

January 15, 2025

CREATING SUCCESSFUL JOURNEYS FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

Middlesex College has developed multiple strategies to ensure success for first-generation students, striving to meet their unique challenges and put them on course for success.

“What we are trying to do here is ensure that students feel proud of being first-generation students and not see it as a detriment, but something that is empowering,” said Alex Delgado, Middlesex College assistant dean for student success. “They are the first in their family to go to college and that can bring pressure, but it can also be rewarding and fulfilling because they are the ones who are making the pathway of change and new opportunities—not just for themselves, but for their families.”

First-generation students, defined as a student being the first in their family to attend a college institution, make up 42 percent of the Middlesex College population. The College provides programs they can take advantage of to help guide their journey through the academic process and beyond.

America Needs You (ANY) is a two-year in-person program that offers mentorship and career development resources. FirstGenU is a digital curriculum offered through ANY that provides social connections with other first-generation students and alumni and information on area internships.

Walking onto a college campus for the first time can be intimidating for anyone, but first-generation students feel the pressure acutely and can develop “imposter syndrome,” where they feel lost and unworthy.

“My first semester, I walked in the hallways completely confused,” admitted Leslie Bello Rojas, a first-generation Middlesex College student. “I felt like I was in the wrong halls. The campus isn’t that big, but when you enter, you feel like it gets 10 times bigger.”

“My imposter syndrome [experience] was walking onto campus and thinking I shouldn’t be here, or I don’t belong here, or I should have done this sooner or finished school sooner,” said Heidi Nunez, another first-gen Middlesex College student. “I have met a lot of people at Middlesex who have been able to help me navigate these challenges and hold my hand a little bit and support me and encourage me and say it’s OK for me to be here.”

Members of the Student Success team understand these challenges and strive to create a welcoming culture for first-generation students with guidance along the way.

“We want our students to succeed,” said Lorna Joasil, assistant professor of psychology in the History and Social Sciences Department. “As much as some of them are academically ready, in terms of advising and mentoring, any form of support services we offer targeting that population strengthens them academically and psychologically so that they can thrive.”

“I am first generation,” said Delgado. “But back then there was no talk about that, or any symbol of that on campus. Now, we embrace it.”



Members of the First-Generation Council, which is charged with identifying innovative strategies to support the success of first-generation college students attending Middlesex College. From left, Maribel Garcia-Gonzalez, Priscilla Hernandez, Lorna Joasil, Judy Robinson, Alex Delgado, Gurdeep Sawhney, Elba Arias Bueno, Mat Siegel.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON CAMPUS

CONNECTING SCHOLARSHIP DONORS AND STUDENTS

The Middlesex College Foundation honored benefactors and beneficiaries at its Annual Celebration of Philanthropy and Scholarship reception November 21. Four hundred seventeen Middlesex College students garnered 911 awards totaling \$575,136 from various philanthropic efforts and members of the regional business community. Ava Yap, the evening's highlighted speaker and recipient of the Switzer Foundation Annual Scholarship, shared the impact of scholarships on her personal educational journey, as well as stories of classmates and alumni professors who

also earned awards during their time at Middlesex College.

Since 1967, the Middlesex College Foundation has awarded over \$19.5 million in scholarships and financial aid to 19,500 students. The mission of the Foundation is to provide educational opportunities for qualified students and help them realize their academic and career goals. During Giving Day, held this year on December 3, generous supporters helped the Foundation raise \$31,186, which will help to better students' lives on their academic journey.





MASTERS OF MOVEMENT

The Dance Ensemble held its 23rd Annual Dance Concert on December 4 and 5 at the Performing Arts Center. The performances included choreographic works by Barbara Angeline, Joshua Handler, Juliana Martino, Aimee Mitacchione, Nia Serrano, Casey Yorke, and artists of Matheny Arts Access, with whom students collaborated for performances on and off campus. Participants in the Dance Ensemble include beginners to advanced-level performers, and all students are encouraged to audition regardless of their prior experience.



FILLING THE NIGHT WITH MUSIC

The Middlesex College Community Gospel Choir filled the Performing Arts Center with soulful songs at its 10th Anniversary Winter Concert on December 14. The evening performance included a live band to accompany the singers, who shared uplifting sentiments through songs of joy and peace.

CONNECTIONS

External Partner(s)	Middlesex College Representatives	Action
New Brunswick Cultural Center (New Brunswick)	Executive Director of Workforce Development and Lifelong Learning James-Waldon and Director of Lifelong Learning Stratton	Explored opportunity to provide training for wellness instructors at the New Brunswick Cultural Center
Staff Management Group (Carteret)	Corporate Education and Training Director Vega	Explored opportunities to provide leadership training for Staff Management Group employees
State Theatre New Jersey (New Brunswick)	Lifelong Learning Director Stratton	Discussed potential collaboration opportunities with State Theatre New Jersey department leadership

OUTREACH

Date(s)	Outreach Activity	Location or Means of Access
Thursday, December 12	Invited students from local high schools to attend a performance of the Middlesex College Dance Ensemble	Edison campus
Friday, December 13	WellPoint Community Event	Edison
Wednesday, December 18	New Brunswick High School Application Day	New Brunswick
Thursday, January 9	Edison High School Junior Parent Night	Edison
Thursday, January 9	RIME Program Admissions Information Session	Piscataway
Multiple times	Admissions Information Session*	Virtual events
Multiple times	FAFSA on Demand Workshop*	Virtual events
Multiple times	Health Programs Information Session	Virtual events
On an ongoing basis	Live chat appointments*	Via the web

*in English and Spanish

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Event	Location or Means of Access
Wednesday, January 8*	Board Committee meetings	Via Zoom
Thursday, January 9*	Board Committee meetings	Via Zoom
Wednesday, January 15 8:30 a.m.	Board meeting	Boardroom and via Zoom

*Schedule TBD

