



with special thanks to



2024 FULL CONFERENCE AGENDA (PRINT VERSION)

Welcome to the 5th Annual THRIVE Student Conference and Opportunity Fair! The THRIVE student conference features a wide range of opportunities for students to connect and learn from one another about **solutions to food insecurity, racial justice, addressing climate change, political awareness, LGBTQ+ justice, and building career pathways through community engagement**. We also go one step further – the Opportunity Fair provides an interactive space for students to learn from and work with professionals to develop your skills, interests, and pathways to meaningful careers.

This year, we have added a new **THRIVE Mural** – a continuously evolving piece of art that we will construct together, year on year – as a reflection of how democratic engagement is a daily act embarked upon together.

We are also piloting the **TIKTOK BOOTH!** Here, you can hone your impact pitches, presentation skills, and post your high quality videos to Tik Tok!

Engage NJ will launch the second year of student awards – the **2024 Kesselman Fellowships for the Advancement of Democracy, and Thrivers List 2024** (nominations due at the end of March)

Build your network – **OVER 130 STUDENTS** are attending from **Hudson County, Kean, Middlesex, Montclair, Passaic County, NJIT, Ramapo, Rider, Rutgers, Saint Peter's, Seton Hall, Stockton, and William Paterson!!**

WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

Engage NJ to Thrive in Life and Work!

OPPORTUNITY FAIR (*Open 10am – 3pm for Students to Stop by*)

This large open space will have multiple professionals of varied backgrounds and experiences who are ready to work with all students, answer questions, tweak resumes, bios, and hypothetical interview responses, show you a database of Student Opportunities for Success (SOS), understand your pathway to a meaningful career, and much much more! You can stop by all day, any time. Here are the themes, then below that are the professionals you can engage with.

Using Experience - Learn how prior community engaged work, volunteerism, or extracurricular experience can be easily turned into elevator pitches, resume builders, or interview responses.

Self-Presentation - Learn why networking, social media presence, dressing to impress, and knowing business talk are important – and how to balance all this with personal expression.

Student Opportunities for Success (SOS) - Learn about Engage NJ's database for scholarships, grants, internships, education awards, and more

Finding Career Pathways - Learn about how various professionals have explored different paths and experiences to lead them to the job they love.

Service Career Pathways - Learn about service careers and education awards – with AmeriCorps VISTA, Engage NJ ENGAGECorps, and PeaceCorps.

Public Service Leadership - Learn about local and state government leadership jobs, meet the officials in these positions, discover the skills required for these positions, and brainstorm ways to build your resume for this career path.

Let's meet the Professionals!

1. **Using Experience** - Learn how prior community engaged work, volunteerism, or extracurricular experience can be easily turned into elevator pitches, resume builders, or interview responses.

Engage NJ Team - Elizabeth Hunt & Janai Reaves-Ortiz will share a tool to help turn your “service” language into “skills”, and “giving back” to “getting ahead”

Steve Katz, Somerset Food Bank

- Executive Director of Somerset Food Bank, Retired Army Colonel, highly decorated combat veteran with humanitarian assistance/disaster response experience
- Incorporated in 1982, the Food Bank Network of Somerset County, Inc. is a non-governmental, non-sectarian, 501(c)3 not-for-profit public benefit organization. For the past 40 years The Food Bank has been responding to the needs of the food insecure in Somerset County, New Jersey

2. **Self-Presentation** - Learn why networking, social media presence, dressing to impress, and knowing business talk are important – and how to balance all this with personal expression

Rosa Zaremba, Inspiranj.org

- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rosavzaremba/>
- Inspira is exclusively for charitable and educational purposes that work to empower and provide social-economic change through the power of education

Diane Davis, Stay Motivated Youth Empowerment Studios, www.themotivationqueen.com

- Through empowerment, workshops, coaching services, and mentorship initiatives, Diane Davis equips young minds with the tools and skills necessary for a brighter, more prosperous future

