

A PUBLICATION OF ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Impact

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The ECC Arts Center celebrates
its 30th anniversary!

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MISSION

The mission of Elgin Community College is to improve people's lives through learning.

SHARED VALUES

- Excellence*
- Freedom of Inquiry*
- Ethical Practices*
- Accountability*
- Collaboration*
- Holistic Approach*

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The Community College District 509 Board of Trustees meets at 6:30 pm on the second Tuesday of each month, unless otherwise posted on the board's web page. All meetings are held in: Building E, Room E125 Seigle Auditorium Elgin Community College 1700 Spartan Drive Elgin, IL 60123

You can access board agendas, minutes, instructions for addressing the board, and board contact information at elgin.edu/boardoftrustees.

For additional information, contact the Office of the President at 847-214-7374 or dkerruish@elgin.edu.

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LEADING THE WAY

A message from the ECC President and Board Chair

Dear ECC Community,

When people ask, "What makes Elgin Community College different?" we tell them: It's our people. When you talk to our board of trustees, faculty, staff, and administrators, you'll quickly discover they are all invested in our students' success. At ECC, we take our work seriously because of the many students who have trusted us with their dreams.

As an institution, we received a significant honor last year when the Aspen Institute recognized ECC as one of the top 25 community colleges in the nation. This recognition shows that excellence is at the center of what we do. From helping prepare students for college to finding internship opportunities, we prioritize student success.

Additionally, our faculty members are outstanding. Each day, they commit to providing excellence in the classroom. Our staff and administrators provide students with the resources they need to be successful, from advising and tutoring to wellness and financial aid. At ECC, we work as a team to ensure that each student who steps foot on our campus has the opportunity to achieve their dreams.

This semester, enrollment rose again to near pre-pandemic numbers, with 9,614 students enrolled. When students graduate and transfer to hundreds of colleges and universities nationwide,

including Ivy League universities, we want them to be prepared and confident as they continue their academic journeys.

This year, we had 85 students earn their college degrees before they received their high school diplomas through ECC's Dual Credit Program. These students saved time and money by earning their associate degrees while still in high school. They have now transferred to institutions such as Vanderbilt University, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, University of Pennsylvania, Northern Illinois University, and Illinois State University.

As we continue to educate our students, we must ensure we do not saddle them with debt. Student loan debt is a big problem in our country, but ECC is doing its part to improve financial mindfulness and literacy. We recently opened the ECC Center for Financial Empowerment and Wellness on our campus to help students graduate debt-free, afford homes, start businesses, and contribute to our community.

So many exciting things are happening at ECC now and in the future. Next year, we will celebrate our 75th anniversary, the ECC Arts Center's 30th anniversary, and the Education and Work Center's 10th anniversary. These milestones are a testament to our college's commitment and dedication to the communities we serve.

The investments we make in our students create lasting impacts. We hope you enjoy reading about our ongoing efforts to improve people's lives through learning. Thank you for your continued support.

David Sam, PhD, JD, LLM
President



Donna Redmer, EdD
Chair, Board of Trustees



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ON THE COVER:

Dancers in ECC's in-residence ensemble BFH (Ballet Folklórico Huehucoyotl) perform on the Blizzard Theatre stage.



FINANCIAL SENSE

Empowering students to make smart decisions

Egin Community College dares students to dream big. But, in a world where dreams have a price tag, ECC is intent on helping students reduce debt and improve financial literacy for lifelong success. “Our mission is to improve lives through learning, but that mission is meaningless if we are saddling students with debt while pursuing their goals,” said ECC President David Sam. Ongoing efforts to improve the affordability of the college include steady tuition rates, an increase in grants and scholarships, and financial education workshops.

This year, ECC established the Center for Financial Empowerment and Wellness in partnership with the Kane County Teachers (KCT) Credit Union to enhance financial smarts in the community. By leveraging KCT Credit Union's expertise, the center offers a variety of workshops, seminars,

and resources designed to empower students, employees, and community members with the knowledge needed to make informed financial decisions.

While ECC has kept tuition affordable and ensured students receive scholarships and grants, the college is ready to take the next step in improving the economic futures of its students. “Financial literacy is not just about numbers; it’s about providing individuals with the essential life skills they need to achieve their goals, navigate economic uncertainties, and build a brighter future for themselves and their communities,” said Sam.

“KCT has a history of serving the underserved in the banking community,” noted Mike Lee, president and CEO of

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97%
of ECC students
finance their education
without loans.

KCT Credit Union. “We chartered 86 years ago because most banks would not allow female teachers to open their own accounts. Our hope in working with ECC is to equip students for life — that they come out of college with good credit scores, ready for employment, and not burdened with financial debt from the start.”

