

# COMMUNITY

THE MAGAZINE OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Volume 10, Issue 4



## Great Migrations

MCC Traveling Classrooms trace flight of sandhill cranes, trails of pioneers and explore other Midwest marvels



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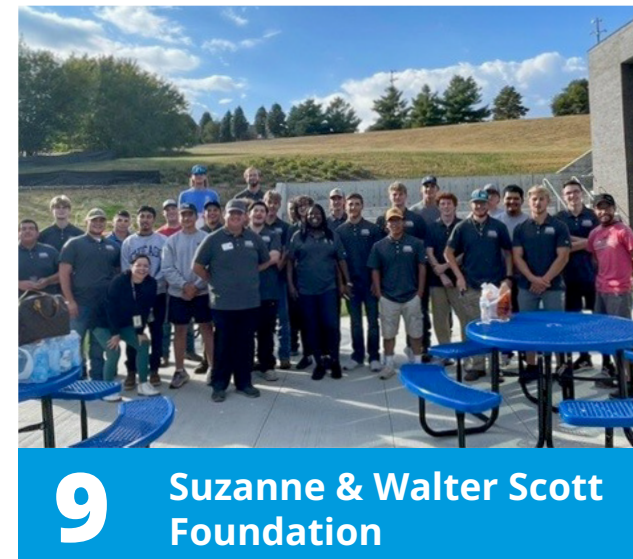
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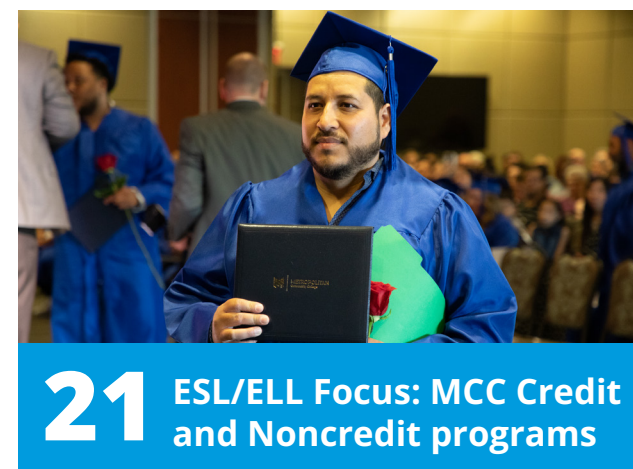
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## A LETTER FROM THE MCC FOUNDATION

Dear friends and supporters,

Summer is coming to a close with autumn weather around the corner. The fall quarter brings the bustle of new students to Metropolitan Community College's campuses. There's nothing quite like the start of a new academic year, and with our 50th anniversary approaching in 2024, we have a great one in store.

In this issue of Community Magazine, we highlight how MCC is for every age and stage of student. You'll read about MCC Traveling Classrooms and their adventure to Kearney to watch the sandhill cranes during their annual migration. You'll learn about the ELL program, provided at no cost to our students. You'll also hear from students and instructors from our English as a Second Language program and how it prepares students for success in the classroom and on the job.

I also hope you enjoy reading about our students' triumphs at both the state and national levels of the SkillsUSA competitions; 35 MCC students traveled to the national conference this year. We're so proud of how they represented MCC in Atlanta.

As the College and the MCC Foundation prepare to celebrate our golden anniversary, we've been looking through hundreds of newspapers, photos and archives to try to encapsulate the last 50 years. There's so much to celebrate.

You've been a part of our history, and we want you to join us for the celebration. Make sure you are in the know by visiting [mccneb.org/StayConnected](https://mccneb.org/StayConnected). We look forward to reconnecting with you throughout the next year. Thank you for being an important part of our community.

Sincerely,

*Amy*

Amy Recker  
Associate vice president for advancement  
Executive director, MCC Foundation

### Volume 10, Issue 4

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# Great Migrations: MCC Traveling Classrooms trace flight of sandhill cranes, trails of pioneers and other Midwest marvels.

The College's immersive learning tours throughout the region are being offered through the fall after a two-year pause.

A group of 36 people arrived in the parking lot at the Metropolitan Community College Sarpy Center last March. The wind was brisk as it often is around St. Patrick's Day – more like winter than spring. The groundhog saw its shadow a few weeks back, but in central Nebraska, where the MCC Traveling Classroom was headed, the last gasps of winter aren't heralded by a burrowing rodent.

In the Central Platte River Valley, the first signals of spring are marked by the presence of the sandhill cranes that ride the thermal winds along the Central Flyway migration corridor. It is the aerial interstate for one of the world's only remaining great animal migrations.

During the pandemic MCC paused its Traveling Classrooms, but the College course calendar is now filled with a full slate of planned excursions spanning the rest of summer and continuing through the fall. The sandhill crane tour was the first of 2023.

Throughout the day, the MCC class witnessed the 3- to 4-foot tall, 10-pound birds gracefully drop down to the cornfields lining both sides of nearly every roadway in the area to fill up on waste corn from last year's harvest. The day's itinerary included a stop at the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center, visits to two museums (the Archway Monument and the Classic Car Collection) and a film screening on Nebraska bird migrations at Fort Kearny State Historical Park.



The daytrip culminated with a dusk viewing of the sandhill cranes at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area as they descended to the safety of the banks and sandbars of the Platte River. The class had two meals before returning via motor coach about 14 hours after setting out.

## Frequent travelers to the area

Beginning near Chapman and ending near Overton, an 80-mile strip of refuge along the Platte has been the annual month-long home of sandhill cranes for millions of years. The Kearney area

has the peak concentration of the mostly gray-feathered birds with signature red markings on their crowns.

Nearly 500,000 sandhill cranes were estimated to be in the area on the day of the tour, as well as about the same number of snow geese. Sandhill cranes add 20% of their body weight during their layover in Nebraska, the only state in which it is illegal to hunt them on their journey north. For this reason, MCC tour guide, Kevin Kowskie, who has been planning and leading MCC Traveling Classroom tours for nearly 20 years, advised attendees not to wear orange or red clothing.

Some of the greatest nature photographers in the world and travelers from continents across the globe flock to Kearney to bear witness to one of the longest-running rhythms in nature. The only other great animal migration remaining in the natural world is the wildebeest migration on the African plains. Loss of habitat has caused other animal migrations to disappear.

Despite being a frigid 15 degrees outside, Kowskie, who leads and plans all MCC Traveling Classroom outings, had a way of making the most of (and planning for) the unpredictable weather in Nebraska during March.

As the 80-foot-long Arrow motor coach, equipped with AV outlets and a bathroom on board; set out on I-80 West with a group of attendees that included families with teenagers, groups of adult friends and retirees, Kowskie spoke into the microphone to provide his first update of the day.

"The good news is that it's three degrees warmer in Kearney than it is here right now," said Kowskie as the bus rolled through the last mile of Sarpy County. "The bad news is it's 10 degrees cooler by the river."

The first of many moments of laughter filled the warm, comfortable cabin.

Kowskie spends countless hours scouting and researching the places he takes people on the tours, from dining to entertainment and his trademark mystery stop on each tour. No tour is exactly the same, he said. His working knowledge of the areas he visits is informed by years of experiences and conversations with locals — search results that won't be found online.

