

IV. Incoming Freshmen and the Admissions Process

In this section, we describe CUNY's incoming students, their basic skills levels, the normal process by which they are admitted, and certain special admissions procedures for disadvantaged students.

We need to begin with a word of caution. As we explained in Part III, there have been, in recent years, numerous Trustees' resolutions that affect admissions and remedial education throughout the CUNY system. As a result of these resolutions, not only have the policies regarding admissions and remediation¹⁷⁹ been in flux; implementation varies from campus to campus, and additional changes in policy and practice are currently under consideration. Moreover, it is not yet possible to judge the full impact of some of the more recent changes. So while we have attempted to pull together an accurate description of the "current" approaches to admissions and remediation at CUNY, we were hampered by the confusion of the faculty and administrators we interviewed, and information that was correct at the time we received it may already be outdated. Nevertheless, we are confident that what follows is a fair picture.

A. *Vital Statistics*

This section presents information about CUNY's incoming freshmen, including the scale and depth of their need for remediation, as diagnosed by CUNY;¹⁸⁰ their academic preparedness, as measured by their SAT scores; their demographic and economic characteristics; and their high school background. Wherever possible, we have tried to present this information in national context, and in terms of its ability to predict the likelihood that students will eventually graduate from college. The data show that, by most measures, CUNY students face an uphill road to graduation.

The fact that many CUNY students are academically underprepared and face personal challenges may not be surprising. Indeed, the poor performance of the city's public schools, in combination with CUNY's current admissions policies, effectively guarantees this unfortunate circumstance. Because 60% of CUNY's incoming freshmen are graduates of the New York City public schools, the following description of CUNY's incoming freshmen is largely a description of the public school system's effectiveness, or lack thereof. The data point to an urgent need to equip the city's public school students with basic verbal and math skills long before they arrive at CUNY.

¹⁷⁹ See footnote 1 for terminology.

¹⁸⁰ In Section V.B.2, we show that there is reason to suspect that CUNY does not correctly sort students into "remedial" and "non-remedial" categories.

Although it might be tempting to argue that the characteristics of CUNY’s incoming students excuse CUNY’s low graduation rates and poor performance on other outcome measures, to do so would be irresponsible – even unconscionable – for the following reason: CUNY does not fulfill its access mission merely by opening its doors and giving needy New Yorkers the opportunity to “try” college. When CUNY’s Trustees voted in 1969 to begin admitting large numbers of academically underprepared and disadvantaged students, the university undertook the urgent and daunting responsibility of helping those students to succeed.¹⁸¹ Higher education policy experts agree that providing “meaningful” access “implies a commitment to ensuring the ‘open door’ does not become a ‘revolving door’”:¹⁸²

The underlying assumption is that if a college or university admits a student, the institution has an obligation to help that student succeed. Matriculation implies that the institution has confidence that the student has the necessary skills and knowledge to experience academic success. It would be morally reprehensible for an institution to admit a student knowing that he or she would have little or no chance of passing the courses without informing the student. Thus, whether it is a community college, a state flagship university, or a private liberal arts college, the institution must have policies and procedures in place to help those students who are experiencing academic difficulty.¹⁸³

Accordingly, while the following description of CUNY’s incoming freshmen constitutes a sort of baseline against which one might assess the value added by a CUNY education, and while it may help to explain why CUNY’s graduation rates are so much lower than national and state averages, it should not be construed as providing excuses for the system’s failure – over the course of three decades – to provide effective programs or demonstrate positive student outcomes. Although CUNY has not collected valid and reliable data quantifying the productivity of its various programs – particularly remediation – the information in the following subsections provides, at the very least, some context for the outcome information presented in the accompanying report, *Beyond Graduation Rates*.

1. Scale of Remediation

Ever since the implementation of open admissions, CUNY has conducted remediation on a grand scale.¹⁸⁴ Every year for the last twenty years – which is as long as systemwide data have been available – approximately three-quarters of each incoming freshman class has failed one or

¹⁸¹ The accompanying report, *Beyond Graduation Rates*, discusses the fact that CUNY’s commitment to open admissions entails weighty responsibilities.

¹⁸² *Assessing Institutional Effectiveness in Community Colleges*, 33, 41.

¹⁸³ IHEP, 6.

¹⁸⁴ Prior to the implementation of open admissions, it seems that the need for remediation was largely limited to SEEK and CD students. According to the Minutes of Board of Trustees’ meetings from the early years of open admissions, most of the senior colleges did not yet have large numbers of severely underprepared students, nor did they have the capacity to provide remediation for such students. (See Section III.D.)

more of CUNY’s remedial placements tests (the “FSATs”) on the first attempt;¹⁸⁵ for purposes of this report, we refer these students as “requiring” or “needing” remediation.¹⁸⁶ By contrast, in the U.S. as a whole, remedial need has remained stable at about 30% of college freshmen since 1989.¹⁸⁷

Table 3 shows the percentage of CUNY’s 1997 first-time freshmen who failed one or more of the FSATs on the initial attempt, compared with the percentage of first-time freshmen nationwide who enrolled in at least one remedial reading, writing, or math course in Fall 1995 (the most recent year for which national data are available). The table shows that the percentage of CUNY students who placed into remediation is unusually high – overall and for each subject; at both the community and senior colleges; and in comparison with the nation as a whole (“All U.S.”), other public two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions (“Public 2-yr.” and “Public 4-yr.”), and other postsecondary institutions where 50% or more of the students are members of racial minority groups (“Hi minority”).

Table 3. Percent of Fall 1997 CUNY First-Time Freshmen Requiring Remediation, Compared With Percent of U.S. Freshmen Enrolling in Remediation, by Institution Type and Subject Area

	CUNY c.c.	Public 2-yr.	CUNY sr.	Public 4-yr	CUNY total	Hi minority	All U.S.
Any remed.	87	41	72	22	78	43	29
Reading	61	20	43	8	51	25	13
Writing	70	25	59	12	64	29	17
Math	63	34	36	18	48	35	24
No remed.	13	59	28	78	22	57	71

Sources: CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. I, 68-69; NCES 97-584, 2-3, 10.

Because the CUNY system is so large, these percentages translate into substantial numbers of students who require remediation. Table 4, below, shows that in 1997, more than 9,000 incoming community college students and more than 10,000 incoming senior college students¹⁸⁸ failed one or more of the FSATs on the first attempt. By contrast, in 1995, the average U.S.

¹⁸⁵ (Mary Kim, *CUNY Statistical Profile 1980-1998*, Vol. I & II (RAND Report to Mayor Giuliani’s Advisory Task Force on the City University of New York, 1999).) For convenience, we will refer to any CUNY student who failed one or more of the FSATs on the first attempt as a “remedial student.” As we discuss in Section V.A, “Configuration,” however, some of these students never enroll in a basic skills or ESL course. We will refer to students who enroll in basic skills courses as “basic skills students” and those who enroll in ESL courses as “ESL students.” Finally, some students who passed all three FSATs enroll in courses with some pre-college content; those students are included when we measure remedial “full-time equivalents.”