Steve Katz, Somerset Food Bank

- Executive Director of Somerset Food Bank, Retired Army Colonel, highly decorated combat veteran with humanitarian assistance/disaster response experience
- Incorporated in 1982, the Food Bank Network of Somerset County, Inc. is a non-governmental, non-sectarian, 501(c)3 not-for-profit public benefit organization. For the past 40 years The Food Bank has been responding to the needs of the food insecure in Somerset County, New Jersey

3. Engage NJ *Student Opportunities for Success (SoS)* Database

The **Engage NJ Team** will walk you through our SoS database of grants, awards, stipends, and more to help you with your community engagement goals. See engagenj.org/grants for more

4. Finding your Pathway from your Major to Meaningful Careers – Nonprofit, Corporate, AmeriCorps Service, or other

Rosa Zaremba, [Inspiranj.org](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rosavzaremba/)

- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rosavzaremba/>
- Inspira is exclusively for charitable and educational purposes that work to empower and provide social-economic change through the power of education

Engage NJ team will outline the various service pathways to stimulating careers and trajectories through their AmeriCorps service years

Marie Thelmsma-Chase, [Box Wood Learning Center](#)

- Marie Thelmsma-Chase, CFRE, is the CEO of the nonprofit Boxwood Learning Center, founder for a high school alternative program for juvenile probationers, and the author of *Chasing After Impact: Remembering What Truly Matters When Seeking to Transform Lives*
- The Boxwood Learning Center's mission is to create learning environments for supporting the whole person by way of tutoring, mentoring, and career exploration and to provide supportive guidance to youth

Nathaniel Cooke, [Propel America](#)

- Propel America is a new pathway for young adults to move quickly to an upwardly mobile job with college credits and offers tuition-free job training for healthcare careers

Tomas Valero, [New Jersey Black Empowerment Coalition](#)

- The NJBEC is dedicated to creating equality for all Black people in New Jersey and nationwide and stands at the intersection of policy, democracy, and civic participation via their focus on voter education around racial-justice issues and the importance of public policy

Steve Katz, [Somerset Food Bank](#)

- Executive Director of Somerset Food Bank, Retired Army Colonel, highly decorated combat veteran with humanitarian assistance/disaster response experience
- Incorporated in 1982, the Food Bank Network of Somerset County, Inc. is a non-governmental, non-sectarian, 501(c)3 not-for-profit public benefit organization. For the past 40 years The Food Bank has been responding to the needs of the food insecure in Somerset County, New Jersey

Bre Azanado, [Black Lives Matter Paterson](#)

- Black Lives Matter Paterson is a Black youth led organization dedicated to transforming the city of Paterson through mutual aid, harm reduction, and education to ensure safety and justice for all Black people

CONFERENCE AGENDA

- 9:30** **Registration and Breakfast Opens**
- 9:30 – 10:15** **Breakfast Available (*Hot Buffet*)**
- 10:15** **Welcome to Middlesex College**
Dr. Mark McCormick, President
- 10:20** **Event Launch & Setting the Stage for the Day**
Dr. Saul Petersen, Engage NJ Executive Director
- 10:30 – 10:50** **Check out the Opportunity Fair – it's open all day! Plan Your Morning!**
- 11:00 – 11:30** **BLOCK 1 of Panels & Presentations (30-Minutes Each)**

Room 100 11:00 – 11:30

Theme: Student Organizing

Title: The Kesselman Fellows: Organizing for Impact

Description: Join the previous year's Kesselman Grant Fellows from Raritan Valley, Saint Peter's, and Stockton as they share their respective experiences in building and developing student support resources and a campus food pantry; surveying community members on their knowledge of medicinal and edible plants; and building resources for and promoting the campus food pantry – all of which was made possible through the Kesselman 2023 \$1000 Award.

