

A PUBLICATION OF ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# Impact

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**New programs  
come into focus**

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Elgin  
Community  
College



**MISSION**

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

**SHARED VALUES**

- Excellence*
- Freedom of Inquiry*
- Equity*
- Diversity*
- Ethical Practices*
- Accountability*
- Collaboration*

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

You can access board agendas, minutes, instructions for addressing the board, and board contact information at [elgin.edu/boardoftrustees](http://elgin.edu/boardoftrustees).

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# LEADING THE WAY

## A message from the ECC President and Board Chair

Dear ECC Community,

**W**e are excited to be moving toward a post-pandemic reality at Elgin Community College. But we have to admit that some things, such as helping our students cross the finish line, will never change. This past May, we held our traditional, in-person commencement ceremonies, a welcome sight after suspending the events the past two years due to COVID-19 safety protocols. As a bonus, we welcomed some of our 2020 and 2021 graduates back to walk across the stage—a moment they undoubtedly deserved and will treasure for the rest of their lives.

We are proud of every student, all 980 (and counting), who earned their degrees and certificates in the spring 2022 semester. We know it was not easy, and we salute them, all of their supporters, and our outstanding faculty for their roles in helping our students reach this momentous occasion.

Completion rates are only one of the metrics we use to hold ourselves accountable to our mission. We also analyze our student loan debt, transfer rates, student engagement data, and support services offerings to ensure our students have what they need to succeed.

As a testament to the exceptional work done by our faculty, staff, administrators, and board of trustees, ECC has been recognized nationally since 2012 as an Achieving the Dream Leader College. This year, we earned an additional designation as a

Leader College of Distinction.

Furthermore, the Aspen Institute recently recognized ECC (for the fourth time!) as a Top 150 College in the nation, and, drum roll please, we were thrilled this past spring to learn that ECC advanced to be among 25 semifinalists competing for the \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. This achievement means that your community college is among the top 25 in the nation! These acknowledgments are a direct result of ECC's strategic focus and progress in achieving successful and equitable outcomes for students.

Additionally, several key initiatives stand out as we continue to serve our students with distinction, including a holistic approach to supporting the whole student through wellness services provided by experienced, licensed clinicians right on the ECC campus. From new fall program offerings to removing financial barriers, you will find stories throughout the pages of this publication that illustrate ECC's comprehensive efforts to equip our students with academic, accessible, and financial resources that lead to greater success in the classroom and beyond.

We look forward to seeing the many students who will be returning to ECC this fall and those attending for the first time, all of whom will benefit from our commitment to an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment of limitless opportunities. What about you? If you are thinking about returning to school, now is your time! The fall semester begins on August 22. Visit [elgin.edu](http://elgin.edu) during regular business hours to chat live with our enrollment and recruitment office.

Thank you for your continued support!

**David Sam, PhD, JD, LLM**  
President



**Jennifer Rakow, BA**  
Chair, Board of Trustees



## FEATURED STORIES

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**ON THE COVER:**

Shelby Stanley, ECC's ophthalmic technician program director.

# FOCUSING ON WELLNESS



Desiree Oliveros

## Supporting students with holistic care

**A**s the COVID-19 pandemic persisted, mental health became a pervasive and expanding issue. The need to focus on students' mental health became more apparent as students all over the country faced a great deal of uncertainty, unexpected shifts to remote learning, and a diminished sense of community. For Elgin Community College student Desiree Oliveros, reaching out for help meant moving past a belief system that stigmatizes mental health therapy as unnecessary because she was probably just sad or nervous or in 'a mood' that would pass. "It wasn't until the spring of 2021 that I realized I was at my breaking point. My eating habits were out of control, my mood changed drastically from day to day, and my grades were suffering," said Oliveros. "It felt like I had no control over my life. But then one of the professionals from the wellness center came to talk to our class, and at that moment, I knew I needed to do something to improve my mental health, and I had somewhere to go for support."

ECC's Wellness Services Office proactively plays a critical role in enhancing students' overall health and well-being using a holistic approach. ECC began adding clinicians in 2015 and now has three licensed clinical professionals who provide a wide range of free mental health services on campus, which is rare

among two-year colleges.

"Having a positive experience with a mental health provider can turn students into advocates," noted Wellness Professional Jasmine Young. "Friends are more comfortable talking about their feelings with each other and can recognize when to say, 'Hey, this issue goes deeper, maybe you should talk to a professional.'" Wellness professionals urge students not to wait until they have a mental health crisis to seek help. Whether a student needs one session to talk through something or multiple sessions to work on coping tools, ensuring a continuum of care is critical.