The center's accessible programming, designed to meet the diverse needs of ECC's student body and

the community, will play a pivotal role in creating a financially empowered generation. The new KCT Credit Union branch in ECC's Renner Academic Library opened in July and is available to students, employees, and the community. ■



Crisanta Mora

CAREER PREP

Free services help motivated adult learner thrive

One night, while scrolling through Facebook, Crisanta Mora saw an ad that read 'Free GED Classes at Elgin Community College.' Mora, who immigrated to the United States without a high school education, spent 15 years working long hours in manufacturing, splitting shifts with her husband to ensure someone was always home with their children. She knew her high school diploma was the key to advancing her career, and the ad gave her the spark to start.

A few weeks later, Mora visited the Education and Work Center (EWC) in Hanover Park. The EWC provides comprehensive classes in adult basic education, English as a second language, and career development assistance. The center serves an area with a high immigrant population and residents facing language, transportation, childcare, and financial barriers.

"The EWC is a holistic experience for students," said Monika Gadek-Stephan, senior director of the EWC. "Classes are free, textbooks and materials are available on-site, as are Chromebooks or computers for completing assignments." ECC and Harper College faculty members teach students through daytime and evening classes, and transitions coordinators help students move on to higher education or career training at ECC or

Harper College.

"At the EWC, everyone made me feel at home," said Mora. She credits instructor Laura Azcoitia for motivating her to continue. "She told me, 'You can do it — it's never too late to continue your education,' and that gave me the confidence to finish my diploma at 38 years old." The best part of achieving her goal was that she did it alongside her 18-year-old son. In May, Mora graduated with her State of Illinois High School Diploma and attended her son's high school graduation three days later.

Next, Mora plans to enroll in the new medical assisting program at ECC's Spartan Drive Campus. "I am so proud to say I am a high school graduate, but at the same time, my experiences with the EWC motivated me to continue my education." She informs everyone she meets about the resources available at the EWC, telling them, "I assure you, you will always find the help and motivation you need to accomplish your goals; just take that first step." □

To learn more about the Education and Work Center, visit elgin.edu/ewc.

Note: EWC is a partnership among Elgin Community College, Harper College, the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, the Village of Hanover Park, and the state of Illinois.



LaShaunda Jordan

COLLEGE BOUND

TRiO coordinator helps students succeed

When young students share their struggles with LaShaunda Jordan, '15, a TRiO Upward Bound coordinator at Elgin Community College, she knows what they are going through. From academics to mental health concerns and lack of family support, Jordan understands their challenges. "I struggled in high school, not feeling academically worthy enough for college."

When Jordan had difficulties as a sophomore at Elgin High School, her mom encouraged her to enroll in ECC's Upward Bound Program. The program changed her life trajectory. Instead of thinking college was not for her, she persisted and enrolled at ECC, where she thrived. Jordan served as the commencement speaker for her graduating class. She transferred to Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, majoring in mass communications, and again served as the student commencement speaker. Jordan also earned a master's degree from DePaul University.

To Jordan, her greatest accomplishment is that she is now intervening and helping high school students in the same program that helped her. This year, Jordan returned to ECC's Upward Bound

Program as an employee to work with college and local high school students. "I knew I wanted to work in education," she said. "Students need guidance. As a product of Upward Bound, I know I'm in the right spot to help these kids."

"The mission of TRiO programming is to encourage and assist traditionally underrepresented students in preparing for and attending college," explained Lewis Rule, assistant dean of college transitions, who oversees the federally-funded TRiO

Upward Bound and Talent Search programs at the college. "We equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and motivation they need before, during, and after college."

Early intervention is the key.

"Students participating in Upward Bound programs are more than twice as likely to continue to college," added Rule, "and more than four times as likely to earn an undergraduate degree than their peers."

Not only has Upward Bound impacted Jordan's life, but it's now benefiting her children too. Jordan's daughters currently participate in the Upward Bound program at Streamwood High School. Through TRiO and Jordan's leadership, her daughters and many other students will be better prepared and college-bound. ■

**"I struggled in high school, not feeling academically worthy enough for college."
— LaShaunda Jordan**

SHARING THE LIME

ECC Arts Center celebrates 30 years

Jersey Boys. Second City. John Lithgow. Mavis Staples. Graham Nash. These are just a few artists to have graced the Blizzard Theatre stage since the Elgin Community College Arts Center opened 30 years ago.

The concept was to bring art to life for the region. Since then, the center has continued to fulfill that vision as a creative hub for the Fox Valley, offering distinctive performances in drama, music, comedy, culture, symphony, dance, and more.

The theatre showcases year-round performances and arts experiences, from national touring acts to international legends. "Since its beginning, the ECC Arts Center's mission has always been to include the community," said Cindy Gaspardo, performing arts manager. "We are here for everyone." To live that mission, the center has not only brought art to life with critically acclaimed acts but also features school-produced plays and musicals, on-campus art galleries, college ensembles, and music lessons.