"People have all kinds of different interests, so I try to cover all the topics that could be enjoyable. When I plan out all the tours we offer during the year, I try to make each one distinct," Kowskie said.

As the bus approached the first stop of the day at the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center, Kowskie called in an order of cinnamon rolls he highly recommended at the educational center in Wood River. MCC travelers were greeted by a herd of buffalo grazing on the 10,000-acre "habitat for whooping cranes, sandhill cranes and countless other species sharing fragile river and prairie ecosystems."





One of the displays inside lit up the cranes' migratory path against the backdrop of a map of North America. Incredibly strong flyers with a wingspan that is almost double their height, sandhill cranes can travel up to 200 miles in a day, using updrafts of warm air to gain elevation and glide leisurely across the landscape. Their route resembles an hourglass with its base starting in northern Mexico. It narrows in Nebraska — leading to their highest concentration during any part of their journey north — and then progressively widens, stretching across Canada, covering Alaska and some ranging as far as nesting grounds in eastern Siberia in Russia.

At the Crane Trust, a gallery with awe-inspiring photography and art freezes the cranes in moments of majestic motion against sunset skies, or doing their trademark courtship hop to find their monogamous mate for life on the flyway.

Deemed "Flyover Country" to many humans, Nebraska is a honeymoon destination for sandhill cranes, with the best beaches in the world as far as their needs are concerned.

## Regional education

After spending an hour at Crane Trust, the group headed to downtown Kearney to onboard a "step-on guide," Neva Klemme, from the Kearney Visitors Bureau. Klemme shared information about Kearney's downtown rejuvenation as the bus passed by the recently restored World Theater, as well as the Museum of Nebraska Art, which is housed in a former U.S. Post Office that was built in 1911 and showcases the work of Nebraska artists and art inspired by the state. Normally a stop on the MCC tour, MONA was closed this year while undergoing a \$35 million expansion, restoration and renovation.

In place of MONA, the class visited the Archway Monument, a museum that stretches over I-80 as travelers enter or leave the Kearney area. Most cars zoom underneath without stopping while on the way to different destinations. What they leave in the rearview is a history lesson on "the people who traveled the Great Platte River Road through Nebraska and who helped to build America."

In addition to being on a key route for the bird migrations, the Platte was also important for the movement of people in the 19th century. It was a fixture for miles along the historic Mormon, Oregon, California and Bozeman trails.

The bus provided front-door service to Alley Rose, a restaurant located "on the bricks," the historic downtown district of Kearney. MCC travelers sat down together for a buffet lunch with a salad bar that was included in the cost of the tour.

A group of six sat together — two separate pairs of female friends and a husband and wife. The groups of friends had attended past MCC Traveling Classrooms, while the husband and wife were attending their first trip with the College.

The returners shared stories of other tours they enjoyed: the bridges of Madison County in Winterset, Iowa; the Tulip Festival in Orange City, Iowa; and the Czech Festival in Wilber, Nebraska.



Migration Map

Kowskie said he's been able to get to know several committed MCC travelers in the four-county service area from doing the tours since 2005, like Bob and Joanne Hicks, who said they attend the MCC Traveling Classrooms like it's "an addiction." Since going on their first MCC outing in 2015, they have gone on 29 tours and are signed up for more in the months ahead.

"We really missed them during the pandemic," Joanne Hicks said.

Their favorite are the MCC Mystery Tours. To keep them true to their name, Kowskie provides extremely scant details about the destinations, which is the best part, Bob Hicks said.

"About 40 people get on the bus, you have no idea where you're going or what you're going to do. Nine times out of ten, even when you're minutes away, you still can't figure it out. It's a stitch," he said. "Some people like to stay within their comfort zone, but once you try one of these mystery tours, you get hooked."

**"I think we're extremely lucky. A lot of people never get to see this, and it's only a couple hours away. I think there are a lot of gems like this in our backyard. We just don't realize it."**

It's also a great educational experience, he said.

"The way [Kowskie] structures these things, you're learning something new the whole time about the people, the places and the history. You're tired when you come home, but when it's over, you say, 'Wow, wasn't that something,'" Bob Hicks said.

Joanne Hicks said it's a great way to keep learning.

"We're both over the age of 70. There's nothing that says, 'Oh well, education stops now,'" she said. "Once you go on these trips, you see there's so much out there all around us. We've been to the Black Hills, through Iowa and into Missouri. It's fun learning that gives you the local experience, seeing things you probably wouldn't have gone to on your own because you wouldn't have known about it."

Another frequent MCC Traveling Classroom attendee, Pat Gates, an Omaha transplant from Pittsburgh, said she would put the Midwestern knowledge she's gained from the tours up against any native in a trivia contest.

"When I moved here from Pennsylvania, I didn't know a thing about the Midwest. But now I've seen lavender fields and eaten lavender cookies, learned about the Loess Hills, the Morton salt mines and so many other unique places and events," said Gates, an MCC adjunct instructor and tutor.

Gates, who attends as a solo traveler, said she enjoys being the student on tours, as well as the convenience of not having to plan, drive or worry about parking. It allows her time to just enjoy the ride and meet others, some of whom she has gotten to know from going on previous trips together.

"It's wonderful research, and there's a major convenience factor. We just sit back and listen and enjoy the scenery along the way. I've enjoyed every single one I've gone on, and I will be going on more this year," Gates said.

Kowskie said with the Traveling Classrooms having a two-year break during the pandemic, it's been good for him to be reacquainted with the experiences and seeing others enjoy their time learning about the region.

"My favorite part is seeing people enjoy the experiences and verbalize their excitement to me. That's what makes it all worthwhile for me," Kowskie said.





## A Nebraska marvel

It approached 7:30 p.m. at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area as the bus rolled in and let passengers off in front of the paved, tree-lined trail. The viewing bridge was a 10-minute walk.

The scene on the river resembled paintings by artists like Albert Bierstadt who depicted Nebraska's landscapes during westward expansion in America — an egg-yolk sun beamed against a canvas of orange sky that grew a deeper shade the further the rays dipped on the horizon, casting long shadows from the wooded island its beams passed through in the distance. Hundreds of people gathered on the quarter-mile bridge that spanned the wide, shallow river.

There was a church-like reverence among the observers, whispering to one another and pointing to the sky as ribbons of sandhill cranes began their descent to their marshy beds along the water, safe from predators.

They arrived in flocks of dozens initially, then by hundreds as the minutes passed and the sense of awe among the crowd grew. As cranes parachuted down, their gooselike, rattling bugle calls filled the air. It was a form of air traffic control as the light dimmed on the river valley.

Over the course of an hour or so, the birds that were scattered across the cornfields all day were

nestling in one concentrated area. They'll clamor a cacophonous chorus of thousands upon waking in the morning. And at some undistinguishable moment, the conductor among them will give the instruction, and in one the biggest games of "Follow the Leader" on the planet, they will all rise up to head off to the fields, completely unaware of the sense of wonder they've planted in the people watching them from below.

