

May 2026



FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE OF JACONVILLE
COMMENCEMENT

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2026 AT 4 P.M.
VYSTAR VETERANS MEMORIAL ARENA

Commencement 2026

We were thrilled to celebrate the achievements of our proud graduates during the 59th Annual Commencement Ceremony on Thursday, May 7, at the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena. Surrounded by an audience of their families and friends, 1,427 graduates accepted their diplomas from Dr. Avendano and our District Board of Trustees.

For the 2025-26 academic year, more than 5,700 degrees and certificates were awarded to FSCJ graduates and candidates, with some students earning more than one. Of these, 809 were bachelor's degrees, 1,581 were associate in arts degrees and 489 were associate in science degrees. Additionally, 187 high school students completed the dual enrollment program, and 115 graduates accepted their high school diploma or Florida Department of Education equivalency diploma. Read more [here](#). Click on the image above to watch the recording.

[View Photos](#)

News and Updates

Congrats to Faculty and Staff Awards Recipients



Pictured left to right: Roma Keesecker, Tenisha Reales, Brandi Bleak, Dr. Avendano, Dr. Coram, Dr. Apostel, Dr. Guine, Sierra Ejanikowski, Dr. Ertenberg and Dr. Dumouchel (Not pictured: Dr. Cronrath and Brad Frick)

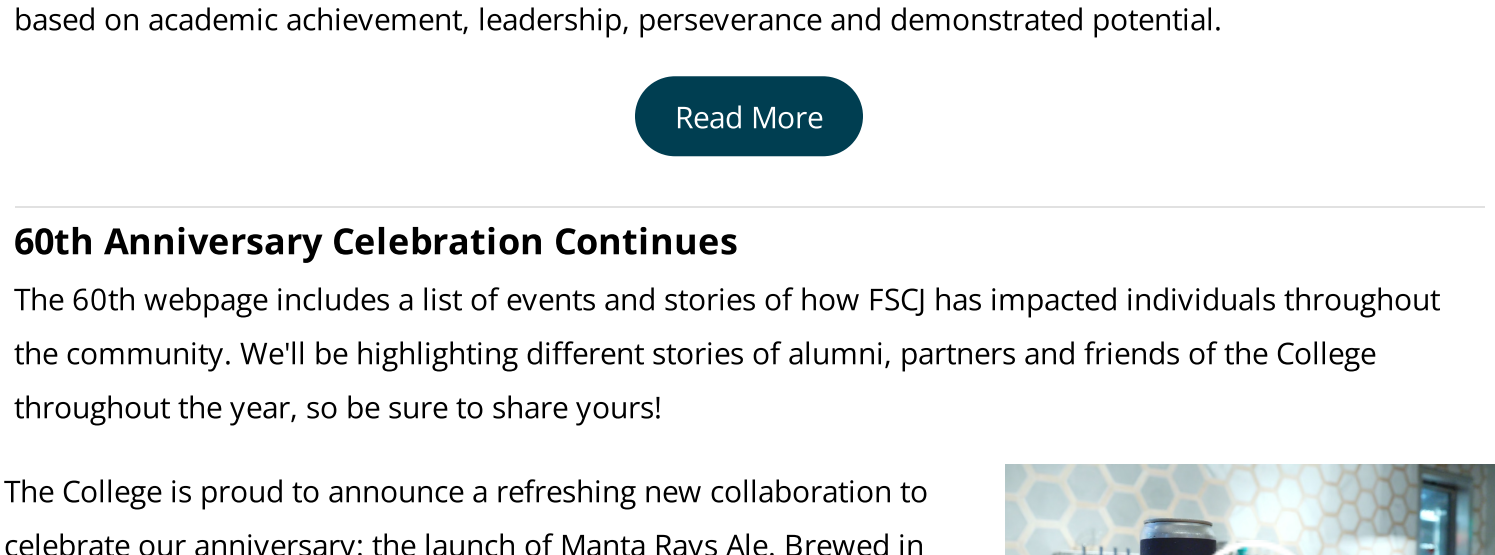
The Employee Awards Luncheon was held on Thursday, April 23 to celebrate and honor the recipients of this year's Distinguished Faculty Awards, Distinguished Adjunct Faculty Award, Administrative and Professional Collaborative Exceptional Service and Initiative Award and the Career Employees' Council Recognition of Excellence Award, and the IRSE Awards.

