

III. The History of Open Admissions and Remedial Education at the City University of New York

CUNY's statutory mission has remained essentially unchanged since the Free Academy was established in 1847. According to section 6201 of the New York State Education Law, CUNY is "an independent system of higher education" committed to "academic excellence and to the provision of equal access and opportunity for students, faculty and staff from all ethnic and racial groups and from both sexes." Access and excellence are CUNY's historic goals. But over the past 30 years, the "access" portion of the mission has overwhelmed the university, at the expense of excellence. This Part traces the history of that transformation.

Section A, "History of Open Admissions and Remediation in the U.S.," shows that since at least the late 1800s, this country's higher education sector has struggled over whether four-year colleges should provide postsecondary remediation.

Section B, "Educational Opportunity and Admissions Policies at CUNY (1847-1968)," explains that from 1847 – when the first of the colleges that make up CUNY was founded – until the implementation of open admissions in 1970, only those students with certain academic credentials could be admitted to CUNY undergraduate degree programs. Competitive test scores (from 1847), a college preparatory or "Regents" diploma (from 1882), and a minimum high school average (from 1924) were required, at both the community and senior colleges.

Section C, "The Birth of Open Admissions at CUNY (1965-1970)," describes how increases in the availability of government aid for underprepared students, coupled with community demands for increased minority representation, led CUNY to abandon its insistence on objective standards of college readiness and to implement a policy of access for all high school graduates. This decision was made in late 1969, and it was implemented less than twelve months later. In the fall of 1970, CUNY's community colleges began to admit any student with a high school diploma – Regents or not. The changes in senior college admissions, while more subtle, were more dramatic in effect: the senior colleges began to admit students with Regents and non-Regents diplomas on equal terms; they began to admit students on the basis of class rank – a relative rather than absolute measure; and they discontinued the use of standardized test scores for admissions.

In Section D, "CUNY's Solution to the Problem of Segregation (1969-1973)," we learn that the CUNY Trustees viewed racial and academic integration as virtually synonymous. Thus, CUNY's principal strategy for racial integration was to spread academically underprepared students throughout the university's 17 colleges, and to create a "sizeable identifiable group" of the most severely underprepared students on each senior college campus.

Section E, “The Early Years of Open Admissions: CUNY and the BOE (1970-1974),” explains that CUNY is unique among the nation’s large open admissions public university systems in that more than half of its students come from a single school system: the New York City public schools. In the early years of open admissions, CUNY officials were shocked to discover how poorly prepared many of the new students were. They viewed these students’ poor reading skills as a major indictment of the city’s high schools, and they considered returning the responsibility for remediation to the public schools. Eventually, however, they decided to focus on improving the articulation between BOE and CUNY programs.

In Section F, “CUNY Faces a Turning Point (1975-1976),” we learn that, during a period of fiscal crisis, CUNY’s Trustees twice voted to reestablish admissions standards. The first plan would have required applicants to demonstrate 8th grade competency in reading and math; the second would have required those community college students who did not have a minimum high school average, class rank, or General Equivalency Diploma (“GED”)³ score to obtain remediation through a “transitional program.” Neither of these policies was ever implemented. In 1976, CUNY bowed to political pressures and began charging tuition, for the first time in its long history.

Section G, “The Institutionalization of Remediation (1976-1990),” identifies two trends that fueled the institutionalization of large-scale postsecondary remediation at CUNY: a decline in the quality of the public schools (arguably a result of CUNY’s own open admissions policy), and the decline in CUNY enrollment that followed the imposition of tuition. By the late-1970s, the city’s public schools had deteriorated to such a point that a significant number of graduates with B averages were arriving at CUNY with extensive remedial needs. School officials attributed declines in rigorous courses to the initiation of open admissions at CUNY. Meanwhile, CUNY – in response to declining enrollment – lowered its admissions standards and sent counselors into the public schools to recruit students. During this period, and in the years that followed, the Trustees and the administration struggled to establish system-wide standards for grading, academic progress, transfer, testing, and other issues raised by the influx of vast numbers of remedial students.

Section H, “The Gap Between Policy and Implementation (1993-1999),” documents CUNY’s failure to implement and enforce many of the transfer and testing policies that were established by the Trustees in 1976 and 1985. Some of those policies were not fully implemented until 1998 – more than twenty years after their enactment.

In recent years, CUNY has enacted numerous policies aimed at ratcheting up standards. Section I, “Standards Revisited (1992-1999),” describes CUNY’s new policy directions in the areas of college preparation, admissions, testing, remediation, and graduation. While some of

³ See footnote 239 for an explanation of the GED.

the recent changes were based on a systematic analysis of what has worked in the past, others seem more reactive and less carefully thought through.

Finally, Section J, “Epilogue,” reflects on three decades of policymaking in the areas of admissions and remediation. Before 1970, CUNY provided what was, by all accounts, an excellent education, but its standards of access – while broader than most – were clearly unacceptable in post-civil-rights-movement America. Over the last 29 years, CUNY has provided broad access, but in the process, its seventeen colleges have become academically homogenized. In the 1990s, the university has begun to try to restore the balance between the two aspects of its historic mission. A return to bachelor’s admission standards that emphasize Regents courses, high school grades, and standardized testing is one hopeful sign of this “new” direction.

A. History of Open Admissions and Remedial Education in the U.S.

Open admissions in this country dates back to the 19th century, when Congress passed the Morrill Act to assist states in financing higher education institutions, known as land-grant colleges, to teach agriculture and mechanical arts. These colleges were typically open to all state residents who had completed an academic course of study in high school.⁴

Today, open admissions is associated more closely with two-year “community colleges.” Such institutions date back to the early 20th century, when state policymakers, recognizing that geography and cost were barriers to attendance at senior colleges, established junior colleges to provide lower-division course work in more accessible locations and at a lower price.⁵ After World War II, in response to the increase in demand for access to public higher education fueled by the G.I. Bill, the mission of junior colleges was expanded to include the promotion of lifelong learning. In addition to offering the first two years of the four-year degree, they threw open their doors to students who wanted to pursue vocational, college preparation, and adult and continuing education programs.⁶

Postsecondary remediation has a somewhat longer history in this country than open admissions, if one considers Harvard College’s provision of Latin and Greek tutors to its underprepared students in the 1600s to be a form of remediation.⁷ Table 1 shows that, since at least the late

⁴ Albert L. Lorenzo, “The Mission and Functions of the Community College: An Overview,” in *A Handbook on the Community College in America*, ed. George A. Baker, III. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 112-115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶ James L. Ratcliff, “Seven Streams in the Historical Development of the Modern American Community College,” in *A Handbook on the Community College in America*, ed. George A. Baker, III. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 21.

⁷ Milton G. Spann and Suella McCrimmon, “Remedial/Developmental Education: Past, Present, and Future,” in *A Handbook on the Community College in America*, ed. George A. Baker, III. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 164.

1800s, the higher education sector has struggled over where to locate postsecondary remediation and how to explain the need for it.

Table 1. History of Remediation in the U.S., 1800s - Present

	Historical Context	Locus of Remediation	Explanations of Poor Academic Performance
19th century - early 20th century	Primary and secondary education were <i>in utero</i> throughout the 19 th century. Compulsory secondary education was not enforced until the early 20 th century.	As early as the mid-1800s, universities were calling for an end to the admission of students with “defective preparation.” Between the Civil War and WWI, remediation was widespread in American colleges.	From 1894 through the 1920s, it was widely believed that poor study habits were the underlying cause of poor academic performance.
1920s - WWII	High school preparation improved. A new generation of two-year colleges was established.	Most four-year institutions stopped providing remediation. Two-year colleges absorbed most of the remedial student population.	During the 1930s and ‘40s, poor reading and study skills were believed to be the causes of poor academic performance.
Post-WWII	As a result of the G.I. Bill, colleges and universities were flooded with underprepared students.	Four-year colleges began testing applicants to separate “underachievers” from “low-ability” students and tried to admit only the more promising underprepared students. Many of those who were rejected – the so-called “low-ability” students – enrolled instead in community colleges and technical institutes.	Education professionals began to cite environmental and socioeconomic factors as the primary causes of poor academic performance, and “compensatory” replaced “remedial” as the term of choice to describe the extra education these students required.
1950s	Sputnik-era competition drove up four-year college admissions standards.	The bulk of remediation shifted to two-year institutions.	
1960s - 1970s	Increasing numbers of underprepared students were graduating from high school. The Higher Education Act, passed in 1965, expanded access for educationally and economically disadvantaged students.	Two- and four-year colleges expanded access and began offering some credit for remedial work. Remediation became a major function of community colleges. In the 1970s, access continued to expand, and remediation became institutionalized at the postsecondary level.	Policymakers and education professionals continued to believe that socioeconomic factors were the main impediment to academic achievement until the early 1970s, when multiple factors such as cultural and individual differences and different learning styles were added to the list of causes. “Developmental education,” focusing on academic potential rather than deficit, became the preferred term.
1980s - 1990s	Higher education resources have grown tighter. The	Policymakers and higher education institutions have once again begun scrutinizing the	

	<p>number of students requiring postsecondary remediation has increased unabated.</p>	<p>problem. Many states are moving towards strengthening K-12 preparation, raising admission standards for bachelor's degree programs, and encouraging a range of providers to offer remedial programs, including community colleges and private for-profit and not-for-profit entities.</p>	
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Sources: Baker; Boylan; Maxwell; Ignash; McMillan et al.; Ravitch.

B. Educational Opportunity and Admissions Policies at CUNY (1847-1968)

The City of New York has a long history of providing educational opportunity to its residents. In 1847, after the citizenry approved a referendum proposal to establish a free academy of higher education, the New York State legislature created the Free Academy (now known as City College). The Free Academy was to provide an academic curriculum comparable to that offered by the Ivy League.⁸

The Free Academy was founded on a basic 19th-century democratic principle: all qualified boys should have access to higher education. The principle was extended to include qualified girls in 1870, when the Female Normal and High School (now Hunter College) was established to prepare the city's public school teachers.

Originally, the Free Academy sought to instill mutual respect and citizenship in its students. When large numbers of immigrants began enrolling in the late 1890s, the two colleges expanded their goals to include the acculturation and socialization of these new groups.⁹

Table 2 shows that, prior to the implementation of the open admissions policy, standardized tests and academic achievement determined who was qualified to matriculate into the Free

⁸ The Free Academy originally planned to provide an innovative, practical curriculum that would prepare graduates for business-related occupations. Within one year of its founding, however, the commercial course of study was abolished and the school reverted to a more traditional curriculum. In the decades that followed, "[a] classics-oriented faculty became entrenched and succeeded in curtailing educational innovation." Sherry Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor: Education in New York, 1880-1924* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1981) 5; see also Florence Margaret Neumann, "Access to Free Public Higher Education New York City" (Ph.D. diss., CUNY, 1984, [University Microfilms International, 8409411](#)), 42-44.

⁹ (Neumann, 358.) A government report prepared in 1901 noted that the City College was "practically filled with Jewish pupils, a considerable proportion of them children of Russian and Polish immigrants." By 1930, half of the City's doctors, lawyers, dentists, and public school teachers were the children of Jewish immigrants. (Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 180.)

Academy, the municipal college system, and – eventually – CUNY.¹⁰ The university expanded rapidly in the 1960s, opening both community and senior colleges. With the establishment of open admissions in 1970, the use of standardized test scores was abandoned, and students with general, non-academic high school diplomas were admitted on the same terms as students with Regents diplomas.

¹⁰ Neumann; S. Willis Rudy, *The College of the City of New York: A History, 1847-1947* (New York: City College Press, 1949); James Traub, *City On A Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1994).

