

Students earn Global Seals of Biliteracy

BY CHRIS YURKO

Special to The Republican

Three recent graduates and one older alum are among the nine Holyoke Community College students who recently received their Global Seal of Biliteracy, a national credential that recognizes functional literacy in two languages, in their case English and Spanish.

The nine students were enrolled this spring in Intermediate Spanish II with professor Monica Torregrosa. For the last two years, Torregrosa has offered the Global Seal of Biliteracy test in place of a final exam.

“The students are really motivated,” she said. “They come in with excitement. It makes them feel like they are really aiming for something that will be rewarding. This never happens on a final exam, where they come in all stressed out.”

The four-plus hour proctored test measures reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in the second language (Spanish) and scores them according to national standards. Students earning a 5 (Intermediate Proficiency) or higher in each of the skills qualify for the Functional Proficiency Seal.

“It’s a skills-based test, not content based, and it is very intense,” said Torregrosa. “The test tells them what they can actually do with the language. It’s great for their resumes, and for their sense of accomplishment. Studying a second language is super hard work, and these students did the work, sometimes at the expense of their own exhaustion.”

Torregrosa noted that the Global Seal of Biliteracy is a recognized professional credential that can be embedded as a badge on LinkedIn profiles and make them more appealing to employers. At



Holyoke Community College students show off their Global Seal of Biliteracy certificates. Seated: (front) Nicholas Gentile, left, Leyron Perez, right; (center) Inglyana Yard '23; (back, l-r) Carina Franco '23, Scott Lawrence, Mark Friese '21, Hailey Phillips '23; Standing is professor Monica Torregrosa. (PHOTO COURTESY HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE)



Recent Holyoke Community College graduates Inglyana Yard, left, Hailey Phillips, center left, and Carina Franco, right, stand with their Spanish professor, Monica Torregrosa, center right, after being awarded their Global Seal of Biliteracy certificates in June. (PHOTO COURTESY HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE)

the functional level, the seal shows employers that they can, for example, read forms and documents, answer simple customer questions, and give directions in Spanish.

Hailey Phillips, a class valedictorian, graduated from HCC in June with her

associate’s degree in Latinx Studies. She is transferring to Mount Holyoke College, where she plans to study Spanish and education with the intention of becoming a Spanish teacher.

“We live in a region with a lot of Spanish speaking

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Monica Torregrosa, professor

people,” said Phillips, who lives in Westfield. “I think it’s a very valuable skill to have to have a second language you can speak, and I want to be able to communicate with people better.”

Carina Franco, from Southampton, a liberal arts major from the class of 2023, grew up in a Puerto Rican family but didn’t learn much Spanish herself as a child, she said.

“Going into college,” she said, “I wanted to take

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Spanish classes to perfect my Spanish for the workforce, because I see how many opportunities it has brought my mom and how many more people you can connect to.”

Inglyana Yard, an HCC psychology major from the class of 2023, is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in psych at Bay Path University. She plans to work as a counselor with young adolescents.

“I wanted the certification because of the field I’m in,” said Yard, who lives in West Springfield. “I know my Spanish speaking skills will help me out, and I wanted to integrate that into my career.”

The other students who earned their Global Seal of Biliteracy are Leyron Perez of Springfield, Scott Lawrence of Holyoke, Nicholas

Gentile of Wilbraham, Briana Bowers of Springfield, Isabela Soto of Chicopee, and 69-year-old Mark Friese of Southampton, who has continued taking classes at HCC since earning an associate’s degree in accounting in 2021. (Classes for those 60 and older cost only \$50.)

“I’d like to travel to Spain and Mexico a little bit,” said Friese, who is retired from ISO New England. “There’s so much material to cover and also just to practice.”

In 2022, 10 of Torregrosa’s Intermediate Spanish students received their Global Seal of Biliteracy certifications. She’s happy with the results.

“It’s a great validation,” she said. “It’s been a great assessment tool for our department because students are proving that they can meet these national standards. It tells us we’re on the right track.”