



# Connections

SUPPORTING THE MISSION OF EL CAMINO COLLEGE

SPRING 2021

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Athena Perrakis, The Sage Goddess

“We’ve been blessed this year — time to give back in a way that makes my heart sing,” stated El Camino College alumnus Athena Perrakis, '94, in a recent email inquiring about establishing two annual scholarships in memory of her favorite El Camino College professors who, unfortunately, passed away recently.



Kathleen Murphy taught English and Mercedes Thompson taught Spanish at El Camino, and had a great impact on a young Athena. “They changed my life, and establishing these scholarships feels like a small way to say thank you.”

The scholarships will help ECC students receive some extra help with books, fees, technology and supplies. The funds will make a grand impact on the success of the recipients’ educational goals, and provide the support and encouragement needed to succeed at El Camino.

Dr. Athena Perrakis is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer

of Sage Goddess, the world’s largest source of sacred tools and metaphysical education. Each week, Sage Goddess reaches over two million people across the globe, on every continent, and in more than 60 countries.

Athena holds a doctorate from the University of Southern California in educational leadership, and for the last 24 years she has been an online instructor, university professor, corporate trainer, and private sector consultant. Athena has traveled the globe and worked with CEOs and senior executives from Fortune 50 companies. But her metaphysical experience, in which her current work is largely rooted, spans more than 30 years.

**“You’re making a dream come true for me and it’s a big deal. Somewhere from high above, Kathleen and Mercedes are smiling upon us.”**  
— Athena Perrakis

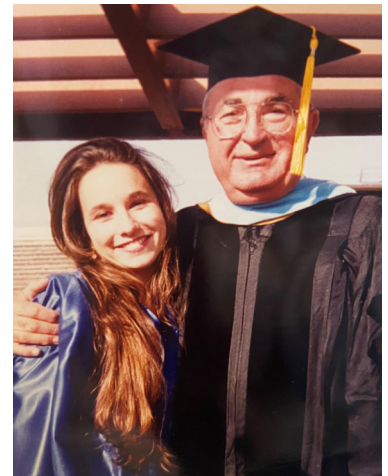
During that time, she has become an expert in gemology, astrology, Tarot, aromatherapy, Reiki, and herbal medicine. Her Etsy shop was the first online metaphysical storefront to reach the Top 10 stores in the handmade category around the world. Today, there are more than 8,000 products available through SageGoddess.com – everything from essential oils and ritual perfumes to candles, jewelry, gemstones in every form, home decor, clothing, body art and temporary tattoos, canvas art, and more.

Athena has written three books that are Amazon Bestsellers: *The Ultimate Guide to Chakras*, *Crystal Lore, Legends & Myths*, and *The Book of Blessings and Rituals*.

Athena’s work with Sage Goddess centers on the concept of a truly holistic spiritual practice, one in which every person who discovers her work can truly find themselves. Through her writing, online courses, and material offerings, Athena helps others cultivate and maintain sacred space in their lives for peace, healing, and abundance.

Her guiding philosophy is that those who develop and maintain a consistent and sustainable spiritual practice – one that aligns with their own cultural values and spiritual beliefs – will enjoy a longer, healthier, and happier life. To that end, her mantra “Held to a higher standard, bathed in a different light” reminds people that they are accountable for their thoughts, actions, and interactions.

“I definitely feel blessed and grateful... I’m looking forward to working with you in the years to come on these scholarships.”



Athena Perrakis was the 1994 Commencement Ceremony student speaker. Pictured here at graduation with then El Camino College President Sam Schauerman.



## Scholarship Spotlight: Midori Norris Shines

When Midori Norris enrolled in the El Camino College Nursing Program, she considered it a second chance to do exactly what she always wanted – become a nurse. After starting and stopping college several years ago, this time she was ready and there was nothing in her way.

Until the pandemic. With her elementary school-age daughters now at home full time and her own busy day of nursing schoolwork, she was unable to keep her job, making it difficult to cover her bills.

