

## CUNY ASAP

The CUNY ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) program provides extensive support to help students and working adults complete Associate's Degrees.

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>Number Served per year</i>	<i>CEO Budget (City FY 08)</i>	<i>Total Budget (City FY 08)</i>
The City University of New York	September 2007	1,132	\$6,500,000	\$6,500,000

### *Problem Statement*

Approximately 350,000 individuals in New York are working yet not earning enough to rise above the poverty level.<sup>1</sup> A lack of skills and an inability to access education prevents many working poor from securing permanent well-paid jobs with growth potential.<sup>2</sup> Low-income students are less likely to complete a post-secondary education, placing them at greater risk of continued poverty.<sup>3</sup>

### *Research and Evidence*

Community college students confront a variety of obligations that conflict with their educational goals. Nationally, only 17% of students who enroll in a community college end up receiving an Associate's degree within six years. In New York City, this number is higher, but still only 21%.<sup>4</sup> For many students, competing work and family responsibilities can prolong or interrupt college attendance. More than 60% of the City's community college students balance their studies with full-time or part-time work. Family responsibilities, such as the care of small children, can also impede the completion of a college degree.<sup>5</sup>

The value of an Associate's Degree when compared to a high school diploma is considerable: in 2005 those with an Associate's Degree earned on average \$37,990 a year, whereas those with a high school diploma earned on average \$29,448 a year.<sup>6</sup>

MDRC's 'Opening Doors' program is a rigorously evaluated national demonstration project involving six community colleges (including the Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn). The program examines the impact of learning communities (where students take blocks of classes with the same group of peers), customized instructional support, incentives, career counseling, and other supports designed to help students complete their degree. At the Kingsborough site, MDRC is using a randomized control experiment to measure the impact of learning communities on persistence and academic success.<sup>7</sup> Although it is "too early to draw any firm conclusions about the effects of Kingsborough's Opening Doors program,"<sup>8</sup> preliminary data give grounds for cautious optimism. When engaged in the learning communities, Kingsborough's Opening Doors students were more likely than the control group students to pass their courses.<sup>9</sup> Opening Doors students were also 10% more likely than control group students to pass reading and writing skills tests, although both groups passed the tests at the same rate prior to the program.<sup>10</sup> The preliminary data do not indicate that involvement in learning communities positively

affects subsequent credit accumulation or pass rates after students leave the program.<sup>11</sup> In the first post-program semester, the persistence rate was unusually high both for the Kingsborough Opening Doors students and the control group.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the learning communities studied in the Kingsborough Opening Doors program lasted one semester only, CUNY ASAP interventions are designed to last until the student receives an Associate's Degree.

The CUNY ASAP program creates a holistic response to the difficulties confronting community college students. Individual elements of CUNY ASAP have previously been shown to be successful. For example, CUNY's University Skills Immersion Program has helped tens of thousands of students to finish their remedial work in the summer before entering college.<sup>13</sup>

The CUNY ASAP model of block scheduled cohorts is well-recognized as one of the primary approaches to structuring learning communities.<sup>14</sup> With structured learning communities, curricular structures link courses "so that students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise."<sup>15</sup> Peer cohort groups of 25 students attend classes on the same schedule and receive dedicated tutorial support as well as case management.<sup>16</sup>

Although the components the CUNY ASAP program are known to be necessary conditions of community college success, continued research is required to determine the optimal arrangement of these features. As a recent report by the Lumina Foundation for Education notes, "[r]esearch conclusions point out that counseling, advising and developmental education are all crucial for community college students, but research has been less helpful in identifying the most effective design and organization for these services."<sup>17</sup> MDRC researchers have observed that "[m]any studies have discussed the implementation of learning communities and described students' and instructors' experiences in these programs, but relatively few have attempted to measure how learning communities affect key outcomes such as student persistence, course completion, and degree attainment."<sup>18</sup>

CEO will evaluate whether the ASAP model improves credit accumulation and persistence.

### ***Program Description***

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The CUNY ASAP program increases the availability of support services for young adults and the working poor to continue with post-secondary education. The program assists students in earning an Associate's Degree within three years. Students attend all of their classes at the same time of day or on weekends to accommodate their work schedules. Students are grouped in cohorts based on their academic interests. Peer cohort groups of 25 students attend classes on the same schedule and receive dedicated tutorial support. Participants complete all necessary remedial work before beginning fall classes. In a pre-college summer program, cohorts of participants get a head start on their college coursework (remediation) and become familiar with the intellectual and behavioral demands of college.

Participants take 12 credits each semester, rendering them eligible for financial aid as full-time students, and positioning them for graduation within three years. Graduates of the program will be qualified for positions in health, hospitality, early childhood education, and retail professionals, as well as legal assistants. These areas have been identified by New York State's Department of Labor as having very

favorable or favorable employment prospects in the New York City region because they require no more than an Associate's Degree that is already offered by CUNY, and have median salaries of at least \$40,000. Liberal Arts and Business are also popular majors and students will also be encouraged to transfer to 4-year colleges where they can obtain a Bachelor of Arts (or Science) Degree.

Academic advisors meet with students bi-weekly to address student needs, providing the support necessary to eliminate obstacles to student success. Faculty also communicate with academic advisors at regular intervals to provide immediate feedback on student performance and activity in the classroom. Job developers help students find employment that accommodates their school schedules and supports career interests.

The CUNY ASAP program provides students with free MetroCards thereby eliminating the cost of transportation as a barrier to class attendance. Barnes and Noble is providing underwriting support that in combination with CEO funds will enable students to receive free books.

### ***Target Population***

The CUNY ASAP program serves low- and moderate-income community college students. Participants include recent high school graduates and working adults. Students were required to complete all remedial work prior to the beginning of fall classes. In addition, they must maintain good academic standing and earn at least 24 credits per year.

### ***Expected Outcomes***

- 50% of the participants graduate within three years of beginning college
- 75% of the participants graduate within four years of beginning college

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey.

<sup>2</sup> CEO Report, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education. "Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study of 1996-2001." 2003; CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. "System Retention and Graduation Rates of Full-time First-time Freshmen in Associate Programs by Year of Entry: Total University." New York: CUNY, March 7, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> New York City Mayor's Office. "Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Goldstein Unveil Tailor-Made Programs for Working New Yorkers at Six CUNY Community Colleges." Apr. 16, 2007. available at nyc.gov

<sup>6</sup> MDRC. "Fast Fact: How Much Is a College Degree Worth?" New York: MDRC, April 24, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Bloom, Dan and Colleen Sommo. "Building Learning Communities: Early Results from the Opening Doors Demonstration at Kingsborough Community College." New York: MDRC, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 46-49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *A New Model for Community College Education: A Path to Success* (CEO internal document, CUNY ASAP Project proposal).

<sup>17</sup> Bailey, Thomas R. and Mariana Alfonso. "Paths to Persistence: An Analysis of Research on Program Effectiveness at Community Colleges." Lumina Foundation, February 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Bloom and Sommo, 2005: 15.