJ BON	Certificate New Jersey Board of Nursing

NJ Rev Stat	New Jersey Revised Statues
NJCAA	National Junior College Athletic Association
NJCCC	New Jersey Council of Community Colleges
NSO	New Student Orientation
OSCS	Office of Student Cares Services
PBI	Predominately Black Institution
PLO	Program Level Outcome
PTK	Phi Theta Kappa
REG	Regulation
SAP	Satisfactory Academic Progress
SDC	Student Development Center
SGA	Student Government Association
SGE	Subcommittee on General Education
SLAO	Student Life and Activities Office
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SOC	Sociology
SPOL	Strategic Planning On-Line
TAG	Tuition Assistance Grant
TASC	Test Assessing Secondary Completion



## INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

### **The College**

Founded in 1966 (and first admitting students in 1968), Essex County College (ECC) is one of New Jersey's 18 public, two-year colleges. Serving the County of Essex and located in Newark, NJ, the College enrolls approximately 9,000 students annually seeking to earn an associate's degree or academic certificate. An additional 2,000 students also enroll 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 has a median age of 21 years and is comprised of nearly 60% women. ECC 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% of the College's students are minorities. The largest racial and ethnic populations among students are African-American (47%) and Hispanic (27%). Adding to the College's rich diversity, it annually serves nearly 100 international students, representing over 30 countries.

The College also 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.

ECC is comprised of two campuses, with the main campus located in Newark, NJ, and the West Essex branch campus located in West Caldwell, NJ. Roughly 90% of student credit hours are taken at the main campus, with most of the remaining balance taken at the West Essex branch campus. In 2021, the College broke ground to rebuild the West Essex branch campus, which will be a modern, state-of-the-art building that continues to embrace the College's mission and vision for student access and success (expected opening for Academic Year 2023-2024). During the construction of the West Essex Campus, a temporary additional location is operating locally at the West Essex Technical High School. ECC also has a permanent additional location in Newark (the FOCUS Center).

The College predominantly serves students who reside in the County of Essex (92%), with a large portion of those residing in the city of Newark (47%). Newark is Essex County's largest municipality, both in terms of land area (24.2 square miles) and population (307,220) and accounts for roughly a third of the County's total population (854,917). Newark has a median household income of just \$41,335 and a per capita income of \$22,194 while also having the highest cost of living to income gap among the 18 municipalities that are home to New Jersey's community colleges. Roughly 76% 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% 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 food insecurity, the majority of ECC students experience unstable living conditions with 61% 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% experiencing homelessness in the prior year. An analysis of these three metrics shows that 75% of students are affected by at least one of these economic barriers (food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness).

Data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic via the *#RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey*, indicated that ECC students were severely impacted by the health crisis. Among students who were employed prior to the pandemic, 42% lost their jobs, 27% saw reduced hours and pay, and 47% reported caring for a family member due to the pandemic.

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

These statistics 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 socioeconomic 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 ECC'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 the vision and 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 face, 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 it 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. It identified four 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, and not just in relation to the Commission's Standards and Requirements of Affiliation. 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 coursework to remote delivery (with some exceptions), while continuing to provide student and public services both in person (to a limited extent as allowed by the State and Federal guidelines) and remotely.

This transition and its aftermath required that the College examine what it does and how it does it, followed by adaptation and change in real time. Along with those actions, the College conducted a more detailed evaluation of itself in regards to how efficiently it was performing under such extraordinary circumstances. Students were regularly surveyed to determine if their needs were being met. Additional references to how the College responded to the pandemic, especially as 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 – being significantly curtailed.

During the development of the Strategic Plan, which covers 2019-2024, attention was paid to the goals that the College considered most important. From that process, four areas were designated as 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

These Institutional Priorities emphasize the importance the College places on student success. 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. The Self-Study discusses the steps taken to achieve the vision and goals. The challenges encountered as well as recommendations as to how to overcome them are 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

As a two-year college serving students interested in beginning their undergraduate studies and subsequently transferring to four-year institutions, as well as students interested in moving directly into the workforce, Essex County College (ECC) is organized to execute its mission within the framework of its vision and values, and in accordance with its institutional goals.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLLEGE'S MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

ECC's original philosophy of purpose was informed by the development of higher education in the state of New Jersey and the evolution of public two-year colleges as the much-needed open access to expanded and accessible opportunities for post-secondary education and training within the state.

By 1985, some 17 years after ECC opened its doors to its first students, the College's mission was refined to more clearly articulate ECC's goals and objectives. In 2002, 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, with the addition of "diverse constituencies" to reflect the varied demographics of the College's student population. In March 2002, the Board of Trustees approved this newly crafted Mission Statement and the Statement of Values. In 2009, the Board expanded the 2002 statement to include the words "dedication to academic excellence" for an updated Mission Statement that reads: "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". The Mission has been the same for the past 14 years. The Mission Statement and the accompanying Vision Statement, cited in the College's 2011 Middle States Self Study, is virtually unchanged. It undergoes periodic review and affirmation by the Board of Trustees. It was the foundation for the 2014-2018 and the 2019-2024 Strategic Plans and continues to provide an inspirational capstone that points to the guiding principles of the College. The full text of the Mission, Vision, and Values Statements are presented in the Institutional Overview.

The College's Mission, Vision, and Values Statements address its internal community (faculty, staff, and students) and external partners (public, private, alumni, governmental, business, and non-profit organizations). These statements are operationalized through the College's strategic plan, titled *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, which captures the essential qualities that define the College's identity of today and for the future. 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 clarity and inclusivity of the Mission, Vision, and Values have served the College as executive leadership, demographics, and other factors changed, and have provided useful guidance to ensure that Essex County College consistently holds true to its mission 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 proud that its guiding principles, coupled with a dynamic strategic plan, were strong and flexible enough to weather the COVID-19 pandemic and this has led to an even stronger institution.

The College community and its partners have been crucial to the evolution of the Mission Statement. The Board of Trustees has supported this by affirming and approving recommended revisions and additions. The Board last affirmed the College's Mission, Vision, and Values Statements on April 19, 2022, through its adoption of Board Policy 1-3 Formal Adoption of the College's Mission, Vision, and Values Statements (I; REG 1-3 Items Requiring Action by the President). With this, the College codified the Board practice of annual review. The Mission, Vision, and Values Statements and the Board Policy Manual are available to the public on the College's website. The Statements are also displayed throughout the College and are typically reproduced in official college publications. The Statements are concise and provide the guidance necessary for the development of transparent implementation plans.

#### INSTITUTIONAL GOALS ALIGNED WITH THE MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

ECC uses a mission-driven assessment process through which all assessment initiatives are aligned with the institutional and unit mission, educational goals, and institutional (strategic) goals.

The *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0* identifies seven Key Performance Indicators to help measure the effectiveness of the strategic plan implementation. 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 which are briefly discussed below. A more detailed analysis may be found in Standard VI (I; Students First Strategic Plan 2019-2024).

##### **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). Goal I consists of an annual target of increasing the College's financial reserve by \$5,000,000 over the prior year. This goal was accomplished in FY 2022, under the first year of the revised Strategic Plan.

## **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 Version 2.1\*](#), p. 8-9). The goal consists of three annual targets: to increase the fall-to-fall enrollment yield by 3.0% annually, to increase fiscal year student credit hours, and non-credit clock hours by 3.0%. In fiscal year 2022, ECC met two of these three goals by increasing the enrollment yield by 7.1% from 40.8% in fall 2020 to 47.9% in fall 2021. ECC far surpassed the non-credit clock hours target with a 35.2% increase from 104,241 in FY 2021 to 140,888 in FY 2022. However, ECC did not meet its target of increasing student credit hours by 3.0% in FY 2022, as credit hours increased by only 1.1% from 140,438 in FY 2021 to 141,922 in FY 2022. While fiscal year data for FY 2023 is not yet available, the fall 2022 enrollment yield, one of the annual targets for FY 2023 is available. ECC saw a 1.5% decline in enrollment yield, mostly due to a large increase in applications via the implementation of Naviance and the CRM. Despite this slight drop in the enrollment yield, first-time enrolled students increased by 25.6% in fall 2022.

## **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 Version 2.1\*](#), p.10-11). The Plan specified an annual target to increase the one-year retention rate by two percentage points. ECC surpassed this target with the fall 2021 cohort, achieving a 61.0% retention rate, an increase of 9.6% from the previous year. And while the fall 2022 cohort yielded a decrease of 0.2%, this very much shows that the previous year's increase was not an anomaly, confirming the College's approach in this endeavor. To achieve the goal, a College-wide academic advisement/mentorship program, incorporating the Progressive Retention Initiative, was initiated and this 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 enhance student services and retention, also discussed in Chapter 4.

In addressing the on-time completion, the College saw the three-year graduation rate for the fall 2018 cohort increase by 3.7% in a year-over-year comparison. This number grew again for the fall 2019 cohort by increasing another 2.1%, resulting in a 16.9% three-year graduation rate.

## **Institutional Goal IV – Continue to Improve the Physical Infrastructure of Essex County College**

The College developed a plan to improve its physical infrastructure 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 and the Clara Dasher Student Center bridge
- Renovate the Information Technology Area
- Renovate the faculty and staff areas of the Center for Technology (CFT)

## ASSESSMENT OF MISSION AND GOALS

The success of the strategic plan is contingent upon the College's 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 Plan's implementation. The process was reorganized, and the goals and objectives were updated and refocused. Annual activities were identified, and this allows the institution to chart a more transparent course and enhance the accountability for how it intends to respond to challenges and fulfill its vision (I; *STUDENTS FIRST Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.0*).

For each annual activity, designated reporting officers were identified and, using strategic management software, they assess and report quarterly on progress with implementation. In addition to these quarterly reports, area heads (who are also Cabinet members) and unit leaders (Deans, Chairs, and Directors) are required 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, which is aligned with the annual budgeting process. A strategic planning calendar was developed in conjunction with the annual budgeting cycle, and this is discussed in more detail in Standard VI.

## CHANGES IN THE COLLEGE'S ENVIRONMENT REFLECTED IN INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES

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 *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* can also be attributed to the enormous changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the vision of the new president.

The initial version of the *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* was based on an environmental scan conducted in 2017. The pandemic had produced drastic and rapid changes to the learning communities and labor market, so ECC conducted a new environmental scan by partnering with Terra Firma, LLC, a third-party consulting firm, to assess and reflect the reality

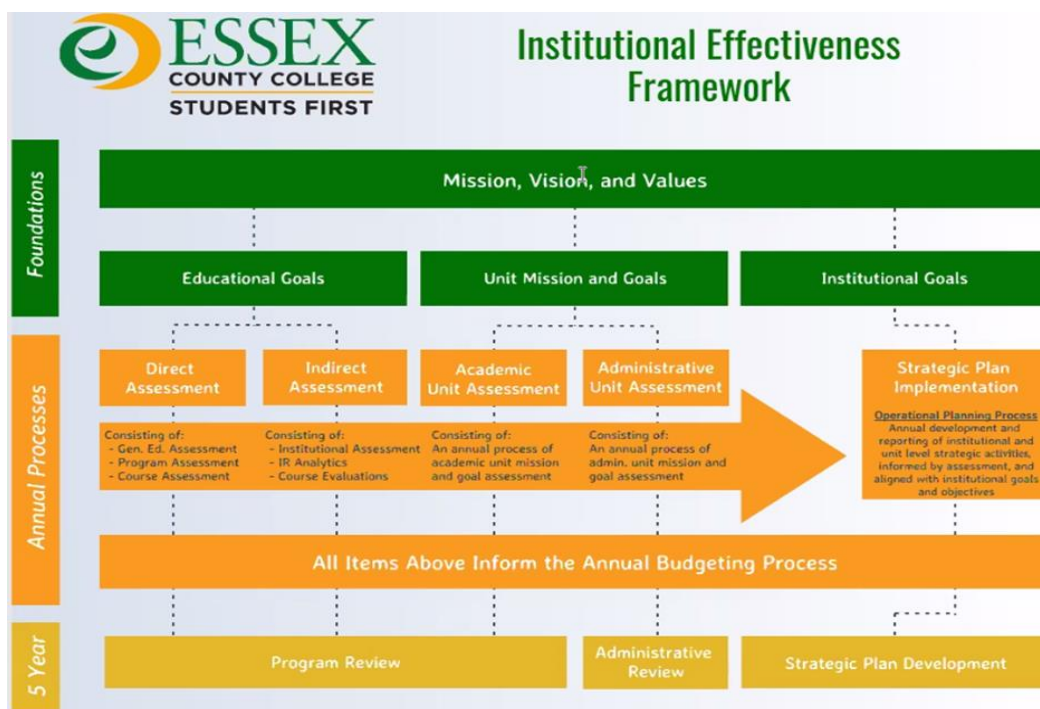
and the needs of all constituencies. ECC continues to use the information obtained from this report in its decision-making. Additionally, with an emphasis on boosting enrollment and retention, the College President has established a Progressive Retention Taskforce (I; 100 First Days Accomplishments of Dr. Boakye's Presidency, p. 3) to guide these efforts. The College has also created a 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

Memorialized in Board Policy 1-3, the Mission, Vision, and Values Statements define the College's purpose as an open access community college and provides guidance as to the direction it intends to take to serve its students (I; REG 1-3 Items Requiring Action by the President). This ensures transparency to all stakeholders.

The Statements are 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 public areas of the College, including Academic Divisions, where Mission, Vision, and Values posters remind stakeholders of the common purpose that unites them and help to build engagement. In addition to what is displayed 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, the Course Catalog, the Annual Fact Book, and in external documents. Figure 1 illustrates how the Mission, Vision, and Values are the foundation of ECC's entire institutional effectiveness framework. All of the College's institutional planning, assessment, and budgeting activities are designed for supporting the affirmation of the College's Mission, Vision, and Values.

Figure 1 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 within the County of Essex. More than 50 years ago they laid the foundation by delivering needed resources and direction that has allowed the College to thrive and grow. ECC has since assumed the responsibilities mandated by that charter and developed its Mission, Vision, and Values Statements commensurate with the evolving needs of the diverse community it serves.

## STRENGTHS

- The College's mandate to serve its students and community is well-defined and clearly guides the institution's actions
- ECC has a transparent process for implementing its Strategic Plan, thus creating a high-level of accountability as it moves towards its stated vision

## CHALLENGES

- A rapidly-changing labor market and keeping pace with the needs of the community
- The COVID-19 pandemic's effects upon the community and institutional operations

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to support the Mission, Vision, and Values by building upon the reporting process for the current Plan's implementation while preparing for the development of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan
- Continue to work with local leaders and assess the ever-growing and changing needs of community members



## STANDARD II: ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

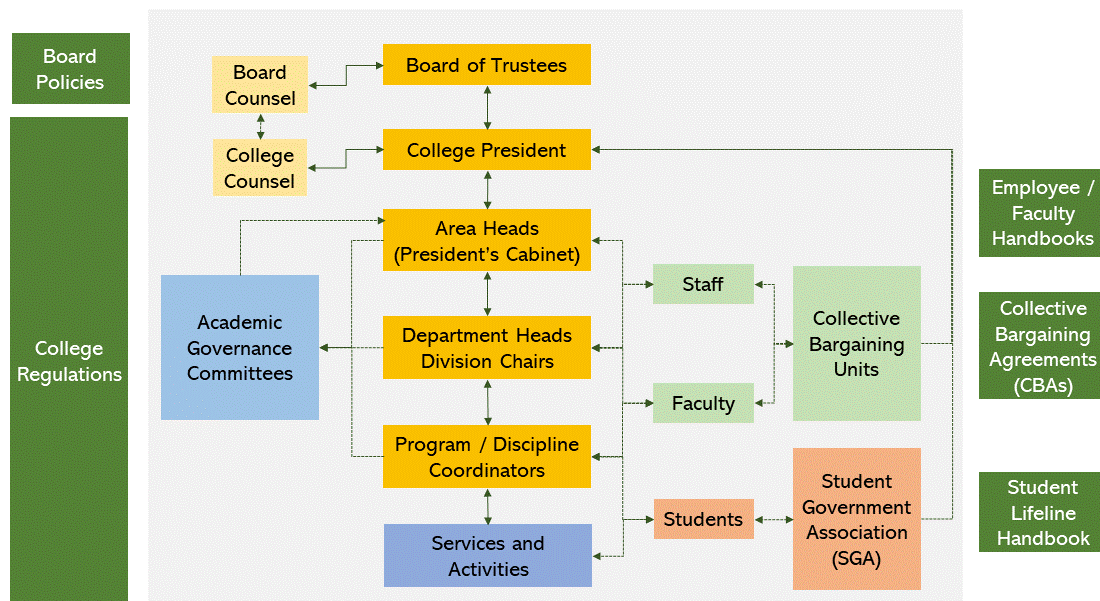
*Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.*

### 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. As to both internal and external constituents, ECC is truthful with public announcements and complies with all federal, state, and MSCHE reporting policies. The College promotes affordability and accessibility and conducts periodic assessment of its ethics and integrity policies and practices in furtherance of its Mission, Vision, Values and commitment to continuous improvement (II; Mission, Vision, and Values, II; Master Board Policy Manual, II; [College Regulations](#))

The College operates through a multilevel organizational structure, seen graphically in Figure 2, with a top/down and bottom/up approach for the management and implementation of organizational initiatives, processes, and practices. The multilevel structure provides the checks and balances for oversight and assessment of ethics and integrity practices, offering opportunities for students, faculty, and staff participation, review, feedback, and approval at multiple levels throughout a process. The guidelines governing compliance and adherence to federal, state, local, and institutional rules are codified in the policies, regulations, handbooks, and agreements of the College (II; Collective Bargaining Unit Agreements - Documents Standard Annotations (v2) 06-08-21.docx, II; Employee Handbook 03-3-2021). ECC is a unionized workplace with approximately 87.0% of its employees affiliated with one of seven collective bargaining units.

*Figure 2 Multilevel Organizational Structure*



## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

Essex County College provides services and support to fulfill the educational needs of a diverse population of traditional and non-traditional students. The College is based in the city of Newark, an urban community of Essex County, the most populous city of the State of New Jersey and the second largest city within the New York metropolitan area. As of fall 2021, 93% of students resided locally in the County of Essex where 40.9% were non-traditional students (i.e., over the age of 24), and 54.8% were part-timers ([Institutional Profile 2022](#)). The demographics of the College population for students, faculty, and staff are graphically accounted for in Table 1 ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)).

*Table 1 Fall 2022 Student, Faculty and Staff Demographics*

	Gender	Ethnicity			
	Female / Male	Black	Hispanic	White	Other
Students	53.9 / 46.1 %	43.3%	31.6%	5.3%	19.8%
Full-Time Faculty	47.0 / 53.0 %	37.3%	10.8%	38.6%	13.3%
Full-Time Staff	63.3 / 36.7 %	54.4%	26.2%	13.3%	6.1%
Part-Time Staff and Faculty	41.4 / 58.6 %	39.3%	12.9%	27.5%	20.3%

The College is committed to ensuring equity in access to higher education, while fostering an inclusive college community that embraces the rich diversity of our students and employees. The College's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was added as a new goal of the College's Strategic Plan 2.1 ([STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1](#)). The goal is to develop a leadership team with representatives from all areas of the College, as designated by the College President, to ensure that the College's policies and practices involving communication and interactions with students, prospective students, employees, and the community-at-large, are aligned with its DEI values. The leadership team will serve as the College's DEI Committee. The Chief Compliance and Equity Officer (CC&EO), in collaboration with the DEI Committee, will be responsible for the review, identification, and recommendation for implementation of DEI initiatives for the College and incorporation in the College's future strategic DEI plan. Planned DEI initiatives include the procurement of a translation services agency for college-wide use, and the development of regulations and internal controls and protocols. These will help to ensure use of gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language, and to accommodate preferred names and pronouns. A third initiative would consist of training which promotes understanding of various DEI topics and best practices.

