

THE VOICE

Dr. Brenden Rickards Named Second President After 17 Years at RCSJ

By: *Lu Grayson*

After nearly two decades at the Gloucester Campus, Dr. Brenden Rickards became President of RCSJ on January 20, 2026. Since 2007, he has committed to student accessibility and success at the college, and hopes to amplify this message following the retirement of the first president, Dr. Frederick Keating.

Having withstood the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting impacts on education, Rickards stresses the importance of student outreach and support, referring to them as “constituents.” Meeting students’ needs while preparing them for an ever-evolving world takes precedence in the changing state of education. Adversity will come and go; the response to it shows character.

His preparedness for this role cannot be understated. Dr. Rickards earned his PhD and Master’s in Molecular Biology from

Princeton University before taking on leadership roles at RCSJ. His titles included Dean of the STEM Division and Vice President of Academic Affairs, where he pushed for expanding degrees and certifications that directly give students more options throughout their graduation and transfer process.

With the momentum behind the merger of the Gloucester and Cumberland campuses, he has stated his commitment to strengthening their bonds with one another and the university. The transition to higher education institutions should be “seamless,” but RCSJ serves more than just the students. Surrounding neighborhoods, public schools, and businesses are all affected by the possibilities of construction, students and staff, and the resources offered. Although it’s in the label, he believes community colleges should be “pillars” of the



President Dr. Brenden Rickards

community, not just part of the background.

As the campus changes, the world does too. COVID-19 safety measures forever altered how students learn, and a trend Rickard’s has taken notice of is the “thirst” for technology. Education is streamlined, available anywhere, and done efficiently. Student feedback has greatly aided this mission for clear, quick communication. However, emerging technology like artificial intelligence has also shaken up how schools operate. Rickards is insistent on how “responsibly” it must be used, and how it’s unavoidable when preparing for a modern career. *(Cont. on pg. 6)*

Middle States Reaccredits RCSJ for 2026

By: *Domenic Klemash*

The MSCHE evaluation and accreditation were conducted recently at RCSJ. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) is an institutional accreditor, which means they evaluate and recognize institutions of higher education, such as RCSJ, for meeting specific regulations and standards. Since 1952, the MSCHE has been recognized by the US

Secretary of Education, meaning that the organization is seen as an authority on the quality of institutions and can influence federal funding towards them for services like student aid.

Doctor Valerie Gouse, alongside Professor Timothy Schmitz, led the charge of preparing the College for the recent reaccreditation. Reaccreditation is a mandatory review that occurs every few years and is handled by MSCHE to

ensure the College meets standards for academic quality and institutional effectiveness. The College was last reaccredited during an evaluation in 2024. Since then, RCSJ has continued to improve in quality and evaluated itself for future reaccreditations. “Over the past two years, Rowan College of South Jersey conducted a comprehensive review of its policies, programs, and services,” wrote Dr. Gouse. *(Cont. on pg. 6)*

NEWS

Campus on Ice: The Unexpected Snow Streak

By: Riley Sheahan

This season, winter storms trudged through South Jersey, significantly affecting day-to-day operations at Rowan College of South Jersey. For students and staff traveling to school, circumstances were challenging due, to slippery walkways, iced roadways, and massive snow mounds spanning parking lots and sidewalks. To keep the community safe, the College had to cancel classes and modify campus activities, due to the ongoing snowfall and cold temperatures. The usual busy campus quickly became silent when the semester was momentarily paused due to inclement weather. Every member of the faculty had to work together to create a plan for handling icy, problematic weather several times this Spring Semester.

Administrators were forced to cancel classes and adjust campus operations. In January, the college closed for in-person classes on Tuesday, Jan. 16, and Wednesday, Jan. 17, due to an early-season snowstorm that covered the region in several inches of snow. Later in the month, a second storm on Friday, Jan. 26, prompted another closure, giving students an unexpected long weekend. The cancellations resumed in February, with the most significant disruption occurring on Monday, Feb. 23, when a major snowstorm shut down the campus entirely, rendering travel unsafe for commuters from across South Jersey.

Even on days when the campus remained open, the pattern of winter weather disruptions created an uneven impact on class schedules. Because several of the closures occurred on Mondays and Wednesdays early in the semester, courses that met on those days were affected more heavily than Tuesday/Thursday classes.

CLASSES

CANCELLED

"I had to be extra careful when there were full glaciers in the parking lot with a new car that I am financing. And I knew they would be sticking to the parking lots for weeks." Lu Grayson - RCSJ Student

Lumberjack Crew Gets in Touch With the RCSJ Community

By: Matt Bauman

One common complaint that can often be heard by students that go to a commuter college is the lack of community offered to the student body. But to battle against this feeling, on Nov. 17th, 2025, the Lumberjack Crew hosted a fundraiser for the club at the Acenda Behavioral Sciences Center on the RCSJ Gloucester campus. This fundraiser was a



Snow piles taking up space in RCSJ's parking lot

Some Monday/Wednesday courses lost multiple sessions within the first few weeks, leaving professors scrambling to adjust their syllabi, condense lectures, or shift material online to keep students on track. Meanwhile, many Tuesday/Thursday classes were able to continue with fewer interruptions, creating a noticeable difference in how quickly some courses progressed through the semester's material. Despite these challenges, campus staff and administrators worked to keep the community safe while also helping students and faculty stay on track. Maintenance crews focused on clearing walkways and parking lots, while instructors continued adjusting schedules and assignments to help classes catch up as conditions improved.

cornhole tournament in which students won prizes, met other students by making teams of two, and of course helped raise money for the Lumberjack Crew.

The Lumberjack Crew hosted this event during the fall semester of last year and this past spring semester as well. The advisor of the Lumberjack Crew, Professor Hoxworth, and the members ironed out the details of this event (Cont. on pg. 7)

Significant Student Involvement for RCSJ's First Banned Books Week

By: Lu Grayson

RCSJ hosted the inaugural Banned Books Week event in October, which included free "blind dates" with a book, trivia, open mic, silent book club, and a lottery inspired by Shirley Jackson's story of the same name.

Created and hosted by the Banned Books Committee and featuring clubs such as the Educational Opportunities Fund, the weekly events provided students with education on why books are considered 'banned' through games, gifts, and social gatherings on campus.

The American Library Association reports 72% of all book-banning efforts come from political entities and organized groups. Only 21% are reported by parents and library users. Four out of ten of the most challenged books of 2024 featured LGBTQIA+ content, while the rest were questioned for sexual assault, drug use, and profanity.

Professor Bowman, head of the Banned Books Committee, believes access to stories is a "luxury" and that "freedoms are fragile." Exposing students to what it means to ban a book is crucial, considering current events, and higher education institutions have the privilege of avoiding mass censorship that can occur in public schools or libraries.

Organizers were enthusiastic, including RCSJ Advisor, April Kellum, who has a family history with publishing. While distributing donated books wrapped in paper for their 'blind dates' with students, Kellum says authors and literature should be especially considered

when they are challenged, Audrey Lord being a notable author for her.

RCSJ Librarian, Amanda Fach, was also tabling, offering resources and information about the campus library. She discussed how books are "cherry-picked" for their content, leading many to cross lines to "protect children." She affirms children can handle mature subjects when explained properly, and that books get special regulations when the internet or television may not. Dr. Sayantani DasGupta, an author and pediatrician for *TIME Magazine*, believes book banning is bad for our "Imaginative, intellectual, and physical" health. She says that a child growing up without exposure to new ideas or representative stories for them and their community is subjected to "psychic violence."

Many students passing through the College Center stopped to read signs and pick up free books, and the events provided ample opportunities for student involvement. Student Lateefa Green said she enjoyed the events and wanted more. Walking around campus almost felt like "shopping," and she appreciated the healthy debate happening in the spaces.

During the trivia event, students answered questions based on banned book characters, plots, and themes. When answers were revealed, murmurs were audible from the crowd.

Child-friendly or historical literature were usually scrutinized and targeted for banning.

For example, the story of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carol was challenged for "talking animals." There was audible confusion when it was revealed that *The Diary of Anne Frank* was banned for its content.

Silent Book Club, held in the Together Cafe, Too, was an informal social gathering where students could bring their own banned book or receive one to discuss. A silent reading session occurred before students broke into groups. RCSJ's Samantha VanKooy and other organizers discussed the relationship between the recent political climate and banned books, and the importance of hearing "what people have to say." The Princeton University Press reported that between 2024 and 2025, 4,000 books were challenged, and 23,000 bans were enacted since 2021. Before 2020, only approximately 300 books were challenged each year.

Students also positively reacted to other events, such as the Banned Books Matinee and the lottery drawing. Creativity, donations, and specially designed activities from the RCSJ community made the inaugural Banned Books Week at the Gloucester Campus meaningful. It was evident how much genuine care and involvement surrounded the events.



Flyers handed out to students during Banned Book Week

RCSJ Honors Service at 2025 Veterans Day

By: Emily Jordan

The RCSJ Gloucester Campus held its 2025 Veterans Day Ceremony to recognize and honor the service and sacrifices of military members past and present. The event brought together student veterans, faculty, staff, and members of the community to reflect on the meaning of service and the importance of remembering those who have defended the nation. The event welcomed veterans from All American Assisted Living, allowing students and attendees the opportunity to recognize and thank members of an older generation who served the country. RCSJ highlighted its ongoing support for veterans through programs and services available on campus. The college offers educational opportunities for veterans as well as access to a VA clinic, helping military-affiliated students transition to civilian life and continue their education.

Veterans Day is a time to celebrate the men and women who put their country before themselves and served to protect the freedom Americans enjoy today. During the ceremony, speakers emphasized the importance of remembering the sacrifices made by service members and their families, not just on Veterans Day, but throughout the year. The ceremony opened with remarks from John Ryder, Director of Student Affairs and Military Services at RCSJ and a Veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard who served from 1989 to 1997. Ryder reflected on the meaning of service and the role military members have played throughout the nation's history.

"In the current times we live in, it's important to remember and reflect on the sacrifices our military members and their families are making and have made for the freedoms this country continues to have," Ryder said. "As we celebrate our 250th year as a nation we need to reflect on why we have been free for 250 years. It's because of the men and women in uniform that have defended those freedoms. The one percent of our population that served this country defended it against all enemies. These are the military personnel that we need to remember not just on Veterans Day but every day, because without their service we could lose our status as a free nation."

The ceremony also featured key speaker Frank Piccioni III, a U.S. Navy Veteran who served from 1982 to 1988. Piccioni spoke about the legacy of those who served before today's generation, reflecting on the sacrifices made by earlier veterans and our responsibility to remember their contributions.

"To our military-affiliated students—past and present—thank you for your service and sacrifice," Crawford said. "We're proud to support you and stand beside you as you pursue your next chapter."

A key moment of the ceremony was the presentation of the Student Veteran of the Year Award, which was awarded to Ammar Alvi, a member of the Army National Guard who has served since 2021. Alvi, a Computer Science Major at RCSJ, was recognized for his academic excellence, maintaining a 4.0 GPA while balancing his military service and studies.

The ceremony served as both a tribute and a reminder of the dedication and sacrifice of the nation's veterans. Through reflection, recognition, and gratitude, RCSJ honored those who have served and reinforced its commitment to supporting veterans within its community.



Justin Rubiski and his family, honored members of the armed forces at RCSJ-Cumberland's Veterans Day Celebration.

Keating Family Institute for First Generation Students

By: Madi Exler

The Keating Family Institute, founded in 2024 by Rowan College of South Jersey's former President, Dr. Fred Keating, is a program aimed to help first-generation students reach their educational goals. Rowan College of South Jersey officially launched The Keating Family Institute for First Generation Students with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Wednesday, November 6, 2025.