Table 2. Changes in Admissions Requirements, 1847-1998

Year	Historical Context	H. S. Diploma and Academic Units	H.S. Grade Average and Class Rank	Examinations
1847-1882	1847: Free Academy (now City College) established. Admissions was into a sub-freshman class because, until 1898, the city had few high schools. 1870: Female Normal and High School (now Hunter) established.	One year attendance in the common schools.		Competitive scores required.
1882-1900		Certificate of graduation from accredited H.S. H.S. diplomas were awarded only to students who passed Regents exams, beginning in 1865.		Pass competitive examinations to enter college-level courses.
1900-1924	1909: As immigration increased demand for higher education, part-time evening division established; same admissions requirements as day session.	Certificate of graduation from accredited H.S. or meet exam requirement.		Pass entrance exam or pass College Board tests or meet high school graduation requirement.
1920s		1926: 15 H.S. units, including 11.5 in academic subjects: 3 in English, 2.5 in math, 5 in language, 1 in history.	1924: At the urging of city’s H.S. principals, minimum GPA requirement established. 1926: 75 average required.	↓
1930s	1930: Brooklyn College est. 1932: In response to Depression-era demand, “limited matriculation” status established for students considered able to do college-level work but lacking academic preparation. 1937: Queens College est.	1938: H.S. began awarding second-tier “general diploma,” which did not require students to pass Regents exams; Regents diploma still required for admissions.	1936: 80 average required (higher at some colleges).	↓
1940s	1943: “Non-matriculated” status established at City College; lowest admissions standards. 1946: N.Y. City Tech est.	1943: Colleges suspended 2 nd language requirement, reducing units from 12.5 to 10.5.	1943: Minimum reduced to 75-78. 1948: Minimum raised to 80.	↓
1950s	1950: 75% of entering class admitted based solely on GPA. 25% admitted based on aptitude tests. 1955: Staten Island Community College (now	1950: 16 units, including 11.5 in academic subject areas.	-- Senior Colleges -- 1950: Min. average of 80 based solely on academic subjects or meet aptitude test requirement. 1955: Minimum average	1950: Students who could not meet min. GPA were required to pass aptitude tests designed and administered by outside contractors.

	<p>lower division of College of Staten Island) est. 1957: Bronx Community College established. 1958: Queensborough Community College est.</p>		<p>ranged from mid-80s to 90s, depending on the college. -- Community Colleges -- Late 1950s: 75 average or meet combined GPA and test score requirement for liberal arts “transfer” programs. 70 average for two-year career programs.</p>	<p>1957: Specially designed aptitude tests replaced with SAT to speed up admissions and facilitate comparison with colleges outside system.</p>
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Year	Historical Context	H. S. Diploma and Academic Units	H.S. Grade Average and Class Rank	Examinations
1960s	<p>1961: CUNY established and begins rapid expansion.</p> <p>1963: BMCC & Kingsborough established.</p> <p>1964: John Jay established; College Discovery established.</p> <p>1965: Richmond College (now upper division of College of Staten Island) est.</p> <p>1966: York and SEEK est.</p> <p>1968: Baruch, Lehman, Medgar Evers, & LaGuardia established.</p> <p>1969: Open admissions enacted, effective Fall 1970.</p>	↓	<p>1966: Students who are “economically and educationally disadvantaged” eligible for admission to SEEK.</p>	↓
1970s	<p>1970: Hostos established. SEEK program increased by 85% to facilitate racial and ethnic integration of senior colleges.</p> <p>1972: SEEK and CD expanded again.</p> <p>1974: TAP established.</p> <p>1976: Tuition imposed.</p>	<p>1970: General H.S. diploma, which required only 9.5 academic units, given equal weight as Regents diploma. SEEK expanded to provide opportunity for GED students.</p>	<p>-- Senior Colleges --</p> <p>1970: 80 average or rank in top 50%.</p> <p>1976: 80 average or rank in top third or evidence of comparable achievement on the SAT.</p> <p>1979: SEEK expanded to include (1) students with 80 average or rank in top 35%, but who received extensive remedial assistance in H.S. and were found to need a “full range of support services,” and (2) applicants to highly competitive programs who lacked H.S. math or science course prerequisites.</p> <p>-- Community Colleges --</p> <p>1970: No minimum required.</p> <p>1976: Trustees voted to require applicants to have a 70 average or rank at least in the 26th percentile or have an acceptable score on the GED; applicants who did not meet these criteria were to be offered “conditional admission to a transitional program” at the community colleges. <i>This policy was never implemented.</i></p>	<p>1970: Use of standardized test scores for admissions was discontinued.</p>

			<p>1977: Trustees amended 1976 policy to define a “transitional program” as “skills development courses within a degree program,” and to explain that students who were admitted into transitional programs were “matriculated in a program of study leading to a college degree.”</p>	
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Year	Historical Context	H. S. Diploma and Academic Units	H.S. Grade Average and Class Rank	Examinations
1980s	1981: New York State establishes Supplemental Tuition Assistance Program (STAP) for students whose remedial needs preclude them from fulfilling TAP's program pursuit and academic progress requirements.	↓	↓	↓
1990s	1995: State terminates STAP program for school year; STAP only available for tuition-based summer work. 1996: Trustees limit bachelor's admissions to those students whose remedial and ESL needs can be met within two semesters. 1998-99: Trustees vote to phase in use of FSATs as admissions tests for bachelor's programs.	1993: With establishment of College Preparatory Initiative ("CPI"), bachelor's programs begin requiring at least 6 academic units ("CPI units"). 1995: Bachelor's programs require at least 8 CPI units. 1996: Most bachelor's programs begin requiring min. number of CPI units in English and math. 1997: Bachelor's programs require 10 or more CPI units (including English and math min.). 1999: Bachelor's programs will require at least 12 CPI units.	c.1993: GPA based only on CPI courses. 1996: Major shift in senior college admissions policies, with aim of improving FSAT scores. Use of class rank for senior college admissions almost totally discontinued.	By 1995, students could bypass other admission requirements if they had a certain min. SAT score. 1999: Baruch and Queens require applicants who are current H.S. graduates to submit SAT scores. 2000: FSATs slated for use as admissions tests at Baruch, Brooklyn, Hunter, and Queens.

Sources: Neumann; Traub; Rudy; Ravitch; Rossmann *et al.*; Lavin & Hyllegard; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-12-69; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 4-5-76; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-25-79; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-23-81, 116; NYT, 9-11-95, 1; *New York Post*, 12-9-69; UAPC interviews; University Budget Planning and Policy Options, 6-26-95, #15; N.Y. EDUC. LAW §667; UAPC, Undergraduate Admissions Criteria for Senior Colleges with Baccalaureate Degree Programs Only, 1995-1998, 1-21-98.

C. *The Birth of Open Admissions at CUNY (1965-1970)*

The implementation of open admissions in 1970 was a defining moment for CUNY. CUNY's decision to establish an open admissions policy was dually motivated. One motive was economic: As the availability of federal and state aid dollars for underprepared students increased, there was a powerful incentive to expand the university. The second motive was political: In the late 1960s, New York City's education establishment was under tremendous pressure to increase minority representation. The open admissions policy that CUNY implemented in 1970 was expected to provide racial and ethnic integration of the university's campuses. That same year, New York City decentralized its public school system, supposedly

to give parents greater control over education policy.¹¹ Thus, two major educational experiments were begun quickly and in response to community demands.

1. Influence of Federal and State Aid Policies

Changes to federal education laws during the 1960s influenced the access trend at colleges and universities across the nation, and at CUNY in particular. The civil rights movement was a grim reminder to the nation that millions of Americans were living in poverty caused by discrimination and inequality of opportunity. The Johnson administration's response was to wage a "war on poverty" in an attempt to create a "great society."

Thus, in 1965, Congress began to legislate equality of opportunity by tying federal education funds to the twin goals of remediation and access. First, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided federal aid for compensatory education for educationally disadvantaged students from low income families. The Higher Education Act ("HEA") followed suit, tying institutions' eligibility for certain types of federal funding to a requirement that they identify and recruit students with "exceptional financial need."¹² More importantly, Title IV of the HEA tied student financial aid to economic need rather than academic ability. Through this legislation, the nation's educational institutions were enlisted in the war on poverty.

In 1970, the New York State legislature modified its community college funding formula to provide more generous subsidies for colleges that implemented "a program of full opportunity" – otherwise known as open admissions.¹³

2. Policy by Riot

Political pressures spurred CUNY to expand and increase access much more quickly than it otherwise might have in response to economic factors alone. CUNY's original plan was to phase in higher educational opportunity for all New York City high school graduates over a ten-year period, with full implementation by 1975. That plan outlined a four-tiered system:

- the top 25% of high school graduates would be admitted to the senior colleges;
- the next 40% would be admitted to the community colleges;
- the next 10% would be in special programs; and
- the bottom 25% would be admitted to educational skills centers featuring career programs and college transition programs.¹⁴

¹¹ See Ravitch, 312-378.

¹² See Lawrence E. Gladieux and Arthur M. Hauptman, *The College Aid Quandary* (Brookings/College Board 1995).

¹³ N.Y. EDUC. LAW §6304 (1970 amendment) (McKinney 1985).

In 1969, however, the four-tier plan was abruptly scrapped. The first clear sign of trouble appeared in February of that year, when a group of black and Puerto Rican students demanded (among other things) that the racial composition of City College entering freshmen reflect the proportion of black and Puerto Rican students in the city's public high schools.¹⁵ In late April, students shut down City College's South Campus (campus shutdowns were practically a rite of spring in the late 1960's),¹⁶ and the proletarian Harvard was briefly renamed "Malcolm X-Che Guevara University." In swift succession, the protesters charged that City College discriminated against minorities and the poor; other CUNY campuses were shut down in solidarity; administrators expressed concern; the more "hip" faculty supported student demands; buildings were set on fire; and the police were called in to quash riots.

Because of the threat of escalating violence, some Trustees and administrators felt they had no choice but to acquiesce to student demands for increased access. In the words of then-Deputy Chancellor Seymour H. Hyman:

I was telling people about what I felt when I saw that smoke coming out of that building [the Great Hall at City College], and the only question in my mind was, How can we save City College? And the only answer was, Hell, let everybody in.¹⁷

Thus, CUNY abandoned the original plan to phase in a four-tiered system, and, in May of 1969, the City College administration began negotiations over admissions policies with the college's Black and Puerto Rican Student Committee ("BPRS").¹⁸

The administration and the BPRS quickly reached agreement on a "dual admission" plan, which would have admitted 50% of the freshman class from designated poor neighborhoods and high schools in black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods, while the remaining 50% would have been selected according to the traditional admissions standards.¹⁹ This plan was rejected, however, due to strong opposition from a number of constituencies. The CUNY Faculty Senate, the CCNY Alumni Association, and the major mayoral candidates criticized it as a quota system; others saw it as relegating minority students to second-class status. But the most powerful force against the plan and in favor of totally open admissions was the Central Labor Council of the

¹⁴ Board of Higher Education (now "Board of Trustees"), *1966 Master Plan*, 54-67.

¹⁵ Traub, 48; see also Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, 7-9-69.

¹⁶ Shutdowns were a proven method of policymaking. In 1968, for example, the United Federation of Teachers closed down New York City's public schools for 36 of the first 48 days of the fall term. The issue was whether, in a decentralized system, local school boards would have the authority to transfer union teachers out of their districts. In the end, the union prevailed. (Ravitch, 368-73.)

¹⁷ Neumann, 13 (citing Martin Mayer, "Higher Education for All?" *Commentary*, Feb. 1973, 40); see also *NYT*, 7-11-69 ("The board's policy action was clearly a response to last spring's student protests at City College . . . and the demonstrations that plagued other colleges in the university system. . . . Whether the open-admissions policy would . . . bring peace to the college campus . . . remains to be seen.").

¹⁸ Students' demands were largely met. (Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, 7-9-69.)

¹⁹ Neumann, 11-14. See also *The New York Times* ("NYT"), 5-23-69; 5-24-69.

city's trade unions, who recognized that the "dual admissions" plan would not increase access for members of white ethnic groups.²⁰

Thus, the CUNY administration realized that a successful plan would have to provide ethnic as well as racial integration.²¹ Unable to devise a scheme that would maintain academic excellence while satisfying the demands of their various constituencies, the Trustees finally decided to throw the university wide open. The plan they adopted, on November 12, 1969, provided that high school graduates who had achieved a minimum high school average of 80 in academic courses or were ranked in the top half of their graduating class were eligible to attend a senior college; all other high school graduates were admitted to the community colleges.

This plan represented a major departure from the pre-existing admissions standards. The most obvious change was the total elimination of admissions standards at the associate degree level. Previously, a high school average of 75 or better was required for admission to a liberal arts "transfer degree" program at the community colleges, and an average of 70 or better was required for two-year career programs; students with high school averages below 70 were not eligible for admission. The new plan would admit any student with a high school diploma, regardless of grades.