Congratulations to all 2026 awards recipients:

- **Distinguished Faculty Award for Liberal Arts & Sciences, Adult Education, and ESOL**
Dr. Florin Apostol, Professor of Physics
Dr. Daniel Cronrath, Professor of Political Science
- **Distinguished Faculty Award for Bachelor's, Career & Technical Education**
Dr. Shawna Coram, Professor of Business & Accounting
- **Administrative and Professional Collaborative Exceptional Service and Initiative Award**
Brandi Bleak, Engineer IV Software, Educational Technology
- **Career Employees' Council Recognition of Excellence Award**
Sierra Ejanikowski, Department Coordinator, Career Workforce Education
- **Distinguished Adjunct Faculty Award**
Dr. Jerrett Dumouchel, AWP of Institutional Effectiveness & Adjunct Professor of Mathematics
- **Integrity Award**
Tenisha Reales, Student Success Advisor II, Financial Aid
- **Respect for All Served by FSCJ Award**
Dr. Samantha Ertenberg, Professor of English
- **Innovation Award**
Dr. Naita Guine, Director of Program Development, Liberal Arts & Sciences
- **Student-Centered Award**
Roma Keesecker, Academic and Career Advisor
- **Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Service Award**
Brad Frick, Head Coach - Baseball

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FSCJ Celebrates First PAWS Program Graduates



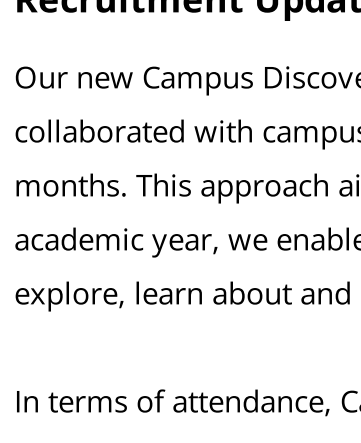
On April 30, FSCJ was proud to celebrate the first graduating class of the Professional Animal Workers (PAWS) Certificate program, a partnership with The Arc Jacksonville and Jacksonville's Animal Care and Protective Services. This initiative offers individuals with intellectual and developmental differences the opportunity to gain both comprehensive education and real-world, hands-on experience in animal care.

PAWS is a 12-week course designed to equip participants with critical skills for careers in kennels, animal daycare centers and other pet-related businesses. Participants engage in FSCJ coursework at The Arc Jacksonville's campus covering animal safety, behavior, nutrition, emergency response and first aid, alongside soft skills like communication, teamwork and problem-solving. They then apply their knowledge through a practical internship at ACPS, gaining meaningful, industry-relevant experience.

PAWS builds on The Arc Jacksonville and FSCJ's successful partnership, which began with the launch of Career Campus in 2023.

[View Photos](#)

Congratulations to FSCJ's First-Ever Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship Recipient



We are proud to announce that one of our recent honors graduates, Stacie Cregg, has been selected as one of the 60 high-achieving community college students to receive the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke (JKC) Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, and one of only five recipients in Florida. The scholarship enables Scholars to complete their bachelor's degrees at four-year institutions with a significantly reduced financial burden.

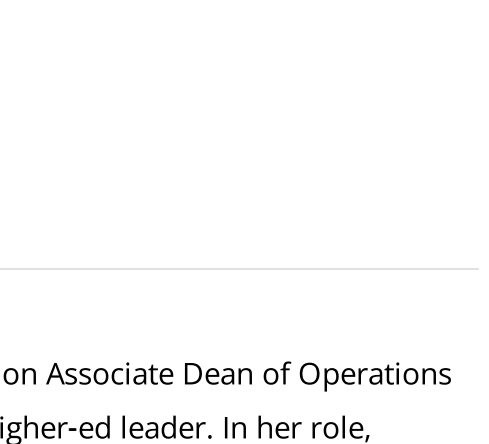
This year, more than 1,300 students from community colleges nationwide applied for the scholarship. The 60 selected Scholars emerged from a competitive semifinalist pool of 485 students and were chosen based on academic achievement, leadership, perseverance and demonstrated potential.

[Read More](#)

60th Anniversary Celebration Continues

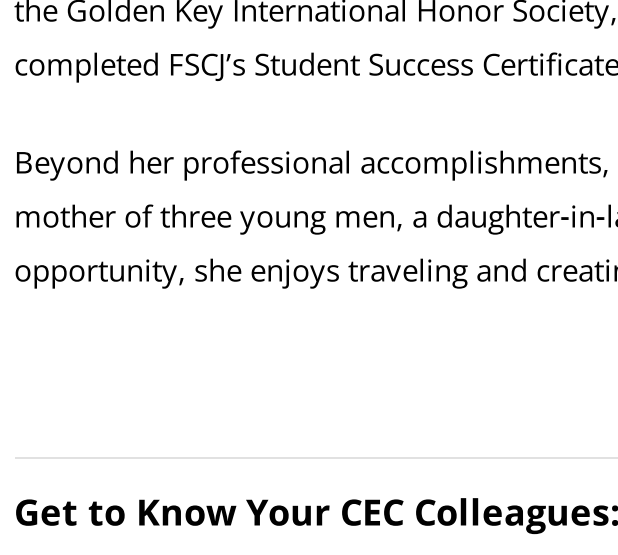
The 60th webpage includes a list of events and stories of how FSCJ has impacted individuals throughout the community. We'll be highlighting different stories of alumni, partners and friends of the College throughout the year, so be sure to share yours!

