

CUNY Task Force on Retention

Creating the Conditions for Students to Succeed

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Retention Task Force: Creating the Conditions for CUNY Students to Succeed

*We are coming to know where the serious problems are:
What can the University do about them?*

Student persistence: Findings at Critical Junctures

- About 27% of our freshmen entering associate programs and 44% of our freshmen entering baccalaureate programs graduate in 6 years¹. Although these rates have improved over the last several years, *we can do better*.
- The first year remains the most critical time of a student's career. One year after enrolling as freshmen at CUNY in Fall 2003, roughly 32% of associate students (at community and comprehensive colleges) and 17% of baccalaureate students (at comprehensive and senior colleges) have left the University. The most precipitous drop is at the end of the second semester and during the summer between the first and second year.
- Students experience difficulty with reading and writing and mathematics courses throughout, but especially at the beginning levels and more especially when combined with ESL status. Only 40% of our associate degree students make it to the 45th credit (the point at which they are required to sit for the CPE).
- While many factors contribute to this number, academic standing is key. 26% of baccalaureate and 41% of associate students (when tracked for 6 years) leave the University in bad academic standing (GPA<2.0). Another 20% of baccalaureate students and 25% of associate students leave in good standing.
- Too many students are not getting through developmental education, particularly in remedial math and writing. Students who earn college credit during their first semester are more likely to remain enrolled (Appendix E, #5; Task Force on Reading and Writing). Those who do complete developmental education have a good chance of earning a college degree. The implications for ESL students are especially strong here.
- Last fall, 32% of the grades awarded in ESL courses were "F"s. ESL students are three times as likely as other students to reach the 45th credit without having reached minimum proficiency in reading or writing or without having completed freshman composition.

¹ Based on University-wide figures for first-time/full-time Freshman, entering class of Fall 1998, graduating from a CUNY college.

- Many introductory and developmental courses are taught by adjuncts and part-time faculty. Teaching students at these critical junctures is not seen as a priority.
- Failing math at all levels affects retention more than any other academic factor.
- Failing gateway courses impedes the ability of students to progress toward their degree. Introductory science courses, freshman composition, and other gateway courses need to be carefully addressed.
- Full-time students have greater persistence than students enrolled part-time.
- Transfer students with an AA/AS have a better chance of earning a BA/BS than those who transfer without the degree. However, too many qualified students cannot enter the majors or professional program of their choice.
- Students in Special Programs (SEEK) at the associate level have a 5% higher retention rate than regularly admitted students.
- 34% of students in 2004 Satisfaction Survey say they are dissatisfied with information about their “college requirements.”

Student characteristics: CUNY and Nationally

- Students are taking longer to get a degree both within CUNY and nationally.
- Females have higher retention rates than do men; they are enrolling in greater numbers than men.
- Entering students aged 20-29 have lower retention rates than traditional students and older students.
- Full-time Asian and White students have higher retention rates than Black and Hispanic students.
- Part-time Black students have higher retention rates than part-time White and Hispanic students.
- First-generation college students are less likely to succeed in college.
- Financial status is a major factor in attending and graduating from college; 54% of CUNY students report “Household Income” of less than \$35,000 per year (2004 CUNY Student Satisfaction Survey).

We need to know more about how to support students on probation, those who stop-out, and those who re-enter.

Recommendations: Creating the conditions for CUNY students to succeed

- *A focus on teaching and learning must be at the heart of the CUNY enterprise. As an institution, we must value teaching excellence and pedagogical innovation.*
- Increase course availability: how many students have difficulty completing degree requirements? Forty-one (41%) percent say seats are unavailable in courses they want to take; 37% say seats unavailable in courses they need to take (2004 CUNY Student Satisfaction Survey).
- Increase program-of-choice availability: how many qualified students are pushed out of undergraduate and graduate programs of their choice (e.g., nursing, business, and other professional programs)? Each college needs to address these issues, with guidance from the Central Office.
- Review college and University policies, including requirements that impact students' progression toward the degree.
- Increase focus on students enrolled in ESL and developmental courses. Contextualize these courses within the disciplines, possibly through learning communities that link developmental and credit-bearing courses. Earning credits immediately will help these students stay enrolled.
- Require students with developmental needs to enroll in developmental coursework in the first semester and continue straight through the sequence until completion.
- Require summer programs for students with developmental needs.
- Link academic support services and academic affairs to monitor student progress and provide early identification of and support for at-risk students.
- Design multiple approaches to advising, using faculty, peers, staff, and technology (including DegreeWorks).
- Use the Coordinated Undergraduate Education Project to create an integrated college education for students. Focus on linking together the fragmented pieces of students' academic experiences.
- Identify and organize common requirements within each college to create a coherent general education program (general education being the largest major).
- Redesign math curriculum to emphasize contextualized quantitative reasoning, pedagogical excellence and innovations, and alternatives to the traditional sequences.