The institute supports students who are earning their associates degrees, as well as those who plan on transferring to four-year institutions. The institute offers several beneficial resources to aid in the student's educational growth through scholarships, mentoring, networking opportunities, and dedicated events.

Danielle Crawford, Compliance Manager for Military Services and Student Affairs and First-Generation Institute Advisor at RCSJ's Gloucester Campus, was asked why she believes it is important for students to be aware of these opportunities.

"Not just the scholarship part or the financial need for it, but the mentorship and the advisors, if they (students) have questions about financial aid, if they are going to continue their education once they have their associates from here, they may contact us and others on campus to help them even further. So, it's not just what's right here, it's looking at the bigger picture."



Keating Family Institute Office at RCSJ's Gloucester Campus

To support and honor first-generation students even further, The Keating Family Presidential Institute features The Tri-Alpha Honor Society, which was established in April 2024. This lifetime membership recognizes and celebrates students' high academic accomplishments, while offering mentorship opportunities from faculty, staff, alumni, and senior first-generation students.

If you are a first-generation student interested in joining The Tri-Alpha Honor Society, contact firstgen@rcsj.edu for more information.

The New Blackboard at RCSJ

By: Riley Sheahan

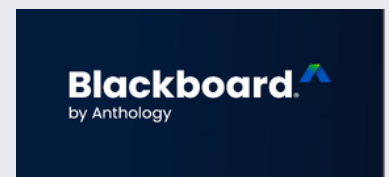
If you're an RCSJ student, you've probably logged into Blackboard more times than you can count. But lately, that familiar platform has been going through some real changes — and there's a deadline coming that affects every student and professor on campus. Blackboard is officially retiring its older "Original" course view on December 31, 2026, which means every class at RCSJ will eventually be moving to the newer "Ultra" experience.

If some of your courses already look different than others, that's why — the transition is already happening, just not all at once. The biggest thing students will notice is that Ultra is built to work on your phone just as well as a laptop, with cleaner navigation and a more modern layout.

Messages between students and instructors are now threaded like a text conversation, so your back-and-forth with a professor looks like a chat. Professors can also record video and audio feedback on your work, so instead of just reading a comment that can be misinterpreted, you could have a short video clearly explaining a critique or a compliment. There's even a built-in virtual AVA that can answer basic questions about your course right inside Blackboard.

On the grading side, AI tools can now suggest feedback comments to professors based on your performance on a rubric, which means a faster turnaround in receiving your grades. Instructors can also set up automatic reminders for comments made on an assignment, allowing corrections to be made more quickly.

Switching Over to Ultra



"If your brain doesn't work in the exact way the new Ultra system wants you to, it's easier to get confused" - Dominic Klemash

One of the biggest reasons RCSJ is making the switch to Ultra is the accessibility. Blackboard Ultra is designed to meet MCAG 2.2 Level AA standards – the federal accessibility guidelines tied to the ADA.

It's a step toward making sure every RCSJ student, regardless of ability, has equal access to their coursework.

Phi Theta Kappa at RCSJ

By: Harmony Herrschaft

If you completed at least twelve credits and have a GPA of 3.5 or higher, then an email from Phi Theta Kappa is probably sitting in your inbox. Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) is an honor society who seeks out, “to recognize and promote student academic achievement.” It's one of the biggest community college honor societies, and it's nationwide. To enter PTK is only a onetime fee. They're known for providing many scholarship opportunities and leadership programs meant to help students academically. The Gloucester and Cumberland Campuses both have their own chapters. At the Gloucester Campus they are the Alpha Psi Pi Chapter and at Cumberland they're the Rho Gamma Chapter.

The Rho Gamma chapter this year focused on developing the HSOP Hub at Cumberland which is student led, and according to one of the chapter's advisors, “The project focused on creating a welcoming, student-centered space that promotes academic preparedness, connection to college resources, and a sense of belonging for students transitioning into college-level coursework.” On March 25th both chapters went to the Middle States Regional Convention and Catalyst in Baltimore, which is PTK's International Convention where all chapters come together to celebrate awards and achievements.

Both Chapters hosted blood drives this April. On April 6th the Gloucester Campus had a Red Cross blood drive, and the Cumberland Campus had theirs on April 7th. Another prominent event coming up is the Induction Ceremony for new members in May. The organization also has frequent meetings and workshops to help members. The organization's chapters try to involve themselves in the local communities, to create networking and possible career opportunities.



Dr. Brenden Rickards continued...

Over the last few years, degrees and certifications have been considered the ultimate end of higher education. The job market and employer requirements are always getting stricter, and students know they need credentials to get work. Rickards acknowledges this fear, but wants students to consider hard skills offered in coursework and on campus. A bachelor's or master's

will always look professional, but what else are students capable of? What talents can they uncover during their time and extend to the university? He says not to train for a “position,” but for their future.

Dr. Rickards speaks of the students, staff, and RCSJ community with great respect.

In this regard, he feels they are

owed all possible resources, connections, and opportunities just by being present. Staff and mentors are here to open doors, make connections, and foster an excitement for education and career building. Student success is the end goal, but more than that, he wants everyone to feel it emanating from the college.

Middle States continued...

“This work ensures that students receive an outstanding educational experience and the support needed to achieve their academic and career goals.”

MSCHE has reaccredited RCSJ. “The College received constructive recommendations from the Middle

States Commission on Higher Education to strengthen operations across all areas of the institution,” said Dr. Gouse. “...completion of the self-study means [students] can trust the College provides an outstanding educational experience, strong support services, and operates according

to recognized standards of effectiveness and accountability.” RCSJ is currently awaiting the letter to finalize the process from MSCHE. The next reaccreditation review for RCSJ will be conducted in 2028.

RCSJ Hosts Ribbon Cutting for the KFGI

By: Makai Warner

Students and faculty at the RCSJ, Gloucester Campus, gathered to celebrate the blue ribbon cutting of the physical location of the Keating Presidential Institute for First Generation Students on November 6, 2025. The institute is dedicated to helping first generation college students navigate higher education.

A first-generation student and Communication 3+1 Major, Harmony Herrschaft, who spoke at the event, said the importance of being a first-generation student is “to be trailblazers for our families.” As a result of the institute, students are being positively impacted and understand the importance of their education and voices being heard.

When asked about advice he would give to a first-generation student, President Keating said, “As a first gen, do not let your dream die with the intimidation of higher education, instead, seek people who can give you guidance.”

Keating was also a first-generation college student who credits his

basketball coach for helping him get into college and begin his educational journey.

The institute, created by former RCSJ President Fred Keating, welcomed its first cohort of students this year. The ribbon cutting symbolized the launch of the institute and the college’s commitment to the students’ success.



The Keating Institute for First Generation students ribbon-cutting ceremony at RCSJ's Gloucester Campus

Lumber Jack Crew continued...

to draw in more students, which is key on a commuter campus. When asked how the club would approach the event, Hoxworth stated: “The club hasn’t really needed to rely on trial and error ... because they spent a lot of time planning that first cornhole fundraiser. And now that they know how to do it, hosting the event a second and third time hasn’t been as time-consuming.”

By using some of these previous fundraisers as a springboard to help build bigger and better events, the Lumberjack crew decided that this year they would offer bigger prizes than in the past. The last few tournaments they had offered rubber duckies and bragging rights to the first, second, and third place winners. But this

year members worked together to find more prizes that would entice students to enter; these prizes could be anything from board games, to a fondue set, or gift cards. They will also offer more cornhole boards to play on this year, for more games at once. This allowed for an expanded bracket and more students to team up and get to know someone new on campus.

It’s often a struggle for students at RCSJ to gain a sense of community due to the fact that it is a commuter college, so events like these can be very important to the student body. Professor Hoxworth believes so too: “These fundraisers/events give other students and connect outside of the classroom.

Participating in such activities is a great way for students to get involved and have that “college life experience.” The college life experience is an important aspect of how a student decides to go to a college. By connecting students together that normally may not have classes together, it allows for fond memories of the event, which may entice students to join other clubs and get involved with the community at RCSJ.

This event has continued to be a massive cornerstone for the RCSJ Gloucester campus over the past year, with turnout growing each time the club hosts it. With the tournament only being \$5 for entry and the prizes becoming better every time, students should pop out and try to connect with the RCSJ community around them.

PROFILES

Cody Miller Helms RCSJ Foundation Rebranding

By: Domenic Klemash

Over the last year, the Rowan College of South Jersey Foundation has undergone a major rebrand and expansion in projects. The Foundation is an organization present on both RCSJ Campuses that offers financial support for students in need of things like class materials, laptops, books, transportation, and food.

The Foundation funds these services through a network of sponsors, investors, and individual donors. The Foundation also hosts events such as its Donor Gala, scholarship receptions, and a STEM summer camp for Cumberland high schoolers. Currently, the Foundation is headed by former RCSJ student, Cody Miller.

Miller also currently acts as a District 4 Assemblyman, supporting the local community by campaigning for legislation in favor of affordable housing and necessities. Miller graduated from RCSJ in 2011 (Gloucester Community College at the time) and was supported by the Foundation during his time at the college.

“As a first-generation college student, I faced challenges focusing on my studies while working multiple jobs to pay for my education,” writes Miller, “It’s personal to me because I now oversee the same Foundation that helped me to afford my education at RCSJ. (Cont. on pg. 23)



Assemblyman and Foundation Executive Director - Cody Miller

“Our efforts help ensure that every student has access to education and that financial barriers won’t hinder their ability to complete their degree.”

From Buenos Aires, Argentina, to the United States: Chronicles of a “Dirty War” Survivor

By: Ewurabena Forster-Forson

“Suddenly, you realize that sense of safety that you had, the sense of normalcy of things going a certain way. You lose all that, it shakes you up completely. It is like you... you don’t know where you are anymore or who to trust.” These are words from Marcela Savelski who gives the roadmap of her life before she came to the USA particularly on the “Dirty War”. I interviewed Salveski last week to delve more into her upbringing after reading an article about her lecture on that dictatorship.

Dean Savelski was born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She came to the US with her husband twice in the 1990s, settling here the second time in 1997. Coming to America was not only for her husband’s post degrees but also an avenue for adventure.

They settled in Tulsa, Oklahoma, initially before moving to New Jersey in the early 2000s. As an Argentinian, she was not an English speaker, so she enrolled as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student at a school in

Tulsa to learn the language.

Upon moving to New Jersey, she joined Gloucester County College (the former name of RCSJ) as a psychology student initially, before shifting to an English major. “So, I started college when my daughter was in first grade, and my son in preschool, and we did homework together, you know. They saw me, too, working for class.” She talked about how excited she was in her new phase. Following her graduation from RCSJ, she

transferred to Rowan University for a bachelor's degree in the same major. She is now a bachelor's and master's degree holder, as an RCSJ and Rowan University alumni. Savelski started work as an adjunct faculty member in the English Department, where she taught several English classes. Connecting with young students who had a different backgrounds than hers was a challenge she accepted wholeheartedly. Teaching was a delight for her, as she got the opportunity to branch into courses like Non-Western Literature, English 101, 102, Reading and Writing. Helping and elevating students to be at their best embodies her goal with her work.

Savelski served as an Assistant Dean to Dr. Paul Rufino in 2018, enroute to her current role. "In summer of 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, a year into the merger, I became Dean. It was challenging; the pandemic was challenging for everyone." She describes her transition into her current position, the Dean of Communication and Creative & Performing Arts role. During that period, RCGC also merged with

Cumberland County College to become RCSJ. During this, she had to collaborate with a team, mostly online, due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Savelski had a fascinating past before her current career and her immigration to the US. She witnessed a gruesome coup d'état in Argentina called "The Dirty War" in the 1970s. She narrates how frightening it was in those days. In the "The Dirty War" the country faced dictatorship for several years. Thousands of people disappeared, torn from their families, many never to be seen again. As a teenager, she lived in fear that she could disappear, be held prisoner, or even be abused.

