

# CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP) A Program of the City University of New York

## PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY

This overview of the City University of New York Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP) initiative is based on a program review conducted by Westat/Metis staff for the evaluation of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiatives. The data were collected between December 2007 and April 2008 through interviews with staff of the CEO, meetings with the director of the CUNY ASAP program, and the assistant dean for Institutional Research and Assessment at CUNY (CUNY IR); site visits during March and early April of 2008 to the six participating community colleges; and monthly data reports provided to CEO by the CUNY ASAP program through May 2008. In addition, the Westat/Metis staff received and reviewed administrative and survey data provided by CUNY IR.<sup>1</sup>

**Sponsoring Agency:** The City University of New York

**Provider Agency:** City University of New York provides CUNY ASAP services through its six community colleges—Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), Bronx Community College (BCC), Hostos Community College (HCC), Kingsborough Community College (KCC), LaGuardia Community College (LCC), and Queensborough Community College (QCC).

**Start Date:** July 2007

**CEO Budget:** \$6.5 million was provided for fiscal year 2008

**Target Population:** Low- and moderate-income community college students

**Statement of Need:** Approximately 350,000 individuals in New York City are working yet not earning enough to rise above the poverty level. A lack of skills and an inability to access education prevents many working poor from securing permanent well-paid jobs with growth potential. Low-income students are less likely to complete post-secondary education, placing them at greater risk of continued poverty.<sup>2</sup> At CUNY and other community colleges nationwide less than 21 percent of students complete associates degree programs within six years.

**Goal and Services:** The goal of CUNY ASAP is to help eligible students to complete associate's degrees in a relatively short period of time (e.g., 500 of the 1,000 or more participating students are expected to graduate within 3 years, and 750 are expected to graduate within 4 years of beginning the program)<sup>3</sup> and then to go on to find jobs with career potential or to transfer to a 4-year college for further academic training.

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<sup>1</sup> These data included responses to a CUNY ASAP-administered student survey; summaries of course grades, grade point averages (GPAs), and credit accumulation statistics for CUNY ASAP participants from the fall 2007 semester; fall-to-spring retention estimates for the current CUNY ASAP cohort; fall-to-spring retention rates and 3- and 4-year graduation rates for comparison students; and CUNY ASAP enrollment projections for fall 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Economic Opportunity (December 2007). *Strategy and Implementation Report*, New York: Center for Economic Opportunity, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Data recently reported by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (March 24, 2008) showed that among a same-size cohort (1,100) of similar students who entered CUNY in fall of 2004, only 291 graduated within 3 years. Similarly, among an analogous cohort in fall of 2003, only 368 graduated within 4 years.

**Eligibility Criteria:** Eligibility criteria for admission to CUNY ASAP include being New York City residents who have a high school diploma or a General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency certificate, have completed all remedial coursework (i.e., are “triple exempt”<sup>4</sup>) before beginning the program, and have previously acquired no more than 12 college credits.

**Targets/Outcomes:** The enrollment target for the CUNY ASAP initiative was initially at least 1,000 students. As shown below, budget guidelines provided by CUNY to the six campuses sought over-enrollment by 125 students. The actual fall 2007 cohort comprised 1,132 students, constituting an over-enrollment of 132 participants.

**Table 1: Enrollment by Campus**

Campus	Target Numbers from Budgets	Actual Numbers Enrolled	Percent of Budget Target Met
Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC)	200	249	125%
Bronx Community College (BCC)	150	118	79%
Hostos Community College (HCC)	100	82	82%
Kingsborough Community College (KCC)	250	247	99%
LaGuardia Community College (LCC)	225	208	92%
Queensborough Community College (QCC)	200	228	114%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,125</b>	<b>1,132</b>	<b>101%</b>

Source: CUNY Budget Documents and CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

### Selected Key Findings

**Fidelity to the Program Model.** Data obtained during the site visits suggest that, overall, programmatic services are being delivered with a relatively high degree of intensity and fidelity. There were some campus-to-campus variations noted that were attributable to local issues such as staff availability, hiring procedures, enrollment capacity, and other challenges, but each programmatic component was in evidence at each campus, and staff appeared actively and enthusiastically engaged in service delivery. In other words, each campus appeared to be implementing the concepts of block scheduling, small class size, advisement, tutoring, and job placement/preparation with fidelity. Although we are satisfied that, to date, programmatic services are being delivered with a high degree of fidelity, there are clues that new challenges will emerge over time. For example, fidelity to block scheduling will be a significant challenge as students progress through the semesters and their academic paths diverge.

**Characteristics of the Clients Served in Comparison to the Target Population.** It is clear from the enrollment data that CUNY ASAP has successfully recruited and serves students who meet the eligibility criteria that have been set forth—i.e., NYC residents who are high school graduates (or GED completers), are “triple exempt,” enter the program with 12 or fewer college credits, and can commit to attending college on a full-time basis. In addition, they have established a cohort for the program that exceeds the minimal target of 1,000 students by more than 13 percent. We note that, although the target population was to be low- and moderate-income, CUNY ASAP

<sup>4</sup> “Triple exempt” students have passed all parts of the CUNY Skills Assessment Test, or they are exempt from taking the test based on their NYS Regents, SAT, or ACT scores. Students interested in the program who were identified as needing only one area of remediation (i.e., “double exempt” students) attended a summer program in order to attain “triple exempt” status. Some students who did not qualify after the summer continued at the campus as non-ASAP students. Such students are referred to as “shadow students.” Once “shadow students” attain “triple exempt” status they may be admitted to CUNY ASAP.

has not used poverty as a specific selection criterion.<sup>5</sup> As a result, it is possible that the CUNY ASAP cohort includes students who are not poor and, without more data, it is too early to say whether the CUNY ASAP program fully meets the CEO’s mission to *reduce the number of people living in poverty in NYC*. This means that the findings from the CUNY ASAP initiative might not be generalizable beyond the participating population, which tends to be higher achieving, younger, and less likely to be working full-time than their campus peers.