The College is proud to announce a refreshing new collaboration to celebrate our anniversary: the launch of Manta Rays Ale. Brewed in partnership with First Love Brewing, this limited-edition release honors six decades of community impact and student success.



First Love Brewing in Fernandina Beach is owned and operated by FSCJ alumnus Kevin O'Brien and his wife, Jessie. The brewery worked closely with the College to develop a flavor profile that reflects the vibrant spirit of the Manta Rays.

Manta Rays Ale is a sophisticated Belgian Blonde Ale, featuring unique blood orange hues. Symbolic of FSCJ's 60th year, the beer's alcohol content (ABV) is 6.0%. Manta Rays Ale will be available at select 60th Anniversary events, as well as on tap at First Love Brewing. Read more [here](#).



Check out this 2010-2014 recap video, part of a 12-part series created to highlight specific timeframes throughout the College's history. All 12 will be housed on the 60th webpage as they are finalized.

[fscj.edu/60](#)

Employee Sports League

Summer FSCJ Employee Recreation Sports are back! FSCJ employees can enjoy co-ed basketball and pickleball at the South Campus Gymnasium (Bldg. R) on Mondays and Thursdays from 6:30-8 p.m. until Thursday, August 20. Please note that FSCJ Employee Recreation Sports will not be played on Monday, July 6, as FSCJ will be closed.

If you enjoy basketball, either half-court or full-court games are played, depending on the employee turnout. If you are new to pickleball, a friendly group of employees can show you how to play. Paddles and balls will be provided if you do not have your own.

Whether you come to play basketball or pickleball, please do not forget to complete the waiver during your first visit of the summer. Also, please join the [FSCJ Employee Recreation Sports Team Channel](#) where you can stay up to date on announcements, ask questions and post photos.

Finally, if you are interested in leading another sport as part of the FSCJ Employee Recreation Sports offerings, please contact Lithesha Holloman at lithesha.holloman@fscj.edu.

Recruitment Update

Our new Campus Discovery Days are in full swing. This academic year, the Student Recruitment Office has collaborated with campus leadership, faculty and staff to organize multiple events over several days and months. This approach aims to maximize engagement. By providing these opportunities earlier in the academic year, we enable prospective students, particularly high school seniors, to have more time to explore, learn about and apply to the College.

In terms of attendance, Campus Discovery Days has been a success. The third event concluded on April 25 at the Downtown Campus, attracting an attendance high of 172 prospective students. In addition to providing presentations on "Why FSCJ" and "Financial Aid" at all sessions, as well as open labs for the College application and Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Downtown Campus personnel hosted several presentations and demonstrations, including:

- YEAR UP Program
- Early Childhood Education
- Robotics & Advanced Manufacturing
- Urban Agriculture
- Logistics

Our community partner, Feeding Northeast Florida, hosted a food giveaway for attendees and donated leftover items to the H.O.P.E. Food Pantry.

The 2026 season of Campus Discovery Days will conclude on May 30 at the South Campus. Program and volunteer registrations are still open. If you are interested, please contact the Student Recruitment Office at fscjrecruitment@fscj.edu.

May Recruitment Highlights:

- 13: Genesys Works Jacksonville: Breaking Through
- 15: Clay County Fine Arts College and Career Events
- 16: Haitian Flag Day Community Resource Event
- 20: North Campus Group Tour: Englewood BTE Students
- 22: Atlantic Coast Signing Day

[Read More](#)

Get to Know Your APC Colleagues: Shirrelle Dover Jones

May's Administrative & Professional Collaborative (APC) spotlight shines on Associate Dean of Operations Shirrelle Vonne Dover-Jones, Ed.D., M.H.A., a seasoned healthcare and higher-ed leader. In her role, Shirrelle oversees a wide range of departmental functions, including scheduling, course encoding, faculty workload, student reinstatement into the ASN program, clinical placement and compliance, and overall operational coordination for the Nursing Department.

