

Essex County College

ACADEMIC MASTER PLAN

2025-2029

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Essex County College's **ACCESS TO SUCCESS**, Strategic Plan 2024-2029, serves to guide the development of this Academic Master Plan. It is vital that the goals and objectives of the Academic Master Plan align with the Strategic Plan. The Academic Master Plan will be reviewed annually and adjusted accordingly.

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

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 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 service.



Message from the President

ECC's Academic Master Plan reflects our strong commitment to ensure that our work continues to focus on the mission, strategic priorities, and core values of the College. We remain committed to ensuring that our students have every opportunity to thrive. Through this plan, we move forward with clear intention and urgency to respond to the changing landscape of higher education and the very real needs of our students and the community of Essex County.

Our plan serves as a living document that will guide our future development in curricular and co-curricular programming. It will also serve to guide us in the key decisions made regarding our college's resources. Priorities are only real if they are explicitly expressed in our institutional budget and this document will drive our year-to-year decisions. Further, this Academic Master Plan serves as the foundation of our new program review process, which demonstrates our commitment to continuous improvement that includes student enrollment, retention, success, and fiscal stewardship.

This document demonstrates the resiliency and determination of the Essex County College community to come together and build a plan for the College's future.

My vision as president is to create access that leads to student success. This of course involves creating strong academic programs and workforce development, delivering through multiple modalities at our various locations – Main Campus & FOCUS Extension Center (Newark) and the West Essex Campus (West Caldwell) – with support of our dedicated faculty and staff.

Dr. Augustine A. Boakye

Essex County College's Academic Master Plan (2025-2029) is anchored by the guiding philosophy that each and every student seeking a quality college education within its walls will be given the tools necessary to thrive academically and complete their course of study. This will prepare them for a transformational future that includes both continuing their education and becoming lifelong learners. This academic model is centered on the successful completion of a stellar education experience, delivered by faculty who are dedicated to bolstering students with intellectual and innovative guidance that encourages respect for all. Under this philosophy, students will receive an education that:

- Values and heightens imagination and intuition;
- Encourages exploration and individual growth both in and out of the classroom;
- Promotes critical thinking and problem solving;
- Fosters an ongoing quest for knowledge;
- Provides stackable and micro credentials; and
- Genuinely prepares students to both successfully manage the pursuit of a four-year degree and immediately navigate and negotiate an energetic, fluid, and vigorous marketplace.

Executive Summary

The Academic Master Plan (2025-2029) is the result of a deep reflection among representatives of Academic Affairs. The AMP is firmly rooted in quantitative and qualitative data which expresses a longitudinal consensus regarding the College's strengths and opportunities. Its creation was guided by the College's Mission, Vision, and Values as well as the Strategic Plan. The AMP is a living document up for review on an annual basis and will cover academic years 2025-2026, 2026-2027, 2027-2028, and 2028-2029.

DATA SOURCES

The following list of data sources were used in the decision-making process of forming the Academic Master Plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN

LABOR MARKET DATA

BENCHMARK DATA

INTERNAL TREND DATA

EXTERNAL/MACRO TREND DATA

STRATEGIC PLAN

While *ACCESS TO SUCCESS: Strategic Plan 2024-2029* incorporates the use of data throughout all six goals, the strategic application of data and analytics is particularly aligned with Goal VI which is as follows:

Goal VI: *Continue to align the College's physical and technological infrastructure to best support student success, employee productivity, and foster creativity/innovation.*

While each of the objectives under Goal VI incorporate the use of data, one objective directly captures the College's culture of data-informed decision making and illustrates the College's commitment to strengthening its analytic capacity.

Goal VI; Objective E: *Identify and develop business intelligence solutions through appropriate platforms that will allow the College to better leverage data and analytics to guide internal decision-making.*

The direct result of this institutional commitment is enhanced data accuracy and data integrity through various data governance initiatives. This enhanced data infrastructure is leveraged through the institution's commitment to enhancing its analytic capacity through the analytic platform Tableau which includes hierarchal reporting and dashboards to support all areas of the College. In FY 2025, the College heavily invested in this platform by more than doubling the number of institutional licenses to seventy-five to ensure that every academic program coordinator and advisor would have access to the data tools that have been developed and continue to be developed. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA) conducted comprehensive training with academic chairpersons and program coordinators on the use of the platform.

LABOR MARKET DATA

The College continues to monitor the local labor market closely to ensure academic offerings are aligned with State and local needs. One of the tools that the College uses to optimize program offerings is Lightcast, which enables ECC to...

- Monitor existing and projected labor market conditions for all currently offered and prospective academic programs;
- Monitor the competitive landscape of each academic program and our local market share among other competing institutions; and
- Continuously track the in-demand skills that employers are looking for in graduates through analysis of job postings.