The country was rocked with the reign of the Junta, who annulled the constitution, striking basic rights away from the people. The experience birthed a movement called "Madres de Plaza de Mayo" meaning mothers of Plaza de Mayo. These women came together in a shared agony of the loss of their children, with the aim of bringing attention to what was going on there. They even got an audience from Hilary Clinton and the Pope.

Though that era ended in 1983, it left lasting effects on Savelski. She recounts, "I remember holding my baby in my arms and it suddenly hit me that bad things can happen to my children. Suddenly, I was identifying myself with the mothers of those who disappeared. I saw her eyes looking at me, those trusting eyes..."

you need to ensure that everything is good with them." Motherhood unlocked even more empathy for the plight of those mothers. Today, she feels a sense of peace sharing this story with me and old wounds have healed.

I was excited to interview Dean Savelski when I saw her at the 2025 fall event for freshmen. Sensing her foreign accent, I knew there would be parallels in our journey as immigrants. She encouraged me to keep being me and not let anyone take that away from me. Her story shows her overcoming the trauma of adversity, forging on to a better life, and not letting the past define us.



Dean Savelski - Division of Communications and Creative and Performing Arts

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Natasha Severino on Working in Financial Aid at Rowan College of South Jersey

By: Madi Exler

Natasha Severino is a Financial Aid Administrator at Rowan College of South Jersey's Gloucester Campus. She has been working for RCSJ's Financial Aid office for just over four years.

Her main responsibilities as an Administrator include applying federal, state, and institutional financial aid to student accounts, as well as advising students and parents at campus and high school events on the various types of financial aid available.

Natasha was asked what she enjoys most about her job as a Financial Aid Administrator.

"I consider it a privilege to be in a position that directly assists students in achieving their goals in higher education. Whether it's through assistance with the FAFSA application or explaining the details of the student's individual financial aid package, I take pride in the work we do in the financial aid office at RCSJ's Gloucester Campus."



Natasha Severino - Financial Aid Administrator at RCSJ



Steps to Apply for Aid:

Step 1: Fill out the FAFSA application at

studentaid.gov. The FAFSA must be filled out annually!

Step 2: Submit the FAFSA application before the deadlines! Federal, state, and institutional deadlines often differ, with the state and college deadlines being earlier than federal.

Step 3: Keep an eye on your email account for any outstanding requirements, such as important documents needed for financial aid to be awarded.

Step 4: Review financial aid offers from schools to compare grants, scholarships, and loan awards.

Step 5: Accept or decline financial aid awards

What is Financial Aid?

Financial Aid is funding provided for students in the form of grants, loans, scholarships, and work-study. Its purpose is to support us financially during college, and it's awarded based on our personal financial needs. These needs are determined when we fill out the Free Application for Student Aid, better known as the FAFSA.

FAFSA gives students access to two major types of financial aid: grants/scholarships and loans. Grants and scholarships are forms of Financial Aid we do not need to pay back, while loans must be repaid with interest.

What are Common Obstacles Students Face That Can Affect Their Aid?

- Poor academic standing
- Adding, dropping, or withdrawing from a course
- Missing financial aid documents

Financial Aid will reach out to students through their RCSJ email with updates regarding their financial aid. This includes emails about missing documents, changes in academic standing, and award revisions.

Financial Aid Assistance at RCSJ

If students have questions about their financial aid, the first line of contact for inquiries would be the financial aid email (**FinancialAid@rcsj.edu**). Students are also encouraged to visit the OneStop counter, located in the Student Services building at both the Gloucester and Cumberland campuses, for general questions. Outside of general financial aid questions, speak with your assigned financial aid advisor. Your financial aid advisor can give you more in-depth information regarding your personal financial aid profile.

Erik Burrell

By: Jewel Monzo-Hull

At Rowan College of South Jersey EOF Manager Erik Burrell is striving to make an impact at RCSJ. He and the Equal Opportunity Fund are working to give chances to those who may not have been afforded the ability to attend college otherwise.

Burrell grew up in Camden, calling it an “interesting experience,” relying on the support of his two older brothers and parents to keep him on the right path. He utilized the EOF program himself through college at Stockton University, gaining his bachelor’s and eventually his master’s degree at Wilmington University. He stated that the people in charge of the EOF program, “Were always willing to lend a helping hand within our college career.” He explained, “Once EOF, always EOF. When I became an EOF student that first summer, I remained an EOF student until I graduated.”

Before he came to RCSJ, he worked as The Dean of Culture and Climate at Camden City School District, advocating for students of all backgrounds at the high school level. Eventually, he felt the inclination to help those in higher education, as others had done for him, starting at RCSJ. He broke down the reason for choosing RCSJ, “I selected RCSJ simply because It is about 10 minutes from my house, and they had a good reputation of helping and guiding students along the way.”

The EOF program provides both funding to students looking to advance their education along with workshops, demonstrations and

other resources for helping them achieve and maintain good grades.

Burrell's specific role with EOF is screening and interviewing potential applicants, making sure they meet the proper criteria, as well as outreach. Burrell explains this part of the role, “but I think that I deal with professionals and reaching out to professors, to enlighten them about the program.” He provides an example, recounting that a colleague spoke in a classroom last week to tell students about the EOF program.

Burrell cares deeply about giving opportunities to others, working incredibly hard to give others the opportunity of success he was once given. Every day he shows up ready to help and teach, sets an example students can follow, and gives guidance to all. One EOF student described him as “energetic, knowledgeable, and supporting,” saying, “he likes helping the students, but also likes having students bring new ideas to the table.”

Burrell shows a deep passion for RCSJ and the community that has been built around it. When asked about the importance of what he does, he replied with, “It is so important now because those students still need academic support systems that are out there to help guide them to make sure that they are in good standing within the college.” He then explains, “EOF still offers some of those same type of academic support systems that I received when I was an EOF

student, as I said, interactive workshops. tutoring, financial support.” In his free time he gives back to the people who supported him most, his family. He said he, “loves more than anything spending time with my family.” He goes on to state that his favorite activity with them is taking his children out to their favorite restaurants.

In his own way, Erik Burrell is making a difference in the RCSJ community, helping to support others not just financially but through his own experience and example, allowing others to thrive and gain access to vital resources and opportunities and inspiring students to make their own difference.



Erik Burrell - Director EOF

Love What You Do: Professor Malinconico - Computer Graphic Arts

By: Harmony Herrschaft

In the back corner of the business building, on the Gloucester Campus of Rowan College of South Jersey is a room filled with computers. Any other room and it would be empty with bare walls, but this is where Professor Mary Malinconico teaches Computer Graphic Arts. The walls are lined with numerous projects from her students over the years, and above the vigorous typing of students, Professor Malinconico treats the open space almost as a stage, filling the air not only with the subject of the lesson but sarcastic quips that take the lesson from a constant stream of information to more of a conversational tone. As most students file out of the room, I'm left patiently waiting my turn. Even after class has ended, she takes the time to help and answer any questions that my peers have. Soon she diverts her attention to me and we dive into the road that led her to her almost thirty years of teaching.

Malinconico was first inspired to get into teaching graphic design when it came time to do the school newspaper. No one else in the newspaper wanted to do the layout, so she rose to the challenge and the teacher taught her how to, which back then was cutting and gluing a magazine. From there, she continued to help with her school yearbook. After high school, she continued onto the newspaper in college. In graduate school she first encountered the computer and talked her way into getting on it. She then used a program called PageMaker, which was the first design tool she used.

Once she went from her masters to post graduate school, she saw how they were introducing many new computers, and she knew she could teach them, since that's what her degree was in. On top of taking up teaching, she was already doing traditional art, graphic design, and photography.

As it always has been, art is still a big part of Professor Malinconico's life. Aside from working as a freelance photographer and graphic artist, she also participates in these hobbies for fun. She has an entire [website](#) that is basically a digital portfolio; it not only shows her education and work history, but also displays her extensive catalog of photography. One of the premiere collections is her toy photography, which she took up during the pandemic as a way to release her creative energy.

Her toy photography is also very prevalent on her Instagram. Another element that stands out are her photographs of the National Parks. It is her life's goal to visit all sixty prominent National Parks. So far she has been to thirty six.

This dream was sparked by the family vacations she often took as



Professor Malinconico

a child. It rose again when her mother passed and her father gave her a box full of photos of said trips. Malinconico decided she wanted to continue the tradition with her wife and sons. Now that her children are older and have their own families these trips have just become her and her wife, who she has been with for twenty five years. Of the thirty six parks visited, she found it difficult to choose a favorite but after some thinking she settled on Mount Rushmore, describing it as the, "human enterprise putting themselves onto nature."

A big art project of hers is "Art in the Graveyard" where she has collected, sorted, and researched the history behind the architecture prevalent in a lot of graveyards. This stemmed from a funeral she attended where she noticed similarities between a statue in the graveyard and a famous sculpture. (Cont. on pg. 23)



RCSJ Liaison Bridges Gap Between Secondary and Higher Education

By: Marley McGlinchey

Jeffrey Burns' office sits directly between Gloucester County Institute of Technology's cafeteria and its pool. It's towards the edge of the counselor wing of the building. I imagine this is so he can more easily leave for the soccer and volleyball games that he coaches. I've caught him at the tail end of his day, just a little bit before the last bell rings. His office is covered in simple décor: a copy of his undergraduate diploma, mementos from his years in the military, and a few personal bits of memorabilia that seem to be inside jokes from past students. Burns works as GCIT's RCSJ liaison. In an official capacity, Burns is responsible for all aspects of GCIT's professional relationship with RCSJ, a large part of his work revolves around helping GCIT students register for classes at the campus next door. On a more abstract level, Burns' position is unique in that he represents a period of transition for many students: the jump from high school to adulthood. In addition to overseeing RCSJ matters, Burns also functions as the counselor for the Digital Media and Advanced Manufacturing programs at GCIT.

One of the hardest parts of his job is handling the logistics of two separate schools, while finding solutions for both sides. At present, Burns is helping to develop an Associate's program for GCIT students, and many of these bureaucratic difficulties have come into play. However, he has an extraordinary degree of focus, as well as connections across both schools.

While I'm interviewing him, his office phone begins to ring. I expect him to take the call, but he only eyes me, waiting for the next question. I have his full attention. When the phone goes off again, I tell him he's welcome to take it. He leisurely reaches for it, but by the time he has his hand on the phone, the call has rung out. Our conversation continues.

Before he began his work in education, Burns worked as pilot for twenty years. He graduated from Embry-Riddle, a renowned flight school, in 1995 with a Bachelors in Aeronautical Science, and then spent four years working for the Atlantic City Airport before joining the Air Force, where he reached the rank of captain before leaving in 2007. A few years later, he found himself at Rowan Community College of New Jersey. Just three years after that, he'd be employed at GCIT, working as both a counselor and as the school's RCSJ liaison. And yet, Burns says his first dream was to be a science teacher.

He worries greatly about the issues facing all the students he encounters. Technology is a big concern for him, especially regarding the prevailing use of AI. A big concern is whether or not kids can stand on their own if they constantly use these tools as a crutch: "Like flying," he says, "I have all these tools available to me, but I still have to fly the plane."

For his own struggles, Burns says the ever-expanding counselor shortage does not affect his work.



Jeffrey Burns

In fact, while the number of students he presides over grows, his strategy for each one remains dogma: "Don't soften the blow." His biggest pride is being able to tell it to kids straight. With eight kids of his own, Burns has experience with tough love, and he applies this in his office, at home, and in the field. A mug on his desk reads: *Do what is right, not what is easy*. His biggest piece of advice to those heading off to college, though? "Don't take it so serious." He believes college functions best as a forum for young adults to explore their passions, and Burns hopes that process can start right in his office.