The changes in bachelor's admissions, while more subtle, were more dramatic in effect. Table 2 shows that, for most of the 20th century, CUNY's bachelor's programs had required a Regents diploma, 11.5 academic units in required subjects, and a high school average of 80 or better; in the years immediately preceding open admissions, a high school average in the mid-80s or 90s had been required. The new plan, by contrast, would give equal consideration to students with Regents and non-Regents diplomas, would require only 9.5 academic units, and would admit students in the top half of their graduating class even if they did not have an 80 average. These changes would have two major consequences.

First, by offering admission based on class rank – which measures students against their peers rather than against students at other high schools – the new plan would afford equal opportunity to students from poor or predominantly minority high schools.²² At the same time, however, by giving equal weight to Regents diplomas – which required students to have passed subject exams and to have followed a college preparatory curriculum – and vocational, commercial, and general diplomas – which required fewer academic units and no competency exams – CUNY's plan undermined the high schools' college preparatory programs and guaranteed that many of those admitted to the senior colleges would be, by definition, underprepared.²³

²⁰ Neumann, 16; Traub, 65.

²¹ Neumann, 13-18; see also Traub, 65-66.

²² Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, 11-12-69.

²³ Lavin, David and David Hyllegard, *Changing the Odds: Open Admissions and the Life Chances of the Disadvantaged* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 15 n.15; *New York Post*, 12-9-69.

Even before the specifics of the plan were agreed upon, CUNY had advanced the target date for implementing open admissions from 1975 – which would have allowed time to phase in the changes – to 1970 – which left no time for adjustment.²⁴ Just 17 months after the student protests at City College, CUNY implemented sweeping admissions changes that simultaneously transformed its academic mission and increased the size of its freshman class by between 45% and 75%.²⁵

D. CUNY's Solution to the Problem of Segregation (1969-1973)

Integration of the colleges was a key goal of the open admissions plan that the Trustees adopted. But the Trustees believed that the new senior college admissions standards alone would not provide adequate racial integration of the senior colleges.²⁶ Their solution to this problem was the repeated expansion of a State-sponsored program known as “Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge,” or “SEEK.”

Several years before open admissions, CUNY had begun admitting underprepared students to its undergraduate degree programs through SEEK and its community college counterpart, College Discovery (“CD”). These programs were established by the New York State legislature in 1966 and 1964, respectively. Participating colleges were supposed to recruit economically and educationally disadvantaged students, admit them to the student body, and provide them with counseling and compensatory education.²⁷

There are a few features of SEEK and CD that took on added importance when CUNY implemented open admissions. First, unlike the underprepared students in CUNY’s adult education and “limited matriculation” programs, SEEK and CD students were fully matriculated into the university’s bachelor’s and associate degree programs. Thus, with the establishment of SEEK and CD, the New York State legislature effectively overrode individual institutions’ academic missions and mandated the provision of remediation within the context of college degree programs. In addition, although the eligibility criteria for SEEK and CD were race-neutral, the CUNY administration relied on these programs to carry out their goal of integrating minority students into the university. Thus, the racial integration of the senior colleges became inextricably linked with the admission of severely underprepared students to those colleges.²⁸

In 1969, as the Trustees prepared to implement the open admissions plan, they projected that the new senior college admissions standards would not adequately provide for ethnic integration

²⁴ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 7-9-69.

²⁵ *N.Y.T.*, 9-18-70 (CUNY estimated that freshman class grew from 20,000 in 1969 to 35,000 in 1970, but said that open admissions accounted for only 9,000 of that increase).

²⁶ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-12-69; see also Lavin & Hyllegard, 29-36.

²⁷ *N.Y. EDUC. LAW* § 6452.

²⁸ See Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-12-69; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1-17-72; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 2-26-73; Traub, 69.

of the colleges. They feared that “the majority of Black and Puerto Rican students who ha[d] not been adequately educated in the secondary schools would be assigned” to the community colleges, creating “a second-track system.” Thus, stating that they “emphatically reject[ed] any approach which would lead to de facto segregated institutions, either community colleges, or senior colleges,” the Trustees resolved to expand the 1970 SEEK freshman class by 2,500 students – an 85% increase over the 1969 SEEK entering class.²⁹

CUNY quickly reached part of its goal: as soon as open admissions was established, the university-wide student body came to reflect the racial composition of the city’s public high schools. In 1969, the ethnic composition of CUNY undergraduates had been 14.8% black, 4% Puerto Rican, and 77.4% white; by 1970, 16.9% were black, 4.9% were Puerto Rican, and 74% were white.³⁰ The largest initial increase was in the percentage of non-Puerto-Rican Roman Catholics, while the proportion of Jewish students dropped dramatically.³¹ By 1974, 25.6% of CUNY students were black, 7.4% were Puerto Rican, 55.7% were white, and 11.3% were members of other racial or ethnic groups.³² The ethnic distribution of students among the individual colleges was a persistent issue, however.

Due to budgetary constraints, the size of the SEEK and CD programs failed to keep pace with the growth in freshman enrollment that occurred in the early years of open admissions. Thus, in 1972, the Trustees further increased the number of SEEK and CD students. This time, however, the Trustees invoked academic integration, rather than ethnic integration, as the justification for increasing the size of SEEK and CD. They explained that SEEK and CD would help to provide “an academic distribution of students among the colleges sufficient to fully utilize the academic resources of the entire University.”³³

The Trustees’ decision met with criticism. In a scathing dissent, one Trustee revealed his belief that the true motive for expanding SEEK and CD was the integration of minorities; his conviction that there must be alternative ways of achieving that end; and his dissatisfaction with the Trustees’ decisionmaking process.³⁴ Some commentators believed that increasing the

²⁹ (Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-12-69.) At the time open admissions was implemented, 90% of CUNY’s SEEK and CD students were members of racial or ethnic minorities. (Lavin & Hyllegard, 32 n.4.) For 1997 figures, see Section IV.C, “Admission to Special Programs.”

³⁰ *NYT*, 3-31-71, 21.

³¹ *NYT*, 7-15-73, 43; see also Traub, 70.

³² *NYT*, 12-19-75, 1.

³³ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1-17-72 (stating that additional students would be admitted according to SEEK and CD criteria, but not making clear whether the additional students would be participants in the SEEK and CD programs); UAPC interview, 2-4-99 (explaining that the additional students were not merely look-alikes but actual SEEK and CD participants).

³⁴ I regret that I must vote “No” on this resolution. I wholeheartedly support the end which the resolution is intended to achieve – a true integration of minority students into all of our senior colleges. In the past I have opposed actions taken by our Board [of Trustees] for the very reason that I believed they would lead to segregated conditions at some of our colleges. Nevertheless, I cannot support this resolution for the following reasons:

The basic document “explaining” this resolution . . . is so unclear that I read it several times and still did not know what it was trying to say. Other Board members have told me that they had the same

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number of senior college slots reserved for underprepared students would prevent CUNY from offering the most qualified applicants admission to the college of their choice, and that if CUNY would not offer the city's best-prepared students the college of their choice, the State University of New York ("SUNY") certainly would.³⁵

In 1973, the Trustees again modified the SEEK and CD programs. A study they had commissioned had revealed that, while the 1972 increase in SEEK and CD had been to some extent effective in improving the "academic, ethnic and economic distribution of students," the most severely underprepared students (*i.e.*, those with high school averages below 70) were still concentrated in the community colleges and three of the nine senior colleges.³⁶ The Trustees believed that until there was a "critical mass" of such students on each senior college campus, it would be programmatically difficult to meet their needs. The Trustees therefore resolved to make a "special allocation" of severely underprepared students to the senior colleges in the Fall 1973 semester, which they projected would "more than double" the number of such students in the senior college freshman class.³⁷ The Trustees' goal was to create "a sizeable identifiable group" of the most severely underprepared students on each senior college campus, making possible the creation of "special programs" to address their needs.³⁸

CUNY's strategy for creating racial balance among its campuses had unfortunate side effects. First, it depended on the creation of identifiable sub-populations of severely underprepared students on the senior college campuses, thereby standing the concept of integration on its head and reinforcing the stereotype of the underqualified minority student. Second, it relied on a dangerous double standard in admissions. Whereas the regular senior college admissions standards were designed to provide students with an incentive to achieve a B average or a ranking in the top half of their high school class,³⁹ the SEEK program gave preference to students with D averages, perversely granting benefits to those economically disadvantaged students who did worst in high school.

experience. There is no reason why a report submitted to us by University staff as the basis for action by us cannot be written in language which we can understand. The lack of clarity in the report combined with the vagueness of the resolution itself can result in the implementation of the resolution in ways not intended by the members of the Board who have voted for it.

Granted that the goal sought here is most desirable and essential, it is inconceivable to me that there are not several different ways in which the desired end can be achieved. It may be that the other ways would have more drawbacks and inherent difficulties than this resolution, but we should have had them presented to us with the pros and cons of each. Instead, we have been presented with a single proposal on a take it or leave it basis. . . .

(Board of Trustees, Minutes, 1-17-72 (statement of Mr. Ashe).)

³⁵ In the 1960s, SUNY was reorganized to accommodate more liberal arts and graduate students.

³⁶ Approximately 21% of regularly admitted Fall 1972 freshmen had high school averages below 70, but 83% of those were in the community colleges, while only 17% were in the senior colleges – and 75% of those were concentrated in just three of the nine senior colleges. (Board of Trustees, Minutes, 2-26-73.)

³⁷ The number of students to be admitted under this special allocation was to be limited to 5% of the Fall 1973 freshman class. (Board of Trustees, Minutes, 2-26-73.)

³⁸ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 2-26-73.

³⁹ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-12-69.

E. The Early Years of Open Admissions: CUNY and the BOE (1970-1974)

One feature of CUNY that makes it unique among the nation's large open admissions public university systems is that more than half of its students come from a single school system: the New York City public schools. The relationship between the BOE and CUNY has a long and complex history, the most salient aspects of which – for the Task Force's purposes – are (1) the preparedness of CUNY's incoming students as a barometer of the quality of the city's K-12 system; (2) the influence of changes in CUNY's admissions standards on the academic achievement of the city's public school students; (3) open admissions' role as a safety valve for the BOE's underprepared graduates; (4) CUNY's dependence on BOE graduates to maintain enrollment and revenues; and (5) the relationship between the quality of CUNY's teacher education programs and the quality of the city's K-12 teaching force. Some of these issues are discussed in greater detail in a separate report to the Task Force entitled *Bridging the Gap Between School and College*. This section spotlights CUNY's reaction to the underpreparedness of its freshmen in the early years of open admissions, and its efforts to work with the BOE to improve matters.

With the enactment of a policy that granted admission to every student with a high school diploma, CUNY had effectively delegated its admission standards to the New York City Board of Education. Yet CUNY apparently did not realize what level of preparation a non-Regents diploma represented until they administered assessment tests to the Fall 1970 freshmen; CUNY administrators were reportedly "shocked" to discover that 25% of students tested were reading at or below a 9th grade level, and an additional 40% scored between the 9th and 11th grade levels. CUNY viewed these results as a major indictment of the city's high schools.⁴⁰

A study conducted by Lehman College sociology professor David E. Lavin in the fall of 1971 confirmed that significant numbers of students were entering the university with reading and math skills below the 8th grade level. The study found that 72% of the black students tested for the study scored below the 8th grade level in either reading or math, as did 65% of the Hispanic students and 20% of the white students.⁴¹

Further evidence of the ill-preparedness of these new students was the scale of accommodations needed to retain them. One of the key elements of the open admissions plan enacted by the Trustees had been the promise to provide "remedial and other supportive services for all students requiring them."⁴² As it turned out, the new students required

⁴⁰ (NYT, 9-14-70, 1.) The landscape has not improved much in the intervening decade. In Section IV.A.2, we show that just over half of CUNY's 1997 first-time freshmen failed CUNY's Reading Assessment Test, which is supposedly pitched at an 11th grade level.

⁴¹ NYT, 12-19-75, 1.

