

THE MAGAZINE OF FARMINGDALE STATE COLLEGE

FSCNOW²⁰²⁶

TAKING THE MOUND

MADISON DeMAIO FINDS
HER CALLING AT FSC

ACADEMIC INNOVATION IN ACTION

FSC's new degree programs and expanded learning opportunities are shaping the future of education

VOICES OF THE FUTURE

Empowering FSC's students through civic discourse

ROOTED IN THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Stephen Hicks has a deep connection to FSC and a commitment to service



The 2025–2026 academic year at Farmingdale State College has been marked by growth, transformation, and renewed momentum. Across our campus, new academic programs have taken shape, talented colleagues have joined our community, and our engagement with industry partners and the broader community has expanded in meaningful ways.

In this edition of *FSCNow*, you will find stories that capture the spirit of Farmingdale State College through the experiences of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends. These pages celebrate personal achievement, resilience, innovation, and service qualities that define our institution and inspire us every day. We are especially proud to highlight alumni, from healthcare to horticulture to community service, whose accomplishments are making a lasting impact on their professions and communities. At the heart of any strong institution are the personal experiences that, when combined, create a cohesive, diverse, and stronger community.

This year also brought exciting developments to campus life. New leadership in Student Affairs has elevated the student experience, while distinguished guests from the entertainment and sports worlds enriched our campus by sharing their transformative journeys. We were also privileged to honor one of our most accomplished and committed alumni with an honorary doctorate degree, recognizing a legacy that reflects the very best of Farmingdale State College.

We've revitalized the newly named Division of Institutional Advancement, reflecting a vision for building deeper connections with our alumni, supporters, and community partners. New leadership and this transition advance our work toward engaging with friends of the College both longstanding and newly established. I was also honored this year to host and participate in an informative discussion on leadership alongside colleagues from neighboring institutions of higher education, reaffirming the value of collaboration and shared purpose in shaping the future of our region.

While our faculty, staff, and administrators continue to move Farmingdale State College forward, our students remain at the heart of everything we do and are the true lifeblood of the College. Throughout the year, they have embraced countless opportunities to learn, lead, contribute, and grow. Whether in the classroom, on the athletic fields, or throughout the community, their energy, determination, and accomplishments reaffirm our responsibility to educate, and remind us of the promise to our collective future. As you read the student stories featured in this edition, I am confident you will share my optimism for all that lies ahead.

Thank you for being part of our community and for celebrating the pride, progress, and promise reflected in these pages.

Go Rams!



Robert S. Prezant, PhD
President, Farmingdale State College

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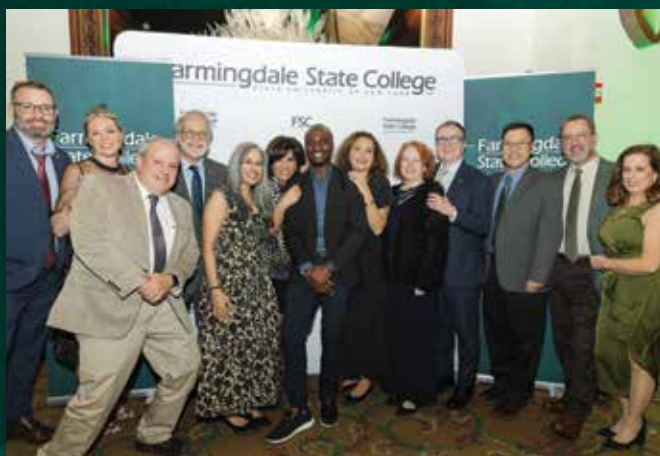
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Kim Nyoni builds a new culture of philanthropy



AN AUTUMN STROLL

The fall semester offers FSC students a beautiful view of Lupton Hall and a bright future ahead.





AND THE HONOREES ARE...

2025 Gala event celebrates five distinguished campus community members for excellence, service, and leadership

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

Last fall, members of Farmingdale State College's (FSC) campus community joined President Robert S. Prezant, PhD, for the 2025 President's Gala, "a night to celebrate all that makes Farmingdale so extraordinary," said President Prezant.

More than 275 FSC alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends gathered for the elegant evening, which included dinner, dancing, a silent auction, and a fabulous variety of raffle prizes that raised nearly \$200,000 to support scholarships and critical resources for FSC's students.

HONORS AND AWARDS

A cherished part of the annual event, the gala also acknowledged five distinguished honorees for their positive impacts on the College and its community:

- *The Ram's Horn Award for Corporate Leadership:*
David Antar
- *The President's Award for Alumni Leadership:*
Kevin M. Spiegel, FACHE, '76
- *The President's Award for Academic Leadership:*
Jeff Hung, PhD, '97
- *The President's Award for Professional Leadership:*
Patricia Lind Gonzalez
- *The President's Award for Student Leadership:*
Aliyah Adnan Khan, '26

"We are proud to recognize these extraordinary people whose work and commitment have made a lasting difference for our students and our community," said President Prezant.

"Farmingdale State College is a well run organization with a very special place in my heart not just because of its history or its growth, but because of the incredible people who make up this College," said Antar, a visionary entrepreneur with over 36 years of experience in the security technology and educational technology industries. "The Ram's Horn [award] represents strength and perseverance, values that I see reflected in FSC's students, faculty, and everyone who works tirelessly to make this College what it is today. When we invest in each other and in our community, we all rise together."

"It is a true honor to be recognized among such distinguished alumni and community leaders," said Spiegel, chief executive officer of Florida Medical Center, who traveled with his wife, Chava, from Miami, Florida, for the special evening. Spiegel, who has held numerous clinical teaching positions and executive leadership roles in healthcare systems across the United States, shared warm recollections of the classes, student clubs, faculty members, and FSC memories that had "a positive impact on me and my quest in shaping my career goals."

"It has been my great pleasure to have reported on the tremendous growth of the College and work alongside such talented and dedicated faculty and staff who truly care about the success of our students," said Lind Gonzalez, who as FSC's chief officer for institutional research and effectiveness has "fostered a culture of transparency, accountability, and continuous growth," said Senior Vice President and Provost Sean Lane, PhD.

It is a true honor to be recognized among such distinguished alumni and community leaders."

– Kevin M. Spiegel, FACHE, '76,
Chief Executive Officer of Florida Medical Center

"During my time at Farmingdale, I have had great leaders, wonderful colleagues, and excellent corporate partners. Your ongoing support has helped us improve our programs, and your news about our students always brightens up my days. Thank you. For all of these reasons, I am not afraid of Mondays," Hung, FSC alumnus and professor and chair of the Mechanical Engineering Technology Department, shared to applause.

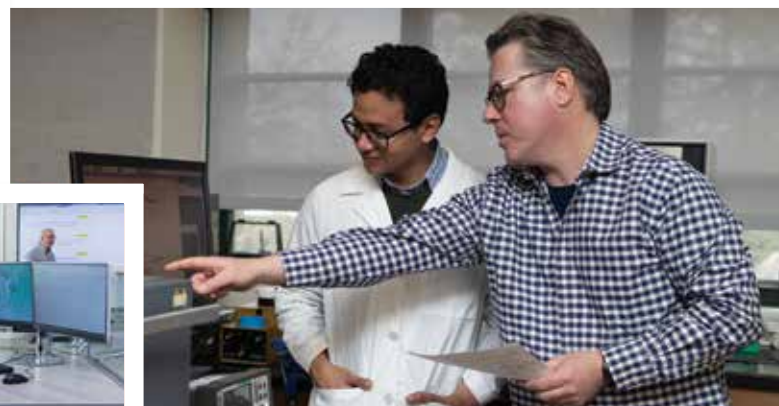
"As a woman in STEM, FSC has blessed me with many opportunities which allowed me to complete both my degrees in the span of four years," said Khan, a dual degree senior in applied mathematics and applied psychology, who was recently named a Newman Civic Fellow. "Even though this award may have my name on it, it's actually a collection of all the people who have gotten me to this point today and a reflection of everything I've learned at Farmingdale State College."

ACADEMIC INNOVATION IN ACTION

New degree programs and expanded learning opportunities are shaping the future of education at FSC

BY DANIELLE DIMURO





Higher education is evolving, and at Farmingdale State College (FSC), academic programs have been reimagined to reflect the needs of today's students and the demands of a changing workforce. Through intentional program development and expansion, the College continues to create clear pathways that connect education to meaningful careers while integrating emerging technologies that are reshaping industries.

New and expanded undergraduate offerings are preparing students to lead, adapt, and succeed across a wide range of fields. The Bachelor of Science in Public Administration and Policy equips students with the knowledge and skills needed for impactful careers in government, nonprofit organizations, and public service, with a focus on policy analysis, ethical decision-making, and community engagement. The Bachelor of Science in Applied Physics provides a strong academic foundation through an applied, career-focused approach, preparing students for opportunities in engineering, research, and emerging technology fields.