Speakers: Sandra Faragalla, Maraya Cruz, Giannamaria Guido, Justin Capin, Junanyelis Flores, and Olivia Lovett

Room 101 11:00 – 11:30

Theme: Addressing Food Insecurity

Title: We Care Program

Description: Ramapo's We Care Intern Andrea Semeraro explains how her program addresses food insecurity -- and she will give models and advice on how to fight food insecurity on your own campus.

Speaker: Andrea Semeraro, Ramapo College of New Jersey

Room 102 11:00 – 11:30

Theme: Addressing Climate Change

Title: Permitting a new Gas Power Plant: What Comes Out and Where Does It Go?

Description: Join Middlesex's Peter Fairclough as he explains how a college paper turned into a larger project that led him to diving into research, appealing to Woodbridge's town council, and building a case as to why adding another power plant to the local area would be detrimental to the environment.

Speaker: Peter Fairclough, Middlesex College

Room 123 11:00 – 11:30

Theme: LGBTQ+ Justice

Title: LGBTQIA+ Justice and Advocacy

Description: Kean student Rashaad Couloote shares the history of LGBTQ+ civil rights, discrimination, and legislature in the United States, and how initiatives like Safe Zone Training Kean University play a role in promoting campus inclusion.

Speaker: Rashaad Couloote, Kean University

Room 173 11:00 – 11:30

Theme: Building Career Pathways

Title: Building Bridges to Success: The Power of Community and Campus Engagement in Higher Education

Description: Raritan Valley's Garret Gerow shares his story of how getting involved on campus led him to becoming his college's Student Government President.

Speaker: Garret Gerow, Raritan Valley Community College

Room 174 11:00 – 11:30

Theme: Finding Career Pathways

Title: The Impact of Student Involvement in the World of Sports Business: Kean Sports Business Club

Description: Join Kean student Sebastian Salazar as he shares his journey in getting involved on campus – and how he started a club that ended up with over 100 members and networked with some high-profile organizations in the sports world.

Speaker: Sebastian Salazar, Kean University

Room 175 11:00 – 11:30

Theme: Finding Career Pathways, Public Service Careers

Title: Interviewing: Next Generation Service Corps

Description: Public Service Careers. Montclair State University has partnered with the Volcker Alliance to join the Next Generation Service Corps (NextGen Service), a national network of 18 higher education institutions committed to preparing undergraduate students for public service. The NextGen Service Corps fills a critical educational gap by preparing undergraduates from all disciplines for public service careers. This program will help college students develop the values, nimble thinking, and collaborative leadership required for effective public service.

Speaker: Jessica Picardo, Montclair State University

11:30 – 11:55 THRIVE Mural. TikTok Booth. Visit the Opportunity Fair !

12 – 12:45 Lunch & Keynote Address

Keynote Speaker: Assemblywoman Shavonda E Sumter

<https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislative-roster/346/assemblywoman-sumter>

**12:45 – 12:55 Announcing Launch of Kesselman Fellows, Thrivers List, and
Student Success Steering Group Opportunities**

Dr. Saul Petersen, Engage NJ Executive Director

1:00 – 1:30 BLOCK 2 of Panels & Presentations (30-Minutes Each)

Room 100 1:00 – 1:30

Theme: Political Awareness

Title: RVotesMatter

Description: Join Raritan Valley's Nicholas Gallo as he explains the systems that he and his team employed in the RVotesMatter campaign and how that led to a successful organization and the success of the students that participated in it.

Speaker: Nicholas Gallo, Raritan Valley Community College

Room 101 1:00 – 1:30

Theme: Addressing Food Insecurity

Title: We Care Program

Description: Ramapo's We Care Intern Andrea Semeraro explains how her program addresses food insecurity -- and she will give models and advice on how to fight food insecurity on your own campus.

Presenter: Andrea Semeraro, Ramapo College of New Jersey

Room 102 1:00 – 1:30

Theme: Addressing Climate Change

Title: Permitting a new Gas Power Plant: What Comes Out and Where Does It Go?

