

# EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FUND (EOF) NEWSLETTER



## WELCOME FROM EOF DIRECTOR, LAURA F. RICKARDS

ONCE UPON A TIME... Storytelling is a way to share traditions, rituals, and culture. You may remember stories shared by elders that chronicle and celebrate your family history. Through telling stories, our newsletter highlights EOF scholar achievements and shares the richness of EOF@OCEAN culture and practices.

We are a community of learners. Every EOF scholar has a history of unique experiences that brought them to OCEAN and EOF. Each works toward making the vision of their lives and futures unfold and manifest.

This newsletter celebrates who we are — it commends accomplishments and successes. Settle in comfortably, and enjoy the read.



# STATE OF NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (OSHE)



## OSHE SITE VISIT

On November 15, 2023, OSHE EOF Executive Director, Dr. Hasani Carter and Assistant Director, Hema Patel visited EOF@OCEAN and met with the staff members (pictured above).

Scholars also joined both in-person and via WebEx to share their positive EOF@OCEAN experiences and successes. It truly takes a village, and our partners help us with the good work we do in EOF. We appreciate and thank you for your support

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Markie Aronson	Helen Konz
Keith Bunn	Mary Lancaster
Michele Connolly	Debra Lee-Vasquez
Cynthia Fleureton	Dr. Kate Mohr
Rich Futrell	Tracey Mursko
Dr. Sheenah Hartigan	Joe Pelkey
Robbin Haynes	Anna Regan
Dr. Maysa Hayward	Laura Wills
Celeste Jamerson	

## THANK YOU TO OUR STUDENTS

Gloryfer Ayala	Mariah Macias
Wilson Castillo Alvarez	Cody Parrish
Megan D'Amico	Sadain Siddique
Mariam Ghobrial	Beverly Walker-Anderson
Sarah Grant	Kenya Warren
Pedro Higueros	Letitia Warren
Ruben Higueros	
Elizabeth Macchioni	

# 2024 EOF GRADUATE ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE) recognizes graduating EOF students who have demonstrated exceptional achievement and exemplify the meaning of the EOF program.

## Outstanding Academic Achievement (3.5-3.99 GPA)

Melissa Amador	3.833
Eli Goldman	3.887
Pedro Higueros	3.83
Ruben Higueros	3.894
Kayla Livolsi	3.875
David Morris	3.75
Abigail Neri Bruno	3.775
Sadain Siddique	3.911
Ian Wheatle	3.727

## Academic Achievement (3.2-3.49 GPA)

Victoria Crespo	3.278
Trudy Ann Jackson	3.25
Isabella Pena	3.417

## Outstanding Achievement – Best exemplifies the spirit and intent of EOF (No GPA required)

Cody Parrish	2.992
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## ACADEMIC COACHING

Our academic coaching is designed to support scholars working toward degree completion. Coaching activities include working with students on time management, motivation, study skills, organization, goal setting, and test-taking. Using a holistic approach, we connect students with other resources as needs present. Our goal is to have scholars use coaching as another tool for success.

# MEET OUR COACHES



**Christine Cassidy**  
*English*



**Renee Gregory**  
*English*



**Jonas Weissbrod**  
*Math, Chemistry,  
Statistics*

## What EOF Scholars Have to Say About Academic Coaching

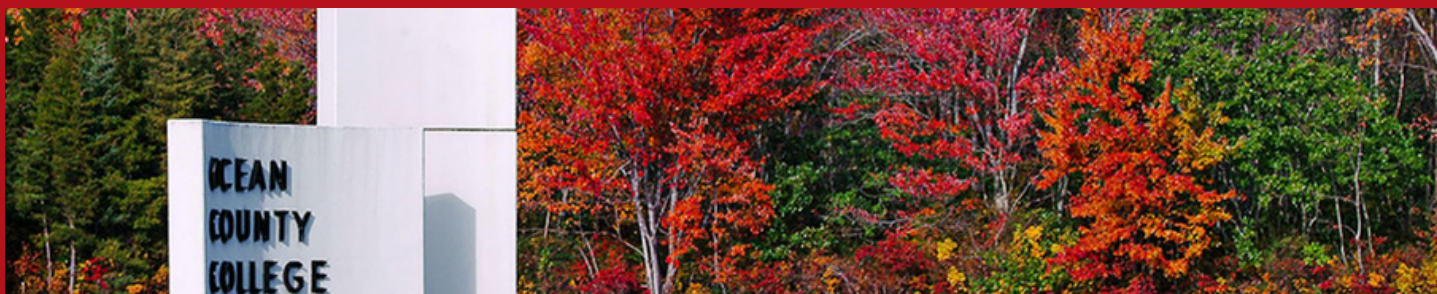
*Working with Jonas was a treat that allowed me to work at my own pace and helped me gain confidence in a subject that I hadn't visited in many years. Jonas was always ready to answer any questions, as well as challenge me with questions to find on my own, which strengthened my mathematical senses. I couldn't have gotten through the semester without him! - **Sarah Grant***

