



Newsletter - Spring 2024



The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy aims to educate and engage the public on important policy matters, but in this issue, I want to highlight the ways this mission benefits our campus community.

Whether they are engaging in practical research through our internship and polling opportunities, attending events to hear from accomplished industry experts, meeting legislators, or immersing themselves in the civic process at our debates, Stockton students can count on the Hughes Center to model the many ways they can put their education into practice.

As a first-generation college student, I know firsthand just how transformative these types of experiences are. These opportunities not only instill new skills and confidence, but Hughes Center programming can also open students' eyes to new possibilities for their future, introduce them to changemakers, and demonstrate the various ways they can make an impact through policy work.

In this issue, among a recap of our many initiatives, you will read about our latest event featuring New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Lee Solomon and other legal experts discussing innovative diversionary programs that are changing lives. You will also read about a new Hughes Center initiative launched to equip students with the resources they need to secure public policy internships. And as always, you can catch up on our latest research releases which add to the public discourse around timely but under-explored issues like the regulation of artificial intelligence or medicinal psilocybin.

We aim to inform and engage stakeholders all across New Jersey and that includes our campus community.

Stockton students are eager to blaze their own path and we hope the Hughes Center can be a catalyst to help set them on their way.

Alyssa Maurice

Alyssa Maurice, Interim Director, Research Associate

In this issue:

- Learn about the panel on mental health in the justice system
 - Read about the Hughes Center Honors 2023
 - Take a look at the first Hughes Center Student Research Reception
 - Review the latest Hughes Center poll results
 - Find out how the Hughes Center supports student engagement
 - Stay tuned for more programming by the Hughes Center
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Responses to the Mental Health Crisis in the Justice System Panel

On April 16, the Hughes Center sponsored a virtual panel event which featured a lineup of experts who discussed topics related to mental health in the justice system.

Justice Lee Solomon, associate justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court and chair of the court's committee on Wellness in the Law, opened the discussion by talking about how the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting physical isolation amplified the many stressors that legal professionals, including judges, lawyers, and administrators, face as part of their professional activities. Solomon cited surveys that showed increased depression, suicidal ideation, addiction, and other concerning trends, particularly among lawyers.



Timothy McGoughran, president of the New Jersey State Bar Association, spoke about the increased stress that legal professionals have been facing in recent years, and the member's assistance program that was started to help these professionals and their families with various disorders, including depression, anxiety, and eating disorders.

Nan Waller, Multnomah County Circuit Judge in Portland, Oregon, discussed her primary

occupation of presiding over a mental health court and competency docket. Many of the cases she hears involve people who are suffering from addiction or mental health issues, and too often the criminal justice system is ill-equipped to adequately provide the necessary support and treatment required.

James Bianco, judge of the Superior Court of Los Angeles, offered some perspective about how his court handles the large number of mental health cases. He presides over a centralized mental health court that deals primarily with such issues and has an individualized plan for different individuals based on their mental health and criminal history, as well as the ODR program, which allows people to obtain housing, mental health treatment, and be gradually reintegrated into society.

Mark Sandson, retired Recovery Court Judge and chair of the New Jersey JOBS program which aims to secure employment for probation clients, spoke about the success of the program in reducing recidivism and helping people find and maintain jobs that provide a living wage and benefits for themselves and their families.

Iyana James, associate director of Justice Involved Services at Jewish Family Services of Atlantic County, discussed her agency's role in assessing people who have court appearances for the Central Municipal Courts program, the first regional court in New Jersey. This program provides assistance with mental health issues, substance abuse, housing, and employment.

The event was moderated by retired assignment judge Julio Mendez, a Hughes Center senior contributing analyst.

Watch the panel and learn more about the event [here](#).

Hughes Center Student Research Reception

The first Hughes Center Student Research Reception was held on February 1, 2024. The event highlighted the work of Hughes Center students.

In recent years the Hughes Center has intensified its work with students. Since 2020, the center has taken on at least one student research intern each semester, mentoring students in research methods and publishing their projects on a dedicated student research webpage. Research

Associate Alyssa Maurice and staffer Darya Hrybava also created videos in 2023 to promote the research of students in the School of Social & Behavioral Sciences.

More than 1,000 Stockton students have worked with the Stockton Polling Institute since its inception in 2012, learning about survey research and statistics as well as government and politics. For years, the center has supported the Washington Internship Program by providing \$1,000 scholarships each semester to a needy student.

The center has also provided funding to sponsor student research in the Faculty Fellow and the state Wind Institute Fellowship Programs.

