

The College Hill News

SPRING 2022

Sussex
County
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Mask Optional Completes Sussex County Community College Spring Semester

By Paige McCarrick
College Hill Writer

At Sussex County Community College (SCCC), the COVID-19 mask mandate that had been in effect for the past two years, was lifted on March 7 on campus for students and faculty for the remaining spring semester.

The move allowed students and faculty to decide whether they want to wear a mask inside the school buildings at the Newton campus.

After speaking with multiple students and faculty at SCCC, there have been a few different opinions within having the decision of removing the mask. Students and faculty still had a choice of wearing a mask. Many students on campus had chosen to remove their masks, but some students and faculty still had concerns regarding COVID-19.

Ryan Chilenski, freshman, shared his reasoning for wearing a mask on campus even though the mandate had been lifted.

"The reason I wear a mask is because over winter break when the mask mandate was still in effect, my mom got COVID very bad so to protect her and myself, I still wear the mask for safety," said Chilenski.

Randall Ramdas, freshman, shared that the removal of masks has allowed for a better learning environment.

"I think classes are taught better since classes no longer have masks," said Ramdas. "Because in my effective speaking class, we were graded on our speaking, so our low voices were barely heard."

Having a similar outlook about masks within a classroom setting, SCCC Journalism Professor Cheryl Conway shared her thoughts and concerns about the mandate being lifted.

"As a new professor at SCCC I found it quite difficult teaching a three-hour class," said Conway. "I was not sure if the students could hear me correctly and I hated that I could not see their facial expressions during any of our discussions. While many may feel anxious about the spread of germs post the pandemic, I do hope that most are courteous, respectful and have the common decency and sense to know that if they are not feeling well or have been exposed to someone who is sick, to either wear a mask or stay out of the classroom if needed. Mask optional aligns with freedom of choice, and in my book, is clearly the best way to go moving forward."

After speaking with multiple students and faculty members, other ideas had been expressed throughout the college about masks.

As many students are still wearing masks for reasons related to the pandemic, a mask is also being transformed into a safety net due to an isolation tactic as well as emphasizing an individual's political stance.

Although the mandate was lifted at the community, Tyler Turnage, sophomore, stated why he enjoyed having the face mask when they were required as it allowed for a sense of comfort.

"I feel that it is another article of clothing," Turnage stated. "If I take it off they [his classmates] will know me in a way that they've never seen me before."

As the spring semester is over, the fall semester of 2022 is approaching quickly. Although most students and faculty have a positive outlook on the mask mandate being lifted, this may change when the fall semester returns.

There are many different opinions on the college campus about the mask mandate as the pandemic has been an ongoing battle for all school environments, but the Skylanders had a successful first spring semester maskless since the pandemic, but remained cautious and enforced hygiene safety procedures.

Mental Health Services Ramps Up For Increased Need

By Cybele Tamulonis
College Hill Writer

During the past two years the COVID-19 pandemic has put additional pressure on people's mental health world-wide. This hits close to home in New Jersey, including students at Sussex County Community College in Newton.

According to state specific data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, 60% of N.J. adults reporting anxiety and/or depressive symptoms in early 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic were 18 to 29 years old. Flash forward to today, where inflation, rising gas prices and the resurgence of nuclear war worries are added to the United States creeping towards one million deaths from the pandemic.

"I have seen an increase in students with mental health concerns," says Alyssa Hoekstra, Sussex County Community College's licensed professional counselor. "According to the American Psychological Association, the prevalence of anxiety and depression has drastically increased, and rates have been up to four times higher than pre-COVID. Although there has been an uptick in mental health symptoms, I do believe there is a discrepancy between individuals' symptoms and those that seek support services."

In response, SCCC created the monthly Wellness Newsletter at the start of the pandemic to address the growing need for mental health awareness and support.

"We also offer free confidential short-term counseling and referrals, and the Student Success Center offers a Wellness Workshop," says Hoekstra, whose background in mental health settings spans outpatient facilities, psychiatric hospitals and therapeutic schools.

To access these services, students can make an appointment online by clicking the Student Support tab at sussex.edu and then choosing the Student Success Center option. The center can provide virtual, or in-person counseling sessions and Wellness Workshops are held monthly.

According to a study that tracked patients throughout the U.S. for a year and led by researchers based at the Veterans Administration and Washington University in St. Louis, MO., COVID-19 patients had a 60% higher risk of mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, or substance abuse compared with those who weren't sickened by the virus.

"We know from previous studies and personal experiences that the immense challenges of the past two years of the pandemic have had a profound effect on our collective mental health," said Senior Author Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, a clinical epidemiologist at Washington University in a press release from Washington University. "But while we've all suffered during the pandemic, people who have had COVID-19 fare far worse mentally. We need to acknowledge this reality and address these conditions now before they balloon into a much larger mental health crisis."

In addition to services offered at SCCC, Sussex County has also spearheaded additional tele-health programs to make sure that residents had continued access to services throughout lockdowns and limited access to transportation. (cont'd. on page 5)



SCCC Refugee Student Educates Schools On Value of Education

By Hailey Read
College Hill Writer

Far from being an average student, Arta Kida is a refugee from her war-torn country of Kosovo, in Southeast Europe, and survivor of gruesome and unforgiving tribulations.

Kida, a 30-year-old mother, wife and student of Sussex County Community College, in Newton, is receiving an associate's degree in education to further tell her story. Traveling to schools and universities across the northeast, Kida speaks publicly about her life as a refugee.

She has spoken to countless schools, including SCCC with a talk that was set to be held on April 25.

"My reasoning for wanting to speak to the Sussex County students would be to let them know how many resources they truly have and what they could really do with this degree," Kida emphasizes. "Don't just get your credits and leave. There's so much there, there's so much staff that is willing to help you; they're so kind."

Kida is not only a refugee student, but also a soon-to-be author, as she's been working with the SCCC Writing Center on writing and editing her first novel, projected to be released this summer.

The story details the events of her life as a refugee through her disabled grandfather's eyes. Kida chose this perspective for her book to commemorate the life of her grandfather and honor the legacy he left behind. As a handicapped man bound to a wheelchair, the odds of his survival as a refugee fleeing a burning country were very slim. Despite this, he kept his composure and remained strong in the face of adversity. This is highlighted in Kida's book, as she shines a light on the courage that individuals with disabilities possess in their daily lives across the globe.