## 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 currently available on the College's Human Resources landing page. Academic freedom, 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 always 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 (II; REG 6-10 Academic Integrity). These values encapsulate principles of behavior which 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's website (II; REG 6-10 Academic Integrity).

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY OF STUDENTS

The College preserves the ethics and integrity of the institution by disallowing plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty. 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 recognition of the research of others. Academic integrity guidelines are expected and encouraged to be 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 software, Turnitin, within the learning management system, Moodle. The College also makes available Respondus, a custom lockdown browser for online proctoring of exams. By checking against plagiarism, both platforms help to ensure that the student is submitting their original work. Student violations of academic integrity are sanctioned within the framework of actions identified in the Student Code of Conduct. Sanctions for acts of academic dishonesty can include the resubmission of an assignment; failure of the exam; failure of the course; probation; suspension from the College; and expulsion.

## ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees provides leadership and oversight of academic matters at Essex County College. Said matters are also regulated via the administration (II; 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 processes on academic matters (II; REG 6-2 Standing Academic Governance Committees). Per Regulation, there are seven 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); and the newly formed and approved Academic Assessment Advisory Committee (AAAC). There is also the College Promotion Committee (CPC), which makes recommendations for faculty promotions to the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics. 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, V, and VI.

## CLIMATE OF RESPECT

Essex County College fosters a climate of respect among its population and administers separate annual Campus Climate Surveys to both students and employees in order to ensure it maintains a positive and welcoming atmosphere. The Student Campus Climate Survey presents ten statements to students which serve as indicators of a positive campus climate and asks them for their level of agreement. The fall 2021 survey was completed by over 800 students (see Table 2) with more than three-quarters of respondents agreeing with all ten indicators, as well as improvement in nine out of ten indicators over the prior year. These improvements can be attributed, in part, to the Customer Service Training Workshops conducted throughout spring and summer of 2021. They were administered through dozens of small group sessions to all areas at the College. Training focused on creating a culture of care and climate of respect for all ECC students.

*Table 2 Data from the Fall 2021 Student Campus Climate Survey*

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	% of students who agree with statement*	Year-over-year Change
I feel safe at Essex County College	84.7%	+ 6.2%
There are sufficient support resources available	77.4%	+ 6.8%
I believe my differences are embraced and valued	77.0%	+ 1.4%
Discrimination is not tolerated at ECC	81.7%	+ 1.2%
Harassment is not tolerated at ECC	83.6%	+ 1.4%
ECC works hard to prevent discrimination and harassment from happening	76.4%	- 1.3%
Racial and cultural differences are celebrated at ECC	84.9%	+ 1.2%
I feel a sense of community and belonging at ECC	74.8%	+ 3.6%
Campus police and security protect us from harm	74.9%	+ 5.0%
ECC provides sufficient programs and resources to foster the success of a diverse population	77.7%	+ 1.2%

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

An Employee Campus Climate Survey is administered annually to all full- and part-time employees of the College. The survey measures various aspects of employee morale from feeling valued, recognized, physical safety, job security, and adequate resources. Results in fall 2021 revealed that employees feel they are valued by their supervisors and treated with respect by their colleagues. The key highlights of the fall 2021 report were that the majority of employees feel safe on campus (80%) and that campus police and security protect them from harm (77%). In addition to feeling safe, the majority of employees report that racial and cultural differences are celebrated on campus (76%), and harassment (72%) and discrimination (71%) are not tolerated. However, only 62% of employees feel that the College provides support resources.

*Table 3 Data from the Fall 2021 Employee Campus Climate Survey*

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	% of employees who agree with statement*	Year-over-year Change
I feel safe at Essex County College	80.4%	+ 3.8%
There are sufficient support resources available	61.9%	+ 3.7%
I believe my differences are embraced and valued	65.7%	- 1.3%
Discrimination is not tolerated at ECC	70.9%	- 0.2%
Harassment is not tolerated at ECC	71.9%	+ 0.2%
ECC works hard to prevent discrimination and harassment from happening	65.5%	- 3.3%
Racial and cultural differences are celebrated at ECC	76.0%	- 2.1%
I feel a sense of community and belonging at ECC	68.0%	- 1.6%
Campus police and security protect us from harm	77.0%	- 0.9%
ECC provides sufficient programs and resources to foster the success of a diverse population	80.9%	- 2.4%

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

While the data from the Employee Campus Climate Survey showed that a climate of respect exists among employees, the College continues to use 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 biannual event, with a focus on team building. Additionally, these results factored into the decision to incorporate the following FY 2023 strategic activities into *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan: 2019-2024, Version 2.1 ([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

The administration has initiated several strategies designed to recognize and develop talent to secure the future success of the College. Research was conducted by the Executive Director of

Human Resources on succession planning and a presentation was facilitated with the President's Cabinet Members in August 2022. The objective set forth by the President of the College was to have a unified knowledge of succession planning to adopt a collaborative approach to the development of opportunities for advancement throughout the institution. To meet this goal, the College continues to review job descriptions and the organizational chart to create career ladders. Identification of strengths and opportunities for improvement for constituents has presented the ability to mentor employees. Leadership has sought out and encouraged the attendance of internal and external training opportunities. Participation in organizations such as Affinity Groups and professional associations for higher education has provided knowledge of best practices in education.

## FAIR AND IMPARTIAL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

### **Policies and Regulations**

The College adheres to fair and impartial employment practices as provided in its Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Regulation and Non-Discriminatory Policy (II; REG 4-16 Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Act). Human Resources and the Office of Compliance, Equity, and Legal Affairs 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 collective bargaining agreements (II; ECC 2018 Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Administrative Association, II; ECC 2019 Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Adjunct Faculty Federation, II; ECC 2021 Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Faculty Association (Set 1 of 2), II; ECC 2021 Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Faculty Association (Set 2 of 2), II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Professional Association, II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Security Association, II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Support Staff Association (SSA), II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Adjunct Faculty Federation, II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Administrative Association, II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Administrative MOU 2018-2024, II; ECC B Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Faculty Association (Set 1 of 2), II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Faculty Association (Set 2 of 2), II; ECC Bargaining Unit Contracts & MOUs - Faculty). Regulations are updated periodically and accessible from the College website. Board Policy is reviewed and updated on a biannual 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 the College and the respective collective bargaining units. Human Resources oversees the process for regular full-time employee classifications (i.e., faculty, administrative, police, professional, security, and support staff).

Recruitment and selection of adjunct faculty, temporary and part-time staff are conducted by the hiring areas. The requisition, recruitment, and selection of all positions undergo a multilevel process that includes the review, clearance, and approval by the area heads, Finance, Human Resources, and the College President (with the Board of Trustees approval 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, 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 Resources. During the onboarding process, the new hire's position appointment is confirmed, benefits reviewed, and the Employee Handbook and 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 Vector compliance training system. Employee completion has improved from an average of 28% since the launch of Vector to averaging over a 55% completion rate for AY 2021-2022. Hybrid training methods implemented in 2021-2022 for the delivery of Customer Training garnered an average 65% completion rate. Updates in delivery and enforcement are being developed in order to improve completion rates.

Formal meet-and-greet sessions were introduced in 2021 to provide the new hires the opportunity to meet the College President and other administrators. Orientation on the assigned job, department area, and introduction to senior administration has, and continues to be, conducted informally at the department level for all employee classifications. Involuntary separations are discussed below.

### STAFFING

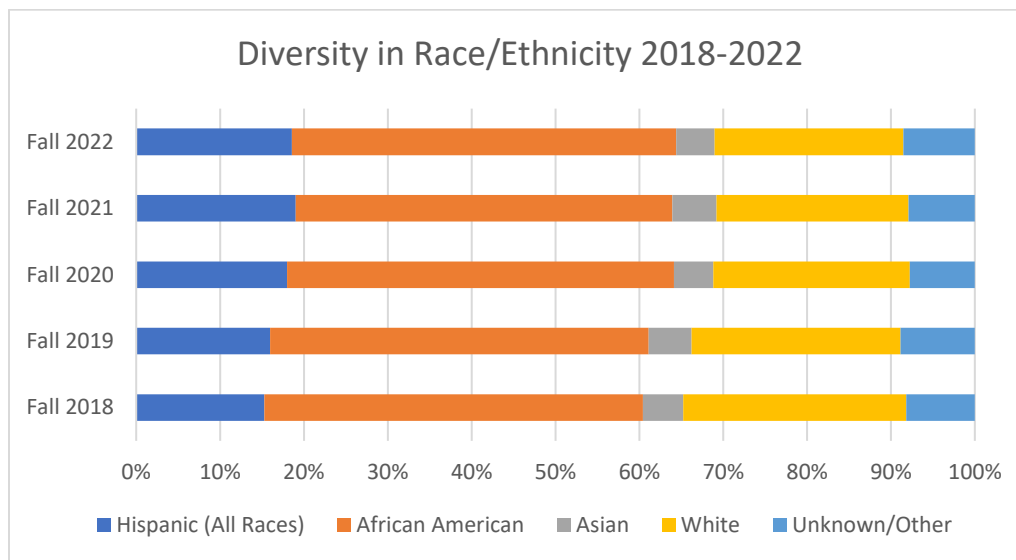
The College has experienced a gradual reduction in personnel count over the five-year period from 2018-2022 as seen in Table 4. The reductions are attributed to employee attrition and the utilization of adjunct faculty. The College, as did many higher education institutions, experienced a decline in enrollment between 2018 and 2022, which resulted in a 37% reduction in the number of individual part-time instructional personnel (i.e., adjunct faculty) utilized. Through its staffing, the College has and continued to maintain a proportionate level of diversity in gender and ethnicity over the five-year period seen in Figures 3 and 4. During the COVID-19 pandemic (specifically, 2019-2021), the College continued its recruitment efforts with 58 position vacancies posted for an average of 46 days with a total response of 3,265 applications from a combination of internal and external applicants ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)).



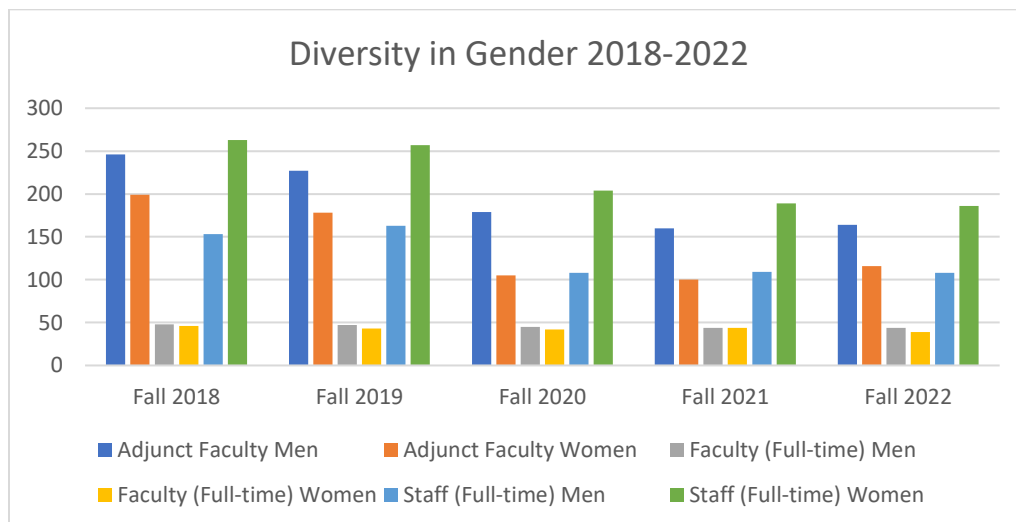
*Table 4 Staffing Counts for Fall 2018 to Fall 2022*

Year	Full-Time Faculty	Adjunct Faculty	Staff
Fall 2018	94	444	416
Fall 2019	90	404	420
Fall 2020	87	283	312
Fall 2021	88	259	298
Fall 2022	83	279	294

*Figure 3 Employee Diversity in Ethnicity Fall 2018 – Fall 2022*



*Figure 4 Employee Diversity in Gender Fall 2018 – Fall 2022*



## 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 various collective bargaining agreements and MOUs as indicated in the Evidence Inventory.

The performance rating scales and timetables vary for each of the collective bargaining units as described in the Performance Evaluation Rating Guides (II; Performance Evaluation - Administrative Evaluation Rating Guide, II; Performance Evaluation - Administrative-fillable Evaluation, II; Performance Evaluation - Non Instructional Evaluation Rating Guide SSA FOP Security, II; Performance Evaluation – Non Instructional fillable Evaluation, II; Performance Evaluation Professional Evaluation Rating Guide, II; Performance Evaluation Professional fillable Evaluation).

The evaluation process is initiated with one-on-one meetings between the employee and their supervisor 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 which 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 and Equity Officer are coordinating ways to improve participation in the process. An employee's compensation increase after their initial appointment is through annual salary increments and periodic longevity payments, as contractually set by the collective bargaining units. Merit awards and incentives are available and can be recommended annually by the collective bargaining units and Area Heads, respectively, for approval by the President.

As demonstrated in the Evidence Inventory, The Employee Handbook and the collective bargaining agreements contain the policies outlining disciplinary procedures for both voluntary and involuntary 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. The steps which are taken to provide an employee the opportunity to improve job performance before separation are formal verbal warnings, written warnings, and subsequent placement on a 60-day, or extended additional 30-day probation status. 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 this time period. The 2020 and 2021 Employee Campus Climate Surveys revealed that employees were able to perform to their full potential (76%), felt highly valued by their supervisor (72%) and coworkers in their departments (77%) and were treated with respect by their colleagues (81%). Employees believed supervisors have a genuine concern for their wellbeing (65%), while providing adequate support to manage a work-life balance (73%). However, on average, only half of the surveyed employees felt they received recognition when earned (53%), that their department had adequate resources to achieve its goals (51%), and that the College was providing sufficient opportunities for training and professional

development (51%). Although these results were reported 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). Policies and procedures are documented and disseminated through various forms of communication and are accessible via the College website. Procedures allow for the anonymous, informal, and formal reporting of complaints and can be placed via phone to the ECC Compliance Reporting Hotline. The Office of Compliance, Equity and Legal Affairs (CELA) is responsible for all grievances and complaints of a legal nature and is involved with any formal grievance and complaint that has the potential to escalate to a legal matter. The Compliance Reporting Hotline was initiated in Fall 2018, 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 CELA who forwards it to the appropriate ECC department for follow-up. The number of hotline complaints vary from semester to semester. From April 1, 2020 until January 2022 there were only four calls (two from students, one from an external individual, and an employee test call). For Spring 2022, there were a total of five employee and no student calls received. For Fall, 2022, there was a total of one student call and no employee logs.

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, II; REG 4-16 Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Act). These policies are disseminated through the Employee Handbook and posted on the website. The policy and procedural process for raising complaints and grievances is outlined in College Regulation 4-5 the Employee Handbook, and the respective collective bargaining agreements. Employees are encouraged to address their complaints directly with their supervisor before proceeding to Human Resources. The ECC Complaint Form is used for the filing of a formal complaint (II; REG 4-5 Employee Complaints and Grievances, II; ECC Complaint Form Revised 08-2022, II; ECC Employee Handbook 03-3-2021, II; REG 4-16 Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Act).

Procedurally, a complaint or grievance must be initiated informally at the department level. If unresolved at this level, employees have the right to advance their concern formally through their respective union representative as per their specific collective bargaining agreement. Rarely has a grievance reached the level of arbitration. Typically, one to three grievances per year may rise

to the level of the President and Board of Trustees, and a case or two escalate into a lawsuit against the College. At the time of the submission of this report there were five open grievances. Human Resources receives complaints from staff and faculty across all employee classifications and position titles on a variety of concerns. Reasons for the complaints vary, with filings for inappropriate behavior, equal pay, overtime pay, gender identity, counter for disciplinary actions, and denied accommodation requests. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the College experienced a rise in complaints centered on employees' concerns with the mandate to return to work on campus and the denial of specific accommodation requests to continue working remotely. While most complaints are resolved after one or two discussions with the employee, and further investigation and discussion with the department and other parties, as needed, there are a few which have escalated to a formal grievance.

## **Student Grievances and Appeals**

Students' academic related complaints (e.g., course assignment, instruction, grades) are addressed by Academic Affairs through the respective division chairpersons as set out in the 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.

ECC has a fair and respectful academic grade appeal process. The academic divisions have Grade Appeal Forms (II; Grade Appeal 2021) for students to complete which, with supporting documentation, are then submitted to their respective Divisional Grade Appeal Committee. 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 to the College 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 is in development. Also, as part of the Voluntary Compliance Plan for the Methods of Administration process through the New Jersey Department of Education, the Compliance, Equity and Legal Affairs Office has provided training on accommodations for students with disabilities.

## **Title IX**

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 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

Handbook 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 Title IX cases rising to the level of student expulsion or employee termination. A decision not to rehire was the outcome reached in some cases involving temporary, part-time, and adjunct faculty employees. At the time of the writing of this report, there were three open cases.

The College continues to streamline employee-related matters by reviewing and updating, as needed, its internal complaint procedures. The Office of Compliance, Equity and Legal Affairs is working on strengthening and training the 504 and Title IX Coordinators and Team in addition to other employee and student support services, programs, and areas. In 2022, a regular schedule of on-going training and periodic team meetings on Title IX were implemented. For 2023, additional training and an updated policy and procedural manual will be created for Title IX along with revision of the process and procedures of accommodations for students with disabilities. A major challenge for the College is the manual tracking of complaints. In 2022, a tracking system to log employee complaints was implemented. In 2023, the Office of Compliance, Equity and Legal Affairs will conduct a review and feasibility study of alternative methods and systems for the tracking of employee and student complaints, grievances, and legal cases throughout the College.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

A number of measures are undertaken by the College to ensure students, employees, and the Board of Trustees 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, regulations, and codes, which are 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 the State of New Jersey's Code of Ethics, the College has achieved 100% 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). 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 may exercise their rights through the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) to verify whether a 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, the President, and the Board of Trustees). Trustees will recuse themselves when their votes could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Their recusals are recorded in the minutes of the public sessions as required by College Regulation 3-5 (II; REG-3-5 Purchasing Approved).

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 received three applications in 2022.

## 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) where messages are communicated and disseminated to students and the College community. These messages include upcoming activities, text messaging alerts, virtual and on-campus Town Hall meetings, electronic posters, calendars, and other important College-related information. Externally, there are outreach efforts utilizing local, city, county, and state entities; public radio and TV stations [e.g., WBGO, WBLS, NJ News12]; print publications such as newspapers, *Positive Community* magazine, and *Local Talk* (periodical), and; 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. All relevant external and internal printed and digital materials must obtain approval from the College's Office of Institutional Advancement. The College Catalog is particularly scrutinized so that all information is accurate and up-to-date.

## 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 annually assesses the tuition and fees structure. The Office of Student Affairs meets with the Student Government Association to discuss proposed tuition increases and address any concerns by the student body's representation. 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 provides information about resources, advisement, on and off campus Open House events, and hands-on application assistance for the dissemination of information about financial opportunities and requirements.

The Office of 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 and virtual) assistance with the completion of the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) applications. The Financial Aid Officers conduct FAFSA workshops, attend Open House and other types of information sessions, and hold weekly virtual sessions (by appointment or “walk-in”) for prospective, new, and continuing students.

ECC’s website provides information on tuition and fee costs, the contact information for Financial Aid personnel, and the Net Price Calculator. 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. Financial Literacy programs and workshops are conducted throughout the year by the Office of Financial Aid.

### **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. New Jersey student aid programs include (but are not limited to) the Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG), NJ STARS, and the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG), this last one being a “last dollar” program for students with a federal Adjusted Gross Annual 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, mailings, brochures, meetings, and the College website (II; Tuition Free College).