**Service Delivery.** Students admitted to the program (as well as applicants who are still completing the entrance requirements) attend a summer orientation. Students are required to take at least 12 credits each semester. CUNY ASAP classes are intended to be small, with no more than 25 students in a class, and students are assigned by major to attend classes in blocks—that is, groups of CUNY ASAP students attend the same sets of classes together. Advisors meet with students on a regular basis to provide support and monitor student progress. Tutors are also available as needed to provide an academic boost outside of the classroom. Faculty members communicate with advisors frequently about individual student performance. Job developers help students prepare for and find employment as needed. Students receive financial support including assistance in applying for financial aid, free monthly transportation stipends (in the form of Metrocards), and free use of textbooks for their classes. In addition, students eligible for federal and/or state financial aid receive additional CUNY ASAP funding to pay for the balance of tuition and school fees.

**Provider Capacity and Agency Management.** CUNY Central takes an active role in managing CUNY ASAP at all six campus locations. The project director meets with the campus directors at least monthly to discuss their challenges and provide opportunities to interact with each other over a wide range of programmatic issues and concerns. The CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (CUNY IR) maintains a wide range of administrative data regarding student demographics, credit accumulation, grades, and other key indicators. However, CUNY IR reports that it currently does not have sufficient staff resources to do much more than provide the basic CUNY ASAP data that it is required to collect and report to CEO.<sup>6</sup>

**Early Outcomes.** Data obtained thus far from CUNY IR indicate that, as shown below in Table 2, 1,029 (91%) of the initial cohort re-enrolled for courses in spring 2008.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2. Spring Retention of CUNY ASAP Students**

Campus	Initial Cohort	Re-enrolled for Spring Semester	Percent Re-enrolled for Spring Semester
BMCC	249	229	92%
BCC	118	107	91%
HCC	82	69	84%
KCC	247	228	92%
LCC	208	184	89%
QCC	228	212	93%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,132</b>	<b>1,029</b>	<b>91%</b>

Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (8/28/2008).

<sup>5</sup> Though poverty is not a selection criterion, CUNY personnel report that a sizable segment of the CUNY ASAP participants have low or moderate incomes and are eligible for and receive financial aid. Specifically, data obtained from CUNY IR (11/15/07) indicate that some financial aid is received by 72 percent of the participants at BMCC, 86 percent at BCC, 84 percent at HCC, 73 percent at KCC, 81 percent at LCC, and 69 percent at QCC. Further, full financial aid is indicated for 51 percent of the participants at BMCC, 45 percent at BCC, 65 percent at HCC, and 32 percent at QCC. No data have yet been received from CUNY IR regarding the proportion of students (if any) at LCC and KCC who are receiving full financial aid.

<sup>6</sup> CUNY IR was able to conduct a student survey in the fall semester that gathered data on student demographics, perceptions about the initiative, use of the CUNY ASAP offerings, and other information. CUNY IR initially provided data to the Westat/Metis team without respondent frequency counts for individual survey items. Subsequently, Westat/Metis requested and received additional data showing item response frequencies. The Westat/Metis team is currently analyzing these data.

<sup>7</sup> Preliminary data provided by CUNY (9/4/2008) indicate a fall-to-fall re-enrollment rate of 81 percent.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Early findings indicate that:

- CUNY ASAP appears to have good program infrastructure, management, and agency oversight in place, and services are being implemented with enthusiasm, commitment, and a high degree of fidelity.
- Recruitment targets have been exceeded.
- Participating students meet the eligibility criteria that have been set forth.
- Sufficient progress has been made to date to suggest that it is plausible that the initiative will meet its outcome objectives with the current cohort of participants.
- To the extent that students who are not poor are being served by CUNY ASAP, the initiative may be out of full alignment with the CEO's mission.
- Specific and measurable outcomes have been articulated, and data systems are in place to capture the required information.
- CUNY has a strong interest in contributing to the base of knowledge about improving community colleges and student outcomes and, through its Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, is an active and supportive participant in the evaluation.

The Westat/Metis team recommends the following:

- During the initial academic year, each campus organizes its instructional schedules to allow CUNY ASAP students to participate in block programming. However, as students take more classes in their majors and other variations in the cohort occur (e.g., failed classes, course withdrawals, etc.), it will become increasingly more difficult to sustain block programming. We recommend that CUNY consider alternative arrangements to block scheduling that would continue to satisfy the students' needs for a high degree of interaction with their fellow students and with their instructors.
- In an effort to evaluate the impact of CUNY ASAP on participating students, CUNY IR constructed a comparison group from the fall of 2006 using only three match criteria—"triple exempt" status, full-time enrollment, and registration in the same majors as students enrolled in CUNY ASAP. We recommend that CUNY consider expanding the match criteria for subsequent comparisons, in order to better discern the relative impact of the CUNY ASAP experience on participating students.
- As a group, the current CUNY ASAP cohort may not be representative of the general CUNY community college population. If future cohorts are enrolled in the program, we recommend that consideration be given to enrolling groups that better represent the overall population. In this way, the results of the intervention would be more generalizable.