¹⁸⁶ In Section V.B.2, we show that, due to flaws in the FSAT program, there is reason to suspect that the tests do not correctly sort students into “remedial” and “non-remedial” categories.

¹⁸⁷ IHEP, vii.

¹⁸⁸ Note that several of CUNY’s senior colleges actually enroll mostly associate degree students, who typically fail the FSATs at a higher rate than bachelor’s degree students. The Task Force staff have presented the data in terms of college type rather than degree program in order to facilitate the national comparison.

public two-year institution enrolled 407 freshmen in remedial courses, and the average public four-year institution enrolled 161 freshmen in remedial courses.¹⁸⁹

Table 4. Number of Fall 1997 CUNY First-Time Freshmen Requiring Remediation, by Institution Type and Subject Area

	CUNY community colleges		CUNY senior colleges		CUNY Total	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Any remed.	87	9,385	72	10,468	78	19,853
Reading	61	6,580	43	6,252	51	12,832
Writing	70	7,551	59	8,578	64	16,129
Math	63	6,796	36	5,234	48	12,030
No remed.	13	1,402	28	4,071	22	5,473
Total	100	10,787	100	14,539	100	25,326

Source: CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. I, 68-69.

Given the enormous number of CUNY students who require remediation, it is not surprising that CUNY colleges also offer many more remedial courses than average. Table 5 compares CUNY's Fall 1997 remedial course offerings with national data from Fall 1995 (the most recent year for which national data are available). While the number of remedial reading courses that CUNY offered was not unusual, CUNY offered more remedial writing courses – and substantially more remedial math courses – than other U.S. higher education institutions. The differences were especially pronounced at the senior college level: whereas the average public four-year institution offered about 1.5 remedial courses each in reading, writing, and math, CUNY senior colleges offered an average of 2, 2.5, and 3.8 courses, respectively. In total, CUNY offered 38 different remedial reading courses, 45 different remedial writing courses, 68 different remedial math courses, and 105 different remedial ESL courses – and many of these courses had multiple sections.¹⁹⁰

Table 5. Mean Number of Remedial Courses Offered, by Institution Type and Subject Area

	CUNY c.c.	Public 2-yr.	CUNY sr.	Public 4-yr	CUNY total	Hi minority	All U.S.
Reading	2.7	2.7	2.0	1.6	2.2	2.2	2.1
Writing	3.0	2.7	2.5	1.5	2.6	2.4	2.0
Math	4.3	3.6	3.8	1.5	4.0	2.4	2.5
ESL	7.2	n/a	5.6	n/a	6.1	n/a	n/a

Sources: ESL and Basic Skills Courses by College; NCES 97-584, 9.

¹⁸⁹ NCES 97-584, 6, 10.

¹⁹⁰ CUNY Responses, July 1998, Attachment 9, Fall 1997 ESL and Basic Skills Courses by College.

2. Depth of Remedial Need

The typical CUNY remedial student does not merely need to brush up her algebra¹⁹¹ or work on her writing skills for a semester; Table 6, below, shows that 55% of CUNY freshmen – that is, 71% of CUNY remedial freshmen¹⁹² – require remediation in more than one skill. Moreover, half of CUNY freshmen – that is, two-thirds of CUNY remedial freshmen¹⁹³ – are deficient in reading – the most basic of the basic skills. Thus, as shocking as the inordinate scale of remediation at CUNY may be, the depth of CUNY’s remedial students’ needs is key to understanding CUNY’s low credit accumulation and graduation rates.¹⁹⁴

Table 6. Percent of Fall 1997 CUNY First-Time Freshmen Requiring Remediation, by Institution Type and Number of Remedial Subjects

	CUNY c.c.	CUNY sr.	CUNY total
Any remed.	87	72	78
Reading	61	43	51
1 remedial	21	26	24
2 remedial	31	27	29
3 remedial	35	18	26
2 or 3 rem.	66	45	55
No remed.	13	28	22

Source: *CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997*, Vol. I, 68-69.

Studies have shown that the extent of a student’s need for remediation, as measured by the number of remedial courses she takes, is inversely related to her chances of graduating. Students who take two or more remedial courses are particularly at risk. For example, a 1998 CUNY study concluded that bachelor’s students who need remediation in two or three areas “face longer odds to graduate than students who need instruction in a single skill.”¹⁹⁵ These results are consistent with a national study that found that taking “one remedial course affects both bachelor’s and overall degree completion rates a bit, but there are more serious consequences for students taking more than one remedial” course.¹⁹⁶ Table 6 shows that, at

¹⁹¹ In general, to be considered a remedial math student at CUNY, a student must fail to earn a score of 63% on an exam that covers arithmetic and elementary algebra; thus, CUNY officially considers intermediate algebra to be college-level math. By contrast, most other U.S. colleges consider intermediate algebra to be a remedial course. (Adelman 1996.) For details on how CUNY’s definition of college-level math varies from college to college, see Section V.A.1, “The Nomenclature of Remediation at CUNY.”

¹⁹² The percent of freshmen requiring remediation in two or three subjects (55%) divided by the percent of freshmen requiring any remediation (78%) equals the percent of remedial freshmen requiring remediation in two or three subjects (71%).

¹⁹³ The percent of freshmen requiring remedial reading (51%, or half) divided by the percent of freshmen requiring any remediation (78%) equals the percent of remedial freshmen requiring remedial reading (65%, or two-thirds).

¹⁹⁴ For outcome data, see accompanying report, *Beyond Graduation Rates*.

¹⁹⁵ *Basic Skills & ESL Overview*, 12 & Table 13.

¹⁹⁶ Adelman, “The Kiss of Death.”

CUNY, 55% of 1997 freshmen required remediation in two or more subjects; this is almost double the percentage of 1995 freshmen nationwide who took any remediation (see Table 3, above).¹⁹⁷

Since reading is such a fundamental skill, the likelihood of completing a degree is particularly low for remedial reading students. As one noted expert has pointed out, “If you can’t read, you can’t read the math problem either (let alone the chemistry textbook, the historical documents or the business law cases).”¹⁹⁸ He found that only 35% of students nationally who took three or more remedial courses *including remedial reading* were able to earn a degree by age 30 – compared with 60% of students who took no remedial courses.¹⁹⁹ These results are consistent with a 1998 CUNY study, which concluded that “students who began bachelor’s programs with weak reading scores were much less likely to earn a degree than students with strong skills,” and that “the depth of remedial need in reading is related to prospects for long-term success” in CUNY associate programs as well.²⁰⁰

These findings help to explain low graduation rates at CUNY, where the percentage of freshmen requiring remedial reading has climbed from an all-time low of 31% in 1992 to more than 50% in 1997.²⁰¹ Indeed, CUNY’s Fall 1997 freshmen required remedial reading at a rate triple or quadruple the national average, and double the rate at other institutions with high minority enrollment (see Table 3, above).

