Testimony of Vice Chancellor for Community Colleges

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The City University of New York
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Financing Public Higher Education In New York State

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Good morning, Chairwoman Glick and committee members. My name is Eduardo Martí, and I serve The City University of New York as the vice chancellor for community colleges.

First, I want to express my gratitude for your support of community colleges across the state. You not only understand the value of community colleges as economic development engines but you also support the important concept of open access.

CUNY’s community colleges serve as an entry point to the entire University. However, the promise of the open admissions policy must be grounded in increased attention to students who are at greater risk. Otherwise, the open door becomes a revolving door.

During this economic downturn, more and more New Yorkers have turned to community colleges for educational opportunities. In fact, since 2006, enrollment at our community colleges has grown by 26 percent, or more than 22,000 students.

However, many of these students are coming to us with greater needs. Coupled with the budget reductions the community colleges have sustained recently, this poses a significant challenge to the University. As Associate Vice Chancellor Sapienza mentioned, over the last four years, state base aid at our community colleges has been reduced by 20 percent. Even with the impact of full funding and tuition increases, our resources are stretched. We know that we must address our student needs through innovative and effective programs.

To that end, we have implemented a number of initiatives that are successfully addressing the range of student needs I alluded to earlier, from minimal intervention to more intensive immersion. The University is addressing students with minimal remedial needs by expanding the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs; it is emphasizing learning communities and cohort education for students with some or no remedial needs; and we are encouraging students with needs in reading, writing, and mathematics to defer
admission and enroll in CUNY Start, an immersion program that preserves their financial aid and accelerates preparedness for college level courses.

Let me briefly address each of these.

The ASAP initiative began in 2007 with a cohort of more than 1,100 students across all CUNY community colleges. After three years of a program that offers financial support, intensive academic counseling, convenient scheduling options, and small learning cohorts, 55 percent of the first class earned associate degrees. Compare that to the three-year graduation rate of 24 percent for a similar group of CUNY.

Bolstered by these success rates, in 2009 ASAP enrolled students with some developmental needs. After two years in the program, the cohort has realized a two-year graduation rate of 27.5 percent, compared to a 7.2 percent rate for a comparison group of similar students. We believe that this group of students will meet the target of a three-year graduation rate of 50 percent. Based on these results, the University intends to expand ASAP to serve 4,000 students by 2014.

To address the needs of the student with some or no remedial needs, the colleges offer a number of freshman-year experiences that provide enhanced academic and student support services for all students. These experiences emphasize learning communities, e-portfolios, tutoring, introduction to college life, and other support services. They are designed to help students who place in the middle of the range in assessment tests.

For those students who need additional help, the University developed the CUNY Start program. As recently described in the New York Times, CUNY Start provides intensive preparation in academic reading/writing, math, and college success. It primarily targets CUNY students who have been accepted to a community college but who are not ready for college-level work based on their scores on at least two of the three CUNY Assessment Tests. CUNY Start students re-take the assessment tests, and then begin building skills needed for college-level study through both the college’s remedial courses and CUNY Start.
The advantage of CUNY Start is that study is intensive—12 or 25 hours per week. It also enables students to save their financial aid for credit courses, rather than using it to pay for remedial coursework. The total cost to students in CUNY Start is $75.

In addition, the University will also continue to expand its partnership with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) in order to pinpoint areas in need of attention. Chairwoman Glick, you may recall that five or six years ago when you visited my office at Queensborough Community College, we discussed the need to improve the interaction with the secondary sector in order to determine how best to improve college preparedness. I am pleased to report that CUNY is engaged in specific programs designed to improve the readiness of the city’s high school graduates. For example, as part of a $3 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Graduate NYC! Initiative analyzes student performance in reading and writing at critical points along the continuum from high school to college, from SAT scores to success rates for DOE students in CUNY remedial programs. This program should improve communication to DOE students about what it takes to prepare for college.

Finally, the ASAP initiative has also informed the development of CUNY’s new community college. The college’s goal is to improve students’ graduation rates and their career prospects. It will include elements like required full-time enrollment in the first year, a common first-year curriculum, college-wide learning communities, an Office of Partnerships to establish employer relationships, and a college-wide theme centered on sustaining a thriving New York City. The University recently received state approval of the master plan amendment enabling the college to join the CUNY system, and the college is set to open in the fall of 2012. The first class will comprise about 500 students at a location in midtown Manhattan.

On a personal note, I would be remiss if I did not highlight the importance of CUNY’s faculty in these initiatives, and why our faculty hiring initiative is so critical. Increasingly, our faculty members are engaged in pedagogical research as well as in discipline-based scholarship. We are attracting new Ph.Ds who are interested in teaching at the community
colleges. Their work will help us better understand how we can solve the complex educational challenges posed by ensuring open access while preserving quality and increasing completion rates. The University is supporting these faculty efforts. This year, CUNY’s vice chancellor for research is offering seed funding for projects focusing on pedagogical research at the community colleges. The resulting work, which will hopefully attract even larger external grants, will enhance our academic programming.

Our new approaches, new programs, new college, and our extraordinary faculty continue to put CUNY at the forefront of community college education. These advancements would not be possible without your consistent support, which we sincerely appreciate.

I will now ask Vice Chancellor Gillian Small to talk about CUNY’s growing research program. Thank you.