At the reception students Jessie Nash, Daniel Tidcombe, Valery Cintron, Heather McCarty and Dylan Irmiere spoke about their experience working with the center and what this opportunity meant for them.



At the end of the reception Dr. John Froomjian's retirement was announced and he was presented with a plaque in recognition of his dedication to the center and his great contributions to its success.

The reception was sponsored by Salmon Ventures Ltd.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the event.



Latest Hughes Center Poll Results on Artificial Intelligence, Medicinal Psilocybin, and More

In March, the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy conducted a poll that focused on the rising impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in all aspects of daily life for New Jerseyans.

Residents were asked about a wide range of applications of AI, and the responses varied widely depending on the specific use of AI. Regarding their general exposure to AI, a majority of residents (56%) said they had heard a lot about artificial intelligence, 36% had heard at least a little, while only 8% said they had not heard anything about AI. As for how AI would impact their lives, 36% said the increased use of AI would make their lives worse, 25% said it will make their lives better, and 26% said it would have no impact. Of the respondents who predicted their lives would be made better by AI, 58% said the main reason is that their daily tasks would become easier and faster.



When asked about specific uses of AI, 33% responded positively and 22% negatively in response to using AI to do research, answer questions or simulate human conversation; 44% responded positively and 33% negatively about facial recognition technology; and 33% positively and 47% negatively with regard to companies using AI chatbots to answer questions or provide customer service.

Other potential uses of AI generated more skewed responses: Using AI for hiring decisions (9% positive and 76% negative), companies using personal data to customize online content decisions (12% positive and 71% negative), and using AI to generate realistic fake images or videos (9% positive and 71% negative).

As many as 78% of residents think the increased use of AI will cause misinformation to increase and most (57%) said it is very important to them to have government regulations and oversight over the use of it. An overwhelming majority (90%) said images, audio or video created with AI should be required to include a label disclosing that.

“Artificial intelligence is already ingrained in many aspects of daily life, but people are feeling uneasy about some of the ways it’s being used,” said Hughes Center Interim Director Alyssa Maurice. “Technology continues to outpace policy and AI is no exception. The poll shows residents want those regulatory guardrails in place.”

The Hughes Center is also working with the Stockton Center on Successful Aging (SCOSA) to conduct Atlantic County’s Senior Needs Assessment. The data collected will inform the county’s decisions on how to allocate their funding for senior services over the next three years.

A poll was also conducted on medicinal psilocybin, gauging residents' views on the drug and their opinions on various legislation that has been proposed in New Jersey governing the use of these therapies to treat mental health disorders. The results will be released in the coming weeks.

[Learn more about the Stockton Polling Institute and its latest polls.](#)

Hughes Center Honors 2023



The 2023 Hughes Center Honors took place on November 9 in the Campus Center on Stockton's Galloway campus. The biennial awards ceremony recognizes outstanding New Jerseyans for professional excellence and a commitment to public service, civility and bipartisanship, which reflect the life and career of Ambassador William J. Hughes, who served as U.S. ambassador to Panama and as a U.S. congressman for 20 years. The awards program is sponsored by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

The Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award was given to John F. Scarpa of Avalon and Palm Beach, Florida, an entrepreneur who in 2019 donated \$8 million to Stockton University in support of academic programs in Atlantic City and the Health Sciences program at the Galloway campus. Previous Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award recipients include the late former New Jersey Gov. Brendan Byrne, former Governors Thomas Kean, Jim Florio and Christine Todd Whitman, and the late Ambassador Hughes, who was presented his award in 2017 by then-former Vice President Joe Biden.

The Excellence in Civic Engagement Award was presented to Judge Esther Salas, a District Judge who has helped pass state and federal legislation to protect judges and court personnel after her son Daniel was murdered at their home in 2020. In accepting her award, Salas said "We can do so much when we work together, when we love each other".

The Civility in Government & Politics Award went to Thomas P. Giblin, a N.J. State Assembly Democrat and business manager for Local 68 of the International Union of Operating Engineers, and to Kevin O'Toole, a Republican who served in the N.J. State Assembly and State Senate for more than two decades.

The Excellence in Community Leadership Award was bestowed upon William T. Mullen, president of the New Jersey State Building & Construction Trades Council. In accepting his award, Mullen quoted the late Ambassador Hughes: "He often reminded us, if you don't have a seat at the table, you are the menu. He ensured South Jersey had a seat at the table and was heard. Your dedication to the noble cause of public policy is truly commendable and is a beacon of hope for all of us who believe in the power and principles of decision making".