"It is not an easy journey to heal, but I am glad I finally took the steps necessary to better myself," said Oliveros. "My grades returned to the straight A's I knew I was capable of, my confidence returned, and I learned how to cope with my anxiety before it became a problem."

Oliveros is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and a dual credit Accelerate College student who graduated in May of 2022 with an Associate in Science degree and high honors. She will attend the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in the fall to study civil engineering. ✨

# ACCOMMODATING DREAMS



Maryam Ebadi, left, and Pietrina Probst

**M**aryam Ebadi, a single mother living with a hereditary degenerative vision disorder, immigrated to the U.S. excited to continue working toward her dream of becoming a family counselor. After completing her GED® prep at Elgin Community College, the next step was taking placement exams at her local community college. She arrived anxious but ready to do her best. Within minutes, her excitement turned to frustration and disappointment. “When I went in for placement testing, they did not offer any accommodations for my disability,” said Ebadi. “They handed me a test paper and told me to read the instructions, but I cannot read a document without assistance and could not complete the test that day. That’s when I left and came back to ECC.”

A native of Iran, Ebadi struggled with vision problems from a young age but could still see well enough to read and write through her teenage years. In time, her vision continued to deteriorate. With no help offered for her condition, Ebadi’s hopes of completing her education were dashed. She knew that to pursue a career in counseling and have the means to support her children, she would have to leave her homeland.

This realization led Ebadi to the United States in 2015, where she quickly learned English. She then enrolled in ECC’s GED prep classes and turned to the Student Access and Disability Services Office for assistance. The department ensures that students with disabilities

and other barriers have an equal opportunity to succeed.

“We never want students to be forced to stop pursuing their education because a viable solution isn’t available to them,” said Pietrina Probst, director of ADA, student access, and disability services. “Our focus is to do all that we can to provide equal access for students with disabilities by removing barriers to success.”

“Our focus is to do all that we can to provide equal access for students.”

— Pietrina Probst

Probst works individually with students to determine what reasonable accommodations will best support their needs. She then coordinates with faculty and staff members to ensure those defined needs are met through tools such as screen readers, transcribing software, or other accessibility technologies. Accommodations might also include something as simple as adjusting seating arrangements in classroom and lab settings.

“Being blind never got me down, and I know it’s not easy, but I believe I can do anything a sighted person can do,” said Ebadi. With ECC’s help, she now has the materials and technology she needs and is excelling in her studies. Ebadi is on track to graduate with an associate degree in 2023 and is well on her way to accomplishing her dream of a career in family counseling. ✨

# CRISIS CARE

...from those who have been there

**E**lgin Community College is one of only 11 Illinois colleges awarded a state grant by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to support a new program for certified recovery support specialists (CRSS) and certified peer recovery specialists (CPRS). The new offerings launch this fall with the IDHS grant covering the cost of tuition, fees, books, and other wraparound services, such as child care and transportation. The program offers a unique opportunity for individuals who want to pursue a career in human services and have lived experience of recovery from mental health or substance use challenges, or both.

An emerging new professional field, recovery support specialists will work with people in recovery in three core areas: advocacy and aiding persons in recovery with personal advocacy skills, mentoring people in recovery, and recovery/wellness support. "Recovery support specialists have the unique ability to relate to the person in crisis," said Joseph Rosenfeld, PsyD, professor of human services.