*Ms. Cassidy was a great help to me. She was able to help organize my ideas with my final essay. Not to mention, help me make sure that I was on the right track. - **Abigail Neri Bruno***

*My experience working with Renee was excellent. She was so attentive and cares about me completing my education. She listened to my concerns and gave me great advice how to move forward. - **Beverly Walker-Anderson***

*My EOF experience has had a big impact on me. Coaching with Mrs. Cassidy for my essays made everything better! - **Bianca VanBerkle***

# PRESIDENT'S LIST - FALL 2023



These students have completed at least 12 credits with a C grade or above and have earned a semester grade point average of 3.5 or higher.

<b>SCHOLAR</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>SCHOLAR</b>	<b>GPA</b>
Melissa Amador .....	3.75	Kayla Livolsi .....	3.59
Gloryfer Ayala .....	3.44	Elizabeth Macchioni .....	4.0
Remonda Bakhit .....	4.0	David Morris .....	3.83
Caitlin Cortes .....	4.0	Abigail Neri Bruno .....	4.0
Megan D'Amico .....	3.62	Marco Ruiz .....	4.0
Shana-Kay Earl-Smith .....	4.0	Sadain Siddique .....	3.73
Eli Goldman .....	4.0	Bianca VanBerkle .....	4.0
Sarah Grant .....	3.5	Beverly Walker-Anderson .....	3.75
Pedro Higueros .....	3.83	Kenya Warren .....	4.0
Ruben Higueros .....	3.9	Ian Wheatle .....	3.8
Adelaide Holden .....	3.57	Arianna Young .....	3.62

## EOF CANVAS PARTICIPATION CHAMPIONS

We would like to recognize those scholars who have been actively using and participating in our EOF course shell. Our course shell outlines program requirements and helps students meet program goals and stay informed. Our top four scholars are:

1. Megan D'Amico ..... 2962 Page Views, 32 Participations
2. Beverly Walker-Anderson ..... 2023 Page Views, 23 Participations
3. Elizabeth Macchioni ..... 680 Page Views, 16 Participations
4. Teresa Alfonso ..... 529 Page Views, 23 Participations

## EOF ACADEMIC COACHING CHAMPION

We would like to recognize the scholar who has been the most active in utilizing academic coaching this year.

Myron Ford ..... 2535 Minutes

## FROM SOL TO OCEAN: MARIAH MACIAS

LAKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

In 2014, after communication from Sara Winchester, Executive Vice President of Finance and Administration, regarding an opportunity to apply for a grant from Santander Universities, a winning proposal was submitted, and the College awarded a three-year, \$150K grant to support Lakewood High School students.

Mariah enrolled in our 2016 recruitment cohort. The rigorous recruitment process was designed to identify those students most able to commit to and complete the program. Applicants were required to attend all activities to be accepted. Mariah went to the information session, applied, attended orientation, participated in College Experience Day, and earned a seat in the on-site (Lakewood High School) Student Success course.

Mariah shared she applied to SOL because, *I hadn't done the best of my ability in high school. I heard about SOL from a teacher and felt it was the perfect opportunity to get ahead and really redeem myself.*

While Mariah did not successfully pass Student Success, she learned valuable lessons, *Unfortunately, I did not utilize my support system. Looking back, I realize there are people who I could have talked to and more than likely received help. Self-doubt and anxiety led to depression. I ultimately made the decision to give up, a decision I would later regret.*

The years passed. Mariah worked jobs in retail, food service, and earned her Certified Home Health Aid license. She remained unsure and undecided about what her life should be. Her constant and beacon was Diego, her high school sweetheart whom she married in 2019. Her daughter Arabella was born in 2022.

The thought of returning to further her education never left her. Part of Mariah's motivation spurred from the desire to improve her financial situation, to grow stability.