"If one person gets to read this, if one person feels that they can now spread my word then I feel like I'm touching more people, I'm getting to more people," says Kida. "I'm a step closer to letting people know my grandfather's story, and many, many other children that have experienced this and, unfortunately, the ones that are [still] experiencing this."

Kida expresses her gratitude towards the writing center for its kindness and eagerness to work with her on this vulnerable project. She particularly mentions Olivia Maikisch, the Writing Center coordinator, who was the first person she went to for guidance and feedback on the novel.

"I did not think I was going to write it," explains Kida. "[Olivia] encouraged me, and she said to me that day, 'If you are not comfortable with how I'm editing your book, I promise you I will get someone to do it exactly how you want.' There was no pressure, there was no sense of her trying to change or fix it. She listened and shared, and that's really what got the wheel going. I will always be thankful for her."

Maikisch described the experience as, "very, very rewarding."

She explains, "We don't get students who come in with creative writing usually, and I think part of that is because people don't realize that they can bring in creative writing. It is such a

vulnerable thing, to take a story like this that is so personal and filled with so much trauma and to really bear that to another person. She really had indicated that this was the first time she was showing [her writing] to somebody else and so for me, a complete stranger, to be in that position... I was really touched by that, very moved by it."

Early Life

Born in 1991, Kida was raised in a peaceful and loving home in Kosovo with her mother, father, disabled grandfather, two sisters and two brothers, one of which was only 2 months old when the war broke out. Serbia infiltrated Kosovo in 1998 to enforce an ethnic cleansing on its people, which held deadly consequences.

"The conflict and the entire situation is a mirror image of what is going on in Ukraine and Russia," says Kida. "Russia believes that [Ukraine] is their territory. Same thing with Serbia."

Kida and her family were forced to leave behind everything they had for the slim chance of survival. At age 7, Kida and her family went into hiding. This included the woods, trenches and sparse homes that would only hold them for a few days, as Serbian troops would eventually catch up to them if they stopped moving. They went from the average, fun-loving family to a family that could not talk, laugh, move or play without fear of being caught. Their hiding lasted for an entire two years, until Kida was merely 9 years old.

"We'd never been in this situation; we assumed that these troops that are coming to our country are going to only fight other troops," explains Kida. "We need to stay out of it, stay in these hidings that we created, and we need to worry about food, and we'll be okay. No one is going to come and try to kill a disabled child; no one is going to try to kill an infant; no one's going to try to kill elderly people; we didn't think this was going to happen. We very, very shortly realized this was not the case at all."

After two horrific, long years, Kida and her family came out of hiding to seek refuge in neighboring countries. From Kosovo they went to Montenegro, and then Albania, where they crossed the ocean in a speedboat holding roughly 50 other refugees.

Kida recalls crossing the ocean as such: "There was a point where we were more underwater than we were above. Now, having that fear in you for over ten hours, you cannot communicate. You're so terrified, your brain has reached such a level of horror that it cannot process the thought of asking the person next to you a question. You cannot physically do it."

Miraculously, the family arrived at the Italian border. Each of these countries offered some form of help but were too poor or too dangerous for them to stay long. They were constantly displaced, desperate and exhausted after years of hiding to simply find some form of home again. As they passed through Italy, they went to France, where Kida and her family realized that refugees were not so openly welcomed. They spent their nights sleeping on snow-covered sidewalks, with no understanding of the language, freezing and brutally exhausted from their constant travels.

Finally, as the family's first sign of relief, they found refuge and solace in Switzerland.



"Switzerland is what helped my family, and I'm sure [it helped] other refugees gain back their sanity, their dignity," says Kida.

In Switzerland, Kida found some semblance of normal life again. After being stationed in a refugee camp for some months, her family was eventually given access to their own house. She attended school again, had friends, laughed, read and played. As Kida found peace for the first time in years, news reached her family that the war had ended between Serbia and Kosovo. After two years of living in Switzerland, Kida's father brought the family back to Kosovo to see if they could live in their motherland again.

As Kida describes it: "Everything was burnt to a crisp. Our home was burned. We had nothing. And so, we came to America."

While Switzerland gave the family safety, stability, home and comfort after their traumatic escape from Kosovo, Kida's parents said they believed that their children would have more opportunities to flourish in America. Kida's uncle lives in America and offered to bring the family over to help them get set up in the states. In 2003, they were all granted their permit of residency, and Kida began to pick up the pieces of her young, yet war-torn life at the ripe age of 12.

Now, nearly 20 years later, Kida is educated, hard-working, fun-loving and family-oriented, with a journey to inspire the people around her with her story and teach them that they have the strength, resources, support and power to do whatever they set their minds to.

For any inquiries about Arta Kida, she can be reached at arta_kida@hotmail.com.

Learning At College Experience Program Calls for Student Involvement

By Cybele A. Tamulonis
College Hill Writer



Every Wednesday at 4:15 p.m., on the second floor of the D Building at Sussex County Community College in Newton, something inspirational is happening that no other college in New Jersey can claim—adults from the special needs community are taking continuing education courses.

The Learning at College Experience (LACE) program was founded in 2008 by Program Coordinator Patti Nugent with the specific goal of assisting developmentally disabled adults in an educational and social setting.

Nugent, a recently retired special education teacher for Kittatinny Regional High School in Newton, was inspired by her students who were aging out of the public-school setting at 21 years old with no resources to continue their education.

"I had been teaching the Life Skills Program at Kittatinny for several years and saw my students still had a desire to learn as they were aging out," says Nugent. "I knew they would not have the same opportunity once they left the public school system."

Nugent approached SCCC in 2008 with the idea of a continuing education program and after being given the go ahead by the administration, the original pilot program ran for five weeks with eight students and a few psychology major volunteers.

Today, the program has continued every semester facilitating up to 60 students in eight sections.

Students range in ages 18 to 65 and follow a rotation schedule so they can participate in a class (geared to each group level) from each instructor. Academic classes include: Language arts literacy, math, social studies, independent living, science, health, computer and job skills. Infused within these classes are social and communication skills.

The students who attend LACE come from a variety of backgrounds. Some work or volunteer in their communities or may not be involved with anything outside of their home, making the program vital to their social and educational goal success. Students who need a one-on-one aide or have medical issues must provide their own assistant to accompany them to class.