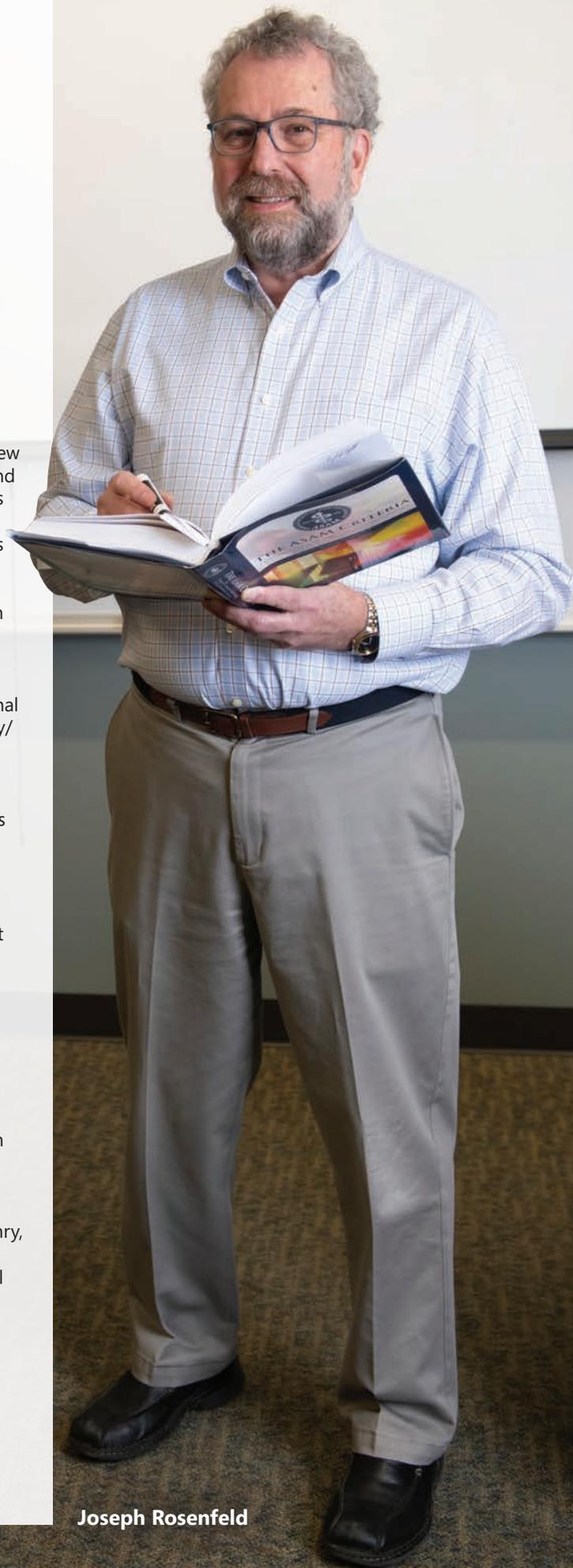
A CRSS can enter the workforce to address multiple areas of need. These professionals may work with the homeless, in mental health centers, or as specially trained members of mobile crisis teams supplying additional resources for the community. They can also support law enforcement to provide 24/7 clinical response to anyone experiencing or at risk of a behavioral health crisis.

"The 'Living Room Model' refers to a community crisis center that offers an alternative to hospitalization for people experiencing a mental health crisis and is another growing concept in the mental health field that will utilize CRSS professionals," explained Rosenfeld. "When a person in this situation seeks assistance at a hospital emergency department, they must wait in an environment that can harm rather than help them," said Rosenfeld. "A living room center provides an alternative option equipped for crisis intervention, offering a safe space to rest and relax with support from recovery support specialists."

"ECC will be the only community college in Kane, McHenry, DeKalb, and Winnebago counties with a human services program that provides a pipeline for students in this critical profession," added Peggy Heinrich, EdD, vice president of teaching, learning, and student development. "The experience and expertise already established by ECC in the area of human services make us ready to lead the way in developing this growing profession for uniquely qualified individuals who can fill a vital need in mental health and substance use treatment and recovery services." ❄️



For more information, please visit [elgin.edu/rss](https://elgin.edu/rss).



Joseph Rosenfeld

A photograph of four people standing in a construction site. From left to right: a man in a blue button-down shirt and khaki pants wearing a white hard hat; a woman in a black top and plaid pants wearing a white hard hat; a woman in a grey sweater and black pants wearing a white hard hat; and a woman in a pink jacket and black pants wearing an orange hard hat. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a large, open industrial space with concrete floors, metal beams, and pipes.

# BUILDING A FUTURE



**E**gin Community College is known for offering innovative programs that provide students with access to in-demand training and education. One area of continued growth lies in the programs celebrating a decade of progress since the construction of the health and life sciences building in January 2012.

The facility contains 29 classrooms, laboratories, and teaching spaces that simulate the environment in which future graduates will work. “Our equipment for hands-on practice is spectacular,” said Wendy Miller, EdD, dean of health professions, math, science, and engineering. “Students have opportunities to learn and practice skills on campus before going into a clinical setting. This gives them more confidence when working with patients.”

Construction is currently underway to complete the third floor, which will add classroom and lab spaces, study spaces, and offices to support the new ophthalmic technician and medical assisting programs and a new lab for biology. The new programs will launch at the start of the fall 2022 semester.