⁴² Without such programs, the Trustees believed, open admissions would "provide the illusion of an open door to higher education which in reality is only a revolving door, admitting everyone but leading to a high proportion of student failure after one semester." (Board of Trustees, Minutes, 7-9-69.) For information on how

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considerable remediation, counseling, and other support services. Each college was allowed to develop its own approach to addressing these needs. Some colleges required students to attend specific classes, while others adopted a “cafeteria” approach, allowing students to choose whatever programs they felt would benefit them.⁴³

The Trustees agreed that students admitted under the new open admissions policies would be allowed an academic grace period: no limit was placed on the length of time a student could take remedial courses, and failing course grades would not count in students’ GPAs.⁴⁴ Moreover, in February of 1973, a Task Force commissioned by the Trustees proposed that the senior colleges develop associate degree programs to “accommodate the abilities and . . . aspirations of lower ability students allocated to the senior colleges,” thereby “provid[ing] students with a valid and honorable means of exiting and then reentering college.”⁴⁵

When they realized the depth and extent of these students’ needs, the Trustees’ first instinct was to call on the New York City public school system to turn out better-prepared students instead of sending CUNY young people in need of massive remediation. According to press reports, a draft of CUNY’s 1972 Master Plan recommended returning the responsibility of remedial work to the public school system.⁴⁶ In the fall of 1974, at the urging of the CUNY Trustees, the BOE administered the first-ever diagnostic reading tests given to 9th and 11th grade students.⁴⁷

Eventually, however, the Trustees began to seek ways to share with the BOE the responsibility for remediating underprepared students, while simultaneously improving the articulation between BOE and CUNY programs.⁴⁸ In the mid-1970s, the two systems began to explore a variety of collaborations:⁴⁹

- early admissions for high school juniors, so that remedial needs of admitted students could be addressed while they were still in high school;
- pairing CUNY colleges with one or more high schools to work on college preparation (*i.e.*, remediation) for underprepared juniors and seniors;
- tutorial programs in which education majors would tutor public school students;
- faculty exchanges between high schools and colleges;
- on-campus summer programs for high school students, offering either remedial help or advanced placement courses;

remediation at CUNY has become a “revolving door” for too many students, see Section V.A.2 of this report, entitled “Financial Aid,” as well as the accompanying report, *Beyond Graduation Rates*.

⁴³ (Rossman *et al.*, 14 n.12.) The educational issues raised by offering high-school-level – and in some instances elementary-school-level – reading and mathematics courses in a college context remain unresolved to this day. (See Part V, “CUNY’s Current Approach to Remedial Education.”)

⁴⁴ *NYT*, 10-21-69, 96.

⁴⁵ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 2-26-73.

⁴⁶ *NYT*, 7-14-72, 34.

⁴⁷ *NYT*, 6-26-74, 28; *NYT*, 10-24-74, 45.

⁴⁸ Board of Trustees, Minutes 2-26-73.

⁴⁹ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 2-26-73; *NYT*, 2-24-74, 30.

- laboratory schools for teacher training, to which colleges would assign faculty for limited periods;
- early college entrance for qualified high school seniors;
- coordination between high schools and community colleges offering similar programs; and
- “adoption” of some high schools by CUNY colleges, to share resources and staff.

Some of these ideas were never implemented, and financial considerations and logistical issues limited the scope and duration of many of the others. In the 1990s, CUNY and the BOE renewed their commitment to improving college preparation, with the establishment of the so-called “seamless transition.”⁵⁰

F. CUNY Faces a Turning Point (1975-1976)

In the fall of 1975, New York City was in a fiscal crisis and CUNY was facing dramatic budget cuts. The Trustees were reluctant to replace lost City funds by imposing tuition, so they began to consider creative alternatives. As it turned out, however, the Trustees never had much choice in the matter: political forces conspired to ensure that they would impose tuition within the year.

When the fiscal crisis hit, the Trustees proposed cutting costs by closing, merging, or downgrading several of the colleges.⁵¹ This proposal was not well received: Puerto Ricans protested the merging of Hostos and Bronx Community Colleges; blacks objected to turning Medgar Evers into a community college;⁵² police officers objected to merging John Jay with another college; and residents of Staten Island objected to the proposed closing of its senior college. Accordingly, the Trustees abandoned this tack.

Alternatively, the Trustees considered a series of proposals designed to cut spending by tightening admissions standards.⁵³ According to one estimate, CUNY was spending at least \$30 million a year on remedial education and other costs associated with handling large numbers of underprepared students.⁵⁴ One of the proposals the Trustees considered would have capped enrollment by setting academic guidelines for reasonable progress toward a degree, setting standards for admission into the upper division of the senior colleges, and tightening admission standards for both the senior and community colleges. A second proposal would have required applicants with high school averages below 75 or ranked in the bottom third of their class to

⁵⁰ See Section III.I.1, “College Preparation and the Seamless Transition,” and Section IV.B, “Regular Admissions.”

⁵¹ *NYT*, 2-27-76, 31; *NYT*, 3-14-76, 6; *NYT*, 4-3-76, 41.

⁵² On April 5, 1976, the Trustees voted to terminate Medgar Evers’ authority to offer bachelor’s degree programs (except in Nursing) and to change the college’s name to Medgar Evers Community College. (Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, 4-5-76, 41.)

⁵³ (*NYT*, 11-26-75, 1; *NYT*, 12-17-75, 44; *New York Post*, 11-25-75, 1.) The specifics of the proposed changes are not mentioned in the minutes of the Trustees’ meeting because discussion occurred in executive session.

⁵⁴ *NYT*, 11-26-75, 1, at 38.

demonstrate 8th-grade reading and math competency in order to be admitted.⁵⁵ Those who failed would be offered the opportunity to enroll in either educational opportunity centers or BOE-operated remedial classes and would be given a second opportunity to pass the basic skills tests a year later.⁵⁶

On December 15, 1975, the Trustees voted 7-2 to set an 8th grade level of competency in reading and math for admission into the university, effective Fall 1976.⁵⁷ This decision immediately met with opposition. The two dissenting Trustees, joined by the presidents of Medgar Evers and Hostos, university student senate president Jay Hershenson,⁵⁸ and the president of BMCC's Black Faculty Coalition, filed a lawsuit to overturn the decision on procedural grounds.⁵⁹ Lehman sociology professor David Lavin, extrapolating from data he had gathered on the 1971 entering class, predicted that the 8th grade competency requirement would lead to a 40% drop in enrollment and that two-thirds of the excluded students would be members of minority groups – bringing the university's racial composition back to what it had been prior to open admissions.⁶⁰

On April 5, 1976, the Trustees replaced the 8th grade competency policy with the following compromise:

- applicants with high school averages below 80 had to have a class rank in top third (rather than the top half) or evidence of comparable achievement on the SAT to qualify for senior college admission;
- open admissions at the community colleges was replaced with a policy requiring applicants to have a high school average of 70, or a class rank in the 26th percentile, or an acceptable score on the GED;⁶¹ and

⁵⁵ (NYT, 11-26-75, 1.) At that time, New York City high school students were officially required to meet an 8th grade level in reading to qualify for a non-Regents diploma, but only those students receiving Regents diplomas were required to pass the Regents exams to demonstrate their academic competency. (Ibid.) There were no minimum competency exams for non-Regents high school graduates until 1976 (effective with the June 1979 graduating class), when the Regents enacted a regulation requiring all high school students to demonstrate 9th-grade competency in reading and math. The tests used for this purpose are known as the Regents Competency Tests ("RCTs"). (NYT, 3-27-76, 1.) See Cilo and Cooper, *Bridging the Gap Between School and College* (report to the Task Force) for an explanation of the new Regents policy phasing out the RCTs by 2001 and requiring all high school students in the state to pass Regents examinations in five subject areas in order to receive a diploma.

⁵⁶ (NYT, 11-26-75, 1, at 38.) CUNY officials estimated that 15% of BOE graduates who entered CUNY through open admissions did not meet the 8th grade competency standard. (Ibid., 1.)

⁵⁷ A top CUNY academic official explained, "Now we're saying 'you not only need the diploma but you have to meet the definition of the diploma – in order to go to college you have to actually have the reading and math skill the diploma says you have, otherwise the colleges can't cope with you.'" (NYT, 11-26-75, 1, at 38.)

⁵⁸ Mr. Hershenson is now CUNY's Vice Chancellor for University Relations.

⁵⁹ NYT, 1-9-76, 34.

⁶⁰ (NYT, 12-19-75, 1.) Lavin has released a similar report predicting the impact of the new admissions policy enacted by the Trustees in January 1999. (David E. Lavin & Elliot Weininger, [New Admissions Policy & Changing Access to CUNY's Senior and Community Colleges: What Are the Stakes?](#), May 1999.) For more about the new admissions policy, see Section III.I.2, below.

⁶¹ See footnote 239 for an explanation of the GED.

- applicants who did not meet either of these standards were to be offered “conditional admission to a transitional program to be operated under the supervision of the Board” of Trustees.⁶²

The lawsuit was dismissed, and plans for implementing the new admission standards went forward.⁶³

Despite the Trustees’ best efforts to avoid imposing tuition, however, New York City’s worsening financial crisis created increasing pressure to do so. In March of 1976, the City placed CUNY on a monthly budget. As City funds tightened, CUNY was placed at the mercy of upstate politicians, who believed it was unfair for CUNY to remain free while SUNY charged tuition.⁶⁴

The Trustees weighed the pros and cons. Whereas minority students would be hurt most if open admissions ended, the imposition of tuition would hurt middle-class students, because they would not qualify for financial aid.⁶⁵ But if CUNY imposed tuition and then reclassified the funds being spent on remediation as “student aid,” the university would become eligible for additional federal and state assistance.⁶⁶

By June, CUNY had overspent its budget and could not meet its payroll. The university closed and waited for emergency funds, which the New York State legislature refused to provide. Press reports blamed Mayor Beame for the deadlock, accusing him of “dithering” over the tuition issue. Only after Mayor Beame agreed to support tuition charges did the legislature finally provide the emergency funds, enabling CUNY to reopen.⁶⁷

Caught in the political crossfire, the Trustees had no choice but to impose tuition, effective Fall 1976.⁶⁸ State aid would subsidize poor students,⁶⁹ but families with annual incomes of \$20,000 or more would have to pay full tuition.

⁶² Of course, these new criteria would not apply to CD and SEEK applicants. (Board of Trustees, Minutes, 4-5-76.)

⁶³ *NYT*, 4-2-76, 35.

⁶⁴ Those who opposed the imposition of tuition, on the other hand, believed that New York City was not receiving its fair share of State education dollars: CUNY received one-third the amount of State aid that SUNY did. (Michael Harrington, “Keep Open Admission Open,” *NYT Magazine*, 11-2-75, 100.)

⁶⁵ *NYT*, 4-18-76, 6

⁶⁶ *NYT*, 2-9-76, 55.

⁶⁷ *The Economist*, 6-12-76, 12; *Newsweek*, 6-14-76, 53; *The Wall Street Journal*, 6-3-76, 16; *NYT*, 5-28-76, 1.

⁶⁸ This was not the first time the State had attacked CUNY’s free tuition. In 1960, for example, a committee appointed by Governor Rockefeller issued a report urging the imposition of uniform tuition throughout the State in order to level the playing field for SUNY, which had been charging tuition for a decade. City College’s Alumni Association beat back the campaign, arguing that charging tuition would undermine CUNY’s commitment to educating the students who met its highly selective admissions standards, regardless of their ability to pay. By contrast, they argued, SUNY “does not pretend to be selective in its admissions nor are its academic standards comparable” to CUNY’s. To impose uniform tuition, they concluded, would lead to further attempts to impose

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G. The Institutionalization of Remediation (1976-1990)

Beginning in the mid- to late 1970s, two trends fueled the institutionalization of large-scale postsecondary remediation at CUNY. The city's public schools had deteriorated to such an extent that even graduates with B averages were arriving at CUNY with significant remedial needs. Yet when the imposition of tuition caused CUNY's enrollment to slide, CUNY's answer was to lower admissions standards and step up recruitment in the ailing public school system. At around the same time, the Trustees realized that CUNY's existing policies on testing, transfer, and grading were not sufficient to cope with the challenges of open admissions, and that new policies were needed. CUNY has been struggling with the same issues ever since.

1. The Development of CUNY's Original Transfer Policies (1967-1973)

Prior to 1961, the colleges that were to become CUNY were still independent municipal institutions. After the incorporation of CUNY in 1961, one of the most important issues that the new university sought to address was the development of a university-wide policy on the transfer of credits between the community and senior colleges (this is sometimes called an "articulation" policy). The Trustees recognized that, in order to create a true system, they had to ensure that students could move freely among the university's various programs and colleges.⁷⁰

Thus, in May of 1967, the Trustees called for the automatic admission of community college transfer students into the senior colleges. In 1969, a committee reported that the students who had been admitted to bachelor's programs under this policy were relatively successful, but that the senior colleges had inconsistent policies with respect to the transfer of credits towards the bachelor's degree. Based on the committee's findings, the Trustees resolved that, as of September 1969, Associate in Arts degree recipients were to be granted a minimum of 64 credits upon transfer to a bachelor's program.⁷¹

"uniformity at the 'lowest common denominator' which in the long run would depress academic standards at the city colleges." (Neumann, 340-41.)