"We've also had some of the public high schools use us as a transition program for their older students," says Nugent. "LACE is a true continuing education course; no other college in New Jersey offers a program like this."

In addition to academics, students enjoy extra-curricular activities such as class parties (complete with DJ), bowling at Sparta Lanes, dinners out, guest speakers and the now famous pumpkin float on Horton Pond.

Will, a LACE program student attending virtually, says he loves the program because he gets to be with his friends and likes learning new things, especially science or anything with music.

His mother Maggie says, "My perspective is that LACE is an important program because it's held on a college campus which promotes inclusion with typical peers. Specifically, to Will, it offers him weekly interactions with friends and staff that he really looks forward to."





New NPP Grant Lands SCCC's Visual and Performing Arts on the Map

By Hailey Read
College Hill Writer

This year, the town of Newton has been given a rare grant through the Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) to build value back into its neighborhoods that need revitalization, and the Sussex County Community College Visual and Performing Arts departments jumped at the idea.

The NPP is a project that will allocate funds over the course of five years, making this year the first. The town and the college have been attracted to the idea of SCCC branching out and sharing their students' talents more locally. This is reflected in the Visual and Performing Arts department's four main goals, two of which are to: Establish SCCC as a Regional Art Destination and Increase Awareness of SCCC Arts Programs.

"Part of our mission at SCCC in the Visual and Performing Arts is to establish SCCC as a regional arts destination, which requires us to reach out in the region," says Daniel Cosentino, SCCC's coordinator for the Visual and Performing Arts. "We envision to extend our presence off campus so, to create a connection [with the public], we have embarked on a visual identity system for the Visual and Performing Arts that the public can [recognize] as coming from our leadership."

To achieve these goals, students and faculty immediately began brainstorming artistic ideas.

Over the course of the semester, students have been working on a plethora of ideas to give back to the community while also satisfying the needs outlined by the NPP. Some of these ideas include: Art students designing murals and exhibitions for unused storefronts; implementing seasonal foliage through SCCC's horticulture program; and planning live music and performing arts events in the town's public spaces.

Cosentino says that the college's art and gallery committees have "met and established a mission and vision for [these] galleries." The horticulture program has confirmed its projects to be implemented into Newton this spring semester, with the other aspects of student involvement beginning in the fall semester.

Additionally, the Visual and Performing Arts departments are presenting "Silent Sky," which is the first production held in SCCC's facilities since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was scheduled to run May 5, 6, and 7 at 7:30 p.m. in the Student Center's Theater.

"Regarding the production itself, there was a great opportunity for collaboration to provide SCCC students with hands-on experience to build their portfolios and even strengthen their resumes," explains Allison Ognibene, SCCC Theater director and professor. "For example, Professor Christiana Davies' Graphic Design class is creating the poster for the show. Professor Daniel Costentino's Photography II class will be taking photos of our actors and the production. My History of Theater II are creating a dramaturgy booklet for the show as their final project.

"I also reached out to Professor Schoch who teaches astronomy, and his class may also be volunteering information about stars mentioned in the play," added Ognibene.

The collaborative effort made by professors and staff for art students to have more involvement with each other and with the town of Newton has made for a richer experience at SCCC, as shown through these efforts.

For more information on the NPP, contact dcosentino@sussex.edu. For more information on the "Silent Sky" production, contact aognibene@sussex.edu.



SCCC Recognizes Student Success

By Daniel Torres
College Hill Writer

At Sussex County Community College in Newton, all students have the opportunity to achieve their educational goals and earn recognition for their hard work, preparation, and execution of school work presentations and studies.

Like the many students across the nation who strive to become the best version of themselves. SCCC students may be rewarded with educational achievements such as making the Deans' List, Educational Opportunity Funds programs and scholarships.

Teachers, faculty and staff members of SCCC were all helpful and supportive of their students, making sure they stay on top of their work. If a student seems like he or she is falling behind, then whoever is orchestrating the classroom can give opportunities for that student to catch up and get back on track.

These teachers are prime examples of never giving up on their students and this gives individuals tremendous confidence to get their work done. Having a true support system is what gives students the motivation to actually become a successful student.

Ann Bruno, coordinator of the Educational Opportunity Fund program and Jamie Borger, the director of Advising and Student Success, provided some insight on student success at SCCC.

They were asked three questions: Why student success is important to a students' future; if a student needs educational accolades to become a successful student; and if there are any specific instructions that need to be followed to become a successful student.

When asked about why is student success important for a students' future, Bruno responded by saying, "First it must be recognized that differences exist in the definition and expectations of student success. Students may describe it as reaching a desired goal while the institution may see it as student involvement, achieving a certain GPA and graduating."

Bruno stressed that anyone has potential to be successful.

"But I believe everybody can agree that student success is important for productive lives," said Bruno. "If a student is successful at their institution of higher learning they are on a path to a bright future."

Borger was asked if earning educational accolades is needed to become a successful student and her answer should motivate many students.

"Accolades in my opinion is a loaded word," said Borger. "If we are talking about receiving an award of some merit towards a special honor, no educational accolades are not needed. If we are looking on the basis of being educational proficient and continuously moving up in levels of education (like moving from 4th to 5th grade) then yes, educational accolades are incredibly important.

"Research can show that people who master the basics of reading, writing and mathematics are more likely to develop critical thinking skills which will in turn allow them to be more confident in opportunities they may come across," she added.

The final question asked was if there were any specific instructions to follow to become a successful student.

Borger said "Specific instructions are not necessary. Every student has a different version of what success means to them. Being that I was officially the first Student Success coach here at SCCC, I came up with my own properties of what success can look like. Every student should have a basic foundation in these three principles for their academics: Purpose, Proactive and Positive Attitude."

Bruno's response was: "While educational accolades are important, it is not the only way to measure success. In many cases I have seen the average student leave here and do amazing things. Their struggles helped them learn about themselves, solve problems, ask for help and build relationships, which proved critical when pursuing a career."



CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2022!





Radio Station is Cruzin' Right Along at Sussex

By Oliver Lanyi
College Hill Writer

For those who have never heard about the Sussex County Community College's radio station, it is based on the second floor of the E-building in room E207 and has been providing original programming to the community since 2006. If you want to hear some great music produced entirely by college students and a volunteer staff, tune into WRSK 97.5 on that FM radio dial! It also streams online through sussex.edu/wrsk.