3. SAT Scores

In Section V.B, we will show that, due to flaws in the FSAT program, there is reason to suspect that the tests do not correctly sort students into “remedial” and “non-remedial” categories. Accordingly, CUNY’s data do not enable us to draw unassailable conclusions about the scope and depth of remedial need at CUNY. To provide an alternative look at the verbal and math skills of incoming CUNY students, RAND analyzed the SAT scores of the one-third of

¹⁹⁷ As dramatic as these figures are, CUNY faculty members described the depth of their students’ educational deprivation more eloquently than mere numbers ever could. A LaGuardia professor told us that the incoming students there can “barely think” and “barely speak.” Students who enroll in history courses at Bronx Community College are, according to one professor, a “*tabula rasa*.” “I don’t know what they were exposed to in high school,” he said, “but it’s as if there was nothing.” A Lehman math professor echoed those sentiments. Some of his math basic skills students are not technically “remedial,” he said, because they were never exposed to algebra in secondary school; the material is totally new to them. A Bronx Community College professor summed it up best: “Some students have just forgotten over time; some students were never exposed. But some students had a bad education – which is sometimes worse than none at all.” (Bronx, interview, 10-1-98; LaGuardia, interview, 9-24-98; Lehman, interview, 7-23-98.)

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Basic Skills & ESL Overview, 13 & Table 14b.

²⁰¹ RAND (Kim).

CUNY’s Fall 1997 freshmen who took it; for the other two-thirds, RAND used their RAT and MAT scores to estimate what their SAT scores would have been.²⁰²

The SAT consists of a math section and a verbal section, each of which is scored in 10-point increments on a scale of 200 to 800. The two scores can be added, to yield a total score that ranges from 400 to 1600. The SAT is administered each year to college-bound high school juniors and seniors. In 1998, the national mean total score was 1017, and a total score of 1020 placed a student in the 50th percentile nationwide. The average New York City public high school student scored at about the 32nd percentile in 1998.²⁰³

RAND found that the CUNY colleges fall into four categories in terms of students’ estimated total SAT scores, as shown in Table 7, below.

Table 7. Estimated Mean Total SAT Score of Fall 1997 CUNY Entrants, by College

National Percentile Range	Estimated Mean Total SAT Score, by College
30 th -40 th	968 - Baruch 946 - Hunter 942 - Queens 926 - Staten Island (bachelor’s) 924 - Brooklyn 918 - City
20 th -25 th	864 - John Jay (bachelor’s) 847 - York 859 - Staten Island (associate)
13 th -17 th (a full standard deviation below the mean)	811 - Lehman 810 - Medgar Evers (associate)* 809 - Kingsborough 809 - Queensborough 808 - BMCC 800 - N.Y. City Tech 794 - John Jay (associate)
1 st - 12 th	776 - LaGuardia 747 - Hostos 717 - Bronx

Sources: RAND (Klein & Orlando); College Board website.

* Information on Medgar Evers’ bachelor’s students not provided due to their small numbers.

²⁰² RAND (Klein & Orlando).

²⁰³ College Board 1998 SAT Overview Report.

According to a “college qualification index” developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (“NCES”), which measures students’ academic readiness to attend a four-year college or university, an SAT score between the 50th and 75th percentile would be used to classify a student as “moderately qualified”; an SAT score between the 25th and 50th percentile (the average for most CUNY bachelor’s programs) would be used to classify a student as “minimally qualified”; and an SAT score below the 25th percentile (the average for John Jay, York, and Lehman bachelor’s students) would be used to classify a student as “marginally or not qualified.”²⁰⁴

CUNY is unique among large U.S. public universities in that it does not have a single senior college whose entering students’ SAT scores average in the top half of SAT takers nationwide. Table 8, below, shows that every other large system has multiple campuses whose entering students’ SAT scores average in the first or second quartile.

²⁰⁴ (NCES 98-013, 200.) In order to identify as many students as possible who were potentially academically qualified to attend a four-year institution, NCES assigned students to the highest level of qualification yielded by any of five criteria, which included high school GPA, class rank, cognitive test scores, and the rigor of the student’s high school academic courses, in addition to the SAT. (Ibid.)

Table 8. Profile of Incoming Students at CUNY Senior Colleges and Top Campuses of Other Large Public Universities

State	System/College	SAT/ACT Scores: 25 th -75 th Percentile ^{e*}	SAT/ACT National Quartile	Freshmen in Top of H.S. Class (%) ^f
New York – CUNY	Baruch	968	3	n/a
	Brooklyn	924	3	51
	City	918	3	55
	Hunter	946	3	53
	Lehman	811	4	51
	Queens	942	3	52
	Staten Island	926	3	37
	York	847	4	22
California	Cal Poly - San Luis Obispo	925-1250	2	77
	UC Berkeley	1200-1440	top 10%	95
	UC Davis	1060-1280	1	95
	UC Irvine	990-1220	2	90
	UC Los Angeles	1140-1360	1	97
	UC Riverside	940-1200	2	90
	UC San Diego	1140-1340	1	95
	UC Santa Barbara	1040-1260	2	95
	UC Santa Cruz	1020-1260	2	94
Florida	Florida A&M University	20	2	n/a
	Florida State - Tallahassee	1020-1230	2	43
	Univ. of Florida	1100-1310	1	60
	Univ. of North Florida	1030-1230	2	50
	Univ. of West Florida	20-27	2	n/a
Illinois	Univ. of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign	25-30	1	53
Massachusetts	UMass Amherst	1000-1220	2	16
	UMass Dartmouth	930-1120	2	37
Michigan	Univ. of Michigan - Ann Arbor	25-30	1	59
	Univ. of Michigan - Dearborn	21-26	1	57
New Jersey	Rutgers - Camden	970-1180	2	63
	Rutgers - New Brunswick	1050-1280	1	31
New York – SUNY	Albany	1030-1230	2	14
	Binghamton	1110-1310	1	54
	Buffalo	1020-1230	2	22
	Fredonia	1000-1170	2	46
	Geneseo	1130-1290	1	92
	New Paltz	990-1210	2	44
	Oswego	980-1180	2	45
	Plattsburgh	960-1140	2	31
	Purchase	930-1170	2	25
	Stony Brook	980-1200	2	25
Ohio	Ohio State - Columbus	21-27	2	26
Pennsylvania	Penn State Erie, The Behrend College	961-1161	2	78
	Penn State University Park	1100-1300	1	48
Texas	Texas A & M - College Station	1060-1270	1	47
	Texas A & M - Galveston	1010-1182	2	68
	University of Texas - Austin	1080-1300	1	37
Wisconsin	Univ. of Wisconsin - Eau Claire	21-25	2	51
	Univ. of Wisconsin - La Crosse	22-26	2	60
	Univ. of Wisconsin - Madison	25-29	1	53
	Univ. of Wisconsin - River Falls	20-25	2	48

Univ. of Wisconsin - Stevens Point	20-25	2	45
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Sources: *U.S. News & World Report*, 1999, “America’s Best Colleges”; RAND (Klein & Orlando); College Board Online website, [SAT Program Information](#), “SAT I Statistics” (percentiles) and “SAT/ACT Comparison” (conversion table).

* For CUNY colleges, score is estimated mean total from RAND (Klein & Orlando) report.

† Regular type = percent of freshmen from top 10% of their H.S. class; *italics* = percent from top 25%.