### **COMPLIANCE WITH ALL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA) maintains various annual calendars pertaining to institutional reporting responsibilities and external reporting requirements, including the annual IPEDS federal reporting calendar and the New Jersey annual SURE reporting calendar. IEPA has a track record of submitting 100% 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 which fall within the offices’ areas of operation. The respective departments and offices maintain internal calendars and systems pertaining to institutional reporting responsibilities and external reporting requirements.



With recent changes in administration and personnel in various offices throughout the College, ECC 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 personnel evaluations and compliance training.

In response, Essex County College has made an intentional effort to review and update its Board Policies, College Regulations, and prepare and codify departmental procedures to ensure that it serves its mission with integrity and operates in an ethical manner. Additionally, the institution has done an internal risk analysis to better understand its vulnerabilities and create an action plan on how the College can improve its efforts. This has resulted in a solution-oriented, holistic approach whereby College stakeholders are informed of the College's governance structure, policies, and regulations. Moreover, the College continues to streamline employee-related matters by reviewing and updating, as needed, its internal complaint procedures and has implemented a tracking system to log complaints.

All of these efforts are ongoing at the College and have positively impacted ECC's abilities to operate ethically and with integrity. Moreover, they serve to reduce unnecessary risk and exposure to the College. Lastly, these efforts seek to create a "well-oiled" institution, which in turn permits College stakeholders to focus on the institution's primary mission of serving students.

## STRENGTHS

- The College makes an intentional effort to review and update its Board Policies, and College Regulations, and codify departmental procedures
- The College has implemented a tracking system in which to monitor complaints and grievances
- The climate of respect at Essex County College is closely monitored through annual Campus Climate Surveys administered to both students and employees

## CHALLENGES

- The College sees low response and completion rates from students, faculty, and staff in regards to personnel evaluations and compliance training
- In an environment of continually-updated policies and regulations, ongoing communication efforts to keep the College community informed requires time commitment, resources, and coordinated efforts

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop strategies to encourage increased completion for compliance and human resource training efforts (amongst students, faculty, and staff)
- Continue to develop the College's succession planning and DEI efforts and initiatives as per the two aforementioned annual strategic activities added to *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1



## 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 program, 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 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 7 Associate in Arts (AA), 17 Associate in Applied Science (AAS), 21 Associate in Science (A.S), and 22 certificate programs. Both Certificates of Achievement (less than 30 credits) and Academic Certificates (30 or more credits) are offered with most being stackable and applicable to AA and AS degree programs, which are specifically designed to prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Under New Jersey's Lampitt Law, graduates from AA and AS programs may be eligible to transfer a maximum of 66 credits to four-year institutions in the State (III; Comprehensive State-Wide Transfer Agreement). Essex also maintains and continues to pursue program-to-program articulation agreements with local colleges and universities.

The AAS 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 academic divisions and the departments of Community and Continuing Education and Workforce Development.

The College's recognition of the changing marketplace is evidenced through local needs assessment meetings and contracting with Terra Firma, LLC, for environmental/labor market scanning (III; Terra Firma Report). Such environmental scans 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, including non-credit training programs are focused on serving the local community, including the high school initiative that provides opportunities for high school students to take advantage of dual enrollment in academic degree programs. Several academic programs are designed for students

who desire a broad academic foundation to serve the community, including, but not limited to, Human and Social Services, Education, and New Media Technology.

The College, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, had already built three fully asynchronous/online programs along with additional course offerings within the modality which aligned with other majors in an attempt to expand. Due to the pandemic forcing the cancellation of most face-to-face courses, the College introduced the synchronous/virtual modality to deliver instruction remotely. As COVID-19 restrictions eased, ECC has continued to reinforce, build upon, and deliver multiple modalities (in-person, synchronous/virtual, asynchronous/online, and hybrid) in order to continue serving its constituencies in furtherance of its Mission, Vision, and Values.

The College has routinely examined the effects of learning modality on student performance prior-to, during, and post-pandemic using both descriptive and inferential statistics. When examining longitudinal trends, the data initially appears to show a wide performance gap with in-person students outperforming students taking virtual and online courses. Upon further examination, the College found that this gap was highly skewed due to the fact that the only students permitted to take in-person courses during the pandemic years (as per waivers granted by the state), were students majoring in Nursing and Allied Health programs. These programs consist of ECC's most academically prepared students and are the only programs utilizing a selective admissions process. Due to these state waivers, students taking face-to-face courses during the pandemic years are not a representative sample of ECC's student body and thus created the illusion of modality-based learning gaps during those years.

While students taking face-to-face courses still perform at slightly higher levels than all other modalities, the return to face-to-face learning across all majors has resulted in parity in student performance across all learning modalities. In Fall 2022, the College saw only a 3.5% range in course pass rates and only a 0.16 range in final grades (using a 4.0 scale) across all modalities. While analyses indicate that students are performing at relatively similar levels across the various learning modalities, the College continues to be proactive in improving student success for all. Initiatives supporting student outcomes across all modalities include increased funding for tutors and teacher advisors, opening an Office of Student Care Services discussed further in Standard IV, as well as the pursuit of grants that address pandemic-induced mental health issues in the classroom.

A Remote Learning Questionnaire was administered to students and faculty during the pandemic to ensure that the quality of learning was being upheld in a remote environment (III; Fall 2020 Remote Learning Questionnaire Results). This information appears later in this chapter under the section Effectiveness and Evaluation of Faculty.

## RETENTION AND GRADUATION RATES

Essex County College's one-year retention rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students (as per the Federal Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) definitions) saw a sizable increase between the fall 2020 and fall 2021 cohorts (III; IPEDS Graduation Rates 2021-22). As can be seen in Table 5 below, this retention rate increased by 9.6% over the prior year

and was sustained with a minor 0.2% decline the following year, indicating the increase was not an anomaly.

The three-year graduation rate of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students as per IPEDS definitions, has increased for the past three consecutive academic years ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)). As can be seen in Table 6 below, the graduation rate has increased by 3.7% in fall 2021 and another 2.1% in fall 2022, yielding a 5.8% increase over the last three academic years.

*Table 5 One-Year Retention Rates Over the Past Four Years*

Year Cohort Entered*	Retained in:	Retention Rate	Year-over-Year Change
Fall 2018	Fall 2019	52.5%	+0.9%
Fall 2019	Fall 2020	51.4%	-1.1%
Fall 2020	Fall 2021	61.0%	+9.6%
Fall 2021	Fall 2022	60.8%	-0.2%

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

*Table 6 Three-Year Graduation Rate Over the Past Four Years*

Year Cohort Entered*	Graduated before:	Graduation Rate	Year-over-Year Change
Fall 2016	Fall 2019	10.7%	-1.7%
Fall 2017	Fall 2020	11.1%	+0.4%
Fall 2018	Fall 2021	14.8%	+3.7%
Fall 2019	Fall 2022	16.9%	+2.1%

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

A 9.6% increase in the one-year retention rate from fall 2020 to 2021 in Table 5 can be explained by examining the various initiatives undertaken by the College:

- The overhaul of the placement testing model embraced a shift from the exclusive use of ACCUPLACER to a multiple measures approach whereby initial placement is determined by a selection of grades from high school algebra, English, and AP courses, as well as from SAT, GED, CLEP, PSAT, TASC, TOEFL, IELTS, or PTE scores
- The change to the developmental education course sequencing enabled transitioning from a pre-requisite model to a co-requisite model. These changes are aligned with *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan Versions 2.0 and 2.1, Goal III, Obj. A, iv. to continue “to evaluate the efficacy of the newly designed accelerated developmental English and Mathematics courses”
- Students who would have otherwise been placed into one of the three levels of developmental-level ENG (and their corresponding Tutorials) took the ENG 099/101 co-requisite
- Non-STEM majors who would have otherwise been placed into MTH 092/092T (or arrived there by passing MTH 086/086T) had the option of taking either MTH 091S/101

or MTH 093S/103. It was determined that STEM majors, based on the varying curricula (which is reliant on mathematics), would benefit more from the prerequisite model

- Several changes and enhancements in advising services have played a role in providing students with improved services for registration and financial aid. In connection with the retention initiative, Mentor/Advisors are now present in every academic division
- The areas of Online Learning, the Library, and Information Commons were consolidated to realize a synergy among academic resources and support services
- The e-catalog, DegreeWorks, and enhanced scheduling systems
- 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 specific lengths, typically 40 class hours for a three-credit course, spread out over 15 weeks (III; Degrees and Programs). All credit courses offered conform to the federal definition of a credit hour as established by the U.S. Department of Education. Courses may also be taken in accelerated semesters of 12 weeks, 10 weeks, 7 weeks, 5 weeks or in 10 days in the case of Winter Intersession. Based on consultations between the faculty and academic division chairs, the latter send the recommended schedules to the Chief Academic Officer for final approval and rollout.

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%) transfer to a four-year institution within one year of receiving their degree from Essex County College. Querying this database also revealed that over the past five years, among ECC graduates who transferred to a four-year institution within a year of graduating, 44.0% completed their undergraduate degrees within 3 years.

There are some programs with licensing and testing requirements which provide additional objective evidence on the effectiveness of those programs. Examples include a 90% NCLEX pass rate in the Nursing RN program, a 96% licensure pass rate in the Physical Therapy Assistant program, a 100% licensure pass rate in Radiography Technology, and a 78.3% pass rate in the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) programs in 2022.

### Degree Conferrals

The total number of awards including AA, AAS, AS, and Certificates for all divisions of the College over the past three years are depicted in Table 7 below.

*Table 7 Number of Awards (AA, AAS, AS, Certificates, etc.)*

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

## FACULTY ROLE IN THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF CURRICULUM

### Faculty Qualifications

The faculty (which includes both full-time members and part-time adjuncts) play a vital role across the College. This involves curriculum design and revision, instruction, committee work, and governance. All new faculty hires must meet the standards set by the New Jersey Administrative Code (III; NJ Administrative Code 9A1) concerning educational qualifications. Both full-time and part-time faculty must hold a master's degree (or equivalent) at minimum in order to teach college-level courses.

### Sufficiency of Faculty

Over the past five fall semesters, the Student-to-Faculty Ratio (as per IPEDS definition and shown in Table 8) shows a steady hold, indicating that ECC has been able to maintain an efficient instructional environment.

*Table 8 Number of Student-to-Faculty Ratio*

Semester	Student-to-Faculty Ratio
Fall 2018	22:1
Fall 2019	23:1
Fall 2020	21:1
Fall 2021	21:1
Fall 2022	23:1

### Full-Time Faculty

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 were posted in anticipation of September 2022 appointments. Of those, twelve offers of employment were made and nine accepted their appointment.

Table 9 indicates the number of full-time faculty from all academic divisions. However, since the enrollment of students across all divisions from fall 2018 to fall 2022 declined from 7,514 to



6,466 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.

*Table 9 Full-time Faculty by Division and % from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022*

	Fall 2018		Fall 2019		Fall 2020		Fall 2021		Fall 2022	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Biology, Chemistry, and Physics	13	13.8	14	15.6	16	18.4	16	18.2	15	18.1
Business	8	8.5	8	8.9	6	6.9	6	6.8	6	7.2
Humanities and Bilingual Studies	22	23.4	22	24.4	21	24.1	19	21.6	15	18.1
Math, Engineering Technologies, and Computer Sciences	26	27.7	24	26.7	22	25.3	24	27.3	24	28.9
Nursing and Health Sciences	14	14.9	12	13.3	13	14.9	14	15.9	14	16.9
Social Sciences	11	11.7	10	11.1	9	10.3	9	10.2	9	10.8
Total	94	100	90	100	87	100	88	100	83	100

## Adjunct Faculty

While the adjunct faculty are equally qualified in their fields, their availability for interaction with students and participation in curricular and extracurricular activities is limited by the nature of their collective bargaining agreement. An adjunct faculty member is defined as any instructor who is not full-time faculty. If a full-time employee other than a full-time faculty member (e.g., chairperson, counselor, librarian, etc.) is teaching a course then they are considered adjunct faculty.

*Table 10 Adjunct Faculty by Division from Fall 2018 to Fall 2022*

	Fall 2018		Fall 2019		Fall 2020		Fall 2021		Fall 2022	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Biology, Chemistry, and Physics	63	15.6	59	15.8	58	19.7	48	17.4	51	18.3
Business	56	13.8	42	11.2	28	9.5	39	14.1	45	16.1
Humanities and Bilingual Studies	121	29.9	109	29.1	76	25.8	79	28.6	82	29.4
Math, Engineering Technologies, and Computer Sciences	76	18.8	78	20.9	69	23.4	52	18.8	42	15.1
Nursing and Health Sciences	15	3.7	19	5.1	13	4.4	12	4.3	15	5.4
Social Sciences	74	18.3	67	17.9	51	17.3	46	16.7	44	15.8
Total	405	100	374	100	295	100	276	100	279	100

*Table 11 Course Sections Taught by Full-time Versus Part-time Faculty*

Year	Taught by Full-time faculty	Taught by Part-time faculty	Taught by Others*
Fall 2018	33.7%	66.3%	0.0%
Fall 2019	32.6%	63.1%	4.3%
Fall 2020	34.5%	61.2%	4.3%
Fall 2021	35.8%	61.1%	3.2%
Fall 2022	37.6%	59.4%	3.0%

\* Others includes full-time administrators and/or staff.

The College offers all adjunct instructors' free access to training opportunities to help make them better teachers and engage them in the life of the institution. The administration remains committed to improving the full-time to part-time instructor ratio to enhance the effectiveness of faculty governance and broader student engagement.

### **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. These needs assessments help administration and faculty identify areas where targeted growth can lead to increased opportunities for access and helps faculty identify changes that are necessary to keep the curriculum current and effective.

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 labor market data informing decisions on 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 stemming from the state mandated Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) is initiated by the faculty at the divisional level through submission of proposals, such as for a new course, change in course, new program or a change in program. Each division has a Curriculum Committee that is responsible for evaluating the efficacy of the proposal, then upon divisional approval (which includes the chairperson's signature), the 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 final approval. Should the proposal fail at any point in the process, it is returned to the originating division for deficiencies to be addressed. Should all approvals be secured, all student information systems and the College catalog are updated, and departments such as the Registrar and Financial Aid are notified of changes. The process is fully described in the Curriculum Approval Procedures Manual (III; Curriculum Approval Procedures Manual).

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 course instruction and materials is accomplished through multiple modalities: in-person, synchronous/virtual, asynchronous/online, and hybrid. Zoom is used to deliver instruction for all synchronous/virtual course sections, while utilizing the Moodle Learning Management System for course materials delivery. Moodle is used for asynchronous/online instruction and delivery of course materials. Faculty teaching in-person course sections are heavily encouraged to utilize Moodle to supplement instruction. The hybrid modality makes use of both the traditional classroom setting, Zoom, and Moodle.

## EFFECTIVENESS AND EVALUATION OF FACULTY

### Evaluation of the Transition to Remote Learning

Essex County College's faculty demonstrated an incredible amount of effectiveness, flexibility, and adaptability in March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Forced by the health crisis, and guided by State and Federal guidelines, the College transitioned to nearly 100% remote learning in just a single week. To ensure that the high quality of instruction did not suffer, a Remote Learning Questionnaire was administered to students during this time period.

The College administered three questionnaires: one at the midpoint and end of spring 2020, and one in fall 2020. The questionnaire allowed students to rate and describe their experience with the remote delivery for each of their courses. The questionnaire asked students to rate the quality of five aspects of said 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 results, shown in Table 12 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 from spring 2020 to fall 2020. (III; Fall 2020 Remote Learning Questionnaire Results).

*Table 12 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

## Systematic Evaluation of Faculty

### *Supervisory Evaluations*

As per the collective bargaining agreement of the Essex County College Faculty Association, tenured faculty members are formally evaluated by their supervisor (or designee) every three years (or sooner if applying for a promotion in academic rank). Non-tenure track and tenure track faculty members are formally evaluated by their supervisor (or designee) every year.

As per the collective bargaining agreement of Essex County College's Adjunct Association, unit members can be expected to be formally evaluated every semester by their supervisor (or designee).

### *Student Evaluations of Faculty*

Faculty members (both full-time and part-time) are also evaluated by their students. As per the collective bargaining agreements, tenured faculty are evaluated at least once annually, and non-tenured faculty (including part-time adjuncts) are evaluated at least twice every academic year.

When the College moved to remote learning in 2020-2021 and because of COVID-19 restrictions, the College adopted the online software package SmartEvals so students could more easily evaluate faculty, regardless of modality. This model has proven efficient and continues to be used, thus allowing all faculty members the chance to be evaluated each semester, helping them improve and grow as educators based on student feedback.

In the overall student evaluation of faculty, the evaluation scale ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent. Table 13 below illustrates that faculty are rated highly by students in all categories.

*Table 13 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

The results of student evaluations are shared with the faculty members through email by the Department of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment. The evaluations are used to help determine tenure and promotions 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, and non-renewal of adjunct faculty appointments are possible actions which could be taken by administrators but are reserved for extreme cases where remediation has not been effective.

Generally, the evaluation of faculty is used to improve instruction and positively impact the student learning experience. To this end, evaluations take into consideration the faculty member's

performance for their entire length of service at the College and reference is made to previous evaluations and the growth exhibited by the faculty member.

### **Professional Development**

All faculty are encouraged to engage in professional development by participating in conferences, workshops, and webinars, both internally and externally. The Faculty Development Committee (FDC), one of the seven college-wide faculty governance committees, develops varying types of programs and workshops to help faculty (both full-time and part-time) evolve both as professionals and instructors. The College, as per the collective bargaining agreement of the Essex County College Faculty Association, provides tuition reimbursement for full-timers seeking to earn additional credits, certificates, degrees, etc.

### **COMMUNITY, CONTINUING EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The Area of Community, Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CCE&WD) 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. These various programs include basic skills instruction, ESL instruction, job readiness instruction and placement, customized short-term training, vocational training courses, courses geared towards youth, and cultural and recreational activities. The College is currently in the process of restructuring this area to include the West Essex Campus.

The Community, Continuing Education and Workforce Development area has partnered with ED2GO to provide highly interactive non-credit courses in the online environment. ED2GO provides a full-featured, robust learning management system for non-credit courses that is separate from the College's Moodle LMS currently used exclusively for credit course offerings. All courses are led by expert instructors and are project-oriented - including lessons, quizzes, assignments, discussion areas, and supplementary links, similar to the Moodle environment for credit bearing courses. In addition to Essex' online non-credit offerings, students may also select from ED2GO's library of non-credit bearing courses at a reduced rate for which the College receives nominal revenue. The College reviewed the benefits of using ED2GO and contracted services beginning in 2010 (III; Education to Go). Several colleges in the region offer some non-credit continuing education titles from the ED2GO online catalog.

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. Two of the programs which highlight the broad spectrum and mission of CCE&WD are Training, Inc., and Pre-College Readiness and Early College/Dual Enrollment.

Training, Inc., offers a learning environment that enables trainees to develop their abilities and enrich their personal and professional lives. 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.

ECC's Pre-College Readiness and Early College/Dual Enrollment program works with in-county 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. Between June 2021 and 2022, 155 students graduated with a high school diploma and an AA in Liberal Arts.

Tables 14 and 15 show the total number of registrations, headcount, and total clock hours for Community, Continuing Education and Workforce Development over the past three fiscal years ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)). The decrease in non-credit enrollment was a direct result of the pandemic as well as COVID-era government regulations that negatively impacted enrollment in workforce development training for residents referred by the County or City.