Description: Join Middlesex's Peter Fairclough as he explains how a college paper turned into a larger project that led him to diving into research, appealing to Woodbridge's town council, and building a case as to why adding another power plant to the local area would be detrimental to the environment.

Speaker: Peter Fairclough, Middlesex College

Room 123 1:00 – 1:30

Theme: LGBTQ+ Justice

Title: LGBTQIA+ Justice and Advocacy

Description: Kean student Rashaad Couloote shares the history of LGBTQ+ civil rights, discrimination, and legislature in the United States, and how initiatives like Safe Zone Training Kean University play a role in promoting campus inclusion.

Speaker: Rashaad Couloote, Kean University

Room 173 1:00 – 1:30

Theme: Building Career Pathways

Title: Building Bridges to Success: The Power of Community and Campus Engagement in Higher Education

Description: Raritan Valley's Garret Gerow shares his story of how getting involved on campus led him to becoming his college's Student Government President.

Presenter: Garret Gerow, Raritan Valley Community College

Room 174 1:00 – 1:30

Theme: Finding Career Pathways

Title: The Impact of Student Involvement in the World of Sports Business: Kean Sports Business Club

Description: Join Kean student Sebastian Salazar as he shares his journey in getting involved on campus – and how he started a club that ended up with over 100 members and networked with some high-profile organizations in the sports world.

Speaker: Sebastian Salazar, Kean University

Room 175 1:00 – 1:30

Theme: Finding Career Pathways, Racial Justice

Title: Beauty in Diversity

Description: Raritan Valley student Sandra Faragalla talks about the benefits of putting oneself in new situations with new people – even if it’s awkward! She also will share her personal journey in how she found the benefits of embracing diversity, in whatever form it takes.

Speaker: Sandra Faragalla, Raritan Valley Community College

1:30 – 1:50 THRIVE Mural. TikTok Booth. Visit the Opportunity Fair !

1:55 – 2:25 BLOCK 3 of Talks, Panels & Presentations

Room 101 1:55 – 2:25

Theme: Finding Career Pathways

Title: Interviewing: Putting Your Best Foot Forward

Description: Join Engage NJ’s Liz and Janai as they run through a mock interview, provide tips on interviewing skills and techniques, and how to prepare for a successful interview.

Speakers: Liz Hunt and Janai Reaves-Ortiz, Engage NJ

Room 102 1:55 – 2:25

Theme: Racial Justice

Title: History for Justice: Telling the Stories of Enslaved Women of New Jersey

Description: Middlesex College students Emily Fox and Christina Ascolese along with Dr. Denise Rompilla, will speak about student experiences in helping to uncover the hidden histories of enslaved women in the archives in order to create a more human-centered approach to telling the history of the domestic slave trade.

Speakers: Emily Fox, Christina Ascolese, Denise Rompilla, Middlesex College

Room 123 1:55 – 2:25

Theme: LGBTQ+ Justice

Title: LGBTQ Civic Engagement: Surviving and Thriving in Times of Crisis

Description: New Jersey City University students Jacqueline Ramirez, Isaael Sanchez, Naomi Djamba with NJCU professor Dr. Jennifer Musial will share their experiences of taking a LGBTQ Social Change class during a time of crisis for the LGBTQ+ community, how they hosted the successful and LGBTQ+ affirming *Taking Pride in Jersey City* event, and how they contributed to the Jersey City LGBTQ Oral History archive, which emphasizes the importance of intergenerational dialogue in the LGBTQ community.

Speakers: Jacqueline Ramirez, Isaael Sanchez, Naomi Djamba, Jennifer Musial, New Jersey City University

Room 173 1:55 – 2:25

Theme: Building Career Pathways

Title: Exploring Civic Engagement: Insights from AmeriCorps' Perspective

Description: Join AmeriCorps VISTA Mariia Roth as she delves into the various approaches to civic engagement through the lens of AmeriCorps, incorporating insights from project or community-based volunteer experiences.