Perhaps it's their timeless consistency that draws people to see them. In a world that can change overnight, full of jarring interruptions and rapid advancements, the sandhill cranes have continued to visit this same stretch of land, long before indigenous people inhabited it, the pioneers rode their wagons through it or the farmers and ranchers planted their roots in it. As long as their habitat remains, the sandhill cranes can be counted on to return with an inherent elegance.

Corrine Hickman of Omaha, who signed up for the tour with her friend, Tracy Kemp, of Bennington, said she's glad they were able to tap into the experiences the day had to offer, despite the cold weather.

"This is our second tour with Kevin and MCC, and even though it's been cold, this has been fantastic," Hickman said as the final waves of sandhill cranes swept by hundreds of feet above. "I think we're extremely lucky. A lot of people never get to see this, and it's only a couple hours away. I think there are a lot of gems like this in our backyard. We just don't realize it."

"It's easy and stress-free travel. People can just focus on enjoying going to new places and having new experiences," Kowskie said.

They ended the day exactly how Kowskie planned it out.

**For more information on  
MCC traveling classrooms,  
visit [mccneb.edu/CE](http://mccneb.edu/CE).**



## Walter Scott, Jr. Career Pathway Scholarship creates decade of opportunity for Career and Technical Education students at Nebraska community colleges.



Walter Scott, Jr. was a builder, both in practice and through his vision for his hometown. His leadership of Omaha-based Fortune 500 engineering firm, Peter Kiewit Sons' Inc., as well as some of the city's most prominent philanthropic endeavors, shaped not only his own legacy but also the quality of life for tens of thousands who have and continue to live in the area.

The Walter Scott, Jr. Career Pathway Scholarship, a new scholarship and employment program provided by the Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation to three Nebraska community colleges, will further broaden Scott's sizable impact on state education well into the future. For the next 10 years, the Walter Scott, Jr. Career Pathway Scholarship will provide more than 750 Nebraska postsecondary students with the opportunity to complete academic programs at Metropolitan Community College, Southeast Community College and Central Community College "with little to no debt."

During the 2022 fall quarter, MCC piloted the first cohort of Scott Pathway Scholars — 28 students from communities in the College's four-county service area, including Fremont and Blair, but also reaching students from nearby towns like Wahoo and Homer. Based on the cost of tuition per credit hour at MCC, the program creates the opportunity for up to 250 students to complete the program

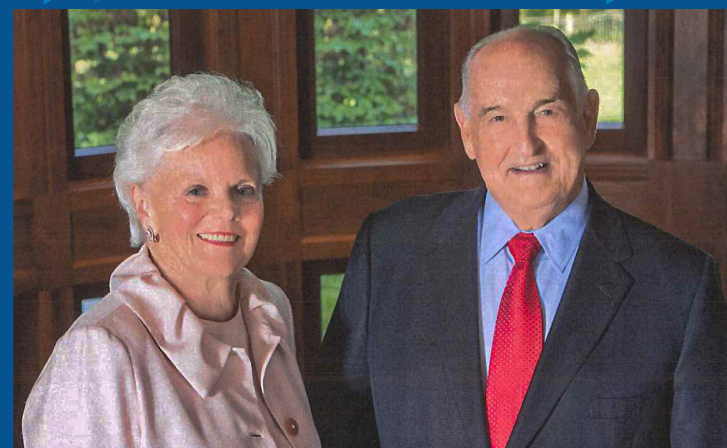
by the 2031-32 academic year, with a cap of 50 MCC students each year. The program will be fully implemented at SCC and CCC this fall.

Recent high school graduates (21 or under) who are U.S. citizens or permanent legal residents wishing to pursue approved MCC Career and Technical Education programs of study requiring a two-year degree or less are eligible to apply. Preference is given to students with career interest and program alignment, resilience and financial need as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), although financial need is not required.

Scott, who maintained a low public profile despite being the most influential philanthropist in Omaha's history, saw education as a catalyst for life-changing impact for families and the basis for a skilled and dedicated workforce to anchor communities, said Lisa Goodwin, assistant director of Education for the Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation.

"Walter often emphasized that education is the one thing that cannot be taken away from you," Goodwin said. "He referred to scholarships and education as an investment, and if you stop to think about it, he was spot on. It's an investment in the future that improves the lives of others and society as a whole."





**Suzanne and Walter Scott**

### **A holistic, student-focused approach**

Nate Barry, vice president of Strategic Operations and Initiatives at MCC, said the Walter Scott, Jr. Career Pathway Scholarship addresses the need for advanced skills in the workforce as careers in the trades become more technologically advanced.

“Formalized training is and will continue to be required for entry-level positions in many career paths in the skilled trades, and MCC has positioned itself as the leading educational and training provider for these careers,” Barry said. “This scholarship provides a clear path toward a high-wage, high-skilled and high-need career for many students who have the desire.”

MCC industry partnerships are integrated into the program through co-ops, part-time employment and/or internships, creating earn-and-learn opportunities while students are enrolled. Companies in short supply of qualified workers benefit from a level of candidate credibility and vetting that is difficult to find, Barry said.

“From an employer’s perspective, when they receive an application from a Scott Pathway Scholar, they know the student is serious about their career and driven to succeed,” Barry said.

Barry said the program shows the power of philanthropy, education and industry working together. The holistic approach to the student drives successful outcomes, he said.

“What excites me most is the dedication of the Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation and MCC to develop and support the whole student. While the students receive excellent technical training, they also go through a robust leadership development program, not only preparing them for a great career, but all the things that life puts in their path,” Barry said.

Students enrolled in the program are guided along their educational journey by Scott Pathway coordinator, Racquel Henderson, who works exclusively with students in the program as a connector to opportunities and resources. Goodwin said Henderson’s past work at MCC as a success navigator and long history of community involvement made her an ideal fit for the foundation-funded position solely dedicated to successful program outcomes.

The Walter Scott, Jr. Career Pathway Scholarship was established months after he died in September 2021, but Scott clearly cast the vision. The decision to pilot the program at MCC was based on a more than 20-year relationship between the Foundation and the College. The Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation has been a philanthropic partner to MCC, providing resources for capital projects, scholarships and other programs and student support.

Goodwin said program partners were selected based on their success in supporting students, strong connections with local industries, superior job placement data and commitment to contributing resources to the partnership.

“[MCC president] Randy Schmailzl and Metropolitan Community College have been trusted partners for many years, with a track record of being good stewards, forward-thinking and with the ability to put ideas into motion,” said Goodwin, an MCC employee of 14 years.

In addition to completing the program with minimal student debt, intended outcomes include student participation in a paid internship or sponsorship program, completion of a credential or degree and employment in a high-skill, -demand and -wage career six months after completion.

“By providing opportunities that are not typically associated with a two-year scholarship, we aim to shift the perspective on career and technical education to help meet the growing demand for skilled workers and provide valuable resources to businesses and industries,” Goodwin said.

“Racquel’s passion for education and the community is apparent in her work,” Goodwin said of the North Omaha community leader and Institute for Career Advancement Needs (ICAN) 2023 Women’s Leadership Conference award recipient. “She knows how to relate to students while also keeping them accountable. She’s really good at relationship building and providing the one-on-one connection students need to see the program to completion.”

