Preparing Now for the Future of Higher Education: Policy recommendations that leverages institutional data analytics and technology. Building upon existing best practices for the survivability of the City University of New York (CUNY)

Marcus Richardson
Mind the Gap

Fall 2018
Prof. Kirshner
Executive Summary

Background

In fall 2017 the City University of New York (CUNY) enrolled 274,099 students. Broken down that number represents 173,531 (8,622 graduate) full-time and 100,568 (21,057 graduate) part-time individuals.¹

CUNY Institution Retention and Graduation Rates for Associate Programs for Full-Time First-Time Freshmen:²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Total Cohort (N): 20,828</th>
<th>1 Year</th>
<th>2 Years</th>
<th>3 Years</th>
<th>4 Years</th>
<th>5 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Still Enrolled</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Awarded Associate</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Awarded Baccalaureate Degree</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Baccalaureate or Associate Degree</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CUNY Institution Retention and Graduation Rates for Associate Programs for Full-Time First-Time Transfers:³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Total Cohort (N): 4,721</th>
<th>1 Year</th>
<th>2 Years</th>
<th>3 Years</th>
<th>4 Years</th>
<th>5 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Still Enrolled</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Awarded Associate</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Awarded Baccalaureate Degree</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Baccalaureate or Associate Degree</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CUNY Institution Retention and Graduation Rates for Bachelor Programs for Full-Time First-Time Freshmen:⁴

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall 2012</th>
<th>Total Cohort (N): 11,641</th>
<th>1 Year</th>
<th>2 Years</th>
<th>3 Years</th>
<th>4 Years</th>
<th>5 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Still Enrolled</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Awarded Associate</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Awarded Baccalaureate Degree</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Baccalaureate or Associate Degree</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CUNY Institution Retention and Graduation Rates for Bachelor Programs for Full-Time First-Time Transfers:⁵
Statement of Problem

Data shows that after five years CUNY graduates 28.5% of full-time first-time freshmen and 35.5% of full-time first-time transfer students enrolled in associate degree programs. Additionally, in the same time period CUNY graduates 45.8% of full-time first-time freshmen and 56.8% of full-time first-time transfer students enrolled in bachelor degree programs. Moreover, retention rates show a precipitous drop-off after year one and tapering off sharply thereafter. Unfortunately, there is no publicly available data that tracked student post graduation employment outcomes.

The future of work and the future of higher education in the United States challenges CUNY (Ashburn, Botkin, Hanson, Saleh, Sentz, Weise, 2018)\(^6\) to do a better job of guiding students towards degree completion, via reflectively designed curriculum and connecting graduates with gainful employment in order to stave off the effects of a national enrollment decline in higher education (Craig, 2018; Goldrick-Rab, 2016). CUNY has raised tuition in lock step with trends in New York State (NYS) legislative defunding and places the university on a fiscally austere path.\(^7\) Additionally, revenue from increased tuition only addresses shortfall in operational capital due to union contract negotiations and agreements. CUNY must address these issues with long term strategic administrative and academic planning.
CUNY was once labeled as a bureaucratically inefficient 'institution adrift' by a 1999 mayoral task-force report. However, significant improvements were made under Chancellor Goldstein’s administration due to a clear strategic vision, a system wide alignment in the core education curriculum, transfer credits standardization and the creation of the Guttman Community College. This concept policy proposal takes off with creation of Guttman Community College in transforming CUNY into the next iteration of what it needs to become in order to remain the greatest urban university in the world.