⁶⁹ Students with incomes under \$10,000 – half of the total student body – would end up paying less than before, because state and federal financial aid would cover fees, books, and even some living expenses.

⁷⁰ Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, 7-9-69. See also N.Y. EDUC. Law §6201 (1970 amendment) (McKinney 1985).

⁷¹ (Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, 4-28-69, 60-61.) In 1969, 64 credits were required to earn an associate degree at CUNY, and 128 credits were typically needed to complete a bachelor's degree. Effective September 1, 1996, the requirements were lowered to 60 and 120 credits, respectively, to bring CUNY's standards in line with national practice and to reduce tuition. (Board of Trustees, *Minutes*, 6-26-95, 100; Board of Trustees Committee on Long Range Planning, 6-26-95, *University Budget Planning & Policy Options*, 6.)

The Trustees expanded this rule to include Associate in Science (“A.S.”) students in November of 1972,⁷² and to include full transfer of credits for Associate in Applied Science (“A.A.S.”) graduates to the corresponding senior college professional programs in May of 1973.⁷³ The Trustees clarified that senior colleges could require additional coursework to fulfill prerequisites and major requirements.

2. Declining Public Schools, Declining CUNY Enrollment (1970s)

During the 1970s, the declining quality of the New York City public schools and the lowering of admissions standards at CUNY became locked together in a downward spiral.

Public school achievement decreased during the 1970s, both in terms of the rigor of courses taken, and in terms of the level of skill attained. In 1974, unofficial estimates put 40% of the city’s 300,000 high school students two or more years behind grade level, with the average 9th grader 15 months behind the national standard.⁷⁴ According to a study conducted by *The New York Times*, the percentage of students entering their senior year of high school who had completed both algebra and geometry dropped from 40% to 33% between 1972 and 1978, and the proportion of students with two years of academic science courses dropped from 63% to 51% during the same period. School officials attributed the decline in rigorous courses to the initiation of open admissions at CUNY.⁷⁵

Paradoxically, however, the grade averages of public high school graduates did not reflect the decline in academic achievement. As the size of the high school graduating class declined in the early 1970s, the percentage of students who earned averages of 80 or better increased.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, a growing number of city high school graduates were entering CUNY with reading or math skills below the 8th grade level. For example, Bronx Community College reported that between 1971 and 1975, the percentage of students requiring remedial English had grown from 60% to 78%, and the percentage of students requiring remedial math had grown from 56% to 68%.⁷⁷ By the late 1970s, as a result of this combination of declining achievement and grade

⁷² Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-72.

⁷³ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 5-7-73, 61-62.

⁷⁴ *NYT*, 10-24-74, 45.

⁷⁵ (*NYT*, 6-12-83, 1.) Similarly, in the early 1970s, college textbook publishers were coming under pressure to simplify language to accommodate students with lower reading levels, and some cited CUNY’s open admissions policy as the reason. “[T]he community colleges do report a decrease in reading-level ability, particularly open admissions colleges,” said one chief editor. “We have had reports of some of these students reading at a sixth-grade level.” According to one Queensborough professor:

It is not uncommon for a significant percentage of entering City University students to be reading on a junior high school level, while traditionally, most college textbooks are prepared on a readability level of upper-senior high school to college level. The abstractions, the difficulties of reading specific words and understanding the meanings of words bore many of our students

(*NYT*, 11-7-74, 47.)

⁷⁶ *NYT*, 5-29-75, 37.

⁷⁷ *NYT*, 12-19-75, 1.

inflation in the public high schools, a significant number of students with averages of 80 or higher were arriving at CUNY with extensive remedial needs.⁷⁸

In Fall 1976, after the imposition of tuition, CUNY suffered dramatic drops in enrollment – particularly among high achieving students. University-wide enrollment plummeted from 270,000 in June of 1976 to approximately 220,000 in May of 1977 – a 17% drop in a single year.⁷⁹ Enrollment at Brooklyn College alone was cut in half, from 35,400 in 1974 to 17,567 immediately after the imposition of tuition.⁸⁰ A 1979 internal study revealed that the percentage of students from 19 high-performing high schools who applied to CUNY dropped sharply from 77% in 1976, to 66% in 1977, to 62% in 1978; the study also indicated a significant decline in applications from students with averages of 85 or higher.⁸¹

To explain these declines, some charged that open admissions had devalued a CUNY education to the point that qualified students no longer wanted to apply. Others believed that the imposition of tuition in Fall 1976 had driven away both those low-achieving students who lacked the motivation to apply for financial aid, and those better-prepared students who had other options.⁸² Whatever the correct explanation, CUNY’s enrollment continued to decline over the next decade. Meanwhile, because fewer students meant fewer dollars, CUNY scrambled to recruit students;⁸³ rather than devise ways to win back the best students, however, CUNY went after ever less-qualified BOE applicants.

Thus, in 1977, CUNY rolled back its admissions standards (which it had only recently raised). At the senior college level, Brooklyn, Queens, Hunter and City colleges lowered their minimum high school average from 87 to 80.⁸⁴ Moreover, the Trustees’ 1976 decision to impose admission standards at the community colleges was never implemented. The 1976 policy stated that applicants who did not meet community college admission requirements would be “offered conditional admission to a transitional program” supervised by the Trustees, which would provide math and English instruction. The administration told staff to “ignore” the policy, however, and in May of 1977 the Trustees amended the policy to define a “transitional program” as “skills development courses within a degree program,” and to explain that students in these transitional programs were to be “matriculated in a program of study leading to a college degree.”⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-25-79, 75.

⁷⁹ *NYT* 9-9-76, 34.

⁸⁰ *NYT* 11-9-80, 57.

⁸¹ *NYT*, 11-16-80, 25 (citing Admissions and Enrollment at the City University of New York).

⁸² *NYT*, 3-2-77, 1, at D16; *NYT*, 11-16-80, 25.

⁸³ *NYT*, 3-2-77, 1, at D16.

⁸⁴ *NYT* 3-2-77, *Ibid*.

⁸⁵ (UAPC, interview, 2-4-99; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 5-18-77, 48.) The Task Force staff believe, but could not confirm, that this series of events was related to the availability of financial aid. Prior to the imposition of tuition, neither “transitional program” students nor matriculated degree students would have been eligible for financial aid. After the imposition of tuition in the fall of 1976, however, only full-time matriculated degree students would have been eligible for financial aid, and non-matriculated “transitional” students would

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In addition to these measures, CUNY dispatched recruiters and counselors – armed with shortened, simplified registration forms and empowered to grant “instant admissions” – into the city’s high schools during the spring of 1977. CUNY also extended its application deadline – twice; first they extended it from February 1 to March 1, and then they extended it again so that students could be admitted through the first week in September.⁸⁶

CUNY continued to recruit aggressively from the public schools in the decades that followed. In 1984, Kingsborough Community College established College Now, a collaborative program designed to help Kingsborough “sell” itself to BOE high school students by giving those students a head start on accumulating CUNY credits. College Now students take assessment tests during their junior year in high school, receive college counseling, and take remedial and college-level courses with CUNY-trained instructors. During 1997-98 school year, 25 high schools in four boroughs participated, for a total of 7,000 students – making College Now CUNY’s largest collaborative program with the BOE.⁸⁷

Today, CUNY spends more than \$5 million each year for collaborative programs. Although College Now is the largest program, the bulk of the money goes to six CUNY campuses that operate middle schools to test new methods of encouraging disadvantaged students to attend college.⁸⁸ CUNY has recently sought to expand College Now to five more colleges and at least fifteen more high schools. In its 1998-99 Operating Budget Request, CUNY described its plan to fund the program at five additional campuses, each of which would enroll at least 600 students and at least three high schools.

3. New Academic Policies (1976-1990)

During this period – in response to studies, financial aid regulations, and persistent complaints from various quarters – the Trustees and the administration struggled to establish system-wide standards for grading, academic progress, transfer, testing, SEEK, and other areas affected by the influx of vast numbers of remedial students. It was, to some extent, a process of trial and error; there simply had not been time to think these issues through before open admissions was enacted.

The first issue to arise was that of grading. A study released in the mid-1970s revealed that the transcripts of CUNY students did not accurately reflect performance, and that grading practices varied so widely across the university that a student who would not graduate at one CUNY

not have been eligible. (See Section V.A.2, “Financial Aid,” for an explanation of the relevant regulations.) Thus, in order to attract “transitional” students, CUNY had to redefine them as degree students.

⁸⁶ *NYT* 3-2-77, A1.

⁸⁷ City University of New York 1998-99 Operating Budget Request, 19-21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

college might graduate with honors at another.⁸⁹ On April 5, 1976, the Trustees acknowledged that, since the start of open admissions, CUNY had “liberalized the grading process” – supposedly in order to “maximize opportunities for students.” Moreover, the grading system had been “abused” to such an extent that transcripts did not accurately reflect student performance and students had “very little incentive” to work hard.⁹⁰

In an effort to reverse this liberalizing trend, the Trustees established university-wide academic progress standards, retention standards, and rules for allowing students to withdraw from a course. The Trustees also resolved that no-credit grades, failing grades, and withdrawal grades were to be incorporated into a student’s cumulative average for the purposes of determining academic standing and degree progress.⁹¹

Also on April 5, 1976 – in what would later prove to be the most important resolution of the day – the Trustees established a certification requirement for students moving to the upper division of a four-year college, either from the lower division of the same college, or from a CUNY or non-CUNY community college. The resolution required students to provide evidence, in accordance with a standard to be determined by the Chancellor, that they had “attained a level of proficiency in basic learning skills necessary to cope successfully with advanced work in the academic disciplines.”⁹²

In the spring of 1977, in response to the certification resolution, a faculty committee recommended testing all incoming freshmen in reading, writing and mathematics to identify basic skills deficiencies, and placing students into remedial courses to bring their skills up to university standards of competency before they entered the upper division. The administration concurred in these recommendations and created the faculty task forces that were to develop the reading, writing and mathematics assessment tests now known as the FSATs.⁹³ CUNY began testing incoming freshmen in 1978. The certification requirement was not implemented until 1980, when those students who had been tested as freshmen were due to enter the upper division.⁹⁴

In 1978, after a comprehensive, four-year-long review, CUNY officially transformed SEEK from a “marginal” or “experimental” program into a “major,” “permanent” fixture on every senior college campus. The Trustees affirmed that SEEK was “an intrinsic part of the mission of the senior colleges”; they issued comprehensive guidelines for the program; and they resolved

⁸⁹ The study was based on grades awarded in 1967 and 1972. (*NYT*, 9-2-74, 1.) Senior college representatives stated told Task Force staff that, to this day, a lack of confidence in grades inhibits system-wide implementation of CUNY’s transfer policies. (Lehman, interview, 7-23-98.) For the results of a RAND study of 1997-98 freshman grades carried out for the Task Force, see Stephen P. Klein and Maria Orlando, CUNY’s Testing Program: Characteristics, Results, and Implications for Policy and Research (RAND Report to Mayor Giuliani’s Advisory Task Force on the City University of New York, 1999).

⁹⁰ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 4-5-76, 41-42.

⁹¹ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 4-5-76, 41-42.

⁹² Board of Trustees, Minutes, 4-5-76, 42.

⁹³ Crain v. Reynolds, Defendants’ Trial Exhibit E, 1328-29.