Henderson said she created a customized relationship-building curriculum for MCC Scott Pathway Scholars.

“Building the relationships is the biggest piece and the most difficult part,” Henderson said. “But once students understand that they really can come to me about anything — it doesn’t matter if it’s a mama, boyfriend or girlfriend issue, or street stuff — when they know that they are in a safe, judgment-free space, that seals the deal for everything else. Identifying and understanding those academic barriers allows us to be proactive in addressing them. When my students start acting different, I pick up on it right away.”

Henderson said the student-first approach and prescribed one-on-one conversations, which happen as often as needed but a minimum of two times each quarter, are keys to success.

“When I am getting to know the students at first, I don’t talk about MCC. They’ll get to know their teachers and the campus, and they’ll get through their classes naturally. It’s the outside factors that they have a hard time balancing, so we spend time on those initially,” Henderson said.

Henderson facilitates the Scott Pathway Academy, a foundation program designed around four pillars of success: communication and employability skills, leadership development, self-care and well-being and community engagement.

Goodwin said students participate in seminars and workshops on topics that include employability skills, physical and mental health and financial literacy. They are also required to participate in community service projects and leadership development training. Goodwin and Henderson said for some participants, this can be the first exposure to focused conversations on these topics. The feedback they are receiving from parents is encouraging, Goodwin said.

“One father said to me, ‘You know, the money is great, but it’s the small things you are providing, like the accountability and coaching, programming outside of the classroom and connections that are being made — all those extras are really making a difference,’” Goodwin said.

### **A lasting impact on Nebraska postsecondary education**

With the first cohort of students through the first year of their scholarship, student performance is promising. The scholar retention rate is 93%.

The programs at SEC and CCC have a living-learning component in which Scott Pathway Scholars live together on campus. While there isn’t a living arrangement integrated into the MCC program, Henderson said Scott Pathway Scholars at the College are developing a close connection.

“There’s a camaraderie that has developed through programming and going to events together. They talk to each other and hang out together when it’s not required, and I love that, because peer connections and connections on campus make the most successful college students,” Henderson said. “If one student doesn’t want to go to class, one of their peers is pushing them, saying, ‘Come on, we’ve got to knock this out.’ They’re there for each other.”

The way Scott Pathway Scholars lead one another to the attainment of personal goals is reflective of the way Scott, in a career as a builder and civil engineer, challenged others to join him in constructing a better future for all.

From the nationally recognized research facilities at UNMC to the first dormitories built on UNO’s thriving Scott Campus and the countless number of students who have benefitted from his generosity, Scott’s impact on the state’s educational ecosystem continues to broaden, including expanding support for Nebraska’s community colleges.

Goodwin said Scott had a steady reminder for the students who participated in the foundation’s scholarship and career programs.

“Walter would frequently tell Scott scholars, ‘My job is done. Now it’s up to you to make sure my investment lets you do great things,’” Goodwin said.



# MCC Architecture and Design remodels program around industry innovation

## Curriculum focus makes program one-of-a-kind

Metropolitan Community College students studying architecture and architectural engineering design technology will benefit from enhanced career-readiness skills through the College's investment in building information modeling (BIM) curriculum. Starting this fall quarter, in response to local workforce needs, courses for the program's two associate degree offerings will include a more intensive study on the digital processes and technology used to create and manage building design and construction.

Supported in part by Nebraska American Rescue Plan Act funding, deeper integration of BIM into its curriculum makes the MCC Architectural Design Technology program a one-of-a-kind offering in the region. A major differentiator is its curriculum focus on students developing proficiency using Autodesk Revit (BIM software) — a workforce skillset that has become the industry standard for preconstruction industries, including architecture and architectural engineering (structural, mechanical, electrical and plumbing) fields. Because of recent industry-wide adoption of this technology, employers are challenged by a labor shortage of people who possess the knowledge and training to use it.

"We want to set our students up for success in the workplace, so we made this shift in our curriculum to align with the huge opportunities in the commercial and industrial sectors of architecture, engineering and construction industry, where the majority of new construction projects are concentrated," said Jacquie Armstrong, MCC associate dean of Construction Education.

Under the new program structure, students who earn an associate degree in Architectural Design Technician (ARCTO) or Architectural Engineering Design Technician (ARCED), will have the option to enter the workforce to fill in-demand roles as BIM technicians or managers, capable of supporting the work of architects, engineers, manufacturers and contractors. Students can also continue their studies by transferring to another college to earn an accredited bachelor of architecture degree, which is required to become a licensed architect.

Along their path to an associate degree, MCC students will earn career certifications developed in partnership with local architecture and engineering industry leaders. Students who complete the architectural design technician program will earn a BIM Architectural (BIMAR) career certificate. Architectural engineering design students will graduate with either a BIM Electrical (BIMEL), BIM Mechanical (BIMME) or BIM Structural (BIMST) career certificate.

Armstrong said the multitude of BIM-specific certifications make the new MCC model one of the more unique ones in the nation, focused on the skills that create the greatest opportunities for employment in the field.

According to the Nebraska Department of Labor's "2022 Labor and Hiring Needs Report," 90.5% of respondents in the construction industry reported hiring difficulties — the highest percentage of any industry due to a shortage of applicants. Omaha-based architectural firm, HDR, one of the College's numerous industry partners, has indicated a substantial need for BIM-trained employees.

The curriculum change, driven and designed by MCC Architectural Design Technology program instructor, Stephanie Ling, is informed by input from leading local industry professionals, some of whom have been contracted as MCC adjunct instructors and consultants for the program. One of the program's greatest benefits to industry employers, Ling said, is its ability to retrain their incumbent workers to leverage BIM for projects.

"Growing our offerings in building information modeling is a recognition that this is the direction the industry has gone and that there's a need for people with these developed, high-end skills," Ling said. "When our students graduate, companies won't have to exhaust valuable resources training them to develop these skills, which is the current industry practice."

Ling said during their first year of study, students will explore the industry as a whole and the fundamentals of building design and engineering. Toward the end of that year, they will select which discipline they will concentrate on for their remaining credit hours and BIM training.

BIM skills are in demand in the workforce because of Revit's capacity to accurately model all designed aspects of a building. This makes it possible to realize greater efficiency in design and construction through estimating materials and tasks, such as a building's thermal and energy performance. Clash detection is another benefit to using BIM, Ling said,

because it allows for corrections to be made prior to causing construction delays. Working within a collaborative 3D model, BIM creates cost efficiencies and enables easier coordination and knowledge transfer among project partners.

Additionally, the MCC program is working on a transfer articulation agreement with another higher education institution. After completing their ARCTO associate degree with MCC, students can then transfer to complete the last three years of a five-year accredited bachelor of architecture degree, which puts students on the path to licensure as architects. Typically, licensure through the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards often requires a master's degree in architecture, and Ling said no colleges or universities in Nebraska currently offer a five-year architecture degree option.