In the health sciences, the Exercise Professions track within the Health Promotion and Wellness Program reflects growing demand for careers in fitness, strength and conditioning, and human performance. Through a combination of scientific coursework and experiential learning, students gain practical, real-world skills that prepare them for careers in a dynamic and expanding industry.

FSC has also taken a leading role in preparing students for the future of technology. The College was ahead of the curve, launching its Bachelor of Science in Artificial Intelligence Management in fall 2024, the first program of its kind within the State University of New York (SUNY) system. The program combines business and computer science, equipping students with both managerial and technical skills to understand, develop, and manage AI-driven solutions across industries such as healthcare, finance, marketing, and logistics. With a focus on machine learning, data-driven decision-making, and the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, the program reflects FSC's commitment

to preparing students not only to use emerging technologies but to lead in environments where they are shaping the future of work.

As Sean Lane, PhD, senior vice president and provost, shared: "The landscape of work is changing at a breakneck pace, and higher education cannot afford to play catch-up. Our commitment at FSC is to provide a 'future-proof' education. Whether it is through our flexible online pathways or our new career-focused degrees, we are empowering our students with the creativity, versatility, and technical edge required to lead in industries that are being reshaped by technology every single day."

**Our
commitment
at FSC is to
provide a
'future-proof'
education."**

– Sean Lane, PhD
Senior Vice President
and Provost

At the graduate level, programs continue to evolve in response to workforce needs. The Master of Science in Construction Management prepares professionals to lead complex building and infrastructure projects, integrating technical expertise with leadership, planning, and project management. The Master of Science in Quality Assurance and Regulatory Affairs expands opportunities in highly regulated industries, preparing graduates for roles that require precision, compliance, and a strong understanding of quality systems across sectors such as pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and biotechnology.

FSC is also expanding access through flexible, online learning opportunities designed to meet students where they are. The Bachelor of Science in Applied Economics provides a fully online pathway for students to build analytical, business, and decision-making skills in a format that supports both traditional and nontraditional learners.

Together, these programs reflect a broader institutional commitment to innovation, access, and outcomes. Academic programs at Farmingdale State College are not only expanding; they are being reimagined to ensure students graduate prepared to contribute, lead, and succeed in an evolving, technology-driven workforce.



LEADERSHIP INSPIRED

University presidents discuss challenges shaping higher education today

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

On Wednesday, March 4, 2026, Farmingdale State College (FSC) hosted four distinguished university presidents for Our Collective Reality: Challenges and Opportunities Facing Higher Education Today. Part of President Prezant's Inspiring Leadership lecture series, the session brought together leaders from across Long Island, including FSC President Robert S. Prezant, PhD, Stony Brook University President Andrea Goldsmith, PhD, SUNY Old Westbury President Timothy E. Sams, PhD, and New York Institute of Technology President and CEO Jerry Balentine, FACEP, DO.

Moderated by Kara Cannon, executive director of the Tesla Science Center at Wardenclyffe, the conversation offered valuable perspectives and covered a range of topics such as the evolving perception of the value of a college degree, "AI-proofing" students, and rebuilding public trust in higher education.

"There is a general, negative perception [around higher education] that I don't think we've seen in a very long time," said Cannon. "We are here to talk about the challenges facing higher education today and all of the opportunities that exist because of this network of colleges and universities."

"A college degree is going to generate a million, a million and a half more in salary over a lifetime and a lot more opportunities," said President Prezant. "The return on investment is worth the work."

"A challenging time is always a great time for change. And, if you have the right leaders, if you have the right setup, that change can be positive," said Balentine. "Higher education is an incredible value for each individual, and for us as a society as well. But we have to change the narrative."



"My college experience transformed my life," said Sams. "I went from an environment where I was constantly told, 'You cannot,' to one where the expectation was, 'You can do anything.' That was transformational because I believed it, and it made a difference in my life."

The panel also shared their thoughts regarding the critical thinking and civic discourse made possible with a college experience, as well as navigating a changing technological landscape with artificial intelligence (AI).

"AI is here to stay," said Goldsmith. "It's a transformative technology, but no technology is a substitute for what makes us human, which is human engagement. We have to teach our students how to be adaptable, resilient, and robust and use their creativity, their way of thinking about the world, to make them AI proof, technology proof in their careers."

Looking ahead, the panelists highlighted how institutions can collaboratively navigate challenges, continue to innovate with university-driven research, and effectively serve the broader community and their student body.

"Communication is key, especially communication with our students," said President Prezant. "As I talk to students, I tell them, 'Follow your passion. If you love it, follow it.' Farmingdale State is a remarkable place and, I think my colleagues will agree, our students are hardworking, focused, smart, energetic, and goal-oriented and ready to meet the needs of the future."

"It was eye opening to get a perspective from the president's point of view," said Juliette Jordan, '26, a science, technology, and society major. "Being approachable to speak about these different topics makes me feel a lot more confident. The great thing about this campus is it's so diverse and these perspectives just make it a more well-rounded school."



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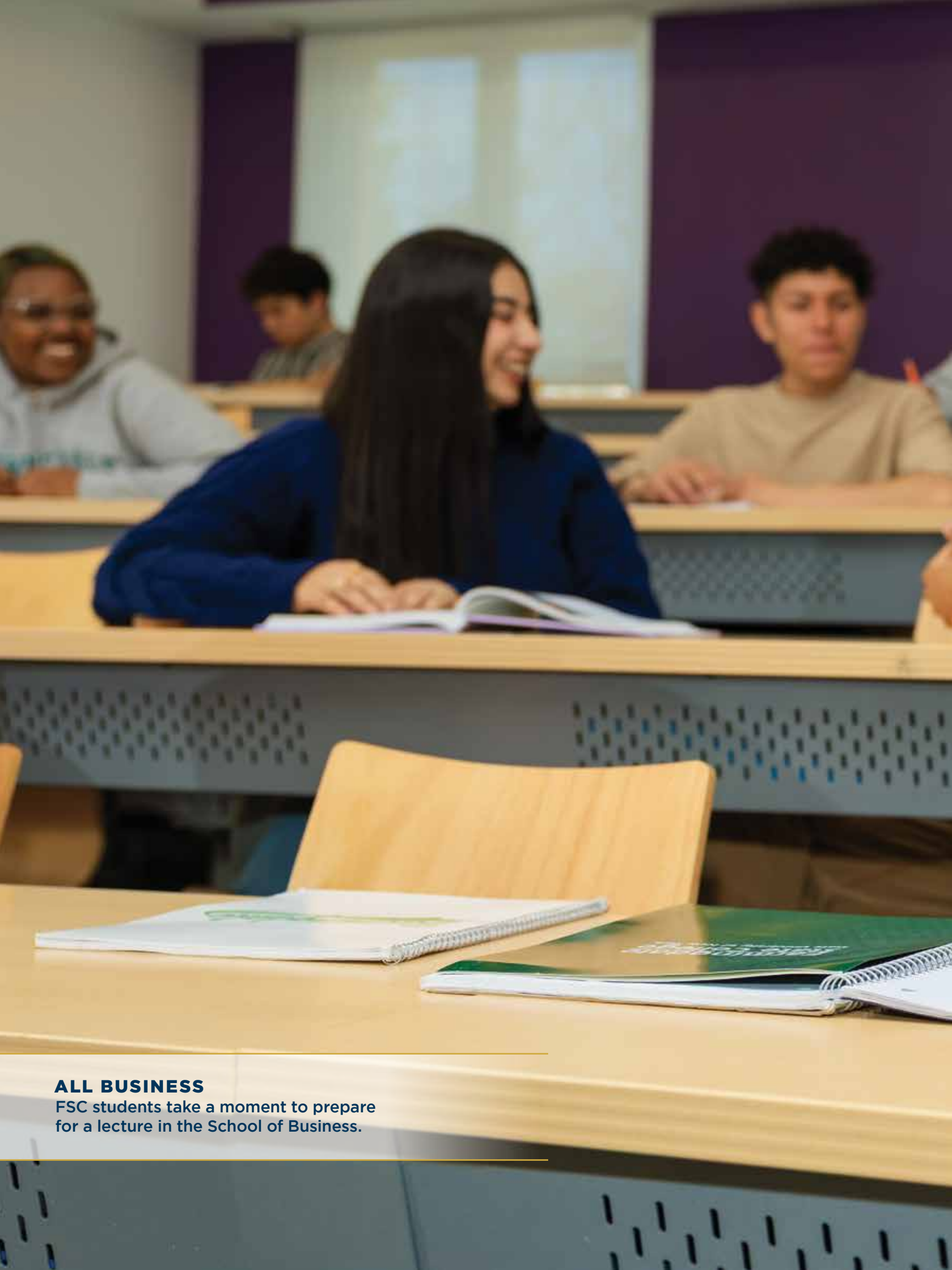
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ALL BUSINESS

FSC students take a moment to prepare for a lecture in the School of Business.