It is telling that, despite CUNY students’ low average SAT scores, approximately half of CUNY senior college entrants are in the top 25% of their high school graduating class. By contrast, other colleges with similar percentages of top high school students reported much higher SAT scores among entering freshmen. This suggests that high school class standing is not an accurate indicator of the academic ability of CUNY students, perhaps because CUNY’s feeder high schools have low academic standards. This observation underscores the need for objective information about the academic preparedness of CUNY applicants.²⁰⁵

As with remedial need, the estimated SAT scores of incoming CUNY students may give some clue to CUNY’s low graduation rates. Research shows that the percentage of students who complete bachelor’s degrees in five years rises with SAT scores.²⁰⁶ Indeed, Table 9, below, shows a relationship between SAT scores and graduation rates at CUNY’s senior colleges and a group of peer institutions identified by PricewaterhouseCoopers, in collaboration with RAND and the Task Force staff.²⁰⁷ In general, at both CUNY and the peer institutions, the colleges whose incoming freshmen have the lowest SAT scores also have the lowest six-year graduation rates, and as SAT scores rise, so do graduation rates. For example, the colleges whose incoming freshmen had SAT scores in the 700s to low 900s tended to have graduation rates in the twenties, while those with SAT scores in the high 900s to 1000+ tended to have graduation rates in the thirties and forties.

Moreover, if we compare CUNY colleges and peer institutions whose incoming freshmen have similar SAT scores, we find that they also had similar six-year graduation rates. For example, Baruch’s estimated mean total SAT of 968 falls in the middle of San Francisco State’s 820-1100 range, and the two colleges have graduation rates of 41% and 39%, respectively.

²⁰⁵ See Section III.I and Section IV.B.3 for discussions of CUNY’s recent efforts to replace subjective admissions standards, such as class rank and high school grades, with more objective standards, such as SAT scores and the number of rigorous high school courses taken.

²⁰⁶ College Board website, citing NCES 96-155.

²⁰⁷ The peer institutions were selected according to the following criteria:

- They are public, rather than private, institutions, and are part of a larger system.
- They offer a level of instruction (Carnegie class) similar to CUNY’s senior colleges. A significant portion of the instruction at the peer institutions is devoted to the lower division, which makes them comparable to CUNY’s comprehensive senior colleges.
- They are located in major urban areas.
- They have a large enrollment.
- A high percentage of their students are members of racial or ethnic minorities.

The three SUNY colleges that provided the closest comparison with the CUNY colleges were also included, even though they are not located in major urban areas and, in two cases, have relatively low minority populations. See PwC, [Report I](#), 16, for more information.

Similarly, York’s estimated mean total SAT of 847 falls in the middle of Chicago State’s 760-930 range, and both colleges have graduation rates of 22%.

Table 9. SAT Scores of Entering Freshmen and Six-Year Graduation Rates of CUNY Senior Colleges and Peers

CUNY College	Estimated Mean Total SAT Score	6-Yr. Grad. Rate: 1991 Full-Time Bachelor’s Entrants (%)	Peer College	Total SAT Score: 25 th -75 th Percentile	6-Yr. Grad. Rate: 1991 Entering Class (%)
Baruch	968	41	SUNY Buffalo	1020-1230	59
Hunter	946	31	Florida International	1040-1200	40
Queens	942	37	SUNY Purchase	930-1170	37
Staten Island	926	41	Georgia State	960-1140	25
Brooklyn	924	36	San Francisco State	820-1100	39
City	918	21	Jersey City State College	750-950	30
John Jay	864	26	Chicago State	760-930**	22*
York	847	22	SUNY Old Westbury	690-930	28
Lehman	811	22	Univ. of Texas El Paso	930 [†]	24
CUNY	795-1040 ^{††}	32	Northeastern Illinois	810-850 ^{**†}	13*

Sources: RAND (Klein & Orlando); *U.S. News & World Report*, 1999, “America’s Best Colleges”; *1997 Data Book*, Vol. II, 49-50, 53, 87-99; PwC, *Report III*, 17.

* Average of the most recent four years’ worth of 6-year graduation rates.

** Converted from ACT using College Board Online conversion scale.

† Average score, not 25th-75th percentile.

†† Estimated 25th-75th percentile.

4. Diversity

Many CUNY faculty and administrators stated that CUNY’s extraordinarily high levels of remediation, as well as other features such as longer time to degree and low graduation rates, are a result of certain unique characteristics of the CUNY student body: that it is “nontraditional” in being much older (many more adults and parents with family responsibilities), that it includes many working students, that the students are disproportionately poor, that there are higher percentages of immigrants for whom English is not their native language, and that there are higher percentages of racial minorities.

The Task Force does not dispute the incredible diversity of CUNY’s student body (we present the relevant statistics in the following paragraphs). But in the thirty years since open admissions was established, CUNY has done far too little to tailor the traditional college model to its “nontraditional” student body. (See Section V.B.2.c, which discusses CUNY’s failure to

institute systematic ESL tests, and Section V.A.2, which discusses the fact that CUNY students are encouraged to matriculate full-time in a degree program, with little or no regard to their educational goals, remedial need, or employment commitments.)

Black and Hispanic students each make up just under one-third of CUNY freshmen, whites make up one-quarter, and Asian students one-eighth.²⁰⁸ Thirty percent of CUNY undergraduates reported that they are or have been married, and almost as many say they are supporting children.²⁰⁹ Half of CUNY's freshmen are foreign-born,²¹⁰ though only 16% report that they are most comfortable in a language other than English.²¹¹

The high average age of CUNY's undergraduates is a frequently cited statistic. This phenomenon is not wholly attributable to high numbers of students delaying enrollment more than one year after high school graduation, however. (In Fall 1997, 77% of CUNY's senior college entering freshmen were 19 years old or younger, and 76% were current high school graduates; the comparable figures for community college freshmen were 50% and 46%.)²¹² Rather, the high average age of CUNY undergraduates is due in large part to the fact that both BOE and CUNY students take much longer than average to graduate. More than one-third of the graduates of the New York City public school system (CUNY's main feeder) take five or more years to get through high school.²¹³ This suggests that many of CUNY's 19- and 20-year-old freshmen are right out of city high schools. Taken together with the fact that CUNY students take much longer than average to accumulate degree credits, one can assume that students who go to the city's public schools and then attend CUNY are not likely to graduate from college at the traditional age of 21 or 22; they are more likely to graduate at age 26. In this connection, it is also interesting to note that CUNY's older students require remediation at slightly lower rates than the younger students.²¹⁴

In a 1995 survey, the percentage of CUNY undergraduates reporting household income under \$20,000 was just over one-third at the senior colleges and just over one-half at the community colleges. About one-third reported household income between \$20,000 and \$39,999; 10%-15% reported household income between \$40,000 and \$59,999; and the remainder said their household income was \$60,000 or more.²¹⁵ Almost three-quarters of CUNY undergraduates reported that they were either not employed or working only part-time, while just over one-quarter said they worked 35 or more hours per week.²¹⁶

²⁰⁸ CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. I, 109.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

²¹⁰ CUNY counts students from Puerto Rico in this category. (*Ibid.*, 167.)

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

²¹² (*Ibid.*, 67, 70.) Current national comparison data were not available.