Lightcast is also a key data source used in the College's multi-year Program Review process which was revised for Academic Years 2025-2029.

BENCHMARK DATA

In addition to conducting internal analytics, IEPA regularly conducts benchmarking analytics to gauge the College's performance when juxtaposed with comparable institutions.

The College participates in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) through the University of Texas at Austin, every three to five years and last participated in 2022. Through CCSSE, ECC is able to benchmark the following five indicators against other community colleges of similar sized enrollment, nationally:

- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Student Effort
- Academic Challenge
- Student-to-Faculty Interaction
- Support for Learners

The College last participated in the CCSSE Survey in 2022 which revealed that ECC's largest performance gap when compared to the averaged top 10% of community colleges was in Student-to-Faculty Interaction.

The College is participating in the Community College Cost and Productivity Project in 2025 through The National Higher Education Benchmarking Institute (NHEBI) at Johnson County Community College. Participating in this project will allow ECC to better analyze instructional costs, faculty workload, and other financial metrics and compare them to national benchmarks. This data will be a focal point of ECC's newly revised Program Review process and will be used for decision-making related to long term planning and budgeting. Participation in the study will help ECC compare their efficiency against peers, manage programs, and justify responsible use budget and resources. Individual academic programs will be able to use research and extensive data sets to examine operating costs and persistent cost efficiency of their operations.

INTERNAL TREND DATA

Annual Surveys

IEPA conducts an annual suite of student surveys that are designed to evaluate student perceptions at each stage of the student lifecycle from admission to graduation. These annual surveys include:

- Non-Enrolled Applicant Survey (applicants)
- The New Student Questionnaire (new students)
- Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey (all enrolled students)
- Campus Climate Survey (all enrolled students)
- The Non-Returning Student Survey (students who did not persist)
- Graduate Survey (graduates)
- Alumni Survey (graduates, one-year after graduation)

In addition to collecting survey data, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment incorporates the use of subsequent enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse via StudentTracker for the Non-Enrolled Applicants, Non-Returning Students, and Graduates.

Newly Developed Surveys

The Office of IEPA developed new surveys in AY 2024-2025 to better inform Academic Affairs leadership of ongoing issues related to retention and enrollment. These included:

- A new Scheduling Analysis and Student Preference Survey was developed to more accurately determine the number of sections needed for each course as well as student preference on day, time, and modality for these courses.
- A new Withdrawal Survey was developed to determine factors and behaviors behind student withdrawals.

Newly Developed Tableau Dashboards

The Office of IEPA developed new Tableau dashboards in AY 2024-2025 to better inform Academic Affairs leadership of ongoing issues related to retention and enrollment. These included:

- Retention Dashboards for various filtered lists of students who are yet to enroll during key enrollment periods.
- Assessment Dashboards for displaying longitudinal data trends for programmatic learning outcomes.
- Enrollment Dashboards for displaying various enrollment trends at the course level, including filters for identifying students enrolled in incorrect courses.

Strategic Planning Focus Groups

When Essex County College embarked on the process of developing its next five-year strategic plan, careful considerations were made on how to capture the voice of all members of our college community. This process included conducting focus groups with over one hundred students, faculty, and frontline staff members. Transcripts were recorded and a qualitative analysis was conducted to identify the key themes that ECC should focus on in the next five-year planning cycle.

EXTERNAL/MACRO TREND DATA

Essex County College conducts frequent environmental scans to monitor national and regional trends that may have an impact on the institution. These factors are integrated into strategic planning and budgetary decisions across the College.

For example, the College is closely monitoring the projected “Enrollment Cliff” that projects a significant drop in college enrollment starting around 2025, caused by a decline in birth rates that occurred after the 2008 Great Recession. This demographic shift means that fewer high school graduates will be available to attend college. The College has researched regional and local impacts of the projected enrollment cliff to more accurately predict the impact on the institution and ways to boost enrollment through non-traditional avenues such as dual-enrollment, non-credit to credit pathways, programs for returning stop-outs, and continuing education for non-traditional student populations.