Current Administrative and Academic Policies – Guttman Community College
In spring of 2018, Chancellor Goldstein revealed a proposal to create the tenth community college within the CUNY system, simple referred to at the time as the New Community College. Initial funding provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and later, the Carnegie Foundation. However, after twenty-five million dollars in funding was secured, the school was later renamed the Stella and Charles Guttman Community College. The proposal went through a comprehensive development process, tasking a planning team to garner institutional, community and national feedback. Several areas were identified as areas of concern, chiefly K-12 preparedness. The University would have to make significant investment in college preparation. Guttman Community College’s admissions officers are set up to collaborate with CUNY GED and adult literacy programs. However, to date the Stella and Charles Guttman Community College mostly enrolls students under the age of 22. The College was set up to consolidate student services within a one-stop center to ensure that timely application of financial aid applications (FAFSA and TAP) as
well. Additionally, students meet in-person with staff and faculty to begin the development of individual educational plans. Students are then enrolled in a mandatory full-time credit bearing summer immersion program to develop their math, writing and reading skills.

The model at Guttman Community College is to streamline student services and provide guided pathways towards an associates degree where students can graduate in three years, but as quickly as within two with full-time enrollment. Students are placed into learning communities and registered via block course scheduling. Student academic work is cataloged into ePortfolios that are evaluated by faculty based on quality and quantity, and then credits are assigned respectively. After each year staff and faculty participate in an annual Summer Institute to reflect on cross-departmental progress, curriculum improvements and ensuring that progress is being made towards the college’s strategic goals. It is worth noting that there are no departmental chairs at the Guttman Community College, but academic programs.

Administratively, Guttman Community College is student-centered. All students are made aware of articulation agreements with bachelor degree programs within CUNY and a Guttman Transfer Scholarship incentivizes transferring. Transfer workshops are setup within the second year and advisors reach out to and work directly with counterparts at receiving institutions. Other critical services that
provide public benefits to students, such as healthcare, housing, childcare or food are also streamlined into the college’s single-stop program.

Student academic plans/programs were developed with employment and industry needs in mind. The college only has twelve offerings; Nursing, Surgical Technology, Environmental Technology, Energy Services Management, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Information Studies, Geographic Information Systems, Supply Chain Management (including Logistics), Community Health Worker, Disability Studies, Urban Education and Urban Studies. These majors are designed with the needs of the community and have early fieldwork, place-based learning and credited internships as part of the curriculum design. Guttman created a dedicated Office of Partnerships to continually nurture, develop and retain relationships with employers, community and government entitles that inform decisions academic, internships and student employment opportunities. Lastly, Guttman has created a Center for College Effectiveness, which consists of Institutional Research and Assessment in order create and distribute data to inform decision making. Guttman set an initial graduate rate of 30%, which would scale to 35% and to 40% in the fourth and fifth years of operation. The College’s initial two-year graduation rate was 28% and 49% within three years.

Data and Assessment

Before CUNY can venture into the creation of a new college or large-scale change within the University system, this proposal recommends that a period of deep institutional research and assessment. Data must be produced to show statistical significance or correlations between business practices and student success. The nuances behind teaching and learning need to be explored in order to uncover and inform CUNY’s path into the future. Guttman Community College is the perfect epicenter for this system wide assessment, as it already has the theoretical framework linked to predicted methods of success, such is workforce development driven curriculum, clear student paths to a degree and strategic partnerships with employers, community and government stakeholders. However, what needs to be examined is why the graduation rates are not higher.

Leveraging Technology – Efficient Use of Financial Aid and Scholarships

Quantitative studies on the Social Security Student Benefit (SSSB) and the Georgia HOPE programs show that straightforward application processes, coupled with aggressive marketing leads to increased college enrollment. Additionally, all students attending a post-secondary institution during the academic school year who did not complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) resulted in a cohort size of 8 million. Of those 8 million students, 20% would have been eligible to receive a Pell grant had they applied (Long, 2010). At Brooklyn College as Director of Financial Aid, I lead the implementation of a Data-Driven Financial Aid Advisement model. The Office of Financial Aid looks at its role holistically with that
of other vital areas of student services and success and this was designed to be a beneficial recruitment, enrollment and retention tool for the college. In the 2015-2016 academic year that immediately proceeded the implementation of our Data-Driven Financial Aid Advisement model, Brooklyn College had only 11,789 of 17,199 students apply for financial aid and of that 11,789 only 9,344 received some form of financial aid assistance or 54% of the total student population. In 2016-2017 under the cohort model 15,979 of 17,478 students applied for financial aid and 13,016 students received some form of financial aid assistance or 76% of the student population. This was a direct success of the cohort advisement model. Additionally, Brooklyn College reached out and communicated with 21,159 students, which included prospective students in a very customized – student to advisor approach. Simultaneously, Brooklyn College saw an overall increase of $1,093,295.29 in total aid and an increase of $1,146,909.07 in total grants with a reduction of ($1,625,507.70) in total loans borrowed. This increase can be correlated to a more informed student of their financial aid options and eligibility from a financial literacy perspective regarding loans and maximizing their federal and state grant eligibilities. 15

