

JULY 2025



VISION MEETS ACTION

Strategic connections made on Dr. Kakac's First Day.



THANK YOU, JAY

Community celebrates Edgren's retirement and contributions.



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DR. KAKAC BEGINS PRESIDENCY WITH KEY LEGISLATIVE VISIT

A new month brought a new chapter at Frontier Community College as Dr. Sharmila Kakac officially began her duties on Tuesday, July 1, as President of FCC and Vice Chancellor of Business & Industry for Illinois Eastern Community Colleges.

Dr. Kakac's first day was a memorable one. Following a series of meetings, Illinois State Senator Terri Bryant, State Representative Dave Severin, and IECC Chancellor Dr. Ryan Gower arrived on campus shortly after 3 p.m. The group met in the Mason Hall Conference Room to discuss a range of topics relevant to both Frontier and the broader IECC District.

"Not everybody gets a senator and a representative to visit on their first day," said Dr. Kakac. "It was exciting. It was great to have our local representatives here. They cover a large region, and it's important to make those connections. We need each other to keep this area and region vibrant. We need them to hear our concerns, and they need to stay connected with their constituents."

She described the meeting as very positive and productive.

“We talked about a lot—unique challenges that rural southern Illinois faces compared to other parts of the state. They were very open and shared some of their own concerns about the political landscape in Springfield. Priorities can look very different depending on where you are in the state, so having open lines of communication is critical. We made those connections and feel confident that we can reach out to them when we need to—and they can do the same with us.”



State Representative, Dave Severin, talks to the group about how to make Frontier and the IECC District a stronger voice in Springfield.

One key topic discussed was strengthening the voice of Frontier and all IECC colleges in Springfield. Dr. Kakac emphasized the importance of clear communication at the state level.

“There’s a lot of noise at the state level, and our region often gets overlooked—partly due to politics, partly because of geography,” she explained. “Our needs are distinct. There was a clear consensus in the room that community colleges, especially in our region, need a more unified and amplified voice. We need our lawmakers to advocate for us, and that starts with open and direct dialogue.”

Following the meeting, the group toured the FCC campus, exploring facilities and learning more about the academic programs and student opportunities that make Frontier unique. IECC Board Chairman Gary Carter and Trustee Jan Ridgely were also in attendance.



State Senator, Terri Bryant and Dr. Sharmila Kakac discuss the impact of community colleges locally and abroad.

Dr. Kakac said the visit had a strong impact on Senator Bryant and Representative Severin.

“I think having a united front—IECC speaking together—really resonated. They didn’t realize everything we have here. Seeing our programs up close, hearing about our student success stories—it opened their eyes. Frontier isn’t just important to Fairfield—it’s vital to the entire region. Community colleges play a huge role in our local economy and workforce, and I believe this visit helped reinforce that in a powerful way.”



Dr. Jay Edgren and his wife, Jae Lee, smile behind his cake at the Cookout Potluck held on Thursday, June 26 at Bob Boyles Hall on FCC's campus.

DR. JAY EDGREN HONORED FOR 11 YEARS OF SERVICE AT FCC

Before officially retiring from Frontier Community College on Monday, June 30, Dr. Jay Edgren was recognized for his 11 years of dedicated service during the June 17 meeting of the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC) Board of Trustees. IECC Chancellor Dr. Ryan Gower presented Dr. Edgren with a commemorative plaque, and the Board unanimously approved a resolution honoring his contributions to the college and the district.

On Thursday, June 26, FCC faculty and staff gathered at Bob Boyles Hall for a potluck luncheon from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. to celebrate Dr. Edgren's retirement and wish him well in his next chapter. As a token of appreciation, he received a lamp engraved with the FCC seal. During the event, Dr. Edgren delivered a brief speech of gratitude to those in attendance, mentioning former IECC Chief Executive Officer Terry L. Bruce and Chancellor Ryan Gower.

"Terry L. Bruce was a hands-off kind of guy—until you needed him—and he always had your back. I appreciate him and Dr. Ryan Gower for entrusting me with the opportunities I've had to serve as President and Vice Chancellor.

I will say, anything we have accomplished here has been a 'we'—not a 'me.' It's always been a team effort, whether it was athletics, beautification projects, or academic decisions. I appreciate you all for providing input, helping carry out the vision, and doing the hard work. This isn't a 'Jay' thing—it's a Frontier Community College thing. It's always been that way."

Later that afternoon, a come-and-go retirement reception was held at Bob Boyles Hall from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., welcoming members of the IECC Board and the community.