*Table 14 Non-Credit Open Enrollment Registrations, Headcount, and Total Clock Hours*

Open Enrollment	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Number of registrations	8,173	2,321	3,435
Unduplicated headcount	5,509	1,484	1,912
Total clock hours	233,655	102,321	137,756

*Table 15 Non-Credit Customized Training Registrations, Headcount, and Total Clock Hours*

Customized Training	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Number of registrations	993	252	382
Unduplicated headcount	664	134	280
Total clock hours	9,463	1,920	3,132

## AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION CONCERNING COLLEGE PROGRAMS IN OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

The programs of the College are clearly described in its official publications. 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” (III; Mission Vision and Values). The latest version of the Strategic Plan 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 ([STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1](#)).

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-Catalog which went live early in 2021. All degrees and certificate programs are listed in detail with course descriptions in the e-Catalog ([ECC 2022-2023 Catalog](#)). Under Academic Affairs, a committee has been convened to maintain the integrity of the process used to update the e-Catalog on a regular basis. The committee consists of faculty members, chairpersons, a

counselor/advisor, and a full-time scribe. Current and prospective students can utilize the College's e-Catalog to learn about program offerings.

## GENERAL EDUCATION

### **Design and Delivery of the College's 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 responsible for mapping course requirements for all their programs. 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.

Essex County College's General Education course offerings have been designed and implemented in alignment with those of the New Jersey Council of Community Colleges (NJCCC) (III; NJCCC General Education Framework). Since the College's opening, there have always been general education courses, which have seen revision over the course of time both at the statewide level (through NJCCC's oversight) as well as at the institutional level (spearheaded by the faculty). General education goals and objectives follow 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 are fully transferable to state public four-year colleges and universities. There are specific minimum NJCCC General Education credit requirements for AA, AS, AAS degrees and Academic Certificates. New Jersey's general education goals address nine foundation categories, and broad course criteria for each category were adopted by all two-year colleges in the state.

In Fall 2019, New Jersey moved to a 60-credit course 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. 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 and incorporated into the recently launched DegreeWorks system used for advisement.

### **The Breadth of the General Education Offerings**

Each division has a Curriculum Committee that is responsible for establishing programs and course requirements that fulfill the eight general education requirements established by NJCCC (III; NJ General Education Foundation 2022). These eight 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.

The following are just a small sampling of the courses currently offered under these eight General Education Categories are as follows:



- Written & Oral Communication: ENG 101 (College Composition I), ENG-102 (College Composition II)
- Quantitative Knowledge and Skills: MTH 101 (Statistics and Probability I), MTH 103 (Fundamental Concepts of Modern Math I)
- Scientific Knowledge and Reasoning: BIO 101 (College Biology I), GEO 101 (Rocks, Minerals, and Fossils)
- Technological Competency: CIS 131 (Micro Computers in Business)
- Society and Human Behavior: POL 104 (American Government), PSY 101 (General Psychology I)
- Humanistic Perspective: ART 101 (Art History I), CIN 101 (Introduction to the Art of Film), ENG 222 (American Literature II)
- Historical Perspective: HST 101 (World Civilization I), HST 112 (United States History II)
- Global and Cultural Awareness: ART 200 (Art of the African American), ENG 264 (Contemporary Women's Literature)

### **ECC Core Competencies**

The following core competencies are our institutional learning goals and are, to the greatest extent possible, 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 the operationalization of the College's Mission, Vision, and Values. A detailed discussion on the assessment process for ECC Core Competencies can be found in Standard V (III; ECC Core Competencies and General Education Goals).

*Table 16 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"> <li>1. Students will be able to read, write, illustrate, and listen actively, critically, and reflectively and respond logically, informatively, persuasively, and creatively.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>3. Students will be able to understand, analyze, and assess nonverbal, cultural, and gender communication in small group and public communication settings.</li> </ol>
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"> <li>1. Students will be able to distinguish among opinions, facts, and inferences identifying and critiquing underlying and implicit assumptions.</li> <li>2. Students will be able to thoughtfully evaluate diverse perspectives and alternate points of view by asking informed questions and making informed judgments.</li> <li>3. Students will be able to solve problems by applying discipline-appropriate methods and standards.</li> <li>4. Students will be able to integrate their knowledge, take an ethical position on issues or situations, and defend their stance with logical arguments.</li> </ol>

Category	Gen. Ed. Learning Goal	Institutional Learning Goals
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"> <li>1. Students will be able to recognize the value of using the information to strengthen arguments and articulate research project questions.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> </ol>
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"> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>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.</li> </ol>

## General Education Goals

Essex County College has eight general education goals with 35 general education objectives nested within. A detailed discussion on ECC's assessment process for general education can be found in Standard V.

*Table 17 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

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Description</b>
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.

## 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 9.4% increase in the one-year retention rate over the past two academic years. 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 pandemic as evidenced by the results of the Remote Learning Questionnaire administered to students throughout the period of fully remote learning. Additionally, through CCE&WD, the College reaches all types of students in the community from children to seniors and provides training opportunities for the local economy and labor force. The College has responded well to changing State requirements and has maintained a general education curriculum that not only satisfies state mandates, but also prepares our students for success in the workplace and their future academic endeavors.

## STRENGTHS

- The College has shown a commitment to faculty professional development as evidenced by the provision of the ACUE Effective Teaching Practices training curriculum
- The College carefully monitored the quality of learning during the transition to fully remote learning due to the pandemic. These evaluations revealed that ECC was able to maintain a high quality of learning during this difficult time
- New initiatives such as the redesign of the developmental education sequences have led to improved student outcomes yielding a 9.4% increase in one-year retention rates over the past two academic years and a 5.8% increase in three-year graduation rates over the same time

## CHALLENGES

- Replenish retiring faculty amid fiscal challenges. Progress is currently being made as over 16 new tenure-track faculty members across the disciplines have been appointed. However, it remains a challenge as additional positions remain vacant.

- The College will need to continue to conduct frequent environmental scans to ensure that program offerings remain aligned with the needs of students in a rapidly evolving labor market and local economy

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The College will work to increase and advertise training opportunities to faculty through the Faculty Development Committee and increase the amount of in-house programming offered at the Center for Learning and Teaching Excellence
- Continue to establish non-credit to credit pathways by aligning curricula to develop stackable credentials and multiple entry and exit opportunities
- Conduct further research to better understand the relationship between course modality and student pass rates



## 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.*

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). Following this Regulation, which is derived from the College's Mission, Vision, and Values results in students who all need support services to varying degrees and some of whom need intense guidance (IV; Mission Vision and Values).

### ONBOARDING (RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS)

Onboarding services at Essex County College are 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..." (IV; Mission Vision and Values). Applicants are processed as efficiently as possible in order to maintain our open-door policy, providing guaranteed admission to ECC, though some programs, particularly those offered by Nursing and Health Sciences, have additional requirements. In addition, onboarding services are also aligned with the *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 goals and objectives, and annual activities.

#### **Recruitment**

The goal of ECC's recruitment efforts is to educate the community on the high-quality educational programs and services offered in an ethical manner by ensuring accuracy and transparency in order to encourage prospective students to enroll. Recruitment efforts consist of community outreach activities to attract traditional and non-traditional students. Outreach activities for traditional students might include recruitment events with local high schools, meetings with guidance counselors, campus tours, and presentations at the county's Superintendents Roundtable meetings. For non-traditional students, the College hosts open-house events, recruiters and representatives attend local community events (e.g. street fairs and concerts), and perform outreach to community-based and faith-based organizations. Additional recruitment efforts are handled by the Office of Institutional Advancement, the area responsible for creating multimedia marketing plans and campaigns. All are designed to attract a diverse student population to the College.

The results of the October 24, 2022, Weekly Registration and Admission Report (prepared by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment) show there was a 29% increase in applications between fall 2021 and fall 2022. Additionally, according to a New Student Survey, conducted in fall 2022, students found high school counselors (56%), college fairs

(58%), social media (52%), and postal mail (58%) to be the most influential factors in their decision to enroll at Essex County College (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

## ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

The Office of Enrollment Management oversees four departments: the Welcome Center, the Testing Center, Financial Aid, and Enrollment Services. Combined, these departments manage the policies and procedures necessary to accept and process new applications, determine initial placement, evaluate and accept transfer credits (when applicable), help with the preparation and completion of financial aid applications, and provide first-semester academic advisement in order to enroll students into the College.

### Welcome Center

In accordance with Strategic Goal II, Objective C, the College established the Welcome Center in August 2020 ([\*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1\*](#)). It was designed to provide students with a one-stop admission experience, following a national trends model dedicated to best practices. Services are provided to new (including first-time and transfer), readmitted, and returning students.

The Welcome Center is staffed by cross-trained student support assistants who provide a variety of services, including, but not limited to, assisting with the completion of both online and paper applications (which are then processed by Enrollment Services, discussed below under the heading of the same name), arranging testing appointments, conducting multiple measures assessment (when applicable, as discussed below under the Testing Center heading), advisement, course registration services, and tutorials on how to log into the MyECC Portal, and the Moodle Learning Management System.

The College's most recent Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey, administered in Fall 2022 and completed by 802 students, revealed that 87.5% of enrolled students were aware of the Welcome Center and its services and 51% utilized its services. Of those students who took advantage of the Center's services, 89.0% reported that they were either very satisfied (51.4%) or satisfied (37.6%) with their experience at the Center (IV; Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey 2022).

### Testing Center

After new students are admitted, their initial placement needs to be determined. An appointment is made, either independently or via help by College staff (such as those working in the Welcome Center), with the Testing Center (IV; Testing).

There are several ways a student's initial placement can be decided upon:

- Multiple measures (for students who graduated from high school within the last three years) (IV; MAM Guidelines for Web)
  - This is an approach that relies on more than one indicator to measure a student's academic strengths and weaknesses. Such information can come from their high

school transcript and scores from their GED (General Educational Development), TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion), or HiSET (High School Equivalency Test) exams

- ACCUPLACER (for students who graduated from high school three or more years ago)
  - This is a series of tests that evaluate a student's skills in reading, writing, and math (IV; Testing)
- Standardized Testing Scores (for any student with non-expired scores)
  - These include, among others, SAT and ACT exams

Based upon the above indicators, a student can be placed into English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, developmental-level education courses, or college-level courses (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

## **Financial Aid**

Financial Aid staff play an important role in informing students of the availability of financial resources (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022). Once a student identifies Essex County College on their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) application, the Financial Aid staff send emails, letters, and text messages to update them of their financial award or request 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. During all recruitment events, part of the presentation is devoted to informing participants about the availability of funds and the financial aid preparation process. Additionally, a financial aid presentation is given during all New Student Orientations (NSO) (IV; Financial Aid Homepage).

Information (both in English and Spanish) as well as video resources are available via the Financial Aid webpage on the College's website in order to guide prospective and returning students on completing the FAFSA. There is also information on scholarships available for new and returning students as well as information on the New Jersey Community College Opportunity Grant program, a last dollar grant that will pay the costs of tuition and approved educational fees not already covered by other available grant funds, helping eligible students attend ECC tuition free. Information on the states' Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) application process as well as guidelines for The New Jersey Alternate Financial Aid application for NJ Dreamers (students who are not U.S citizens), to help students cover the cost of tuition. Lastly, a net price calculator to help students determine the cost of attendance and all other forms and documents needed for students to complete the financial aid process are available to download, complete, and submit electronically through Mapping Xpress. In Academic Year 2021-22, approximately 69% of students received financial aid in the form of federal and state funding.

## **Enrollment Services**

Enrollment Services is the processing center for college admission and academic support services (such as determining the academic calendar) (IV; Student Affairs Operational Report 2022). Staff roles include providing services such as transcript evaluations, international student



admission, registration, add/drop, class withdrawal, grades posting, transcripts issuance, county chargebacks issuance, enrollment and degree verification, veterans' certifications, student record changes, degree audits, graduation certification, commencement information, and diploma issuance.

The staff in Enrollment Services also work with the academic divisions to help evaluate transfer credits for acceptance. Such transfer credits (which could be from other institutions or exams such CLEP) may exclude a new student from having to take the ACCUPLACER exams or be subject to a multiple measures evaluation. Additionally, AP courses taken in high school are evaluated in order to determine transferability.

The Admissions webpage via the College's website contains instructions and forms to assist prospective students with the online and virtual application processes. The Enrollment Services webpage contains information and forms to assist current students with accessing Web Services and the department's services (IV; Admissions Homepage, IV; Enrollment Services Homepage).

The processing of applications (both print, online, and imported from the Naviance common app) is accomplished through our Web Services portal. Once the applications have been submitted, students receive an email message informing them of the next steps to be taken along with information regarding financial aid. Applicants with incomplete applications receive a message informing them that additional information is required prior to admission to the College. The applicant is contacted by email, telephone, or postal mail to discuss the steps needed to complete the process. Access to ECC Web Services is granted to the student within 24 to 48 hours and a College email address (along with a student identification number) is generated or updated (for readmitted students). A welcome letter is sent to the student's personal email address with further instructions on how to obtain ECC credentials (which will get them set up with the MyECC Portal and Moodle) is sent to the student within five business days.

To further the College's mission to advance its intake process, a Banner Customer Relations Management platform called Recruit is in implementation. This will further streamline the admission processes and will help to improve the prospective student onboarding experience.

### **Advisement and Registration (New, Readmitted, and Continuing Students)**

New students receive academic advising and registration assistance via the Welcome Center staff and the New Student Advisement staff. Readmitted and returning students receive this assistance in their respective academic divisions, which could include one-on-one meetings with the mentor/advisors, chairpersons, faculty, and coordinators. ECC strives to create a culture of self-efficacy where students are able to help themselves along in their studies by learning to conduct their own degree evaluations (via Web Services) and to read a curriculum guide. The support structures mentioned above continue to be there for these self-directed students.

To encourage continuing and returning students to register, the College employs several tactics. There are the Progress Retention Initiative and the Early Registration Week, which involve faculty helping make students aware of the fact that they should be making their schedules for the upcoming semester(s). In addition, the College generates posters, emails, and specialized website banners to educate students on the advisement and registration processes.

Weekly Registration and Admission Reports show an increase in new student enrollment from 1,850 students (Fall 2021) to 2,363 (Fall 2022), an increase of 22%. And while the College saw a modest 0.2% decline in the one-year retention rate in Fall 2022, ECC still saw a 9.4% total increase in one-year retention over the past two years (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

### **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 Wraparound Services to Promote Student Success" ([\*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1\*](#)).

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 from SLAO, Financial Aid, the Student Development and Counseling Department, the Bursar, the academic divisions, the Athletics Department, Office of Public Safety, and the Learning Center. Students receive hands-on training on how to access their email accounts, Web Services, the MyECC Portal, and Moodle.

### **Communication with Students**

The College has made a commitment to provide information on programs and services offered to promote student success. One of these methods is through regularly scheduled email blasts from our Office of Marketing and Communication. Emails are sent to the students' ECC email addresses, which contain announcements of upcoming College events, activities, student support services available. Another method is our newly implemented ECC Mobile Application (ECC App). This mode of communication allows the College to directly interact and engage with students through their mobile devices. The application contains pages for student support services and their contact information. Launched in November 2022, the ECC App has already accrued over 1,200 users as of the writing of this report. Students have affectionately bestowed the moniker of "ECC Twitter" upon it within the community chat function (IV; ECC App).

## **RETENTION**

One of the College's strategic goals focuses on the need to improve and maintain a high level of student retention. Specifically, Goal III reads: "Continue to innovate our academic and student support programs to improve student persistence and on-time completion" ([\*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1\*](#)). The work to accomplish this goal can be seen through the redesign of developmental course models and student support programs (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

## **Developmental Education Model**

Over the course of its history, and up until recently, 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 most efficient and pedagogically-sound way. 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 discouraged by taking developmental courses due in part to their expectations of college-level coursework upon the start of their undergraduate studies, resulting in high attrition rates and low graduation rates ([ECC 2022-2023 Catalog](#)).

## **Recent Revisions in Developmental Education**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, both mathematics and English faculty were tasked with discussing and planning a way to redesign the way developmental education courses are structured and offered at Essex County College ([ECC 2022-2023 Catalog](#)). In late 2019, the English faculty, led by the First Year Literacy Committee, created a co-requisite model of ENG 099/101, a 4.5-credit version of the standalone three-credit ENG 101 (College Composition I), to take the place of the various developmental-level reading and writing courses (ENG 085/085T, ENG 096/096T, RDG 096/096T, and ENG 098/098T). A pilot rollout was done in spring 2020 and not even the onslaught of the pandemic was able to disrupt the positive results yielded. Academic Year 2020-2021 saw more ENG 099/101s placed on the schedule and the resulting data convinced the administration to cease offering in fall 2021 the standalone ENG and RDG developmental-level courses in favor of a full rollout of the new co-requisite. After an entire academic year and a half under this new model, ECC has seen the old model outperformed in both pass rates, progression rates (defined as the percentage of students who are able to successfully complete their developmental-level requirements and earn college-level credits without failing any courses), and the time it takes for students to earn college-level ENG credits.

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%). Under the old model, slightly more than half of students earned college-level credits without failing any English courses. In fall 2021, students who placed into the ENG 099/101 co-requisite passed ENG 102 (College Composition II, a literature-based course) at a slightly higher rate than those who placed directly into ENG 101 with no ENG developmental education requirements (68.8% vs 68.1%). Additionally, the time it took students to earn college-level ENG credits went from 1.76 to 1.81 semesters to 1.0. The spring 2021 pass rates and progression rates in ENG 099/101 dipped, but the fall 2022 data shows a rise from semester-to-semester, indicating that while the numbers may fluctuate, they do so by rates determined by faculty to not elicit concern. A larger study will be conducted after spring 2024, once the fall 2021 cohort three-year cycle ends. Similarly, the newly-created MTH 091S/MTH 101 and MTH 093S/MTH 103 co-requisite models were launched in fall 2021 to accelerate students into the college-level experience and propel most students to the next level of their studies within one semester. Students were identified as eligible to register for these courses based on their major (non-STEM as opposed to

STEM) and placement test results according to the Development Mathematic Flow Chart created by the Mathematics, Engineering Technologies, and Computer Sciences Division ([ECC 2022-2023 Catalog](#)).

By going from a pre-requisite developmental education model to a co-requisite model, more students are given the opportunity to take college-level English and mathematics courses, and therefore reduce time to completion. Research on national best practices also strongly indicate that earning English and mathematics credits in the first year, is associated with higher levels of retention and completion. It is expected that the pre-requisite courses will yield much lower attrition rates and higher success rates than our historical approaches to developmental English and mathematics.

### **First Year Experience Course**

Following state and national trends, Essex County College developed the two-credit First Year Experience (FYE 097) course, a mandatory course for all entering students. The course is designed to prepare students for college life by offering critical information and continual support. Instruction provides students with learning on how to use critical skills such as time management, goal setting, self-assessment, notetaking, active listening, memory, test taking, critical thinking, analytical thinking, emotional intelligence, communication, diversity, reading effectively and academic planning. In addition to the personal skills needed to succeed in college, students are also given informational sessions on college services available to them ([ECC 2022-2023 Catalog](#)).

Among students in the fall 2021 first-time, full-time, degree seeking cohort (n=834), roughly 40% (n=330) took FYE 097 in their first semester. Of those taking FYE 097, 77.6% were retained in spring 2022. This is slightly higher than the rest of cohort in which 75.2% were retained in spring 2022. Ongoing efforts are taking place to improve the efficacy of FYE 097 ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)).

*Table 18 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%

### **Educational Opportunity Fund Program**

The longest standing student support service offered at ECC is the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program (IV; Educational Opportunity Fund Homepage). 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 who are from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As mentioned in Standard III, EOF is under the umbrella of Community and Continuing Education & Workforce Development.