Local health care agencies reached out to ECC in hopes the college could start these programs to help with regional demand. ECC also received a state grant to develop the ophthalmic technician program degree. Ophthalmic technicians assist ophthalmologists in caring for patients’ eyes and eyesight. The program will prepare students through ophthalmologist job shadowing, three clinical experiences, and career development help with résumé writing and preparation for the certified ophthalmic technician exam. “The ophthalmic technician program will bring the unique field of eye care to ECC’s Health Professions Division,” said Shelby Stanley, ophthalmic technician program director. “Eye clinics in the area are excited to partner with our program for clinicals and are already looking forward to having our graduates in the job market. This field is full of opportunities and

rewarding work.”

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, by 2030, the market need for ophthalmic technicians will increase by 14%, with demand for medical assistants expected to increase by 18%. Medical assistants perform the vital role of gathering and translating a patient’s issues and needs to a physician, along with performing many clinical duties such as taking and recording vital signs and drawing blood. Medical assistants also ensure medical offices and clinics run smoothly by scheduling appointments and maintaining medical records. For full-time medical assisting students, this is a three-semester vocational certificate program. It is designed to prepare students to be competitively recognized in the field by being able to take the registered medical assistant exam and become certified by American Medical Technologists. After completing a medical assisting certificate, students can qualify for jobs as medical assistants, medical office assistants, specialty medical assistants, and more.

The health and life sciences building is home to the college’s health-related programs, including biology, microbiology, anatomy and physiology, environmental biology, massage therapy, dental assisting, radiography, clinical lab technology, health and wellness management, histotechnology, nursing, physical therapist assistant, surgical technology, and phlebotomy. “When you see students walking around in their scrubs representing different health professions, you can almost imagine yourself being in a health care clinic,” said Miller.

With its newly added programs and building updates, ECC’s Health Professions Division provides a range of opportunities to appeal to prospective students interested in working in health care fields. In turn, it gives the community a skilled workforce ready to put their education to work. “As dean, I’m so proud of my health professions team,” said Miller. “The work they do to prepare our graduates to care for our community is phenomenal.” ✦

“Our equipment for hands-on practice is spectacular.”

— Wendy Miller

**From left to right: Fred Vogt, professor of biology, Kelli Marlin, medical assisting program director, Shelby Stanley, ophthalmic technician program director, Wendy Miller, dean of health professions, math, science & engineering**



Adams Tangué Tsapi

## ICAPS graduate becomes ECC instructor

**A**dams Tangué Tsapi, '20, credits his experiences in the Integrated Career & Academic Preparation System (ICAPS) program for giving him a competitive advantage. "Everything started for me at Elgin Community College," said Tangué Tsapi, originally from Cameroon, Africa. "I began my journey in 2015 when I enrolled in ESL classes so I could continue my studies in electrical engineering."

ICAPS is a guided program to support student success while pursuing Basic Vocational Specialist (BVS) certificates. ICAPS is open to all students but primarily supports those who are underprepared for college classes, adult education students, and second language learners. Services include access to dedicated student support specialists who place students in learning cohorts, conduct regular advising sessions, and serve as the main point of contact to guide students through classes to complete the program in one year. Free loaner textbooks and academic support classes, résumé and job search assistance, and career workshops are also incorporated into the program.

After completing ESL classes at ECC's Education & Work Center in Hanover Park, Ill., Tangué Tsapi then enrolled in ICAPS and

obtained a BVS certificate in automated electronic systems.

He continued on to earn additional BVS certificates in industrial maintenance technology and residential HVAC systems, all with high honors. Today, he is a senior industrial maintenance technician for Smithfield Foods, Inc., and recently joined ECC as an adjunct instructor in the maintenance technician program.

**"I want to positively impact students' lives and help influence them to work hard."**

**— Adams Tangué Tsapi**

Beginning in 2010 with one welding cohort, ICAPS has grown to include seven program offerings. The college expects ICAPS to continue on an upward trajectory, as does Tangué Tsapi.