Mariah worried that she had waited too long and perhaps was no longer capable of meeting the academic challenges of college. Then she remembered SOL and realized she should have stayed active in the program, finished and earned her first three college credits. She remembered how

kind the staff were and how genuinely they cheered for her success. Mariah hoped she would find the same again at OCEAN.

Mariah applied for EOF for the fall of 2023, participated in our summer program, and carried her second daughter Aurora, born on November 27, 2023. Mariah's finish was magnificent, in addition to bringing new life into this world, she earned a 3.70 GPA for the semester – A's in English and Student Success; B+ in Biology and Math, and an overall GPA of 2.96.

Mariah has lessons to share as a role model for her daughters and others, *growing up I didn't realize the importance of having someone, anyone, to talk to. Someone to vent to or to get advice from. Individuals who will lift you up to help you see the greatness dwelling.*

*I want to help others so that the issues I've survived, they can avoid. With the help of my EOF advisor, I've chosen to pursue a career in psychology. It's far from easy but every prerequisite required for these degrees, I will complete to ensure that I am that much closer to helping others in a way I couldn't before.*

*Getting this degree will help me to further understand the human mind and its nature, mental health awareness, coping mechanisms, and more. I'm thankful for the opportunities I have had OCEAN and EOF.*



Santander Universities™ • Ocean County College • Lakewood High School

A Partnership Committed to ACCESS and ACHIEVEMENT  
Illuminating the path toward success

## LOS GEMELOS GUATAMALTECOS ASOMBROSOS: PEDRO & RUBEN HIGUEROS



The Higueros family, moved to the United States, from Guatemala, in 2016. It was their parents' dream to create a better future for their children. Pedro and Ruben are twins who were only teenagers when they left Guatemala. According to Pedro, *my parents always wanted us to have a better education that could lead to good stable jobs and a better life in the long run.* After graduating from Brick Memorial High School, they both decided to attend Ocean County College (OCC).

It was the best decision they've made. You may not always see Pedro and Ruben on campus, because they are completing their degrees online. They credit not only the flexible online schedule but also financial aid, which allows them to study for free. *Having the option of online classes was a big advantage for us, says Pedro, as it helped us save money and time.* Both can agree that taking all online courses allowed them to manage their schedules and learn at their own pace.

Ruben and Pedro have both been a part of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOF) since they arrived at OCC. They have attended every event, from EOF's Leadership Conference to the visit from the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE). You know you could always count on the Higueros brothers to be there. Being a part of EOF has allowed Ruben to feel like he belongs here.



**BRICK TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES**

## DYNAMICALLY DIGITAL: ELIZABETH MACCHIONI

DELTRAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

In the summer of 2022, Elizabeth realized that while she was content with her job, she wanted more out of life. Unsure where to find a clear path to a more fulfilling future, Elizabeth did her research and found Ocean County College; *the only affordable college offering my degree 100% online*. Elizabeth would be able to work full-time all while going to college. Intending to become a Wildlife Biologist, Liz declared an Environmental Studies major and began her college career.

It has been challenging for Elizabeth to maintain her 3.9 GPA. For her, it's all about motivation and healthy habits. That is how she avoids burning out. *Remembering the bigger picture, and building a better life for myself, is my motivation. I have come too far to give up on myself!* Elizabeth credits her success to understanding the importance of taking breaks and time for renewal.

One of the best decisions Elizabeth shares she made during her time at Ocean County College is applying to the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF). She knew that to be successful she would need assistance. *Having individualized advising to help guide me through college, amongst the other opportunities... made joining EOF an easy decision.* In EOF, Elizabeth found community.

Though taking all online courses, Elizabeth has been able to experience much of what OCEAN offers. She attended EOF's annual Leadership Retreat and SUMMER 2023 programs. During the winter break, Elizabeth studied abroad in Italy, with OCEAN faculty and students. Liz grew her relationships beyond the digital classroom

and made new friends interested in travel. Elizabeth is also a member of the History and Dance clubs.

The biggest takeaway from her experience is *that college is what you make of it*. She had not intended to participate in programs or clubs. Like many students, Liz's goal was to complete her coursework and get her degree. That, however, is not the case. While she is busier, she is enjoying her college experience.

Liz did not think that college was for her. *I am a first-generation college student and I have watched my parents struggle financially.* She credits them for doing what they could to provide her with the best and she is truly grateful. While she feels that she owes them, Liz knows that she owes success to herself, to achieve all she can, and to break the cycle of struggle.





