

Beautiful Memories



Smiles were everywhere as MCC graduated its 49th class.

A total of 1596 degrees and certificates were awarded to 1558 students by Middlesex County College Tuesday, May 17 at the 49th annual Commencement exercises witnessed by approximately 3500 guests in the Expo Center in the Raritan Center.

Valedictorian Sridivya Raghavan delivered the class welcome, sharing her experiences and advice. Ms. Raghavan is a Liberal Arts/Business major.

“I did my early schooling in India and moved to the United States when my dad’s job brought him here,” she said. “I became a bookworm, thanks to J.K. Rowling. Harry Potter taught me the joy of reading and believing in magic. Middlesex County College became my Hogwarts. The professors here played a huge role in mentoring me, much like Harry Potter’s.

“Now, if there is one thing I would

like for you to remember, is that failure is inevitable. What is more important is learning from failure, and getting back up on your feet again. You may have heard about how J.K. Rowling, herself, bounced back from a failed marriage, loss of jobs, and abysmal poverty. She went back to doing what she does best, which is writing novels.

“The fact that we are here today means that we are successful. We do not need to fear failure. Live your life. Go on the next adventure! As Harry Potter taught me, anything is possible with belief and magic. Believe in yourselves and the world will be yours to conquer.”

Approximately 675 members of the Class of 2016 participated in the exercises, representing the 364 graduates of August 2015, 435 of

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January 2016 and 797 of May 2016. Participants included several students who fulfilled the requirements for more than one degree or certificate during this academic year.

Mark McCormick, vice president for academic and student affairs, presided. Greetings were delivered by Joann La Perla-Morales, College president; Dorothy K. Power, chairman of the Board of Trustees; and Ronald G. Rios, Freeholder director. Professor Saul Kelton, of the History and Social Sciences Department, led the academic processional as grand marshal.

MCC Student Receives Award Named for Late Professor

Halimat Oshun '16 was recently presented the first Patrick Donohue Outstanding Service and Civic Engagement Student Award at MCC. The award recognizes a student who has demonstrated a substantive and positive impact through community involvement. It was presented at a reception attended by the College community, alumni, and Professor Donohue's family.

Ms. Oshun is a two-year member of Democracy House, MCC's service-learning program. She has participated

in the Habitat for Humanity build several times, a camp cleanup, and numerous blood drives. She has visited the Menlo Park Home for Veterans on multiple occasions and works extensively with the Center for Empowerment. Ms. Oshun has also done both Martin Luther King and 9/11 days of service. She is also a Dean's List student, and an officer with the Student Government Association.

The award is named for Patrick Donohue, a former professor at MCC, who passed away in July of 2015. Beyond his inspirational teachings on American politics, civic society and the democratic process, Professor Donohue was a tireless supporter of student involvement in the local community. Soon after becoming an instructor, he created Democracy House at Middlesex, which paired the needs of the local community with the opportunity for

students to enhance their academic and personal development through community service. He left MCC in June of 2008 to pursue leadership of the Bonner Center at The College of New Jersey.

Jennifer Altman, sociology professor at MCC and the chair of the selection committee, spoke at the reception.

"Pat was the epitome of the perfect community college professor," she said "He was whip smart, but not condescending. He was theoretical and practical. He was a doer, not just a talker and he was always moving, always dreaming, always planning, always connecting people. I could see it in the way faculty colleagues came up and brainstormed ideas with Pat; how the administrative staff glowed over the impact of the projects; how Democracy House staff thrived off Pat's mentorship and commitment; how community members hugged and thanked Pat for truly caring, making a difference and making the time to connect to their worlds, their constraints, and their needs, and most of all, I saw it in the alumni and students. How they told me over and over again how Pat has changed their lives, how Pat believed in them before they believed in themselves. How Pat taught them to question, think critically and set higher expectations in the classroom than they had ever set for themselves."

Through partnerships with the Bonner Foundation, Professor Donohue was instrumental in bringing AmeriCorps and Bonner Scholarships to countless students throughout his tenure at MCC. The Center's partnerships with local nonprofits have focused on several areas of need in the greater Middlesex County area including hunger, homelessness, urban education, the environment, youth and family services, youth development, and immigrant services. For many years the Center has been on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.



From left: College President Joann La Perla-Morales, Halimat Oshun, Pattiann McMahon, faculty advisor to Democracy House, and Jennifer Altman, former faculty advisor and chair of the award selection committee.

THIS MONTH AT MIDDLESEX

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Grads cheered their faculty, while, below left, valedictorian Sridivya Raghavan delivered the class welcome.