Just when she was about ready to quit nursing school, a grant from the El Camino College Foundation changed everything.



**“This grant came at the perfect time,” Norris said. “I was really struggling. Honestly, I almost gave up and dropped out. I am really grateful for all the help. I can’t believe how much they care.”**

—Midori Norris

Norris is among the many students in the El Camino College Nursing Program who will benefit from \$7,100 in funding recently supplied by the First Response Healthcare Student Support Fund. The El Camino College Foundation administers the grant program designed to help students struggling from the financial impacts of COVID-19, so they can continue with their classes and complete their education.

Created by the Foundation for California Community Colleges, in partnership with the CCC Chancellor’s Office, the First Response Fund is designed to help students statewide advance in healthcare fields. Overall, the Foundation was able to award about \$500 grants to 34 deserving El Camino students.

Norris enrolled in El Camino after a high school and college experience where she didn’t focus on classwork, stumbled without support, and lacked the motivation to set goals. Finally, she decided to follow her dreams toward a nursing career. After researching many schools, Norris chose El Camino because of its tradition of academic excellence and consistently high licensure exam pass rates. She makes the drive from her home in North Orange County and says the commute is worth it.

“I really believe in this program; I like the process and the teaching methods,” Norris said. “I feel prepared for my exams and now that I started my clinical work, I still feel prepared. I was actually surprisingly not nervous when I met my first patient.”

“I’ve had many teachers who took extra time to help me with my classes,” she said. “They didn’t have to do that; they went above and beyond to help me. That turned me around. No one ever took the time to help me like that.”

Norris plans to graduate in June 2022 and is looking forward to a nursing career in cardiology. She credits her success and confidence in her work to El Camino faculty and staff members.



## Department Spotlight: There’s No Debate that ECC’s Forensics Team is Great!

This academic year, the El Camino Forensics Team has competed in about 10 tournaments and won sweepstakes (the cumulative award given to the top college or university) at every outing. El Camino is currently ranked as the number one community college in the nation by the National Parliamentary Debate Association and second in the nation in the four-year colleges and universities category, just behind Rice University.

In early February 2021, the team attended the Aztec Invitational at SDSU, where 20 colleges from across the country competed in speech and debate. In debate, every school, including all four-year colleges and universities, finished behind El Camino. Forensics Coach Brittany Hubble stated, “I am so proud of how hard our students have worked despite these unprecedented circumstances and I admire their ability to not just be successful, but also the effort they’ve made to develop team camaraderie. I know this isn’t the competitive season they were hoping for, but the coaches and I are pleased to see the team making the most of their experiences and continuing to seek out opportunities to improve, compete, and bond.”

**“The work ethic and character of the students on the team never ceases to amaze me.”**

—Brittany Hubble

The team also gave a stellar performance at the El Camino Crossman Invitational Forensics Tournament (named for El Camino professors Mark and Diana Crossman) held in the Fall of 2020. The tournament drew 35 colleges and universities from across the nation and about a dozen California community colleges. Overall, El Camino amassed more than twice the points as the second place finisher. The tournament was co-directed by Francesca Bishop, Director of Forensics and Brittany Hubble, Forensics.



Francesca Bishop, Director of Forensics and Brittany Hubble, Forensics Coach/Communication Studies Instructor (Top row, first and second from left) with team.

## Student Spotlight: Matt Morreale Musician, Singer, Songwriter and Future Psychologist



Matt Morreale first picked up a guitar at age 5, and by the time he was 12, he was recording his own songs. He is a multitasking musician who also sings, writes music, and plays piano. Now 18, Morreale has written and produced more than 40 original compositions and still finds time for his studies as a psychology major at El Camino College. An artist pursuing a science degree might seem like an unusual combination, but for Morreale, it works for him.

“I first came to El Camino for music, but then I took a variety of classes and found that I am interested in science also,” said Morreale, a straight-A student, involved in the college’s Honors Transfer Program and South Bay Promise.

