

JUNE 2025



KAKAC NAMED PRESIDENT

Dr. Sharmila Kakac named FCC President, focused on growth.



HANDS-ON HEALTHCARE

Apprenticeship gives FCC students confidence, skills, and career clarity.



TUTORING CHANGES LIVES

Spotlight Awards honor perseverance, mentorship, and educational growth.



A NEW CHAPTER AT FRONTIER: DR. SHARMILA KAKAC NAMED PRESIDENT

For the first time in 11 years, Frontier Community College will welcome a new president. Dr. Sharmila Kakac of Fairfield will succeed Dr. Jay Edgren and become the sixth president in FCC's history, beginning July 1, 2025. In addition to serving as president, Kakac will also hold the role of Vice Chancellor of Business & Industry.

Kakac says she was drawn to Frontier by its accessibility, affordability, and the significant impact the college has made in the lives of its students. She believes FCC is poised to do extraordinary things—both locally and beyond.

"I'm inspired by the impact Frontier has—its accessibility, affordability, and the difference it makes in the lives of students and the community we live in," Kakac said. "Since moving to Fairfield, I've seen this firsthand. I've had family members take classes here and graduate. I know



Dr. Sharmila Kakac and Gary Carter, Chairman of the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Board, at the Dr. Mike L. Dreith Pavilion Dedication Ceremony last fall.

how important this institution is to our region, our city, and our county.

I truly believe in the mission of community colleges, especially that of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. I believe in the people who work here, and I know we have the potential to do great things for our community. That's what motivated me to pursue this position. I'm ready to step into this role, and I'm excited about the future."

Kakac has led FCC's Business & Industry efforts for the past three years and sees natural synergy between that role and the presidency.

"In Business & Industry, I've worked across the district and built strong relationships within the community. That experience has given me a clear view of how these roles can support one another—serving both our students and our local and regional employers. There's a real overlap that aligns with our mission of providing excellent education and meaningful service to the community."

Dr. Kakac describes her leadership style as transparent, student-centered, and collaborative.

"I value listening to diverse perspectives and working toward shared solutions. I also strive to be visible and accessible—not just now, but throughout my career. I've led teams across wide regions, including sales and mining operations.

While my core values remain, I know this new role will require me to be intentional—engaging more broadly across campus and taking a strategic view. Even though we share the same space, it's easy to stay in our offices. I want to meet faculty and staff where they are. And most importantly, I want to empower others to lead. As president, you carry a lot of responsibility, but you must also trust your teams to carry out the day-to-day work effectively."

Kakac says her first 100 days will be about listening, learning, and laying the foundation for long-term success.

"I feel fortunate that I'm not stepping into a completely unfamiliar environment. I understand how IECC and FCC function, so my learning curve is different. My priorities are to ensure strategic alignment across the campus and district, while also strengthening relationships with faculty and staff.

I'll be meeting with every department to understand their roles and perspectives. When people feel heard and valued, they become more invested. I also want to clearly communicate my vision and priorities—guiding principles that will shape our work and impact."

In a few months, construction will begin on a new athletic facility located on the southeastern side of campus, near Mason Hall and Bob Boyles Hall. It will include coaches' offices, locker rooms, a weight room, and a court meeting NCAA regulation for volleyball and basketball.



The proposed site for the athletic facility is located on the southeastern side of campus, south of Mason Hall and east of Bob Boyles Hall.

"This facility will be a gamechanger—it will bring energy and excitement to campus, create a sense of pride, and serve as a powerful tool when recruiting prospective students. Most of all, it will enhance engagement and reshape how we feel about the campus. The impact will be lasting."

Kakac emphasizes the need to align FCC's programs with the needs of local and regional employers.

"Our goal through Business & Industry is to meet workforce training needs while supporting local economic and community development. We offer training in areas like safety, leadership, mental health, and computer skills.

Employers share their challenges with us, and we work together to find solutions. Our aim is to be the go-to resource—the hub—for workforce training. We're

committed to being in lockstep with local industry and growing those partnerships."

Dr. Kakac firmly believes that student success depends on the contributions of everyone on campus—and that students must remain at the center of all decisions.

"Every person on this campus plays a role in student success. My focus is to ensure students feel safe, supported, and prepared for their next steps—whether that's a job, transferring to another college, or starting a new chapter.

We need to consider student impact in every decision—policies, programs, and investments. Our success is measured by how well we serve students. Everything we do is for them and with them. Our goal is to create an environment where they stay, succeed, and become proud alumni."