Each year CUNY distributes approximately 1.4 billion dollars in federal and state financial aid, according to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reports. National statistics suggest that roughly 50% of all students who apply for federal financial aid are selected for a process called verification. Institutions experience about 22% of what is called verification melt or students
who never complete the process. Additionally, not all students who are eligible for financial aid apply. This policy concept proposes the use of technology in order to scale customized financial aid outreach and an electronic platform for the student/parent/spouse submission of verification in order to standardize the statistical gains throughout the entire system. The use of a third-party vendor can decrease verification melt and increase application complete rates for the entire University. This would lead to efficient use of existing student financial aid eligibility.

**Expanding Paths To The Degree**

*The 12/6 Model and Online/Blended Learning*

Guttman Community College currently has a solution for college remediation. However, the data shows that they are still not attracting students over the age of 22. The non-traditional, weekend/evening, adult learner market is not being fully leveraged by CUNY as a means to increased enrollment and revenue as freshmen enrollment is trending downward. What can be built upon from Guttman Community College is it’s 12/6 or trimester enrollment model. This breaks the traditional fall/spring/summer into sessions. Each term has two sessions, allowing for manageable bit sized credit loads for non-traditional adult learners who may have other socio-economic lived and impacted experiences. Additionally, staying in line with the student centered approach of providing increased options for on-line or blended learning (a hybrid of in-person and online coursework) can increase
enrollment and review, as well. The added benefit to on-line and blended learning is the reduced stress that it would have for existing CUNY classroom infrastructure.

*Curriculum Maintenance and Development*

Each college maintains a comprehensive academic bulletin that catalogs the requirements for a student's program of study and path towards a degree. The less transparent and complicated those paths, the least likely a student will succeed. Issues such as course availability, hidden pre-requisites and co-requisites, and applicability of transfer credits all prevent a student smooth transition towards degree completion. Additionally, it commonly results in lose of student financial aid or inefficient use of program agreement lifetime eligibility. An example of how applicability of credits can impact student financial aid eligibility is the newly created NYS Excelsior Scholarship program. The scholarship is designed for students to graduate within successive two-year (associates) or four-year (bachelors) timeframes and the clock start with a student’s first term of undergraduate matriculation. They must generally earn 30 credits a year applicable towards their program(s) of study. Increased student eligibility rates are indicative of an institutions ability to provide clear and efficient paths to graduation. However, year-one assessment data shows that only 3,335 students benefit at a CUNY senior college or 2.3%, 820 or 0.9% at the community college level and only 20,086 or 3.2% for the entire State of New York. Developing clear degree maps and articulation agreements across all CUNY and non-CUNY institutions, with flexibility for individually developed academic plans can help to increase overall graduation and retention rates. Sarah Lawrence College exemplifies what day one advisement
and the impact on educational outcomes can be. A culture of annual curriculum assessment informed by market needs is required to ensure that all academic programs are adequately preparing students not only to graduate, but to be gainfully employed in their chosen fields of study. Lastly, there needs to be more intersection and facilitation between academic program initiatives and administrative implementation. This is important to ensure that paths towards the degree are in line with financial aid eligibility for example.