- Expand learning communities for critical first year; freshman seminar for initiation into academies.
- Institute second-year communities (and beyond) on these models.
- Ease the financial burden on students: emergency funds? One-time free credit offer?
- Investigate, support and link together data-driven “islands of innovation”
- Develop long-term college retention plan that includes consistent and critical self-evaluation and assessment of implemented strategies.
- Fulfill the promise of the Master Plan to make Undergraduate Education at CUNY a flagship environment:
 - Invest in Undergraduate Education: seek additional resources to bolster the enterprise.
 - Focus on teaching, learning, curricular renewal, academic advising and support services, and pedagogy.
 - Engage faculty in teaching undergraduates, especially students in developmental, ESL, and introductory courses.
 - Promote a culture of evidence to design effective programs.
 - Set out the responsibilities of the University and the colleges, as well as faculty, administration, and staff: sound Undergraduate Education is the responsibility of the whole University.

Report of the Task Force on Retention

Section One Report and Recommendations

I. History of the Task Force on Retention

In fall 2004, Executive Vice Chancellor Selma Botman convened a number of working groups to study several critical academic issues within the University, including admissions, recruitment, transfer-articulation and enrollment management. Out of these initial working groups, University-wide Task Forces were formed to study further these critical issues. Specifically, the working group on Enrollment Management recommended that a Task Force be formed to focus on issues related to Retention and Graduation rates. Other Task Forces were charged with examining Transfer and Articulation, and Reading and Writing (Developmental Education), particularly in relation to the CPE.

The recommendations in this report regarding problems and delivery of developmental education rely heavily on the findings of the Reading and Writing Task Force. The two reports should be read as complementary. They are meant to be used as points of departure among the OAA senior staff and the Chief Academic Officers for devising a plan to fix some of the critical problems that prevent student progress towards a degree.

The Task Force on Retention was convened for the first meeting in February 2005, with Judith Summerfield, Acting Dean for Undergraduate Education, as the chair. Representatives from ten colleges were selected for the Task Force, based on recommendations from the provosts, and included representation from both Academic and Student Affairs at the colleges and the University. From the Office of Academic Affairs, Vice Chancellor Otis Hill, Deans David Crook and Cheryl Williams, and Faculty Fellow Timothy Stevens sat on the committee.

The Task Force was thus charged by Dr. Botman:

During the past few years, the University has focused much of its energy and resources on increasing student enrollment throughout the system. I applaud the efforts of our admissions colleagues for attracting record numbers of students to CUNY. I am, however, concerned that we are not retaining and graduating a greater proportion of these students. I would like to focus our attention on ensuring that the quality of our students' experiences at CUNY enables them to succeed in their academic studies, make progress towards the degree, and graduate. I am writing to invite you to participate in a task force charged with studying the issues and making recommendations for developing a comprehensive, unified approach to retention.

The charge, further, was to coordinate the Task Force's efforts with the CUE (Coordinated Undergraduate Education) initiative to review available data on enrollment and retention, progress towards the degree, graduation, and transfer. The committee was

to identify best practices, as well as impediments to success; to look closely at Freshman Programs, Sophomore Programs, Transfer Initiatives, General Education, WAC, and support services such as advising and Degree Works; and to research gate-keeper courses that act as stumbling blocks.

The Task Force met five times between February and September, with three sub-committees formed in May. These sub-committees worked over the summer of 2005, investigating the following areas:

- 1) **Setting a research agenda.** This sub-committee, led by Phyllis Curtis-Tweed, now Assistant Provost at Medgar Evers College, worked closely with the Office of Institutional Research to gather data on retention rates, student characteristics, and critical junctures.
- 2) **Mapping retention issues and practices across the University.** This sub-committee, led by Paul Arcario, Dean of Academic Affairs at LaGuardia Community College, distributed a University-wide survey to the 17 colleges.
- 3) **Reviewing the national literature on retention.** This sub-committee, led by Tim Stevens, OAA Faculty Fellow, examined a range of current studies on retention in order to understand more fully CUNY problems and successes within the national context.

