

## HOLYOKE

# HCC's Gateway to College cited for excellence

For the second year in a row, the Gateway to College program at Holyoke Community College received national recognition for exemplary performance.

The Gateway to College National Network, based in Portland, Oregon, honored HCC with its 2017 Gateway Program Excellence Award at a conference in Providence, Rhode Island.

Gateway is a second-chance, dual-enrollment program for students who have either left high school or are at risk for dropping out.

Gateway students take college classes and earn college credits while also working toward their high school diplomas.

The 2017 award recognizes Gateway programs that exceeded all four of the network's performance benchmarks for the 2015-2016 academic year:

First-Term GPA; One-Year Persistence; Two-Year Persistence; and Three-Year Graduation Rate.

HCC's Gateway program won the national network's inaugural Excellence Award last year and in 2014 was ranked number one among all the Gateway programs in the United States.

"We're awfully proud," said Gateway to College coordinator Vivian Ostrowski. "Putting disadvantaged, at-risk youth into college classes may seem counterintuitive, but our students have proven year after year that this model works and they can



Holyoke Community College Gateway to College coordinator Vivian Ostrowski, right, talks to student Melanie Acevedo, of Springfield, at a graduation ceremony in June. For the second year in a row, the program received national recognition for exemplary performance. (HANNAH WAREHAM PHOTO)

succeed at high academic levels."

In June, the Gateway to College program graduated the largest class in its nine-year history, awarding certificates to 33 students from Springfield, Holyoke, Westfield, Palmer, Longmeadow, Agawam, Minnechaug and Belchertown.

Among them was J'Anthony Smith, of Holyoke, who received the Gateway

National Networks Presidents Award, which recognizes students who earn a grade point average of 3.7 or higher.

Smith is continuing his studies at HCC this month as a business administration major. He is also a candidate for a Holyoke City Council seat in Ward 2.

HCC's Gateway program had a total enrollment of 104 students for the

2015-2016 academic year.

Together they recorded a First-Term GPA of 2.51 compared to a network average of 2.49; 82.8 percent for One-Year Persistence (year-to-year retention rate), compared to a network average of 56.3; 66.7 percent for Two-Year Persistence, compared to a network average of 44.9 percent; and a Three-Year Graduation Rate of 61.1 percent, compared to a network average of 36.8 percent.

Of the 42 Gateway programs in the U.S., only eight received the Excellence Award this year.

"We are proud to have Holyoke in our network and your program is an exemplar for all of our partners and high school re-engagement programs across the country," Emily Froimson, president of the Gateway National Network wrote in congratulatory letter to HCC president Christina Royal. "We are encouraged by your success and look to your program to be a model and a leader within our network."

Since its founding in 2008, HCC's Gateway to College program has helped 251 students earn their high school diplomas while also getting an early start on college.

More than half have continued on to college and so far 30 have earned their associate degrees from HCC, and six have earned bachelor's degrees. Six Gateway to College graduates earned their associate's degrees from HCC on May 27.