The Aspen Institute College Excellence Program has named Moraine Valley Community College as one of the top 150 community colleges in the nation eligible to compete for its $1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. The prize is the nation’s signature recognition of high achievement and performance among community colleges.

Based on strong and improving student outcomes in learning, completion rates, employment rates and earnings, and equity, 15% of community colleges nationwide were invited to apply for the Aspen Prize. Since 2014, Moraine Valley has maintained a strategic and distinct focus on student retention and completion. College-readiness initiatives, the Agree-to-Degree campaign encouraging completion and an improved first-year experience program all have helped increase graduation rates. Last spring, the college joined the Illinois Equity in Attainment statewide committee to address completion gaps in low-income and first-generation students. It also officially adopted equity and inclusion as part of the college’s core values.

“We are elated to be selected to apply for this prestigious prize,” said Dr. Sylvia Jenkins, Moraine Valley president. “To be considered among the elite community colleges in this country is a true testament to the amazing work of our dedicated faculty and staff, who always put students first. Our students made their best choice by coming to Moraine Valley. They put their dreams in our hands, and we take that very seriously. It’s an honor to be recognized for the work we are doing.”

The top 10 finalists for the 2021 Aspen Prize will be named in May 2020, and a jury will make an award decision in spring 2021.
Student options expand with new Associate in Engineering Science degree

A new associate degree in Engineering Science is creating a pathway for students interested in pursuing a Bachelor of Science in engineering. The program encompasses a range of engineering majors, including aerospace, nuclear, agricultural and biological, civil, computer, energy management, and more.

Moraine Valley also offers an Engineering Pathways program, which guarantees transfer admission into the College of Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It is designed for high school seniors who plan to enroll at Moraine Valley as first-time college students for the fall semester following graduation.

“This degree provides the first transfer credential specifically designed for engineering students,” said Dr. Ryen Nagle, dean of Science, Business and Computer Technology. “The success of our Engineering Pathways partnership demonstrated the need for transfer pathways for these students. The degree expands the opportunity for pathways beyond the University of Illinois to many of the institutions popular with Moraine Valley students.”

New winter session in demand

For the first time, Moraine Valley held a winter session Dec. 16 to Jan. 10, with eight accelerated classes. All of the online courses filled within days of registration opening, proving students are looking for expanded enrollment options. The session also included the popular Belize Marine Biology travel course.

Dr. Deron Schreck, Political Science professor, taught the American National Government course and believed offering a winter session was the right choice. “It’s an innovative way to teach a traditional 17-week course in a four-week time frame. Students are asking for options in taking classes. They don’t want to be relegated to the traditional format. For the real ‘go-getters,’ a winter session was right up their alley.”
Nursing Program receives high ranking in Illinois

The Nursing Program received a No. 3 ranking for its Registered Nurse (RN) program and No. 4 ranking for its Licensed Practice Nurse (LPN) program from Nursing Explorer. Over 60 nursing schools in Illinois were assessed and ranked as best-value nursing programs.

Nursing Explorer is a national resource and database for students to research nursing schools and their corresponding programs. Using the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) pass rate and net-price, among other criteria, as its parameters, the final scores reflect the quality of education and affordability. A higher NCLEX pass rate and lower tuition earn a better standing.

“The faculty and students work hard to maintain a high NCLEX rate,” said Georgina Murphy, director of the Nursing Program. “We are very proud of our program and our students. This validates to the public what we have known all along.”

Children’s Learning Center earns state recognition

The Children’s Learning Center, which provides child care and preschool for children ages 2 to 5, received the Bronze Circle of Quality designation from ExceleRate Illinois, the state’s quality recognition and improvement system for early learning and development providers.

National Geographic Learning selects Moraine Valley for video

Moraine Valley was the first community college in the United States selected to be part of a video produced by and for National Geographic Learning, an educational publisher of digital and curricular classroom materials.

In October, a crew from National Geographic Learning spent two days on campus recording staff and students in English as a Second Language (ESL) and Intensive English Language Program (IELP) classes using the National Geographic materials. The video is part of “Project Classroom.”

“It was an honor to be the first ESL and IELP programs at a community college featured, which speaks volumes about our program,” said Dr. Nina Shoman-Dajani, assistant dean of Learning Enrichment and College Readiness. “The books are full of real life stories and pictures from all over the world and recognize that each individual has a unique journey. The diversity represented in the materials is reflective of the students we serve.”
Ukraine delegation visits campus

Members of the Ukraine Parliament visited Moraine Valley in November to learn more about community colleges and higher education in the United States. The delegation spent a week in Chicago, visiting several schools and organizations.

While on campus, they met with Dr. Sylvia Jenkins, trustee John Coleman, members of the Executive Leadership Team, faculty and deans for discussions about technology programs, online courses, disability and veterans services, funding and more. They also received a tour of the technology building.

The meeting was facilitated by the Illinois Community College Board and Open World Leadership Center at the Library of Congress, which assists foreign guests with visiting the United States.

Grant allows for solar panels installation at Moraine Valley

Green energy was incorporated more into curriculum after students taking Air Conditioning Theory and Basic Electrical Controls helped install solar panels, power cabinets, batteries and wiring purchased with funds from a $5,000 grant from the Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN).