II. Overview: Creating the Conditions for CUNY Student Success

In its 2005 study on retention and graduation rates in four-year public college and universities, The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) identifies common features of twelve exemplary campuses. Although these twelve colleges differ from each other in various ways, three elements were present at each of the campuses:

“A pervasive attitude that all students can succeed, reinforced by a wider culture that is not content to rest on past success.”

“A sense of inclusiveness on the part of all members of the campus community frequently characterized as a ‘family.’

“A strongly held sense of institutional mission that recognizes that campus as ‘distinctive’ or ‘special.’

This preliminary report from AASCU, along with the 1996 CUNY Task Force on Retention report, and scores of articles drawn from the national literature, posted on the Committee’s Blackboard site, became the fodder for a vast-ranging and frank discussion about retention issues at CUNY. The three key elements that AASCU identifies as fundamental to retention are a useful way to enter this complex terrain.

Attitude: “A pervasive attitude that all students can succeed, reinforced by a wider culture that is not content to rest on past success.”

First and foremost, the committee agreed that CUNY, to use a vernacular phrase, suffers from “an attitude problem.” It is no secret that within the hallways in too many of our institutions, among both faculty and administrators, a message is persistently conveyed that CUNY’s students are not expected to succeed, that they are woefully “under-prepared” for college, and that even if they do get through the associate degree, they are not up to snuff for senior college level work.

There is a pervasive “passing of the buck.” The senior colleges blame the community colleges for not preparing students for the upper division. And everyone blames the New York City high schools for the problem, particularly, as we shall see, in remedial/developmental education and in math and science.

The remedial taint is insidious: it is a remnant of CUNY’s open admissions experiment. The attitude prevails most egregiously among a segment of an older generation of faculty, along with a deep longing for an old CUNY, when students presumably were better prepared. This, of course, is a common national lament about the way college students – and the culture of the university – used to be, and ignores national trends, particularly in the public colleges and universities. When we measure CUNY’s performance against the national data, as we do in this report, we are not doing so badly. But that does not let us off the retention hook. We are losing far too many students at **critical junctures** of the educational process, and we need to do better.

The remedial question at CUNY came to a show-down during the last decade, when, in 1998, CUNY’s Board of Trustees determined that remediation should no longer be provided at CUNY’s senior colleges, but, rather, relegated to the associate degree colleges. Thus began a phase-out of remediation at the top-tier senior colleges, with the others to follow in the ensuing years. By 2001, the end of remediation at baccalaureate colleges was presumably complete.

Our Task Force agreed that our study of retention at CUNY and the work of the other Task Forces are all, in a very real sense, confronting the consequences of the Board’s 1998 resolution. We agree that it is in the best interests of the University to study what we all see as the results of this historic decision, and to look to how we, as a University, are providing a quality undergraduate education.

Overwhelmingly, we agreed that it is not enough to talk about *retention*, which focuses narrowly on *ends* and numbers. Retention and graduation rates are, indeed, fundamental to the accountability and survival of an institution. Resources are tied directly to enrollment and graduation numbers. Retention speaks to the highest levels of government, politics, and, ultimately, resources. But for the University to effect changes within the system itself – to increase the numbers of the students we retain and graduate – we need to dig deep to understand the factors that enable our students to succeed, and that

impede their success. We also need to recognize the complexity of the retention issue: good students leave the University, as well, and their leaving may not be tied, in many cases, to how well we are doing the job.

But we agreed that we needed, within the system as a whole, to fix our own attitude problem, and to work, systematically and aggressively, to change our expectations of our own students. The data from countless studies on student performance over the years tell us, again and again, that the “teacher’s attitude” towards his or her students makes all the difference to the student’s learning and to his or her success as a student. So it is with the prevailing attitude of the institution. A number of higher education organizations are conveying the same message, calling for “Greater Expectations.” It is time for CUNY to do the same.

We recommend, to strengthen Undergraduate Education for our 220,000 undergraduates, as promised in the 2004-2008 University Master Plan, the University should initiate a multi-dimensional, multi-pronged Retention Initiative with the leadership of the University and the colleges at the helm.

Inclusiveness: “A sense of inclusiveness on the part of all members of the campus community frequently characterized as a ‘family.’”

There is no question that CUNY’s image has improved since the 1998 Resolution on Remediation. Our enrollment is the highest it has been in thirty years. The CUNY Honors College has gained national recognition. Two CUNY undergraduates, one at City College and one at Brooklyn College, were named Rhodes Scholars in 2005. We have launched a new science initiative and are creating a new University science facility, to be housed at City College. The Community College Investment Plan of 2004 bolstered faculty ranks, and increased the number of support staff at the community colleges.