²¹³ Board of Education of the City of New York, The Class of 1997 Four-Year Longitudinal Report.

²¹⁴ Basic Skills & ESL Overview, 5 & Tables 5a & 5b.

²¹⁵ The survey asked students to "estimate total income in your household last year." (CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. I, 170.)

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

Roughly three-quarters of CUNY's freshmen enroll full-time. The percentage of senior college students who attend full-time is about ten percentage points less than the national average, but the percentage of CUNY community college students who attend full-time is double the national average.²¹⁷

5. High School Education

Whereas many of the remedial students at U.S. community colleges never graduated from high school or earned a GED, all CUNY remedial students have a diploma or GED.²¹⁸ In fact, the majority of CUNY remedial students have just graduated from high school. In the fall of 1995, three-quarters of bachelor's freshmen who were enrolled in basic skills and 58% of bachelor's freshmen who were enrolled in ESL were current high school graduates. At the associate level, almost half of the freshmen who were enrolled in basic skills and 30% of the freshmen enrolled in ESL had just graduated from high school.²¹⁹

Students from New York City public high schools are overrepresented among basic skills students, while students from all other kinds of high schools are underrepresented. In 1995, 64% of bachelor's-level basic skills freshmen and 56% of associate-level basic skills freshmen were New York City public school graduates, while students with GEDs made up another 23% of basic skills associate entrants.²²⁰

In 1995, roughly one-third of associate-level ESL freshmen graduated from New York City public high schools, while slightly more graduated from foreign high schools and only one-quarter had GEDs. Students who last attended a foreign high school likewise made up one-third of entering ESL bachelor's students.²²¹ But an astonishing 59% of ESL bachelor's entrants graduated from New York City public high schools.²²²

It is not surprising that a disproportionate number of CUNY's remedial students come from New York public high schools, when we consider which of those high schools are CUNY's main feeders. More than 35% of CUNY's 1997 freshmen were current New York City public high school graduates. But at many of the city's worst high schools, the proportion of graduates

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

²¹⁸ Arthur M. Hauptman, "Financing Remediation at CUNY on a Performance Basis: A Proposal" (RAND Report to Mayor Giuliani's Advisory Task Force on the City University of New York, 1999). See footnote 239 for an explanation of the GED.

²¹⁹ Basic Skills & ESL Overview, Tables 5a & 5b.

²²⁰ One CUNY official opined that students who take the GED in English are by and large good students, because the GED guarantees at least 8th-grade-level skills; by contrast, students who stick it out in New York City public schools and graduate with a local diploma may have lower skills. (N.Y. City Tech., interview, 9-23-98.)

²²¹ Under the Trustees' May 26, 1998 resolution (reaffirmed in January 1999), such students would likely satisfy the criterion, "received a secondary education abroad." But what of the 59% of ESL bachelor's entrants who graduated from New York City public high schools? Although virtually all of these were born outside the U.S., it is not known how many moved here after completing some portion of their secondary education.

²²² Basic Skills & ESL Overview, 5 & Tables 5a & 5b.

attending CUNY was even higher. For example, more than 50% of George Washington, Harry Van Arsdale, and Seward Park graduates enrolled in CUNY, and more than 40% of Franklin K. Lane, John Jay, Louis D. Brandeis, Theodore Roosevelt, and Walton graduates enrolled at CUNY. By contrast, the BOE’s top high schools send very few students to CUNY. In 1997, fewer than 7% of graduates from Stuyvesant and Bronx Science, and fewer than 25% of graduates from Benjamin Cardozo, Townsend Harris, Staten Island Tech, and Brooklyn Tech enrolled in CUNY.²²³

Table 10. Percent of 1997 New York City Public High School Graduates Enrolling in CUNY (Best and Worst High Schools)*

Best High Schools	% Enrolled in CUNY	Worst High Schools	% Enrolled in CUNY	Worst High Schools (continued)	% Enrolled in CUNY
Benjamin Cardozo	23.3	Adlai E. Stevenson	34.5	Park West	37.2
Bronx Science	6.8	Automotive	16.3	Prospect Heights	28.0
Brooklyn Tech	19.8	Bushwick	38.7	Samuel Gompers	28.2
Staten Island Tech	13.3	Franklin K. Lane	41.0	Sarah J. Hale	28.6
Stuyvesant	5.6	George Washington	51.6	Seward Park	51.0
Tottenville	35.3	George Wingate	35.0	South Bronx	33.3
Townsend Harris	15.7	Harry Van Arsdale	52.7	Theodore Roosevelt	42.0
		John Jay	43.3	Thomas Jefferson	33.1
		Louis D. Brandeis	41.8	Walton	42.2
		Morris	36.4	William H. Taft	39.8

Source: CUNY August Responses, Attachment D-2; Parents Organized to Win Education Reform, *Futures Denied*, 16-17.

* The best high schools have graduation rates above 80% and produce students who score well enough on the SAT to warrant recognition by the College Board as national merit scholars. In general, the worst high schools have four-year graduation rates below 40%, and fewer than 4% of their students take and pass Regents exams; moreover, fewer than 15% of the students from the worst high schools take the SAT, and the scores of those who do average at or below the 3rd percentile in verbal and at or below the 7th percentile in math.

6. Conclusions

CUNY is far from unique in admitting underprepared students. But CUNY’s remedial student population is much larger, in both percentage and absolute terms, than that of other colleges and universities across the nation. Moreover, CUNY students are more likely to require extensive remediation than remedial students at other U.S. colleges and universities. This is not surprising,

²²³ CUNY August Responses, Attachment D-2.

considering that the SAT scores of incoming students at even the most selective CUNY colleges are well below the national average.

CUNY's basic skills and ESL students, like CUNY students in general, are very diverse in terms of race, country of origin, and age. But while almost half of 1997 first-time freshmen were foreign-born, only 16% of first-time freshmen reported that they were most comfortable in a language other than English. In addition, at the bachelor's level, only 8% of entering basic skills students were age 25 or older, and at the associate level, freshmen age 25 or older were less likely to take basic skills courses than younger students.

Most CUNY remedial freshmen – like the CUNY freshman class in general – are current high school graduates. The New York City public school system, CUNY's primary feeder, is the source of a disproportionate share of CUNY's basic skills students and a surprisingly large percentage of CUNY's ESL students.

B. Regular Admissions

CUNY and the BOE are interdependent institutions. In the last section, we saw that 35.5% of 1997 BOE graduates enrolled in CUNY that same year. In turn, BOE graduates made up two-thirds of CUNY's bachelor's freshmen and just over half of CUNY's associate freshmen in Fall 1997. In this section, we describe the process by which students – and BOE students in particular – are admitted to CUNY's undergraduate degree programs.

1. College Advising

BOE students receive little college advisement. College advisors do almost no outreach until the second half of junior year, when it is already far too late for most students to make up for shortcomings in their academic backgrounds. College advising is considered a “luxury” in high schools with limited resources.²²⁴

What little advice students do receive is CUNY-centric. For example, nearly every college fair listed in the BOE's Handbook for College Advisors is either sponsored by or held at CUNY. Through CUNY's College Now program, students in 25 BOE high schools in four boroughs take the FSATs during their junior year in high school, receive college counseling, and take remedial and college-level courses with CUNY-trained instructors; 7,000 students participated during the 1997-98 school year.²²⁵

²²⁴ Mecane & Tarlo, interview, 10-22-98.