Moraine Valley received the IGEN grant to implement educational programming around energy efficiency, yielding this project. The solar power apparatus will be incorporated into the learning outcomes and lesson plans for four HVAC courses. The panels will also supply 120-volt power to some new refrigeration training boards rather than plugging into the college’s electrical power supply.

“This was a great project that gave students firsthand experience on why solar power is becoming such a big part of our industry through sustainability,” said Steve Brasel, Mechanical Technologies department chair (retired). “It’s great to see the theory of sustainable energy put into practical use.”
Chorale opens holiday concert season at Rialto Square Theatre

The Moraine Valley Community College Chorale and instrumental ensemble performed to a packed house for an opening-night concert of Home for the Holidays, a monthlong celebration at the Rialto Square Theatre in Joliet, Illinois.

The group, under the direction of Nick Thomas, director of Choral activities and Fine Arts and Humanities department chair, performed A Very Rialto Christmas Making Merry Music, featuring more than a dozen favorite holiday songs.

“We were so honored to have been asked to present this concert in the beautiful and magnificent Rialto Square Theatre,” Thomas said. “To those who heard the Chorale and instrumental ensemble for the first time, I think it was a real treat. I like to think of our concerts as a choral experience they’ve never had before.”

The Moraine Chorale, celebrating its 22nd season, is a community-based choir with 100 members.

College partners with Chicago Fire to host FIFA tournament

Moraine Valley partnered in the fall with the Chicago Fire to host the college’s and the club’s first FIFA Play Station 4 (PS4) College Tournament Challenge. The tournament was held in conjunction with the release of the FIFA 2020 PS4 soccer video game and allowed for 16 slots, which quickly filled with Moraine Valley students and alumni, and community members.

The winner was Amro Mehyar, a former Moraine Valley student. Earning this top prize also earned Mehyar four tickets to a 2020 Chicago Fire regular season home match, a Chicago Fire jersey, and qualification to participate in the next level of the tournament at the Chicago Fire Pitch in Chicago.
Former student soars to ‘The Voice’ finale

Moraine Valley alumna Katie Kadan earned a coveted spot in the finale of “The Voice.” Under the mentorship of award-winning artist John Legend, Kadan remained a frontrunner throughout the competition, winning third place in season 17 of the nationally televised singing competition.

Kaden lived in Summit when she attended Moraine Valley, studying fine arts as late as 2008. She grew up singing in churches, has been performing in local clubs for the past seven years, and worked as a vocal coach and piano teacher. She, along with the first and second place winners of “The Voice,” performed the halftime show at a Carolina Panthers football game in December.

Theater alumni share their experiences with students

Theater students met and talked with two former Moraine Valley students who now are touring with an award-winning national Broadway tour.

Ronnie Malley (right) and Joel Bulthuis visited the college while they were in Chicago with “The Band’s Visit,” winner of 10 Tony Awards and the 2019 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album. Malley, an actor and musician, plays the role of Camal, while Bulthuis is in charge of lighting and video.

“It was wonderful to have them here so our students can make connections with real, working professionals,” said Jenni Lamb-Hetherington, theater outreach liaison at the college. “It was very inspiring for everyone, including me.”

The two spoke to students in a theater appreciation class and to theater students in a panel discussion. “The students really enjoyed talking with them. When you’re a young person looking at taking a risk and going the route of making this your profession, it’s very good to see someone who was in your shoes and is now a success,” Lamb-Hetherington said. “Like many theater professionals, they didn’t grow up surrounded by actors and lighting designers, so it’s good to see the people doing your dream job are real people.”

Bulthuis was really happy to spend some time with the students. “We wanted them to know they could go to a small school in the south suburbs and go on to find a great career,” he said.
**Awards, Recognition and Accomplishments**

--- **Bret Figura**, graphic designer in Marketing and Communications, was named the District 3 Rising Star by the National Council for Marketing and Public Relations (NCMPR) at its conference in October. The Rising Star Award recognizes newcomers who have demonstrated special creativity or ability in marketing and PR, and show evidence of a promising future in the field. Figura was nominated for the award because of his work on the class schedule. Through an iterative revision process, he vastly improved the piece and reduced costs.

--- **Richard Lapidus**, professor of Mechanical Design Technology and coordinator of Computer Generated Imagery, collaborated with George Berlin Studios to design CGI images for an exhibition called EarthRise: Apollo, a four-part series of projection mapping epics to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. One of the segments, titled Moonbeams, debuted on the 248,000-square-foot façade of the Bucharest Parliament Palace in Romania for the International Video Mapping Competition.

--- **Carmela Ochoa**, coordinator of High School Equivalency, was appointed a partner liaison for the Coalition on Adult Basic Education and American Association of Adult and Continuing Education. She will create collaboration between the two organizations.

--- **Dr. John Sands**, professor of Information Technology, received the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) Outstanding Faculty Member Award for the central region during the group’s Annual Leadership Congress in San Francisco in October.

--- **Mai Sugimoto**, adjunct music instructor, performed with her group, the Mai Sugimoto Quartet, at the Chicago Jazz Festival in August. This is the first time she performed on saxophone as leader of a group.
American Sign Language class signs at Wrigley

Moraine Valley students in their second year of the American Sign Language program were interpreters for deaf fans at the Chicago Cubs game at Wrigley Field in September. They interacted with and assisted the deaf community where needed and interpreted the national anthem while practicing their skills.