A LIFE OF GIVING BACK

Murray Pasternack, AAS '60, is awarded an honorary doctorate at 2026 commencement exercises

On May 22, 2026, Farmingdale State College (FSC) was proud to confer an honorary doctorate degree from the State University of New York during the 2026 commencement exercises at Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. Murray Pasternack, AAS '60, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, marking the first honorary degree awarded from FSC since 2017.

"It has been nearly 66 years since I graduated from what was then called the State University of New York Agricultural and Technical Institute at Farmingdale. Back then, I could never have imagined that, in the far distant future, I would return to receive an honorary doctorate and deliver the commencement address to a class of more than 2,000 graduates at my alma mater," Pasternack shared in his keynote address. "I have been incredibly fortunate to live the American Dream, and it all began with the education and inspiration I received at Farmingdale."

Pasternack began his journey at FSC as a student of electrical technology and went on to build a career defined by innovation, leadership, and service. Earning his Associate of Applied Science degree in 1960, he went on to receive his Bachelor of Science and Juris Doctor degrees 16 years later, while working full time.

"I spent nine and a half years taking night courses in applied physics, economics, finance, and law. I worked at seven different businesses, absorbing everything I could before founding my first major business, Pasternack Enterprises, in 1972," he shared.

Pasternack spent more than six decades at the forefront of the radio frequency (RF) and microwave electronics industries. As founder and CEO of the Electro Physics Corporation of America, and earlier as founder of Pasternack Enterprises, he helped shape a global marketplace for high-performance

electronic components. His work with Environmental Communications, Inc. and Varian Associates contributed to foundational advancements in research and development during the rise of Silicon Valley. He also served as a licensed attorney and as a founder and director of Capital Bank, advancing economic growth and opportunity.

"It is important to remember the journey that leads someone to a life of giving back. Today Murray is an engineer, entrepreneur, attorney, and philanthropist, but that journey began right here with a degree in electrical technology from Farmingdale State College," said Robert S. Prezant, PhD, president of FSC.

On campus, it is Pasternack's extraordinary commitment to giving back that most profoundly defines his legacy. Together with his wife Judy, he is the largest individual donor in FSC history, contributing more than \$8 million, including a transformative \$5 million gift to expand scholarships, strengthen student support, and elevate STEM education. His impact is visible across campus from the RF and microwave technology lab in Lupton Hall, to the student managed investment fund and trading room in the School of Business, to the launch of the Honors Program.

Pasternack has advanced applied learning, fostered innovation, and championed access and equity in education, particularly within engineering and technology fields.

"His life and work embody the very ideals of the State University of New York: access, opportunity, excellence, and service," said President Prezant. "His achievements and generosity stand as an enduring example for FSC graduates and for generations to come."



ROOTED IN THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Stephen Hicks, sixth-generation president of Hicks Nurseries, has a deep connection to FSC and a commitment to service

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

“Growing up, there was always an emphasis on education in my family. Regardless of what you want to pursue in life, education has always been something that we value highly.”

Stephen Hicks of Huntington, New York, shares about his remarkable family. As Quaker farmers who settled in the Westbury, New York area in the mid-1600s, the Hickses cultivated one of Long Island’s longest-lasting family businesses when Isaac Hicks (1815–1900) began selling fruit trees and shrubs to his neighbors and founded what is today known as Hicks Nurseries in 1853.

Powered by research and innovation, the business evolved, revolutionizing the horticulture industry with a patented system for moving large, mature trees across Long Island’s Gold Coast estates in the early 1900s and a groundbreaking sales department that offered pre-dug plants in the 1930s.

“Before that, if you wanted to buy trees and shrubs, you came to the nursery, walked around the field, and picked out what you wanted,” said Hicks. “Then, they’d be dug up just for you. The idea of pre-digging plants for sale was a new concept at the time.

“Since then, we have continued to respond to the shifting needs of the community and remain focused on providing the very best experience,” added Hicks, who serves as the company’s sixth-generation president, alongside his sister, Karen Hicks Courts, who serves as vice president.

The family has also remained focused on the importance of higher education. After studying agriculture at Cornell University in 1892, Henry Hicks (1870–1954) became a nationally recognized horticulturist and a dedicated supporter of FSC who was instrumental in strengthening the College’s horticulture program, employing many of its students, and gifting the historic Memorial Oak tree that still stands beside Whitman Hall. In recognition of his outstanding campus contributions, Hicks Hall, one of FSC’s first buildings housing the College’s original horticulture classrooms, was posthumously named in his honor in 1959.

Today, Hicks Nurseries, recently named the number-two independent garden center in North America by *Garden Center* magazine, has grown into Long Island’s largest and premier family-owned garden

center offering top-rated retail and commercial sales, as well as expert landscape design and installation services.

“For me, this business was always something that I had an interest in,” said Hicks. “I wanted to be in a business where I could make a difference, so it was a natural fit.”

In addition, with student internship opportunities, academic program resources and support, and valuable career pathways for graduates, Hicks Nurseries makes an impact as one of FSC’s esteemed corporate partners.

“Farmingdale has been the backbone of the horticultural industry on Long Island for more than 100 years,” said Hicks. “Whether it’s Hicks Nurseries or other businesses across Long Island—from a three-person operation to one of the largest growers out east—they’re populated with Farmingdale graduates. And so, Farmingdale has always been a key foundational piece of the industry and continues to have a strong influence. We are continually looking to Farmingdale as a source of talent, and to deepen our connection because we recognize the quality of the individuals and the programs that Farmingdale is producing.”

Recently, Hicks was honored to be named to the Farmingdale State College Corporate Advisory Board, where he helps offer strategic guidance, industry insights, and support for FSC’s lasting advancement, vision, and mission.

“I was very excited when [FSC President Robert S. Prezant, PhD] reached out and said he was starting the board,” said Hicks. “It’s something I was happy to respond to. It’s tremendous.”

“I am grateful to have Stephen, an exceptional industry leader, serve as a part of this respected group of advisors,” said President Prezant. “His expertise, dedication, and collaboration enrich our programs, exemplify the power of community partnerships, and contribute to the economic growth on Long Island, in New York State, and beyond.”

“It’s a virtuous circle,” added Hicks. “Farmingdale is not just a pillar of the industry; it’s a pillar of Long Island. And it’s very gratifying to play a part in building its future.”



“Farmingdale is not just a pillar of the industry; it’s a pillar of Long Island. **And it’s very gratifying to play a part in building its future.**”

– Stephen Hicks,
President of Hicks Nurseries

A LEGACY OF GLOBAL LITERACY

A love for books led **Dr. Olubayi Olubayi, '83**, to an FSC degree and a commitment to service

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

As a young student growing up in Western Kenya, Olubayi Olubayi, '83, treasured learning.

"It was about 10 hours away from the capital city," Olubayi said of his rural childhood village, which had no paved roads, running water, electricity, or telephones. "We walked to the [village] primary school barefoot...My mother was a teacher, so I loved school. And also, I saw school as an opportunity," he added.

Excelling in his studies, Olubayi was soon chosen to attend a top Kenyan high school, where "I fell in love with reading," he said. "The school had an excellent library and that really became a permanent transformation in my mind, because I fell in love with the idea of having libraries needing libraries."

After graduation, Olubayi received a full scholarship to attend Farmingdale State College (FSC), then known as the Agricultural and Technical College at Farmingdale, through an international student program.

"I credit landing at Farmingdale as one of the foundational, grounding pieces of my life. I loved being on campus and felt very much supported here," said Olubayi, who worked in the campus bookstore as he pursued an associate degree in biotechnology. "The quality of the textbooks, the student centric approach of the professors and their willingness to listen to students, and the excellent biotech labs—it all deepened my interest in science dramatically."

Olubayi went on to earn a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Florida Atlantic University. In 1995, Olubayi earned a PhD in plant biology from Rutgers University, where his research focused on the biology of bacteria plant cell interactions. In addition, he has authored multiple books, journal articles, and research papers on microbiology, biotechnology, and social science, and holds a U.S. research patent on the flocculation of bacteria.

"His body of work is simply outstanding and worthy of recognition," said Yetunde Odugbesan Omede, PhD, director of FSC's Office of Community and Civic Engagement and professor of global affairs and politics, who was a student of Olubayi's in 2005.

"We remained in touch over the years, and today we are both Rutgers African American Alumni Alliance Hall of Fame inductees. Dr. Olubayi has devoted his life to advancing education, humanitarian ventures, and global literacy."