ACADEMIC MASTER PLAN GOALS

AMP GOAL I

Curriculum
Assessment
& Evaluation

AMP GOAL II

Academic
Student
Success

AMP GOAL III

Academic
Support
Systems

AMP GOAL IV

External
Agreements &
Partnerships

AMP GOAL V

Community
& Civic
Engagement

AMP Goal I

Curriculum Assessment & Evaluation

Objective A. New Courses & Programs

- i. Determine market viability for new degree and certificate programs (both for transfer and workforce readiness)
- ii. Create new courses (both for general education and major requirements) to support new and current degree and certificate programs
- iii. Establish new pathways from non-credit programs to degree and certificate programs
- iv. Establish a new vetting process whereby it would be possible for career experience to be accepted for academic credit

Objective B. Current Courses & Programs

- i. Evaluate all current courses, degree programs, and certificate programs to determine if they should be left as is, revised, or inactivated by utilizing the Academic Program Review process
- ii. Evaluate the efficacy of current program accreditation policies and procedures
- iii. Continue the annual assessment of the Program Learning Objectives, the General Education Goals & Objectives, and the ECC Core Competencies

AMP Goal II

Academic Student Success

Objective A. Delivery of Instruction

- i. Maintain and strengthen current in-person, virtual, online, and hybrid course and program offerings while creating new offerings where appropriate and applicable
- ii. Design and implement more flexible but productive course schedules as well as making steps to use the campus spaces effectively
- iii. Assess the efficacy of current instructional resources which both faculty and students have access to and seek out and determine what new instructional resources are available and if they should be adopted

Objective B. Learning Management System

- i. Expand the use of ECC's learning management system (Moodle) by providing regular training sessions and workshops
- ii. Assess Moodle's various functions and tools to enhance the learning experience
- iii. Continue to work with publishers to ensure a smooth delivery process of textbooks and courseware
- iv. Expand the use of technology in the classroom

Objective C. Understanding of Learners

- i. Make use of data from sources such as the Student Course Evaluations and Campus Climate Surveys to better understand student behavior
- ii. Make use of various data points from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning & Assessment to reflect upon patterns in student retention and graduation rates
- iii. Make use of data to establish best practice methods within the academic divisions
- iv. Design and implement learning communities and mentorships at the academic divisional levels

Objective D. Faculty

- i. Continue to hire and maintain highly-qualified full-time faculty
- ii. Maintain a robust adjunct faculty pool across the six academic divisions
- iii. Enhance current interdivisional collaboration while establishing new approaches towards such efforts
- iv. Continue to support and enhance in-house professional development offerings for both full-time and part-time faculty
- v. Continue to support funding full-time faculty to attend off-campus professional development opportunities

AMP Goal III

Academic Support Systems

Objective A. Support Functions for Academic Success

- i. Evaluate the efficacy of FYE-097 (First Year Experience) to establish consistent best practices
- ii. Strengthen the collaborative efforts between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, which includes creating greater awareness, and support, of the latter's programs and services

Objective B. Educational Resources

- i. Reestablish library liaisons to strengthen the relationship between the MLK Jr. Library and the academic divisions
- ii. Support curriculum and instruction by highlighting the resources housed within the MLK Jr. Library
- iii. Evaluate the MLK Jr. Library's current resources and determine what should be purged, what should be maintained, and what should be added (both in terms of physical titles and digital ones)

Objective C. Student Recruitment, Retention, and Completion Efforts

- i. Establish a strong relationship with Institutional Advancement to enhance current and establish new ways to market ECC's academic offerings
- ii. Maintain a strong relationship with Enrollment Management where recruiting efforts are championed
- iii. Align ECC's degree and certificate programs with the requirements students need for their respective bachelor's degrees and careers/industrial needs
- iv. Continue to support and strengthen the efforts of academic advising to ensure students are regularly aware of their progress, using the Degree Works platform
- v. Continue to support and strengthen retention and completion efforts by making use of tools such as Tableau
- vi. Continue to support and assess the efficacy of the co-requisite courses which have replaced developmental-level prerequisite ones, especially in Math and English
- vii. Establish a system to help students better understand what career opportunities will be available to them upon graduation from ECC and upon graduation from the four-year institution

AMP Goal IV

External Agreements & Partnerships

Objective A. Relationships with Four-Year Institutions & Local Industries

- i. Revise, where appropriate, current articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities
- ii. Create new articulation agreements with four-year colleges and universities (both in-state and outside when possible)
- iii. Develop efficient transfer plans for ECC graduates
- iv. Create a comprehensive list of all articulation agreements which would be accessible to everyone
- v. Establish a point person within Academic Affairs who would coordinate securing grant, internship, and externship opportunities, in collaboration with the six academic divisions, which enhance the student learning experience within and outside the classroom related to their major and career goals

Objective B. Pre-College Readiness Programs

- i. Continue to support the efforts of helping Essex County high school students earn college credits towards an associate's degree through ECC's Early College Program
- ii. Continue to support the efforts of helping Essex County high school students earn associate's degrees through ECC's Dual Enrollment Program
- iii. Establish new agreements with local school districts to bring opportunities to more high school students who wish to earn their associate's degree