Tony DeNicola, the program director and engineer, has been teaching at the college for four years and has over 40 years of professional experience.

"I wouldn't say I'm a teacher as much as a radio coach," said DeNicola. "When the semester starts I always make it clear to my students that this is going to be a fun class. We are going to learn how to be broadcasters and have a good time doing it."

With a background in electrical engineering and passion for broadcasting, DeNicola found perfect harmony in his career. After earning an associate's degree in electrical engineering, he attended broadcast school with the intention of going into the business. Eventually, DeNicola blended both career interests.

"Initially I didn't go into radio broadcasting full-time because it didn't pay enough," said DeNicola. "It was a part-time job for me while I worked as an electronic technician. That was until I became a radio engineer, working full-time for a New York radio station."

Iraq Veteran Provides Help for Fellows at SCCC

By Oliver Lanyi
College Hill Writer

He dropped out of high school, wandered around a bit, saw a cool infantry man recruitment video, served in Iraq, sold supplements, worked as a personal trainer and now he's helping veterans in Sussex County Community College's Veterans Office in Newton. Jay Christy's story is interesting, just like his job of veterans office coordinator.

A look at his past

Christy had some process to getting to where he is today. He was born in Georgia, but grew up in Missouri, where he moved with his mother.

"When I was 16, I didn't have any structure or path," said Christy. "I left my mother's house and just wandered around. I was enjoying the freedom, but then I eventually got back. When I was 18, I joined the army, as I didn't know anything."

He explains how he got into the army

"I saw an army commercial and thought that my dad was in the army, so I've decided I want to do it," he said. "Then I saw a really cool infantryman video with soldiers wearing full camo, holding guns. It persuaded me! But before joining, I had to get my GED first as I dropped out of high school."

After 13 years, when Christy got back from the army, he decided to get an education. He got his associate's in history, bachelor's in English and is currently getting his master's degree in English and communications with an emphasis on creative and professional writing. He's working on it right now, while being a veterans office coordinator.

How did Christy end up at the SCCC Veterans Office?

"Dumb luck," he said. "It was a series of incidents. I found myself in Iraq. Then I've heard about SCCC's veterans program and I knew it's something I want to be part of. Just a series of random coincidences. It all happened fast, as I was supposed to go to Afghanistan as a security contractor. I was two weeks from leaving and then my predecessor here has asked me if I would be interested in this job. I said no, as I wanted to go to Afghanistan, but then my wife, who is more pragmatic, has helped me to change my mind."

The Veterans Office plays an important role by providing educational benefits and the process of transition to regular life. Fighting the evil in Iraq, carrying a machine gun and doing daily routines in the military is something diametrically different than a daily life most are used to. Having gone through this process, Christy is a perfect fit to guide others to adjust to normalcy.

"My primary focus as a veteran office coordinator is to find resources that any veteran needs in the personal transition from soldier to student, soldier to civilian, soldier to veteran," explained Christy. "That's what our program Change of Mission is here for."

"Through the VA, veterans can get tuition assistance, basic allowance for housing, monthly housing allowance," said Christy. "For example, veterans who are entitled to post 9/11 GI Bill benefits can get \$2,800 dollars for BAH and then get their tuition and fees paid for and a book stipend roughly worth of \$1,000 dollars. They are getting all these benefits for 36 months, so they are basically getting free college for three years. My job is to get this process rolling and show them the steps."

Christy described his process working with veterans who come into his office.

"When somebody comes in my office, first thing we try to do is to find an ultimate goal," he said "I walk the veterans through a whole process how the college works and try to explain them everything. I'm here to serve as a general guide for the total college experience."

The Veterans office at SCCC is a dynamic association.

Stagnation with adjusting to normal life after military may lead to suicides, alcohol and dependency or other problems. Christy advised on what can help to avoid these issues.

People Behind The Scenes

With DeNicola as the station's program director and chief engineer, he works with students on creating content and producing their own shows. The station is also managed by Vincent Vitale, SCCC's Supervisor of Broadcasting and Communications, and Cory Homer, Vice President of Student Success and Institutional Effectiveness. A few volunteers also assist with station operations, including DeNicola's friend and equally experienced colleague, Dave Marthouse, who does much of the production work, which includes selecting music and finalizing mixes.

"Dave is blind and set the whole automation system remotely!" exclaimed DeNicola. "If something goes wrong, I talk to him. He worked at a radio for his whole life, he knows everything. He and I bought a radio station together in the past and I remember this funny story – I was thinking how I'm going to explain the owner that a blind man wants to buy his radio station? Dave amazed him and they became friends."

Why Should Listeners Tune In?

The call letters of SCCC's radio station are WRSK-LP and its slogan is Cruzin' Oldies 97.5. It is a low power community radio, with a radius of 15 miles of terrestrial signal and broadcasts worldwide on the internet.

The radio station has a disc-jockey, which DeNicola thinks will be a rarity soon.

"People should tune us for personality," explained DeNicola. "They don't tune in just for music. The younger generation is not used to listening to a disc-jockey, but the older one loves it; they grew up listening to deejays, who [is] basically their friend!"

Cruzin' Oldies offers uplifting music, around the clock with variety of shows.

"Our music is up-tempo," explains DeNicola. "I don't want too many down songs, I don't want depressing songs, I want our listeners to hear happy songs. I want our listeners to be cruisin'. One of Smokey Robinson's songs is called 'Cruisin'.' It was stuck in my head and I'm telling myself that it's a good slogan."

"Our radio runs on 24-hour operation; the listeners have various shows— on Sunday we have a breakaway from the oldies and play country music, also we do Polka Show on Sunday morning, which is very popular."



The Radio plays a role in SCCC's Scholarship Foundation

All the money the radio station gets from its sponsors goes to the SCCC's Scholarship Foundation to support student scholarships.