The dozens of students that will sit in one of the office chairs I have, the hundreds more that have already done so, all have been privy to Burns' singlemindedness. For an employee who rides the line between two institutions, he remains singular as a constant advocate and purveyor of student success.

Local College Professor Uses His Passion to Spark a New Generation

By: Matt Bauman

At Rowan College of South Jersey a new way to get crucial experience in the sports media world has been introduced to the school's student body. Professor Michael Wolverton is using this new course in Sports Broadcasting to not only educate students but also mentor them in the ins and outs of an oversaturated field of work. Wolverton, 56, bounced around between NJ and PA for much of his childhood, leaving a lot of change for him to get used to.

But one constant throughout his life was sports and his affinity for the teams that he followed, which helped him develop a sense of self. "The reason I got into sports broadcasting was because I loved sports," Wolverton said. "All I wanted to do was watch games on TV. Football, basketball, baseball, hockey ... so why not make it a profession?" Using this passion created a long career for him, which he would have never guessed would lead him to call games around the US and even in Canada as well.

Wolverton studied at Duke University and went to graduate school at Syracuse University to polish his craft. Through these experiences he learned that not all students in the sports media field will get equal chances to obtain opportunities. After this stage, came his years of broadcasting for the Utica Blizzard Hockey Club, a minor league hockey team, from 1995-1997, and the Atlantic City Surf, a minor league baseball team from 2004 -2007.

Because of the lack of resources at the minor league level, Wolverton had to learn how to cover a team's stats during the game, build new connections, and also work on his craft at the same time. After his stints with minor league teams, Wolverton ended up teaching at RCSJ as an Adjunct Professor. At the same time, he was working a lot of the school's sporting events, and he eventually became a full-time professor at the college. Now as a full-time professor, Wolverton made a push for RCSJ's first-ever sports broadcasting course in order to help train the next generation of sports broadcasters and give college students hands-on practice with their craft.

The Fall 2025 semester was the first semester to have a sports broadcasting course available for students at RCSJ. It gave Wolverton a lot of creative room to tailor the entire course as he saw fit. When asked what starting the sports broadcasting course meant to him, Wolverton said: "The classes I am teaching are interesting to me; I teach a class all about movies. That's interesting to me, but I can't say I have a huge background in it ... sports broadcasting, I mean; I can just blab on about sports broadcasting every class." Wolverton even noted that he had taught a similar class to kids: "I used to teach something like this class to kids, a junior broadcasting thing ... it allowed them to see if this was something they were interested in or not and get their feet wet in it."



Professor Wolverton in front of his graduate school's flag

Wolverton has never been a stranger to giving younger generations a chance to experience what it's like to be a sports broadcaster and shape a future path towards a career, so when Wolverton got the opportunity to implement the same idea at RCSJ, he could not pass up creating a safe and fun environment for students to practice their craft in.

Professor Wolverton has had a long and colorful career, especially when it comes to his time in the sports world. Traveling from Syracuse, NY, for college to Utica, NY, for work with multiple stops in between to call games. Due to his travels, it's safe to say that Wolverton has gotten his fair share of experience in the sports media world. This is why he has made it his mission over the last few years to really give the new generation of sports broadcasters a chance to experience what it will be like if they continue down this path and make it a career.

But Professor Wolverton does not just glamorize the life of a sports broadcaster; he also makes clear the many pitfalls that younger broadcasters can fall into early in their careers. This honest approach to what students may experience if they continue on to this line of work allows for students to really gauge what it'll take for success.

(Cont. on pg. 23)

SPORTS

Roadrunners Return to the Mound

By: *Shane Dougherty*

Spring has arrived yet again, and with it comes the latest season for the RCSJ Roadrunners Men's Baseball Team. Led by coach Robert Valli for his 13th consecutive season in the role, the team is in for the long haul with hopes of winning the NJCAA III National Championship for the fourth year in a row, and also the NJCAA Region Championship, after coming up short last year against Brookdale Community College.

As the excitement among the student body is rising with the warm spring weather, this excitement is also infecting the players. The expectations that come with being a part of such an accomplished team bring an understanding to the players of what should be expected of them. Having refused to let themselves be stressed by it, they instead are taking pride in the team they have been selected to represent.

The team shows up every practice and every game with the willingness and resilience to work and compete to the best of their abilities, building on the team's foundations from previous seasons. With a solid defense and a pitching lineup with strong potential, the players have every reason to be proud of the work they're putting in thus far and will continue to do so until the end of the season.

Both returning and new players to the field this season deserve acknowledgement. Among them include the trio that led the team to the National Championship last year, Alex Apicella, Joe Maier and Nick Slogik. Also returning is Doug King, the right-handed pitcher who was a key player for the team's championship win in 2024.

Among the other names to take the mound this season are Bryson Kirby, Tommy Bradley and Scott Lynch. Topping off the 5-man rotation is newcomer James Kleiven, solidifying the team's pitching staff as one of the strongest in the country. With such a lineup, this team is expecting to go far this season with the right amount of work and drive.

With the endgame for the team being the championship, coach Valli is placing the team's focus on a day-to-day strategy. Every practice, the team arrives to perfect their execution and performance. Throughout the season, the highest priority for the team is playing fundamentally sound baseball, competing with consistency, and furthering development of the players both on and off the field. As Valli puts it, "If we do those things consistently, the results usually take care of themselves." Considering the team's track record since Valli has taken charge, the results for this season are looking to remain consistent with previous seasons, and it will be thanks to the dedication, drive and skill of every player that is stepping onto the field this season.



The RCSJ Roadrunners Baseball Team

RoadRunners Women's Soccer

By: *Layne Anyzek*

During the 2025-2026 season, the Roadrunners Women's Soccer team was led to great success by coach Tom Eichhorn and assistant coaches Kenyatta Collins and Natalie Pantalone. The girls experienced many challenges this season, including unfortunate losses, brutally cold weather, and tough schedules, but regardless, they came out as one of the nation's top D III teams and were consistently ranked among the National Collegiate Athletic Association D III top 5 teams all season.

While discussing the season's end Coach Eichhorn said, "We endured a lot at the end of the season with the two losses, the brutally cold weather in New York, and the fast turnaround in the scheduling with the games -- but none of it takes away from what this team accomplished this season." Eichhorn commends his team for putting their best effort forward despite any hardships they faced this season specifically at the end. Impressively, the Roadrunners also secured the Great Southwest Atlantic Conference and Region 19 Championships, while simultaneously qualifying for the NJCAA D III National Tournament berth at Herkimer College in New York.

Another noteworthy accomplishment for the Roadrunners this season was the production of two Division III All-American players. This is a huge accomplishment not only for the players, sophomore midfielder Ava Pino and freshman forward Brianna Howard, but also for Coach Eichhorn, having his girls go so far in his first coaching season.



The RCSJ Roadrunners Women's Soccer Team

Ava Pino is in her second season with the Roadrunners and contributed 5 goals, 12 assists, and 23 points while playing the solid defense position. Brianna Howard contributed 10 goals, 5 assists, and 25 points and was referred to as "an offensive threat throughout the campaign." There were many other top players this season, including goalkeeper Mackenzie Cignatta; forward Emily Belsanti; midfielders Ava Delaney, Ryann Foote, and Riley Cogan; and defenders Allie Blankenship and Brianna Morgan. These ladies truly had an amazing season that anyone would be proud of.

The Roadrunners Women's Soccer Team finished with an overall 11-4-3 record during the 2025-2026 season under Coach Eichhorn. They also experienced more national recognition thanks to the impressive Division III All-American players, as well as Coach Eichhorn..

Eichhorn said: "We are proud of how these ladies improved throughout the season. We're excited about the new players who developed so nicely during the season, and now we're excited for next season with another talented group of newcomers coming into the program. We've set high standards - - and we do not want to regress." Great success is expected in the upcoming season from all players after such an astounding last season from the girls and coaches!



Rollins' Enduring Battle to the Top

By: Matt Bauman

After the game Chase Rollins leaned back on his bench, sweat rolling down his face. The realization had set in; they would come up just one point shy of winning their tennis match. Through the summer heat and humidity, he and his team had travelled north to Mercer County Park to attempt to retain their crown as region champs. But for the first time since spring of 2022, the Roadrunners Men's Tennis team would no longer be champions.

Although this was Rollins' first season as a college tennis player, previous teams had conditioned him both physically and mentally to prepare him for this venture. The loss to Mercer County College would unfortunately not be Rollins' first time having to deal with this kind of loss. He had experienced a similar defeat a year prior in the South Jersey Group One finals to Haddon Township High School. Through his career Rollins has constantly made it to the championship game but has never been able to capture success.

The Fab Freshman Five

Rollins has played a part in many talented teams throughout his career, even being one of the "Fab Freshmen Five" at Pitman High School, located ten minutes from RCSJ's Gloucester Campus. This group of players revitalized Pitman's boys' tennis team to the point that they became a juggernaut in the South Jersey tennis scene.

This season Rollins is set to make one final run to a championship game in his tennis career. Rollins is using these experiences to ready himself for one last chance at becoming a champion after six years of playing tennis competitively. This effort has fired up many of his teammates and others across the South Jersey tennis community. To be the "region champ" this upcoming season would be "mission complete," Rollins said, admitting that last year left a bitter taste in his mouth.

Through Rollins's success, he's been able to build tight bonds with his previous teammates, even getting the chance to continue to play alongside one of them. Maddox Marker, another player on the RCSJ men's tennis team, was also an important player in the "Fab Freshman Five." "Being here with Maddox is super awesome," Rollins said, "Being close [to] home is a bonus as well, which is pretty cool." Losses at high levels and keeping connected to some teammates helped prepare him for the transition towards the collegiate level. During the offseason he would "hit the gym, hit the treadmill. Whatever you've got to do ... as many reps as possible to get the endurance up." Adjusting to playing at the college level had initially proven to be a challenge. But with the previous preparation from coaches in high school, Rollins knew what would be expected of him once he stepped on a college court. Even though he was used to having to stand on his head at singles alone, he now has to do the same at doubles.

Although Rollins had previous experience at doubles, he would have to implement both singles and doubles strategies. The overall tennis matches were now running longer at the collegiate level. The battle against losing his focus is more at the forefront of each individual match that Rollins plays. His opponents were getting better, many of whom Rollins admitted were a lot more competitive than those he had faced during his high school years. "The competition is a lot harder," Rollins said. "Every match is not easy; whereas, sometimes in high school it would be like a laydown." Not every team was up to playing Rollins' team in high school and gave up easily under the pressure that they would bring.

Even though Rollins had swept many opponents in two sets in high school, he was slowly realizing that his opponents had upped their game. Looking back at their wins during last season, many of them were a battle against respectable programs just to secure the win. But fortunately, he would not have to make this adjustment alone. Chase credits a large part of his easy transition between high school and college to Brian Rowan, head coach of the RCSJ Men's Tennis team. "After one year of playing under him, I feel like I have gotten ten times better," Rollins said. He genuinely "can't wait to get twenty times better this season," Rollins added, due to the fact that he could now level up his tennis IQ by just listening and watching coach Rowan. *(Cont. on pg. 19)*

Coach Steve DePasquale Faces Life's Next Curveball: Retirement

By: *Emmy Childs*

It's rarely ever a good thing when Steve DePasquale cuts his practice short and calls his team in for a meeting. As players brace themselves for the usual punishment for lack of hustle or focus, they're faced with some unexpected news. DePasquale will soon retire from coaching.