²²⁵ (City University of New York 1998-99 Operating Budget Request, 19-23.) New York State allocates \$5 million to CUNY each year for collaborative programs with the New York City public school system. College Now, which began in 1984 and is operated by Kingsborough Community College, is the largest collaboration. (CUNY 1998-

(continued next page)

Since CUNY has relatively low admissions standards, the BOE college advisors' focus on CUNY means that public high students are not encouraged to aim very high. One CUNY official told us that New York City public high school guidance counselors actively discourage students who say they might want to go to CUNY from taking the SAT.²²⁶ BOE officials denied this, but acknowledged that CUNY has only very recently clarified that it is interested in receiving applicants' SAT scores.²²⁷

2. Personalized Application

CUNY and the New York City public school system have worked to ensure that the process of applying to and being accepted by a CUNY college is painless and efficient. Pursuant to its contractual agreement with the BOE, CUNY's UAPC²²⁸ generates a personalized CUNY application for every New York City public high school senior.²²⁹ The personalized application (actually just a single sheet form with the student's name, address, and demographic information on the front and high school transcript printed on the reverse) is distributed to each student by the high school. All the students have to do is rank up to six CUNY colleges in their order of preference, sign the form, and return it along with the \$40 fee to the high school's college advisor, who forwards the form and fee to UAPC.²³⁰ Students are encouraged to choose whatever college and major they want, regardless of their high school grades. According to one CUNY official we interviewed, some high schools encourage mass submission of CUNY applications in order to inflate the high school's college application and college acceptance percentages.²³¹

Since CUNY has year-round, rolling admissions, there is no application deadline; thus, we were told, high school guidance counselors place a low priority on CUNY applicants. Moreover, some CUNY officials complained that the centralized application process is unacceptably slow.

99 Budget Request.) However, most of the state funding goes to the six CUNY colleges that operate high schools that test new methods of encouraging disadvantaged students to attend college. (Hassett, interview, 2-11-99.) Beyond that, every CUNY college is involved in some sort of collaborative project with the public school system.

More than one CUNY official objected to the idea that CUNY should do more to prepare high school students for college. Their fear is that CUNY enrollment would decrease because better-prepared students would have more college options. (Brooklyn, interview, 7-20-98; John Jay, interview, 7-22-98.)

²²⁶ John Jay, interview, 7-22-98.

²²⁷ Mecane & Tarlo, interview, 10-22-98.

²²⁸ UAPC, an "off-budget enterprise" of CUNY that brings in money through entrepreneurial activities and contracts, is CUNY's single most important point of contact with the BOE. Under the terms of the contract between UAPC and the BOE, which is worth approximately \$6.5 million per year, UAPC maintains the high school Student Automated Record-Keeping (SARK) system. UAPC's duties include data collection, scheduling, maintenance of daily attendance and subject class attendance records, grade reporting, transcript production, and production of reports. The SARK system contains each student's public school attendance record, academic history, and test results, organized by high school. According to CUNY officials, the BOE is in the process of reclaiming these functions and bringing SARK in-house. (UAPC, interview, 7-15-98.)

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Queensborough, interview, 7-14-98.

They predicted, moreover, that if CUNY begins to use the FSATs as admissions tests, the process will be slowed down even further. They also worried that better students who would otherwise have applied to CUNY as their “safety school” will be unwilling to submit to a special day-long exam for that privilege.²³²

3. Admissions Standards

Rather than setting objective, meaningful admission standards based on its own determination of the appropriate level of college preparation, CUNY has essentially delegated its admissions standards to the New York City public school system. Since 1995, the senior colleges have taken some steps toward more objective admissions standards,²³³ but most CUNY bachelor’s programs still do not require students to submit any standardized test scores.²³⁴ Instead, bachelor’s admissions are based almost entirely on a combination of high school grades and the number of academic courses taken in high school – a combination that, as we saw in Section IV.A, above, is insufficient to ensure that incoming students possess basic verbal and mathematics skills.

Moreover, top CUNY administrators admit that BOE guidance counselors do not have a good understanding of CUNY’s bachelor’s admissions standards.²³⁵ Even though only the associate degree programs technically have open admissions (in that anyone with a high school diploma is eligible), the BOE’s top college guidance personnel acknowledge that there is a widespread perception that CUNY as a whole is an “open admissions university.”²³⁶

When a student applies to CUNY, UAPC calculates the student’s high school academic average (also known as the “College Admission Average” or “CAA”) based solely on academic courses that CUNY has determined to be sufficiently rigorous. (These courses are known as “CPI courses” or “CPI units.”)²³⁷

²³² Ibid.

²³³ See Section III.I.2, “Admissions Standards and Limits on Remediation,” for a discussion of the recent history of CUNY’s admissions policies.

²³⁴ Baruch and Queens College are requiring Fall 1999 applicants to submit SAT scores. (Mecane & Tarlo, interview, 10-22-98; Sessoms presentation, 1-19-99; Hassett & Mirrer interview, 2-11-99; Baruch, interview, 2-10-99.) CUNY’s own research shows that at least 26 U.S. public postsecondary systems require an admissions test, and that, of these, all require either the SAT or its main competitor, the American College Test (“ACT”). (Crain v. Reynolds, Trial Exhibit D, 1220-31.)

²³⁵ UAPC, interview, 9-15-98; Mirrer interview, 2-11-99.

²³⁶ Mecane & Tarlo, interview, 10-22-98.

²³⁷ There is no written or computerized methodology for determining whether a high school course should qualify for CPI, nor are UAPC’s determinations subject to periodic reviews. CUNY officials noted that because the process is tailored to each school’s history and is also the result of a negotiation, it is not meant to be entirely consistent. (UAPC, interview, 7-15-98.)

No one is systematically informed of the CPI certification determinations. Although UAPC has tracked each high school’s CPI unit certification status since 1993, and the BOE is free to make CPI unit information available to parents, students, and the public at large, neither UAPC nor the BOE has chosen to divulge many details about the program. The “Annual School Reports” for each high school contain no information about the CPI units

(continued next page)

Bachelor's admissions are generally based on a sliding scale that takes into account the student's CAA, on the one hand, and the number of CPI units the student has earned by the end of her junior year in high school, on the other. In general, the higher the number of CPI units, the lower the required CAA.²³⁸

Since 1993, CUNY has been gradually ratcheting up bachelor's admissions standards by requiring incoming students to have a minimum number of CPI units. For 1998, bachelor's applicants must have completed a minimum of 10 CPI units by the end of their junior year in high school in order to be considered for admission to a CUNY bachelor's program. (Students who have a GED²³⁹ may qualify for CPI units, depending upon the score they received on the GED exam.) For Fall 1999, when the phase-in will be complete, the end-of-junior-year minimum will be increased to 12 units. Some colleges have opted to set higher standards: Hunter and Queens already require a minimum of 12 CPI units, and Baruch requires 14. Some colleges also require a minimum number of English or math CPI units.²⁴⁰

Similarly, each senior college, as part of its bachelor's admissions standards, sets a minimum CAA. At some colleges, the minimum is as low as 70, while others have set the minimum as high as 80. All colleges will waive the minimum CAA for students who have earned a high enough SAT score (at most CUNY colleges, a combined math and verbal score of 1020 is sufficient). Some will also waive it for students who have a high enough GED score (ranging from 300 to 390); a high enough class rank (46th percentile or higher at John Jay); or an unusually high number of CPI units (16 at York).²⁴¹ Each college, through a process of "enrollment management," adjusts its specific cutoff numbers each year.²⁴²

awarded to the school, and individual students are told of their CPI status only upon enrollment at CUNY. (UAPC, interview, 7-15-98; Queensborough, interview, 7-14-98.)

