Dear NJASCU Colleagues/Friends:

Welcome to this edition of NJASCU’s "Noteworthy" compilation of a feature story, advocacy report, and news item(s), reflecting the interests and happenings among New Jersey’s senior public colleges and universities. Some of our news articles are reprinted in full; most are summaries with the full article accessible by clicking on the headline.

We would love your feedback and suggestions. Please keep sending press releases, many of which will be included in our "Noteworthy" compilation.

Thank you,

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NJASCU Special News

Ramapo College President Peter P. Mercer Will Step Down in 2021

NJASCU QuickTakes

Dr. Peter P. Mercer will step down as president of Ramapo College of New Jersey at the end of his current contract in June 2021 - thus marking the culmination of Dr. Mercer's 16 years of leadership and service to the college.

"Dr. Mercer is a tremendous asset to public higher education in New Jersey. Ramapo College students and alumni have benefited from his steadfast vision and his unwavering dedication to the mission of the
The Board of Trustees is confident that the college will continue to thrive under his leadership for the next two years," said William F. Dator, chair of the Ramapo College's Board of Trustees.

Under President Mercer's leadership, the college has thrived on several fronts:

- State-of-the-Art Living and Learning Environment
- Curricular Growth and Academic Reputation
- Campus Safety
- Affordability
- Increased Student Success and Demand for a Ramapo Education
- Strategic Planning and Initiative Funding

New Center Will Preserve History of First Successful Jewish Farming Colony

Gifts from two generous donors have helped establish a new center at Stockton University that will preserve and share the history of the first successful Jewish farming colony in America. The Alliance Heritage Center was formally announced September 26 at a ceremony in the chapel at the Alliance Cemetery in rural Norma, Salem County.

Photos and documents from the early Alliance Colony, founded in 1882, are displayed in the chapel and will become part of a new virtual museum coordinated by Stockton. To date some 500 photos, deeds, memoirs, letters, farming tools and other memorabilia have been collected from descendants and will be digitized through Stockton's Special Collections library.

"I am kvelling today," said Jay Greenblatt, referring to the Jewish word for feeling happy and proud. "I am bursting with pride and joy."

Mr. Greenblatt's family members helped settle the first colony and he has been instrumental in collecting and preserving colony artifacts. Stockton is working with the Jewish Federation of Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties to develop the center, which will also share the history of the neighboring communities of Norma and Brotmanville.

"This is not just a story of Jewish immigration," Mr. Greenblatt said. "It is also a story of American immigration. It is an important slice of history to be preserved."

Two major gifts helped establish the center. A $500,000 gift from an anonymous donor established a fund for the Elizabeth and Samuel Levin Director of the Alliance Heritage Center. Thomas Kinsella, a professor of Literature at Stockton, will serve as the director.

A $200,000 gift from Bernard and Shirlee Greenblatt Brown will establish a research endowment. Two recent Stockton graduates, Ray Dudo of Mays Landing and Sara Brown of Estell manor, are the first two research fellows. Read full article.
William Paterson University’s Master of Education in Curriculum and Learning Gathers STEAM
NJASCU QuickTakes

This fall, William Paterson University is launching a revamped version of its Master of Education in Curriculum and Learning program, now offering an innovative concentration in "STEAM," which adds the arts to K-8 science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) instruction. William Paterson University is the first and only institution in New Jersey, and one of only a few universities nationwide, to offer STEAM education at the graduate level.

"Research shows that arts integration in elementary and middle school STEM coursework can bolster student engagement and learning," says Amy Ginsberg, dean of William Paterson University’s College of Education. "Adding the arts makes STEM more accessible to more K-8 students - particularly those that sway heavier to such interests and skills or those who have previously faced inequities in STEM education due to socioeconomic, racial or linguistic factors, among others."

The new concentration is geared toward previously certified K-8 teachers, aiming to enhance their competence and confidence to adequately teach and guide STEAM subjects for all learners, according to Professor Heejung An, director of the Master of Education in curriculum and learning. The 33-credit program, which can be completed in 24 months, employs project-based learning, an inquiry-based research study, and leadership development courses so that candidates are prepared to meet the evolving needs of schools and districts in positions as STEAM teachers or coordinators, instructional leaders, or curriculum developers.

"We are offering an entire concentration at the master's level, which is very exciting," says STEAM concentration coordinator Sandra Alon, associate professor of educational leadership and professional studies. "We have many experienced teachers coming to us, going back to school, eager to enroll in this program." Read full article.

William Paterson Environmental Science Professor Awarded Fulbright Scholar Grant to Conduct Research on Tree Rings in Colombia
NJASCU QuickTakes

Nicole Davi, a professor of environmental science at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey has been awarded a 2019-20 Fulbright U.S. Scholar award to conduct research on tree rings from high-altitude sites in Colombia. The research will contribute to an understanding of climate variability and dynamics in the region.

