

Yes, We Did It!

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2 Grads Receive Nation's Premier Transfer Scholarships

Jonathan Finnerty and Fizza Sulaiman are living examples of the power of persistence. They did not start out as great students at Middlesex County College. But boy, they've made up for it ever since. So much so that the duo just received the largest and most prestigious transfer scholarship in the nation. Mr. Finnerty and Ms. Sulaiman were each awarded a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. It covers up to \$40,000 per year as they transfer on to four-year universities.

Gina Bedoya, a counselor who works with Cooke applicants, said the award covers tuition, fees, books and living expenses.

"It truly is life-changing," she said.

Mr. Finnerty started at MCC in 2007 but quickly decided that college wasn't for him. Ms. Sulaiman arrived in 1999 and did not do well.

But both came back with a vengeance.

Mr. Finnerty is a member of the Metuchen Fire Department; Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society for two-year colleges; and Quo Vadis, the student newspaper.

"Quo Vadis is where I first got my start writing and interviewing," he said. "It gave me a chance to express

myself." It also allowed him to get to know his professors outside of class.

He is grateful for the scholarship, which will allow him to attend either Rutgers or Columbia University to study

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From left: College President Joann La Perla-Morales; Mark McCormick, vice president for academic and student affairs; Fizza Sulaiman and Jonathan Finnerty, Jack Kent Cooke scholars; and Gina Bedoya and Sheema Majiduddin, MCC counselors who advise the program on campus.

Donna-Marie Gardner Named Alumna of the Year

Donna Marie Gardner of the Natural Sciences Department received the 2015 Alumna of the Year Award for Contributions to the College, its Alumni Association or Foundation. The award was presented during Celebration Day in May, an annual event that also honors College employees reaching milestone service anniversaries and two Outstanding Service to the College award winners.

Professor Gardner, a member of the MCC class of 2000, is a superb teacher who motivates and inspires her students. She is an innovative educator who brings many different learning and teaching styles to her classroom. She is respected, admired and liked by her students, both science and non-science majors. In 2014, she was awarded the MCC Excellence in Teaching Award.

Professor Gardner graduated from

MCC with an Associate Degree with highest honors and transferred to Columbia University, where she earned both her Bachelor's Degree and her Master's Degree. She is pursuing a doctorate in post-secondary and adult education.

Along with Professor Mat Spano, Professor Gardner is co-director of the College's Honors Program and the advisor to several clubs on campus.

She also volunteers in the community, participating with Habitat for Humanity, Elijah's Promise Soup Kitchen, and with her church.

She generously offers her time with Alumni Association projects, as well as Foundation events and activities.

"I'm honored, flattered and privileged to be recognized," Professor Gardner said. "This is an important award for me because of how I feel about Middlesex. The College is my home; it transformed my life."

At the Celebration Day ceremony, Damian Gonzalez, graphic services coordinator, received the award for Outstanding Service to the College for Staff and Mark Thompson, director of the Library, for Administrators.



From left: Dorothy Bitetto, president of the Alumni Association; Donna-Marie Gardner; and College President Joann La Perla-Morales.

THIS MONTH AT MIDDLESEX

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MCC Receives Assistive Tech Grant

Middlesex County College received a grant for almost \$15,000 from Disability Rights New Jersey's Assistive Technology Advocacy Center. The grant will allow MCC to enhance and expand its own Assistive Technology Lab in Johnson Learning Center. The Assistive Technology Lab, which is administered by Seham Mohamed, lab coordinator, offers a variety of hardware and software to students with disabilities.

The enhancements include: Three 15-inch portable video magnifiers; two magnifiers that link to computer tablets; two talking graphing calculators; and one talking scientific calculator. The equipment will be used in the lab and available for students to borrow.

Congratulations Class of 2015!



Valedictorian Nicole Risoli delivered the welcome from the Class of 2015, as graduates celebrated their success.



“Embrace Opportunity”

Class of 2015 Celebrates Achievements

A total of 1,571 degrees and certificates were awarded to 1,521 students by Middlesex County College Tuesday, May 19 at the 48th annual Commencement exercises witnessed by approximately 3500 guests. This final event of a year-long celebration of the College’s 50th anniversary was held in the Expo Center in the Raritan Center.

Valedictorian Nicole Risoli delivered the class welcome, sharing her experiences and aspirations. Ms. Risoli is a graduate of the Paralegal Studies Program.