**“I think that is a great thing about El Camino, I can try many different things. Now I have two viable career paths, and I really like both.”**

—Matt Morreale

Morreale enrolled in ECC when he was just 16 and said that at first, he felt a little intimidated being among the youngest students. “That didn’t last long, everyone was so nice and welcoming,” he said. “No one seemed to care about my age, we are just working together. El Camino is great. I’m sure I’m in the right place.”

Morreale plans to continue working on his music at El Camino while also considering a career in health care. Among his many awards, he won state and national recognition from the Royal Conservatory Music Development Program, taking home the top prizes for his performances. He has also performed at USC’s prestigious annual Festival of Excellence.

The San Pedro native developed his own brand of music, drawing from influences such as Ed Sheeran and Keith Urban to create a sound that blends pop, country and electronic genres. “Music is something that will always be part of me; it’s something I was born with,” he said. “Music is a way to express whatever I’m feeling. Once I put it into a song, I feel better. It gets even better when people hear something they can relate to.”

Morreale recently released a new single “Not Today.” He also released “Alone in LA” in spring 2020. “I think a lot of people will relate to this song, especially during this pandemic, because it’s about feeling lonely and hoping someone is there with you,” he said. “It was written during the ‘safer-at-home’ order as a response to the solitary aspect of what people are calling ‘the new normal.’”

## El Camino Awarded \$100K Journalism Grant from NBCU Academy



Comcast’s NBCUniversal News Group recently launched NBCU Academy, a journalism training and development program that collaborated with 17 academic institutions across the U.S., including El Camino College. El Camino College is the only community college in California to join the other colleges and universities nationwide. The program

selected only two California institutions of higher education, with California State University, Fullerton being the other appointed school.

NBCU Academy will invest a total of \$6.5 million to the initiative, including scholarships worth \$3.5 million over the next two years. The El Camino College Foundation was awarded a \$100,000 grant by NBCU Academy in December 2020. In addition to providing equipment and collaborating with professors to develop seminar courses, NBCU News Group journalists, executives, and management from editorial and production teams across NBC News, MSNBC, CNBC, and Telemundo will participate as guest lecturers to provide real-world insight and mentorship.

“We’re pleased to be partnering with NBCU Academy on this incredible training program,” said El Camino College President Dena P. Maloney.

**“At El Camino College, we’re committed to providing our students with real world, hands-on learning experiences. Our journalism program...will be even better positioned to prepare students for success thanks to the NBCU Academy partnership.”**

—ECC President, Dena Maloney

NBCU Academy builds on the foundation of NBC University, which NBC News launched a decade ago as a training program for young journalism professionals from diverse backgrounds, who for so long may have been overlooked. “Creating an inclusive culture for journalism that represents the communities we serve is at the very core of what we do,” said NBCU News Group Chairman Cesar Conde.

Through its exceptional Journalism Department, El Camino College will award multiple scholarships annually to journalism students to promote excellence in the disciplines of journalism, news gathering, reporting, and communications. El Camino College’s student-produced publications, The Union newspaper and Warrior Life magazine, are honored regularly with state and national awards for excellence in writing, photography, and design.





# Thank You President Maloney

If a picture says a thousand words, then we have a million reasons of gratitude for you. Thank you for your presence and support to make all these Foundation events extra special during your time at El Camino. We will miss you when you retire in June! Thanks for the memories!





## Program Spotlight - Legacy Circle: Gifts that Keep on Giving



### Designated gifts through estate planning

Ms. Ruth Abeyta  
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 Mr. Stanley F. Wilson

Our Legacy Circle recognizes individuals and families who have designated a gift to the Foundation through their estate planning. This includes gifts through wills and bequests, revocable living trusts, and retirement assets or real estate. A planned Legacy Circle gift helps to ensure the continued success of El Camino College students.

Thank you to our Legacy Circle supporters whose commitment to education will live on for many years!