Kakac also places a strong emphasis on supporting faculty and staff.

"We couldn't serve students effectively without faculty and staff who feel supported. I'm excited to expand professional development opportunities that are meaningful, accessible, and aligned with their roles.

We want to provide transparent pathways for advancement—not just at Frontier, but across the organization. We also want to recognize and support innovation and creative problem-solving. By empowering our employees, we create a culture where everyone can thrive."

Reflecting on her career, Kakac credits the leaders she's worked with for shaping her values and approach.

"I've learned from great leaders—the importance of customer service, treating others with respect, building

strong teams, and casting a clear vision. I want to recognize Dr. Jay Edgren. When he took over in 2014, the campus looked very different. He's created a strong foundation, and I'm thankful for that.

Great leaders are humble, they listen, and they stay grounded in their purpose. I hope to carry those qualities forward."

When asked what has prepared her most for leadership, Kakac's answer is clear: relationships.

"True progress happens through relationships. I value and prioritize them—whether it's leading change, building programs, or creating a trusting culture. Relationships are the foundation of everything we do."



From left to right: Laela Kohzadi, Dr. Sharmila Kakac, Dr. Jay Edgren, and Gary Carter at Frontier Community College's 47th Annual Commencement Ceremony on Friday, May 9, 2025.

For nearly 50 years, Frontier Community College has left a lasting impact through community involvement and engagement. Kakac hopes to deepen those ties even further.

"It's my vision for Frontier to find new and meaningful ways to engage with our community. Whether it's through outreach that brings people to campus or meeting them where they are, our goal is to keep the community at the center of everything we do. I would love to see Frontier become a true cornerstone of the region."

Dr. Sharmila Kakac lives in Fairfield with her husband, Kevin. They have three adult children.

WALK-IN WEDNESDAYS

get ready FOR FALL '25

ADVISING • CLASS REGISTRATION • FINANCIAL AID • TESTING





FREE SNACKS & GIFTS FOR ATTENDING

JULY 2	JULY 9	JULY 16	JULY 23
9-3	9-3	9-3	9-3



A celebration was held on May 15, 2025, at Clay County Hospital in Flora to recognize the first cohort of students completing a one-year nursing apprenticeship program between CCH and Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. Pictured from left to right: Bob Sellers, Chief Executive Officer of Clay County Hospital; Jebbee Tucker (Olney Central College); Jonathan Paul (Frontier Community College); Victoria Sturm (Olney Central College); Whittney Gill (Frontier Community College); Kamy Vail, CCH Educator; and Dr. Alani Frederick, IECC Dean of Health Professions.

FCC STUDENTS STEP INTO SCRUBS AND INTO THEIR FUTURE

A hospital room isn't just a place for healing—it's now a classroom for the future. Thanks to a forward-thinking partnership between Clay County Hospital (CCH) in Flora, Illinois, and Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC), students are stepping into scrubs and into careers through a new healthcare apprenticeship program. This hands-on initiative is giving participants real-world experience while earning credentials, helping to shape the next generation of local healthcare professionals right where they're needed most.

On Thursday, May 15, a celebration was held at Clay County Hospital in Flora, Illinois, to celebrate students from Frontier Community College and Olney Central College who completed the apprenticeship program through CCH and IECC.

Dr. Alani Frederick, Dean of Health Professions, says the apprenticeship program has yielded significant benefits for participating students.

"We started the apprenticeship and partnership with Clay County Hospital two years ago, so this is our first year of graduates," she said. "It's very exciting because these students were able to gain hands-on experience while completing their academic degrees. They also had the

opportunity to work within the facility where they will be hired. This allows them to acclimate to the workplace culture more easily and gives them a head start in the onboarding process compared to students who didn't have this opportunity."

Apprenticeships give students the chance to apply what they've learned in real-world settings, working side-by-side with experienced professionals. Dr. Frederick noted noticeable growth in students' technical and interpersonal abilities.

"The students have developed not only in their clinical skills, but the apprenticeship has especially helped them grow in their soft skills—how to communicate with patients, how to function effectively as part of a healthcare team," she explained. "Those are skills we can't always fully replicate in the limited time of an academic program. But thanks to this partnership, these students are well ahead of their peers in those areas."

Whittney Gill and Jonathan Paul, students at Frontier Community College, shared some of the key lessons they've learned through their apprenticeship experience.