The mission of EOF is aligned directly with the College's Mission, Vision, and Values: "The mission of the Educational Opportunity Fund Program 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." Services provided to students include a pre-freshman summer program for full-time, first-time degree seeking students (FTFTDS), tutoring, individual and group counseling sessions, and academic-focused 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 retention rate for FTFTDS students enrolled in fall 2021 was 80% as compared to the overall College rate of 60%. In addition, the three-year graduation rate for the Fall 2019 FTFTDS was 24.7% as compared to the overall College-wide graduation rate of 16.7%. This significant difference demonstrates that the EOF program has a positive impact in terms of retaining and graduating students (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

### **Men and Women of Excellence Scholar Program**

One of ECC's most recent initiatives to increase retention and promote completion is the Men and Women of Excellence Scholars Program (MWE) (IV; Men and Women of Excellence Scholars Program). It is funded through a Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success (SUCCESS) MDRC grant. The objective is to improve the post-secondary outcomes for men and women of color who are enrolled full-time. It uses mentoring and tutoring sessions each month, full-time enrollment encouragement, a robust management information system, and financial incentives. 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 its success, MWE staff lessened or eliminated barriers to student success by providing a clear academic road map and connecting students with various resources, which include financial aid assistance, counseling services, and dispute resolution with professors, while also addressing food and housing insecurities by providing them with internal and external resources. While awaiting results from MDRC's impact analysis, ECC compared outcomes for the 300 MWE participants to the overall College student population. MWE participants had an 83.6% fall-to-spring retention rate in fall 2021 which was 8.1% higher than the College retention rate of 75.2%. The fall-to-fall in 2021 of 75.4% was 14.6% higher than the College retention rate (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

### **Student Mentor/Advisors Initiative**

According to data from the Center for Community College Student Engagement, students who receive more one-on-one advising with individuals specifically brought in for the purposes of fostering academic success, will have a better chance at succeeding in their college careers (IV; Show Me the Way - The Power of Advising in Community Colleges 2018 National Report). Building off of this information, Essex County College created the Student Mentor/Advisor Initiative. Launched in fall 2021, at least one mentor/advisor was assigned to each of the

academic divisions. They are tasked with providing academic advisement and information on student support services while tracking student progress from enrollment to graduation.

This initiative has yielded a slight year-over-year increase in one-semester retention for the fall 2021 FTFTDS cohort. Students were retained in the spring 2022 at a rate of 75.7%, an improvement over the spring 2021, 72.9% one-semester retention rate achieved by the fall 2020 FTFTDS cohort ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)).

### **Satisfactory Academic Progress**

Students must maintain satisfactory academic progress (SAP) to be eligible for financial aid. To maintain SAP, students are required to earn at least 67% of college-level credits attempted with a 2.0 or better Grade Point Average (GPA). Students who do not maintain the required GPA are placed on warning and receive a letter from Financial Aid. If students do not gain SAP in subsequent semesters, they are denied financial aid and must complete the SAP appeals process, which is fully explained on the College website (IV; Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy). Students are encouraged to complete the SAP process and Financial Aid sends letters, emails, and text messages which explain the rules and ways to proceed.

During the Fall 2021 semester, 330 students were encouraged to complete the SAP process to continue their course work. Multiple modes of communication (mentioned above) were sent out. To date, 64% (212 out of the 330) of students who were on academic probation in Spring 2022 were able to register for the Fall 2022 ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)).

### **Counseling**

Counseling is designed to provide wraparound services to address life challenging issues and to remove barriers to success (IV; Counseling Services Homepage). Five, full-time faculty counselors (with one also being a certified mental health counselor) are available to students on an appointment or walk-in basis. Recently, an additional mental health counselor was added to the staff. Academic counseling services include, but are not limited to, academic forgiveness applications for students who did not maintain adequate grade point averages, financial aid probation appeals, course withdrawals, and probation counseling. Academic plans are developed between the student and the counselor to improve classroom performance (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

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

## **Mental Health**

Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, ECC maintained a focus on the mental health needs of students (IV; Counseling Services Homepage). Data from the annual Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) showed that our students have experienced periods of anxiety, fear, and bouts of depression. To assist students with mental issues a full-time counselor was hired with a Licensed Clinical Social Worker certification to support their mental health needs.

During the Fall 2022 semester, the mental health counselor provided help both virtually and in-person to 334 students (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022). Of these students, 65 were returning and 269 were new. Most students (269) were self-referred and were provided with strategies and techniques to help them cope with their mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, auditory, and visual hallucinations. Thirty-eight students were referred to Rutgers Behavioral Health outpatient for severe depression and suicidal ideations. Sixty-five students participated in weekly sessions with talk therapy to help them work through any dilemmas that they may be facing. Included in the sessions were positive problem-solving techniques and connection with staff members and other peers in order to maintain their academic and overall well-being. Approximately 95% of the students receiving the services described above completed the Fall 2022 semester.

## **Differently Abled Students**

Essex County College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, and has a college regulation dealing with support services (IV; Disability Services). Students who complete an application for admission to the College can self-identify as having a special need. By making this self-identification known, they have the opportunity to complete an application with Disability Services and meet with the Coordinator. During the intake process, students share their IEPs and other information related to their disabilities. Support services provided to students with disabilities include accommodation letters, one-on-one academic advisement and counseling, a safe space, arrangements for distribution of assistive technology, and referral to outside agencies for additional assistance if needed. In addition, instructions are provided on course syllabi on how to contact the Coordinator of Disability Services. All students who self-identify and meet with the Coordinator are then assigned an attribute code in the student database system to track their academic performance and progress.

Between 2019 and 2021, Disability Services served an average of nearly 600 students. The fall-to-fall retention rate for the fall 2021 FTFTDS cohort was 71.4%, being 10.6 % higher than the college-wide rate. The fall-to-spring retention rate for the same cohort was 90.5%, being 15.3% higher than the college-wide rate (IV; Students Affairs Operations Report 2022).

ECC's overall fall-to-fall and fall-to-spring retention rates for the fall 2021 FTFTDS cohort was 60.8% and 75.2%, respectively, which are both slight increases over the previous year and is a direct result of retention initiatives, student support services, and programs cited in this report.

In June 2022, ECC received a grant from the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education of New Jersey to develop and implement a Center for Adult Transition. The mission of the Center is to provide to enrolled students with intellectual and developmental disabilities enhanced support services to enable them to successfully transition to the College and experience academic achievement. Some of the main student support services provided by the Center are mentoring, job coaching, tutoring, and skills training.

## COMPLETION

Enrollment Services has always fostered a strong collaborative effort with the academic divisions, especially as it relates to degree completion. At the completion of 45 credits, Enrollment Services sends students an email encouraging them to review their degree audit through Web Services to assess whether they are ready to apply for graduation. Included in this communication are graduation application deadlines based on the semester of completion years.

A college-wide initiative was launched during Academic Year 2019-2020 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 with an academic advisor to review program completion requirements. Recently, DegreeWorks was purchased and is being implemented to enhance advising services.

These efforts contributed to a 3.4% increase in the College's three-year graduation rate from 11.1% in fall 2020 to 14.8% in fall 2021 ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)). Three-year graduation rates continued to rise in fall 2022 with another increase of 2.1%, bringing ECC's current three-year graduation rate to 16.9%, the highest in the College's history. The efforts and focus on improving graduation rates are aligned with students' academic goals. As per the fall 2022 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey, 58.2% of students reported that earning a degree from ECC was their main reason for enrolling. This is significant because in fall 2019, 56.9% of students reported the same. This shows that before, during, and as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, earning a degree or certificate remains students' top priority. It is also worth noting that while still only a small segment of the population, more students are attending to advance their current careers. ECC will continue to review data and examine new ways to improve our graduation rate (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

## OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES

### **Tutoring Services**

Tutoring services are available through areas such as the Learning Center, the Educational Opportunity Fund Program, the College's chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa Society, and the academic divisions.

The Learning Center is the main hub of providing academic support. It offers tutoring services in multiple disciplines through peer and professional Learning Associates. The Center increases student engagement in the learning process, promotes greater understanding in the tutored subjects, and supports overall student retention and academic success. Information regarding



services, scheduling, subject tutors, and midterm and final exam review workshops is available each semester. In Academic Year 2020-2021, 1,152 students took advantage of virtual and in-person tutoring.

### **Career Resource Center**

The Essex County College Career Resource Center and Career Services in the Department of Student Development and Counseling, strives to prepare its students for rewarding lifelong careers. The Career Resource Center (CRC) facilitates monthly workshops and events such as resume building, cover letter writing, job search techniques, career exploration, professionalism and etiquette, communication skills, online networking platforms, and on-campus employer recruitment to support students.

During the Academic Year 2021-2022, the CRC provided support to more than 450 students and assisted them with building their resumes, writing their cover letters, creating their online Career Coach Profile, and searching and applying for jobs. CRC also provided opportunities for volunteer work experiences and internships. Additionally, the CRC hosted the Career Closet in partnership with Dress for Success Northern New Jersey and provided more than 30 students with professional clothing for upcoming interviews. Students and alumni were assisted by volunteer stylists who were trained to help select business appropriate attire.

The CRC staff has forged relationships with at least 33 external employers and invited them to in-person and virtual career fairs and information sessions to inform and recruit students for internship and employment opportunities.

### **Internship Program**

To provide experiential learning opportunities for our students, the College revived its Student Internship Program, housed in the Department of Student Development and Counseling. As part of this reboot, the Program held its first Internship Week in August 2022, which engaged 20 local businesses to participate, with a total of 59 students participating. According to post-program survey results, 84% of students were either “satisfied” or “highly satisfied” with the event. Most recently, a Career Fair was held in fall 2022 and over 200 students participated.

### **Transfer Services**

When students are nearing graduation and ready to begin the process of applying to four-year colleges, they are encouraged to contact Transfer Services for assistance (IV; Transfer FAQ, IV; Transfer Services). The Department organizes workshops with representatives from admissions offices and provides students with information about the four-year institutions, including their admissions processes, program offerings, student events, campus, scholarships, and fee waivers for transfer applications. Representatives from these institutions are invited to come to ECC to meet with students who have completed over 40 credits. Transfer fairs and Instant Decision Days are also hosted to the benefit of students. At graduation rehearsal, cards are collected from graduating students to gather data about where they intend to enroll after graduation.

At the 2022 Commencement, 1,125 students graduated and, according to National Student Clearinghouse data, 503 of them transferred to a four-year institution by Fall 2022. To assist students with transferring to four-year institutions, ECC has implemented E-Transcript, a web-based student transcript service to reduce the processing time and transmission of graduates' transcripts to the institution of their choice. Since E-Transcript's implementation in spring 2022, Enrollment Services has received a total of 5,679 transcript requests. Of these requests, 98% of them were processed within 30 minutes or less.

### **Transfer Credit**

College Regulation 5-18, "Transfer of Credit and Evaluation" specifies the process for evaluating and accepting credits that originate outside the College (IV; REG 5-4- Credit by Examination, 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 Presidents Council in 2008 (IV; Transfer FAQ). 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 when seeking transfer credits.

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 then evaluates the transcript and the credits become a part of the student's permanent record. Students must complete a minimum of 30 credits, including half of their major course requirements at the College to earn an ECC Associate's Degree.

### **College Credits for Military Services**

According to College Regulation REG 5-18 (IV; REG-5-18 Transfer of Credit and Evaluation), "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 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 (IV; Student Handbook – Lifeline). It also coordinates the sales of discount tickets to local cultural and sporting events, oversees code of conduct hearings, manages clubs and organizations on campus, operates the Food Pantry, and its staff members serve as advisors for student government and the current 26 student clubs.

SLAO has continued to provide orientations, tutorials, and forums to help students navigate the online support systems. It has, and continues to host Virtual Cafes, educating students how to access their online web portals, scholarship workshops, and cover other relevant topics to keep the student body informed. More than 100 videos have been uploaded to the SLAO YouTube Channel since the inception of the Virtual Café series in April 2020.

### **Food Pantry**

To reduce food insecurity among students, the ECC Food Pantry was opened in fall 2019. A dedicated space, away from the campus main flow of student traffic, was created by the Office of Student Affairs to allow students to avail themselves of the services in a confidential manner. The food pantry offers basic staples such as whole grain products, rice, potatoes, cereals, and protein items such as beans and canned vegetables along with low sugar beverages. Students need only show that they are currently enrolled at the time of service. Students can access food through regularly scheduled distribution dates or by appointment on an as needed basis.

During Academic Year 2021-2022, approximately four tons of food were distributed to 183 students. For this current academic year, 92 students made use of the Food Pantry's services with a distribution of 1,600 pounds of food.

### **Office of Student Care Services**

The creation of the one-stop resource center was to meet the post COVID-19 growing challenges, for already-stressed students to find additional assistance. Students, especially first-generation, underrepresented, and those from disadvantaged groups, face multiple challenges to making ends meet while pursuing a degree or certificate. The College's solution to this was to establish the Office of Student Care Services (OSCS), which began operations in fall 2022. This has allowed for the centralization of the delivery of student support services such as food assistance, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), housing, health and mental health support, childcare, dependent care, and transportation. Since OSCS's inception, 197 students completed the Student Needs Assessment Survey to request services. These students received requested services from on-campus student support offices or were referred to one of the College's community partners.

### **Child Development Center**

The College's Child Development Center is staffed by highly qualified New Jersey certified teachers and offers full day care and educational programs for children. Breakfast, lunch, and snacks are prepared on-site each day and served family-style to all children at no additional cost. Initially geared towards children ages two to five, the Center now serves infants from three months to five years. The Child Development Center improves access by allowing our students to study while their children are in a secure and safe space.

## **Student Involvement in College Governance**

Students are continually involved in the governance of the College. Each academic year, the Student Government Association (SGA) Executive Board meets with the Student Affairs leadership, the College President, and the Board of Trustees to discuss student-related issues which impact the student body. At each Board of Trustees meeting, SGA provides the trustees with a monthly report that outlines their activities and needs. In addition, prior to a tuition increase or change of policy affecting the student body, the SGA Executive Committee is consulted. During the fall 2022, three virtual meetings were held for students to discuss their concerns with the President and his leadership team. Students were also provided with information about changes in college policy, regulations, and procedures affecting the student body.

## **Phi Theta Kappa**

Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) is the leading national honor society for students attending two-year colleges. In addition to academic opportunities, PTK offers leadership training and the development of other skills that will be helpful to students in their academic and professional careers. In the past 15 years, nearly 700 students have been inducted into the College's five-star, award-winning chapter.

With its strict academic requirements, it is not surprising that the fall-to-fall retention rate for FTFTDS enrolled in fall 2021 semester was 90% as compared to the college-wide rate of 60.8%. The fall-to-spring retention rate for this same cohort was 100% as compared to the college wide rate of 75% ([Fact Book 2022-2023](#)).

## **Essex County College Athletics**

Essex County College offers a total of eight intercollegiate athletic sports as a member of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). There are women's and men's teams for each of the following sports: soccer, cross country, basketball, and track and field. The Essex County College Wolverines compete in both the Garden Athletic Conference as a member of NJCAA Region 19, which includes two-year colleges in New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, and Delaware (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022).

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's 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. Student-athletes are expected to maintain an overall GPA of a 2.5 and are required to maintain full-time enrollment (12 or more credits per each fall and spring 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 environment of academic support and accountability through the

*Student-Athlete Academic Monitoring Initiative.* Beginning with Academic Year 2018-2019, the Athletic Department introduced a comprehensive academic monitoring initiative to hold student-athletes accountable for their academic success and progress. This includes mandatory study hall hours, academic progress reports from the faculty, intrusive advisement, coordination of tutoring, and accountability measures. Through this plan, the department monitors the progress of each student-athlete, by implementing individual plans for whomever needs assistance, as indicated by progress reports from each professor and mandatory meetings with the Athletics Department staff members.

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

## EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The Office of Student Affairs, in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment, takes a multifaceted approach to continually evaluate the effectiveness of all student support services, including an annual in-house Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (SSES) and participation in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) every three years. In addition to these college-wide evaluations, the Office of Student Affairs develops and distributes post-event satisfaction surveys to the students who attend the various activities in order to continually improve the quality of services offered. The fall 2022 SSES showed that of 12 different services offered both in-person and virtually, seven out of the 12 yielded higher levels of satisfaction with virtual services, while five out of the 12 services yielded higher levels of satisfaction with in-person services. When placed side-by-side, the levels of satisfaction were comparable with the exception of tutoring services. Students rated in-person tutoring services 19% higher than virtual services. Further research is being planned to address this gap.

## CONCLUSION

Essex County College, in alignment with its Strategic Plan, is committed to meeting the needs of students by providing access to higher education, support services, programs to promote retention, and processes and programs to assist students in meeting their academic goals. ECC has shown the ability to recruit and admit a diverse student population and provides them with comprehensive support services to help ensure student success.

ECC continues to assess and evaluate its processes, procedures, and data to determine the next steps to improve the student experience. For instance, we know that while advisement is occurring, a more college-wide comprehensive advisement model is needed for consistency. The need to continue streamlining our onboarding process through innovative technological platforms is a top priority.

## STRENGTHS

- ECC offers a broad array of student support services which meets the students where they are and address the challenges they face inside and outside of the classroom in order to remove barriers to access and success
- Enhancements in student support services such as the Welcome Center, the Mentor/Advisor Initiative, and the various learning support services have led to improved student outcomes yielding a 9.4% (51.4% to 60.8%) increase in one-year retention rates over the past two academic years and a 5.8% (11.1% to 16.9%) increase in three-year graduation rates over the same time (IV; Students Affairs Operational Report 2022)

## CHALLENGES

- While the Office of Student Care Services has centralized the delivery of additional support services, the College needs to create a physical one-stop resource center to improve the overall student experience
- To ensure that the College continues to keep up with an ever-growing diverse student population's needs and demands

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a comprehensive college-wide model to centralize oversight of advisement practices
- Continue to push towards the full implementation of the Customer Relations Management (CRM) system in order to produce a more effective onboarding experience, which in turn improves the enrollment yield
- Continue to research contemporary methods of increasing student retention, such as building upon the success of the new developmental education English and mathematics co-requisite models



## 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.*

### OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

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 due to 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. Based on the June 2011 warning from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for then Standard VII (Institutional Assessment) and Standard XIV (Assessment of Student Learning), the College shifted from course level to program level assessment. The prior institutionalized course level assessment process, which utilized Scantron forms, was a 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 ([ECC 2022-2023 Catalog](#)).

In August 2018, the State of New Jersey mandated a maximum of 60 credits for all associate degrees (V; NJ Rev Stat 18a62-57 2018) unless an exemption was requested (V; REG 5-18 Transfer of Credit and Evaluation). This mandate took effect in Fall 2019, creating a chain reaction, including a programmatic review, to reduce the number of credits to meet this mandate. All programs at the College conducted a review of their programmatic goals, course requirements, and general education requirements for their majors. The analysis sought to maximize the educational efficacy of each degree, and based on the credit reduction, many programs required new curriculum mapping.

This State mandate 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 these issues. The SGE of 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 previously absent institutional learning goals.

ECC adopted a new, more cohesive program assessment process in 2020 (V; Program Assessment Manual). The process included a comprehensive review of all program goals and previously developed curriculum maps. Changes to program outcomes or curriculum were approved by the various divisional curriculum committees as well as the College Curriculum Committee in accordance with 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). The process includes an annual review of program outcomes, curriculum, and curricular alignment, the collection and reporting of student learning assessment data, and a systematic process for developing and capturing action plans.

Implementation of this program assessment process began in January 2020 with a cohort of 19 programs. The initial cohort was 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 that semester. A third and final cohort went through the implementation process in spring 2022 with three exceptions: General Science, Health Sciences, and Social Sciences. These programs are generalized and more amenable to a portfolio assessment approach. Therefore, IEPA is working with these programs in Spring 2023 to implement a portfolio assessment process.

A total of 42 programs have been assessed at the institutional level, which represents 93% of the 45 currently active degree programs offered at the college. Based on thorough evaluation of the programs, Program Level Outcomes (PLO), and their corresponding mapping of the major course requirements, a total of 5 programs required re-alignments i.e., revisions of program outcomes, curriculum, or course mapping. To date, the 17 programs have created and implemented action plans to improve the educational effectiveness of their program.