### Ways of Giving to the Legacy Circle

**Outright Gifts** Support the work of the Foundation with a gift of cash, securities (stocks or bonds), real estate, or other personal assets.

**Charitable Gift Annuity** A charitable gift annuity is a contract of cash or securities in exchange for annual fixed income over your lifetime (or for the lives of two people). They can increase your income and decrease your tax expense. Cash gifts allow maximum tax-free payments; gifts of securities allow you to minimize capital gains taxes.

Gift annuities offer five distinct advantages:

- Income for Life – at attractive payout rates for one or two lives
- Tax Deductible Savings – a large part of what you transfer is a deductible charitable gift
- Tax-Free Payout – a large part of your annual payment is tax-free return of principal
- Capital Gains Tax Savings – contributions of securities for a gift annuity minimize taxes
- Personal Satisfaction – giving gifts of lasting significance

**Bequest through Will or Living Trust** A bequest can be for a specific amount, a percentage of your estate, real estate or property, or what will be left after you have provided for your survivors and can be designated for a specific program or Division.

**Charitable Remainder Trusts (Annuity and Unitrusts)** Cash, securities or real estate are transferred to a trust which pays you joint-or single-lifetime income. You select the rate of return, set a fixed or variable annual payment, avoid capital gains taxes and receive an additional tax deduction.

**Endowments** An endowment is a gift of financial resources that provides a stable base for funding. Endowments ensure that your contribution supports not only our current students, but also the next generation of students.

Please contact Andrea Sala, Executive Director, with questions or comments about planned giving. It is highly recommend to evaluate estate planning options with a financial adviser.

## The 411 on Wills

It's one thing to have a will; it's another to have a will that works. In fact, there are certain cases where it may be better not to have a will at all than to have one that is ineffective or fails to accomplish your wishes. There are several ways to mess up your will, but we want to help make sure you don't.

### Below are four of the most common mistakes:

**1. Don't do it yourself.** State law dictates what's legal when drafting and signing a will. A universal will form obtained online or based on hearsay advice is risky. A good estate-planning attorney can assist you to help make sure you are covering all the bases. For peace of mind, it will be well worth the cost to obtain professional advice.



**2. Don't provide incorrect or unclear information.** If you are making a bequest to a charity like the El Camino College Foundation, it is important to use the full legal name of the organization and its identification number. This will avoid confusion. The complete name and number is the El Camino Community College District Foundation, EIN number 95-3874302.

**3. Don't hide your will.** Store your will in a safe place, and make sure you tell the appropriate people where to find it.

**4. Don't overlook other transfer arrangements.** A will provides only one way to transfer assets at death. If this document is not coordinated with other transfer arrangements, problems may result.

We want you to have a proper will. It is important for you and your loved ones to have one that correctly reflects your wishes. If you have already provided a bequest for the El Camino College Foundation in your will, please let us know.

If you have any questions about your will, or would like to inquire more about the Legacy Circle, please contact Andrea Sala, Executive Director at 310.660.6040.

Thank you to Ron J. Huddleston, FAHP, CFRE, President & Founder, The Huddleston Group

## Alumni Spotlight: Shoot for the Moon and Land Among the Stars with Ashley Danial



When Ashley Danial's 6th grade teacher wrote in her yearbook to Shoot for the Moon and if you miss you'll be among the Stars, she didn't realize she would literally take these words to heart and pursue a career in aerospace.

Ashley had a very non-traditional El Camino College experience. After completing her undergraduate studies in Mechanical Engineering at Purdue University and subsequently obtaining a master's degree, also in Mechanical Engineering

from UC Berkeley, Ashley attended El Camino as an adult learner. She wished to learn electrical engineering principles and her local community college provided the perfect opportunity. Ashley later earned a second master's degree in Electrical Engineering from USC.