Because CPI certification methods and findings are secret, the process is compromised by political concerns. For example, CUNY's review has led them to "decertify" some high schools' entire selection of math offerings, and although officials say that they would like to do the same thing with certain schools' English departments, several years ago they were warned never to suggest such a thing. (UAPC, interview, 7-15-98.)

²³⁸ (Hassett responses, 1-4.) Both associate and bachelor's degree students are also "expected" to have a certain number of CPI units, in specific subject areas, in order to graduate from CUNY: 2 units (*i.e.*, 2 years) of lab science, 3 units of mathematics, 4 units of English, 2 units of social science, and 4 "elective" units, which can be in any of the listed areas, fine arts, or foreign language. (CPI "Overview" document, undated, Table I.) Those students who did not accumulate the necessary units in high school are supposedly required to make up the difference by taking regular college credit courses that have been evaluated by the individual campus governing body and assigned a CPI unit equivalency value, or by demonstrating their competence through "alternative methods." (See Queensborough catalog, 1997-99, 11.) As of 1997, however, this requirement was unevenly enforced; eight of the 17 colleges had an insufficient mechanism for tracking students' completion of CPI equivalency courses. (*The College Preparatory Initiative Mid-Point Review*, 22-23.)

²³⁹ The GED ("General Equivalency Diploma") is an alternative route to a high school diploma. Currently, the GED test is a five-part, eight-hour exam that covers English, mathematics, social studies, science, and interpreting literature and the arts. Prior to 1997, students needed a minimum grade of 40 (on a 20 to 80 scale) on each part, or an average of 45 on all sections, to receive a passing grade. Now students must have a minimum of 40 on each part and an overall average of 45 or higher in order to receive a GED.

²⁴⁰ Hassett responses, 1-4.

²⁴¹ Hassett Responses, 1-4-99; N.Y. City Tech catalog, 10.

²⁴² UAPC, interview, 9-15-98.

During the “allocation” process, each student’s academic record is automatically matched against the academic requirements for her first choice college. If the student meets the requirements, she is accepted. If the student does not meet the requirements, the student’s next choice is considered. This process continues until the student is matched with a college for which she is eligible. If the student does not meet the criteria for any of her choices, however, the application is reviewed by hand. Based on her original choices and place of residence, the student is placed in a college for which she is eligible. In 1997, approximately 5% of CUNY freshmen – about 1,400 students – were allocated to a college that was not one of their choices; this percentage was closer to 2% at most of the senior colleges, while at Bronx Community, Queensborough, Kingsborough, BMCC, York, and Medgar Evers, the percentage was closer to 10%.²⁴³

Because CUNY’s admission standards and procedures are so complicated, they are poorly understood – even by high school guidance counselors.²⁴⁴ In theory, once the local diploma is outlawed and the Regents’ new high school graduation requirements are fully phased in, a New York high school diploma will signal that a student is prepared for college, and CPI will be obsolete.²⁴⁵ Some CUNY officials we spoke with were not so optimistic, however; they suspect that, once everyone realizes that large numbers of students will be unable to graduate from high school, the Regents requirements will be watered down.²⁴⁶ BOE officials we spoke with predicted a different scenario: large numbers of high school students will be funneled into the BOE’s GED programs. Either way, CUNY will still need some mechanism for assessing the preparedness of its applicants.

4. Conclusions

In recent years, CUNY has taken some steps to improve the college preparation of incoming BOE students – in particular, via its College Preparatory Initiative and College Now program. Over the course of two and a half decades, however, CUNY and the New York City Board of Education have developed a college advising and admissions system that institutionalizes the need for large-scale remediation at CUNY. The two systems proudly proclaim that they have created a “seamless transition” between high school and CUNY. If there were really a “seamless transition,” there would be an articulated K-16 curriculum and the BOE would develop students’ skills sequentially so that the transition from high school to college-level academics would be smooth. By the time students graduated from high school, they would be prepared for college and would have a choice of college options. Instead, because the BOE’s

²⁴³ CUNY Responses, 8-18-98, 20 & Attachment F-1.

²⁴⁴ UAPC, *Ibid.*; Mirrer, interview, 2-11-99.

²⁴⁵ Mirrer, *Ibid.*; Queensborough, interview, 7-14-98; Mecane & Tarlo, interview, 10-22-98.

²⁴⁶ In 1997, only 24% of BOE graduates earned Regents diplomas, while 69% earned local diplomas and 7% earned BOE GEDs. (NYC BOE 1996-97 Annual School Report.)

graduation requirements are so low, and CUNY's admissions standards are based on the BOE's graduation requirements, the "seamless transition" has the effect of extending social promotion from high school into college.²⁴⁷

We began this section by stating that about 35% of BOE graduates go to CUNY, and in turn, BOE graduates make up two-thirds of CUNY's bachelor's freshmen and half of CUNY's associate freshmen. In effect, then, the seamless transition is a vertically-integrated monopoly that guarantees CUNY those BOE students who – because of the inadequate K-12 education they have received, their inability to pay for tuition or room and board at a private or out-of-town college, their lack of motivation, or a combination of other factors – have no other college options.

A separate report to the Task Force, entitled *Bridging the Gap Between School and College*, confirms that the need for postsecondary remediation can, to a great extent, be traced back to the city's public primary and secondary schools – and that CUNY, in turn, is partly responsible for the public schools' problems. This research supports the need for CUNY and the BOE to acknowledge their interdependence and their ability to exert influences, positive and negative, on one another, as a first step towards reducing the need for postsecondary remediation of recent public high school graduates.

C. *Admission to Special Programs*

CUNY does not have a traditional "affirmative action" admission policy designed to advance educational opportunities for members of racial and ethnic minority groups. It achieves that goal through its regular admissions standards and through its participation in New York State's higher educational opportunity programs, SEEK and CD.²⁴⁸ These two programs are designed to bring educationally and economically disadvantaged students into higher education institutions, regardless of race or ethnicity.²⁴⁹ SEEK is available at CUNY's senior colleges, and CD is the corresponding program at the community colleges. CUNY refers to them collectively as "special programs."

²⁴⁷ The seamless transition may be too seamless. CUNY interviewees reported that many students are "passive," never learned any study skills, are unsure why they are in college, or have an "entitlement mentality." Such obstacles are not easy to overcome (see Traub), but a pioneering "Self-Regulatory Learning" program at N.Y. City Tech has had some success in transforming students' perceptions of education from a process that is "outer-directed" to one in which they are in control of their own fates.