For the past 32 years, DePasquale has been the head coach of the Rowan College of South Jersey Softball Team, but after this current season, he will step down from coaching. Now as he prepares for his last season, he reflects on what he will miss most about coaching. Surprisingly, it won't be the wins or the lengthy list of accomplishments, as he feels these aren't the true measure of his coaching success. He says it will be "watching the growth of the players. Both academically, athletically, and in their personal lives." DePasquale has been the first and only head coach of the RCSJ softball team and has built a legacy that goes beyond wins and losses.

It all began in 1995 when DePasquale was hired as the head coach of the softball program at what was then known as Gloucester County College. He showed his dedication to the team immediately as he began recruiting in the college hallways, trying to find anyone interested in joining the new team. This unusual recruiting process created a memorable team with a unique dynamic, as two players were in their 30s, and new players joined the team throughout the year.

This team qualified for the regional tournament and set the foundation for a successful program.

DePasquale never expected to still be coaching more than 30 years after this first season, but here he is today with two national championships and over 900 wins to his name.

However, DePasquale has been wrestling with the idea of retirement for the past four years. He says, "I still love the game, and I still love coaching the game." But, after 32 years of dedication and sacrifice, he's ready to live a life that doesn't revolve around the sport.

Throughout the years, the moments that stand out the most to DePasquale have been watching players who struggled throughout high school succeed when they get to college. One of these instances occurred during his second year of coaching. He was contacted by a high school coach about one of his recruits, Mary Holden Madgey, and warned that she had academically barely made it through high school. Some coaches may have given up on this player, but DePasquale was not going to let this warning affect his own impressions. This same player went on to be a Presidential Award recipient and a Gloucester County Sports Hall of Fame inductee for her success as an athlete and high school coach. When Mary was inducted, she mentioned how she has always strived to be a supportive coach, just like the ones she encountered as an athlete. DePasquale has always enjoyed hearing of the success of his past



Coach Steve DePasuale

players in their careers beyond softball, carrying with them the skills and lessons learned from their playing days. He has always stressed the importance of effort and dedication, continuously reminding his players that no one's spot in the lineup or position on the field is guaranteed; it is earned. The hard work done by players will always be more important than what the statistics say to DePasquale.

In addition to hard work, DePasquale teaches his players how to handle failure. Softball is a game where even the best players fail more than they succeed, but what matters most is how you respond. As DePasquale often reminds his players, "Wins and losses are just wins and losses at the end of the day". This is a tough lesson to learn, especially after a bad strikeout or error, but it helps prepare players for dealing with the frustrations of failure beyond the game of softball.

DePasquale's 2016 team is a great example of this. In an early season trip to Florida, the team had only one win in 12 games. While this trip didn't have the best outcome, the team pushed forward to win their region, qualifying for the National Championship. A shaky start can be hard to come back from, but the resilience of this team proved otherwise. *(Cont. on pg. 19)*

Coach Steve DePasquale Continued..

(Cont.) Even as retirement slowly draws closer, DePasquale continues to worry about his players. When he announced his retirement to the team back in January, he made it clear that he will always be around to support the team in any way he can, stressing that he will not be abandoning the current freshmen. While it's uncertain who will replace DePasquale, he says, "I'll be there for whoever the next coach is." He is determined to ensure that the program is left in good hands and players continue to flourish.

But sadly, it's finally time for DePasquale to put down the score cards and step away from coaching. He assures it's not because he's lost his passion for the game or even because he's slowing down as he gets older. He wants to be there for his family, especially his grandchildren.

Chase Rollins Continued..

(Cont.) Rowan has installed the first steps of championship DNA into his players by putting them up against programs that have seen the success that they are hungry to achieve. This has helped catch Rollins up to speed with how disciplined and competitive he needs to be at the collegiate level, making him comfortable with being able to balance being a student and an All-American tennis player.

Rollins now has the tennis ability, the backing from the coaches, and support from those in his life to be able to find stable footing as a student athlete. Rollins insists that "consistency and the daily

With the demanding year-round schedule that softball entails, he has had to miss out on watching his grandchildren's sports competitions and activities. This fall, instead of being in Florida watching his granddaughter's cheer competition, DePasquale and his players huddled around his phone watching the livestream from the RCSJ dugouts. While he was still supporting his granddaughter, it did not equate to being there in person.

DePasquale says, "Recruiting is the biggest part of this game." He coaches his team from September until May, then immediately begins his recruiting process throughout the summer. Every weekend during June and July is spent at tournaments searching for potential recruits. "You really can't put the program in the right spot if you're not spending that time," DePasquale says.

minimums will be his keys to success this season. "Trying to hit them every day" will be the difference between losing and winning major matches that he will face later this season.

Rollins believes that he has an amazing shot to finally lock up a championship. With a history of being on teams that did not crack down on the fundamentals until later in the season, Rollins pushes himself and his teammates to iron out the details early.

With the RCSJ Men's Tennis team going (5-1) in conference matches and (10-6) overall this past season, it's safe to say there is room for improvement.

With only two years of eligibility for community college athletics, he loses and gains about half of his team every year, which makes recruiting very important. While it seems exhausting to give up all the summer weekends, he saw it as a necessary sacrifice that ensures he's putting forward the best team possible every spring. This is the most time-consuming aspect of coaching and the main factor behind DePasquale's decision to retire.

It seems softball will continue to be a constant in DePasquale's life. He will soon step away from coaching, but he won't be done with the game quite yet. Now he gets to be a spectator as he'll watch his two granddaughters play the sport that has meant so much to him. He'll get to see them learn from mistakes and grow as players, just as he's done with his players over the past 32 years.

But it certainly wouldn't be a stretch to suggest that this can massively improve from last season. Even Rollins admitted that "Looking at all the talent, it feels like we upgraded."

Looking at the roster, most of these incoming freshmen who fill out the roster around Rollins have the playoff experience that much of the roster last season lacked. This has given Rollins one of the most experienced teams he has ever played with to help him make another push to become a champion. As Rollins wound down his media day interviews, it was safe to say he seems amped for the season, ready to play with this roster and to finally go out and win on the championship level.

Road to the Championship: Rowan College of South Jersey Women's Basketball Rises After 21-6 Season

By: *Emily Jordan*

The women's basketball team at RCSJ has built an impressive season in 2026, finishing with a strong 21-6 record and capturing the NJCAA Region 19 Championship with a 62-51 victory. Now the team is preparing for its biggest challenge yet as they head to the Women's Basketball Championship in Texas against Fulton Montgomery Community College on March 11, 2026.

Throughout the season, RCSJ's players demonstrated resilience and teamwork, consistently finding ways to overcome difficult moments. Their journey to the Region 19 title showcased their ability to stay focused under pressure and respond when games became challenging.

Guard Alexis Carroway, jersey number 2, reflected on the team's performance and mindset during the season. "We're proud of how we're doing," Carroway said. "There were a couple of rough games, but we're always ready to bounce back and come out stronger and that's what we need."

Leadership from the coaching staff has played a key role in the team's success this season. The program is led by head coach and assistant director of athletics Rich Cooper, who has guided the team through a competitive schedule and into championship contention.

Supporting Cooper on the bench are assistant coaches Catherine Dunn and Kenyatta Collins, along with volunteer assistant coach Meri Boody. Together, the coaching staff has helped develop a disciplined and resilient roster that has consistently delivered strong performances throughout the season.

Their ability to regroup and improve has been a defining trait for RCSJ this year. Even when facing tough opponents or difficult stretches, the team has remained determined to learn from mistakes and return to the court with renewed energy.

Their Region 19 Championship win 62-51, over Passaic County Community College highlighted the team's defensive effort and disciplined play,

allowing them to control the game and secure the title.

The victory not only added another accomplishment to their season, but also earned them a spot in the National Championship matchup in Texas against Fulton Montgomery County Community College.

In their opening matchup, RCSJ was defeated by Fulton-Montgomery Community College with a 76-50 lose. They later faced Bronx Community College in the consolation round, where they battled until the final moments before falling in a narrow 70-68 loss.

While the result did not go in their favor, the game reflected the heart and competitiveness that defined the team all year. From a 21-6 record to a Region 19 Title and a strong showing on the national stage, the 2026 season shows the program's growth, resilience, and ability to compete at a high level. For RCSJ, this season was not just about wins and losses, it was about establishing a standard that future teams will strive to match.



Rowan College of South Jersey's 2025-26 women's basketball team and coaches.

POP CULTURE

A Skating Joy for America

By: *Shane Dougherty*

From early retirement to American icon, Alysia Liu has cemented herself as one of the comeback stories of sports. At an Olympics that featured the US men's and women's hockey teams defeating Canada for the gold, Liu still managed to shine brighter than most for how she handled sliding onto the ice on one of the grandest stages for figure skaters, doing it not for glory or praise, but for the joy of it.

Born via surrogacy to Arthur Liu, an attorney and Chinese exile, and his partner Yan Qingxin, Liu first took to the ice when she was 5 years old. Arthur, a fan of skaters like Michelle Kwan, brought his daughter to the Oakland Ice Center. She had an immediate passion for the sport that would carry her to Olympic gold. She attempted double axels by age 10 and eventually became the youngest US women's champion at only 13 years old in 2019. Liu pulled off yet another feat in 2019 when she became the first American woman to land three triple axels at the Detroit National Championships.

Despite withdrawing from the US National Championships in 2022 as a result of testing positive for Covid-19, Liu was still named to the US Olympic Team for the Beijing Games. At the event, Alysia did not attempt the triple axel. She ended her first Olympics placing sixth in the singles competition. Shortly after, Liu won bronze at the World Championships in France before



Alysia Liu

announcing her retirement on Instagram. She believed she had achieved her goals and wished to leave behind the stresses that came with competitive skating. For the next two years, Liu stayed under the radar, focusing on college and her personal life.

In March of 2024, Liu announced her return to the ice on Instagram, having earlier in the year regained her spark for skating while on a skiing trip. Having returned to the ice, this time on her own terms, Liu had her eyes set for the Olympic games in Milan.

She arrived in Milan for her second Olympics, ready to tear it up on the ice; Alysia was unwilling to let the stress and competition dim her light. With nothing but the joy of

her sport to carry her across the ice, Liu glided her way to two gold medals, one for the women's singles and another for the team event. With her singles victory, Liu became the first American woman to win gold at this event since Sarah Hughes in 2002.

Liu has cemented herself as a modern American symbol of perseverance and hope. She has received praise and recognition from all parts of the country and people of many backgrounds. Alysia Liu is a story of inspiration and pride. She reached the top again after walking away from the ice, believing she would never feel the rush of skating again. Liu's story may only be in the first act, and is only going to get more exciting from here.

Ryan Coogler's Sinners: Art Ownership and Freedom in Hollywood

By: *Lu Grayson*

Despite the experimental premise of the film, a supernatural horror-fantasy about sharecroppers in the 1930's, *Sinners* swept the Oscars with sixteen nominations and four awards given at the 98th Academy Awards on March 16th, making it

the most nominated of all time. The film highlights the talents and achievements of the predominantly black cast and crew, aligning with the story's symbolic plot and characters. Ryan Coogler's experience as an industry director

(cont.) and writer has culminated in the film's content, especially in the metaphors about seeking and profiting from art that heals communities.

Other than Coogler, the nominees include Michael B. Jordan for Best Actor, Delroy Lindo for Supporting Actor, and Wunmi Mosaku for Supporting Actress. The film was also nominated for Best Editing, Visual Effects, Costume Design, Makeup and Styling, Production Design, Original Score and Song, Casting, and Cinematography. All of these accolades, including BAFTAs and Golden Globes, were earned through the creative freedoms given to the team of artists. In Chris Murphy's article for Vanity Fair, [First, Ryan Coogler Made Sinners. Now He's Living the Movie's Dream](#), he writes about the extraordinary deal Coogler struck with Warner Bros; Sinners will belong to him "outright," in twenty-five years, and he will receive "first-dollar" royalties, or a percentage of all ticket sales.