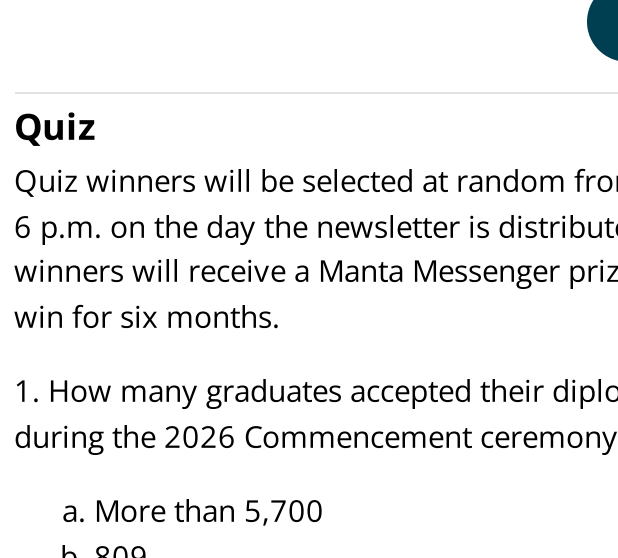
Shirrelle is a proud graduate of Rutgers University, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Public Health, and Seton Hall University, where she completed her Master of Healthcare Administration. She later earned her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from Florida State University.

Shirrelle is an active member of the American Council on Education (ACE) Leadership Network of Florida, the Golden Key International Honor Society, and the Association of Florida Colleges. She has also completed FSCJ's Student Success Certificate Program and the 2024-25 Succession Planning Program.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Shirrelle is deeply devoted to her family. She is the proud mother of three young men, a daughter-in-law and three cherished grandchildren. When she has the opportunity, she enjoys traveling and creating new memories with the people she loves most.

[Read More](#)

Get to Know Your CEC Colleagues: Jade Edgar



May's Career Employees' Council (CEC) spotlight features Academic Department Coordinator Jade Edgar. She completes and organizes program information, assists with faculty and adjunct credentialing, supports departmental events across campuses and more. She recently also became an adjunct instructor, teaching Group Dynamics in the Human Services bachelor's program.

With a background in counseling for mental health, Jade approaches her work with a strong sense of balance and care. She believes in promoting student welfare while also recognizing the importance of employee well-being.

Jade earned both her BA in Applied Psychology and her MA in Counseling for Mental Health & Wellness with a Certificate in LGBTQ Health, Education, and Social Services from New York University. A Jacksonville native, she attended LaVilla School of the Arts for Band and Douglas Anderson School of the Arts for Creative Writing.

When she's not reading or playing video games, you might find her creating ceramics or studying Norwegian—adding to the languages she has explored, including Korean (her undergraduate minor) and self-taught Spanish.

[Read More](#)

FSCJ In Action

International Admissions & Academic Coordinator Laura Pitois, FSCJ Student-Athlete (baseball and international student from Aruba) Keyon Ashby and Director of Campus Enrollment & Student Services Dr. Beatrix Dunn represented the College in Miami at the Caribbean Student Session of the official U.S. visit of their Majesties King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima of the Netherlands.

The first day was a roundtable discussion held at the Perez Art Museum. Queen Máxima asked Florida and the other students about their studies in Florida and their future plans. Attendees also spoke to FLODE Higher Education Senior Chancellor Kevin O'Farrell. The second day was a reception in honor of the King and the Queen, held at the Freedom Tower.

[View Photos](#)

Deerwood Center was invited to bring their children to the Deerwood Center for Take Your Child to Work Day. Students in grades 2 through 12 enjoyed breakfast and interactive sessions to explore how our work impacts students and the community.

[View Photos](#)

Thanks to all who joined us for FSCJ Night at the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp game. Attendees enjoyed meeting Rayzor Ray and the Recruitment team. Members of the FSCJ faculty had a great time watching the game and catching up with colleagues from across the College.

[View Photos](#)

Congratulations to our newest members of the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) Honor Society! We were proud to welcome 45 new members into the Upsilon Eta Chapter in recognition of their academic excellence!

[View Photos](#)

FSCJ IT cybersecurity students participated in HackSpaceCon, a premier cybersecurity and emerging technology conference held at the Kennedy Space Center, alongside Professor Gerry Hilgenberg. The event brings together security professionals, hackers, researchers and industry leaders from around the world, and features hands-on training, expert-led sessions, and panels covering offensive and defensive security, AI, space systems, and real-world cyber threats.