Salaries for positions that require BIM skills at the associate degree level generally range from \$54,000 to \$69,000 annually, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

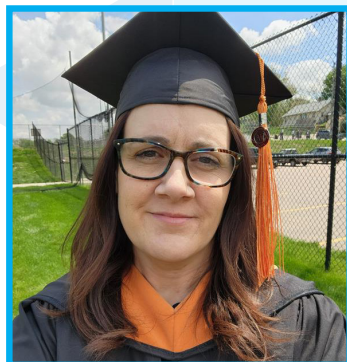
"We know from our industry partners that they need people with these new workplace skills, and we want to be the ones who provide this training," Armstrong said.

"When our students graduate, companies won't have to exhaust valuable resources training them to develop these skills, which is the current industry practice."





# ◀ FACES OF MCC ▶



## ANGELA PARKER

*Nursing – Associate Degree*

Nursing is a second career for me. I needed a program that allowed me to work and still be present with my family. I looked at each of the nursing programs in Omaha and I felt that Metropolitan Community College was the best fit. I liked that the class size was small and it's a very veteran-friendly school.

One of my favorite memories at MCC was attending the National Student Nurses Association Convention in Salt Lake City. All of the Nursing instructors were great, and I have kept in contact with several of them since graduating. Outside of the Nursing program, my favorite class was Anatomy and Physiology with instructor Del Stallwood. He made the class interesting and was very straightforward with what he expected of his students.

Since graduating, I have worked full-time as a registered nurse and held two PRN nursing jobs. I started my career at Methodist Hospital on the Orthopedic Neurology unit and have since also worked in their Cardiac, Forensic/Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner and Palliative units. I have also worked in mental health/substance abuse at the Omaha VA, preoperative and postanesthesia at Nebraska Medicine and the Sarpy County Jail.

One of my proudest moments since graduating was being accepted to the graduate nursing program at Morningside University. It's also been wonderful to show my teenage son that you can accomplish your dreams regardless of your age.

After graduating with my Associate of Applied Science in Nursing, I went on to get my Bachelor of Science in Nursing. I plan to graduate with my Master of Science Degree in Nursing and work as an Adult Gerontology Nurse Practitioner.



## WILLIAM L. PAGE IV

*CDL-A Truck Driving*

My fondest memory at Metropolitan Community College is when I passed my class A CDL at the Applied Technology Center. I took the course in the dead of winter not knowing how the weather would be. I would bike 10 miles for every class or take the bus so I wouldn't disappoint my mother, who died while I was incarcerated, as well as the people who believed in me. I am also thankful to God and the MCC 180 Re-Entry Assistance Program for the opportunity and acceptance.

One of my proudest accomplishments after graduation was using my education to help a struggling dump truck company and transform it into a stable business with potential. It's now a significant part of the local economy in Omaha.

MCC continues to influence my career in the construction and diesel technology sector. With hands-on experience and operation of proper equipment and software, MCC gives me the opportunity to shift with the industry as it evolves.

## METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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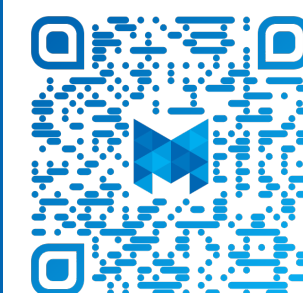


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# Fremont High School students start college at no cost through MCC career academies.

***"I'll have about 30 college credits completed by the time I finish my senior year – that's basically my whole first year of college."***

Sergeant Todd Cruise, with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, shares a fun fact with the Fremont High School students who are taking his Intro to Criminal Justice class through Metropolitan Community College's Criminal Justice Career Academy. As he nears 30 years in a career spent in law enforcement, Cruise's favorite days are snow days.

The six students that attended the introductory, dual enrollment course get snow days off, but they are busy days for Cruise. He spends them digging and pushing stranded vehicles out of the piles of snow they slid into, giving their owners the rides they need to get back to their families, jobs and daily routines.

"Most of the time we're not out there arresting people — we're mostly helping people involved in accidents," Cruise said.

Day-in-the-life insights, foundational knowledge and career overviews and opportunities are some examples of the learning that takes place during any of the six year-long academies MCC offers to Fremont High School students. In addition to criminal justice, career academies are also offered in diesel mechanics, education, health care, long-term care (CNA) and welding. Each academy offers between three to five college-level classes.

All MCC dual enrollment classes are being offered tuition free to all Nebraska high school students through the 2024-25 academic year. Patton Bailey, a senior, said she's glad to be getting early exposure to college courses, as well as the transferrable credits that come with them.

"I'll have about 30 college credits completed by the time I finish my senior year — that's basically my whole first year of college," said Bailey, who is planning to study forensics at Wayne State College this fall. "The cost is going to be a lot less for me, so [the savings] could also give me an opportunity to maybe pick up a minor or even a second major if I want to."

In a classroom down the hall at the MCC Fremont Area Center, nine students sat at desks in a semicircle. Pam Murphy, the former assistant principal at Fremont Middle School, sat at the front of the classroom after breaking retirement to teach the MCC Education Career Academy.

She leads lively discussions about careers in education — their historical, social, legal and philosophical implications, sharing experiences that enriched and challenged her throughout her career.

Murphy said when Todd Hansen, MCC associate vice president of Student Affairs, asked her to teach courses for the academy, she felt compelled to return to the classroom.

"I'm really glad I did because this is about the kids. It's been so much fun to work with them and have these discussions, and learn and share with one another," Murphy said. "It excites me to see bright young people going into education because it's a tough job. They are going to have a huge impact."

They are also taking advantage of a big opportunity. About two-thirds of the class raised their hands when asked if they would not be able, or be less likely to pursue college, if MCC was not offering tuition free enrollment classes.

"I will be the first generation in my family to go to college, so going through [the education academy] has been a lot easier on me to get my general education credits knocked out of the way, so [after completing the academy] I can focus on the next classes that I want to take for my major without having to worry about having to pay for all of them," said Hannah Hughes, a senior.

Murphy said MCC career academies also function like a "free trial" for high school students to explore if the career that has piqued their interest maintains its attraction after learning about it in detail from educators who have decades of experience working in their fields.

"Sometimes students change their minds when they get to college, so even if you take this class and realize

that education is not the career you want to pursue, you found that out without having to spend \$1,000 for a class that isn't on a path that you're going to follow," Murphy said.

For senior Ajari Hernandez, the MCC Education Career Academy only reinforced his interest in becoming a high school math teacher.

"It actually solidified me taking this educational career track, but it's also helping me learn about how to be a coach or a mentor in the future," Hernandez said.

Rachel Wachter, a MCC career navigator who assists high school students in choosing and registering for concurrent enrollment classes with the College, said another important value that high school academies provide is exposure to a college learning environment.

"Academies are a great opportunity for students to get a feel for what college classes are like. Students are able to get insights into what the reading, assignments and tests are like at the college level. This can help ease anxiety and build confidence around taking college courses," Wachter said.

MCC career academies are available to high school juniors and seniors and begin with each new school year. They consist of a set of classes that can be taken at Fremont High School or at the MCC Fremont Area Center. An application and approval from a high school counselor are required to participate.