Gill said, "I've learned the difference between the hospital world and the textbook world—how to do things correctly and efficiently to provide the best care for the patient."

Paul added, "Patient care has been a new experience for me. I've never had a job in this field before, so I've had to learn how to care for patients physically, mentally, and in whatever way is needed to support them."



Jonathan Paul works in Frontier Community College's nursing lab during the Fall 2024 semester.

Apprenticeships also help students build professional relationships and mentorships that can lead to long-term career opportunities. They allow participants to explore specific roles within the healthcare field before committing to a particular path, helping them make more informed decisions about their future. Both Gill and Paul expressed high praise for the staff at Clay County Hospital, crediting them for their guidance and support throughout the apprenticeship.

Gill said, "Thank you to CCH for being a huge inspiration to me. All the employees here have helped me through the past two years. I couldn't have done it without them. They played a big role in mentoring me, guiding me in the right direction, and showing me the ropes. I'm truly thankful for all of it."

Paul added, "I think everybody has been great. Everyone has been so nice, respectful, and helpful—every day, with every patient I've cared for. The value of this apprenticeship has been tremendous. I think anyone attending one of the IECC schools should at least apply if they're considering it. It's a great way to find out if nursing or patient care is the right path for you."

With the first group of students completing the apprenticeship, the program has already made a significant impact. Dr. Frederick shared that Clay County Hospital plans to double the number of apprenticeship opportunities next year.

"Clay County Hospital has agreed to double the number of apprentices for next year," she said. "They currently have applications open for four positions, which is very exciting. It shows they see the value in investing in our students. We're hopeful this will continue to grow and expand into additional apprenticeships, possibly even in other specialties. We are incredibly thankful for the support of Clay County Hospital. As a local institution, it's great to see them partnering with our community college to help students in our district become workforce-ready in a meaningful way."



Genova Aguilera and Peggy Harris were honored during the Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards Ceremony, held Wednesday, May 21, at the Illinois State Library in Springfield. Pictured from left to right: Peggy Harris, Genova Aguilera, Illinois Secretary of State and State Librarian Alexi Giannoulias, and Sharis Wilson, Coordinator of Literacy Development.

SPOTLIGHT AWARDS CELEBRATE DEDICATION TO ADULT EDUCATION

The Illinois Eastern Community Colleges Adult Education Department has announced the recipients of the 2025 Spotlight on Achievement Award and the 2025 Spotlight on Service Award.

Genova Aguilera, an immigrant from Central Mexico, joined IECC's Adult Literacy program nine months ago after learning about it through her local library. At the time, she was working as a hostess at Los Tres Caminos in Flora, Illinois, where her limited English skills confined her to seating guests and bussing tables. Wanting more for herself, Genova committed to learning English—and that commitment has transformed her life.

Today, Genova confidently takes food orders, handles money as a cashier, and engages in friendly conversations with customers. Despite working full time, renovating a home, and preparing to welcome her first child, she attends tutoring sessions twice a week during her work breaks and continues to study independently at home. Her dedication, persistence, and positive spirit have inspired everyone around her.

Because of her remarkable progress and determination, Genova was selected as one of ten outstanding adult learners in the state to receive the 2025 Spotlight on Achievement Award.

Margaret “Peggy” Harris has been a compassionate force in the IECC literacy program since joining as a volunteer tutor through Frontier Community College. After retiring from a career in teaching, Peggy found new purpose in tutoring adult learners—bringing not only experience but a deep passion for helping others succeed.

Since June 2024, she has worked closely with Genova Aguilera, supporting her development in conversational English and helping her build confidence in the workplace. Peggy also volunteers as a Grief Share Group facilitator in Louisville, Illinois, demonstrating the same empathy and dedication in all areas of her life. Her kindness, reliability, and sincere commitment to adult education set her apart.

In recognition of her outstanding service, Peggy was selected as one of ten exceptional volunteer tutors in Illinois to receive the 2025 Spotlight on Service Award.

Both Genova Aguilera and Peggy Harris were honored at the Spotlight on Achievement and Service Awards Ceremony, held Wednesday, May 21, 2025, at 11:30 a.m. at the Illinois State Library in Springfield, Illinois. During the ceremony, Secretary of State and State Librarian Alexi Giannoulas presented commemorative plaques to all award recipients in recognition of their accomplishments and commitment to lifelong learning.

BOBCATS POST STRONG GPA ACROSS ALL TEAMS

Frontier Community College student-athletes proved that excellence isn't limited to the field or court. Academic achievements for the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 semesters highlight the continued commitment of Bobcat student-athletes to success in the classroom.

