

## Grad of STCC's health info program lauded

A Springfield Technical Community College graduate who came to the United States five years ago knowing very little English received two awards this spring for outstanding academic achievement.

West Springfield resident Vania H. Benavides, 21, who earned an associate degree in Health Information and Informatics Management, received the MaHIMA Student Achievement Award and the Health Information Technologies Excellence Award.

Massachusetts Health Information Management Association (MaHIMA) offers an award to an outstanding student from any accredited health information technology or health information management program. STCC faculty this year nominated Ms. Benavides.

Walter R. Houlihan, senior director for Health Information Management and Clinical Documentation at Baystate Health and past president of MaHIMA, presented Benavides with the award on June 4 at STCC.

Less than a week earlier, on May 29, Ms. Benavides picked up her program's Excellence Award during the Class of 2019 Honors Convocation.

"Sometimes I don't believe I accomplished all these things," she said in an interview. "This is an honor. It has confirmed everything I have done. I stayed up late at night working, and it's been worth it."

When she was 16, Ms. Benavides and her mother emigrated from El Salvador. "I remember when I came here my English was too basic. I was afraid of coming up here and talking to people," she said.

Ms. Benavides enrolled in STCC's Health Information Technology program after taking classes at STCC for English Language Learners. Her professors described her as a bright young



**Springfield Technical Community College graduate Vania H. Benavides shakes hands with Walter R. Houlihan, senior director for health information management and clinical documentation at Baystate Health, as STCC health information technology faculty look on.**

woman who excelled in the program.

"She's an outstanding student," said Tracey A. McKethan, department chair and professor of Health Information Technology.

Health Information Technology instructor Laura Piquette said she was impressed with Ms. Benavides' performance. "She took it upon herself to learn English. In our program, you have to understand medical terminology. It's amazing that she caught on so quickly. She really exceeded."

Ms. Benavides said she is looking for a job in the field, but also wants to pursue a bachelor's degree in management or business.

STCC's Health Information Technology program prepares students like Ms. Benavides for certification and practice as registered health information technicians who typically work with patient medical records at health-care facilities. Technicians focus in areas beyond coding including data analytics, compliance and more.

Professor McKethan and instructor Piquette said graduates typically work for hospitals, doctors' offices, attorneys' offices, insurance companies or government entities.

"We are involved in many different areas, so

Vania has many opportunities," Ms. Piquette said. "She can do anything now — and she will."

To learn more about STCC's health information technology program, visit [www.stcc.edu/explore/programs/him.as/](http://www.stcc.edu/explore/programs/him.as/). For questions, call Admissions at (413) 755-3333.