IECC Board Chairman Gary Carter shared reflections on Dr. Edgren's impact and their lasting friendship:

"You really took hold of Frontier. We had a lot of changes during your time—with campus buildings and athletics. One of the things we really stressed was having our presidents and administration involved in the community. You've done that very well—through the clubs you've joined, the organizations you've supported, and even through pickleball. You've taken pickleball to a new level in Fairfield.

I cherish your friendship. We haven't always agreed on things, but the great thing about friendship is that we can disagree and still remain friends. It's been good being your friend."



Dr. Jay Edgren holds a lamp engraved with the FCC seal—a retirement gift presented to him by Frontier Community College.

Dr. Sharmila Kakac has succeeded Dr. Edgren as President of Frontier Community College and Vice Chancellor of Business & Industry. She officially began her role on Tuesday, July 1. A feature story highlighting her vision for FCC and the Business & Industry division can be found in the June 2025 edition of The Voyager.

SPRING 2025 FRONTIER ACADEMIC HONORS

Frontier Community College is proud to announce the Academic Honors recipients for the Spring 2025 semester. A total of 99 students have been recognized for their outstanding academic performance and dedication to their studies. Students earned placement on one of three Academic Honors lists based on their semester grade point average.

The Chancellor's Academic Honors list includes 64 students who earned a GPA of 3.90 or greater. The President's Academic Honors list recognizes 17 students with a GPA between 3.75 and 3.89. The Dean's Academic Honors list features 18 students who achieved a GPA between 3.50 and 3.74. "We are proud to recognize these students for their academic success," said Dr. Sharmila Kakac, President of Frontier Community College. "Their dedication reflects the strength of character and persistence needed to succeed in college and beyond."

Frontier Community College congratulates these students for their academic achievement



Abby and Riley Cunningham look through the graduation programs as Rylan Jarboe looks on during Frontier Community College's 47th Annual Commencement on Friday, May 9.

and continued pursuit of excellence. A full list of honorees can be found on the college's official social media channels.

ADAPTING TO INNOVATION: THE LEARNING COMMONS EVOLUTION

Libraries across the nation have undergone a technological transformation, evolving far beyond rows of books and quiet study corners. From cataloging to multimedia integration, technology has reshaped how students access and interact with information. At Frontier Community College, Learning Commons in Clemence Elizabeth Cox Hall is no exception.

Since January 2021, Lori Noe, Director of Learning Commons, has witnessed these changes firsthand. As student needs shift toward digital research, tech-driven study tools, and flexible learning spaces, the Learning Commons has adapted—embracing innovation while maintaining its role as a welcoming, resource-rich hub for academic success.

With the rise of digital resources, Noe emphasizes the importance of information literacy when students conduct research online for projects or assignments. While the internet offers a wealth of information, distinguishing between credible sources and unreliable content is crucial.

"We are bombarded with information daily, and we must determine what is credible. It is increasingly challenging to impress upon our students the importance of searching for validity and peer-reviewed information when researching a paper. It's easy for them to do a quick Google search or even look something up on TikTok.

I work to teach students that 'just because you can, doesn't mean you should' when it comes to internet research. We have a plethora of databases available that they should be using. Data literacy is at the forefront for everyone who works in a library or research setting."



Lori Noe stands beside a selection of the many books available for checkout at FCC's Learning Commons.

One of the most in-demand resources at Learning Commons is scientific calculators. Many students are reluctant to purchase these costly tools, especially if they only need them for a semester. As a result, Learning Commons offers scientific calculators for checkout, with circulation beginning at the start of each semester.

Technology has changed how students interact with library resources, and Noe has observed a lasting shift since the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020.

"Electronic resources are available anywhere now, so students do not necessarily need to sit in the library to do their research as they did in the past. We see students come in and ask for instruction, but then they complete the work later on their own.

I would say the COVID lockdown formed a new type of student. Our current students were in high school during the lockdown and were forced to complete their work virtually, on their own. Their study skills were molded during this time. Students today are adept

at knowing what works best for them."

While most academic materials are digital, Noe has noticed a growing trend of students checking out physical books for pleasure reading.

"We audit database usage annually to ensure we offer what students need. Most academic materials are digital, but my last few orders of physical books have been for 'pleasure reading.' Since I've been in this position, I've seen an uptick in student pleasure reading, probably thanks to BookTok.