Dr. Davi will spend six months from January through June 2020 working collaboratively with Colombian scientists at EAFIT University’s Department of Earth Sciences and the Universidad EIA to identify research sites where annual tree rings are prevalent in local tree species. Then she and her colleagues will develop tree-ring chronologies using novel low-cost methods that rely on high-resolution scans of tree-core samples.

"Because of conflict and political interest, tree-ring chronologies are particularly scarce in Colombia," says Dr. Davi. "In addition to contributing an extended understanding of climate variation in this region, tree-ring chronologies from Colombian Polylepis trees will allow for a better understanding of regional climate variability and dynamics."
could also provide insights into how forests are responding to climate change. This work can inform the evolution of the country’s forest management policies.”[Read full article.]

### State Colleges/Universities

**Two School of Science Professors at The College of New Jersey Receive Prestigious NSF Grant**

[www.TCNJ.edu](http://www.TCNJ.edu)

Two School of Science faculty members have been awarded grants from National Science Foundation (NSF) to support their research programs and engage undergraduate research collaborators in their work. Dr. Gary Dickinson, Associate Professor of Biology, received an NSF award to study barnacle exoskeleton development and material properties with a collaborator at Colgate University (Dr. Rebecca Metzler). Dr. Donald Hirsh, Professor and Chair of TCNJ's Chemistry Department, received NSF funding to study the genetic and cellular mechanisms controlling responses of phytoplankton to environmental changes with collaborators at Rutgers University (Drs. Kay Bidle and Kim Thamatrakoln) and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (Dr. Benjamin Van Mooy).

**Kean University Has Its Skylands Campus that Provides a Natural Learning Environment**

[www.Kean.edu](http://www.Kean.edu)

The Kean Skylands campus gives students from many disciplines the opportunity to study and conduct research in the beautiful ecological environment of the New Jersey Skylands. [Watch](http://www.Kean.edu) as Kean architecture student and intern Sara Mountford explains the development of this unique campus in Jefferson Township.

**WPU's New $40M Dorms Offer Tall Ceilings, Glimpse of NYC Skyline**

[www.NJ.com](http://www.NJ.com)

September 12, 2019 was a unique day at William Paterson University, where more than 10,000 students attend classes on a 370-acre campus in Wayne. A small crowd had gathered for the grand opening of a $40 million, five-story residence hall offering glimpses of the Manhattan skyline 20 miles away, plenty of space and a range of environmentally-friendly features.

It is called Skyline Hall, though the city is not visible from the first three floors of the 90,000-square-foot building.

Richard J. Helldobler, the university’s president, extolled the new building at a brief ceremony.

"This isn't the dorm of cinderblock rooms, creaky bed frames, cramped closets, and crowded common bathrooms that many of us remember from our own college days," Dr. Helldobler, who became president in July 2018, said amid some laughter.

"It is a cutting-edge facility that our students can truly call home during the academic year," President Helldobler added.
Senate President Steve Sweeney and Senate Higher Education Chair Senator Sandra B. Cunningham celebrated the acquisition of federal funds from the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The total $35 million grant, $5 million every year for seven years, will be used towards academic and development support services to increase and promote college attendance and success for the most economically disadvantaged students.

"The GEAR UP grant helps underprivileged students in some of the most vulnerable areas around the state. These funds will greatly benefit students in both North and South Jersey institutions of higher education," said Senator Sweeney (D-Gloucester/Salem/Cumberland). "When we give our students the opportunity and the tools to succeed, we become a stronger and more economically competitive state. Senator Cunningham and I will continue to promote more higher education initiatives in the Legislature."

"It is a known fact that educational attainment is the best way to pull oneself out of the cycle of poverty, and progress down a path of personal and economic success," said Senator Cunningham (D-Hudson). "Our students are among New Jersey’s most important assets, so it is paramount that we provide them with the assistance and opportunities to achieve their dreams. When our students flourish, we are all better."

GEAR UP is a discretionary grant program funded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education. Its goal is to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

The NJ GEAR UP State Project currently services seven urban cities, each of which is served by a higher education partner: Atlantic City and Pleasantville (Stockton University); Camden (Rowan University); Jersey City (New Jersey City University); Newark (New Jersey Institute of Technology); Paterson (Passaic County Community College); and Penns Grove/Carneys Point (Salem Community College).

A federal judge upheld Harvard University’s use of affirmative action in admissions, arguing in court documents filed Monday that the college's policy "passes constitutional muster" because it is "necessary and narrowly tailored to achieve diversity," which benefits the institution.

Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), a group that advocates against affirmative action, sued Harvard in 2014, arguing that its use of race-conscious admissions unfairly disadvantages Asian American applicants.
The group is likely to appeal the decision, and if successful, the case could end up at the Supreme Court.

**New Mexico is Unveiling a Plan to Make Tuition at its Public Colleges and Universities Free for All Residents**

[www.NYTimes.com](http://www.NYTimes.com)

In one of the boldest state-led efforts to expand access to higher education, New Mexico is unveiling a plan on Wednesday to make tuition at its public colleges and universities free for all state residents, regardless of family income.