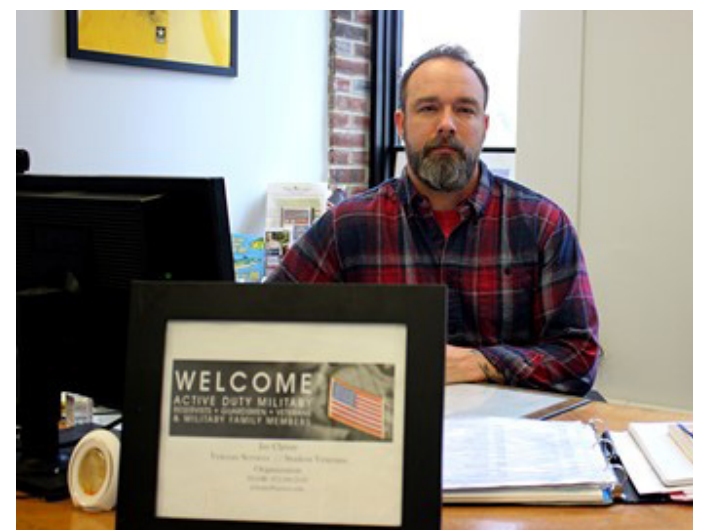
"On an average year, the radio brings in around \$50,000 from underwriters," said DeNicola. "We have a non-commercial license, as we are non-profit station, but we accept donations. We have around 13 local underwriters— car dealerships, the Andover Diner, a gutter cleaning company, a hunting and fishing store, and several others. We appreciate our sponsors generous support."

The Future of Radio

In the world of internet full of streaming platforms, people are slowly forgetting about radio stations and joy it can bring. A happy playlist, funny disc-jockey and amusing shows are not due for the scrap-heap.

"The internet has changed everything," concluded DeNicola. "The younger generation nowadays doesn't even know what the radio is! Back in the day, the radio was an outlet for the outside world, to hear what the deejays had to say. Kids turn to social media and podcasting now, but radio still has a place—and always will so long as I'm around!"

If interested in finding out more about the college radio station, email wrsk@sussex.edu.



"What we got here is an active veteran community, everyone's engaging, everyone's friendly and helpful," Christy said. "Veteran's clubs are not always as inclusive as this one is."

"We try to involve veterans physically into various activities," he said. "Even though you are not in the military anymore doesn't mean you should be eating pizza and drinking Jack Daniel's with a straw every night. Art, fitness and general self awareness training is what we offer in our program."

Christy shared some stories from his army days

His first mission was a real deal. In 2003, just at the age of 20, Christy participated on the invasion of Iraq under Saddam Hussein regime as a teamleader of his unit.

"When we got to Iraq, we were there for three days, staying in this old building at the edge of the city, before we made our presence very obvious," he explained "For our first couple of months, we didn't have any base where we could return, we were constantly on the move. This was my first real mission. I got a M240 Bravo machine gun, we were told to guard our positions and all of a sudden we saw a car full of bad guys coming at us real quick! I was thinking – what are we doing? We got an order to fire and we opened up. We were doing what we were trained and this was my first real action in Iraq. During that year, I killed around 30-40 people. And me? I didn't get shot once!"

Christy was living a life like a war movie

"Some of these stories are insane," he said. "I remember us getting to a building with an order to clear it. We were supposed to get our machine guns at the top of the roof to provide support for our units. When we got to this building, we had a gunfight with our enemies. I remember some of these gunfights would last for three hours."

Christy continued: "A funny story is from Italy, where I saw soldiers sitting in their barrack rooms on Friday or Saturday night playing video games. I was thinking about going to Rome, maybe fly to Spain, take a train to Germany, but these guys were playing video games with each other!"

This was a story of Christy, who managed to live many lives before turning 40. From a high school dropout to honored war veteran, from wandering around the United States, through Iraq all the way to SCCC's Veterans Office.

(cont'd from front page) At the Sussex County Human Services Advisory Council meeting on Feb. 23, Linda Moran, case manager for The Center for Prevention and Counseling reported that, "Individual and group counseling is still offered via tele-health and will continue to be as it makes services more available to those in need and allows for those with transportation, childcare or scheduling issues to attend."

The push to keep mental health services available via tele-health will continue to be important in ensuring the accessibility of mental health.

"We will continue to see the ripple effect of COVID-19 for quite some time," says Hoekstra. "One positive that came out of this mental health crisis is the increased access to free or low-cost care. For example, NJ Hope and Healing has been offering free emotion support from trained professionals."

NJ Hope and Healing also holds free support groups through zoom; to access a list of those services, go to www.mhanj.org/njhope/.

In addition to accessibility, it is imperative that the stigma of seeking services fades away.

"It is my hope that the rise in mental health needs will open the door for an honest and open conversation about mental health," says Hoekstra. "Here at SCCC, I hope that we can continue to implement workshops and have conversations that promote mental well-being because there is no health without mental health."

Below are some tips she shares to support one's mental health or that of a friend or loved one:

1. **Normalize Mental Health!** People talk about their physical health all the time, but not when it comes to mental health. Start to normalize the idea of needing a "checkup" with a therapist to help promote and maintain one's mental health.
2. **Coping Skills:** What are the things in one's life that help release stress? Some options include walking, hiking, cooking, gardening, talking to friends, listening to music and journaling.
3. **Go Back to the Basics:** Sleep, nutrition and exercise. In times of stress, one can often forget to take care of one's most basic needs. Do not discredit the value of a good night's sleep.
4. **Connect with others:** Nurture the important relationships in one's life. Talking to a trusted person can help to process emotions- this can be with a family member, friend or a therapist!
5. **Ask for Help:** Sometimes people do all that they can to live a healthy lifestyle, but they need help. Remember, it is okay to enlist in the help of a trained professional that can guide one to a healthier mindset.

The Life of a Student Ambassador

Opinion Piece

By Paige McCarrick
College Hill Writer

Each year as more students enter community colleges, there is the stigma that the campus life is dull compared to a four-year university. But as a student that is almost done with her two years at Sussex County Community College (SCCC) in Newton, my experience within campus life has exceeded my expectations.

Being involved on campus has allowed for many opportunities and experiences to be explored while having the honor to be a student ambassador on campus.



As a student that was in my final year of high school when the pandemic arrived, my plan for college and starting a new journey changed within a matter of a few months. I did not anticipate attending community college, but as COVID-19 impacted the world in 2020, all of my plans for college began to dwindle. When I began my first year of college education at SCCC with a remote learning experience, the idea of being involved on campus was almost nonexistent.