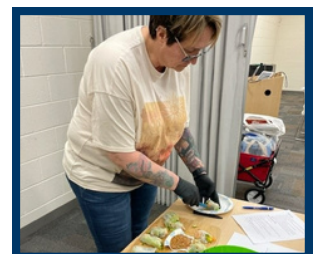


## LEADERSHIP: SPRING BREAK 2024 JOHN WOODEN'S PYRAMID OF SUCCESS

For many spring breaks, EOF@OCEAN has hosted a leadership conference/retreat. Sometimes, we teach a theory, and other times, we focus on behaviors. Traditionally, the three-day event includes a communal living experience.

This year, we enjoyed a new venue, the Johnsonburg Retreat, founded in 1957 by the Presbyterian Church. It is a beautiful refuge of more than 300 acres of rolling hills, a large lake, and varied wildlife. Spring break 2024 focused on **John Wooden's Pyramid of Success**. Fifteen day and overnight scholars, learned about Wooden's life, his successes, and the pyramid. Activities practiced behaviors in the pyramid blocks using an experiential model.

These pictures show the activity How Well Do You Roll? It included culture teaching about Vietnamese spring rolls, or Gỏi cuốn, and practiced pyramid blocks, **Cooperation, Initiative, Team Spirit, and Skill**. Scholars divided themselves into teams, identified a lead roll who could ask questions, chose a dip, and made shrimp and tofu rolls. Afternoon pyramid skills practice included wilderness survival fire and shelter building.



# Reflections from Johnsonburg: Teresa Alfonso

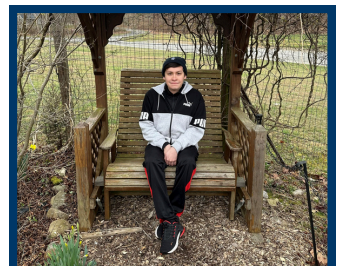
MANCHESTER TOWNSHIP  
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE

So, I sit here thinking about how I feel about the leadership retreat's three-day getaway. It was definitely an out-of-the-comfort-zone experience for me, but I will say that I am so glad that I decided to do it because I've learned a lot of nature life-saving experiences, and I got to know people on a personal and group level.

I learned a lot about achieving goals and pushing myself out of my comfort zone to achieve them. It's OK to do stuff that you've never done before. This was a very good retreat for me and helped me develop my goals for academic and life experience.

It was fun, and very intense at times. We were able to enjoy the snow, rain, sleet, and sun. We did a two-mile hike and learned a lot about the different trees and different animals and what their prints look like.

I would definitely do a leadership retreat again, and for anybody who's thinking about participating, I'll say this definitely go for it because you will be very inspired!



# EOF@OCEAN: SUMMER 2023

We identified three EOF cohorts: New to OCEAN and EOF, New to EOF-only, and Returning-EOF scholars, each having unique programmatic needs. For OCEAN/EOF scholars, learning about the College and EOF were ideas most critical for new OCEAN/EOF scholars, while the concepts of program branding, policies, resources, and responsibilities were essential for new to EOF-only scholars. For returning-EOF scholars nearing graduation, understanding transfer and graduation processes were focal.

The groups worked separately in the morning, addressing each of these agendas, and joined together for lunch and all group activities, including the *Zombie Apocalypse*, a values survival activity, and *Progressive Cookies* with Dr. Monaco, the vice presidents, and deans in a round table conversation activity. Our day ended with reflections, evaluations, and ice cream.



## I want to be EOF!

Apply soon and plan to join us for Summer 2024.



### Apply Now!



[go.ocean.edu/EOF](https://go.ocean.edu/EOF)

# GRADUATES

## Fall 2023

Melissa Amador	AS Business Administration	Business Management
Victoria Crespo	AA Liberal Arts	Kean University
Eli Goldman	AS General Studies Mathematics	Rutgers University
Trudy Ann Jackson	AS General Studies Social Science	Kean University
Kayla Livolsi	AS General Studies Business	Rutgers University
David Morris	AS General Studies Humanities	Kean University
Abigail Neri Bruno	AS Graphic Arts, Design, and Media	Undecided
Ericka Olsen	AA Liberal Arts Psychology	Kean Ocean
Cody Parrish	AA Liberal Arts History	Kean Ocean
Karina Watson	AS General Studies Humanities	Undecided