The Distinctive Student Leadership Award was received by Emily Kramer, class of 2023, Urgent Action Coordinator for Amnesty International, and former intern for the Hughes Center. “I discovered passions I did not even know I had, mainly leadership and activism,” Kramer said in receiving her award. “The community at Stockton sowed the seeds for these passions. The professors, students and faculty created such a unique opportunity for people like me to grow. Without my experience at Stockton, I would not have built the confidence or skills to pursue a career in activism.”

Watch video of the event [here](#).

The Hughes Center Supports Student Engagement

The Hughes Center is proud to sponsor research conducted by Stockton students. The Hughes Center established a student research internship in Fall 2019. Each semester, at least one student intern researches a public policy issue and produces a paper on that topic. The full list of student research papers can be found [here](#).

The latest student researcher was Jordan Davis. She conducted a research project exploring the challenges in contemporary K-12 education post-pandemic in New Jersey, as well as potential policy solutions to address these issues. Some of the problems she highlighted include pandemic-related learning loss, the teacher shortage, increasing class sizes, and the need for additional resources to address persistent inequities in education. Davis outlines potential solutions to help mitigate these challenges ranging from proposed legislation aimed at recruiting and retaining teachers, a call for additional federal funds to rely less heavily on state and local taxes, and innovative alternative methods for classroom instruction to improve student outcomes and reduce teacher burnout.

Jordan graduated this spring with a major in political science and a minor in global studies. She was drawn to this topic because of her work as a substitute teacher. “I graduated high school in 2021 during the pandemic, and I currently work in K-12 education, so I understand both what it is like to learn during a pandemic as well as the subsequent learning loss teachers are now trying to address.”

Some key findings include:

- Proficiency rates of New Jersey students in core subjects continue to lag pre-pandemic levels based on standardized test scores.
- The rate of students earning teaching degrees in New Jersey has been declining for more than a decade and since the pandemic, there has been an exodus of teachers leaving the profession.
- Although additional state and federal funding goes to high-poverty school districts to try to reduce the revenue gaps these districts face, this funding fails to fully compensate for the disparities.

Additionally, under Interim Director Alyssa Maurice, the center launched a new initiative to provide legislative internship opportunities to Stockton students to encourage greater participation in public policy matters. The Hughes Center compiled information from legislative offices throughout southern New Jersey about internships available to students in the summer and fall of 2024. The center aims to expand this list to include other policy or government affairs openings as well. The purpose of this effort is to make the process of finding experiential opportunities easier for students. “We want the Hughes Center to be a resource hub that students can turn to when they’re looking for these types of opportunities in the public policy space,” said Maurice. The center also reviews students’ application materials for those who want feedback. Learn more about the internships [here](#).

The Hughes Center also continues to financially support Stockton University students in the Washington Internship Program, which provides work experience through

internships in government, business and nonprofits for participants in the nation's capital. Stockton has participated in the program since the mid-1970s, and more than 1,300 students have spent a semester living, working, and studying in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

The latest recipient of a \$1,000 scholarship is Abby Alcalde, a Stockton University senior majoring in Communications and minoring in Creative Writing. Abby, a resident of Mays Landing, has an extensive history in photography, radio, and TV production, as both an intern and a professional. She also served in various roles on campus, including as Vice President of *Commuters on the Go*, as a Stockata member of *Stockton A Cappella*, and as an artist and writer for the *Stockpot Literary Magazine*.



Upcoming programming by the Hughes Center

The Hughes Center will be releasing research conducted by Faculty Associate Dr. Justin Ostrofsky on the use of medicinal psilocybin to treat mental health disorders like depression and anxiety. This release will include his full research paper, the results of a Stockton Poll on this topic, and a brief video interview with Dr. Ostrofsky and his student researchers discussing the findings.

On September 12, 2024 the center will host A Hughes Center Conversation with Peter Baker, Chief White House Correspondent for the New York Times, on the 2024 presidential election. The keynote event will be held on the Stockton Galloway Campus. Stay tuned for more details.

Beginning July 1, 2024, Dr. Tina Zappile will join the Hughes Center as its first faculty director. She is Chair and Associate Professor of Political Science at Stockton. Dr. Zappile holds a B.A. and M.A. in Political Science from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and an M.A. in Economics and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Among her service contributions to the university are coordinating Stockton's participation in the State Department's Diplomacy Lab program, advising the campus-wide Model United Nations program, and serving as Chief Negotiator for SFT Local 2275.



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