**For more information, visit [mccneb.edu/CareerAcademy](https://mccneb.edu/CareerAcademy).**



# MCC STUDENTS LEAD NEBRASKA SCHOOLS AT SKILLSUSA CHAMPIONSHIPS



During a May visit to the Metropolitan Community College Applied Technology Center, a solitary banner hangs from the ceiling of the Fire Science Technology program space. Nothing flashy – just white vinyl material, but it contains an important block of blue and red text: “SkillsUSA National Champion, Mason Ingram, Firefighting 2022.”

Four of the Fire Science Technology students in class that day talked about the thrills and challenges of competing and medaling at the SkillsUSA Nebraska Championships in April and how nice it would be to hang another banner next to Ingram’s with a strong performance at nationals, the competition is the country’s largest showcase of skilled trades.

Gage Woods made sure the program added to its accolades in his first time qualifying for nationals. His silver medal performance at the SkillsUSA Championships in Atlanta, which wrapped up in June, was the top individual finish among the 20 MCC students who competed. It was also the most points scored at the event by any of the 179 Nebraska students who participated in a field that featured students from all 50 states and multiple U.S. territories.

In addition to Woods’ runner-up national performance, MCC students brought home three bronze medals. Alayna Kustka, a digital

photography student, became a two-time national champion by taking a bronze medal with partner Hannah Amberg in the digital cinema production event. Joe Lytle earned a bronze in collision damage appraisal as a first-time participant. MCC had the most medalists of all participating Nebraska schools represented in Atlanta.

The annual competition, part of the SkillsUSA National Leadership & Skills Conference, brought together more than 5,100 of the top students in the nation to participate in 110 timed and judged occupational and leadership skill events. All 20 participating MCC students finished in the top 25 of their respective events.

Woods, who went first of all college participants in the firefighting event, watched the competition unfold from the stands after completing his drills that simulated real experiences in the field. He said he knew he had a strong performance, but competitors didn’t find out where they finished until the moment the audience did – when the names of the top three finishers in each event appeared on the jumbotron (and in no particular order).

“Waiting in the back room to find out where we finished had all of us on the edge of our seats. When they called the medalists up to the stage for each event, they put them in random order, so you couldn’t even tell if you finished in first or third place. I tried to figure it out as it went along, but I had no idea until they announced my name,” Woods said.

Boomer Strawn, MCC Fire Science Technology program director, said Woods’ performance in Atlanta has been building since participating in SkillsUSA during high school as part of the Career Academy pathway at Papillion-La Vista South. Firefighting is a tradition in the Woods family. His grandfather and godfather both had careers with the Las Vegas Fire Department. With two quarters of classes left to complete his associate degree, Woods has already applied to fire departments in Nevada, Tennessee and Texas.

“I have had the opportunity to witness the growth of his skills, ability, dedication and unwavering

commitment to the safety and well-being of others,” Strawn said. “Gage possesses a unique combination of technical experience, physical fitness and remarkable professionalism that makes him an outstanding representative for our program.”

Of all the things that stood out to Woods about SkillsUSA, meeting peers from across the country and exchanging state pins with them, a decades-running tradition at the conference, was what he enjoyed most. MCC students were highly identifiable, wearing black cowboy hats with a white “N” on the front and brims lined with LED lights. Woods left the conference with pins traded with students from Idaho, New Jersey, Texas and West Virginia.

“Being from Nebraska, there were a lot of people asking, ‘Where does that even exist?’,” Woods said.

## SkillsUSA training leads to career growth for Lytle

Lytle’s bronze medal in Atlanta was a form of validation for a decision to transfer to MCC from a four-year university. The 21-year-old started pursuing a degree in cybersecurity after high school, but, the cost of attaining the degree caused him to look at other options. As part of a paid internship at B Street Collision, Lytle has been working as an in-shop estimator during the day for the past nine months, attending night classes at MCC.



“Comparing the cost of attending a [four-year university] to going to MCC, you’re getting the same education, plus lots of hands-on training. It was a no-brainer for me,” Lytle said.

Instructor Joe Baker said Lytle made the most of the opportunities presented to him since entering the program. He attended every optional practice offered by the Auto Collision Technology department ahead of SkillsUSA. After spending five years detailing cars, he worked his way into an in-shop estimator position with B Street Collision a few months back, which helped him prepare for the competition in a professional environment.

“Joe has a demanding schedule during the week and worked hard with his advisor Chris Cogan to make sure he was prepared for SkillsUSA,” Baker said. “B Street Collision offered him the opportunity to move into a position aligned with his competition. It turned into a great career opportunity.”

Even though he was a first-time participant, Lytle said he didn’t let that damper his expectations. “I’m a pretty competitive guy. Having a personal goal of winning and then actually achieving it is such a big thing. You want to set reasonable goals, but you’ve also got to shoot for the stars sometimes,” Lytle said.

## MCC women stand out in performance and numbers

Natalie Salt’s feelings were similar to those of the hundreds of other college and high school students as they arrived at the Heartland Events Center in Grand Island to compete in the SkillsUSA Nebraska Championships, one of 80 MCC students to compete at the state meet — the majority for the first time, with gold medalists in eligible contests qualifying for nationals.

“I was so nervous about this, but I told myself, ‘I’ve done the work and put in the time.’ And I felt calmer as I got going,” Salt said of her work on the wooden toolbox she built during the cabinetmaking competition.

The next day, Salt would discover she had good reason to trust her training. She won a gold medal at state and followed that with a top-10 finish at the SkillsUSA Championships.

Qualifying for Atlanta was a defining moment for the 35-year-old. Her path to taking classes at MCC





cabinetmaking because it's a lot of fun and takes a lot of attention to detail. I notice those details and make sure the work gets done correctly."

Drew Henrichs, an MCC Construction Technology instructor who worked with Salt and Cribbs to prepare for the event, said he was proud of how they handled themselves.

"They were nervous. When you get into the arena and see who you're up against, it can be intimidating. I told them it's good to be nervous because it means you're out of your comfort zone," Henrichs said. "But when they saw the project, the nerves calmed because it's a lot of the work we did in class."

Cribbs and Pirlot were among an additional 15 MCC students who attended the conference in Atlanta as part of an Immersive Experience grant for students with an interest in the construction and skilled trades, bringing the total representing the college to 35. In addition to the memorable experience it provides for students during their college education, competing also connects them to industry leaders and representatives from 650 participating national corporations, trade associations, businesses and labor unions.

Henrichs said Salt and Cribbs' examples highlight there is a place for everyone in the skilled and technical trades.

"They came into the program without experience and are already top performers. That speaks volumes about the program and them," Henrichs said.



followed 12 years as a stay-at-home mom. At state, she was part of an all-female MCC participant roster in the construction science events along with Simone Cribbs in cabinetmaking and Alyssa Pirlot in carpentry. Of the 20 MCC students who attended nationals, 35% were women.

"I think it's great. There are still way more men than women in the trades, but there is a larger number of [women] than I was expecting to see here. We have different qualities about us, and it's definitely hard sometimes because we get underestimated. But it feels good for all of us to be here because we put in the time, and I feel like we're a good representation of our school," Salt said.

An oddly shaped bathroom in Salt's former home helped her summon a skill she had for building.