The ECC Arts Center also built a vibrant arts community from within, serving as the

For show and ticket information, visit eccartscenter.org.

home for in-residence ensembles, which are community organizations providing performance opportunities for all ages. "There are thousands of community members involved with the college and in-residence ensembles, utilizing the space and resources to succeed," said Tommy Hensel, senior director of performing arts. "As a part of our arts family, these unique groups connect our campus to the community, and the community to our campus."

"All our in-residence ensembles offer something unique," said Hensel. "There is a place for everyone, from Mexican dance to children's theatre to an 85-member adult choir — this variety makes the center a cultural hub that extends beyond campus borders." ECC music faculty member Cynthia Hernandez is the current executive and artistic director for BFH, an ensemble celebrating 20 years in residence at ECC. "We have been very fortunate to be a part of the college," said Hernandez.

"The facilities are wonderful, and we have access to the various dance rooms, the theatre, and the ECC Arts Center as a whole. Our families feel welcomed and comfortable, and in return, we bring awareness to the college every time we go out to perform."

Another unique opportunity provided by these ensembles is that participants over the age of 16 earn college credit. "Most colleges do not offer credit for participating in [groups like BFH]," said Hernandez. "We are so fortunate to have this partnership with ECC and hope it continues positively impacting future generations for a long time."

As the ECC Arts Center embarks on its 30th anniversary, the college welcomes new and returning patrons to experience shows that don't require a commute to downtown Chicago. Plus, every seat in the 662-seat proscenium-style Blizzard Theatre offers a great vantage point throughout the acoustically-pleasing house. Upcoming performances include The 12 Dames of Christmas starring Angela Ingersoll, Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theatre, Chicago Tap Theatre, Bachelors of Broadway, and the ECC Jazz Ensemble.

The Arts Center through the years

1993

Visual and Performing Arts Center is completed



Jan. 2001

Arts Center's Stage 1 renamed the Blizzard Theatre to recognize the establishment of an endowed fund by Harry and Phyllis Blizzard to support program and equipment needs



Oct. 2004

Event celebrates 10th anniversary and grand opening of the Culinary Arts program



1990

Feb. 1994

CenterStage Series opens with first show, the Vienna Choir Boys (Stage 1)

1995

2000

2005

Jan. 2004

Inaugural American Grands Festival held



LIGHT



ECC Theatre students present William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Nov. 2009
Cast of Jersey Boys performs

Oct. 2011
Grammy Award-winner Roseanne Cash performs songs from her album "The List"

Nov. 2011
Tony, Emmy, and Golden Globe award-winning actor John Lithgow, performs

Nov. 2012
Renowned gospel singer Mavis Staples performs

Feb. 2013
Ladysmith Black Mambazo performs; internationally known after singing with Paul Simon on his 1986 album "Graceland"

March 2022
Graham Nash (of Crosby, Stills, and Nash) performs

2024
30th anniversary celebration begins!

2010 2015 2020 2025



Fatima Ahmed

DOUBLING DOWN

Dual-credit student accelerates her dreams

Fatima Ahmed looks like a typical college student. She sits in the Renner Academic Library studying for her abnormal psychology and microbiology classes. She leads a student club. And, she's focused on her goal of becoming a neurosurgeon or neuroscientist. But Ahmed is still in high school.

The Carpentersville senior has big dreams and began taking AP and honors courses her freshman year. By her junior year, she was ready for the next step. She enrolled in Elgin Community College's Dual Credit Program to simultaneously earn college credit while fulfilling her high school requirements.

"I knew I was ready for the challenge," she said. "I was nervous about how older students would react to having a 16-year-old in class with them, but I love the freedom dual credit has given

me," she said. "There are more classes to choose from, and I can tailor my education to my interests." Thanks to dual credit's accelerated learning format, she'll graduate from ECC with her Associate in Science on the same day she graduates from Dundee-Crown High School in May 2024.

To create deeper connections on campus, Ahmed started the Dual Credit Connections Club. "I remembered that desire to fit in as a new dual-credit student," said Ahmed. "I created the club to help ease the transition for others. The best lesson I learned is that finding your crowd makes things easier."

ECC's Dual Credit Program continues to grow and provide students with increased opportunities. "Dual credit means getting

a head start regardless of your post-high school plans," said Sean Jensen, assistant dean of college in high school programs. Dual-credit students graduate and transfer to schools locally and nationally.

In addition to the academic challenge she sought, Ahmed also understands the financial and long-term benefits. "Knowing I'll be able to pursue my bachelor's degree starting next year helps so much because that's money and time that I am saving," said Ahmed.

"Academics aside, I learned so much through the dual-credit process, even with a little under a year left to go. The way I've grown as a student and individual, I am really grateful to be a part of dual credit." □

111%
increase in dual-credit enrollment since 2019.