This deal, while unusual, is relevant to the film's message about stories, art, and how they are projected. Coogler's history working on the Black Panther franchise is relevant to the themes of Sinners. He was assigned to create a compelling story about a black hero, but he had to be family-friendly, sell products, and adhere to Disney standards. Commentator and media analyst F.D. Signifer covers the topic in his video [Sinners and the Death of Black Art](#) on Nebula and YouTube. He discusses the director's upbringing, his politically active parents, his start in writing, and the fully original, often political films he created early in his career. He points out how many black artists and directors are

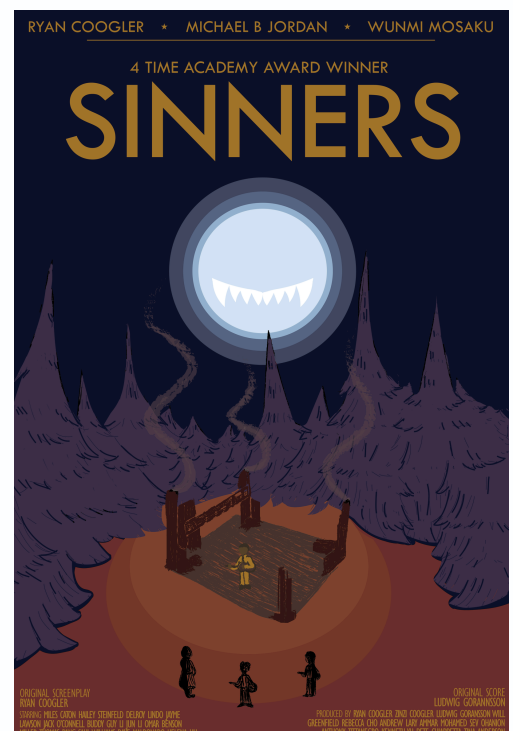
forced to "turn it down, or turn it off" regarding their politics and the struggles of their community, and that Coogler has "perfected" the balance of appeasing white audiences and creating art for and by the community. Producers, funding, and studio interest come easily because he has played the game.

Sinners is different, however, as Coogler has taken the reins and created a movie about this struggle as a Hollywood director. On Medium, author and Academy Script analyst Khalid Abdulqaadir [writes about a scene](#) indicative of that abrasive, self-indulgent style that the Marvel Universe would never touch. Smoke, one of the twins played by Michael B. Jordan, is seen mercilessly killing the Ku Klux Klan members who plot against the townspeople before purposefully reuniting with his dead lover and child in a murder-suicide. This depiction of a black man making the ultimate sacrifice to be a hero to his community contrasts with T'Challa in Black Panther, who mostly protected the world at large and was created by a white man. Smoke does it for his people, and Coogler purposefully includes it in his film.

Art, in this case, music, is used to connect and heal people throughout time. Art like the Blues played at the Juke Joint scene in the film is unique, inspired, culturally significant, and highly rated. Because of this, "vampires" (capitalists) plot to exploit the notorious music for profit. With this in mind, it is undeniable that Coogler has sold a product: a personal, beautiful, and genuine one, but ultimately studio-produced with

a public narrative around it. He finds himself as one of these creators, now sought after for their stories in the same way the vampire Remmick desperately chases down the young blues creators, now sought after for their stories in the same way the vampire Remmick desperately seeks singer Sammie after hearing his song in the film. Disney did it to him, and now, as he sells tickets and streams, he has done it to the viewer.

However, this big-name Hollywood film, which critiques the practice of preying on struggling voices for their songs, is self-aware. The final scene, where real-life Blues legend Buddy Guy, playing an older version of the character Sammie, performs a song for the vampiric version of Stack, who pays him for this in an emphasized shot, slamming the cash down on the table with gold knuckle-rings on his fingers. Having become a vampire, he can no longer channel the feeling the music gave him while he was alive, and craves to hear Sammie's authenticity. (Cont. on pg. 23)



Movie Poster by Lu Grayson

Ryan Coogler's Sinners Continued...

(Cont.) He represents echoes of a person who metaphorically 'sold their soul' for an imitation of freedom. Guy's casting for this scene is understood as a literal and figurative representation of genuine, experienced, culturally shaped music. Guy's final line about the events earlier in the film being "the best night of his life" correlates to what the viewer experiences. A momentary experience of true artistic freedom and expression, before the realization of the genre of entertainment set in. Left with the feeling that something real and beautiful can only exist in fleeting moments, and won't survive before being swallowed up by an industry machine. The final song affirms this bittersweet sentiment, flashing back to happy memories of the characters in the 1930's, accompanied by Sammie's actor, Miles Caton singing, 'So I'll live like it's the last time for a long time, at the wrong time, when's the right time, is it my time?'

Cody Miller Continued...

(Cont.) writes Miller, "It's personal to me because I now oversee the same Foundation that helped me to afford my education at RCSJ. Since then, we have expanded our support for students."

Under Miller, the Foundation has increased its scholarship aid programs and strengthened its community, but he believes its most impactful change is opening food pantries on both campuses.

(Miller cont.) "As someone who was a free and reduced-price lunch student, I know how food access and affordability can impact a student's education. And now, more than ever, with federal funding cuts and programs being affected, we will need to fill the gap to ensure our students have everything they need so they don't go to class on an empty stomach." The Foundation plans to increase its presence and activity on both campuses in the near future.

Looking ahead, The Foundation hopes to support some of the events organized by clubs and organizations on campus through sponsorships, such as free food, activities, and more. We also plan to host events with students in the future to assist with the scholarship application process and provide additional support when students need help."

For more information or to donate, [click here](#).

Professor Wolverton Continued...

(Cont.) Professor Wolverton's approach really allows for growth in a student's craft as a sports broadcaster but also growth in how they look at the job field in front of them. He continues to build on top of his own experiences by stepping out of his comfort zone with taking jobs like teaching at RCSJ, which signifies to his students what's needed of them to be successful in their careers.

Professor Malinconio Continued...

(Cont.) Professor Malinconio made it clear that teaching is as big a passion as her art is. With no plans to retire from Rowan College of South Jersey anytime soon she plans to teach for as long as possible. In her entire career she recounts one of her favorite moments. Some years ago there were two students who sat next to each other and greatly opposed the set up. Seeing the rivalry the professor joked that one day they'd name their kid after her, which the two quickly brushed off. The resentment continued till they parted ways at the end of her class, going to separate colleges.

They eventually reconnected though and soon Malinconio received a wedding invite from them, and have been invited to events like the christenings of their children. It's connections like these that really stand out as highlights in her career. She has said multiple times that,

"The thing I wish for my students is that you find what you love to do." Throughout her busy schedule of freelance work, and travel, she still wakes up everyday and heads to campus. The only answer for that is she loves what she does, and continues to lift up her students so that they one day will too.



The Growing Absence of a Collective Culture

By: Harmony Herrschaft

As society has progressed technologically over time, we have also created a greater sphere of media. This encompasses things such as TikTok and YouTube. Starting in the early 2000s with YouTube, the definition of celebrity began to expand, and the internet personality arose. As the years went by with these new influencers, you no longer needed to audition or have an agent to appear on camera, you didn't need to be signed with a record label to make music, being famous isn't confined to the chosen few anymore. Now TikTok stars are considered proper celebrities getting their own TV shows, making movies, making music, and a blending of internet culture and critically examined media has occurred.

This can be seen as a good thing. All you need to get famous is for the algorithm to randomly choose you, but it has its downsides. Since the opportunities to be known have expanded, not everyone can see everything. This makes it harder to rise to the level of fame that we grew up witnessing. The culture has shifted from everyone in previous decades all going to see the same movies and listening to whatever came on the radio, to now having your own curated list of people who are famous to you that you see through short form video every day. It's to the point where you can constantly be watching one person and seeing articles, or videos about them and then bring them up to your friend who has no idea what you're talking about, and you in turn don't know about the content they consume.

For example I watch the vlogbrothers on YouTube, which is a channel by Crash Course's Hank and John Green, but if I went to any of my friends and mentioned their latest video, they would have no idea what I was talking about.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. It does, however, lessen a sense of community and understanding on a bigger scale. Even in a monoculture it was not like every single person liked or watched every single thing, but most new media was in the collective knowledge. This gave a baseline of a popular culture that surrounded common discussion. It also gave rise to prominent counter cultures that pushed back against this overarching monoculture, such as movements like the beatniks, hippies, and punks. This is to say that the world has changed and is changing.

Even though not everyone has the same celebrities, there are dozens of subcultures and niche communities that allow people who would've been lost before to have community. So, while as a collective it feels like we've grown apart on a smaller scale, community has expanded, and it doesn't center around knowing or watching the same thing that everyone else in your physical proximity does. Though there is now a cultural divide between people in the same generation, and area, creating more division within the community and in some ways lessening the empathy we have for each other as we are able to relate less on a surface level, meaning we dismiss opportunities to connect on a personal level.

There are still major cultural events that a good portion of people are aware of or participate in, like "Barbenheimer" back in the summer of 2023, which centered around the close release dates of the films *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*. In school when we were younger, we were all made to watch things like *Crash Course*, or *Tim and Moby* in class. So, while monoculture isn't dead, it isn't prominent, having dissipated during the growth of social media. Collective culture will never disappear but our view of it will shift as society as a whole evolves.



The Barbie Movie Poster

Review of Bridgerton

By: Layne Anyzek

The hit Netflix original *Bridgerton* is based on, you guessed it, the Bridgerton family. The family consists of the widowed mother, Violet, and her children: Anthony, Benedict, Colin, Daphne, Eloise, Francesca, Gregory, and Hyacinth. They are a close-knit group of siblings who are all very different. After the death of Violet's husband, the late Viscount Edmund Bridgerton, their eldest son, Anthony, becomes the Viscount. Edmund tragically died from a bee sting before any of his children were married. Violet's life then becomes centered on trying to marry off all of her children in place of her late husband—but she will not settle for just any courtship. She wants each of them to experience the same magical love she shared with him.

This show mainly follows the Bridgerton children and their journeys to find their true love matches. It showcases the struggles of the marriage market that each child faces, and we experience all the scandals and intimate moments right along with them.

My initial reaction to *Bridgerton* honestly changes with every season. Since each season focuses on the slow-burning romance between a different couple, my reactions have varied. I remember watching my first episode a few years ago and immediately being hooked. Since the show already matched my interests, it easily grabbed my attention.

The beautiful dresses and outfits, the way the estates were decorated, and the picture-perfect desserts—they pulled me in before the first romance even began. I knew right away this would be a show I'd binge and then impatiently wait for the next season.

The newest season of *Bridgerton* is Season 4. It was released in two parts, the first on January 29 and the second on February 26. Season 4 has been a major success, earning 39.7 million views within just four days of its release. This season follows a Cinderella-like story between Benedict Bridgerton and Sophie Beck, a housemaid. Their relationship is socially unacceptable because of Sophie's status, which creates tension and conflict throughout the season. I personally really enjoyed Season 4 and thought it had a satisfying ending.

Unfortunately, *Bridgerton* is not an accurate representation of Regency-era London as it truly was. The show imagines what that era might have looked like without strict racial hierarchies. One of its most positive impacts is its diverse and inclusive casting, along with its focus on high fashion over strict historical accuracy. In reality, racism and colonialism played a major role in society at the time, and many of the relationships shown in the series would not have been possible. Still, *Bridgerton* is widely praised for offering a refreshing, modern take on traditional historical romance.



The Bridgerton Family

Bridgerton, often considered one of Netflix's biggest original hits, was created and produced by Chris Van Dusen under Shondaland. The show has won over 20 awards, including five Primetime Emmy Awards. Van Dusen has also worked on *Grey's Anatomy*, *Private Practice*, and *Scandal*, and served as a consultant on *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*.

