

2026 Academic Excellence Award winners named at community colleges across North Carolina

RALEIGH, NC – The [North Carolina Community College System](#), [State Board of Community Colleges](#), and the [North Carolina Community Colleges Foundation](#) announce the winners of the 2026 Academic Excellence Awards – the highest academic honor the System bestows on its students. The award was created in 1998 to recognize and encourage scholarship among students at all 58 North Carolina community colleges.

Each college selects one student to receive the award each year. To be eligible, students must be currently enrolled, have completed at least 12 semester hours in a curriculum degree program, and have a cumulative GPA of no less than 3.25.

“This award honors students who haven’t just mastered their curricula but have redefined what it means to be a scholar in an era of rapid change. They have navigated a shifting digital landscape with integrity and heart, proving they are ready to lead North Carolina into the future. Their success underscores the vital role our community colleges play in bridging the gap between potential and prosperity,” said Dr. Jeff Cox, System President.

The NC Community Colleges Foundation will present the names of all 58 winners at the [NC Community Colleges Awards Dinner and Celebration](#) on the evening of April 15 at The Angus Barn Pavilion in Raleigh. Each student receives a plaque and medallion in honor of their academic accomplishments, which are provided by the Foundation.

Below are the 2026 Academic Excellence Award winners, in alphabetical order:

COLLEGE	STUDENT
Alamance Community College	Samantha James
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College	Kelsey Fisher
Beaufort County Community College	Mackenzie Conaway
Bladen Community College	Kevin Aguilar-Saraoz
Blue Ridge Community College	Victoria Dmytryszyn
Brunswick Community College	Zoe’ Elliott
Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute	Linda Herrera
Cape Fear Community College	Nicolas Haun
Carteret Community College	Lillian Green
Catawba Valley Community College	Nicole Morales
Central Carolina Community College	Ramon Gomez
Central Piedmont Community College	Tala Sarmiti
Cleveland Community College	Mallory McMahan-Cook
Coastal Carolina Community College	Jacqueline McDonald
College of the Albemarle	Alfredo Landazuri

Craven Community College	Sarah Fedyna
Davidson-Davie Community College	Emma Martinez
Durham Technical Community College	Jeferson Gonzalez
Edgecombe Community College	Tara Davis
Fayetteville Technical Community College	Jessica Albrecht
Forsyth Technical Community College	Mehtabh Sahi
Gaston College	Brooklyn Thompson
Guilford Technical Community College	Crystabelle Nwameme
Halifax Community College	Crystal Powell
Haywood Community College	Kathryn Decurtis
Isothermal Community College	Cindy McAbee
James Sprunt Community College	Jonathan Barnette
Johnston Community College	Aaron Duran Garcia
Lenoir Community College	Taryn Barnett
Mayland Community College	Willa Patience
McDowell Technical Community College	Christopher Harris
Mitchell Community College	Kelsey Kiser
Montgomery Community College	Kiara Miller
Nash Community College	Jessica Gorczynski
Pamlico Community College	Delante' Grant
Piedmont Community College	Victoria West
Pitt Community College	Kimberly Baker
Randolph Community College	Hannah Hicks
Richmond Community College	Braxton Lett
Roanoke-Chowan Community College	Bryson Andrews
Robeson Community College	Beatrice Oxendine
Rockingham Community College	Jessica Smith
Rowan-Cabarrus Community College	Michael Shoe
Sampson Community College	Molly Hobbs
South Piedmont Community College	Mattie Simpson
Southeastern Community College	Samuel Sibbett
Southwestern Community College	Shaughn Harrington
Stanly Community College	Helene Best
Surry Community College	Daniel James
Tri-County Community College	Julian Arvizu
Vance Granville Community College	Ann Sheteiwy
Wake Technical Community College	Sehyun Park
Wayne Community College	Kelly Nachbaur
Western Piedmont Community College	Gavin Brookshire
Wilkes Community College	Ethan Jacko
Wilson Community College	Jessica Cossette

About the North Carolina Community College System

The North Carolina Community College System is the engine for workforce development in North Carolina and the only public entity dedicated to providing affordable college access to anyone in the state. The System is governed by the NC State Board of Community Colleges with administration from the NC Community College System Office, and support from the NC Community Colleges Foundation, and is powered by the 58 community colleges and their respective foundations. Together, the System serves 600,000 students and awards more than 60,000 degrees, diplomas, and certificates annually.

About the State Board of Community Colleges

The State Board of Community Colleges is the policy-making arm of the NC Community College System. The Board consists of 22 members, who have either been assigned by the Governor, the State House or the State Senate. The Lieutenant Governor, State Treasurer, Labor Commissioner, and President of N4CSGA (Student Government Association) also serve on the board.

About NC Community Colleges Foundation

The NC Community Colleges Foundation (Foundation) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded in 1986 to support the NC Community College System. The Foundation is governed by a diverse board of directors who, together with staff members, raise awareness and funds to advance the System's mission, manage several scholarship and award programs that honor excellence, and support public-private partnership programs that foster innovation.