Jasmine Aguinaga with her mentors, Sergeant Will Werneske, center, and Deputy Chief Brett Czechowski

THE ROOKIE

Intern investigates career in law enforcement

Jasmine Aguinaga spent her summer like many college students on summer break — riding in the car, windows down, taking in the town. The difference for Aguinaga is that the car was a South Elgin Police Department cruiser and she was working with detectives as a summer intern. The second-year Elgin Community College student is pursuing her passion for criminal justice, gaining valuable experience before graduation and transferring to a university.

“Taking criminal justice courses is not the same as being with actual police officers,” said Aguinaga. “I wanted to see if it was truly something I was interested in before continuing down that path — I didn’t want to graduate, become a police officer, and realize it’s not what I thought it would be.”

With the help of ECC’s Internship Program, Aguinaga interned with the South Elgin Police Department and worked with police officers, detectives, and community service officers. She

“It’s kind of a test drive for your future.”

— Jasmine Aguinaga

learned how they write tickets and citations and observed an autopsy with the Kane County medical examiner. But the networking aspect proved most valuable to Aguinaga, as she connected with officers on a personal level. “Working alongside them and hearing their stories and experiences helped me mentally prepare for my future, she said. “And they gave me tips on what I need to do to succeed in this field.”

ECC Internship Coordinator Renee Arcos aims to help students like Aguinaga find the right internship. “If a student has never applied for an internship or job before, the process can seem daunting,” said Arcos. “We are here to help them find the opportunities they are looking for and navigate the process, including coaching on business etiquette and professionalism.”

Aguinaga’s internship with the South Elgin Police Department solidified her desire to become an officer, and she recommends internships to those looking to explore their career path further. “It’s kind of a test drive for your future,” she said. “This was a new experience for me, but with ECC’s help, the process went smoothly. I’m on track with my education and more excited than ever about my career choice.” □

Explore more about ECC’s Internship Program at elgin.edu/internships.

GRANTING OPPORTUNITIES

Scholars program opens career prospects

At Elgin Community College, there is an unwavering feeling that students can do anything.

But often, those considering college — and even currently enrolled students — are uncertain about what to study or how to afford it. Some of the uncertainty stems from not having exposure to a particular career or field of study. And so, with the support of the Motorola Solutions Foundation, the ECC Foundation is helping to change that.

The Motorola Solutions Foundation is the charitable and philanthropic arm of Motorola Solutions, committed to diversifying the workforce and creating opportunities for up-and-coming innovators in technology and engineering. Since 2017, the organization has awarded more than \$170,000 to the ECC Foundation to champion student scholarships. The Motorola Solutions Foundation Scholars Program at ECC supports 20 women and minority students pursuing degrees in public safety, engineering, and technology.

“Motorola Solutions sees value in our students, especially those who may not ordinarily look at engineering and technology as a career choice,” said Susan Taylor-Demming, executive director of institutional advancement and the ECC Foundation. “They are helping students realize their worth, supporting them academically and financially, and allowing them to see the breadth of opportunity the industry provides.”

For Motorola Solutions, the partnership is a win-win. Innovation has been at the core of the company’s 95-year history, and it aims to inspire and cultivate future engineers and inventors by supporting organizations that foster new thinking in education. “We want to nurture the next generation to continue innovating and pushing the boundaries of technology and possibility. And for innovation to benefit everyone positively, we need individuals from all walks of life, with different lived experiences, to contribute to it,” said Karem Pérez, executive director of the Motorola Solutions Foundation.

For Taylor-Demming, the best part of awarding this scholarship is the student-employee interaction. Scholarship winners





Recipients of ECC's Motorola Solutions Foundation Scholars Program tour the Motorola Solutions facility in Elgin and talk with employees about public safety and STEM careers.

tour the Motorola Solutions facility in Elgin and meet with employees. "The chance for students to talk to employees in the field they want to pursue is extremely gratifying, and there's nothing like it," said Taylor-Demming.

Students also find this experience rewarding. ECC graduate Kathryn Chappel is now studying at the Grainger College of Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The scholarship helped her worry less and perform better, and with it, she got into her top-choice school. "The Motorola Solutions Scholarship allowed me to focus more on academics and getting good grades and less on paying for school. I really enjoy my classes, and I got involved in the school by joining the Tau Beta Pi engineering honor society," said Chappel.

Scholarship funds directly support students' tuition and college expenses, such as books, lab fees, transportation, and food insecurity. The connection forged between students and Motorola Solutions is a wealth of opportunity. "What we hope students take away from their grant tenure is the feeling that they can accomplish anything and a desire to pay it forward at some point," said Pérez. For the ECC Foundation, it's a great partnership — and for the community, this partnership strengthens students' interest in and access to these fields. "We believe a thriving community is one in which each person has a chance to reach their full potential," said Pérez. ■

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