Objective D. Other External Organizational Partnerships

- i. Maintain and revitalize existing partnerships with external organizations
- ii. Continue to conduct external stakeholders' and advisory meetings
- iii. Create new partnerships focused on AAS degree programs

AMP Goal V

Community & Civic Engagement

Objective A. Community & Civic Engagement

- i. Integrate community and civic engagement into curricular and co-curricular experiences
- ii. Develop infrastructure for civic engagement initiatives to better partner across the College and serve the community
- iii. Incentivize and reward faculty who are committed to community and civic engagement and scholarship
- iv. Continue to engage and train faculty (full-time and adjuncts) to use the College's policies, regulations, and other appropriate laws that impact students and the College's operations

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026

AMP Goal I. Curriculum Assessment and Evaluation

<i>Key Performance Indicator</i>	<i>FY 2026 Target</i>
Academic Program Review Cycle	5 Year Cycle
Increase Degree and Certificate Program Offerings	Three new certificate programs... - Culinary Arts Academic Certificate (creation) - Autism Spectrum Disorder Academic Certificate (rollout) - Entertainment Production Academic Certificate (rollout) One new degree program... - Architecture AFA (creation)

AMP Goal II. Academic Student Success

<i>Key Performance Indicator</i>	<i>FY 2026 Target</i>
Expand Full-Time Faculty Roster	15% increase over prior fiscal year
Training for Virtual & Online Instruction	20% of full-time and adjunct faculty

AMP Goal III. Academic Support Systems

<i>Key Performance Indicator</i>	<i>FY 2026 Target</i>
Expand usage of MLK Jr. Library Resources	5% increase over prior fiscal year
Expand usage of the Learning Center's Services	5% increase over prior fiscal year
Increase the one-year retention Rate for FT-FT-DS (first-time, full-time, degree-seeking) and FT-PT-DS (first-time, part-time, degree-seeking) students	2% increase over prior fiscal year for FT-FT-DS cohorts 2% increase over prior fiscal year for FT-PT-DS cohorts
Increase the 6-Year Graduation Rate for FT-FT-DS (first-time, full-time, degree-seeking) students	2% increase over prior fiscal year for FT-FT-DS cohorts
Increase the 6-Year Graduation Rate for FT-PT-DS (first-time, part-time, degree-seeking) students	2% increase over prior fiscal year for FT-PT-DS cohorts

AMP Goal IV. External Agreements & Partnerships

<i>Key Performance Indicator</i>	<i>FY 2026 Target</i>
Increase Articulation Agreements	3 to 5 new articulation agreements
Evaluate & Assess Current Articulation Agreements	3 to 5 current articulation agreements for continued efficacy in transfer

AMP Goal V. Community & Civic Engagement

<i>Key Performance Indicator</i>	<i>FY 2026 Target</i>
Establish Community Engagement Efforts	2 to 3 community engagements designed and conducted by ECC faculty
Workshops on College Policies, Regulations, and Other Appropriate Laws which Impact Students and College Operations	2 workshops and 1 seminar

Conclusion

It is with great enthusiasm that we share our Academic Master Plan (AMP) for 2025-2029. It is a bold and student-centered roadmap designed to reinforce the fundamental operations of Academic Affairs as we prepare for a future of even greater opportunities for all Essex County College (ECC) students.

This plan is rooted in our Mission, Vision, and Values, and our commitment to transforming lives, expanding learning, and empowering students to achieve their full potential. This plan also reflects ECC's best collective vision, in alignment with our Strategic Plan. This alignment ensures that every decision we make, whether pursuing an initiative or choosing not to, directly supports our institutional priorities.

Our Strategic Plan outlines key priorities that shape the future of our institution, including student success, academic innovation, community engagement, and operational sustainability. This AMP serves as the academic engine driving these priorities forward by embedding them into our college's curriculum, faculty development, policies, and student support strategies.

At its core, this AMP is about our students, who trust us with their aspirations; our faculty, who inspire and empower them; and our staff, who help to create the conditions for success. Collectively, we have envisioned a path forward that strengthens our programs, expands our opportunities for engagement, and reaffirms our commitment to meeting the evolving needs of today's students and tomorrow's workforce.

This AMP is designed to be a living document, one that will change continually as we envision new ways to improve our students' success and outcomes within the disciplines we offer, and will also serve to strengthen the community that we serve and that supports us.

I believe that this level of accountability, transparency, and collaboration will foster student success, empower our faculty and staff, create mutually beneficial relationships between all our employees, and build strong connections with the community and our industry partners. Together we can better address the challenges of today and seize the opportunities of tomorrow as we become one of the most transformative educational institutions in the County of Essex.

Dr. Hamin Shabazz

Vice President of Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer

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