Over his extensive career, Olubayi has held university faculty positions around the world, and acted as a government advisor to several Kenyan and South African officials and as a consultant for the prestigious United Nations Development Programme. He also served as vice chancellor and president of the International University of East Africa in Uganda before joining Africa Education Holdings as chief academic officer in 2016, where he currently leads programming for four universities.

Taking a page out of his alma mater's book, Olubayi is thrilled to offer his students the student centric approach he first experienced at FSC.

"[In Kenya] the practical work was fairly limited for students," he said. "So, I've focused on faculty development and moved them away from traditional lectures to project based learning. And it was very rewarding seeing that transformation of pedagogy. Student outcomes were better. Students were happier with their studies."

Feeling bound to give back to his global community, Olubayi also co founded Kiwimbi International, a nonprofit that promotes opportunity through education, and the Global Literacy Project, a nonprofit that provides libraries and service learning opportunities to students worldwide.

"One of the most fulfilling projects of my life is I've been able to go back to my village and set up a library that serves over 50,000 students. It is the first free public library in a county of more than one million people," he said.

"In my family, there was always an ethos of volunteerism, of service, and that was enhanced by my Farmingdale experience," added Olubayi, who shared he was deeply touched by how FSC's faculty and administration always treated students equitably. "A reminder that really, if you are in a position of privilege or good fortune, it means that you should serve, that you should give back to the best of your ability."



I credit landing at Farmingdale as **one of the foundational, grounding pieces of my life.** I loved being on campus and felt very much supported here.”

– Dr. Olubayi Olubayi, '83



UNSTOPPABLE

How **Tamara Gordon-Ferguson, '91**, forged her path to purpose

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

Widely recognized for her leadership and strategic legal acumen, Tamara Gordon-Ferguson, senior risk services counsel for Northwell Health, expertly guides senior executives on complex insurance and enterprise risk matters—but her journey to service was formed far from the boardroom, shaped instead by her quiet determination as a single mother who refused to let circumstances define her future.

Beyond her Long Island-based corporate role, Gordon-Ferguson is also deeply committed to serving others through mentorship, career development, and community outreach, including as co-chair of the Northwell Health African American Caribbean Business Employee Resource Group (AA/C BERG), founder of the AA/C BERG Movers Circle, Northwell School of Health Sciences mentor, and chaplain for the Suffolk County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

"I believe that the knowledge that I have is not for me, it's to share," she said. "Being a lawyer is not about authority; it is about service, stewardship, and using my gifts to lift others higher."

"It is difficult to capture all that Tamara has to offer in just a few sentences," said Crystal Thomas, senior administrative support assistant for Northwell Health Physician Partners and one of Gordon-Ferguson's mentees. "Her unwavering support, insight, and example of excellence have had a lasting and transformative impact on my professional growth and career trajectory."

While it's hard to measure the magnitude of her reach, Gordon-Ferguson admits: It all started at Farmingdale State College (FSC). An excellent student, Gordon-Ferguson, who grew up in Massapequa, New York, graduated from high school a year early with an interest in criminal law and a loving family that wanted her to stay close to home.

"I was determined to find a college that would give me the opportunities I was searching for—a chance to live on campus and study the field I was passionate about," she said. "FSC was that place. It will always be close to my heart because it is where I discovered what I wanted in my life. It opened the door."

Through FSC, Gordon-Ferguson earned an AAS in criminal justice in 1991 and from there earned a BA in criminal justice and a dual MS in criminal justice and political science from Long Island University, all while building a career that

spanned public service and several top-level positions at State Farm Insurance Companies. She later obtained a JD from the Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center, which she notably achieved while navigating a lengthy divorce and raising her young son, Brendan—now in his fourth year of PhD studies in chemical biology at Princeton University.

[FSC] will always be close to my heart because it is where I discovered what I wanted in my life. It opened the door."

– Tamara Gordon-Ferguson, '91

"During a time when I thought I would be a wife and a mom, I found myself a single mother with the responsibilities of two people," she said.

"I have my own home. I have all these things to manage, and I have this beautiful baby boy. I went through a very tough time. But I had a very strong support system in my family, and I just kept moving forward. Sometimes I worked two jobs, seven days a week. I did whatever I had to do to take care of my son. And it was particularly important to me that he see me achieve my goals, succeed, and thrive."

And thrive she has. Today, Gordon-Ferguson serves "as a guiding light, inspiring action among team members and fostering a profound sense of community and purpose," said Andrea S. Adams, DNP, MS, RN, ANP-BC, SCRNP, a nurse practitioner in hematology oncology at Northwell's Zuckerberg Cancer Center. "Her insightful leadership and dedication enhance our vision, ensuring that it resonates deeply within the community and drives meaningful societal change."

So, what's next for Gordon-Ferguson?

"I want to continue helping others rise, especially single mothers and the next generation," she said. "My faith guides me as a lawyer to use my journey, my voice, and my perseverance to open doors for those who need hope the most."

WHERE PASSION BECOMES IMPACT

In Hale Hall's state-of-the-art biology laboratory, FSC students apply focus, precision, and dedication, to put science, and their futures, into motion.







GUEST COLUMN

STUDENT AFFAIRS REIMAGINED

Building a culture of support through programming, expanded student support systems, and intentional collaboration

BY RONALD JACKSON, EdD, VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

It has been nearly a year since the division of Student Affairs returned to Farmingdale State College (FSC) with my appointment as the new vice president and, in that short time, the division has been a driving force in shaping a vibrant, student-centered campus experience. Guided by our mantra **Reach. Achieve. Matter.**, our goal is to empower FSC students to thrive through inclusive experiences that foster personal growth, meaningful connections, and lifelong success.

NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

From the outset, the division hit the ground running with a comprehensive redesign of New Student Orientation, together with the division of Academic Affairs and the Office of Enrollment Management. Recognizing that students begin their college journey with different experiences and needs, we developed distinct orientation tracks to ensure new students were prepared and confident to begin the first day of class.

For first-time-in college students, the focus was on fostering meaningful engagement with the college community—both inside and outside the classroom—which included a service-learning opportunity. The program was designed to cultivate a strong sense of belonging and reinforce the value of co-curricular involvement, with special attention and support dedicated to our first-generation students. We also offered an orientation program for family members, engaging them as valued partners in their students' success from the very beginning. For transfer students, the emphasis was on building connections with faculty, ensuring academic alignment, and supporting early integration into their chosen academic programs. For online students, orientation highlighted academic and student support services, reinforcing access, navigation, and connection in a virtual environment. The result was a more intentional onboarding experience aligned with measurable student success outcomes.



STUDENT SUCCESS, SUPPORT, AND WELL-BEING

Beyond orientation, the division has strengthened campus infrastructure to support student well-being and success. The launch of a new Basic Needs Team reflects a proactive commitment to addressing barriers to academic success, such as food insecurity, housing instability, and financial hardship. In addition to the on-campus food pantry, students can apply for food vouchers to get a hot meal while on campus. They can also request funding to purchase groceries from local stores. The Basic Needs Team case manager helps students identify external resources such as government assistance programs to address more long-term concerns, as well as a student advocate to assist students in maneuvering college processes, including steps to take when unexpected circumstances arise. This unified approach streamlines the process and keeps students moving steadily toward their goals.



ADVOCACY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND MENTAL HEALTH

The appointment of a new dean of students further centralized student advocacy, conduct, and crisis response efforts, ensuring students have a clear point of contact for guidance and support. Additionally, the revamped Students of Concern Committee provides a more structured case management framework that enhances early intervention strategies and strengthens the campus safety net to address emerging concerns in a timely fashion. The Disability Services Center and Office of Residence Life have expanded accessibility efforts for residential and commuter students by implementing more accessible outdoor furniture on campus, support for accessible doors and desks, and improved testing facilities for students with approved accommodations.

Complementing these structural enhancements, Student Affairs has continued the Mental Health Speaker Series designed to normalize conversations around mental health. By bringing expert voices to campus, the series underscores the division's commitment to holistic development, recognizing that mental health is foundational to academic persistence and personal growth. Gaten Matarazzo, an actor and advocate in the Netflix series *Stranger Things*, came to campus to share his experiences living with cleidocranial dysplasia (CCD), a rare genetic condition that was incorporated into his character on the show.

Olympic gold medalists Aly Raisman and Laurie Hernandez joined students, faculty, and staff for an inspiring conversation about resilience, leadership, teamwork, mental health, and overcoming challenges in sports and in life. The event highlighted self-care and perseverance, encouraging students to develop a “gold medal mindset” in all aspects of their lives.

In one short year, the division of Student Affairs has reintegrated both its presence and purpose at Farmingdale State College. Through strategic programming, expanded student support systems, and intentional collaboration, the division is building a culture where students are empowered not only to succeed, but to reach beyond expectations, achieve meaningful milestones, and know that their presence and contributions truly matter.