Jessica Cortese '08 Named MCC's Alumna of the Year

Jessica Cortese, a 2008 graduate, was named the 2016 Alumna of the Year for Contributions to the College, its Alumni Association or its Foundation. The award was presented during Celebration Day, an annual event that also honors College employees reaching milestone service anniversaries, and two Outstanding Service to the College award winners.

Ms. Cortese was a student in Project Connections, a program that provides college-able students with learning disabilities with academic and other support so they can succeed.

“My gratitude and involvement with MCC never faltered,” she said as she accepted the award. “It is because of

the people here, in this room, and the students outside these walls that I am standing here today. I would like to thank Middlesex County College for shaping the person that I am today: academically, personally and socially. I would like to specifically thank Project Connections for helping me find my autonomy.”

After graduating from MCC, Ms. Cortese transferred to The College of New Jersey where she earned a dual Bachelor's Degree in English and Women and Gender Studies. She earned her Master's Degree from TCNJ, graduating with a 3.95 grade point average.

Ms. Cortese is very active in the

community. She is the treasurer of the Human Relations Council of Plainsboro, which addresses the social needs of the community and plans events that celebrate Plainsboro's diversity. A trustee of MCC's Alumni Association Board, she participated in the Association's Habitat for Humanity building project last summer, volunteered at MCC's 50th Anniversary Community Day Celebration, and, for the past two years, has entertained guests as “Lady Luck” at the MCC Foundation's Casino Night events.

Awards were also presented to two individuals for Outstanding Service to the College. Judy Robinson was presented the award for staff and Patricia Cardinale for administrators.

Kimberlee Hooper Named to National “40 Under 40” List

Kimberlee Hooper was named to the American Association for Women in Community Colleges’ list of “40 Under 40,” at the organization’s national conference in Chicago in April. The list consists of 40 women faculty, counselors, administrators and staff under the age of 40 from all over the nation who are leaders on their campuses. Ms. Hooper is MCC’s director of school relations, which is the link between MCC and the kindergarten to 12th grade community in the county and beyond.

“I can’t say enough about Kim’s ability and work ethic,” said MCC President Joann La Perla-Morales, who nominated Ms. Hooper for the award. “She is an excellent team player and leader, is committed to the College mission and works tirelessly to create new pathways for students.”

Ms. Hooper started at MCC in 2010 part time, as the coordinator

for the CARE program (Center for Adults Returning to Education), which enabled adults students who were 21 years of age or older to return to MCC to complete their Associate Degree. She assisted those students during the enrollment process and collaborated with campus departments to provide financial aid, advisement and tutoring workshops. She became director of School Relations in 2012.

“Kim has done a tremendous job in this role,” Dr. La Perla-Morales said.

Since 2012, Ms. Hooper has added five high schools and almost 500 students to MCC’s High School Scholars Program, in which high school students can take college courses. In addition, she has hosted several large scale events, including the state finals of the NJ Science Olympiad.

“The programs offered through School Relations show the K-12 community what MCC has to offer by

way of faculty, facilities and campus resources,” Dr. La Perla-Morales said. “Bringing middle school students on campus for the Algebra Summer Institute

exposes students to the campus, facilities and faculty. Bringing elementary school students on campus for a tour and a day filled with activities allows them to begin considering MCC as an option for them down the road.”

School Relations also organizes professional development programs for teachers, as well as mid-career professionals who aspire to become teachers.

Ms. Hooper also developed workshops on dyslexia, autism, and how to use an iPad effectively in the classroom.

She also oversees three college summer bridge programs – Johnson and Johnson Scholars, College Readiness, and the Bridges to Baccalaureate Program. These provide high school students with college readiness remediation prior to graduation, which allows them to begin taking credit-bearing courses upon entering MCC.

Ms. Hooper said she was honored to receive the award.

“The work I do at MCC is very important to me because of the impact it has on others,” she said. “I am thrilled to be among this distinguished group and I hope it will inspire other young women.”

Ms. Hooper is a member of the College Assembly, the MCC Scholarship Committee, a state representative to the American Council on Education, and she is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Arc of Middlesex County.



Kimberlee Hooper



Eight MCC students were recently honored for their induction into Alpha Mu Gamma, the national honor society for foreign language study. Seated, left to right, Rose Almasi (inducted last year), Kaitlyn McSpedon, Rosaura Figueroa, Adriana Blanco. Standing: Gary Abbott, chairperson of ESL/Languages and Cultures, Professor Juan Saborido, Chapter advisor, Timothy Francis, Pedro Escarate, Adam Piepoli and Jihyun Park.