I think any romance fan would really enjoy *Bridgerton* for the couples alone. But anyone interested in Regency-era London, Jane Austen-style stories, or history should watch it as well. I also think that anyone who watched *The Crown* and found it a bit boring—like I did—might enjoy this less accurate but much more entertaining take on a historical show. Overall, *Bridgerton* is an amazing series that I would definitely recommend, especially for viewers who love romance and drama.

LISTICLES

Five Myths About the Academic Support Center (And Why They're Untrue)

By: Acadia Couchoud

Many students avoid the Academic Support Center like the plague, not because they don't need help — most do — nor because the Academic Support Center hates helping them —they don't, but because of the many myths they associate with tutoring.

Here are five common myths about the Academic Support Center and why they are not true.

Myth 1: Tutoring Is Only for Struggling Students

The most longstanding myth about the Academic Support Center is only students with the worst grades go for tutoring. This is far from the case. While many students receiving tutoring are having trouble in their courses, a substantial portion just want their questions answered, concepts explained, and good grades maintained.

Nick Shepherd, Director of Academic Support, emphasizes that not all students making appointments are struggling. Saying that, "...students come in. They're your high achievers, if you will. They're looking for clarification on things or someone, a peer, that's kind of at the same level, just to communicate and to hold themselves accountable to."

Tutoring can be the difference between an 'A' and a 'B.' A tutor can catch a fallacy in your paper, finally get that math concept to click, or give that extra study boost to help pass a final.

Students think, "Oh, I don't need help yet. I'll be fine. I'll be fine," says the Assistant Director of Academic Support, Sheri Chamberlain, "and then they come in here in a panic during finals week like, 'Please help me — I'm failing.'"

While many students believe tutoring is only for those who are struggling, its real value is preventing academic struggle before it begins. It's far easier to stay caught up than to play catch up once a student has fallen behind.

Myth 2: Tutoring Is Awkward

The fear of a tutoring session being awkward is another obstacle that prevents students from scheduling an appointment.

The traditional college student fears their peers will think they are stupid, and the non-traditional learner's concern is that their tutor isn't going to understand where they're coming from. After all, they have been out of school for a long time.

"There's a stigma that's attached — 'I don't want to see myself there,' or 'I don't want to seem stupid or be judged.' There's a sense of pride with students not wanting to receive tutoring," Shepherd says.

In addition, the tutors do "all kinds of training to make sure they're treating each person with respect, taking each person's situations into account and adapting teaching styles to student learning styles."

Level of understanding doesn't matter—the purpose of a tutor is to help them identify where they are and where they want to be.

Sheri Chamberlain recounts that many students come back after their first session surprised at how accommodating tutoring is, with some saying: "You guys are so nice and welcoming and encouraging. I was afraid I'd be judged."

Myth 3: Tutoring Is a Waste of Time

Many students believe that tutoring is a waste of time, either thinking their issue is something a tutor cannot help them with or that a tutor's help is not going to make a difference.



Subtitle

One RCSJ student who has been attending tutoring regularly since 2023 says she, like many others, once believed that tutoring was not a good use of her time, but after her first appointment changed her mind.

She said, "I was a little skeptical ... in the beginning because I didn't think that it was as necessary as it is; but I found out it is very beneficial. I feel more confident once [I] leave here." For her, tutoring helps give her confidence in her ability to do well in her classes.

It's not just student experience that confirms the value of tutoring.

Studies at RCSJ have shown that tutoring and academic coaching can help improve a student's GPA. A three-year longitudinal study conducted by the Academic Support Center discovered that 75% of students who came in at least once a week passed the classes they received tutoring in. Similarly, a study done two years ago for students using the Center's academic coaching revealed that 80% of students using the service saw an increase in their GPA.

Myth 4: Tutoring Is Just Another Lecture

Students often come into tutoring expecting the tutor to give them a lecture, similar to what they would receive in class. They are hoping to gain the same learning experience they would in a classroom.

"A lot of students feel like 'I don't need to go to class—I go to tutoring,'" says Nick Shephard, "Well, that's not true."

Tutors are more likely to ask open-

ended questions to help the students work out the answers for themselves than to attempt to drill the student with information. The student sat through that already, and it didn't stick.

A tutor's goal is to teach students how to learn independently. While a tutor may help a student to review material, tutoring is no substitute for sitting in class. A tutor is incapable of teaching the material as thoroughly, or as well as the professor.

Myth 5: Tutoring Is There to Give You All the Answers

Tutoring is also not going to just answer all the questions on the homework. Many students come in with the idea that by taking their homework to a tutor they'll get the tutor to do their homework for them. Tutoring, however, isn't as convenient as that.

Students who come into the Academic Support Center should expect to ask questions but also should be prepared to be asked questions as well. Not only this, but not every tutoring session is even going to yield immediate results.

Sometimes, it takes multiple sessions for a student and tutor to work through the issue, and tutoring takes work beyond just the hour-long appointment.

My 7 Favorite Study Spots on the RCSJ Campus

By: Emmy Childs

Have you ever noticed that your surroundings affect your productivity? In college, many people begin to discover the importance of finding a work

**"Don't expect the tutor to just lecture at you...It should be a two-way conversation."
-Sheri Chamberlain**

The main purpose of a tutor is to show the student that they already have the tools they need to figure out the answers and work independently, not make them reliant on tutoring.

For one student who has been coming in for tutoring for the past five years, it has been a valuable resource that helps her stay caught up in her classes.

Her advice to students on the fence about tutoring: "I would encourage it, because if you need that extra help, I would say it helps you not stress out as much, and it helps you understand things more rather than going home and being stressed out on what you're understanding."

The myths surrounding the Academic Support Center prevent students from taking the time to make a much needed appointment. Rather than letting the myths stand in the way of success, students should realize that tutoring is for everyone. It's not a waste of time, and a tutor is always there to help.

environment that best suits them. This can start with finding the perfect place to study on campus, which is not a one-spot-fits-all equation. Some students may prefer a silent corner tucked away from any and all

distractions, while others may opt for a collaborative area where they can bounce ideas off other classmates. Whatever your preferences may be, Rowan College of South Jersey has a study spot built for everyone. Here are my top seven recommendations for study spots on the RCSJ Gloucester Campus.

1. Library

The library is not only the largest study spot on campus, but it is also one of the most valuable spots. Students have access to a wide variety of resources, such as printers, desktop computers, and research help. The library is a silent study area with plenty of seating, including chairs, couches, and study cubbies that allow everyone to find a comfortable spot. Third-year RCSJ student, Naya Sanchez, explains why the library is her go-to study spot: "I like the library because it's nice and peaceful, and it never gets crowded, so I'm able to focus on my assignments." A distraction-free work zone is what many students are searching for when it comes to studying, and the library makes the perfect spot.

2. Eugene J. McCaffrey College Center

The College Center's first floor is a popular study lounge for students. Many students like the center because of how accommodating it is. RCSJ sophomore, Faith Esposti, says, "I like the atmosphere, the comfy seats, and the printer." These amenities sound pretty similar to those in the library, but the college center has a more relaxed environment with more chatter. This building has an open

layout, allowing for plenty of dispersed seating so you don't feel like you're on top of those around you. The College Center is pretty busy at all times of the day, but with the large amount of seating options, there are usually open spots available. This is a reliable study spot for those who want a casual and relaxed environment.

3. RCSJ Cafes

Any of the three cafes on campus offer an excellent opportunity to grab something to eat or drink while studying. Whether you treat it as a reward for knocking out assignments or just can't fathom working on an empty stomach, the RCSJ cafes are great places for a little snacking while studying. Each cafe serves both breakfast and lunch with a wide variety of food and drink options, including coffee, sandwiches, and salads. The cafes are always busy and stirring with students, so it is the perfect fit for people who prefer moderate background noise while working.

4. Acenda Behavioral Sciences Center Lobby

The Behavioral Sciences Center's lobby is a great place to hunker down and get productive. This room offers ceiling-length windows that allow direct sunlight to pour in, boosting energy and curbing drowsiness. There are about 10 sets of tables and counter stools available for students, as well as additional sofa seating directly outside of each classroom. This building is a great fit for those who prefer a calm studying environment.

5. Math & Engineering Center

The Math and Engineering Center's

lobby is the ideal spot for group studying. This room is almost always full and offers an inviting atmosphere for collaborative work. There are numerous communal whiteboards provided for students, which are great for brainstorming or notetaking as a group. Most study spots have the reputation of being silent, but the Math Center is "very student friendly," as RCSJ sophomore, Jordan Johnson, puts it. It caters to students with different learning styles, allowing them to bounce ideas off fellow classmates and get immediate feedback and opinions from people other than themselves. If you are looking for a place to study with other classmates without feeling disruptive, this is the best place.

6. Scott Hall - STEM Center

The Scott Hall STEM Center is the perfect study spot for students who prioritize comfort and privacy. This center's lounge consists of several couches and armchairs, which are great for those who are looking for a more casual studying environment. There are about 15 individual workstations that have built-in desk dividers to block out distractions and ensure privacy, as well as a few tables and stools located throughout the center. The STEM center is normally pretty busy, and with it being a smaller lounge, the workstations and couches go quick.

7. Education and Humanities Center

The Education and Humanities Center is a very helpful study spot for those who like to finish their assignments directly after class. This is the smallest lounge on the list with only around five sets of tables, but there are about 25

sofas and armchairs throughout the entire building. While this isn't the quietest place to get work done, it is very convenient for those who want to finish assignments as quickly as possible and save themselves from the stress of procrastination. The RCSJ campus has a number of different places where students

can relax and get work done. There are areas meant for silent, individual study time, group areas where students don't need to worry about being a distraction, and everything in between. You're bound to find somewhere that works for you on campus.



RCSJ's College Center Study Area

7 Ways Social Media Drains Student Mental Health

By: Ava Schneck

Today is a digital world. Every student at Rowan College of South Jersey seems to be sitting and scrolling on their phones, whether it's in class, sitting in their cars, or even just at the library. Everywhere you look, someone seems to be staring at a screen.

Many students recognize this bad habit, while others wish there were more face-to-face interactions on campus. Students today may not fully realize the harmful effects social media can have on their mental health. Social media can be fun in moderation, but it can also affect how students interact, feel, and think. Today, I want to shed some light on this issue and bring some awareness to seven ways social media drains students' mental health. By recognizing these unhealthy patterns, students can begin to understand how social media, if not used appropriately, can hurt them in negative ways they may not even realize.

1. Constant Comparison on Social Media Lowers Self-Esteem

Anxiety, depression, and comparison are at an all-time high. Students scrolling through

apps like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, watch other people's daily lives, and are often left wondering why their own life doesn't look as glamorous or put together. This can lower self-esteem by making students feel less than, which then makes them internally more insecure. On social media, students are more likely to compare themselves to others because many online people present an idealized version of their lives. After scrolling long enough, it's easy to believe everyone is happier than you.

Social media comparisons have been linked to negative psychological outcomes such as low self-esteem and depression, the *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, reported in 2022. Seeing what appears to be a "happier life" can make students feel as though what they are doing with their own lives, even pursuing what they love, may not be enough compared to what other people are doing on social media.

2. Endless Scrolling Disrupts Sleep Patterns

Not only does scrolling affect students through comparisons but

it also disrupts sleep. Most students today will stay up late and scroll before bed, but they don't realize the damage. Sleeping is crucial for all college students, especially if they have class early in the morning. This can damage students' sleeping patterns. It would be much more beneficial for students not to be on their phones before bed because of the damage this can do. Dr. Susan Tapert told *UC San Diego Today* that excessive exposure to harmful content can affect mental health.