I keep up with trends—right now, 'romantasy' is popular with our students. For pleasure reading, they want actual physical books. I assume they read so much online and electronically that it's refreshing to hold a book and turn the pages."

To better meet student needs, Learning Commons has undergone several upgrades to create a more comfortable and functional space.

"We have made some upgrades to better cater to what our students need and want. We now have two semi-private study rooms, which have been very popular. ISAB provided us with a Keurig, so we are seeing new faces come in to grab a hot drink.



This quiet space has served many students as a spot for studying, doing homework, or collaborating on group projects.

AUGUST 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

13	IECC Faculty & Staff Workshop	8:00
14	Faculty Workshop	9:00
18 - 20	Fall Registration, Testing	
19	New Student Orientation	9-11
20	Back to School Splash at Leo French Park	
21	First Day of Fall Classes	
21	Cookout & Outdoor Games at Dreith Pavilion	11-1
22	Board Games in Learning Commons	11-1
23	Bobcats Volleyball @ Vincennes Tri-Match	
25	Donut Stress with TRiO in Learning Commons	7:30-10
25	Pickleball at Lakeside Park	2-4
26	Sweet Start	11-2
26	Club Rush at Learning Commons	11-2
27	Bobcats Volleyball vs Wabash Valley	
27	School Spirit Night @ Center Street for Volleyball	
28	Chalk Walk Contest	9-4
28	Popcorn Bar at Learning Commons	9-4
29-30	Bobcats Volleyball at Jimmy Johns Classic @ South Eastern College in West Burlington, Iowa	
29	Board Games at Learning Commons	11-1

SEPT 2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

1	Campus Closed - Labor Day	
2	Bobcats Volleyball @ Rend Lake	
2	BINGO Night hosted by Student Senate at BBH	7
3	Pizza & Preparation at Learning Commons	12 Noon
4	Bobcats Volleyball vs Lincoln Trail	
4	Duck Drop	Noon
5-6	Bobcats Volleyball @ East Central Tourney	
10	Bobcats Volleyball @ Kaskaskia	
12-13	Bobcats Volleyball @ Lake Land Tourney	
15	Bobcats vs Lake Land	
16	IECC Board of Trustees Meeting @ FCC	6:15
17	Constitution Observance Day (Campus Open)	
17	Bobcats Volleyball @ SWIC	
24	Bobcats Volleyball vs Southeastern Illinois	
26	Bobcats Volleyball @ John A. Logan	
29	Bobcats Volleyball vs Kaskaskia	

* As of Monday, July 7, 2025, Bobcat Volleyball game times are still being finalized. Once confirmed, the schedule will be shared on FCC's official social media channels and posted on fccbobcats.com.



The massage chair in the Learning Commons has become a favorite among students and staff at Frontier.

We have traditional chairs and tables, but I also added some alternative seating options. We purchased two soft chairs and a bench, and I've seen students rearrange them for their comfort. I also welcome students to bring in their food if they are here during their lunch break.

The massage chair is a favorite, and I always have various 'brain break' activities available when students just want to do something else. We want this space to be as welcoming as possible."

For students who may not have reliable internet access at home, the Learning Commons serves as an essential resource.

"We encourage students to come in and use the Wi-Fi," Noe says.

Additionally, Learning Commons is always open to faculty suggestions for new resources and ways to integrate technology into curriculum support.

Learning Commons is designed to be more than just a place for research—it's a comfortable and accessible space for students to study, collaborate, and unwind. Learning Commons is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. during the fall and spring semesters and from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. during the summer semester. For more information, contact Lori Noe at noel@iecc.edu.

Enjoy Your Summer, Bobcats!
First Day of Fall Classes: August 21



SACRIFICE AND STRENGTH: A MOTHER'S JOURNEY TO RN

Education never stops—especially when you're chasing a dream.

For Flora, Illinois native, Kate Fopay, returning to school wasn't just a decision—it was a calling.



Kate Fopay listens attentively and takes notes during a nursing lecture in Cox Hall.

Years after earning her high school diploma, she's back in the classroom at Frontier Community College, proving it's never too late to start something meaningful. Just this summer, Fopay became a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). With her sights now set on earning her nursing degree, she's showing her children—and herself—that perseverance has no expiration date.

Fopay says her interest in the medical field started with a mix of passion and curiosity.

"My inspiration to pursue nursing comes from my passion to help others and my fascination with the human body. Throughout my time in the program, that inspiration has grown even stronger. I've gained confidence, knowledge, and skills that have shown me just how rewarding—and challenging—this profession truly is."