The move comes as many American families grapple with the rising cost of higher education and as discussions about free public college gain momentum in state legislatures and on the presidential debate stage. Nearly half of the state’s including New York, Oregon and Tennessee, have guaranteed free two- or four-year public college to some students. But the New Mexico proposal goes further, promising four years of tuition even to students whose families can afford to pay the sticker price.

The program, which is expected to be formally announced by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Wednesday and still requires legislative approval, would apply to all 29 of the state’s two- and four-year public institutions. Long one of the poorest states in the country, New Mexico plans to use climbing revenues from oil production to pay for much of the costs.

Some education experts, presidential candidates and policymakers consider universal free college to be a squandering of scarce public dollars, which might be better spent offering more support to the neediest students.

**Scaled-Back HEA Plan Coming Soon?**

[www.InsideHigherEd.com](http://www.InsideHigherEd.com)

GOP senator Lamar Alexander is expected to introduce legislation soon that would offer a path to piecemeal reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, after months of stalled talks over a bipartisan overhaul of the landmark law, which wasn’t expected to move until at least next year.

Alexander, the chairman of the Senate education committee, has said he wants to pass an update to the HEA before he retires after next year. He’s particularly eager to simplify the application for federal student aid known as the FAFSA and the myriad repayment options for student borrowers.

A scaled-back package of higher education bills - which could be attached to a funding bill for historically black colleges that Congress is under pressure to pass by September 30 - could include a streamlined FAFSA application, the College Transparency Act, expanded Pell Grants for incarcerated students and the broadening of Pell eligibility to short-term programs, according to a wide range of individuals with knowledge of the discussions. Alexander’s office didn’t respond to questions about plans to introduce a broader HEA proposal.

But Senator Patty Murray, the Washington Democrat and ranking member on the
committee, has repeatedly said she’s not interested in passing legislation that falls short of a comprehensive reauthorization of the higher ed law. And discussions between Republicans and Democrats have hit numerous hurdles over issues like college affordability, oversight of for-profit colleges and campus sexual misconduct.

**What's at Stake for Colleges as Employers Rethink Hiring and Training?**
[www.EducationDive.com](http://www.EducationDive.com)

To contend with a reported lack of critical skills internally and among new hires, employers are sharpening their focus on workforce planning. And they expect the types of educational opportunities colleges offer to change.

That's according to panelists at BMO Capital Markets' 19th-annual Back to School Conference held Thursday in New York.

"There's brand risk, reputational risk, by allowing people to reach a terminal point in their career, and (companies) are trying to think more carefully about the talent plan within the enterprise and also where people will end up over time," said Frank Britt, CEO of Penn Foster, a skills training firm, during a panel about the future of work and reskilling.

**AASCU Appropriations Update**
[www.AASCU.org](http://www.AASCU.org)

**Appropriations Update**

The Senate Appropriations Committee passed its Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 302(b) allocations, which determine the level of overall funding for each of the 12 appropriations bills, on a 16 to 15 party-line vote. The Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) appropriations bill was allocated $187.7 billion, which is higher than FY 2019 but less than the House allocation.

However, the Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee and the full Appropriations Committee cancelled their markups of the FY2020 LHHS appropriations bill, both initially scheduled for this week. The markups were cancelled due to growing partisan issues and the likelihood of potentially contentious amendments being introduced. It is presently unclear whether the LHHS markups will be rescheduled in the Senate, but it is possible that the Senate Appropriations Committee could simply release a draft FY 2020 LHHS bill to state its positions and begin immediately negotiating with the House on a final bill.

**Study Minimizes Impact of Free Community College**
[www.InsideHigherEd.com](http://www.InsideHigherEd.com)

A new study asserts that providing free community college to students does not lead to increased four-year graduation rates, but proponents of free community college argue that that isn’t the point of such programs.

The authors of the new study assert that the most effective ways to raise four-year graduation rates are to increase per-student instructional spending at public institutions
and eliminate tuition and fees at four-year colleges for those below certain income levels.

The report, "Policies and Payoffs to Addressing America's College Graduation Deficit," by authors Christopher Avery (Harvard Kennedy School), Jessica Howell (College Board), Matea Pender (College Board) and Bruce Sacerdote (Dartmouth College), was released Thursday in the Brookings Papers on Economic Activity.

Using economic data from past higher education studies and enrollment and degree completion data from the College Board-National Student Clearinghouse dataset, the researchers analyzed four possible policies to increase bachelor's degree attainment: free community college, reduced tuition at four-year colleges, increased spending at public colleges and reallocating students to academically matched in-state four-year colleges.

The simulation showed a 3.1 percentage point increase in enrollment at four-year colleges if tuition and fees were eliminated for students from families who make less than $60,000 annually. It also showed that removing 10 percent of the per-student spending gap between four-year public and private institutions and increasing per student spending by 10 percent at community colleges raised bachelor's degree completion rates by 1.1 percentage points. Read full article.

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