"I like to be self-sufficient and work by myself. And I like to make things that fit a space," Salt said. "I had to figure out how to best use the space and knew I was going to have to make something to do it because there wasn't anything I was going to find that would fit."

Salt said her family moved from Iowa to Bennington last year. Her husband works from home, and when her youngest child started kindergarten this year, she saw a window of opportunity to turn her interest in carpentry into an employable skill. She registered for classes at MCC.

"I was ready to do something for Natalie instead of Mom. I get emotional about it because I'm really proud that I can create something," Salt said. "Going back to school as an older student, I haven't one hundred percent figured out what I want to do yet, but I think something like carpentry or

## MCC NONCREDIT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM POINT OF ACCESS FOR STUDENTS, ASSET FOR COMMUNITY

What Israel Valadez learned along the road to completion was undeniable as he approached the podium at the Swanson Conference Center during the MCC Adult Education Graduation and Workforce Training Awards in April at the Fort Omaha Campus.

Valadez was one of 31 students who received their GED diplomas at the event, a journey he began in 2019 when he started taking Noncredit English Language Learning classes at MCC South Express. The location on 24th and Vinton streets is a hub of community access to GED and ELL education and services the College provides at no cost through a convenient network of campuses and centers, partner locations and a variety of delivery formats.

Valadez said being asked to be a student speaker at the event put into context all he had achieved. He estimated when he started taking classes, he only had 20% of the language he would command nearly four years later — when he delivered an inspiring, five-minute speech in English to a room full of mostly native speakers, along with his peers.

"This is like a dream for me, because in my country, I didn't have these kinds of opportunities," said the 35-year-old, who emigrated to the U.S. in 2006 from Mexico. "I had to overcome my language barrier, a low level of education in my country, and I had not been to school for over 15 years."

As the largest adult education institution in Nebraska, Metropolitan Community College recognizes its crucial role as a connection to lifelong learning opportunities for students and a pipeline to a skilled workforce for employers. The ELL program served more than 7,000 students in the 2022-23 academic year through structured classes, open learning, the MCC Integrated Education and Training program and information sessions.

"Whether their goals are for better employment opportunities, being able to help their children with homework or be the first in their families to attend college, the goal of our Adult Education programs is to meet our students where they are in order to get them where they want to be," said Deana Tsbak, MCC director of Adult Education. "Achieving this involves a coordinated, community-wide effort to keep the program free of charge while addressing barriers for students."

As cities and towns across the country seek to grow their local and regional economies but are challenged by having more job openings than candidates available to fill them, providing access to English language learning opportunities aids in the development of a skilled workforce. Growing English language proficiency skills gives families the ability to increase their income potential through access to more and better-paying employment opportunities.

Bob Nikunen, MCC Adult Education program facilitator, said the College's unique noncredit program provides the four-county region with valuable community and family assets. He is part of an enthusiastic and expanding Adult Education staff that "solves for every student."



**"THIS IS LIKE A DREAM FOR  
ME, BECAUSE IN MY COUNTRY,  
I DIDN'T HAVE THESE KINDS  
OF OPPORTUNITIES."**



After completing assessment testing to determine appropriate placement into courses, ELL students begin a sequenced program of instruction and support strategies to build English language proficiency, helping participants transition to career pathways and prepare for credit-level courses.

The program utilizes BurlingtonEnglish curriculum, which combines academic and workforce-readiness skills into the lessons. Students practice applying language skills with conversation coaches, who help guide students through situational exchanges, like communicating with a manager about coming in late for work due to an unexpected issue.

Nikunen said the graduation event is always a good reminder of each success that happens on the road to completion for each student. He enjoys seeing other people in the MCC community experience the energy of the event for the first time, like a new member of the Board of Governors of the College who remarked to him after the ceremony, “I had no idea it would be this inspiring.”

“When you think about all the obstacles, and then about all of the good decisions the student had to make, and for everything that had to line up and fall in place to get to get to this day — it’s not a miracle, but it’s approaching one,” said Nikunen after the ceremony, reflecting remarks he made as keynote speaker during the event.

Valadez said the student-focused, hands-on approach of MCC Adult Education faculty and staff stood out to him. The support services and resources available to students at no cost also set it apart from other ELL programs — laptops and hotspots on loan, free bus passes and connection to a host of community organizations that provide support for basic needs.

One student was so grateful to his instructor, Nikunen said he made an oil painting of his revered teacher. For Valadez, expressions of gratitude were less grandiose but equally palpable.

When asked about what the gift of language meant to him personally and whether a feeling of

belonging accompanied it, an unavoidable smile spread across his face before the words followed.

Being able to answer questions from strangers makes him feel more helpful. Punchlines to jokes hit differently when he experiences them in real time rather than having them explained afterward by his wife, Emilie. She received the traditional rose passed from the program completer at the graduation event to the person that believed in them along the way.

“I don’t ask what they said as much anymore. I’m more conversational now,” Valadez said.

He’s also more confident. After completing his GED, Valadez began applying for scholarships and was awarded a True Potential Scholarship from Pesek Law LLC. It is a renewable, one-year scholarship to any Nebraska community college, covering full tuition and fees. The next step on his academic journey is to pursue the education and training for a career as an electrician.

“I feel like there’s a wider door open for me and less distance to accomplish my goals,” Valadez said.

**For more information about the MCC Noncredit ELL program, visit [mccneb.edu/ELL](http://mccneb.edu/ELL) or call 531-622-4060.**

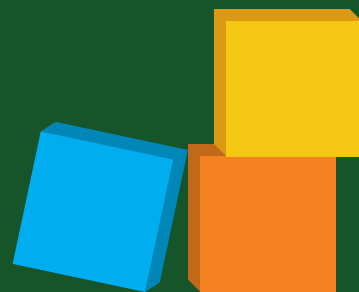


#### MCC ELL LOCATIONS

Fort Omaha Campus  
Fremont Area Center  
MCC North Express  
MCC South Express  
MCC at Yates Illuminates

#### PARTNER LOCATIONS

Anderson Middle School (Millard)  
Bellevue Public Schools Support Center  
Children’s Hospital  
Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties  
(North and South Omaha locations)



## ESL PROGRAM’S ESSENTIAL ENVIRONMENT CREATES BUILDING BLOCKS FOR MORE THAN LANGUAGE

you confidence,” Do said. “If I would have gone to UNO right away, I don’t think I would have been successful. You see more people [on campus] there, but you don’t feel that close. You come to class, study and you go home.”

The connection she found at MCC wasn’t just among ESL students. As Kevin Mortensen, an instructor in the program, walked the hallways of the Mahoney and Connector buildings on the South Omaha Campus, he paused near an entryway where ESL students gather at the beginning of the day and between classes. He noted the space has nothing to do with the academic side of the program but everything to do with its culture. It’s a place of camaraderie with the energy of a college campus.

Past students Ana Hernandez and Yasmin Hassan stopped Mortensen to say hello and update him on their progress toward their academic goals. Hernandez is pursuing an associate degree in fashion design and Hassan in cybersecurity. They conversed comfortably in their use of language and in familiarity with their former instructor.

“I think there’s a lot of power in those incidental conversations,” Mortensen said.