The new assessment model initiated in the spring 2020, coupled with the faculty's support, provided a seamless process to evaluate, optimize, and make decisions to sustain academic excellence while fulfilling the mission of the College. These decisions are the products of collaborative efforts made by the faculty and the office of IEPA. They are driven by metrics, documented evidence, and institutional guidelines. The implementation of the Institutional Learning Goals Model illustrated in Figure 5 provides evidence of the institution's strategic directions and commitment to ensure that students receive the academic knowledge and the necessary skills to advance in their future endeavors (V; ECC Core Competencies and General Education Goals). A graphic summarizing the timeline described in this section is available in the Evidence Inventory (V; Assessment Overview – Timeline).

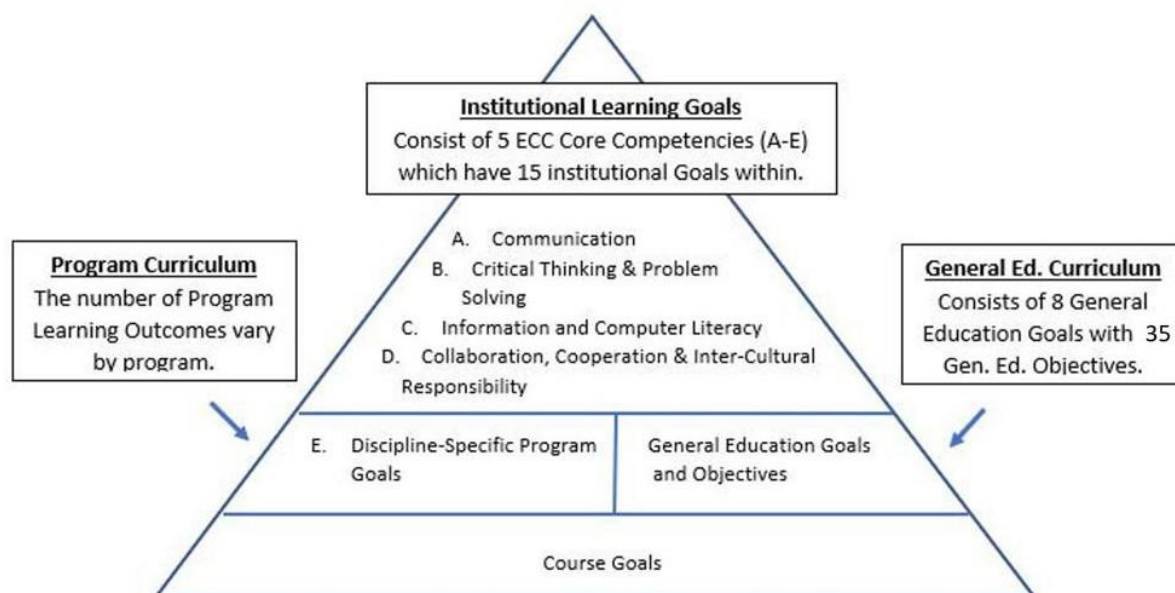
## INSTITUTIONAL COMPETENCIES AND GENERAL EDUCATION GOALS

The institutional competencies and general education goals of Essex County College adopted by the Academic Policies Advisory Committee (APAC) in 2021 consist of five ECC Competencies and 15 institutional learning goals nested within (V; ECC Core Competencies and General Education Goals). The general education goals include eight general education goals with 35



nested objectives. These objectives are mapped to general education themes in a comprehensive crosswalk. The process is discussed below and memorialized in the Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual which guides assessment of these areas (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual 2022). Further context on the goal creation process may be found in Standard III. Figure 5 illustrates how the various levels of ECC’s learning goals are structured and interrelated.

*Figure 5 Institutional Learning Goals Model, 2021*



## 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 (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual 2022), developed through a faculty-driven process coordinated by the Sub-committee on General Education (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 (discussed below) behind the development of the process, all of which were directly derived from our institutional Mission, Vision, and Values (V; Mission Vision and Values).

The first was to develop a process that is intended to honor our stated institutional value of 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” (V; Mission Vision and Values). The resulting process is an acknowledgment by the institution that it is first and foremost accountable 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” (V; Mission Vision and Values).

The third driving principle is 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,” as well as ECC’s value of Legacy and Transformation, specifically “building upon our past achievements, we eagerly embrace the future by pursuing innovations in teaching” (V; Mission Vision and Values). 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.

#### **Four Assessment Themes Assessed Biannually**

ECC Competencies and General Education Goals are evaluated within a biannual cycle that focuses on two distinct assessment themes each year. The themes are:

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

Table 19 outlines 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 (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual 2022).

*Table 19 Overview of Annual Assessment Themes*

#### **Years 1, 3, 5 – Annual Assessment Themes**

*\*All General Education courses in all subjects are assessed for each competency.*

<b>Assessment Theme</b>	<b>Years Assessed</b>	<b>Team Leader(s)</b>	<b>ECC Competency Assessed*</b>	<b>Gen. Ed. Goals Assessed</b>
<b>Forms of Expression</b>	AY 2021, AY 2023, AY 2025	Chair, Humanities and Bilingual Studies	<b>Competency A:</b> Communication	<b>Goal 1.</b> Written and Oral Communication; English  <b>Goal 6.</b> Humanistic Perspectives; Humanities
<b>Reflecting on our Past and Present</b>	AY 2021, AY 2023, AY 2025	Chair, Humanities and Bilingual Studies Chair, Social Sciences	<b>Competency B:</b> Critical and Ethical Thinking and Problem Solving	<b>Goal 7.</b> Historical Perspectives; History

### Years 2, 4, 6 – Annual Assessment Themes

*\*All General Education courses in all subjects are assessed for each competency.*

Assessment Theme	Years Assessed	Team Leader(s)	ECC Competency Assessed*	Gen. Ed. Goals Assessed
<b>STEM</b>	AY 2022, AY 2024, AY 2026	Chair, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics Division  Chair, Mathematics, Engineering, Technology, and Computer Science	<b>Competency C:</b> Information and Computer Literacy	<b>Goal 2.</b> Quantitative Knowledge & Skills; Mathematics <b>Goal 3.</b> Scientific Knowledge & Reasoning; Science <b>Goal 4.</b> Technology or Information Literacy; Technology
<b>The Individual and Society</b>	AY 2022, AY 2024, AY 2026	Chair, Humanities and Bilingual Studies Chair, Social Sciences	<b>Competency D:</b> Collaboration, Cooperation, Intra- and Inter-Cultural Responsibility	<b>Goal 5.</b> Society & Human Behavior; Social Science <b>Goal 8.</b> Diversity and Global Perspective; Diversity

### Annual Timeline for the Assessment of ECC Competencies and General Education Goals

IEPA collects data in January and May and the assessment process begins in May of each year. The process starts with the selection of the Assessment Team and is followed by an orientation conducted by IEPA, Academic Affairs, AAAC, and the SGE. Additionally, IEPA in conjunction with Academic Affairs, coordinates the collection of annual updates from the Assessment Team Chairs (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual 2022). Table 20 illustrates this annual timeline.

*Table 20 Annual Timeline for the ECC Competency and General Education 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, AAAC, 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	<p>The Assessment Team completes the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Examine the General Education assessment results and develop appropriate Action-Plans.</li> </ul>
July and August (off cycle years)	<p>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.</p>

## **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 one 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 (V; Keeping our Promises) and interactive PDF introduced the ECC Core Competencies and General Education assessment process immediately prior to the initial data collection (V; ECC Core Competencies and General Education Goals). The seven-minute video showed the development of these competencies and goals and highlighted faculty's role in the development of the goals and the assessment process.

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.

IEPA delivers results to the annual Assessment Team along with both written instructions and a live demo on how to interpret the report. IEPA also provides several critical questions to act as a framework for reviewing the information:

- 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 currently collects data on each ECC Competency every semester. However, the Annual Assessment Team only focuses on assessing two competencies per year. Therefore, each competency is assessed on a biannual basis. Each summer, IEPA and Academic Affairs reviews

the ECC Competency data that will not be reviewed by the assessment team that year. While not designed as an in-depth assessment, this mechanism ensures that any issues do not go unabated until that Competency is scheduled for review by the Annual Assessment Team the following year.

The Annual Assessment Team compiles best practices for the assessed ECC Competency and drafts recommendations to the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics and the division chairs. The Annual Assessment Team also uses the assessment results to develop appropriate action plans. Recommendations and best practices are compiled and shared with faculty.

An example of best practices and recommendations that were shared in the Competency B Team's report to the Dean and faculty include:

SOC 101 Competency B Integration summary: 100% reported integration with 92% 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

Competency B 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**

The General Education Data Collection process is 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.

General Education goal data is collected on an annual basis from sub-sets of courses that have been identified in the crosswalk document as those with a primary focus for each General Education goal, which can be found in the General Education Assessment Manual (V; Institutional and General Education Assessment Manual 2022).

At the conclusion of each semester, IEPA uses the Annual Timeline for the ECC Competency and General Education Assessment (Table 19) to send General Education data collection forms to instructors teaching courses aligned with the relevant 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 19).

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% or higher, the institution's threshold used for defining achievement of mastery for a learning outcome.

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:

- To what degree are each of the General Education objectives being assessed?
- According to assessment data, what percentage 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?

### **General Education Action Plans Put into Action**

The inaugural Annual Assessment Team produced several explicit actions plans for Theme I – Forms of Expression. 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 and 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
- 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

### **Periodic Evaluation of the ECC Competency and General Education Assessment Processes**

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

### **PROGRAM ASSESSMENT (ECC COMPETENCY E)**

As previously noted, Competency E is discipline-specific and therefore assessed outside of the institutional and general education assessment process through the program assessment process.

### **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. 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. It also confirms that they are aligned with the *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024, particularly Goal III. Objective F: Foster Institutional Improvement through Assessment, Evaluation, and Evidence-Based Planning ([\*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1\*](#)).

To ensure that all these processes work together according to the Institutional Effectiveness Framework, the IEPA developed its own customized in-house process that makes use of several software solutions such as Strategic Planning On-Line (SPOL), SharePoint, Qualtrics, and SmartEvals (V; Institutional Effectiveness Framework Process Graphic 2021).

For courses identified as “mastery” level, IEPA collects assessment data on a semester-to-semester basis. Course instructors are required to report, using a program assessment data collection form, how many students demonstrated mastery of the PLOs that were determined to be mastery level in their specific courses (V; Program Assessment Manual).

Measurement tools vary across the academic divisions, and included the use of case studies, research papers, oral presentations, rubrics, lab reports, midterm exams, and final exams.

At the beginning of each academic year, IEPA creates a new annual assessment template for each program. This template is prepopulated with the program’s mission, curriculum, outcomes, and curriculum map from the prior year. If changes are required, IEPA will work with the Program Coordinator to make sure the faculty governance process has been followed and will

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, distributing results to faculty, and guiding programs through a documented action planning process.

*Table 21 Sample ECC Curriculum Map*

**Environmental Science A.S.**

I= Introduced

R= Reinforced

M= Demonstration of Mastery

		CHM103	GEO101	GEO102	CHM104	MTH118	BIO220	BIO210	BIO230
<b>PLO 1</b>	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
<b>PLO 2</b>	Students will be able to effectively communicate and critically evaluate scientific observations, analyses and ideas.	I / R	I / R	R			R	M	M
<b>PLO 3</b>	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 works with IEPA to ensure 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 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. Table 21 illustrates how the curriculum map drives the data collection process. Examples of data collection forms can be found in the program assessment manual (V; Program Assessment Manual).

IEPA collects and aggregates data from each mastery-level 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, the Program Coordinators also receive the disaggregated individual section results so they can ensure 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 (V; Final Assessment Results and Action Planning AY 2021 - 2022). To enhance participation rates, a faculty-developed interactive video titled “Keeping our Promises”



is made available to all faculty who seek more information on the program assessment process (V; Keeping Our Promises).

### **Action Planning Process**

Upon receiving their annual assessment results, Program Coordinators form small Program Assessment Committees consisting of three to five faculty members. This committee examines the percentage of students who met the mastery threshold for each PLO and suggests courses of action. If the percentage of mastery is below the target set by the program, the committee uses the curriculum map, assessment data, and their classroom experience to develop solutions to improve student learning.

In the Action Planning Guide sent to the Program Assessment Committees, 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 the curriculum, process action plans include recommendations on components of the assessment process. These include recommendations on the quality of the PLOs being measured, the accuracy of the curriculum map, and whether the assessment measures being used are appropriate indicators of student mastery.

### **Action Planning Examples**

The program assessment process has resulted in several changes at the course level. For example, “A review of the accounting concepts will be provided to students at the beginning of the semester prior to the completion of projects”. This action was identified for implementation at the course level 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: “Students in MTH 222 will be given access to all lecture notes and the solutions to the included problems at appropriate times. 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 these action-plans is then monitored as part of the annual action-planning process.

Academic programs’ long-term effectiveness and viability are evaluated on a five-year basis by faculty members and college administrators in a separate but related process, the Academic Program Review process, as discussed in Standard III.

### **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; College Curriculum Committee Bylaws 2019). This process is memorialized in the Curriculum Approval Procedures Manual (V; Curriculum Approval Procedures Manual).

During the initial phase of program assessment implementation, changes that are necessary are identified and revisions are made. The Divisional Curriculum Committee (DCC) then reviews the revision proposals, and, if approved, they are 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 restricted elective courses aligned with the introduction, reinforcement, and mastery of PLOs where students can select any two courses of an approved list of courses. However, several of these courses were not being offered on a regular basis. 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 to eliminate courses from the program that were not regularly offered and ensure graduates are more effectively assessed. The proposal was approved at the division level and then was submitted to the College Curriculum Committee (CCC) for review. The CCC approved these curricular changes on 05/06/2021. The newly revised BIO/Pre-Med program became effective as of fall 2021.

### **Assessment of Externally Accredited Programs**

The programs listed below are either 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, these programs also take 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 encouraged 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. Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Mechanical 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 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; Program Assessment Evaluation Survey Fall 2021, V; Program Assessment Evaluation Survey Spring 2022, V; Measures and Results Survey). These instruments asked the Program Coordinators to identify ways to improve the program assessment process and solicited feedback that was used for that purpose.

At the end of the academic year, Program Coordinators are invited to attend multiple group discussions with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning and Assessment (IEPA). Program Coordinators are asked to share their ideas and recommendations on improving the assessment process. The discussion group is digitally recorded, summarized in an executive summary and discussed with the CAO. Approximately 75 % of the invited Program Coordinators attended at least one of the three sessions. Key findings from these discussions included:

- Program Coordinators reported that the program assessment process has helped them think critically about their program's curriculum and has led to improvements in several programs. Other programs made formal changes to their PLOs and/or curriculum through the formal faculty governance process. Several others made changes to key assignments in courses that assess for student mastery.
- Program Coordinators expressed a strong interest in building upon the current process by formalizing the action planning process into Division-wide annual meetings and presenting their action plans at convocation workshops. The development of an annual institution-wide assessment summit was also proposed.
- Program Coordinators expressed strong support for the creation for a faculty-led Assessment Committee to be added to ECC's current faculty governance structure.

Based on the faculty's feedback, the College established the Academic Assessment Advisory Committee (AAAC) in October 2022, an official faculty-led advisory committee that closely collaborates with IEPA. College Regulation 6-2 which outlines the institution's standing academic governance committees was updated to include this new committee and subsequently approved by Cabinet. By November 2022, AAAC had already established its bylaws and mission, and began its monthly meetings. This reflects the faculty's harmonized vision of the assessment process and its intended purpose, including the institution's continuous improvements. AAAC makes "recommendations on all matters relating to student learning assessment and policies and procedures that directly affect student learning assessment at the College, including outcomes assessment, instructional strategies, technology, academic support services and faculty support" (V; REG 6-2 Standing Academic Governance Committees, V; AAAC Bylaws 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The institution successfully implemented a college-wide program assessment process for all programs offered while cultivating a culture of collaboration among administration and faculty. ECC's strong faculty governance structure led to the creation of ECC's institutional learning

goals (ECC Competencies) in this process. The President, Academic Affairs leadership, the Office of IEPA, and the Cabinet were fully supportive and encouraging of this faculty-driven process.

Moving forward, the College intends to expand upon the foundation built during the initial implementation. Areas of improvement have been identified and will be focused on as the assessment process matures. These areas of focus will be the institution-wide exercise of norming of assessment instruments and enhanced faculty governance, which is already in motion with the establishment of the AAAC as previously discussed.

### STRENGTHS

- The College has made tremendous strides in cultivating a culture of assessment which is collaborative, faculty-led, and fully supported by administration
- The faculty are engaged and supportive of the process as evidenced by a 90% participation rate for the collection of assessment data

### CHALLENGES

- Building a culture of collaborative assessment is a challenging task, made even more difficult following leadership turnover and the COVID-19 pandemic
- Communicating multiple new processes to a population of faculty, many of which are part-time adjuncts, is a challenging endeavor

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the collaboration between IEPA, program coordinators, and faculty by continually soliciting feedback to optimize the program assessment process
- ECC should build upon the process that has been established by further embedding assessment measures for mastery-level courses into course outlines



## 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 entitled *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* ([\*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 Restart Plan (VI; ECC Pandemic Restart Plan 2020).

While *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* was critical in navigating the pandemic, it was clear that the pandemic had altered the landscape of higher education. Faced with new realities in the areas of student needs, learning modalities, faculty development, labor market demands, and 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 2.0*). 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 better 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 to "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

These enhancements led to changes that better integrated the planning and budgeting processes. These changes included revisions to the departmental budgeting forms and a new process for the development of annual strategic activities. Additional improvements also included a reporting process to link annual strategic activities to the annual budget and a quarterly reporting process to provide accountability for the implementation of the Plan.

Decision-making at the President/Cabinet level down to expectations of staff in student interactions, are 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-19 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 constituents at the College are treated in a climate of respect outlined in ECC's Mission, Vision, and Values (VI; Mission Vision and Values).

## AREA AND UNIT OBJECTIVES

The College's Strategic Plan serves as a touchstone for several additional satellite strategic plans. These plans, which are all in alignment with *STUDENTS FIRST*, are area-specific, and drill down on corresponding College operations ([\*STUDENTS FIRST\*: Strategic Plan Version 2.1](#)). These plans are:

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

All area-specific strategic and master plans are developed with the objective of supporting the institutional strategic plan. Master Plans are developed by the area and disseminated by the area head for the review of the President and Cabinet. After a review period, recommended revisions are discussed in Cabinet and incorporated into the documents prior to Cabinet approval. All strategic and master plans at the College are considered living documents that can be updated and amended, as necessary, after Cabinet-wide discussion.

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. Areas and units submit monthly reports using ECC's in-house reporting system. In addition, each area submits an annual assessment report 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 2020, the new Acting/Interim President (now fully appointed) worked with the Executive Director of IEPA to develop a new and enhanced accountability process for the implementation of *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1*. This process includes quarterly reporting for each of the annual strategic activities at both the unit and area levels. The FY 22 Annual Report on the strategic plan shows the key annual goals that were accomplished by ECC (VI: FY 2022 Annual Accomplishments, VI: FY 2023 Midterm Accomplishments). 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% (actual) in fall 2020 to 46.7% (target) for fall 2021 (Actual: 47.9% in fall 2021)
- Increase total non-credit clock hours by 10% from 104,241 (actual in FY 2021) to 114,665 (target) in FY 2022 (Actual: 140,888 in FY 2022)
- Increase the one-year retention rate from 51.4% (actual) for fall 2019 FTFTDS cohort to 55% (target) for the fall 2020 cohort (Actual: 61% for the Fall 2020 cohort)
- Increase three-year graduation rate from 11.1% (actual) for fall 2017 FTFTDS cohort to 12% (target) for the fall 2018 cohort (Actual: 14.8% for the fall 2018 cohort)

Completion of the following capital planning projects (VI; Board of Schools Estimates 2022,) (VI: FY 2022 Annual Accomplishments, VI: FY 2023 Midterm Accomplishments):

- 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 most of the Newark campus restrooms
- Repairs of the Concrete Sidewalks and Pedestrian Bridge adjacent to the Clara Dasher Bridge
- Renovation of the Information Technology Department
- Renovate the Center for Technology staff/faculty space
- Exterior Doors Replacement project
- 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

### **Institutional Objectives Are Linked to Institutional Mission, Vision, and Values**

The institutional objectives of the *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1* ([\*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1\*](#)) are derived from the institutional Mission,

Vision, and Values of Essex County College (VI; Mission Vision and Values). Table 22 shows some key examples of this alignment.