“Your hard work has paid off and I commend you for your successes big or small,” she told the class. “The most frequently asked question of the day seems to be, so what are your plans? What’s next? For some of us we will go on to other colleges or perhaps enter the work place if we aren’t there already. But for some of us, like myself, we shrug because we still don’t know

what we want to be when we grow up. And that’s okay too. Because the truth is there is no direct path from the seat you sit in today to where you are going. There are no definitive answers. Success is what you make of it and only comes when you embrace opportunity when you find it. If you keep your eyes open, I assure you that opportunity will find you. I hope you find happiness, love, strength and courage along the way.”

Approximately 675 members of the Class of 2015 participated in the exercises, representing the 355 graduates of August 2014, 420 of January 2015 and 746 of May 2015. Participants included several students who fulfilled the requirements for more than one degree or certificate during this academic year.

Dr. Mark McCormick, vice president for academic and student affairs, presided. Greetings were delivered by Dr. Joann La Perla-Morales, College

president; Dorothy K. Power, chairman of the Board of Trustees; and Ronald G. Rios, Freeholder director.

Dr. Frederick Montana, professor of Natural Sciences, led the academic procession as grand marshal.

Dr. La Perla-Morales, sixth president of the College, conferred degrees and certificates to the graduates, who were introduced by Acting Dean Jeffrey Herron and Dean David Edwards. Dr. McCormick presented the candidates for graduation.

Earlier in May, the College held an honors convocation for students with the highest academic achievement in each program. MCC also presented the Chambers Awards to graduates with a 4.0 grade point average, and the five individuals were recognized during Commencement. They include Ms. Risoli, the salutatorian, Matthew R. Spare, and John A. Addeo, Yulia Forte and Henry B. Vargas.



Diane Conboy, senior vice president at Provident Bank and the treasurer of the Middlesex County College Foundation, was presented a Women in Business Award by the radio station Magic 98.3 in May. Ms. Conboy joined Provident Bank in 2007 with the responsibility of managing commercial loans over \$3 million and providing financial resources to business owners and nonprofit organizations. She also volunteers as a key member of the Board of Trustees of the MCC Foundation, serving as treasurer and chair of the Finance & Allocations Committee. The award was presented by Chris McCoy, one of Magic's on-air personalities. Other winners included Lina Llona, director of the Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce; Pamela Christy, of JFK Medical Center; and Shirley Lopez, owner of Burn Fitness Studios.

The MCC step team, called Exitium, won first place at the fifth annual "Step or Die" competition at Temple University in Philadelphia in April. The team, which was established in 2013, had earlier won several regional competitions and faced the Princeton Steppers at the Temple competition in the finals. "Two students, Aliyah Knighton and Charles Jones, founded Exitium in the fall of 2013 as a means of expressing excellence through the African art of stepping," said Lori Johnson, the advisor. "With a purpose to educate, entertain and excel, Exitium has gained much recognition on campus." In front is Lauren Villanueva. Standing from left: Rodney Green, Aliyah Knighton, Imani Wheeler, Shayla Henderson, Kaila Smith, Nina Scott and Charles Jones.



2 Grads Awarded Jack Kent Cooke Scholarships

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philosophy and classical history.

"This wouldn't have happened without the support of my mentors," he said. "Look at any great person throughout history and you realize they really weren't an individual, they had a large support base. Middlesex provided that for me. Each professor I've had has changed some aspect of my thinking." He highlighted Professors John Roskoski, Saul Kelton and Emanuel di Pasquale as especially influential.

Ms. Sulaiman left MCC in 2003 but came back determined to succeed.

"Education is the only way up," she said. "I was focused. My time management skills, my study skills – everything changed."

When she received a scholarship from the MCC Foundation, she became even more determined.

"I can't let them down. They trusted me," she said.

She felt the small class size and personal attention she received from her professors were the keys to her success.

"For me it was the professors," she said. "If they had to stay an extra two hours just to help me understand something, they were willing to do that."

She named Professors George Pangalos, Donna-Marie Gardner and Erin Christensen as mentors.

Ms. Sulaiman, a biology major, is a member of Phi Theta Kappa, the North Brunswick First Aid and Rescue Squad, as well as Democracy House, the College's service-learning program. She is planning to attend either Columbia University or the University of Pennsylvania.

Mr. Finnerty and Ms. Sulaiman are the third and fourth Jack Kent Cooke scholars in MCC history. Namema Amendi was awarded the scholarship in 2007 and graduated from Columbia University, and Zizhou Zhao received it in 2010 and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley.

The Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship program began in 2002, and is dedicated to advancing the education of exceptionally promising students who have financial need. This year, 90 students were selected from 2,061 applications.

"We're so proud of them," said College President Joann La Perla-Morales. "Students who graduate from a community college and go on to a four-year college are going to be successful, because they've learned how to be a student and how to succeed."