⁹⁴ Hassett, interview, 2-11-99.

that each senior college campus should have a SEEK department with permanent status. SEEK was to become a showcase program, a “bold thrust forward in the field of compensatory and catch-up education.” A new Vice Chancellorship was created to oversee it.⁹⁵

In 1981, New York State’s financial aid policies led to various developments at CUNY. On March 23, 1981, the Trustees made certain revisions to their retention and academic progress policies to facilitate compliance with the State’s financial aid regulations. In addition, in an apparent effort to standardize the interpretation of grades and the calculation of GPAs across campuses, the Trustees directed the administration to promulgate a glossary defining the grading symbols used by the university’s different campuses.⁹⁶ Almost four years later, in January of 1985, CUNY published “Uniform Grading Symbols: Glossary and Guidelines”; the document defines 33 approved grading symbols and 9 symbols no longer approved for use.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, the New York State legislature established the Supplemental Tuition Assistance Program (“STAP”) in 1981. This program (which has since been almost totally abolished) attached new funds to remedial students: eligibility was limited to those students whose remedial needs precluded them from fulfilling TAP’s program pursuit and academic progress requirements.⁹⁸

On June 24, 1985, in recognition that there still existed barriers to intra-university transfer, the Trustees called for full implementation of their 1973 transfer policy. They further resolved that, effective in the fall of 1986, all liberal arts and science courses taken in one CUNY college were to be transferable to all other CUNY colleges, departments, and programs, with full credit toward the degree, and that, based on a fair evaluation of the transcript, at least nine credits were to be granted in a student’s major. Credit was also to be granted for basic skills courses such as writing, but the senior college would determine the proper level of placement in its own course sequence. On the other hand, senior colleges would not be required to award transfer credit for vocational courses.⁹⁹

Also on June 24, 1985, the Trustees extended the certification testing requirement to transfer students, as follows: all CUNY community college students would be required to pass all three FSATs prior to transfer, while students transferring into a CUNY senior college from outside the university would merely be required to take the FSATs and be placed at the appropriate level.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 3-27-78, 16-36.

⁹⁶ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 3-23-81, 23-25.

⁹⁷ During the 1970s, grading practices varied widely by campus. Some colleges awarded traditional A through F grades; others gave such grades as “J” (failure for non-academic reasons), “X” (non-punitive failure); and “NF” (failure in a non-academic course). (Rossmann, 11-14; Uniform Grading Symbols.)

⁹⁸ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 11-23-81, 116. See Table 2 for more on the legislature’s 1995 changes to STAP. See Section V.A.2, “Financial Aid,” for a summary of TAP’s program pursuit and academic progress requirements.

⁹⁹ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-24-85, 100-102.

¹⁰⁰ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-24-85, 101.

On April 23, 1990, the Trustees enacted a university-wide grade replacement policy that automatically erases D and F grades from students' GPAs if they repeat the course and earn a C or better the second time around. Under the CUNY-wide policy, students may repeat and replace up to 16 credits.¹⁰¹

H. The Gap Between Policy and Implementation (1993-1999)

In the 1990s, the administration acknowledged that the transfer and testing policies originally enacted in the late 1960s and 1970s and modified in 1985 were never fully implemented. This Section catalogs the many implementation problems that have been encountered, the official explanations for those problems, and the current status of each.

⇒ **Problem:** The 1985 transfer and testing policies were not being followed, even though they unambiguously addressed most of the relevant concerns. For example, despite the explicit provision that community college transfer students pass the FSATs before transferring into a senior college, several senior colleges conditionally accepted students who had not passed all three FSATs and allowed them a grace period in which to do so.¹⁰²

Explanations: The chief reason was the lack of administrative monitoring and enforcement. The 1985 resolution requiring the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs to monitor the implementation of transfer policies with "periodic and systematic audits" had never been implemented.¹⁰³

Current status: The Office of Academic Affairs commenced its first transfer audit in 1994 and issued the audit report in 1997.¹⁰⁴ In February 1998, the central administration drafted a memo warning the college provosts that, "beginning with the first transfer admissions allocation for Fall 1998," CUNY associate degree students who had not passed the FSATs would be ineligible to transfer into a CUNY bachelor's program.¹⁰⁵ Now that this policy is being enforced, intra-CUNY transfers have been denied for approximately 1,278 students in Fall 1998 and approximately 725 students in Spring 1999.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, CUNY's central offices still do not keep track of when or whether students achieve certification; they only keep track of students' performance the first time they sit for the FSATs.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Queensborough *Catalog*, 187-88. See Section V.A.2, "Financial Aid," for a discussion of how this policy can temporarily help students meet financial aid requirements.

¹⁰² The Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Articulation & Transfer 6-30-93, Report to the Chancellor, 5-9.

¹⁰³ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-24-85, 102.

¹⁰⁴ CUNY Office of Academic Affairs, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, Spring 1997, An Audit of the 1985 Board of Trustees' Policy on the Transfer of Liberal Arts and Science Courses ("Transfer Audit"), 2.

¹⁰⁵ Angelo B. Proto, 2-13-98, "Missing Freshman Skills Assessment Test Data," Draft Memorandum to College Provosts.

¹⁰⁶ Mirror "Responses" memo, 2-23-99.

¹⁰⁷ UAPC, interview, 7-15-98; Institutional Research, interview, 6/25/98; Lehman, interview, 7-23-98, interview, 7-24-98.

Interviewees at community colleges complained of a continuing need for enforcement of transfer policies.¹⁰⁸

⇒ **Problem:** Many college practices, while in technical compliance with the Trustees' resolutions, were inconsistent with their spirit.

Explanation: CUNY's 17 colleges view themselves as self-contained institutions with different missions and different "curricular evolutions," and authority over curricular issues rests with the faculty at the individual colleges.¹⁰⁹

Current status: Individual colleges must devote substantial time and resources to developing college-by-college, program-by-program articulation agreements.¹¹⁰

⇒ **Problem:** Senior and community colleges differed in their interpretation of the transfer policies. For example, with respect to intra-CUNY transfers, there was disagreement over which college should shoulder the burden of administering the certification tests – the lower-division college from which the student was transferring, or the senior college into which the student was seeking to transfer.¹¹¹

Explanation: Particular provisions of the 1985 policies were "difficult or impossible to implement" without administrative guidelines.¹¹² With regard to which college should administer the FSATs to students wishing to transfer, the community college had no incentive to do so, and the senior college may have been unwilling to commit the resources.¹¹³

Current status: CUNY promulgated administrative guidelines, but the guidelines do not specifically address the issue of responsibility for administering the FSATs.¹¹⁴

⇒ **Problem:** Some of the senior colleges insisted on readministering basic skills tests to incoming CUNY community college students who had already exited remediation and been granted certification by their home institutions. These students were subject to being placed back into remediation at the senior college.

¹⁰⁸ Hostos, interview, 7-15-98.

¹⁰⁹ Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Articulation & Transfer, Report to the Chancellor, (CUNY: 6-30-93), 2, 4, 7.

¹¹⁰ BMCC, interview, 7-8-98; N.Y. City Tech., interview, 9-23-98.

¹¹¹ Lehman, interview, 7-23-98.

¹¹² Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Committee on Academic Affairs memo to Council of Presidents, "Recommendations on Articulation," (CUNY: 5/26/94), 2-3.

¹¹³ John Jay, interview, 7-22-98.

¹¹⁴ Office of Academic Affairs, Administrative Guidelines 1985 Board of Trustees Policy on the Transfer of Liberal Arts and Science Courses (CUNY: undated).

Explanation: Colleges were free to establish their own remediation exit criteria and set their own passing scores for the FSATs. For example, until Fall 1998, colleges were free to set different passing scores for the reading portion of the FSATs, and some senior colleges had higher cut scores than the community colleges from which students were seeking to transfer.

Current status: A university-wide passing score on the reading test was phased in beginning in 1995, with full phase-in scheduled for the entering class of Fall 1998.¹¹⁵ Each college is still free to set its own remediation exit criteria, however, and there is still no consensus regarding the level of preparation required for enrollment in college-level courses.¹¹⁶

⇒ **Problem:** Senior colleges questioned students' grades, classified many transfer credits as electives, and required students to take extensive core, general education, prerequisite, or major courses, on the basis that particular CUNY community college courses were not equivalent to senior college courses.¹¹⁷

Explanations: The Course Equivalency Guide was not updated between 1988 and 1995, and a CUNY-wide course numbering system was needed to aid student advisement and academic planning. Furthermore, the Trustees' guarantee that transfer students would be required to take no more than 64 credits above the A.A. or A.S. degree needed to be limited to students who enter a "parallel program" at the senior college, and needed to account for the fact that some senior college majors could not be completed in 128 credits.¹¹⁸

Current status: A new Course Equivalency Guide was promulgated in 1995; the "parallel program" issue and the case of majors that require extra credits were clarified in administrative guidelines,¹¹⁹ and some interviewees said that it has been getting somewhat easier to negotiate articulation agreements.¹²⁰ A common course numbering system was never implemented,¹²¹ however, and interviewees agree that CUNY senior colleges still tend to be "elitist," questioning grades and classifying credits as electives. In fact, the Task Force staff were repeatedly informed that CUNY community college students are better off

¹¹⁵ Report to the Chancellor, 8-9; Administrative Guidelines, 11-12; contra Mirrer interview, 2-22-99.

¹¹⁶ See Section V.B, "Assessment," for each college's remediation exit standards, and Section V.A.1, "The Nomenclature of Remediation at CUNY," for a discussion of college-by-college differences in the dividing line between remedial and college-level work.

¹¹⁷ Report to the Chancellor, 7.

¹¹⁸ ("Recommendations on Articulation" memo, 2-4.) In 1997, CUNY's Office of Institutional Research found that transfer students were required to take extra credits because (1) they had not fulfilled senior college liberal arts core requirements; (2) they needed to complete or repeat basic English composition; or (3) they had not met senior college foreign language requirements. (Transfer Audit, 10-12.)

¹¹⁹ Administrative Guidelines, 4-5, 9-10.

¹²⁰ BMCC, interview, 7-8-98.

¹²¹ Administrative Guidelines, App. III; Institutional Research, interview, 6-25-98.

transferring outside the CUNY system.¹²² Some interviewees believe that attempting to define course-by-course equivalency is “pointless” and “unfair”; they recommend matching competencies and transferring courses in bundles. They believe that such an approach would honor inter-college relationships, avoid unnecessary delays, and better serve students – particularly those who have followed an academic program that is at all unconventional.¹²³

Despite more than 25 years of discussion, CUNY has not yet fully implemented the Trustees’ testing and transfer policies. College-by-college variations in standards – standards of grading, remedial exit standards, and standards of college readiness – are a major obstacle to the smooth functioning of the CUNY system. Due, in part, to the lack of system-wide standards, several of the senior colleges remain opposed to the principle that a CUNY community college education is equivalent to the first two years of a senior college education.

Interviewees pointed out that the issues of accountability and credit for student outcomes lie at the heart of CUNY’s transfer problem. Under the current system, once a senior college has admitted a transfer student, the senior college is held solely accountable for that student’s future performance;¹²⁴ thus, it is understandable that a senior college may not want to hurt its graduation statistics or water down its academic standards by admitting underprepared transfer students. On the other hand, if a transfer student is successful and graduates, it is unclear which college gets credit for that positive outcome. Interviewees suggested smoothing out the transfer process as follows: require underprepared students to go to community college until they meet system-wide standards of readiness, then allow both the community college and the senior college to count transfer students who eventually earn a certificate or a degree as a positive outcome (*e.g.*, under an outcome-based accountability or performance-based funding system).¹²⁵

¹²² BMCC, interview, 7-8-98, (contrasting CUNY senior colleges with New York University, which tends not to question the course titles and grades listed on transcript); Queensborough, interview, 7-14-98 (stating that Queensborough students “get a better deal” when they transfer to a private college than when they transfer within CUNY); Lehman, interview, 7-23-98 (known as “community college friendly” because a CUNY or SUNY associate degree automatically satisfies Lehman’s General Education requirement).

¹²³ N.Y. City Tech, interview, 9-23-98.

¹²⁴ Hostos, interview, 7-15-98.

¹²⁵ City, interview, 7-20-98 (describing California’s public higher education system).

I. *Standards Revisited (1992-1999)*

In recent years, CUNY has enacted numerous policies aimed at ratcheting up standards. These policies have targeted every area: college preparation, admissions, placement and certification testing, remediation, and graduation. The impetus for these actions was twofold: (1) economic pressures, including repeated budget cuts, and (2) heightened public interest – at both the national and the local levels – in education.

Some of these efforts to raise standards were based on a systematic analysis of what works. But others seem more reactive and less carefully thought through. CUNY decisionmakers rarely, if ever, sought input from independent experts. In many instances, it appears that CUNY administrators had not supplied the Trustees with complete and accurate information about the *status quo*. Given the unevenness of CUNY’s policymaking process, it is not surprising that recent efforts to bolster standards have not resolved the issues raised by the establishment of open admissions almost 30 years ago.