Alex Griffin, an Associate in Arts student, NCSA Club member and FSCJ telephone, won a badge in a "capture the flag" challenge set in a simulated analog telephone closet. Using real phones and junction blocks, contestants had to jack into simulated voicemail boxes and extract keywords to advance but nobody knew what the questions were. Competitors spent hours plugging away at the board, listening into company memos, hold music and hacker movie clips looking for the key words that would lead them to victory. With the help of a few new friends from across Florida, the Manta Rays team took home "black badges," trophies earned for successfully completing a challenge.

"Caught in the Act" – Elevating the FSCJ Experience Spotlight: Have you witnessed a colleague in the act of elevating the FSCJ experience for students, community members or colleagues? If yes, we want to hear about it! Selected stories will be featured in HR newsletters. Please share your stories [here](#).

Facilities Updates

The Facilities Team has been hard at work, updating and upgrading spaces across the College.

| Recently Completed | Deerwood Center | In Planning |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Driving Track Lighting • Deerwood Conference Center Renovation • Downtown Parking Lot Lighting • Downtown Exterior Art Mural • North Spange Building ID's • South Locker Room Chairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interior ADA Signage and Paint • Nursing Area Remodel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cecil Training Institute/Hub |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan/Digital Facilities Plans • Science Lab & Classroom Renovations • Wayfinding, Monument Signage • Memorial Benches/Legacy Walk • Energy Initiatives • Classroom USA Flag Replacement • Library Master Planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Alarm System Replacement • Fire Alarm System Replacement • Propane Tank Installation • Art Mural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deerwood Center: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking Garage Joint Repair • Center Stage Flooring Replacement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door Access Control Upgrades • Fire Alarm Replacement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Alarm Replacement • Fire Academy AHU Replacement • Kitchen Renovation • Student Services Renovation • Allied Health Program Renovation • Scoreboard Screen Framing • Building A Upgrades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warehouse Building • VEC Renovation • Jr. Achievement ELC Design • ATE Boiler Replacement • Coffee Cafe Remodel |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chiller Replacement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Campus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Services Renovation • Building A Upgrades • South Campus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Alarm System Replacement • Fire Academy AHU Replacement • KInn Repairs • Canopy Repairs • Covered Walkway Repairs • CUP Plant Pump Unit Replacement • Fire Academy Flooring and Paint • Wayfinding Monument Entrances | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nassau Center: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildwood Outdoor Retreat Center Renovation and Entrance Gate • South Campus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Burn Building |

Show Your Manta Rays Spirit

Get your Manta Rays merch now! In partnership with Baker's Sports, the local uniform provider for FSCJ's Athletics teams, we are pleased to offer t-shirts, hoodies, a special baseball jersey and more.

Make your selection and customize it with different designs so you can represent FSCJ and our athletic teams. You'll also be helping out our program, as FSCJ Athletics will receive a portion of the proceeds from your purchase!

[Mascot Shop](#)

Did You Know?

Did you know we still have suggestion boxes located at each campus and center? This is where you can anonymously submit an idea or recommendation for consideration. Click on the button below for the maps to find your nearest suggestion box.

[Suggestion Box Maps](#)

Upcoming Events

Next Call:
August 12, 2 p.m.

Click here for previous call.

They are also available via the myFSCJ OnPoint Quick Link.

Stay a Manta Ray!

Full registration is open!

Classes start Aug. 31

Check out the full calendar to view more and access the form to submit your College-related events: [fscj.edu/events](#).

[View More Events](#)

Quiz

Quiz winners will be selected at random from entries with all questions answered correctly. You have until 6 p.m. on the day the newsletter is distributed to email your answers to newsletter@fscj.edu. Three winners will receive a Manta Messenger prize pack! Please note: newsletter quiz winners are not eligible to win for six months.

- How many graduates accepted their diplomas from Dr. Avendano and our District Board of Trustees during the 2026 Commencement ceremony?
 - a. More than 5,700
 - b. 809
 - c. 1,427
 - d. 1,581
- How many weeks is the PAWS course?
 - a. 12
 - b. 8
 - c. 6
 - d. 16
- Where did FSCJ's Take Your Child to Work Day event take place?
 - a. South Campus
 - b. Downtown Campus
 - c. North Campus
 - d. Deerwood Center
- Roma Keesecker accepted which award during the Employee Awards Luncheon?
 - a. Distinguished Adjunct Faculty Award
 - b. Student-Centered Award
 - c. Innovation Award
 - d. Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Service Award
- What is the name of FSCJ's 60th anniversary beer?
 - a. Rayzor Ray Ale
 - b. Manta Rays Ale
 - c. Manta Rays Brew
 - d. Manta's Blood Orange Blonde