As the community college and state guidelines allowed students to have more interaction on campuses during my second semester, there began to be more interaction of faculty reaching out regarding events on campus. While I began to receive emails from SCCC Campus Life Advisor, Amy Rude, I quickly got excited for the fall 2021 semester. I was thrilled with the idea of exploring campus life as I effortlessly became a student ambassador due to the lack of interested students because of the pandemic.

When receiving the guidelines and information about being a student ambassador, there were two benefits that intrigued me. Looking over the application, the first incentive was to get discounted tuition; and the second was to make new friends and enjoy myself at events. But as I went to the first meeting in the summer of 2021, I immediately knew the program had so much more to offer. I quickly realized that I was part of a program that would change my life and college experience.

I realized that being a student ambassador was more than just about having a good time and participating in campus events. It came with the responsibility of being a leader for the student body and representing the community college. I was one of the many voices for the student body as well as a friendly face to be known at SCCC. My whole experience of what I thought, along with many other students, about attending a community college changed the more I engaged in the

program. Throughout my time within campus life, I have made life-long friends, experienced events that were fun as well as educational, and have had the opportunity to be known as a student that succeeds in her academics as well as being a role model throughout the college.

Now in my last semester at SCCC, my experience as a co-captain in the Student Ambassador Program has been uplifting in many different ways. I have enjoyed every event as well as all of my peers that I befriended who joined throughout the two semesters. Meeting new people and representing the college in a fun environment has allowed me to blossom more as a student and learn more about myself as well as others. The program has allowed me to gain wisdom and knowledge as I have further developed into a young adult.

"By getting involved on campus you will connect with other people and have a support system, it's more fun to be involved," said Rude.

She shed light on her personal experience as an advisor within the Student Ambassador Program and campus life.

"I want to be a person that I wanted when I was their [the students] age," said Rude.

She shared that students need guidance when transitioning into a college environment as well as the real world. Rude loves watching students that she connects with grow and become empowered within their time at the community college.

Antonio Velez, captain of the Student Ambassador Program, shared his thoughts about being a student ambassador as a non-traditional student. Velez continued, "Stay involved, enjoy your time [at the college], make new friends, definitely make the best of it, and show what you're worth!"

A first year Student Ambassador, Sunny Tola, shared her experience: "I have enjoyed every second in campus life! I love being able to make a difference as a student for the student body as a whole."

As students join community colleges, they should take advantage of all the experiences that they can be involved in on campus. Within a community college it can be difficult for students to engage, but the Student Ambassador Program is a way that not only enhances the experience for a student, but also the way they grow and learn within a community college as it prepares students for their next adventure.

Being a student ambassador for a year has been a life changing experience. The fun and inviting community has allowed me to know that I will always have people to count on. As I embark on a new journey, this experience will always be remembered and appreciated as I have grown and learned valuable lessons through my peers as well as from Rude.

More information about the Student Ambassador Program and applications can be located at <https://sussex.edu/campus-life> or students can visit the campus life office located in the D-Building. Good luck to all future student ambassadors!



SUSSEX SKYLANDERS

SPORTS NEWS



SCCC Soccer Makes History

By Oliver Lanyi
College Hill Writer

Sussex County Community College soccer teams had an outstanding season, teamwise and individually this past school year. Both women and men teams gained remarkable victories and the women's squad managed to rewrite historical records!

Also, the staff made some changes in its management.

Men's team did not disappoint

Success was guided by experienced professionals, who live and breathe for Sussex.

"We are super, super fortunate for the group of men and women we had this year," said already Former Coach Frank Vernacchio. "It was all hard work, how we prepared in the spring, throughout the summer and then fall was just tremendous."

Vernacchio - who had been coaching the men's soccer team at SCCC for 11 years and then became the head coach for the women's soccer team- said: "On men side, we did an excellent job with bringing in the right players. Both groups did an extraordinary job, which came thanks to their mentality. We had a nice combination of freshmen and sophomores that allowed us to have success."

The men's team had an incredible regular season, as they didn't lose a single game and managed to score 27 goals in 11 matches, including the Region final against Ocean County College (3:0). Thanks to this win the SCCC team had advanced to the NJCAA National Championship Tournament, where they faced Herkimer College and Genesee Community College. The Skylanders didn't make it to the next round, but certainly did not disappoint.

The match against Herkimer was even from the beginning and it had to wait for a penalty shootout to find a winner.

"The game went to penalties, and we lost; it was a tough game to be in," said Vernacchio. "The boys did extremely well."

Due this loss, the SCCC team lost a chance to advance to the next round. Therefore, in the last game of the season against Genesee Community College coaches used players who didn't get a lot of minutes throughout the season but earned their spot in the starting lineup against GCC for their hard and exemplary work.

"Against GSC, we gave playing time to players who really earned it and to see them play on the big stage was great to see," said Vernacchio. "We lost 2:1. GSC moved the ball well, played very quick and fast and they can punish your mistakes. Unfortunately, we made some in the first half and they hurt us, but in the second



half we came out and competed pretty well. I really felt there were some players who deserved to showcase themselves more and the game against GMC was a chance for them to do that. And they did not disappoint. I was proud of our freshmen who stepped up there and sophomore who was rehabilitating throughout the year and finally was able to finish the season at high note."

Women went above expectations

Who would have said that at the beginning of the season when they lost their first game against Genesee County Community College 4:2?

This loss did not scare the team and SCCC women earned their spot in the Region final thanks to consistent performances and great team spirit. Amazing productivity was highlighted in the game against Mercer County Community College, when the Skylanders won 8:3.

Next rival was Howard Community College. A very important NJCAA Division II East District Championship was a great success, with SCCC winning 4:2 and advancing to prestigious NJCAA Division II National Tournament in Wichita, KAN. Sussex faced Waubensee Community College and Phoenix College in its group.

How does the Assistant Coach Mike Rath evaluate the results in the group?

"From each group, just one team gets a spot in another round, and unfortunately we went out on goal difference, as Phoenix had the best goal difference out of the three teams, so they advanced to semifinal," says Rath. "We did very well in the game against Waubensee, we won 3:0 and were clearly the better team and then in the second game, we ran out of steam and Phoenix took us a little bit by surprise."

The game against Waubensee was remarkable, as history was written. "For the women's team to win the first game at the National tournament - that's something nobody ever did in the SCCC history," said Vernacchio.