1. College Preparation and the Seamless Transition

In 1990, recognizing that better prepared students are more likely to complete college, CUNY and the BOE began studying the possibility of creating a collaborative initiative to encourage New York City high school students to take rigorous academic courses. They hoped that clearly communicated college preparation standards would facilitate a “seamless transition” between high school and college.¹²⁶

After an “unprecedented” university-wide consultation process that involved “thorough scrutiny and discussion” of the issue, the Trustees voted in 1992 to establish the College Preparatory Initiative (“CPI”). The new initiative was modeled on other states’ successful efforts.¹²⁷

To implement CPI, CUNY faculty and BOE teachers first worked together to formulate “competency statements” in mathematics, science, English, foreign languages, ESL, social studies, art, and music.¹²⁸ Based on the competency statements and other factors, CUNY’s University Application Processing Center (“UAPC”) – in cooperation with the city’s six high school superintendents – would review all high school course offerings (approximately 64,000 course codes) to determine which courses are sufficiently rigorous to qualify for CPI credit.¹²⁹ For a discussion of CPI’s current implementation status, see Section IV.B.3, “Admissions Standards.”

¹²⁶ CPI Conference Prospectus, 10-24-97, 1.

¹²⁷ (Board of Trustees, Minutes, 4-27-92, 80-81.) BOE Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez spoke of the “vital” need for CUNY to “clearly and unequivocally state its preparatory expectations for entering students,” while one of the Trustees stated that many CUNY faculty were concerned that CPI would limit access to CUNY. (Ibid.)

¹²⁸ CPI Overview, undated, 1.

¹²⁹ UAPC, interview, 7-15-98.

On June 26, 1995, the Trustees voted to reinforce CPI by administering the FSATs to public high school students and addressing their academic underpreparation prior to their enrollment at CUNY.¹³⁰ They noted that similar initiatives at other public universities had proven successful in improving math skill levels, and that improved math preparation enhances retention and graduation rates. This mandate has been implemented, on a limited scale, through CUNY's College Now, Early Warning, and Bridge to College programs.¹³¹

2. Admissions Standards and Limits on Remediation

On June 26, 1995, the Trustees ratified a package of measures designed to manage resources and improve efficiency in response to repeated budget cuts.¹³² Based on an estimate that a 10% reduction in remedial course offerings would save \$2 million per year at the senior colleges and \$1.7 million at the community colleges, for a total of \$3.7 million annually,¹³³ the Trustees enacted limits on remediation and revised bachelor's admissions standards, effective Fall 1996.

The new policy required each senior college president to set a one- or two-semester maximum on basic skills and ESL courses, and provided that students who received no credit or a failing grade in such a course could only repeat it once; after the second failure, they are subject to academic dismissal.¹³⁴ Thus ended the remediation grace period, which had begun in 1970 to help ensure that open admissions would not become a "revolving door."¹³⁵ (No time limit was placed on remediation at the community colleges.)

At the same time, the new policy required the presidents to develop admission criteria that would admit only those candidates who were not likely to need more than the maximum number of semesters; alternatively, they could develop criteria "based upon a demonstrated relationship between the level of student academic preparation and student success" in college.¹³⁶

To implement this policy, each college developed new admissions criteria designed to improve the FSAT scores of entering freshmen. With the help of UAPC, the colleges used computer simulations to determine which criteria were the best predictors of FSAT performance. As a result of this process, most of the senior colleges now require bachelor's applicants to have completed a minimum number of CPI units in English and math and to have achieved a grade average in high school academic courses above a certain minimum – criteria that echo CUNY's pre-open-admissions standards. Meanwhile, the use of class rank for admissions – which was

¹³⁰ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-26-95, 99; University Budget Planning & Policy Options, 18-19.

¹³¹ Crain v. Reynolds, testimony of Louse Mirrer, 781; Staten Island, interview, 7-29-98; Queensborough, interview, 7-14-98; Lehman, interview, 7-23-98.

¹³² Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-26-95, 97-102; University Budget Planning & Policy Options, 1-2.

¹³³ University Budget Planning & Policy Options, 19.

¹³⁴ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-26-95, 99.

¹³⁵ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 7-9-69.

¹³⁶ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-26-95, 99.

so important to the architects of open admissions – has been almost entirely discontinued, because UAPC found that students admitted based on their class rank tended to be weaker academically.¹³⁷

At least two factors have limited the effectiveness of these resolutions. The first is CUNY's failure to communicate senior college admissions standards to high school guidance counselors; see Section IV.B.3, "Admissions Standards," for further discussion of this problem. The second factor is the absence of objective, university-wide remedial exit standards; without such standards, the semester limit is much easier to enforce, but it is a far less meaningful indicator of student success.¹³⁸

On May 26, 1998, the Trustees mandated that all "remedial course instruction" in bachelor's degree programs at the CUNY senior colleges be phased out over the next three years, and that once a college has eliminated "remedial course instruction," students who have not passed all three FSATs cannot enroll or transfer into its bachelor's degree program (there is an exception for certain ESL students). This resolution was challenged in the courts, but the Trustees reaffirmed it with a new vote on January 25, 1999. The revised timetable calls for implementation by January 2000 for Baruch, Brooklyn, Hunter, and Queens colleges; January 2001 for City, John Jay, Lehman, N.Y. City Tech, and Staten Island colleges; and January 2002 for Medgar Evers and York colleges.¹³⁹

It is clear that the Trustees want to ratchet up standards at the senior colleges, but the Task Force staff's research suggests that CUNY's various discipline councils and academic committees failed to provide the Trustees with the best advice about how to accomplish their goal. Given that CUNY has never evaluated the validity¹⁴⁰ of the FSATs for their current purposes, much less for use as admissions tests; and given the existence of many alternative criteria that do have a proven relationship to college success,¹⁴¹ the Trustees might have been better advised to demand stepped-up implementation of their 1995 resolution that encouraged

¹³⁷ (UAPC, interview, 7-15-98; Undergraduate Admissions Criteria for Senior Colleges.) The SAT – which CUNY calls the most widely used objective admissions criterion in the U.S. and one of the best predictors of student success – is used to varying degrees by the senior colleges (Ibid.), but even those colleges that plan to require the SAT for Fall 1999 have not set a minimum cutoff score. (See Section IV.B.3, "Admissions Standards.")

¹³⁸ See Section V.B.2.b, "Progress testing, post-testing, exit from remediation, and certification," for further discussion of this problem. Note that a two-semester maximum can be interpreted as allowing, when necessary, five "treatments": the pre-freshman summer program, the fall semester, the January intersession, the spring semester, and the summer following freshman year – plus workshops, learning centers, and tutoring. (Hunter, interview, 7-22-98.)

¹³⁹ CUNY sociology professor David E. Lavin has issued a report predicting that this new policy will have dire consequences, just as he did in 1975 when the Trustees voted to require an 8th grade level of competency in reading and math for admission into the university. (Lavin & Weininger; see Section F, above.)

¹⁴⁰ Validity measures how well a test accomplishes the specific purpose for which it is being used.

¹⁴¹ (See, e.g., Undergraduate Admissions Criteria for Senior Colleges (discussing admissions criteria with best predictive power); College Board website, citing NCES 96-155 (showing that percentage of students who complete bachelor's degrees in five years rises with SAT scores).) 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.)

the colleges to select admissions criteria with “a demonstrated relationship [to] student success” in college.¹⁴²

3. Testing Policy

CUNY has made several attempts to reform its testing policies and practices in recent years, including several false starts. The first abortive attempt was in 1990, when a report commissioned by CUNY’s Office of Academic Affairs (“Otheguy report”) found that CUNY was failing to conduct systematic research to verify the validity of the FSATs, in violation of widely accepted professional standards. The Otheguy report called for CUNY to replace the FSATs with a set of diagnostic and placement tests whose validity had been proven, and to make explicit provisions for testing ESL students.¹⁴³ No action has ever been taken to implement these recommendations. Two year later, in 1992, another report recommended that the FSATs should be reviewed, but no review was undertaken until the 1994-95 academic year (see below).¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, CUNY decided to address college-by-college variation in FSAT passing scores and testing practices. As discussed earlier, disagreement among the colleges as to what constituted college-level skills was inhibiting implementation of the university’s transfer policies. Thus, in 1994, the Committee on Academic Affairs recommended the adoption of uniform passing FSAT scores.¹⁴⁵ CUNY began phasing in a university-wide minimum passing score for the Reading Assessment Test (“RAT”) in 1995; the minimum was slated to apply to all entering students by Fall 1998.¹⁴⁶ In order to facilitate standardization, the Trustees resolved to create a testing unit at UAPC and to phase in centralized administration of the FSATs, beginning in the fall of 1996.¹⁴⁷ Since then, with respect to the closely related issues of remedial exit criteria and readiness for college-level study, each college has remained free to set its own standards – severely limiting the effect of the uniform passing score policy.¹⁴⁸

During the same period (1994-1996), CUNY also tackled the low reliability¹⁴⁹ of its Writing Assessment Test (“WAT”) scores. CUNY’s ongoing WAT Audit program, which assesses the degree of consistency among colleges in scoring the WAT, had discovered that the inter-

¹⁴² Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-26-95, 99.

¹⁴³ Ricardo Otheguy, June 1990, The Condition of Latinos in the City University of New York: A report to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and to the Puerto Rican Council on Higher Education, 8.

¹⁴⁴ CUNY Assessment Review Report, Spring 1996, 1 (citing The Report on the Freshman Year, 1992).

¹⁴⁵ Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs, “Recommendations on Articulation,” memo to Council of Presidents, 5-26-94.

¹⁴⁶ Report to the Chancellor, 8-9; Administrative Guidelines, 11-12; contra Mirrer interview, 2-22-99.

¹⁴⁷ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-26-95, 100.

¹⁴⁸ See Section V.B, “Assessment,” for each college’s remediation exit standards, and Section V.A.1, “The Nomenclature of Remediation at CUNY,” for a discussion of college-by-college differences in the dividing line between remedial and college-level work.

¹⁴⁹ Reliability is the likelihood that a student’s pass/fail status on a test would remain the same regardless of which form of that test the student took. (RAND (Klein & Orlando).)

reader disagreement rate ranged from 13% to 22% between 1984 and 1993.¹⁵⁰ In 1995-96, CUNY took several steps to improve inter-reader consistency: they published a training manual for WAT readers; they began training and certifying faculty to score the WAT; and they centralized reading of the initial administration of the WAT.¹⁵¹ According to a study conducted for the Task Force by RAND, however, CUNY's audits of inter-reader consistency only shed light on a small part of the WAT's reliability problem. In conducting a reliability analysis, it is more important to examine the degree to which a student's performance is consistent across different questions ("score reliability") than it is to examine inter-reader consistency in scoring the same answer. According to RAND, single-question essay tests such as the WAT have very poor score reliability. Thus, CUNY's recent efforts to improve inter-reader consistency fail to address the WAT's primary reliability problem.¹⁵²

In the 1994-95 academic year, the university conducted what was ostensibly a comprehensive review of its assessment program. The review team consisted of 84 CUNY faculty, students, and administrators. No outside consultants were involved. The resulting Assessment Review Report, published in 1996, both ignored the fundamental validity problem raised in the 1990 Otheguy report (see above), and failed to recognize the reliability problems that RAND has recently identified. The major recommendation of the Assessment Review Report was that the FSATs should no longer be used for certification, but should be replaced with a proficiency-based (as opposed to skills-based) certification exam. The proposed exam would have contained materials from the sciences and the humanities, and would therefore have functioned as a general education accountability measure. It would also have been expensive. According to interviewees, the Trustees were unwilling to adopt this recommendation, and, as a result, the review team's chief psychometrician left CUNY.¹⁵³

On September 29, 1997 – more than a year after the release of the Assessment Review Report – the Trustees enacted two resolutions requiring the administration to overhaul CUNY's testing instruments. Pursuant to the first of these, the administration and faculty were charged with reviewing the FSATs and revising them as necessary to improve their effectiveness as placement tests, in time for the Fall 1998 semester. The second directed that a new proficiency exam "developed by the Chancellor, in consultation with the faculty and Council of Presidents," should replace the use of the FSATs for upper-division certification.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ In other words, between 13% and 22% of students would have received a different pass-fail outcome if their exam had been graded by a different reader. (The CUNY Writing Assessment Test Audit Results 1984-1993, Oct. 1994, 2.)

¹⁵¹ The CUNY Writing Assessment Test Audit Results 1988-1997, March 1998, 1; Crain v. Reynolds, Defendants' Exhibit E, 1332-33.