Undergraduate Education has earned its share of national awards: John Jay College of Criminal Justice is one of the twelve colleges to be lauded for improved graduation and retention rates in the AASCU study. Freshman Year Programs at half a dozen colleges have been recognized nation-wide as innovative projects. LaGuardia Community College has been selected this year to be part of the Carnegie Foundation’s Integrative Learning Project. Brooklyn College and Medgar Evers College are part of the Freshman Year Experience Foundations of Excellence project.

Paul Arcario, Dean of Academic Affairs at LaGuardia Community College, who conducted a University-wide survey on retention issues and interventions for this report, notes that “two pedagogical approaches were widely cited as being effective: learning communities and the CUNY-funded WAC/WID (Writing across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines) program.”

During the past decade, every college has been engaged, in one way or another, in retention efforts at the freshman level, and ten colleges have developed well-organized

projects. Retention at the freshman level has inched upward. The fall-to-fall retention rate University-wide for freshman entering baccalaureate programs in Fall 2002 was 82.9%, up 7.1 points over the previous eight years. For freshmen entering associate programs, the rate rose 3.1 points, to 66.8%, during the same period.

These freshman programs mimic the best of the small liberal arts college, providing students with an academic and social community. They are models of inclusiveness. Students get to know each other; they are, in the best case, taught by senior faculty, who are master teachers, and deeply committed to the mission of the institution. They are provided upper-class mentors, thus given a chance to learn not only the academic ropes but also the social opportunities of the college and New York City. Faculty and peer advising are made available from “day one.” For faculty, these projects are, also, opportunities for intellectual connectedness and pedagogical innovation. Qualitative studies of these programs tell us that students often find that this utopian first-year island, however, is a “cruel joke,” because second-year life on the mainland is disappointing.

As our report notes, these freshman experiments are “islands of innovation,” to borrow the term from AAC&U, in their recent study entitled “Inclusiveness and Diversity.” They exist largely unconnected to other programs within the colleges. Thus, while retention in the freshman year has seen an increase over the past decade, we are not holding students into their sophomore year and beyond.

After two years of enrollment, the picture on retention significantly deteriorates. Students who entered baccalaureate programs in Fall 2002, for example, had a retention rate of roughly 83% after one year, but only 72% after two years, dropping 11 points. For students entering associate programs in Fall 2002, retention dropped from roughly 67% after one year to 48% after two years, a drop of 19%.

The six-year outcomes of the fall 1997 cohort for full-time, first-time students University-wide are roughly 40% for baccalaureate programs, and 27% for associate programs. In other words, at the end of six years, nearly 60% of baccalaureate degree candidates and 73% of associate degree candidates have not graduated. Although a small percentage of these students are still enrolled at CUNY, the majority has left the University.

The Coordinated Undergraduate Education (CUE) initiative is a recent attempt to urge the college to coordinate academic and academic support programs in order to create a quality undergraduate education. Through CUE, General Education, which is required in one form or another of all CUNY students, has been brought to the attention of administrators and faculty. There are pockets of change, but far-reaching transformation to regularize or strengthen the undergraduate curriculum has yet to take place.

The same situation exists with the Writing Across the Curriculum program: the potential of a 1999 Board Resolution to enhance the writing abilities of all CUNY’s students, and to pay particular attention to the ESL population (nearly 50% of our students name a language other than English as their first language) needs to be fulfilled. Again, we have

an island of innovation, which is bringing together faculty, doctoral students, and students into an inclusive community, where pedagogical innovation and research are being brought into play.

In many ways, we are talking about providing for CUNY's students what has come to be expected for undergraduates in the CUNY Honors College, a quality education that includes full-time faculty teaching the lower division, exciting courses, advising in general education and the major, social life that includes New York City, opportunities for internships and study abroad.

Thus, as we move forward with a comprehensive and unified plan of action to improve students' success, so that they have every opportunity to earn the degree of their choice, we must build towards an institution that is inclusive at every turn.

Institutional Mission: "A strongly held sense of institutional mission that recognizes that campus as 'distinctive' or 'special.'"

CUNY's historic mission, revitalized through Chancellor Goldstein's promise of an "integrated university," positions us to commit our energies and resources not only to fix the broken parts of the system, but also to reaffirm a commitment to the democratic vision of educating all CUNY's students. In the Task Force, we talked a great deal about getting the University "on message," and creating a University-wide program to market for success. We would mimic the best of our recent marketing strategies - "Study with the Best," the CUNY Honors College, the CUNY Campaign - to set expectations high for our students, to treat those who enter our doors as **college** students (and not as pre-college or under-prepared students), and to build programs that enable them to succeed.