Standards are set very high and both coaches know what the team is capable of. After years of trying, coaches are happy the curse was broken.

"It took a lot to get into Nationals tournament," said Vernacchio. "We were at the Regional final each year. And we kept losing, it was heartbreaking. And we always felt if we got over that hump, we would set the new standard. That's we want to instill to our players, that it's the part of the culture and responsibility they carry."

SCCC spirit and talent was recognized

"We didn't win the National Tournament, but we got the Sportsmanship award," said Vernacchio.

"When people talk and ask about our soccer team, it's always with high respect and regard and that's the bigger picture we try to do - quality program on and off the field."

Student Joao Campos was named to the NJCAA DIVISION III Men's Soccer 2nd Team All American. Campos was an influential player for Sussex this season, scoring 4 goals and providing 8 assists, leading the team in points with 16. Joao is the 9th All American in the program's history with the first being named in 1994.

Individual recognition has also been given to Santiago Vasquez and Carina Gasparini, who were named to the 2021-22 NJCAA National Tournament All Tournament Teams. Vasquez starred in the quarter final loss to Genesee County College, which was played in Herkimer, N.Y., where the National tournament took place. Sussex went out on penalty kicks in the NJCAA DIVISION III National Tournament. Vasquez finished the season as the joint top scorer for Sussex along with Campos. Gasparini was named to the NJCAA Division II All-Tournament Team after Sussex was eliminated in pool play on goal difference after a 1-1 record in the group stage. Gasparini finished the season with 10 goals and 13 assists, breaking the college record for career assists (34) in the process. The bar is high now and there's always more to achieve for both teams. With ambitious staff and hungry players, everything is possible.

SCCC is looking for a coach.

Vernacchio has decided to pursue a career change and his former assistant, Rath, took over as a women's team head coach. Men's team is actively looking for a new one. Rath was offered an opportunity to take over men's team as well, his reason not to do so is understandable: "It would just be too much," said Rath.

Women's Basketball Rises to the Challenge

By Cybele A. Tamulonis
College Hill Writer

Sussex County Community College Women's Basketball Team, led by Head Coach Kaitlyn Blair and Assistant Coach Brittney Bartell ended the 2021-2022 season with 7 wins and 13 losses, not bad considering conflicts with the pandemic.

COVID-19 continued to be a challenge, taking out one of SCCC's best defenders and two additional players over break. With 20 games under its belt, the team averaged 44.9 points per game.

"I truly never had a team that was 100% healthy," says Bartell. "I can't imagine the outcome if we did see a fully healthy team."

The constant fluctuation in health was strain on the season, but that did not let the players waiver from their positive view and working together. When one player struggled, the rest of the team pushed through to help so they could finish strong.

"I am proud of all their wins, but I am most proud of how the team came together and stayed together," says Bartell. "Win or lose we left as a family and kept that going the entire season. A true wolf pack."

And win or lose, the women's team made it clear that despite setbacks, they were players to be reckoned with, gaining a reputation as a fighting team never to be counted out. This dedication worked particularly well for players Ellen Villapando and Madison Mailloux, who were both named to the GSAC 2nd team.

For SCCC Women's Basketball, coaches make it clear that the classroom comes first. Players are expected to attend one study hall a week as well as put in time for rigorous training, including lifting three times a week.

But being a female athlete in a male dominated sport does have its challenges.

"We saw in the National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament last year the difference players received in just the meals, the training equipment and the gear packages," says Bartell. "Females are out there putting the same or more work in and overlooked constantly. Challenges for women basketball players today start with just playing. We see so many female athletes give up playing by the time they get to college."

Bartell remains hopeful that next season's team will share the same passion as this year's team did and potential players are welcome to observe games and join practices to bond with the team.

"I look forward to having our team go even further next season and reach playoffs," she says. "Being competitive and competing in the biggest games. I hope to get a team that truly cares about one another the way this previous team did."



"Coming together is the beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is SUCCESS."

By Hailey Read
College Hill Writer



Despite the number of losing games as of press time, the Sussex County Community College's softball team has grown tremendously, and for the record, that counts as a huge win!

Its wins versus losses were 3 to 18 as of the third week in April, with more games set to be played.

Overall this season, the softball team has won one game against Rowan College of South Jersey by 10-9 and two games against Ocean County College with large margins of 25-0 and 12-1. One homerun was struck with a batting average of .240, or 24 percent.

Some important highlights are that the team placed 2 to 4 in the region which further opened the door on the opportunity to make it to the regional playoffs. The team has shared that one of its goals this season was to play as competitively as possible and push themselves to achieve more wins, both on the field and in their personal lives.

"The most successful teams do not just win one year and then crash the next; success takes sacrifice, effort, defining value and trust," says Jamie Borger, the head coach of SCCC's softball team. "We are building this program up to compete in a higher division and also be successful as athletes and people."

The team also strengthened its friendships with each other this season by going on an exclusive trip to Myrtle Beach, S.C., over the semester for spring training. The week-long trip gave the players ample time to get to know one another and form strong friendships with one another after practice. This allowed the players to value the strength of their team on a personal level. This helped them achieve their goal of being not only successful athletes, but successful individuals as well.

"This hasn't been a reality for this program in over 10 years," says Borger regarding its Myrtle Beach trip. The team hopes to continue this revisited tradition in the following season.

The team has been playing against strong opponents in the region and holding its place amongst the competition. The players have said that competing against tough, strategic, and strong teams helps to teach them how to further correct their shortcomings.

Borger explains: "We've also had the opportunity to play some of the best teams in the nation for our level. Surrounding ourselves with top competition will only help us in the long run."

To become a member of the SCCC's softball team, SCCC requires students to have a full-time status and an eagerness to give the team their all. With five of the teammates graduating in the spring 2022 semester, the coaches are looking for new recruitments for a bigger roster in the fall.

For additional information, contact Borger at jbberger@sussex.edu

Skylander Baseball Team Swings Back Into Action

By Paige McCarrick
College Hill Writer

The 2022 Skylanders Baseball team at Sussex County Community College finally returned to the pitch in a lively spring season as the team faced many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Head Coach Ramadan Mehmedi mentioned that this 2022 season "has been long awaited since our past two seasons were affected by COVID, so [we are] just happy things are back to normal."