¹⁵² RAND (Klein & Orlando). For further discussion of RAND's findings, see Section V.B.2, "The Task Force's Analysis of CUNY's Assessment Program."

¹⁵³ CUNY Assessment Review Report, Spring 1996; Baruch, interview, 2-10-99 (stating that the prospect of a general education accountability exam was very unpopular with the faculty).

¹⁵⁴ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 9-29-97, 128-29.

The Trustees may have been ill advised in directing the administration and faculty to “review,” “revise,” and “develop” the exams. By most accounts, the track record of the administration and faculty when it comes to developing assessment instruments is not enviable.¹⁵⁵ The Trustees might have done better to direct the administration to hire outside experts to overhaul CUNY’s testing program. In any event, a revised MAT has been implemented, but the RAT and the WAT remain substantially unchanged.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, a faculty committee was formed to design and pilot the new certification exam. At the November 23, 1998 Board of Trustees meeting, the committee presented the results of the pilot and enthusiastically recommended that the Trustees approve the new exam. When pressed, a committee representative stated that the test’s designers were following applicable professional guidelines.¹⁵⁷ The Task Force staff saw no hard evidence that this was true, however.¹⁵⁸ Despite the new exam’s supposed improvements, the pilot forms consist of a single essay question, and the committee appeared unaware that the exam might therefore suffer from the same reliability concerns that plague the WAT.¹⁵⁹ During the meeting, certain Trustees and other officials suggested that the pilot exam be vetted by impartial outside experts and that the final product incorporate best practices from other states,¹⁶⁰ but their suggestions appear to have come too late. The new exam is slated for implementation in Fall 1999, and many Trustees are understandably suspicious of suggestions that contradict the committee’s recommendation, and which might derail their efforts to replace the FSATs and raise academic standards.¹⁶¹

4. Graduation Standards

Over the years, the FSATs have been used for various purposes. As of May 1997, however, Trustees’ resolutions only mandated their use for two purposes: certification and transfer. In particular, all bachelor’s students wishing to move beyond the 60th credit had to pass all three

¹⁵⁵ See Section V.B, “Assessment,” for a discussion of the faculty’s insufficient assessment expertise.

¹⁵⁶ It appears that the MAT was revised pursuant to a recommendation contained in the 1996 Assessment Review Report, rather than in response to the Trustees’ 1997 resolution. (Queensborough Community College, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, Placement Exam Evaluation (timeline illustrating that current version of MAT was implemented as of 11-1-96); but see Crain v. Reynolds, Defendants’ Exhibit E, 1322 (stating that revised MAT was instituted in the 1997-98 academic year).)

¹⁵⁷ Mirrer statement, 11-23-98 Trustees’ meeting.

¹⁵⁸ We were troubled that although the new exam was originally intended for students who had earned between 45 and 60 credits (typically second-semester sophomores), it was piloted on freshmen. Moreover, Vice Chancellor Mirrer stated that there is nothing to prevent students from taking the exam prior to the 45th credit. (11-12-98 Trustees’ meeting.)

¹⁵⁹ “CUNY Proficiency Examination First Pilot Study: Writing Assignments,” Forms 11, 12, 21, 22, 31, and 32; CAWS Conference – August; RAND (Klein & Orlando); but see Crain v. Reynolds, Defendants’ Trial Exhibit E, 1322 (stating that students would be asked to write one open-ended essay and respond to three additional questions).

¹⁶⁰ Bowen, Marino statements, 11-23-98 Trustees’ meeting.

¹⁶¹ Paolucci, Ruiz statements, 11-23-98 Trustees’ meeting.

FSATs;¹⁶² all intra-CUNY transfer students had to pass the FSATs prior to transfer; and all outside transfer students had to take the FSATs for placement.¹⁶³ Meanwhile, the use of the FSATs as placement tests for incoming freshmen – to be taken but not necessarily passed – was based on an administration policy promulgated in the individual colleges’ catalogs.¹⁶⁴ Finally, while some colleges required students to pass the FSATs to exit remediation or to enroll in required college-level composition courses, this practice was far from uniform.¹⁶⁵

The combined effect of these policies was that almost all students had to take the FSATs at some point, but, in general, only bachelor’s students and those associate degree students wishing to transfer to a senior college were required to pass them. Conversely, associate degree students who did not wish to transfer to a senior college¹⁶⁶ could generally graduate without having passed the FSATs.¹⁶⁷

On May 27, 1997 – just days before some of the CUNY colleges were scheduled to hold graduation ceremonies – the Trustees passed an “emergency” resolution requiring that no student could graduate from a CUNY community college unless she had passed the writing portion of the FSATs, the WAT. They explained this action by stating that the WAT was “a University-wide requirement that must be adhered to by all colleges within the City University system. Proficiency in writing in English is critical to maintaining standards. Basic proficiency requirements for graduation cannot be waived by any college.”¹⁶⁸

At that time, unbeknownst to the Trustees, at least four of CUNY’s six community colleges were not requiring their students to pass the WAT prior to graduation: Hostos, Bronx Community College, BMCC, and LaGuardia.¹⁶⁹ Because the Trustees were given incomplete information, however, only Hostos was required to enforce the new resolution for its June 1997 graduates.¹⁷⁰ A group of Hostos students sued, but an appeals court found in favor of the university, on the grounds that it would contravene public policy to force a university to award diplomas where, in the university’s considered judgment, the students had not demonstrated the requisite degree of academic achievement.¹⁷¹

¹⁶² Board of Trustees, Minutes, 4-5-76, 42.

¹⁶³ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 6-24-85, 101.

¹⁶⁴ Crain v. Reynolds, Defendants’ Trial Exhibit E, 1328-29.

¹⁶⁵ Acting Vice Chancellor Anne L. Martin, 5-29-97 Memorandum; Section V.B, “Assessment.”

¹⁶⁶ Note that four of CUNY’s senior colleges offer associate degrees; indeed, these “comprehensive” or “hybrid” senior colleges serve almost one-third of CUNY’s total associate degree population. As of May 1997, the associate degree students at senior colleges were subject to the same university-wide FSAT requirements as those at community colleges.

¹⁶⁷ Crain v. Reynolds, Defendants’ Trial Exhibit E, 1329.

¹⁶⁸ (Mendez v. Reynolds, 1998 N.Y. App. Div. LEXIS 13220, 12-8-98, *2-*3; Board of Trustees, Minutes, 5-27-97.) Note that the resolution applied only to community college students, and not to associate degree students at senior colleges.

¹⁶⁹ Martin memo to Chancellor W. Anne Reynolds. See also Appellants’ Brief, Mendez v. Reynolds, New York Supreme Court Appellate Division, First Dep’t, 1-21-98.

¹⁷⁰ CUNY officials were unable to provide Task Force staff with evidence that the resolution was enforced anywhere else prior to 1998. Mirror “Responses” memo, 2-23-99.

¹⁷¹ Mendez v. Reynolds, 1998 N.Y. App. Div. LEXIS 13220, 12-8-98, *6-*7.

Soon thereafter, the Trustees realized that the FSATs were not, strictly speaking, “a University-wide requirement.” On September 29, 1997, they issued a set of new resolutions intended “to clarify and consolidate previous Board [of Trustees’] resolutions, administrative guidelines, and practices that have grown up concerning testing at [CUNY,] and to eliminate inconsistencies in the application of policy.”¹⁷²

The Trustees expressed particular concern over the fact that “use of the same tests for multiple purposes ha[d] been questioned.”¹⁷³ They resolved, therefore, that the practice of requiring all incoming students to take the FSATs for placement purposes would be officially mandated,¹⁷⁴ while the practice of using the FSATs for certification would cease.¹⁷⁵

At the same meeting, the Trustees corrected an apparent oversight in the drafting of the May 27th resolution by extending the WAT graduation requirement to associate degree students at the senior colleges. The Trustees explained, “Passage of this resolution achieves the Board [of Trustees’] objective to make the [WAT] a University-wide requirement that must be adhered to by all colleges awarding associate degrees.”

The Trustees’ actions of September 29, 1997 reveal CUNY’s urgent need for professional management of its testing program. On that date, the Trustees resolved that the FSATs should no longer be used for certification, because, according to various sources, the FSATs’ use for multiple purposes was questionable. At the same time, the Trustees’ firm belief that all associate degree students should have to demonstrate writing competence as a condition of graduation was common knowledge, yet apparently no one informed them that the WAT might not be not the best test for this purpose, or that off-the-shelf alternatives of proven validity were readily available.¹⁷⁶

5. Conclusions

In recent years, CUNY’s Trustees have redoubled their struggle to establish standards that will support excellence while maintaining access. Rather than providing them with the best information upon which to base their policy decisions, however, CUNY’s academic committees have resisted collecting the kind of objective, consistent test results that would help the Trustees to find practical solutions once and for all.

¹⁷² Board of Trustees, Minutes, 9-29-97, 128-29.

¹⁷³ See, e.g., Otheguy, 1990; Assessment Review Report, Spring 1996.

¹⁷⁴ The resolution created an exception for students whose SAT scores the administration deems high enough to demonstrate a grasp of basic verbal and math skills, but this provision has not yet been implemented.

¹⁷⁵ Board of Trustees, Minutes, 9-29-97, 128-29. See Section III.I.3, “Testing Policy,” for a fuller discussion of the certification test resolution.

¹⁷⁶ CUNY has never evaluated the validity of the WAT for any purpose – placement, certification, or graduation. Interviewees at N.Y. City Tech pointed out that the Trustees’ actions sent “mixed messages.” For more information about off-the-shelf writing assessment tests, see Section V.B.3.

By allowing itself and its students to be dragged into a testing imbroglio, CUNY has fallen out of step with the rest of the country. Every university in this country worth its salt recognizes the need to use standardized test scores in admissions. 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 ACT.

Standardized testing is a vital, scientific tool for measuring not only individual achievement and progress, but also the effectiveness of our policies and institutions. In order to compete in the workplace, in the global economy, and in life, we need to know where we stand. Whether we are discussing the 4th-grade reading test, the SAT, or the Bar exam, there is nothing wrong with measuring what students can do. What is wrong is the fact that huge numbers of children in this city cannot read and write.

J. Epilogue

In 1970, CUNY and the BOE embarked together on two grand experiments that were supposed to improve educational opportunities for minority students. Three decades later, policymakers are reviewing the evidence and assessing the effects of these policies. Arguably, whatever gains were derived from these innovations have come at a cost. Both systems have struggled with unwieldy governance structures that were unable to establish accountability for student outcomes; both have lost public support and confidence; and both have yielded consistently low academic performance – in comparison with their own historical achievements and with state and national benchmarks.¹⁷⁷

As the city's public education systems have eroded, so have the credentials of CUNY's entering students. The proportion of city high school graduates with high school averages of 80 or better enrolling at CUNY has declined significantly since the establishment of open admissions. In 1969, for example, almost all public high school graduates enrolling in CUNY's senior colleges had Regents diplomas and high school averages in the mid-80s or higher. Between 1970 and 1995, the percentage of bachelor's enrollees with those credentials declined. In 1996, CUNY instituted new bachelor's admissions standards designed to reinstate the pre-open-admissions emphasis on college preparatory courses and high school grades. Since 1980 – when systemwide data first became available – more than 75% of entering freshmen have required remediation in at least one subject.

CUNY's graduation rates are also extremely low. Fewer than 7% of CUNY's bachelor's entrants earn a bachelor's degree within four years. Since the entering class of 1978, the six-

¹⁷⁷ For comparisons of CUNY and BOE performance with state and national benchmarks, see accompanying report, *Beyond Graduation Rates*, and Cilo & Cooper, *Bridging the Gap Between School and College* (report to the Task Force).

year graduation rate for CUNY's bachelor's entrants has hovered around 30%, compared with the New York State average of 58%. Similarly, since the entering class of 1978, the four-year graduation rate for CUNY's associate entrants has been approximately 17%, compared with the New York State average of more than 30%. Typically, fewer than 2% of CUNY associate entrants graduate in two years.¹⁷⁸

Some have concluded that it is time for both of New York City's public education systems to readjust their course. In 1997, the BOE took a step toward reasserting central control, with the enactment of a new law that authorizes the Chancellor to – among other things – select community school district superintendents. The Task Force staff members hope that this report can help to guide the decisionmakers who are charting CUNY's course for the next century.

¹⁷⁸ *Beyond Graduation Rates*; CUNY Student Data Book: Fall 1997, Vol. II, 85-86.