Speaker: Mariia Roth, P.h.D, AmeriCorps VISTA

Room 174 1:55 – 2:25

Theme: Building Career Pathways

Title: Uncovering Local History and Community Building

Description: A panel in which Middlesex College students Patricia Duncan, Evelin Ponce and Breanna Daroff share their experiences in uncovering local history through the Middlesex County Oral History Archive. Panel topics will include their research process, their gathering of data, and adding to the archive.

Speakers: Patrickia Duncan, Evelin Ponce and Breanna Daroff, Middlesex College

Room 175 1:55 – 2:10

Theme: Building Career Pathways

Title: 5 Ways Community Engagement Can Build Your Career

Description: Rutgers student Daniela Valverde shares her personal process of how she finds relevant and interesting opportunities to engage with her community – and how she uses these experiences to help build her career in public service.

Speaker: Daniela Valverde, Rutgers University

Room 175 2:10 – 2:25

Theme: Solutions to Food Insecurity

Title: Pantries Serving as Community Centers

Speaker: Dr. Saul Petersen, Engage NJ

2:35 – 3:05 BLOCK 4 of Panels and Presentations

Room 101 2:35 – 2:50

Theme: LGBTQ+ Justice, Political Awareness

Title: Transgender Rights and Legislation

Description: Join Engage NJ's Nathan Reilly as he explains the current political climate for transgender adults and children in the US, how civil and Constitutional rights are nationally being violated for this community, and what actions can be taken in the face of injustice.

Speaker: Nathan Reilly, Engage NJ

Room 102 2:35 – 3:05

Theme: Racial Justice

Title: History for Justice: Telling the Stories of Enslaved Women of New Jersey

Description: Middlesex College students Emily Fox and Christina Ascolese along with Dr. Denise Rompilla, will speak about student experiences in helping to uncover the hidden histories of enslaved women in the archives in order to create a more human-centered approach to telling the history of the domestic slave trade.

Speakers: Emily Fox, Christina Ascolese, Dr. Denise Rompilla

Room 123 2:35 – 3:05

Theme: Solutions to Food Insecurity

Title: Food tubes, a Possible Solution to Malnutrition

Description: Saint Peter's student Nayely Marquez shares her exploration and market research on food insecurity and malnutrition rates after the COVID-19 Pandemic – and the innovations that many European countries have adopted in response.

Speaker: Nayely Marquez, Saint Peter's University

Room 173 2:35 – 3:05

Theme: Building Career Pathways

Title: Exploring Civic Engagement: Insights from AmeriCorps' Perspective

Description: Join AmeriCorps VISTA Mariia Roth as she delves into the various approaches to civic engagement through the lens of AmeriCorps, incorporating insights from project or community-based volunteer experiences.

Speaker: Mariia Roth, P.h.D, AmeriCorps VISTA

Room 174 2:35 – 3:05

Theme: Building Career Pathways

Title: Uncovering Local History and Community Building

Description: A panel in which Middlesex College students Patrickia Duncan, Evelin Ponce and Breanna Darof share their experiences in uncovering local history through the Middlesex County Oral History Archive. Panel topics will include their research process, their gathering of data, and adding to the archive.

Speakers: Patrickia Duncan, Evelin Ponce and Breanna Darof, Middlesex College

Room 175 2:35 – 3:05

Theme: Finding Career Pathways

Title: Engagement Leadership Team

Description: Olivia Lovett, Azra Mahisa, and Madelyn Sacco share how being an Engagement Leadership Team member at the Stockton Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning supports their professional networking, graduate school applications, and career goals.

Speakers: Olivia Lovett, Azra Mahisa, and Madelyn Sacco, Stockton University

3:10 - 3:20

Final Announcements; Last Chance for TikTok Booth

Close

Dr. Saul Petersen

---- ENDS 3:30 ----