**Center for Institutional Diversity and Intersectionality**

CUNY as the greatest urban institution in the world serves many marginalized and under represented groups of students. Institutionally, CUNY needs to look at student academic needs and services based on intersectional needs that often go beyond race, gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic status, etc., only. These important student, staff and faculty lived experiences should inform co-generative dialogs from student services to cultural relevant pedagogy and practices. Moreover, this center should work hand in hand with the CUNY Office of Special Program to ensure that all opportunity programs are unified in strength and not separated/isolated in weakness.

**Strategic Partnerships**

The future of work and the future of higher education are one and the same. Inextricably tied together as a means of mutual success. CUNY must develop, sustain and grow with the future of New York City. Institutional Research offices must be
tasked with a top priority of finding out what the surrounding industry/governments needs from CUNY graduates and proactively keeping track of changes to those needs. This important data can help in the successful creation of in-house last mile programs, paid internships and place based learning opportunities. A last mile training program and strategic internship opportunities can aid in the translation of learned skills with what employers are looking for in graduates. At CUNY roughly 80% of students graduate debt free, but what about the remaining 20%. This is a good opportunity for creative strategic partnerships, as a form of incentive provided by State, local government and NYS employers to pay for part or all of the average $15,000 CUNY student loan debt. This incentivizes students to live and work in NYS, generating and paying all forms of NYS/NYC or county taxes. In addition to the creation of a Partnership Office like the one that exists at Guttman Community College, there should be a CUNY partnership board that comprises of public/private/government stakeholders that are in touch with industry trends and opportunities.

**Sustainability**

CUNY facilities accounts for a large amount of a college's operational cost on an annual basis, it would be a worthwhile venture to explore ways that CUNY could save cost through sustainable and renewable measures. Current examples of urban rooftop gardens (can keep buildings cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter), beehives, rain catchment, solar energy and hydroponic systems can create viable financial eco-systems. Providing vital place-based learning for students in the
STEM, nutrition and sustainability to name a few. Partnerships with NYS food coops and farm shares can create a robust food pantry service for low-income students and their families. Not to mention that these efforts are always a good bone for University public relations.

In conclusion public higher education should be in the business of successfully providing students with a path towards academic credentialing that will lead to positive economic outcomes first. However, CUNY is not so good at figuring out an efficient way to go about doing just that. CUNY needs to put front and center the reasons why it is the greatest urban university in the world. Simply stating that fact is not enough. Everyone who works for CUNY knows that it lifts students out of poverty better than any other public institution and is a great vehicle for upward social mobility. This needs to be more clearly stated. Students, donors, government officials can identity more viscerally with the why versus the proverbial what and the how. If those two powerful concepts were leveraged – first – an efficient means of degree attainment with the serving of the public good by lifting marginalized and low-income students out of poverty. Well, CUNY would ensure its survivability for many more years to come.

________________________

References:


1https://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/ENRL_0001_UGGR_FTPT.rpt.pdf
2http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/RTGI_0001_FT FTFR_ASSOC_TOT_UNIV.rpt.pdf
3http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/RTGI_0002_FT TNS_ASSOC_TOT_UNIV.rpt.pdf
4http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/RTGI_0007_FT FTFR_BACC_TOT_UNIV.rpt.pdf
5http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/RTGI_0008_FT TNS_BACC_TOT_UNIV.rpt.pdf
9 https://nypost.com/2013/08/03/learn-from-cuny/
11 https://guttman.cuny.edu/about/fast-facts/
12 https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=nc_arch_ncc
13 https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=nc_arch_ncc
14 https://guttman.cuny.edu/about/fast-facts/
15 https://www.nasfaa.org/2018_nasfaa_awards_announced_in_austin
16 http://www.collegeaccess.org/BlogItem?dg=5b0d35a074c545c6a608357bce9ca4ba
17 https://nycfuture.org/research/excelsior-scholarship
18 https://www.sarahlawrence.edu/undergraduate/