*Table 22 Alignment of Mission to Strategic Objectives and Activities - Key Examples*

Institutional Value:	Aligned Institutional Objectives and Strategic Activities:
<p><b>Teaching and Learning:</b> 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><b>Goal II, Objective A.</b> Develop and implement strategic retention initiatives. <u>Related FY 2022 activities:</u> 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.</p> <p><b>Goal III, Objective F.</b> Foster institutional improvement through assessment, evaluation, and evidence-based planning. <u>Related FY 2022 activities:</u> 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><b>Excellence and Accountability:</b> 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><b>Goal II, Objective C.</b> Design and implement professional development and training for faculty and staff. <u>Related FY 2022 activities:</u> 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.</p> <p><b>Goal II, Objective F.</b> Foster institutional improvement through assessment, evaluation, and evidence-based planning. <u>Related FY 2022 activities:</u> ii. Continue the implementation of an administrative unit assessment process that reports on the annual achievement of area/ unit mission and goals.</p>
<p><b>Community and Engagement:</b> 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</p>	<p><b>Goal I, Objective C.</b> <u>Related Strategic Activities:</u> ii. Coordinate with Alumni to increase active membership.</p>



Institutional Value:	Aligned Institutional Objectives and Strategic Activities:
<p>forging effective partnerships with our many constituencies.</p>	<p>iii. Coordinate with alumni to develop strategies for increased scholarship fundraising.</p> <p><b>Goal II, Objective B.</b></p> <p><u>Related Strategic Activities:</u></p> <p>ii. Design recruitment activities targeting both local high school graduates and adult learners.</p> <p>iii. Coordinate with the local high schools to engage students with college readiness into our dual enrollment program.</p> <p>vi. Develop linkages between credit and noncredit offerings for the purpose of creating learner centered pathways.</p> <p><b>Goal III, Objective E.</b></p> <p><u>Related Strategic Activities:</u></p> <p>i. Redesign advisement processes to ensure a smooth transfer process from ECC to four-year institutions.</p> <p>ii. Coordinate and renew articulation agreements between ECC and four-year institutions.</p> <p>iii. Develop a sustainable system for tracking ECC graduates, beginning with the Class of 2021.</p> <p>iv. Develop and implement annual transfer events which include transfer fairs and opportunities for individual consultations.</p>
<p><b>Diversity and Access:</b></p> <p>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><b>Goal II, Objective A.</b></p> <p><u>Related Strategic Activities:</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>Goal II, Objective C.</b> Streamline and revise the student onboarding process to ensure equitable access and a smooth transition to Essex County College.</p> <p><u>Related FY 2022 activities:</u></p> <p>i. Design and implement new onboarding processes and provide cross-functional training to improve the enrollment yield.</p>
<p><b>Legacy and Transformation:</b></p> <p>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: Strategic Plan 2019-2024</i> 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 Assessment (IEPA) has better integrated assessment processes into the annual planning and budgeting cycle, while the Finance Department has integrated enhanced review and control processes. While the cycle is dynamic and steps often run concurrently, the FY 2023 Budgeting Manual lays out the key steps in the process (VI; Budgeting Manual 2023).

The Finance Department has a significant role in developing the budget (VI; REG-3-2 Budget Review and Revision, VI; REG 3-7 Budget Analysis). The review, analysis, and control of the budget is an ongoing process occurring throughout the fiscal year and includes coordinated budget activities among operating units, such as preparing the budget for presentation to the Board of Trustees and maintaining a system of budget controls. 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 supports the Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Plan by minimizing tuition and fee increases while providing for salaries and benefits as well as other operating expenses. While the College receives/generates funds from different sources and for different purposes, the College carefully analyzes and plans in categories such as Operating Funds (i.e. Fund 10), Special Grants, Capital Funds and Emergency Funds. Among these, the Operating (reoccurring) is the core and requires special elaboration here. The College has four main sources of operating revenue:

- State Allocation – The State allocates a bulk amount to all community colleges to distribute based on a specific formula. The state allocation accounts approximately 19.5% of the College's annual budget
- County Allocation – This is determined by the County Administration and the Board of Commissioners. The County allocation is approximately 29.0%
- Tuition and Fee Allocation – This is the largest source of the College's operating account and this accounts for approximately 50.2%.
- Other Revenue Sources – This includes auxiliary revenue and investments which accounts for approximately 1.3%

Similarly, there are two major areas of expenditure:

- Salaries and Wages – These are reviewed with regard to contractual obligations and covers all employee salaries, wages, and benefits. This accounts for approximately 84.0% of the College's operating budget. Since personnel is a significant portion of the College's Operating budget, the administration has introduced multiple training programs including customer service to equip employees and increase productivity.
- Other Expenses – These include costs for utilities, employer taxes, insurance, travel, supplies, etc. This accounts for 16.0% of the operating budget.

As with every institution, the COVID-19 pandemic provided serious challenges for the College. Assistance provided by the government (Emergency Funds) was invaluable in allowing the College to assist students and continue operations. As required in participation agreements, the funds were distributed directly to students, as well as personnel, technology, and supply needs of the College.

### **Budget Control**

Budget control and the budget transactional detail are an integral part of the College's accounting system (VI; REG-3-2 Budget Review and Revision, VI; REG 3-7 Budget Analysis). Primary purposes of budget control at ECC are to ensure that expenditures do not exceed revenue and that they do not deviate from policy. The Finance Department has the responsibility for overall institutional budget control and to take appropriate follow-up action. Area heads assume the primary responsibility over the control of expenditures within their budget units.

The operating budget amounts are analyzed and controlled by the Finance Department throughout the fiscal year. Once initial budget amounts are determined, budget requests and approved modifications are also tracked. Throughout the fiscal year, the budget details are reflected and tracked in the Banner ERP system. An analysis of budget versus actual expenses is performed regularly and anomalies are reviewed with area heads. A Budget Planning Committee discussed later in this Standard, may recommend reallocations throughout the fiscal year to the President and Cabinet.

Two levels of budget reporting are used to oversee budget controls. The first is an online departmental level tool. This system grants access to online reports and up to date and expense information in the Banner system. The second is an institutional level system where online budget inquiries and reports assist in the tracking and analysis of budget related activity. Budgets are reviewed monthly comparing projected versus actual revenues and expenses. These monthly reviews are performed by the Finance department and discussed with the President and the Board Finance Committee.

### **Post-Performance Review**

The Finance Department analyzes several factors in addition to budget variances, including evaluation of budget revisions, and review of strategic activities. These reviews continue throughout the fiscal year in preparation for the annual audit. This information is useful in assessing financial estimates and in developing more accurate budget estimates for subsequent budget periods. Budget development, implementation, and analysis are all closely related to the strategic planning process.

### **Initiation of Departmental Budget Requests**

In March of each year, area heads receive budget request forms for their respective units (VI; Non-Personnel Budget Request Form FY23, VI; Personnel Budget Request Form FY23, VI; Budgeting Manual 2023). The forms were re-designed in FY 2022 and now include two distinct sections: funding requests required for the unit to successfully meet its unit mission and

objectives, and requests that directly support new or ongoing strategic activities that directly support strategic planning objectives. Unit managers discuss and formulate these departmental requests with their area head. Under the College's bottom-up process, Area Heads review all departmental requests and prepare an area budget request that is presented to the President for further discussions and approval. Table 23 shows the timeline of this process.

### **Sharing of Assessment Results**

The Office of IEPA creates 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 November through June of each year, the Executive Director of IEPA presents key findings from these institutional assessment reports to the President and the Cabinet to better inform area heads on their proposed budgets and strategic activities for the upcoming year. IEPA also presents additional assessment findings relevant to institutional-level planning throughout the year. This includes 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.

### **Identification of Strategic Activities for the Upcoming Year**

In April of each year, the Executive Director of IEPA meets with each individual Area Head (who throughout the year assesses the needs of their area with the department heads) to discuss strategic activity proposals for the upcoming fiscal year. These discussions include which strategic activities from the current fiscal year will need to roll-over to the next year, which are completed and can be removed in the next year, and which are being proposed for the upcoming year. Both new and continuing strategic activities need to be included in the departmental budget forms if they require funding. The President reviews and finalizes the list of strategic activities for the upcoming year and items that are approved are included in the upcoming budget. Prior to these discussions held in May, members of the Budget Planning Committee and the President have preliminary conversations about funding initiatives directly related to the objectives of the strategic plan. These items are then discussed with each area in more detail beginning in May. Discussions on earmarking funds for strategic planning objectives for fiscal year 2024 are already underway.

## **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 previous year's activities. The President also communicates the directions and the strategic goals with the Board of Trustees and updates them throughout the course of 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 as well as provide quarterly updates on each activity. Quarterly reports are generated for the President and 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 and provides 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) which is charged to lead the development of the institutional annual budget for the approval of the Board of Trustees and the Board of School Estimate (VI; Board of School Estimate 2022). The BPC is also charged by the President to serve as an advisory body to Cabinet for strategic budget re-allocation throughout the fiscal year. The BPC is comprised of both Cabinet and non-Cabinet level members who are tasked with thinking outside of their respective areas to identify and propose strategies to best leverage resources to achieve the objectives of the Strategic Plan (VI; Non-Personnel Budget Request Form FY23, VI; Personnel Budget Request Form FY23).

ECC's Budget Development Timeline shown in Table 23 on the next page illustrates how the President, Cabinet, Financial Operations, and the Office of IEPA coordinate to develop a budget that ensures that planning efforts drive the College's budgeting decisions.

Table 23 Budget Development Timeline

STAKEHOLDERS	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
Budget & Finance	Year-end processing in Banner	Budget variables analyzed for next year				Work on projection of revenue and enrollment hours (Dec-Jan)			Finance will ask Directors via Area Heads to prepare budget from the bottom up based on Strategic Plan. Budget Request Forms sent to Area Heads to share with Unit Managers			Upload approved General Fund Budget to Banner
		Adjust allocations if necessary	Compare YTD to actuals to projections			Receive information regarding anticipated State Funding						
						Budget materials for Trustees						
President & Cabinet	Start executing and implementing objectives of the Strategic Plan			Discuss Budget assumptions with Cabinet for the next fiscal year	Discuss/ Review initial Budget	Review/ Approve Budget	Submit Budget for Board of Trustees approval	Budgets and Chapter 12 funding submitted to Board of School Estimates (BOSE) for approval		Forms and Area Head Summary due and sent to President and Cabinet for review	Final Review of Budget and approval of allocations	
					Discuss potential Chapter 12 and other Capital Funding					Cabinet & President with help from Finance work to assess needs and reconcile budget conflicts.		
Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment	Area Heads submit Q4 report on annual strategic activities			Area Heads submit Q1 report on annual strategic activities along with their targets, timelines, and approved budget for each activity			Area Heads submit Q2 report on annual strategic activities			Area Heads submit Q3 report on annual strategic activities		
	The Strategic Plan is re-printed and re-published with the updated annual strategic activities for the upcoming FY				IEPA presents Institutional Assessment results to President, Cabinet, and the Board of Trustees							Annual Area Head Report generated by IEPA and submitted to the President
											Exec. Dir of IEPA meets individually with area head to update annual strategic activities	Exec. Dir of IEPA meets with the President to finalize updated strategic plan
Board of Trustees					Review Budget Model and Chapter 12 funding allocation for next fiscal year	Fund 10 and Chapter 12 Budgets approved by Trustees	Budgets and Chapter 12 funding reviewed and approved by Board of School Estimates (BOSE)					

Revised March 2022

## PHYSICAL AND TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

### Capital Planning Budget

The College ensures the institution maintains sufficient physical and technical infrastructure through the Facilities and Information Technology Master Plans, as well as several funding sources independent of student tuition. The Capital Planning process is informed by ECC's Academic Master Plan which is further aligned to the institutional Strategic Plan. As guided by Goal IV of the Strategic Plan: "continue to improve the physical infrastructure of Essex County College to better meet the needs of our students and enhance the student learning experience" ([\*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1\*](#)), ECC seeks to improve its infrastructure and technology in ways that support student success. For example, Goal III of the Strategic Plan presents the College's goal to "strategically expand our capacity to offer multiple learning modalities to best accommodate all learners". In order to provide more access to students, integrated classrooms were created to allow students to have a college experience that best fits their preferred learning modalities and lifestyle.

The Operating (Fund 10) and Capital Planning budgets work in tandem to achieve the Mission and strategic initiatives of Essex County College. Fund 10 budgets facilitate day-to-day operational needs such as supplies, software subscriptions, and employee salaries. Capital Improvement Funds, as guided by the Facilities Master Plan and Strategic Plan, seek to maximize resources (technology and infrastructure) to better serve students, faculty, and staff (VI; Facilities Master Plan 2019-2023).

The College utilizes Capital Funds from available federal, state, and local programs. One on-going annual program is the State of New Jersey and County funded "Chapter 12" program. The College participates in this annual community college competitive New Jersey program. Chapter 12 Funds are provided to assist with academic related building, infrastructure additions and renovations. The College also participates in the State of New Jersey sponsored "Perkins Grant" program. This continuing annual allotment provides support for defined academic technical programs, mainly with funding of specialized equipment. In addition, the College receives and designates outside funding for what is called "Minor Capital" projects, such as technology related and other equipment and renovation projects. The College has intermittently benefitted from "Special Bond Capital Funds" from the state to further assist with funding Capital Projects. These funds can cover projects that span across multiple fiscal years.

The College has several initiatives underway funded by various sources, most of which are non-recurring. As described further below, the College has undertaken the construction of a new West Essex Campus totaling approximately \$52 million. The funding includes a one-time \$10 million award from the Governor/Legislature of the State of New Jersey, as well as \$20 million from the County of Essex. The remaining funding (\$22 million) comes from an accumulation of the College's prior Capital Funds. This project is expected to be completed in July 2023.

The College received Chapter 12 funds in the amount \$3 million in FY 2023 and expects to receive \$3.9 million in the upcoming fiscal year (FY 2024). Several projects have been completed and others will be undertaken as a result of receiving these funds including the

renovation of the Gymnasium, IT Department, Cafeteria, and Center for Technology; replacement of main entrance doors; and remediation of the pedestrian bridge.

The State of New Jersey Perkins Grant, around \$700,000, is funding a variety of program activities and equipment, including educational system software for the nursing program, workshops for the Criminal Justice program, equipment for the Vision Care Tech program, and computers for the Engineering programs. The Business Division's Bloomberg Terminal facility is also funded through the Perkins Grant.

As an example of private funding, the College received a grant as part of the PSE&G Energy Savers Project to upgrade classrooms, hallways, and lecture halls with LED lights. Phase two of this project calls for more areas fitted with LED lights in 2023, with resultant savings in energy and maintenance costs.

### **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 (VI; Facilities Master Plan 2019-2023). Perhaps the greatest issue was environmental problems at the West Essex Campus. When it was concluded that it could not efficiently be remediated, the College procured funding from the state and the county and all entities agreed that the institution can better support the residents of the western part of the County with a new facility.

## **COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE PLANNING FOR FACILITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **Facilities and Infrastructure**

To optimize its potential and resources, the College is addressing the priorities outlined in the *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Versions 2.0 and 2.1*. There, the College developed four specific goals, including re-establishing financial stability and continuation of improvement projects to operate proficiently in the service of its Mission, Vision, and Values. Fiscal processes and management, performance impacts, academic innovations, and an effective physical infrastructure address this through annual targets. Some aspects of the four main goals are found 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, an architect was commissioned to create a five-year Facilities Master Plan for the College's Main Campus. The study serves as a planning tool for the College for program expansion 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, 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 excellence in 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. While prioritizing the list of recommended projects, the College had to consider financial challenges and the pandemic's effects on operations and resource opportunities. 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. Updated again in July 2022 *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1* was released with an updated list of projects to be completed by FY 2023.

## Technology

All technology planning begins with the College's Strategic Plan, which is tied to the Mission, Vision, and Values. Planning also happens within each Information Technology sector (Network, Systems, Academic Computing Services, Instructional Support Services, and Technology Support Services). In focusing on meeting its goals, ECC improved its technological infrastructure over the last five years with funding assistance from a Foundations for Instructional Technology Grant. This includes expanding the wireless network, implementing a virtualized server and desktop environments, and bringing a core network infrastructure upgrade to closure. ECC aims to create a more innovative and reliable digital environment in an ongoing basis. Under this model, the College was able to adapt quickly to the pandemic, and local, state, and federal mandates, and acted on and adopted the following strategies:

- Acquisition and set-up of Zoom videoconferencing for the College, as well as training of staff
- Provided the capacity and technical infrastructure for remote learning
- Upgraded Moodle to support remote teaching and learning
- Provided technical support for remote learning throughout the pandemic
- Developed a computer loaner program for students and staff which provided computers, laptops, headsets, and web cameras
- Established a Cloud Call Center for Admissions and Enrollment Services
- Provided technical support and equipment for the on-campus COVID-19 vaccination site in conjunction with the County
- Upgraded the cabling infrastructure for the Physical Education Building which served as a Covid-19 testing and vaccination site

In support of the College's *STRATEGIC PLAN: Students First Version 2.1*, Goal III. Objective D (technical infrastructure), Information Technology has directed its efforts on the required software platforms to enhance student services and retention.

*Table 24 FY 2022 Activities*

<b>Software Platform</b>	<b>Activity/Status</b>
Implementation of Qless	Completed
Implementation of Customer Relationship Manager (CRM)	Partially completed
Implementation of DegreeWorks	Completed
Implementation of E-Transcripts through the National Student Clearinghouse	Completed
Implementation of Softdocs	Completed
Implementation of Elevate	In process
Renewal of Touchnet	In process
Implementation of the Ready App	Completed
Implementation of the CourseLeaf Online College Catalog	Completed
Website Upgrade	Completed
E-Catalog	Completed
Implementation of Naviance	Completed

ECC continues to improve upon its technology infrastructure and resources to ensure it can carry out the College's use of current and new technologies, provide secure and reliable services, and facilitate digital accessibility. This includes upgrading software, hardware, and infrastructure. Currently, in progress:

- Campus-wide wireless system upgrade
- Upgrade and deployment of 50% 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
  - Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence
  - Center for Technology
  - Information Commons
  - 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
- Office 365 messaging system migration for staff, faculty and adjuncts
- Network and systems infrastructure upgrade

Through these initiatives, ECC's technical infrastructure serves as a supportive arm for its mission of academic excellence and the success of students. It involves keeping pace with the

evolving needs of students, faculty, and staff while dealing with limited staffing. Despite challenges, all processes and services run with proper support.

### **Annual Audit**

The issues experienced by the finance areas of the College which were noted by the Middle States Commission in 2017 and 2018, were resolved, and, in 2019, the College 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 current 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 funded 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 these findings.