Ashley fondly remembers her ECC experience. "I received a very hands-on, practical education that allowed me to pivot both my educational and career trajectory. I remember my professor was a good lecturer and always available to help us in our labs. I was struck by the difference in the students in my classes from what I had previously experienced. At Purdue or Berkeley, it was generally younger, full-time students. Most didn't have jobs and were being supported by their parents. At ECC, the students were a little older, nearly all of them were working and self-sufficient, some had kids. I really admired their internal drive and the

personal sacrifices they were making to work during the day and attend school at night. That was a different level of commitment to achieving their educational goals that was really powerful."

Ultimately, Ashley chose engineering because she didn't see many women headed into that field and she wanted to do something different than her peers.

**"Now when I look at my own daughter, I can clearly see the signs of a budding engineer or scientist. I am proud that she gets to see a female role model in engineering, especially since women are still under-represented in that field."**

— Ashley Danial

Ashley currently works at Northrop Grumman as Director of Engineering, Radio-frequency Mixed Signal, Antenna & Product Engineering and has over 22 years experience in the Aerospace industry. When asked what her future educational and career goals are, Ashley responded, "As a leader in a large engineering organization, my educational goals are more centered on the next generation engineers at our company. How can we provide quality and relevant training to them through mentoring, in-house classes, on the job training, and external educational opportunities including certificate programs, graduate degrees or continuing education classes?"

From baking a cake in the shape of the moon, to giving a "How to Find the Orion Constellation" speech in 6th grade, to convincing her family to visit the Space Center in Huntsville, Alabama over spring break, Ashley is obviously very passionate about STEM. She and her husband Albert, have been long-term Foundation donors, supporting STEM education, the newly established Student Emergency Fund, and President's Circle. Thank you both for nearly 20 years of philanthropy to help better the lives of El Camino students.

## Coming Soon: A Groovy Chapter for ECC Retirees!

### Hello Fellow ECC Retirees!

I am a recent retiree of ECC (June 2020) and was curious to see what other ECC retirees are doing. In my search, I discovered that Angela Simon is putting together an AFT chapter for retirees. Excited about this project, I volunteered to take the lead in putting together a list of potential members.

If you would like to join this chapter for ECC retirees or if you have any questions, please contact Angela Simon at [asimon@elcamino.edu](mailto:asimon@elcamino.edu) and me at [bbudrovich@gmail.com](mailto:bbudrovich@gmail.com).

This chapter is in gestation, so it may take a while before it becomes real. But we thought it would be great to get a list of interested people, so when it does change from caterpillar to butterfly, we will be ready.

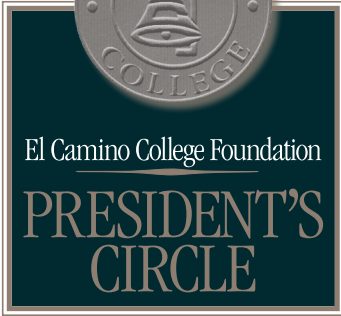
Barbara Budrovich,  
 Former ECC English Professor and Writing Center Coordinator







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### ESTABLISHMENT

Fund created in **March 2020** in direct response to El Camino students experiencing hardship from COVID-19.



### FUNDRAISING

**\$215,000** in community gifts raised since fund inception. THANK YOU!

### ASSISTANCE

**500** El Camino students have received emergency grants to help with tuition, educational expenses, technology, reduced wages, and general living expenses.



### TESTIMONIAL

"Throughout this pandemic, I've been struggling with my bills. I'm a part-time college worker who only works a couple of hours per week. It's been hard juggling school and work...I've been behind in my rent. I'm afraid of becoming homeless if I'm not able to pay my bills. Not having a computer or WiFi at home makes it even more difficult."

GIVE TODAY!  
[www.elcamino.edu/foundation/donate](http://www.elcamino.edu/foundation/donate)

For more information, please contact [foundation@elcamino.edu](mailto:foundation@elcamino.edu) · [elcaminocollegefoundation.org](http://elcaminocollegefoundation.org) · 310.660.3683

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