"Spending hours immersed in distressing news can fuel anxiety and depression and interfere with sleep," Tapert explained. For students already prone to struggling with anxiety or low mood, scrolling upsetting stories can worsen those feelings and potentially reinforce negative thoughts, leading to a spiral in which anxiety leads to more scrolling, which in turn leads to more anxiety. The brain stays stimulated and stressed, instead of winding down. Limiting phone use before bed, by reading, doing a hobby, or journaling, can create time to mentally unwind.

3. Chasing Likes Increases Anxiety

Students today who post frequently on social media share pictures from their lives and things they enjoy, which is great. However, over the years, students have begun craving more likes, followers, and comments. Some students today care more about how many followers they have than about getting good grades. They may spend so much time getting the most comments on a vacation post than living in the moment. This can cause severe anxiety in students who want validation from people online. Pam Kerley, a program assistant for the NC Cooperative Extension, says online validation affects the brain's reward system.

"It creates an addictive cycle where youth constantly seek external validation," Kerley explained. This can make people more dependent on digital affirmation for their sense of self-worth. She also warns that this pursuit of validation can sometimes involve unhealthy behaviors, such as excessive self-promotion, which can open youth up to cyberbullying. Negative comments and online harassment can have a devastating effect on a young person's self-image and mental well-being.

4. Cyberbullying Increases Emotional Stress

If you're an avid social media user, negative comments and reactions are bound to come. Some students can handle getting hateful comments towards their pictures or posts, but for some, this can be a truly hurtful thing. Cyberbullying is still active today, and even more so due to so many people being chronically online. Getting hateful comments from people you

don't know can cause stress for students. People today who watch videos comment on whatever they feel like commenting on.

So, there is no control over what is being said once a post goes up. This can leave a student feeling terrible about themselves and what they have posted. A 2024 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that students who reported frequent social media use were more likely to be bullied at school and electronically bullied compared with less frequent social media users. They are more likely to report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. According to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, frequent social media use was associated with having seriously considered attempting suicide and having made a suicide plan. As college students, it's good to know what is too much. Taking a break from posting or not reading comments at all can help reduce that stress. If someone is busy working, doing school, and balancing so much, reading hateful words will not help them get better. This is not good for students or anyone to have to deal with.

5. FOMO Makes Students Feel Left Out

Students often feel pressured to go to parties, get-togethers, or certain events just because they don't want to miss out on anything. Students may feel like they must do things even when they don't want to, just because other students their age are posting their exciting lives. What are social media users so afraid of missing? The founding Attorney of the Social Media Victims Law and Center,

Matthew P. Bergman, explains how it stems from this FOMO that students may have.

"The compulsion to constantly check social media stems from fears associated with specific functions of social media, including the ability to share photos and video, communicate with others, and create groups among others."

In a brief interview with a student from Rowan College of South Jersey, Emily Hamilton shared her experience with taking a break from social media. She explained that she stepped away from it during a week-long mission trip as part of an effort to better herself.

"I have taken a break from social media in the act of wanting to better myself. This break was a result of a mission trip that I participated in that lasted about a week. I would say during this break, I kept myself busy, so it was easy at first. Throughout the week, I felt very connected with the fellow students who went on this trip with me," Emily said.

She admitted that when she was regularly scrolling, she would sometimes see a post of another person's life and start to compare her life to theirs.

"When I was off social media, I didn't feel any pressure or want to scroll on social media. Being on a mission trip made me realize how not having social media for a whole week can make such an impact."

When asked how she would reduce her screen time in the future, Emily said she would "put strict boundaries" on her usage and motivate herself to focus on hobbies instead of immediately reaching for her phone.

6. Scrolling Replaces Real Conversations

Students today never linger after class because they would rather go straight home or straight to work. Students barely speak to each other in class unless they are already friends or placed in groups together. You can look around the library or cafeteria and see almost every single student with their head down, focused on a phone or laptop screen instead of speaking to someone right next to them.

This isn't just a random observation made; social media has a huge part in this. It has become normal on college campuses everywhere, including at Rowan College of South Jersey.

Writing in the International Journal of Marketing Studies, Noelle Defede explains that social media influences interpersonal communication and face-to-face interaction, from the new and shortened form of words, phrases, and abbreviations in people's messages to people being more comfortable speaking online than in person.

She explains how the change that social media has brought forth to communication is evident and noticeable. Once students recognize this shift, they should take a look and evaluate how they interact with the people around them compared to how they used to.

Are conversations happening only through FaceTime, or are real, authentic relationships and friendships still being made? Are any meaningful face-to-face connections happening at all?

Challenge yourself this week and put your phone away while waiting for class, and try to talk to someone. Those small moments can spark relationships that could last a lifetime. This is something scrolling could never replace.

7. Digital Distractions Hurt Academic Focus

Social media today can make students focus less, care less, and not pay attention. Yes, some students can multitask and pay attention to two things at once. But most students will be on their phones scrolling or looking at Instagram and have no idea what's going on outside of what they're watching. Leslie Reed reported that a study from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln found that students are aware of the academic cost of these digital distractions.

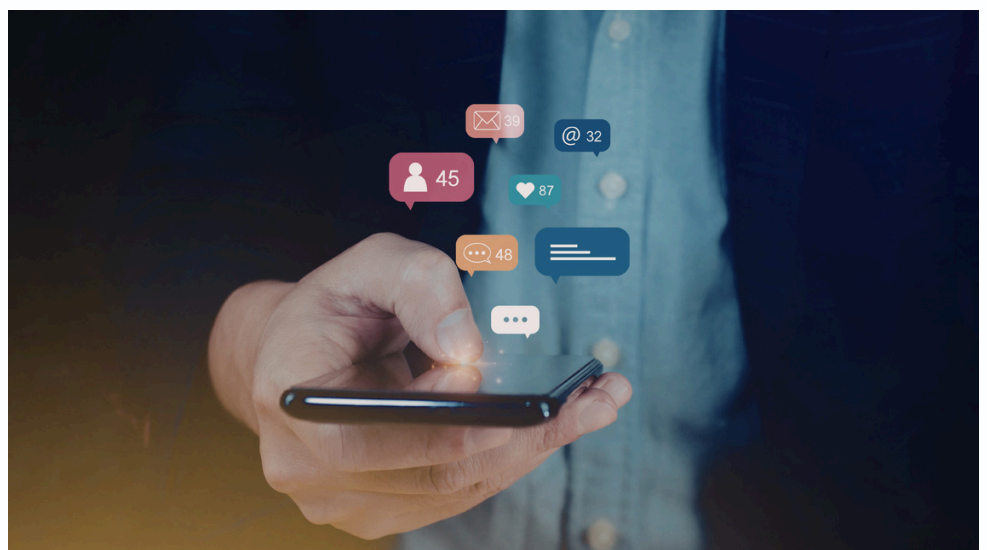
"Students admitted they 'miss instructions,' and recognize that 'their grades may suffer,' and they understand they can be 'called out by professors.' Even while knowing these consequences, most students said they 'can't or won't

change their behavior at all."

In conclusion, as a college student, it's important to limit screen time and be more mindful of social media use in order to improve mental health, academic performance, and overall focus.

It may feel too hard to step away from but, small adjustments and using it in moderation can create a powerful change in anyone's life. Without good moderation, these long-term effects can follow students far beyond just college. It could impact students later in life, affecting their mental health, relationships, and academic success.

Try to start small by setting a daily timer, try to do something before bed that doesn't involve scrolling, or even take a full day of just no social media at all once or twice a week. This addiction does not have to hold students back anymore. Learning to do your best at controlling it can help students feel less tired, drained, and more present in their everyday lives.



HOROSCOPES

By: *Tasheika Scott*

Spring Astrology Forecast

Aquarius (Jan 20- Feb 18): Aquarius, your summer may bring interesting people and creative ideas into your life. You could find yourself joining new groups, trying unusual activities, or starting conversations that lead to exciting opportunities. Staying open to different views will help you grow and make excellent connections. The Leo solar eclipse on August 12 activates your seventh house of partnerships, ushering in new relationship dynamics or commitments.

Pisces (Feb 19- Mar 20): Pisces, expect a creative and exciting summer. You might enjoy music, art, writing, or any activity that lets your imagination flow. Spending time in relaxing places may help you refresh. Listening to your sixth sense could guide you toward experiences that feel meaningful and fun. The Leo solar eclipse on August 12 activates your sixth house of work and health, sparking changes in daily routines, jobs, or wellness practices.

Aries (Mar 21- Apr 19): Aries, this summer may feel like the start of an exciting adventure. You may suddenly decide to take a spontaneous trip, start a new project, or say yes to something you normally would not try. Just remember that even the most energetic Aries needs a break sometimes, so make sure you balance late-night plans with some downtime. June 29 boosts joy, creativity, and self-expression.

Taurus (Apr 20- May 20): Taurus, your summer may be all about enjoying the good things in life. You may find yourself exploring new restaurants, relaxing with friends, or finally having time to focus on hobbies you love. You may appreciate peaceful moments, like long walks, music, or simply relaxing outside. The Taurus new moon on May 16 is your annual reset, offering a chance to plant seeds for income, security, and personal goals.

Gemini (May 21-Jun 20): Gemini, your social calendar could become very busy this summer. You may meet new friends at events or while traveling. Your curiosity may lead you into unexpected opportunities. Try to slow down sometimes so you can enjoy the moment instead of rushing to the next exciting thing. By June 29, Jupiter enters Leo, blessing your third house of communication, writing, and local community.

Cancer (Jun 21-Jul 22): Cancer, this summer may give you a chance to focus on yourself and what truly makes you happy. Spending time with close friends or family will feel especially meaningful. You may feel motivated to set new personal goals. Taking care of your emotional well-being will help you enjoy the summer even more. Think self-care. With Jupiter in your sign until June 29, luck and opportunity favor you personally—doors open when you lead with authenticity.

Leo (July 23- Aug 22): Leo, summer is basically your time to shine. You may find yourself at the center of social events, parties, or creative activities. People will be drawn to their confidence and fun personality. Romance could feel exciting and dramatic, especially if you let yourself enjoy the moment without overthinking things. Take note that Jupiter will be in your sign, Leo, from June 30th, 2026, until July 11th, 2027.

Virgo (Aug 23- Sept 22): Virgo, you might spend part of the summer organizing your life and planning your next steps. This could include preparing for classes or internships. Even though you like to stay productive at your work, do not forget to have fun with friends and take breaks. The best summer memories happen when plans change without warning. The Leo solar eclipse on August 12 highlights your twelfth house, calling for rest, healing, and closure.

Libra (Sep 23- Oct 22): Libra, your summer may likely rotate around friendships and connections. You may enjoy group activities, road trips, or meeting new people through mutual friends. Finding a balance between social time and personal time may help you stay energized. The Leo solar eclipse on August 12 activates your eleventh house of friendships and long-term goals.

Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21): Scorpio, this summer could bring new insights about what you want in life. You might feel motivated to pursue a goal you have been thinking about for a long time. It may also be important to relax and enjoy the present moment. Deep conversations and meaningful friendships may stand out this season. When the nodes shift into Leo/Aquarius on July 26, balancing career with home life becomes key.

Sagittarius (Nov 22- Dec 21): Sagittarius, exploration may call your name this summer. You may feel excited about traveling, exploring new places, or learning something entirely new. Saying yes to opportunities could lead to unforgettable experiences. A spontaneous trip might end up being the highlight of your summer. The Pisces lunar eclipse on August 28 deepens this theme, bringing clarity to family dynamics or your private life.

Capricorn (Dec 22- Jan 19): Capricorn, this summer could help you focus on long-term goals while still enjoying time off. You may be thinking about internships, career plans, or ways to build your future. Even though you tend to take life seriously, the summer could remind you to celebrate your growth and spend time with caring friends. The Pisces lunar eclipse on August 28 continues this theme, marking breakthroughs in how you share your voice.