TAKING THE MOUND

Madison DeMaio, '27, finds her calling at Farmingdale State College

BY NICOLE MILLER

For Madison DeMaio, growth has always required dedication. A scholar-athlete at Farmingdale State College (FSC), DeMaio's journey—from the top of her class to the pitcher's mound—has been shaped by her willingness to take risks, reflect deeply, and lead with intention.

DeMaio grew up in a close-knit family in Elmont, New York. A standout student at Sewanhaka High School, she graduated as salutatorian of her class, earned a lead role in *All Shook Up*, played softball, and began developing the confidence and determination that would shape her future.

That chapter led her to FSC—the only school she applied to. Drawn initially by her interest in psychology, DeMaio's path to FSC became clear when she was offered a roster position on the softball team as a pitcher. Her first campus visit sealed the deal. "It felt like a sanctuary," said DeMaio. "An oasis." Majoring in applied psychology with a minor in exercise science, DeMaio has made FSC not just her school, but her home.

DeMaio's passion for psychology began in high school through an AP Psychology course, and has evolved into a focused interest in sport psychology. Fascinated by the connection between mental and physical performance, she is especially interested in mindfulness, visualization, and helping athletes optimize their mindset. "When mental performance improves, physical performance follows," she explained. Looking ahead, DeMaio plans to attend graduate school with the long-term goal of earning a PhD in clinical psychology. Ultimately, she envisions a future as both a neuropsychologist and, one day, a professor.

On campus, DeMaio is deeply involved. In addition to her commitment as a student-athlete, she serves as a Rambassador student tour guide, works as a supervisor for Campus Recreation, participates in the Research Aligned Mentorship and Honors programs, and was involved with Summer Undergraduate Research Institute. She is also an exercise science minor, a choice that complements her academic and athletic interests. Balancing such a full schedule requires discipline, and DeMaio has developed routines that keep her grounded. A disciplined regiment that includes reading, crocheting, maintaining a consistent sleep schedule, and weightlifting helps her stay focused and energized.

"Being a student-athlete is about more than what happens on the field; it's about handling pressure and responsibility without losing who you are," said Liz Pennino, Women's Softball head coach. "Madison handles a packed schedule, yet when she steps between those white lines, she is fully present, focused, and locked in. She manages her time, keeps her grades up, and still finds time to dominate in the circle."

DeMaio was named Skyline Pitcher and Rookie of the Year in her freshman year, as well as Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference (ECAC) Rookie of the Year, and set the single-season program wins record.

As a student-athlete, DeMaio is aware of the inequities that can exist in athletics, particularly around mental health, and communication between athletes and coaches. Rather than shrinking from these challenges, she leads by example. "It can feel overwhelming [to athletes]," she admitted, "but it motivates me even more." Her experiences have reinforced her desire to pursue sport psychology, with a focus on interpersonal relationships, team culture, and ensuring athletes feel supported and heard.

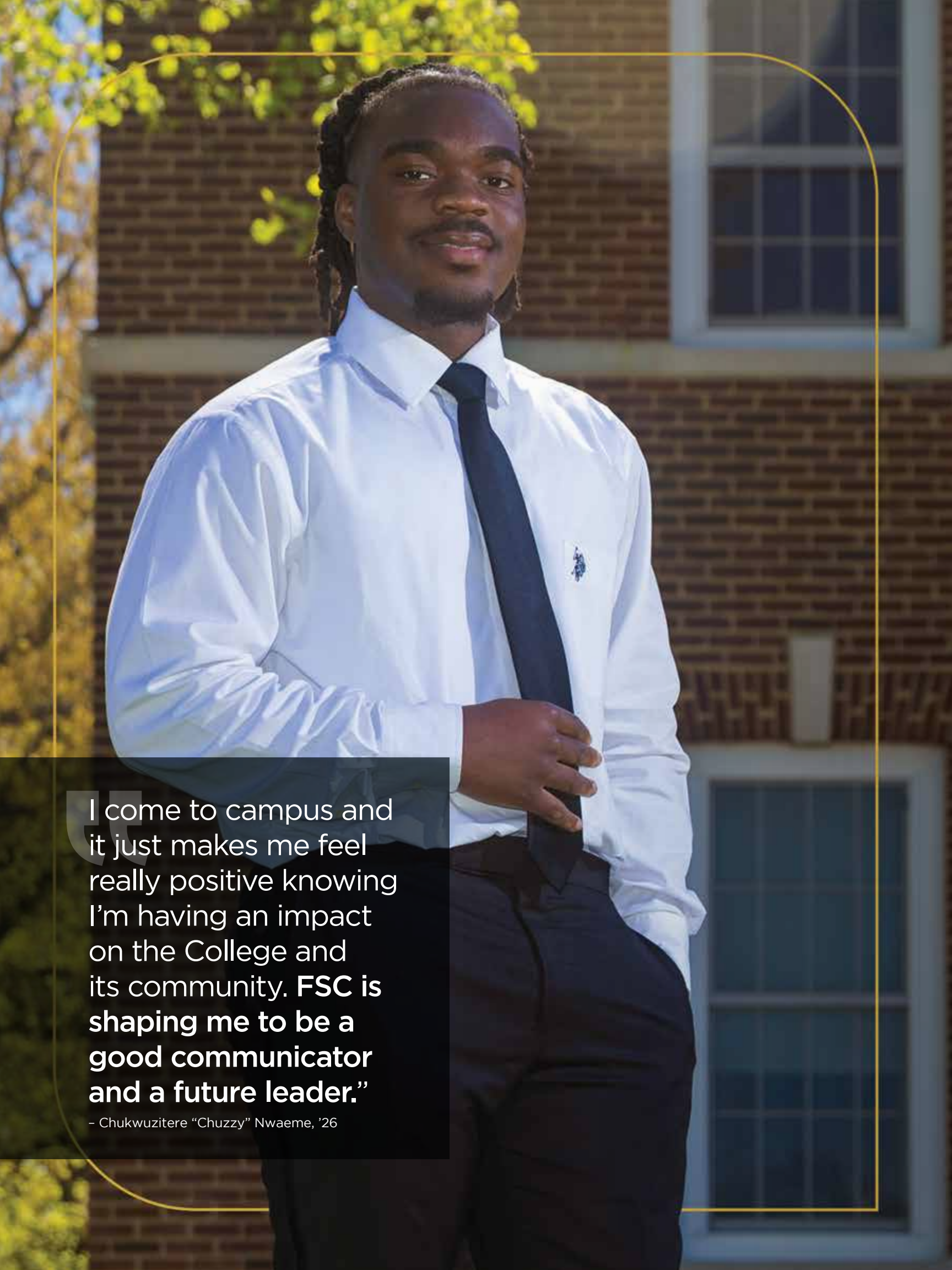
DeMaio's academic journey is also shaped by her hands-on experiences. Through an internship in applied behavioral therapy, she worked with children with disabilities, gaining exposure to people from all walks of life. "It opens your perspective," she said. She credits FSC Assistant Professor Bianca Marro-Boyle, PsyD, BCBA, for guidance and support, and she also participates in the Junior Moxxie Program, a professional development mentoring program for college women, where she relates to professional women in business and social work. Through opportunities from leaders like Jenna Natale, FSC alumna and executive director of Moxxie Mentoring Foundation, DeMaio has expanded her network and gained a valuable sounding board for her goals and ideas. Most recently, DeMaio collaborated with FSC's Campus Recreation Office and The Viscardi Center to give FSC students the opportunity to experience adaptive sports while connecting with members of the local community.

DeMaio approaches her education with purpose. Whether on the field, in the classroom, or through mentorship, DeMaio embodies what it means to take risks, grow intentionally, and lead with heart—making her a standout member of the FSC community.



Being a student-athlete is about more than what happens on the field; it's about handling pressure and responsibility without losing who you are."

- Madison DeMaio, '27



I come to campus and it just makes me feel really positive knowing I'm having an impact on the College and its community. **FSC is shaping me to be a good communicator and a future leader.**

- Chukwuzitere "Chuzzy" Nwaeme, '26

COMING UP ACES

Chukwuzitere “Chuzzy” Nwaeme, ’26, makes a difference with his ACE student leadership

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

Chukwuzitere “Chuzzy” Nwaeme was just 12 years old when he moved with his family to Queens, New York, from their home in Lagos, Nigeria. An excellent student, Nwaeme was quickly moved into ninth grade at his new school, where he struggled to connect with his classmates.

“It was definitely a different feeling to adjust to because everybody was two years older than me,” he said. “It was overwhelming for sure. My parents were very supportive and encouraged me to be my best. So, I was just focused on getting good grades, and that helped me. But socializing was the hardest part. I learned how to navigate life changes...how to take it as it comes and keep moving forward.”