## Spring 2024

Jaysen Emmons	AS General Studies Health & Physical Education	Kean Ocean
Pedro Higueros	AA Liberal Arts	Kean Ocean
Ruben Higueros	AA Liberal Arts	Kean Ocean
Isabella Pena	AS General Studies Science	Rutgers University
Sadain Siddique	AS Computer Science	NJIT
Ian Wheatle	AS General Education Business	University of Delaware

## Summer 2024

Shana-Kay Earl-Smith	AA Liberal Arts	Kean Ocean
Mariam Ghobrial	AS General Studies Science	Stockton University
Nichole Paternostro	AA Liberal Arts History	Kean Ocean
Arianna Young	AS General Education Business	Undecided



Ericka Olsen



Cody Parrish



Nichole Paternostro



Pedro Higueros



Abigail Neri Bruno



Mariam Ghobrial



Melissa Amador



Sadain Siddique



Shana-Kay Earl-Smith



Kayla Livolsi



Ian Wheatle



Trudy Ann Jackson



Isabella Pena



Eli Goldman



Karina Watson



Ruben Higueros



Arianna Young



Jaysen Emmons



David Morris



## EOF@OCEAN GRADUATE AWARDING OF THE MEDALLION CEREMONY

On April 11th, we gathered to honor the achievements of graduates through the awarding of the EOF Graduate Medallion. The theme of the event was, *You Gotta Be*, encapsulating the essence of determination, resilience, and aspiration. Staff, faculty mentors, families, and friends joined together to celebrate our graduates.

Dr. Pamela Monaco was in attendance, to share in the occasion. Dr. Monaco was presented with an EOF medallion, bestowing upon her the title of Honorary EOF Scholar.

*You Gotta Be* had not merely marked the end of a chapter but had ignited a beacon of inspiration, illuminating the boundless potential of each graduate as they embarked on their future endeavors.

*You gotta be bad, you gotta be bold, you gotta be wiser  
You gotta be hard, you gotta be tough, you gotta be stronger  
You gotta be cool, you gotta be calm, you gotta stay together  
All I know, all I know, love will save the day*

**You Gotta Be by Des'ree**

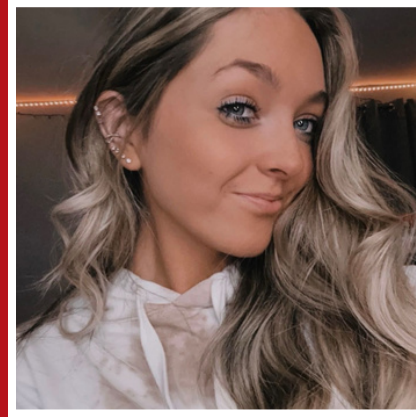


# SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

**Viking Scholarship:**  
Cody Parrish



**The Hayward Viking Scholarship:**  
Ericka Olsen



## SCHOLARSHIP DONORS

We would like to thank the following contributors for their generous donations to the EOF scholarship funds.

**Viking Scholarship:**

Maryann Birdsall - Bridget Feneis - Dr. Marilyn Kralik

**The Hayward Viking Scholarship:**

Dr. Maysa Hayward

## WHAT SCHOLARS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT EOF

*EOF has changed my life in ways that I haven't expected. I've met many beautiful people and have seen many bright minds. By far being a part of EOF has been one of my most defining moments of being at OCC. And I will carry that pride for the rest of my life. - **Cody Parrish***

*My EOF experience has meant to me a few different things, but the main one is family and support. Also knowing someone is in my corner to be there on the good or bad days. - **Megan D'Amico***

*EOF has been a valuable resource in my academic journey, providing tremendous support not only academically, but also in navigating personal issues I have encountered. EOF has been instrumental in directing me to help I need to have a smoother college experience. - **Kenya Warren***

*EOF has meant a lot to me. Every time I had questions, EOF has been there to help me and assist me. I would have struggled a lot more without the help. - **Sergio Vargas***

## EOF GRADUATE: SADAIN SIDDIQUE

Sadain has been accepted to New Jersey Institute of Technology and plans to study Computer Science.



### Parting Comments from Sadain:

*Getting involved with EOF connected me to a community of peers, advisors, and role models who understood my background. Having that support system made me feel like I truly belonged and could accomplish anything I set my mind to.*

**We would like to congratulate Sadain on being selected as the Class of 2024 Student Commencement Speaker!**

To learn more visit  
[go.ocean.edu/EOF](https://go.ocean.edu/EOF)



## EOF@OCEAN STAFF

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Recruiter / Advisor  
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