"Returning to ECC as an instructor allows me to share my unique perspective with my students. I want to positively impact their lives and help influence them to work hard and realize the benefit of a solid educational foundation before embarking on their chosen career." ❄️

# ON BOARD

## Alumnus returns to serve students

**S**ergio Rodriguez, '06, knows what it's like to be a student at Elgin Community College. Now serving as a member of the District 509 Board of Trustees, he plans to put those experiences to work on behalf of students and district residents. "I understand what it's like to be a part-time adult student while juggling work and family responsibilities and the additional stress that can bring," said Rodriguez. "I'm committed to working with the board of trustees and Dr. Sam to serve the needs of the students, faculty, staff, and communities of District 509 to continue providing opportunities to improve lives through learning, collaboration, and partnerships."

Rodriguez believes his deep ties to ECC as an alum and his unique background are assets to his service as a trustee. "I bring a different perspective to the board that is shaped by my modest upbringing as a first-generation immigrant, a veteran, and a part-time student, along with my work experience, unique skill set, and volunteer community involvement." He is currently also serving as president of the board of directors for Centro de Información, a not-for-profit social services organization serving the Hispanic community in the Northwest suburbs.

Rodriguez, of Pingree Grove, was the unanimous selection during the board's special meeting held on Wednesday, January 26, 2022. His appointment will last until the next consolidated election on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. Rodriguez is a decorated United States Marine Corps veteran and is now vice president of IT and marketing for KCT Credit Union in Elgin, where he leads continuous business improvement focused on enhancing revenue and streamlining business operations.

Juggling his growing career, continuing with volunteer service, completing his bachelor's degree, and becoming a new dad takes a lot of hard work and commitment. Still, Rodriguez says it has all been rewarding and helped prepare him to better serve his community.

"I am an example of the many paths you can take to achieve your goals," said Rodriguez. "Mine was not traditional and included breaks from school as my workload increased over the years, but I never lost sight of or quit working toward what I wanted to accomplish. Now, more than ever, and as a first-time father, I am committed to completing my bachelor's degree. Plus, I'm only three classes away from graduating!" 🏆



**Sergio Rodriguez**

# Using data to help fund dreams

I dreamed of becoming a nurse, but I did not think going to college would be an option for me because of my financial circumstances and having to help support my family," shared Elgin Community College student Kristine Darvin. "Because I got the help I needed, I'm only one semester away from graduating with a degree I never thought was possible for me."

As a student who struggled in high school, Darvin is now an honors student in the nursing program and will graduate in the fall of 2022. Darvin received support from the ECC Foundation Complete to Compete Program, which provided crucial financial support that ensured she could

"Because others cared about students like me and invested in my future, I haven't had to worry about how to pay for my tuition."

— Kristine Darvin

concentrate more on her studies and less on financial strains. The program targets near-completer students who are 15 or fewer credit hours away from completing a degree.

Students like Darvin are precisely who the ECC Foundation and its board of directors are committed to

supporting. "We realized that to deploy limited donor resources as smartly as possible and in ways that would yield the best outcomes for our students, we needed more information," said David Davin, executive director of institutional advancement and the ECC Foundation.

The foundation forged an innovative partnership with ECC's Institutional Research Department to accomplish this strategic goal by harnessing the power of data. By digging deeper into areas such as course completion and graduation rates, financial need, and remaining credits needed, trends could be identified that indicated when gaps in funding or other obstacles could hinder students' degree completion. Armed with this predictive data, the foundation can now more proactively determine where best to direct financial resources that help eliminate





Kristine Darvin

## BY THE NUMBERS

Percentages are for the 2020-21 academic year



increase in the graduation rate of Complete to Compete scholars compared with similar students who did not apply for financial assistance.



retention rate increase for students receiving funding over the general student population.

potential barriers to success.

This process is also helping the ECC Foundation's Student Success Fund (SSF), along with other scholarships, have even greater impacts on student success. Workforce development scholarships, for example, support additional skills training. To date, the SSF has provided more than \$150,000 in direct financial assistance to more than 180 students.

Davin is optimistic about implementing a new Student Success cohort fund that will utilize predictive data, similar to components of the Complete to Compete program, to proactively award funds to students when they enter a program. "The goal is to increase the number of credit hours students are able to take, ultimately helping increase graduation rates within a faster timeline than would have been possible without this targeted funding," said Davin.

Being informed of the scholarship funds available has been transformative for Darvin. "I wouldn't have made it this far if I was always worried about the financial aspects of college," she said. "Because others cared about students like me and invested in my future, I haven't had to worry about how to pay for my tuition, and I was able to focus solely on my goal. In the future, I would like to be part of those who give to the ECC Foundation and help out students like me who just need a little financial push to continue their college journey." ✂

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