Nwaeme stayed resolute in his studies and became strongly interested in electrical engineering before enrolling in Queensborough Community College, where he learned about the Advancing Success in Associate Pathways (ASAP) Program, a State University of New York initiative focused on meaningfully improving student support, retention, and degree completion across New York State.

After earning his associate degree in electrical engineering in 2024, Nwaeme was determined to find the perfect balance of student support and academic programs to continue his education. He transferred to Farmingdale State College (FSC), where he immediately applied for the Advancing Completion through Engagement (ACE) Program, an ASAP counterpart, and enrolled as an electrical engineering technology major.

“ACE was actually the first program I applied for and [ACE Director Georgia Kalamidas] replied to me the next day,” he said. “I was very excited and happy because I knew how much ASAP had helped me and I knew I needed something here that’s going to do the same, if not better.”

Nwaeme fondly recalls his first meeting with Kalamidas, who offered a warm welcome and explained the program’s unique holistic services, including individualized counseling, leadership and career development, peer mentoring, interactive workshops, and events.

“I made friends right away through ACE’s summer orientation,” Nwaeme shared. “And it helped me get familiarized and comfortable with different resources and the whole Farmingdale campus.

“It felt like a light shining on my younger self,” Nwaeme added, remembering his high school experience. “In life you need setbacks because you appreciate it more when you turn it around. It hits twice as good. And I am grateful for this opportunity to feel connected.”

“As a transfer student, Chuzzy has fully embraced all that FSC has to offer, immersing himself in opportunities that foster growth, leadership, and community,” said Kalamidas. “His dedication to excellence and his commitment to uplifting others have made him a tremendous asset to our campus and the ACE program. We could not be prouder of him and all his accomplishments.”

Now a member of the ACE Student Leadership Committee, Nwaeme has become a powerful advocate for the program, recently speaking at a variety of campus community events, including a recent ACE celebration ceremony and the College’s annual legislative breakfast, where he addressed elected officials, government partners, and local leaders in business, community, organized labor, and industry from across Long Island.

“I come to campus and it just makes me feel really positive knowing I’m having an impact on the College and its community,” he said. “FSC is shaping me to be a good communicator and a future leader. And, in the coming months, I’m looking forward to graduation walking down that stage with my suit on pursuing my dream job as an electrical engineer, and continuing to grow,” added Nwaeme, who is interested in power systems engineering and electronic circuit design. “I believe college is the way forward and I’ll keep being my best and see where that takes me.”



I attribute the majority
of my growth **to the
opportunities I've
had at FSC.**

- Austin Hernandez, '26

INVESTING IN TOMORROW'S SUCCESS

Austin Hernandez, '26, maximizes personal and professional growth at FSC

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

When Austin Hernandez first became interested in Farmingdale State College (FSC), it was for the College's nationally recognized Aviation Department. Growing up the youngest of three in Copiague, New York, Hernandez enjoyed time with his close-knit family and a "lovely high school experience" studying aviation at Western Suffolk BOCES.

"My father was a business owner; he was a machinist," said Hernandez, who often helped complete jobs at the family's West Babylon shop. "That's what I did for work...up until my sophomore year at FSC."

That's when Hernandez's father suddenly became "deathly sick. He was in and out of hospitals for the better part of eight months," said Hernandez, now in his senior year. "During that time, I was in the shop trying to fill his shoes, which was not an easy task being that he ran the place. We ended up closing down. Navigating all of this has definitely been my biggest challenge as a student."

Today, Hernandez shares that his father is doing much better, and the unexpected adversity piloted him to a successful new path as a business management major with a minor in economics.

"The weight of trying to support my family got me very interested in financial advising," he said. "So, I made a pivot. I wanted to understand money, understand how to make money. Looking on the brighter side of it, my father is still with us, and the pressure helped me grow...and I attribute the majority of my growth to the opportunities I've had at FSC," he added.

On campus, Hernandez is a School of Business Student Advisory Board member, where he loves helping others and acting as a voice for his fellow students.

"Austin truly embodies the grit, gratitude, and grace of our student body," said Internship Coordinator Lisa Lubrano, who helped Hernandez land a rewarding double internship with National Financial Network, where he built and strengthened client relationships.

"I would like to thank Lisa with every fiber of my being," said Hernandez. "She really hit the gas, helping me touch up my resume, put out applications, and prepare for interviews."

Hernandez was also honored to contribute to the Murray Pasternack '60 Student-Managed Investment Fund, an academic course that operates as a boutique trading firm. On behalf of the Farmingdale College Foundation, participating students manage assets generously donated by Pasternack and an alumni advisory council of additional investors.

"It was a phenomenal experience," Hernandez said. "I've learned so much. We invested into the market in real time, and it carried weight knowing that it was real money. And the fund is meant to be a succession plan—other students will be picking up where we left off. That definitely played a big role in our decision-making when it came to what funds, what stocks we wanted to invest in. We wanted to make sure that they were long-term and financially sound."

"What sets Austin apart is not only his technical ability, but his maturity and commitment to excellence. He consistently demonstrated a strong work ethic, professionalism, and a genuine passion for finance," said Associate Professor of Finance Meeghan Rogers, PhD. "He approached every investment decision with thoughtful analysis and a high level of preparation, and he contributed meaningfully to both team discussions and portfolio strategy. I have no doubt that he will be highly successful in his future career."

The experience culminated in Hernandez leading a final presentation to the advisory council, Pasternack, and his wife, Judy. "I gave an overview of the portfolio, and I thanked Murray for trusting us with his money. I let him know what a bountiful experience it was," he said. "And he stood up and shook my hand. He said that was some of the best news he's received in a long time. For me, it was a breath of fresh air after all the hardships and personal challenges that have come my way. Having that reassurance was heartwarming. I'll never forget it."

As Hernandez prepares to graduate this spring, "I've never felt happier," he said. "I feel optimistic about the future."



VOICES OF THE FUTURE

Empowering FSC's students through civic discourse

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

At Farmingdale State College (FSC) there's no debate about the institutional commitment to advancing democratic engagement across campus. Led by the Office of Community and Civic Engagement (OCCE), with support from the Office of the Provost and the State University of New York (SUNY), FSC recently introduced a new initiative ensuring a campus community capable of robust, respectful discourse.

Since fall 2025, FSC's Civic Discourse and Intellectual Square Initiative (CDISI) has hosted a series of ongoing events, including comprehensive civic discourse training for faculty and staff, interdisciplinary learning labs for students, and a dynamic panel discussion that included distinguished SUNY campus speakers.

"In an increasingly polarized world, the ability to engage in productive, respectful disagreement is a fundamental requirement for a functioning

democracy and a critical competency for our students' future success," said Senior Vice President and Provost Sean Lane, PhD. "And as educators, we have a unique responsibility to model how to navigate differences and equip our students with the resilience and empathy to hear opposing viewpoints without retreating into conflict. To support this vital work, we are pleased to host these important opportunities designed to foster constructive dialogue in our classrooms and beyond."

Through a partnership with the Constructive Dialogue Institute, the campus wide professional development training helped faculty and staff explore how moral values and cognitive biases shape perspectives, gain practical tools to support civic discourse across fields and in their co-curricular settings, and learn strategies for bridging differences and facilitating healthy classroom dialogue.

"The civic discourse initiative provides something that students wouldn't normally get from a standard lecture or textbook—an opportunity to engage with others who share differing viewpoints and perspectives from their own," said Associate Professor of Physics Edmund Douglass, PhD, Science, Technology, & Society (STS) Department chair and CDISI committee member. "In a time of significant political polarization, we are preparing graduates to listen, reason, and contribute meaningfully and constructively to their communities."

The ability to engage in productive, respectful disagreement is a fundamental requirement for a functioning democracy and a critical competency for our students' future success."

— Sean Lane, PhD
Senior Vice President and Provost

During two high impact learning labs, students from different disciplines joined active interchanges and real world problem solving. For the first session, medical laboratory science students paired with STS students to examine the role of artificial intelligence in laboratory analysis, medical diagnostics, and ethical decision making in healthcare. The second session had criminal justice students teamed up with business students to inspect the ethical, policy, and equity implications of prison privatization in the United States.

Christopher Marine, '27, a criminal justice: police, courts, and corrections major, said he enjoyed "the thought provoking manner of discussion," the collaboration, and working with his group to find the totality of their perspectives. "It's important to understand that more than one person can bring an idea to the table," he said. "Farmingdale is a powerhouse in the region, and we do a great job of elevating every voice and pioneering initiatives that make sure everyone gets a seat at that table."

"My experience with FSC's civic discourse initiative has shown me how powerful it is when students feel heard and encouraged to engage in meaningful conversations," agreed Aliyah Adnan Khan, '26, applied mathematics and applied psychology dual degree student and CDISI committee member. "This initiative is essential in helping students build the skills needed to engage thoughtfully with real world complex issues and contribute positively in their communities and future careers."