Reflecting on her time at Frontier, she shares how transformative the experience has been.

"The most rewarding part of my nursing journey so far has undoubtedly been the self-confidence and self-discovery I've gained by pushing myself beyond my comfort zone and achieving goals I once thought were out of reach."

Clinicals are a foundational component of nursing education, essential for both Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) and Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs. These hands-on rotations give students the opportunity to apply what they've learned in the classroom and lab to real patient care settings. Under the guidance of registered nurses and clinical instructors, students develop critical nursing skills, professional confidence, and a deeper understanding of the human side of healthcare.

Fopay says her clinicals at Clay County Hospital in Flora have played a major role in her development as a future nurse.

"My clinical experiences have deeply shaped my understanding of patient care and what it truly means to be a nurse," she explains. "I've learned that nursing goes far beyond medical treatments—it's about caring for patients holistically. That means supporting their mind, body, and soul on their path to healing."

Fopay doesn't shy away from the realities of balancing nursing school with being a single mother. She's honest about the obstacles, but also grounded in hope.

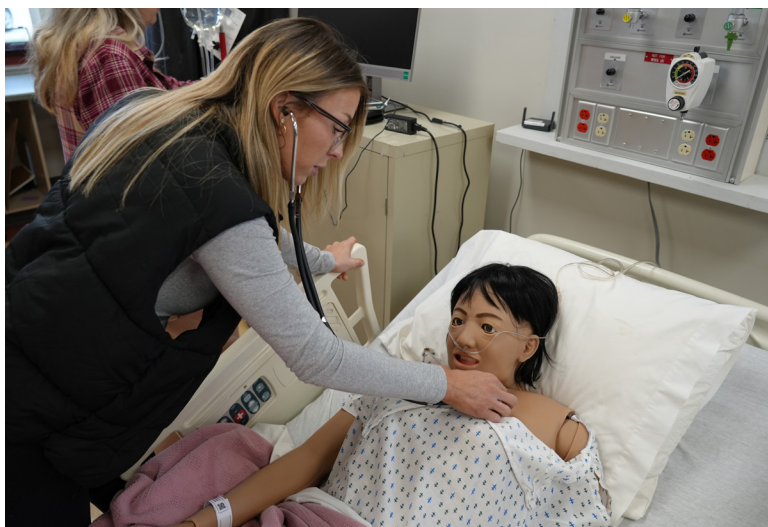
"Being a single mother has brought many challenges to my nursing journey," she admits. "The biggest hurdle has been living on a single part-time income while balancing school and family life. But God has made a way for me! I know the sacrifices I'm making now will be worth it when I reach my goal of becoming a nurse and building a better future for my family."

With just one more year left at Frontier before becoming a registered nurse, Fopay is already looking ahead.

"I'd love to specialize in medical-surgical nursing or emergency medicine," she says. "Those fields offer so much variety, and I'm drawn to the challenge and the opportunity to care for a wide range of patients."

As she looks back on her journey, she expresses deep gratitude for Frontier's nursing faculty and support system.

"Attending FCC has prepared me for success in nursing by giving me a strong academic foundation, supportive instructors, and valuable hands-on experiences," Fopay says. "The smaller class sizes have allowed me to build meaningful connections with my professors and classmates, which has helped me grow both personally and professionally."



Fopay and her nursing classmates use the Cox Hall nursing lab for hands-on training. Manikins like this one help students gain a better understanding of real-world medical scenarios.



On May 9, Kate stands outside Fairfield Community High School after receiving her Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) certificate. With one year to go, Fopay is on track to become a registered nurse.

To those just starting the program—or thinking about it—Fopay offers heartfelt advice.

"The nursing program will likely be one of the hardest things you'll ever do—but it's possible, and it's worth it," she says. "If you're questioning whether you should pursue a career in nursing, take the leap and go for it. You won't regret it."



FCC IN PICTURES



1 Dr. Jay Edgren chats with IECC Board Trustee Brenda Culver.

3 Gary Carter shares a few words about Jay during his retirement reception.

5 Chancellor Ryan Gower speaks with Senator Terri Bryant and State Representative Dave Severin in the Mason Hall Conference Room.

2 Beautiful flowers are in full bloom outside Mason Hall.

4 Illinois State Senator Terri Bryant greets Dr. Sharmila Kakac outside Mason Hall.

6 FCC MLT Instructor Julie Dehart attends the potluck luncheon honoring Dr. Jay Edgren.