With a total of 25 games played throughout the season, the team stuck together and worked towards a goal of going to the Region Tournament. Even though it did not qualify for the Region Tournament, the team strived towards beating its opponents through its hustle.

Throughout the season, the team did face some challenges that impacted its ability when planning to be on the field. Mehmedi shared that the main struggle this season was the weather as it impacted the team more than planned.

"The challenges have been tough via the weather," said Mehmedi. "This year the weather has played havoc on our schedule more so than the past and it is hard to get a consistent feel." Even though the weather had a huge impact on the team's home fields, the weather was not stopping it from going on its annual spring break trip to Myrtle Beach, S.C. This season was the first time that the team went on the trip since the pandemic. The players had the opportunity to compete in ten games during their time at Myrtle Beach.

Another event that the team played in on the field this season was the Military Appreciation Game. The game took place on April 27 at Skylands Stadium in Frankford. The night consisted of lineup callouts, the first pitch thrown by a veteran, prizes given out during the game and interviews with veterans that shared their stories. As the event was a huge success, Mehmedi shed some light on the reasoning behind the annual event and how important it is to the team and himself.

"The Military Appreciation Night Game is a big deal for this program and myself," said Mehmedi. "We have done this almost every year to help raise funds for the Student Veteran Fund here on campus. We pride ourselves on being a military friendly campus and I believe this is the best way to help veteran students here on campus with a great eventful night."

At the Military Appreciation Game, Dom Zinna, sophomore at SCCC and player #2 on the field, gave his thoughts on this spring season as well as what the team's goals were towards the end of the season.



"Our season is going pretty good, we didn't make the playoffs, but we're looking to have a good game today and finish strong and play baseball as long as possible, that's the goal," said Zinna.

The Military Appreciation Game was a cold night, but allowed for the players to be part of an amazing experience as it was a great way of wrapping up the season.

As the players were part of many great experiences this season, they had some rough times throughout the season as well. The team had many wins and losses this season, but the players had a great support system. As Mehmedi is a huge part of the team, he shared some advice to the returning and new players that will be involved next season.

"Cherish the time we have on the field and always give everything you get when opportunity is presented because you never know when the games will end," said Mehmedi.

Mehmedi also shared some insight into the team and how it is a great asset to the community college, on and off the field, as well as his personal experience with the players and the commitment they have towards the sport.

"I appreciate my players for the consistent work that they put in from August til the end of May," said Mehmedi. "Unlike most sports on campus we play all year round and give them workouts to do in the wintertime to get ready for spring which starts in January. With long travel days, games and practices on top of that with their academics, they truly deserve that respect of being a student-athlete!"

As there are many aspects to look forward to next season, the team had one goal that Mehmedi has made part of each season every year which will include building off of the season that just ended.

As the 2022 baseball season just came to a close for the players, stay updated with the team's stats and game schedules for next season at <https://sussexskylanders.com/sports/bsb/index>.

Congratulations to the players on their hard work this spring season and good luck to the team next year!



SCCC Comes to Life with Activities Galore for Students

By Paige McCarrick
College Hill Writer



Sussex County Community College (SCCC), in Newton had a lot of events happening on campus for the 2022 spring semester. As community colleges can be difficult for engagement amongst students, campus life at SCCC began to expand by offering more events as participation grew each week.

SCCC has a campus life that allows for all students to join as well as participate. The Student Ambassadors Program and the Student Government Association (SGA) hosts many events throughout fall and spring semesters. Every week there are new events for students to attend throughout the campus. The campus life crew is in the D-Building and the door is always open for students and faculty.

Each semester campus life brings free enjoyment for students on campus during school hours, between classes, as well as after school hours for some relaxation. Some events throughout the fall semester have included a Welcome Week BBQ, Club Rush, Skylander Football Games, the Skylander Trunk-or-Treat, as well as the annual Turkey Bowl: Flag Football Tournament. Spring semester events have included Open Mic Night, the annual Transfer Fair, Coffee Talks, as well as a trip to New York city to see live Broadway Shows.

“My favorite events have included Open Mic Nights, Trunk-Or-Treat and Club Rush because I was able to find a way to get all my friends involved too!” said Veronica Conklin, Student Government president.

Kylie Knipp, a sophomore at the community college, shared her experience with the recent 2022 Transfer Fair that was held in February: “It had a lot of good information, [the Transfer Fair] was located in a good spot that couldn’t be avoided!”

There is always something for every student to be involved in on campus during each semester. Small events such as Pluck-a-Duck, Giant Connect Four and Root Beer Float Day are located at information tables in D-Building as well as Connor Green during warmer months. Students are able to win multiple different prizes, such as school supplies as well as Skylander apparel and accessories.

Although there are many prizes for students to win at different events, Knipp shared her thoughts on what else she would like to see within different campus life experiences.

“There’s no incentives’ for students to go to the events,” said Knipp. There could be more [events] targeting certain majors.”

Even though campus life is still recovering from the pandemic, being involved on campus at a community college allows for students to be present within the college. Students make connections that are created amongst their peers as well as with faculty members.

“I think people should get involved because there is no reason not to,” said Conklin. “It opens up a lot of opportunities for you, whether personally or professionally, as well as helps you develop as a student.”

Amy Rude, campus life advisor, shared her thoughts about the community college environment and how students should interact while on campus.

“This is not high school part two, this is college part one, it should reflect a similar experience of a four-year college,” said Rude.

Rude continued as she explained what benefits students receive from being involved on campus. She stated that students experience a new environment, new people, and become more connected to the college during their time here.

“It’s important [campus life] because you only get out of every situation what you put into it,” said Rude.

As the fall semester of 2022 is approaching quickly, Rude shared some of the events students can look forward to: The Welcome Bash & Picnic, the Skylander Cup, Homecoming Weekend and Monte Carlo Night. More information about the events will be posted on the Campus Life Canvas page in the fall semester.

For more information about events or joining the campus life crew, or other clubs such as the Film and Broadcasting Club, the Gaming Club, and the National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS), check out the flyers that are posted throughout campus on the bulletin boards in each building.

Before taking flight into the real world, post college, Skylander students should try to participate in as much as they can and enjoy their time at SCCC with all that is offered!

There is always something new to get students involved. For more information go to the campus life office located in the D-Building or go to <https://sussex.edu/campus-life>.

SUSSEX COUNTY COMMUNITY COMICS