Other CUNY interviewees referred to the need to "acculturate" students, who are otherwise inclined to bring their breakfast to class; use radios, beepers, cell phones, and video games during class; leave class without permission; and mill in the halls.

²⁴⁸ See Section III.C.2, "Policy by Riot," and Section III.D, "CUNY's Solution to the Problem of Segregation (1969-1973)," for further discussion of this issue. Note that CUNY's regular admission standards have changed substantially since 1970; see Section III.I.2, "Admissions Standards and Limits on Remediation."

²⁴⁹ N.Y. Educ. Law, §6452.

In order to be eligible for SEEK and CD,²⁵⁰ a student must be “economically disadvantaged,” as defined in New York State law. Second, students must be “educationally disadvantaged,” which is defined differently for the two programs. For CD, a student is considered educationally disadvantaged if she has a GED, or if she has a CAA of less than 80.²⁵¹ For SEEK, a student is considered educationally disadvantaged if she:

- has a GED, **or**
- a CAA of less than 80, **or**
- fewer than 10 CPI units, and fewer than one CPI unit in math, **or**
- is not eligible for regular admission to the college to which she has applied.²⁵²

Each year, CUNY’s central administration distributes the SEEK and CD funds it receives from the State, according to each college’s planned program enrollment. Enrollment is a function of the historical size of each campus’ program and the number of counselors the campus has dedicated to the program. In turn, the size of each college’s entering SEEK or CD class is determined by program attrition rates: the higher the attrition rate, the more freshmen must be admitted to maintain planned program enrollment for the year. In the event that a college has more eligible SEEK applicants than freshman slots, the college is allowed to determine which admissions criterion is most important to it (*e.g.*, CAA, SAT scores, CPI units, CPI math units), and the applicants who score best on that criterion are admitted, until the SEEK class is filled.²⁵³

Table 11 shows that, in 1997, SEEK and CD students made up 14% of CUNY’s entering freshman class. In that same year, SEEK students made up 8% of all bachelor’s enrollees, while SEEK and CD students made up 15% of all associate enrollees.

Table 11. SEEK/CD Enrollment as a Percentage of CUNY Enrollment

	First-time freshmen		Bachelor’s enrollment		Associate enrollment	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
SEEK/CD	3,444	14	6,841	8	11,540	15
All CUNY	25,326	100	84,867	100	75,660	100

Source: CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. I, 12-13, 65, 87, 90.

Because SEEK and CD students must be “educationally disadvantaged” to be eligible, and because “educationally disadvantaged” is defined to give preference to students with weak academic records, entering SEEK and CD students fail the FSATs at higher rates than first-time freshmen overall. Table 12 shows that, in 1997, 85% of SEEK and CD entrants required some remediation, compared with 78% of all freshmen. In other words, the remedial needs of

²⁵⁰ In addition, a student cannot be eligible for these programs unless she fills out the appropriate section of the CUNY application form. (UAPC, interview, 2-4-99.) Certain state residency requirements also apply. (CUNY website.)

²⁵¹ UAPC, interview, 2-4-99.

²⁵² Thus, as a college raises its admissions standards, more of its applicants become eligible for SEEK. (Ibid.)

²⁵³ UAPC, Ibid.; Mirror “Responses” attachment.

SEEK and CD entrants are roughly comparable to the remedial needs of CUNY’s community college freshmen. Interestingly, however, SEEK and CD entrants significantly outperformed the community college freshman class on the math portion of the FSATs.

Table 12. Percent of SEEK/CD Entrants Requiring Remediation, by Institution Type, Subject Area, and Number of Remedial Subjects

	Community Colleges		Senior Colleges		Total CUNY	
	All first-time freshmen	CD entrants	All first-time freshmen	SEEK/CD entrants	All first-time freshmen	SEEK/CD entrants
Any remed.	87	84	72	86	78	85
Reading	61	64	43	58	51	60
Writing	70	70	59	73	64	72
Math	63	58	36	45	48	50
1 remedial	21	18	26	24	24	22
2 remedial	31	29	27	34	29	32
3 remedial	35	37	18	28	26	31
2 or 3 rem.	66	66	45	62	55	63
No remed.	13	16	28	14	22	15

Source: CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. I, pp. 68-69, 92-93.

Table 12 also shows that SEEK and CD students tended to have more serious remedial needs than the freshman class as a whole. For example, 60% of incoming SEEK and CD students required remedial reading, compared with only 51% of all freshmen. Similarly, 63% of SEEK and CD entrants required remediation in more than one subject area, as compared with 55% of all freshmen.

Because of its history, the SEEK program is sometimes viewed as an “affirmative action” program that brings the racial composition of the CUNY student body more closely in line with the racial composition of the city or its K-12 public school system. Most notably, one of the reasons that CUNY expanded the SEEK program in the early 1970s was that it wanted to promote racial integration at the senior college campuses.²⁵⁴ Table 13, below, shows that the SEEK and CD programs do, in fact, help to bring CUNY more closely in line with the city’s public school population. What is not widely know, however, is that Hispanic students are the primary beneficiaries of the SEEK and CD programs, whereas the percentage of black students (33% in Fall 1997) is exactly the same in SEEK and CD as in the undergraduate population as a whole. In 1997, Hispanics made up 45% of SEEK and CD students, but only 27% of the undergraduate degree population. Only 10% of Fall 1997 SEEK and CD students were white, compared with 28% of all undergraduate degree students.

²⁵⁴ See Section III.D, “CUNY’s Solution to the Problem of Segregation (1969-1973).”

Table 13. Race/Ethnicity of SEEK/CD Students, Compared to all CUNY Undergraduates and New York City Public Schools (“NYCPS”)

	White – %		Black – %		Hispanic – %		Asian/Pacific – %	
	Undergr.	SEEK/CD	Undergr.	SEEK/CD	Undergr.	SEEK/CD	Undergr.	SEEK/CD
Senior	32	11	32	34	22	41	13	13
Comm.	19	8	34	29	36	56	11	7
All CUNY	28	10	33	33	27	45	12	12
NYCPS	16		37		35		12	

Sources: CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. I, pp. 89, 99; NYC BOE 1996-97 Annual School Report.

The other reason that CUNY expanded SEEK in the early 1970s was to create a “sizeable identifiable group” of underprepared students on each senior college campus, so that special classes for those students could be justified.²⁵⁵ In this way, SEEK contributes to the ghettoization of students of color. Moreover, SEEK and CD, by basing eligibility on low high school grades, actually provide a disincentive for high school achievement and reduce the number of seats that CUNY can offer to academically qualified poor students. In the accompanying report, *Beyond Graduation Rates*, we show that SEEK has a shockingly low graduation rate, which suggests that, despite CUNY’s best efforts, the program sets up underprepared students for failure. Finally, as a result of all these features, SEEK and CD feed the public perception that CUNY is a standards-less institution.

²⁵⁵ See Section III.D, “CUNY’s Solution to the Problem of Segregation (1969-1973).”