The College has progressed from a situation of fiscal exigency (declared in 2018) to fiscal stability with steady progress to building a significant financial reserve. The rate of progress has varied somewhat due to turnover in the CFO position. Prior to 2018, ECC's financial status and limited longer term analyses prevented the realization of sustained financial stability and needed reserves. Through the guidance of the fiscal exigency plan, ECC worked to right size the institution by examining personnel levels and operating expenses. The *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1* acknowledges the achieved financial stability with the target of increasing fiscal reserves by five million dollars over the prior fiscal year. ECC has exceeded the goal for Fiscal Year 2022, and it is expected to do so for Fiscal Year 2023.

### **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 Standard, 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
- The hiring of a Senior Comptroller to fill the vacant renamed CFO position

- The addition of annual strategic activities, aligned under each objective, added directly into the Plan, and updated annually
- Better integration of the planning process with the budgeting process and within the context of assessment results
- 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 via IEPA
- 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 its FY 2022 annual target for Goal I in *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* Version 2.1. 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% 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.

Examples of how ECC uses a data-informed approach to ensure that budgeting is aligned with its strategic planning efforts are included in the Evidence Inventory (VI; FY 22 & FY 23 Data Informed Decision-Making – Closing the Loop, VI; Mapping of 2019-2024 Strategic Plan to FY 24 Budget)

## CONCLUSION

Essex County College recognizes that fiscal stability is required to support every aspect of the College's operations. The first institutional goal in *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* Versions 2.0 and 2.1 is to increase the College's fiscal reserves to five million dollars by the end of FY 2022 and the College was able to successfully achieve that goal. Through the implementation of the annual strategic activities outlined in each annually updated version of the strategic plan, the College is working to build financial reserves so that it may be better able to support its programs and weather disruptions such as those caused by the 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.

## STRENGTHS

- The initial version of *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* served the College well for unprecedented times during the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan was further strengthened with revised goals and objectives, an updated environmental scan, and

enhanced accountability reporting processes in versions 2.0 and 2.1 to respond to rapidly changing conditions

- The *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan Version 2.0 acknowledges the achieved financial stability with the target of increasing fiscal reserves by five million dollars over the prior fiscal year. ECC has exceeded the goal for Fiscal Year 2022, and it is expected to do so for Fiscal Year 2023
- Despite the national decline in enrollment that has been experienced by institutions of higher education during the pandemic particularly in the two-year public sector, ECC experienced a 2.4% increase in student credit hours in FY 2022

### CHALLENGES

- 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 the College has since hired a Senior Comptroller to fill the renamed CFO position
- It is a challenge for the College's technical and physical infrastructure to keep pace with the evolving needs of students, faculty and staff while dealing with declining resources and staffing shortages

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to build the College's fiscal reserve to ensure the sustainability and stability of the institution
- While carrying out the implementation of the current Strategic Plan, the institution should invest in the time and resources to begin collaboratively developing the next five-year strategic plan building upon the successes and lessons learned from *STUDENTS FIRST*: Strategic Plan 2019-2024



## 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 contributions of all stakeholders and gives high institutional priority to developing partnerships with a broad and inclusive group of civic and community-based organizations. The College operates within a system of shared governance, with decision-making informed by multilevel participation which includes students (including alumni), staff, faculty, and administration. At the apex of the governance pyramid is the Board of Trustees (BOT or the Board), followed by the President, the President's Cabinet, and eight faculty 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, division, area, and office. The College Organizational Chart (VII; ECC Organizational Chart 2022-2023, VII; ECC Organizational Chart Presidents Cabinet and Administration by Name 2022-2023) shows the chain of command for each administrative position. The current chart was revised after the appointment of then Interim President and was adopted by the BOT on September 2020, and revised again on January 2023. Additionally, there are more detailed charts which show the relationships between Cabinet members and the area they supervise (VII; ECC Organizational Chart Presidents Cabinet and Administration by Name 2022-2023).

The College has a three-level governing structure that is composed of the Board of Trustees, the President, and 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 final decisions on proposals forwarded by the College Administration i.e. providing oversight.

Administrators are properly vetted based upon their experience and credentials before appointment to their positions. This creates an effective support system for the President's vision. 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 have the necessary leadership and resources to support their overall job performance.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### **Membership**

New Jersey state statute and ECC Board Policy (BP 1-2; N.J.S.A. 18A:12) (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022, VII; N.J.S.A. 18A:12) provide for a total Board membership of eleven Trustees. 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 eleven appointed members, at least two must be women. Additionally, the Essex County School Superintendent serves as a voting member. There is one seat occupied by a non-voting student representative who is a member of the graduating class and is elected by the outgoing graduating class. The President of the College serves *ex-officio*, as a non-voting member. At the time of this writing, Board membership is constituted as mandated except for the two governor-appointed positions which are vacant at ECC, as they are at some other New Jersey community colleges. The College has been actively pursuing the appointments with the Office of the Governor.

### **Board Executive Committee**

The Board Executive Committee is fully constituted and functioning in accordance with Article IV of the Essex County College Bylaws (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022). Each November, the Trustees elect, by majority vote, a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer to serve for a term of one year. The Board may also elect other officers as may be needed. Vacancies in the Executive Board, which occur during any given year, are filled by the Board for the expired term.

The Board Manual remains dynamic as revisions are made on a continual basis. The manual was last updated in January 2023 and approved by the Board at the monthly meeting. It is available to the public through the College's website (VII; Master Board Policy Manual).

### **Board Sub-Committees**

Board members are assigned to committees based on their interest, experience, and at the discretion of the Chair of the Board (VII; N.J.S.A. 18A64A-8). The Student Representative's participation in Board Committees is limited to the Educational Programs Committee (VII; Master Board Policy Manual, VII; N.J.S.A. 18A64A-8). Representatives of constituent units of the College, including employee, student, and alumni organizations, may be invited to contribute input to the Board at any Conference Meeting of the Board, and to any Board Standing or Special Committees (VII; Master Board Policy Manual, VII; N.J.S.A. 18A64A-12). Board Committees meet on a monthly basis with the exception of July and August.

## **Board Agenda**

Agendas for Board Committee meetings are developed by the President and the Administration with the consultation of the respective Committee Chairs. It is worth noting that, other than the President, the Board is open to the College community at public meetings and sometimes participates in College events to ascertain topics of interest that could be discussed on the Board agenda. The standing committees of the Board are the Personnel, Finance, Educational Programs, Site/Facilities/Equipment, Community Relations, and Policy & Governance Committees. While the initial agenda items go through the six Committees at the Committee meetings, the final BOT Agenda consists of the approved items (mainly resolutions) from the Committees with the consent of the Board Chair. The final BOT Agenda is published to the College community via email and the College's Website at least 48 hours prior to public meetings.

## **Board of Trustee Orientations**

Newly appointed Trustees are now mandated by the State of New Jersey to attend an orientation. The State of New Jersey has recently codified this practice. The purpose of the orientation process is to address responsibilities, policy making, communications, resources, ethical standards, and more. There are also new Trustee orientations through the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC) in seminars, workshops, and printed and electronic materials. The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) also provides orientations in the form of annual conferences, publications, and online and face-to-face workshops and seminars. The most recent Board of Trustees orientation session was held in fall 2022.

## **Responsibilities**

The Board satisfies its oversight obligations by observing 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 NJ's Open Public Meetings Act, ensuring that the dates and times of monthly public meetings are publicly advertised, that agendas are developed in advance of the meetings, and that a quorum is formed before voting on any action items (VII; Open Public Meeting Act). To ensure appropriate confidentiality, personnel and certain budget deliberations are not open to the public and are governed by legal regulations and requirements.

The Higher Education Restructuring Act of 1994 (VII; Legislative History Checklist 1994c48) requires that each community college annually files with the Office of Management and Budget an audit of the College's accounts, financial transactions, and enrollment. Upon completion of the audit, the College President presents it to the Board for review (VII; Master Board Policy Manual). The Board also has policies addressing financial reserves that the College should have available. The 2022 audit is underway at the time of this writing, and more information on the process is available in Standard VI.



## **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, which was updated and affirmed in 2017 (VII; Master Board Policy Manual June 2022, VII; N.J.A.C. 9A 3-1.1, VII; N.J.S.A. 5213D-12, VII; N.J.S.A. 5213D-23). These standards provide that Trustees may not use their position to secure unwarranted privileges and 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.

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 their responsibilities as a Trustee conflicted with their business interests outside of the College. It also asked whether during the appointment process, they were given any direction as to how the College should be run. Copies of the confidential survey and results are available upon request of the Visiting Team and permission of the Board General Counsel through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA). At the time of this document submission, there are no known conflicts of interest, past or present. Each current member of the Board is required to file annual statements of compliance with this policy, and they have done so consistently each year.

In May 2021, 11 senior administrators and the heads of the Administrators and Professional Staff collective bargaining units (VII; Survey Results Bargaining Units) were surveyed in-house about their perception of the Board's functioning. Those surveyed unanimously felt that the Board members respected their roles and were not overreaching or interfering in the daily operations and decision-making processes of the College.

## **Assessment of the Board**

In accordance with Board Policy 1-5, all Trustees must complete an annual Board-approved evaluation to assess personal performance. The evaluation incorporates criteria regarding Board operations as well as criteria that define the effectiveness of the Board 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 and then discussed at the Board's annual retreat. These retreat discussions are used to review progress on strategic initiatives and to formulate strategic goals for the upcoming year. The most recent Board Retreat was held on November 5, 2022. The Board developed and adopted the Board Action Plan memorialized in Board Resolution 7-3.4/11-2022 on November 15, 2022.

## **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 prioritizes initiatives to insure

the stability, productivity, and growth of the institution. With the advice and data provided by Cabinet members and College leadership, the President works towards developing goals, plans, and policies to effectively manage the organizational structure and resources of the College. When brought to their level for consideration, the Board reviews and provides recommendations when deemed necessary before making final decisions on the action items.

## **Historical Perspective**

A brief explanation of the history of the Office of the President of Essex County College is useful to understanding how the College has worked through various challenges and come out stronger on the other end.

After 30 years, Dr. A. Zachary Yamba retired from the presidency, replaced by Dr. Edythe M. Abdullah, who served between 2010 and 2013. After several months in an acting capacity, Dr. Gale E. Gibson, the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer under Dr. Abdullah, was appointed to the presidency by the Board of Trustees. In April 2016, Dr. Gibson and the College's then General Counsel were terminated by the Trustees due to allegations of misconduct.

In response to Dr. Gibson's dismissal, the Board immediately convened and acted to appoint Dr. Yamba as Acting President in order to stabilize the institution. In a show of solidarity, the Faculty Association, in April 2016, voted unanimously to show its support for Dr. Yamba's return. That June, the Board of Trustees approved and extended Dr. Yamba's contract through June 30, 2017. At that same public meeting, the BOT's Chairperson also announced that a nationwide search, according to Board Policy regarding presidential searches, would be opened to hire a new College President. At its May 2017 public meeting, the Board unanimously voted to appoint Dr. Anthony E. Munroe Interim President before officially appointing him as the College's eighth president that July (with a contract set to expire May 31, 2020).

With Dr. Munroe's departure in the summer of 2020, Dr. Augustine A. Boakye, a tenured member of the College's faculty who had been serving as an Acting Academic Dean after serving as the Chairperson of the Business Division, was appointed Interim President. After a nationwide search, the Board of Trustees appointed Dr. Boakye as the College's ninth president. This was met with widespread applause and approval by the College community.

Having five presidencies over the span of 10 years has presented unique challenges. There were changes in policies, procedures, and practices which were planned and partially implemented before ultimately being modified or outright abandoned once a new president came on board. Dr. Boakye has begun to put forth policies, procedures, and practices that have stabilized the College and set it on a path towards increasing student access and success.

## **Qualifications and Selection Process**

The process for presidential searches is codified in Board Policy (VII; Master Board Policy Manual). The process includes the development of Board-approved criteria based upon an assessment of institutional needs and the creation of a Search Committee made up of ECC

stakeholders who will work towards selecting the best possible candidate from a pool of qualified individuals. This Search Committee makes its recommendation to the Board for full consideration.

The Search Committee in 2021 consisted of the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, two additional Board members, 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 (one of the College's community partners).

The Committee consulted with various groups within the institution to establish criteria for the Presidential Profile, which was approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2021. The position was advertised widely, and a pool of qualified candidates selected. Three final candidates (Dr. Boakye being one of them) interviewed with the Board and the College community. Dr. Boakye was the successful candidate and assumed the presidency on November 1, 2021. Dr. Boakye earned his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Dundee in Scotland. He has over a decade of experience as a professor and administrator (having served as Chair of the Business Division and as an Acting Academic Dean at ECC) (VII; Boakye CV).

### **Evaluation of the President**

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 (VII; Master Board Policy Manual). The Board's 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**

Members of the President's Executive Team (Cabinet) include 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 West Essex Campus, Executive Director of Enrollment Management, and the Executive Dean of Faculty and Academics. The Organizational Chart shows the Executive Team structure and can be found on the College's website (VII; ECC Organizational Chart Presidents Cabinet and Administration by Name 2022-2023).

### **College Administration and Staffing**

The College employs highly-qualified administrators and professional staff sufficient to ensure the institution is effectively meeting its mission. These positions include department heads, office staffing, and additional office support services in order to oversee daily operations. Newly-hired individuals go through the Board-approved hiring process where they are properly

vetted through search committees and Human Resources. Respective area heads are provided with the names of final candidates before being approved and recommended to the President prior to the Board of Trustees' final approval. Essex County College is committed to hiring and promoting from within, creating and maintaining upward mobility and a culture of highly-dedicated, educated, and driven individuals all working towards promoting student access and success. Evidence of this commitment includes a strategic activity outlined in *STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan 2019-2024 Version 2.1* "to develop and implement a succession planning process that will help the institution better identify, fill, and train for key positions while fostering a cultural of commitment and long-term planning in all areas of the College" ([\*STUDENTS FIRST: Strategic Plan Version 2.1\*](#)).

## **Faculty Governance Committees**

The system of shared governance originated when the College opened, and reflects the belief that different perspectives on the development and implementation of the strategic goals best serve the Mission, Vision, and Values of the institution. Per College Regulation 6-2, Standing Academic Governance Committees, there are eight standing committees (VII; REG 6-2 Standing Academic Governance Committees):

- Academic Assessment Advisory Committee (AAAC)
- 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)

Voting representatives to committees are full-time members of the Academic Divisions and selected to serve through secret balloting within Divisions. Students and administrators participate in shared governance committees as per article 5 and 6 of the regulation. There is a Presidential appointee on each committee and also an administrator who serves as a liaison to College leadership. To allow for maximum participation, meetings are scheduled once per month during the College Hour (Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:40pm to 3:40pm).

Each academic governance committee makes recommendations to the Academic Policies Advisory Committee (APAC). APAC is organizationally the highest faculty governance body where issues and recommendations discussed and developed by the other seven 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.

## **ECC Bargaining Units**

College governance is heavily guided by the various union contracts which are negotiated between the unions and the administration. ECC has seven bargaining units which include the Faculty Association, Adjunct Association, Administrative Association, Professional Association, Support Staff Association, Fraternal Order of Police, and the Security Association. Apart from the regular leaders meeting with the President, the union leaders advocate and handle grievances on behalf of the respective units. The leaders also provide vital input to assist the President in daily operations. The Faculty and Administrative Associations have individual elected Board representation for their memberships. Each bargaining unit is given the opportunity to update the Board at regular public meetings.

## **Student Government and Alumni Association**

ECC values the voices of our students and to this effect, both students (via SGA) and alumni have permanent places on the Board regular monthly agenda. Both groups present updates to the Board and to the College community and use this platform ask questions regarding the operations of the College.

## **Assessment 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 ([\*STUDENTS FIRST\*: Strategic Plan Version 2.1](#)). The College follows a five-year assessment cycle and all administrative units are required to submit monthly reports following a specific format. The workflow begins with unit reports which are submitted to their respective area heads. These reports are incorporated into area-wide reports which are then submitted to the President. Unit mission and goals are in the forefront of each report. The specific three areas to reported on are:

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

This process culminates with an end-of-year update, broken into the following three sections:

- Area Mission and Goals achievement, which is described in detail and includes 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
- Assessment Process, which is intended for units/areas to describe which of their unit/area goals were assessed over the past year, how it was done, 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.

## INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

At the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, ECC promptly responded with a variety of safety measures for the College community. As discussed in Standard III, most courses were moved to remote learning formats. Information Technology (IT) provided support to students, faculty, and staff to learn and work remotely. A computer loaner program was established for students and employees. A limited number of employees who were designated as essential to the onsite operation of the College were permitted on campus from March 2020 to August 2021. 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 addition, an on-line support services webpage was created providing students with access to various support services such as admission advisement, Moodle assistance, transcript requests and other support services.

Students and staff were continually briefed on the College's Restart Plan through the COVID-19 Task Force, working with additional College leadership, through a series of digital communications and virtual Town Halls to ensure safety protocols were understood and met. 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.

As the pandemic and governmental protocols were eased and lifted, the College continually updated its Restart Plan to reflect Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. While the COVID-19 Task Force no longer meets on a weekly basis, 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.

Many other initiatives were developed so that daily activities were not unduly impacted. Announcements on the College's public address system were made several times a day in buildings. In-person COVID-19 Town Hall meetings were held to inform the College community of safeguarding measures taken. The President and Cabinet Officers conducted walk-throughs of buildings to assess conditions and provide support and solutions as needed. Facilities were 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 briefings 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 posted information on the pandemic, including COVID-19 information, the 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 the 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.

## CONCLUSION

The 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 including the Board of Trustees, President, senior leadership, administration, faculty governance, union leaders, students and alumni representatives operate with the same goal of serving the community by providing the best possible education and support services to students. After a prolonged period of stability throughout most of its history, the College was impacted by instability in leadership in the earlier years of the past decade. In 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 9.4% (51.4% to 60.8% over the last two years) and a more than 5.8% increase in the three-year graduation rate (11.1% to 16.9%). Under the current President's open-door policy, he meets with various stakeholders in smaller groups and interacts directly with the College community in a variety of ways. Under this approach, everyone's voice is heard as the College continues to move in a positive direction and build on its accomplishments.

## STRENGTHS

- The College's COVID-19 response was immediate, efficient, thoughtful, and ever-evolving (as per governmental guidelines) to maintain operations and, above all, ensure the safety of students and employees as a top priority
- The Board of Trustees and top leadership's relationship and partnership in supporting the Mission, Vision, and Values of the College is apparent and embodied in the overall progress made over the last three to four years

## CHALLENGES

- Five presidencies within 10 years was not easy on the institution, but Essex County College now has a President from within who has already worked and continues to work on overcoming obstacles and celebrating ECC's successes by turning challenges into opportunities
- The early months of the COVID-19 pandemic forced institutions to temporarily put their primary focus on day-to-day operations over long-range planning efforts. To adapt to the rapidly-changing environment, the College had to reevaluate its operations and update its Strategic Plan to ensure it remained current and actionable

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage leadership to cultivate talent from within to support future succession planning and institutional memory
- To continue building upon the administrative assessment process to better systematize it and enhance accountability





## EPILOGUE

Essex County College has embraced the Self-Study process as an opportunity to assess and reflect on its current state while using an approach built on collaboration, inclusiveness, respect, and teamwork. The results were illuminating and transformational. Through the collaboration of nearly 100 individuals who were guided by the voice of our students and fully supported by leadership, the College was able to successfully identify thoroughly-researched strengths, challenges, and recommendations for each Standard. Although ECC's Self-Study is officially drawing to a close, the College will continue this collaborative approach as it immediately transitions from the Self-Study into the two-year process of developing its next strategic plan.

The approach taken by Essex County College has positively impacted its institutional culture and serves as one of its shining examples of how much can be accomplished when the College embraces this method. As the institution embarks on the journey of developing its next strategic plan, it will take with it the discoveries, lessons learned, and recommendations of the Self-Study. Most importantly, it will do so together as a community built on a foundation of collaboration, inclusiveness, respect, and teamwork.