Hernandez and Hassan are examples of how the ESL program is designed to work — to help English learners develop the language and academic skills needed for success in college. Divided into four academic levels, placement into the program is determined by a set of assessment tests. Reading and vocabulary and writing and grammar classes are integrated in all four levels, and more nuanced listening and speaking courses are introduced in levels three and four.

“In the credit program, we work with students who have done beginning ESL and have basic literacy. We’re trying to help move them to college-level

Nguyen Do doesn’t mind a challenge. When she arrived in Omaha in November 2012 from Vietnam, she learned how to drive in a new country during a Nebraska winter. After being placed in the beginning level of Metropolitan Community College’s credit English as a Second Language program six months later, she completed the program and went on to earn an academic transfer degree from the College.

Then she mastered the complex financial language that governs the field of accounting, earning a bachelor’s degree from UNO and becoming a certified public accountant in 2019.

In May 2023, Do reflected on the major life events she’s gone through since moving to the United States with her parents, something she hasn’t had much time to do over the past few busy years. It was nine months after she had gotten married and two weeks after finishing tax season at Bricker Accounting & Tax Services. In June, she delivered her daughter Katherine, she and her husband Cahn Nguyen’s first child.

Do, 30, said it would be hard to imagine her life today had the first step in her postsecondary education not been through the doors at the South Omaha Campus. She found an ESL student connection and shared experiences awaiting at MCC with other international students that she doesn’t think she would have found anywhere else.

“When you take ESL classes, you learn with other students who start at the same level and you meet them again in classes in levels two, three and four. It helps you build a circle of friends that gives



communicative skills and English, while helping them understand and practice academic culture," Mortensen said.

Mortensen said most students who enter the credit program are savvy with their phones and other technology, but some have never been exposed to academic and professional email. Through the progression in the different levels of the program, the level-4 student determines which academic focus area they would like to pursue after completing ESL courses. An immersive and important lesson designed and coordinated by instructor Sheryl Mason follows. It is intended to help students practice professional interactions with MCC faculty.

Via email, students identify a class in their area of study and introduce themselves to the instructor, sharing their ESL background, interest in the instructor's class and request to come observe it.

"It's a powerful assignment for so many reasons and such an important part of how we do everything in the ESL program," Mortensen said.

### Language and Literacy Center offers magical support

Another critical component of the ESL program is the access students receive to the Language and Literacy Center located in the Mahoney Building on the South Omaha Campus. ESL students get 1-on-1 assistance for tutoring, academic coaching and homework and test preparation on a drop-in basis.

Darin Kiel, an adjunct ESL instructor and fixture in the Language and Literacy Center, serves up academic support services like a short-order cook, Mortensen said.

"Darin and the entire Language and Literacy Center staff can take you from zero English to conversational English. They can take you from writing a sentence to drafting an essay,"

Mortensen said. "I'll walk by when it's hot in here, and Darin will have four tables going. Knowing the level of care each ESL student needs, it's really special what they do here. It's magic."

Mudathir Tairab walked into the Language and Literacy Center with his laptop open, examining an introductory paragraph of a homework assignment, trying to determine which sentence is the thesis statement. A dentist in his native Sudan, Tairab was preparing for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam, the standard test academic institutions use to evaluate the taker's ability to combine listening, reading, speaking and writing skills in a classroom setting. With a passing score, he will be able to pursue his credentials to practice dentistry in Nebraska.

Tairab's earnestness and anxiousness were on display, but so were Mortensen's counterbalancing measures and calm guidance.

"It's a high stakes test, but what I want to make sure you don't have getting in the way when you take it is anxiety. You're an excellent writer – very high level. If you want to talk about it, or if you want to go through it before you take the test, we can grab a cup of coffee or something," Mortensen said.

Tairab returns to his laptop and rereads the opening paragraph of the assignment. Mortensen asks him if he notices any modal verbs — *would*, *could*, *should*, *might*, *must*.

"When modal verbs show up, we're usually getting some opinion from the author. This paragraph starts with two facts, but then we see a shift when we get to the modal verb, and that is a way you can decipher."

Tairab looked at the next paragraph on his assignment. He quickly identified the thesis, noting the shift in tone in the language that revealed it.

Some of the most important education and support available to students in the ESL program are not official academic offerings, like helping students navigate unfamiliar institutional systems and developing an understanding of academic culture. They are surrounded by people who understand their challenges, advocate for them and work hard to meet the unique and wide-ranging needs of each ESL student.

For Do, among the greatest outcomes of her experience in the program are that two of her closest friendships developed during her life in

the U.S. originated with students she first met in level 1 ESL classes, Sally Choi and Diana Limas. As the only Vietnamese student in her class, building friendships with her South Korean and Colombian classmates forced her to use English. Through assignments, she learned the details of other students' lives and discovered commonalities despite the varied cultures, life experiences and goals that brought them all together.

"I was really shy [when I started ESL classes], but you have to try to learn how to go out and talk to people and ask questions, and MCC gave me the environment and opportunity to do that. But you also get to know people personally. I learned a lot, and I also met a lot of people and made some great friends," Do said.



**"KNOWING THE LEVEL OF CARE EACH ESL STUDENT NEEDS, IT'S REALLY SPECIAL WHAT THEY DO HERE. IT'S MAGIC."**

**Scholarship opportunities are available to students interested in pursuing the MCC Credit ESL program. For more information about the program, visit [mccneb.edu/ESL](http://mccneb.edu/ESL) or call 531-622-5231.**



# 23<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL STUDENT ART EXHIBITION

A diverse collection of artwork can be found throughout the Metropolitan Community College campuses. The walls of the College showcase the talent of students, alumni and community artists. The nucleus of the arts at MCC can be found at the Elkhorn Valley Campus, in the College's Gallery of Art and Design.

The gallery exhibits paintings, textiles, ceramics, photography, videography, digital prints and more.

"It really is a wide variety and it's to show students that there's no limit to the type of artwork they can make," said Laura Burke, the gallery coordinator.

The gallery has become instrumental in preparing students in the arts for shows and exhibitions in the industry. At the end of the spring quarter, the gallery showcases the Annual Student Art Exhibition. In this event, a jury with no affiliation to MCC blindly rates hundreds of art submissions to filter down the pieces that will be on display and later select the top artwork.

"In addition to students seeing their work on the wall in a gallery, I think it's important that they see

the process of going from applying for a show to getting accepted or not," said Burke. "It's good for them to see the process of how they might submit their artwork and prepare it."

The first place winner of the 23rd Annual Student Art Exhibition, Katie Goossen, has been described by her peers as a promising artist, posing as her own muse in her work. Goossen's piece titled "Intrusive Thoughts In Blue" earned her a \$1,500 scholarship.

The gallery hosts seven shows throughout the year, which allow artists to gain exposure as well as the possibility to earn scholarships and art supplies. Many of the pieces on display can be purchased directly from the artists. Burke said the College supports the arts and students by using designated funds to purchase artwork to enhance MCC campuses.

**The Gallery of Art and Design is open to students, staff and the public.**



**"It really is a wide variety and it's to show students that there's no limit to the type of artwork they can make."**



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