"Civic discourse infrastructure is among the most consequential work happening in higher education right now and we are proud to put that belief into action at FSC," said Yetunde Odugbesan Omede, PhD, OCCE director, professor of global affairs and politics, and CDISI committee chair. "Watching our faculty, staff, and students engage with practical frameworks for navigating difficult conversations has been genuinely energizing and makes clear that the ripple effect of equipping people with the right tools will reach far beyond any single workshop."







CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

Between classes and lectures, FSC students find time to enjoy friendships and meaningful moments in Gleeson Plaza.

PREPARING FUTURE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Amanda Lavery helps FSC's students at every stage of the pre-health journey

BY DANIELLE DIMURO

Originally from the Northwest, Amanda Lavery did not set out to become an academic advisor. With a background in biology and a clear focus on research, her path seemed to be defined early on. That changed during her graduate studies when she stepped into the classroom as a teaching assistant. "I fell in love with teaching," Lavery said. "There was a moment where everything just clicked."

That moment led her to Farmingdale State College (FSC), where she began as an adjunct professor in 2009, teaching courses in microbiology, anatomy and physiology, and introductory biology. What began in the classroom soon expanded into something larger, shaping not only how she worked with students, but how she supported them beyond the classroom.

Today, Lavery serves as the program coordinator of the Pre-Health Professions Advisement (PHPA) office, a growing and essential resource at FSC that supports more than 2,600 students and alumni pursuing careers in healthcare.

The role, which once existed informally, has evolved into a structured and highly personalized advising model under her leadership. Through one-on-one guidance, long-term planning, and application support, Lavery works alongside Amber Dominguez, with the recent addition of Lauren Bazhdari, as the team helps students navigate the complexities of applying to medical, dental, physician assistant, physical therapy, and other professional programs.

"We are guiding them through their entire journey," Lavery said. "From the moment they start to the moment they receive that acceptance."

That journey often extends well beyond graduation. Many students return years later for continued support, a reflection of the relationships built throughout their time at FSC. Some return after taking gap years, while others come back several years later, ready to pursue the next step in their academic or professional path.

Those relationships are at the core of the work. Watching students grow from uncertain freshmen into confident, competitive applicants to professional programs is what Lavery finds most rewarding. "To see them reach that point after years of hard work, it never gets old," she said.

A first-generation college student herself, Lavery brings a deep understanding of the challenges many

of her students face. That perspective shapes the office's approach, ensuring students feel supported, understood, and capable of achieving their goals.

"They are learning how to navigate college while pursuing incredibly competitive careers," she said. "It is important that they know they are not doing that alone."

In recent years, Lavery has led a significant shift in how PHPA prepares students for the application process. Moving away from the traditional committee letter model, Lavery partnered with Amber Dominguez to introduce a portfolio review system that allows students to build and refine every aspect of their application over time.

Beginning the year before students apply, the process breaks down each component of the application, including personal statements, supplemental essays, and experience descriptions. Students receive detailed feedback and revisions throughout the process, ensuring they are fully prepared when applications open.

The results have been compelling. Students participating in the portfolio process are receiving earlier interview invitations and acceptances, along with increased confidence as they enter the application cycle.

"The Pre-Health Professions Advisement office reflects the high-impact, student-centered support that defines Farmingdale State College," said Dr. Sarah Gross, dean of the School of Health Sciences. "With the portfolio review process, PHPA continues to lead in innovation while delivering outcomes that exceed national benchmarks."

Success is measured not only by outcomes, but by how prepared and confident students feel as they take the next step. "Nothing they do is just something," she said. "Every experience matters. It is about helping them see that and understand what they bring to the field."

As PHPA continues to grow, including the recent expansion of her team, Lavery remains focused on what has always driven her work: supporting students and helping them move forward. For her, it comes down to something simple but powerful. "This work is a privilege," Lavery said. "To be part of their journey and see them achieve their goals, there is nothing better than that."



This work is a privilege. **To be part of their journey and see them achieve their goals, there is nothing better than that.**

- Amanda Lavery
Program Coordinator of Pre-Health Professions



MORE THAN A MENTOR

Gregorio Diaz Martinez cultivates brighter futures at FSC

BY KAREN V. CONTINO

A passion for engineering, research, and helping others has led Gregorio Diaz Martinez, Farmingdale State College's (FSC) newest Research Aligned Mentorship (RAM) Program team member, to share his undeniable enthusiasm with FSC's students. Diaz Martinez, who joined FSC in 2024 as undergraduate research coordinator and advisor, brought with him a wealth of knowledge as an experienced researcher and science educator.

Growing up the oldest of three in Colombia, Diaz Martinez gained an early interest in engineering from his father, who was a carpenter.

"He had an area in the backyard where he worked, and, as kids, we always had access to that," shared Diaz Martinez. "I was always watching him lifting this, building that. So, that really helped me learn to be more hands-on and problem-solving."

A first-generation college student, Diaz Martinez went on to earn a bachelor's degree in agro-industrial engineering from the University of Sucre, Colombia, and a master's degree in engineering from the National University of Colombia, which he finished at North Carolina State University.

"I'm really grateful to my parents because they didn't go to college. My mom finished fifth grade and my dad finished 10th grade, but they gave everything for me to pursue my education and career," he said. "They did everything they could to support me."

Along the way, Diaz Martinez also got involved in research, which he discovered was the perfect complement to his studies.

"Being an engineer and a researcher gives you the opportunity to innovate, find new ideas, and do things that nobody else has done," he said. "And it allows you to share that knowledge with others who can help you and collaborate."

With a focus on biochemistry, chemistry, and physical science, Diaz Martinez has held several secondary and post-secondary teaching positions across Long Island, where he enjoyed the rapport with his students and the opportunity to have a positive impact on their lives.

Now, as part of FSC's RAM Program, which was launched in 2015 with a \$3 million First in the World (FITW) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Diaz Martinez relishes the chance to "do everything I've always wanted to do combined in one place," he said. "I advise and mentor students, help advance new initiatives, and create life-changing research opportunities. I just love talking about this because it makes me so happy. Every day I get up to come to work and I tell my wife, 'I love what I do.' I know that I'm making a difference."

Every day I get up to
come to work and I tell
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**I know that I'm making
a difference."**

– Gregorio Diaz Martinez
Undergraduate Research Coordinator & Advisor

"Gregorio inspires others by being a leader and role model through his devotion to students' academic and career growth," agreed Luis Ramos Dominguez, '28, a mechanical engineering technology major. "Gregorio has helped me home in on my goals and his help has made a huge difference in my future."

"Gregorio has been an invaluable source of support throughout my academic journey," said Michelle Hernandez Leiva, '27, a criminal justice: police, courts, and corrections major with a minor in sociology. "He has provided both guidance and understanding that has helped me stay focused and resilient and has played a key role in my professional development. He truly cares about his students and always makes time for us, no matter what."

"The most rewarding part of my job is seeing the students succeed," said Diaz Martinez. "Growing up, I didn't have all these opportunities. So, having the chance to open doors and prepare students for the future, that's what motivates me the most."

A HAPPY ACCIDENT WITH A LASTING IMPACT

Shane Owens and the work of Campus Mental Health

BY NICOLE MILLER

Shane Owens, PhD, never set out to work in mental health. In fact, when he graduated from high school in South Jersey, his dream was Broadway—not a counseling office. “I wanted to perform,” Owens recalls with a laugh. “But I was told by my parents that you can’t really just major in music.” So, he paired his artistic interests with psychology, a subject he’d grown to love thanks to a high school teacher who made the material come alive.

That decision—part practicality, part curiosity—would quietly shape a career dedicated to supporting students through some of their most vulnerable moments.

Owens earned his bachelor’s degree from Drew University, majoring in psychology and philosophy, with a minor in music. Philosophy, he said, taught him how to think deeply and ask better questions—skills that would later become essential in clinical work. A pivotal moment came when an advisor, who always seemed genuinely happy, shared that he was a clinical psychologist. “That stuck with me,” Owens said. “I thought, maybe that’s something I could do.” He applied to graduate programs soon after, what he now describes as a “happy accident.”

After moving to Long Island in 1997, Owens went on to earn his PhD in clinical and school psychology from Hofstra University. Today, he brings that experience to Farmingdale State College (FSC) as the director of College Mental Health Services (CMHS), where he works with college-age students navigating academic stress, personal challenges, relationships, and mental health concerns.

CMHS at FSC is staffed by three full-time psychologists, a part-time social worker, a full-time trainee, a part-time trainee, and a full-time outreach and prevention specialist, focusing on proactive education and engagement across campus. What makes the team unique, Owens explained, is the level of expertise. “Everyone here is already licensed as a mental health professional—either a mental health counselor or a social worker—and many are on their way to earning doctoral-level degrees. That means we’re advanced enough to hit the ground running.”