Three athletic programs—volleyball, baseball, and softball—achieved strong cumulative team grade point averages, with all teams earning above a 3.60 GPA for the academic year.

JULY 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

2	Walk-In Wednesday at Student Services	9-3
4	Independence Day - Campuses Closed	
9	Walk-In Wednesday at Student Services	9-3
15	IECC Board of Trustees Meeting at OCC	6:15
16	Walk-In Wednesday at Student Services	9-3
21	Last Day to Withdraw from Summer Courses	
23	Walk-In Wednesday at Student Services	9-3
25	Last Day of Summer Classes	
28-29	Finals for Summer Classes	

* - To view the July 2025 calendar and upcoming events, visit iecc.edu/fcc and click on the "Community" tab to access the Calendar of Events. Our calendars are updated daily.

AUGUST 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

13	IECC Faculty & Staff Workshop/Campus Closed	
14	Faculty Workshop	
18-20	Fall Registration, Testing	
19	New Student Orientation	
19	IECC Board of Trustees Meeting at WVC	6:15
21	First Day of Fall Classes	
23	Bobcats Volleyball @ Vincennes Tri-Match	
27	Bobcats Volleyball vs Wabash	
29-30	Bobcats Volleyball @ Jimmy Johns Classic at Southeastern Community College in West Burlington, Iowa	

* - To view the August 2025 calendar and upcoming events, visit iecc.edu/fcc and click on the "Community" tab to access the Calendar of Events. Our calendars are updated daily.

Volleyball:

Fall GPA – 3.47

Spring GPA – 3.85

Overall Team GPA – 3.63

Baseball:

Fall GPA – 3.61

Spring GPA – 3.61

Overall Team GPA – 3.61

Softball:

Fall GPA – 3.69

Spring GPA – 3.78

Overall Team GPA – 3.73

In recognition of their academic accomplishments, many student-athletes were named to the Chancellor's, President's, and Dean's Honor Lists.

Chancellor's Honor List (GPA 3.9 – 4.0):

Volleyball: Rebekah Busby, Laela Kohzadi, Camdyn Tappendorf, Maryn Vaughn

Baseball: Keyonte Back, Ian Olivier-Beaulieu, Bailey Collins, Justin Early, Landon Harrelson, Nick Kaelin, Troy Mann, Braxton Mathews, Sean McConachie, Cameron McDonald, Caden Myers, Chance Pair, Ethan Payne, Gael Salinas, Nathan Stivers, Miles Whitesell

Softball: Abby Cunningham, Riley Cunningham, Rylee Hendricks, Rylan Jarboe, Lexi Miller, Kinley Sparks, Emmy Vinson, Maci Warner

President's Honor List (GPA 3.75 – 3.89):

Volleyball: Arlissa Sharber, Cadence Wartsbaugh

Baseball: Kyle Carter, Asa Dunleavy, Dawson Holtz, Trent Lowery

Softball: Bella Brownlee, Alicia Stanley, Kyndall Webb

Dean's Honor List (GPA 3.5 – 3.74):

Baseball: Kaelin Farr, Seth Harris, Drake Hartline, Cole Lambert, Isaac Lawson, Brock Taulman, Isaiah Thompson

Softball: AJ Hollowell

No volleyball student-athletes were named to the Dean's Honor List, as several qualified for the higher honor categories.

Frontier Community College is proud of its student-athletes for their academic diligence and the standard of excellence they continue to uphold both in and out of competition.

For more information on Frontier Community College athletics, visit fccbobcats.com.



You Are Invited!

Come-and-Go Retirement Reception for Dr. Jay Edgren

Thursday, June 26, 2025 1-3 P.M.

Bob Boyles Hall - Frontier Community College

2 Frontier Drive - Fairfield, Illinois 62837

FCC IN PICTURES



1 Lori Noe crafted a Bobcat out of origami during the Origami I Kids Camp.

3 Justin Trucks and his classmates listen as Linda Monge instructs.

5 Kyndall Webb, Rylan Jarboe, and Gracelin Schell share high-fives on National High Five Day.

2 Robert Tennyson gets his blood pressure checked by CNA student.

4 Shalom Okoroafor collaborates on a group project in the Learning Commons.

6 Derek Dunn and Carrie Halbert discuss FCC and IECC with WNOI Radio's Tom Lavine.