At a time when colleges nationwide are grappling with a mental health crisis, Owens emphasizes that FSC and the State University of New York (SUNY) are taking meaningful steps to respond. SUNY-wide policies are focused on expanding mental health programming, funding, support, and education. For example, recently, FSC received a grant to train three campus members in Mental Health First Aid, a program that teaches participants how to recognize and respond to signs of mental health crises.

“Through innovative outreach programs, which have aligned with SUNY’s focus on student mental health, students feel more empowered to communicate when they’re struggling,” said Ronald Jackson, EdD, vice president of student affairs. “Through creative techniques such as virtual reality therapy, Dr. Owens has embraced technology to improve student wellness.”

CMHS offers a wide range of services to students, including individual psychotherapy, group therapy, couples counseling, and virtual appointments. Students can call to make an appointment, and a patient portal is expected to launch soon to make access even easier. Services are available to currently registered students and are covered through the student health fee.

There are no session limits, no direct charges, and no insurance billing required. “We want to remove as many barriers as possible,” Owens said.

Importantly, CMHS staff are on call 24/7, providing direct support rather than outsourcing care. When students graduate, the team also works to connect them with appropriate referrals, so support can continue beyond FSC.

For Owens, a big part of the job is demystifying mental healthcare. “People sometimes think therapy has to be this big, scary thing,” he said. “Really, it’s about having a space to talk, to reflect, and to get support from someone who’s trained to help.”

What began as a backup plan to a Broadway dream has become a career rooted in compassion, expertise, and connection. And for the students at Farmingdale State College, Shane Owens’ “happy accident” has made all the difference.



People sometimes think therapy must be this big, scary thing. Really, it's about **having a space to talk, to reflect, and to get support from someone who's trained to help.**"

– Shane Owens, PhD
Director of Campus Mental Health Services

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

James Durant, '68, and **Meero Kalo, '21**, have a lot in common. Both earned degrees in the field of aviation. Both worked on campus for the Admissions Office and as residential life assistants. Kalo's career goal has always been to become a professional airline pilot for a major carrier based out of JFK International Airport. Durant retired from JFK as airport duty manager 20 years ago.

Most recently, Durant invested in Farmingdale's future by establishing the James Durant 68 Scholarship in Aviation. Kalo was the first recipient of that scholarship.

When asked what Kalo would say to his donor before having the opportunity to meet Durant in person, he said, "Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I appreciate the generosity and the help, as it will get me a few flight hours and much needed experience! Seeing this has encouraged me to possibly do the same with future generations of aviators. I would love to help another fellow aviator in the future once I am all settled!"



To continue the legacy of a Farmingdale education and learn more about how your gift can transform the lives of our students, contact Institutional Advancement at advancement@farmingdale.edu or call 934-420-2142.

Farmingdale College Foundation | Office of Institutional Advancement
2350 Broadhollow Road | Farmingdale, NY 11735 | advancement@farmingdale.edu | 934.420.2142

BIG IDEAS & ELEVATED OUTCOMES

Kim Nyoni builds a new culture of philanthropy

BY CHRIS MAIO

In November 2025, Farmingdale State College (FSC) welcomed a new vice president for institutional advancement, Kim Nyoni. A 20 year advancement veteran, Kim serves as chief advancement officer for the College, playing a central role in shaping its philanthropic support and in cultivating meaningful relationships while helping to grow and nurture corporate partnerships. He also serves as executive director of the Farmingdale Foundation, guiding its fundraising strategy and aligning its mission with FSC priorities.

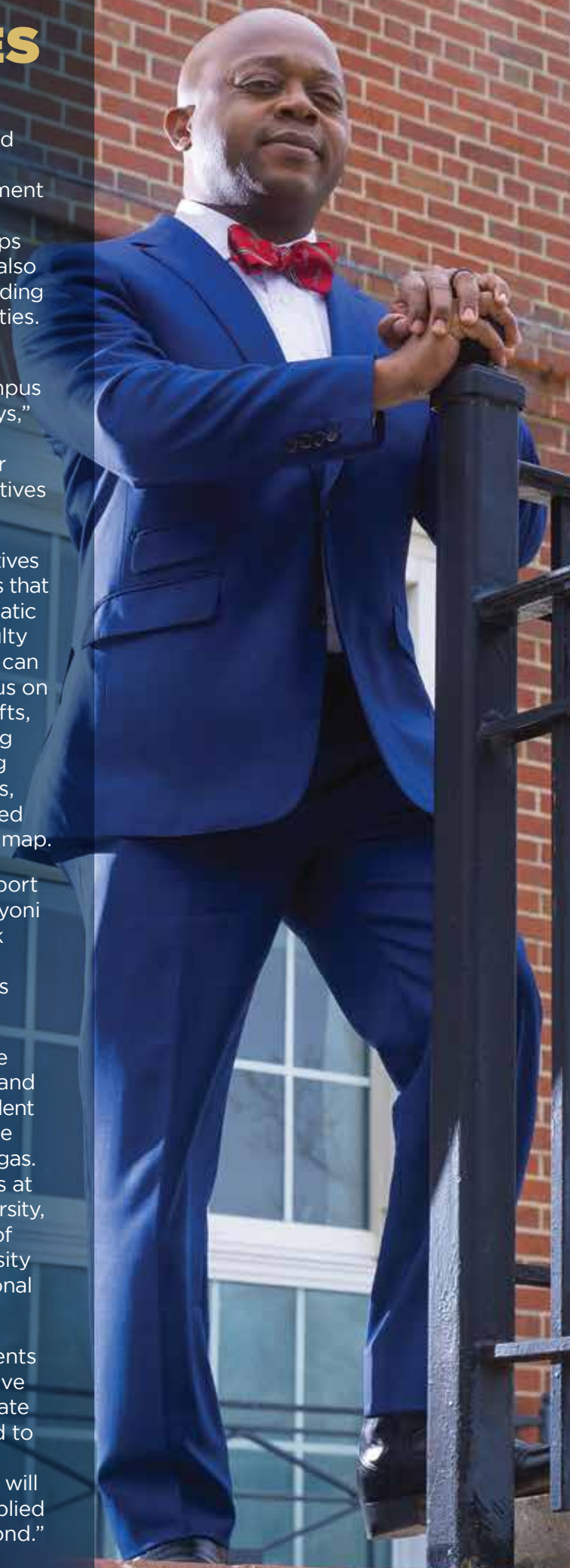
“Kim’s extensive experience, insight, and depth in building successful advancement programs will greatly benefit our campus and help engage donors and alumni in new and innovative ways,” said FSC President Robert S. Prezant, PhD. “He demonstrated a deep understanding of Farmingdale, with high aspirations for the future. He is well positioned to lead our development initiatives to the next level.”

Since joining FSC, Nyoni has actively engaged corporate executives in a variety of industries to develop comprehensive partnerships that create opportunities for research, talent growth, and programmatic support. He is also working with academic leadership and faculty to build the culture of philanthropy and develop big ideas that can elevate outcomes. In the months and weeks ahead, he will focus on growing institutional endowments through transformational gifts, establishing planned giving, and implementing an annual giving program, centered on the Farmingdale Fund to facilitate giving at all levels in support of FSC. With a focus on FSC’s challenges, opportunities, and aspirations, he has become better acquainted with the community and regional economic development roadmap.

“Our philanthropic success is infinitely tied to our ability to support the College in addressing the business needs of our region,” Nyoni said. “Long Island is home to the second largest industrial park in the United States, in close proximity to FSC. In addition our proximity to New York City is a difference maker. Our team has to take full advantage of these levers.”

Nyoni joined Farmingdale from the University at Buffalo, where he served as senior associate vice president for advancement and campaign co director. He was previously the assistant vice president for advancement at the University of Florida, and associate vice president for development with the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. During his career, he has also been part of advancement teams at the University of Missouri, University of Arizona, Utah State University, and University of California, Berkeley. He received a Bachelor of Journalism and a Master of Arts in advertising from the University of Nebraska Lincoln. He also attended the Institute for Educational Management at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

“Farmingdale is all about facilitating social mobility of our students and developing strong experiential learning programs. We have exceptional students, wonderful alumni, and strategic corporate partners who truly believe in FSC,” said Nyoni. “I look forward to supporting the development of new interdisciplinary facilities and creating leading edge experiential learning programs that will open new career paths for students, grow our footprint for applied research, and amplify the impact of FSC in New York and beyond.”





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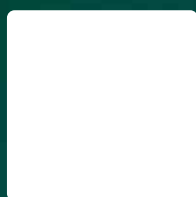
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