We can build upon the distinctiveness of each of the colleges, guiding students to the rich programs that we offer at the associate and baccalaureate programs, but we must make certain that there are enough seats in the colleges in which students begin and into which they transfer for students to complete their degree requirements in both General Education and in the majors and professions.

We need to develop, with the aid of technology, a multi-pronged approach to advising, making certain that requirements are transparent, using all the technological and human resources available.

We need to make certain that student services are "in sync" with students' needs, that all the parts of student services are working together, that students' financial needs are reckoned and met in realistic ways. A number of colleges have developed one-stop shopping programs, which allow students to register for classes, receive information and guidance on financial aid, and pay their bills in a timely fashion.

We must engage our faculty in carrying out the Campaign for Success, by teaching students how to succeed, encouraging our students to enroll full-time, fixing the areas in

the curriculum that are flawed (developmental education, math, science and other “killer courses,” General Education requirements), arranging for flexible scheduling of classes, on-line education options, and system-wide options (e-credits), creating greater capacity in popular majors (nursing, health-related programs, business, and other professional programs), and making the course of study and requirements transparent. We need to begin, perhaps, an “I believe in CUNY campaign...”

III. Context: The National Discussion on Retention and Student Success

Discussions concerning retention and student success within CUNY are predicated, more frequently than not, upon two curious preconceptions: CUNY’s issues are uniquely its own, and comparison with other institutions of higher education are not really possible. Certainly, the University’s size, complex organizational structure, and diversity distinguish it from many other colleges and universities, but almost any institution can make the case that it is unique as well. These preconceptions also speak to the cultural reality of CUNY’s location in a famously insular urban context, uniqueness and incomparability being New York City’s *sine qua non* in American popular culture.

Nevertheless, the national literature on retention and student success has a great deal to contribute to this report’s discussion, placing CUNY’s self-evaluation in relation to data on higher education in the United States. Careful consideration makes it clear that CUNY is far more like other American colleges and universities than not. The University’s problems and its efforts to address them are also considerably more effective than CUNY’s highly self-critical faculty, staff, and administrators often presume.

A subcommittee of the Task Force was charged with researching and reporting on this national literature. The full report, from which the two paragraphs above have been excerpted, can be found beginning on page 37.

IV. What Needs to Be Fixed?

In addition to the subcommittee on national retention literature, two other subcommittees focused on the following projects: mapping retention issues and practices at CUNY, and creating a research agenda. Below are highlights from these reports which can be found in their entirety in Section Two, including a synopsis of a first attempt to analyze what have come to be known as “killer courses,” those gate-keeper courses that prove to be hazardous to far too many CUNY students.

Quantitative Data on Retention:

Degree and Enrollment Status (Fall 2003):

- One year retention rates, for first-year, full-time baccalaureate students: 82.8%; for first-year, part-time baccalaureate students: nearly 66%.

- One year retention rates, for first-year, full-time associate students: 67.6%; for first-year, part-time associate students: approximately 50%.
- Re-enrollment: 4% full-time freshman leavers re-enroll in non-CUNY
- Transfer: 4.8% AA/AS and 3.5% BA/BS full-time students transfer within CUNY; 3.2% AA/AS and 4.7% BA/BS full-time students transfer out of CUNY.

Preparedness:

- Lack of basic math skills proficiency affects retention more than any other factor in the category of level of college preparation.
- Students in special programs (SEEK, College Discovery) have a higher retention rate (5%) than regularly admitted students.

Student Characteristics:

- Entering students aged 20-29 have lower retention rates than traditional students and older students.
- Females have higher retention rates by 3-5 percentage points.
- Full-time Asian and white students have higher retention rates than black and Hispanic students.
- Part-time black students have higher retention rates than part-time white and Hispanic students.

Vulnerable Points:

- Drop out rate, for both AA/AS and BA/BS students, is highest between first and second semester. “Red flags” during this period include: slow credit accumulation, low GPA, course failure, remedial needs at start of term.
- Math courses have high failure rates at nearly all the colleges.
- Freshman composition, chemistry, and computer science courses have high failure rates at many senior colleges.
- Remedial math and writing have high failure rates at all community colleges.

“Killer Courses”—Mathematics, Science and English:

According to data from the Office of Institutional Research, all the colleges have “killer courses,” or high fail-rate courses,² particularly in math (including algebra, pre-calculus, calculus, and quantitative analysis). Accounting and economics also appear to be high-risk subjects. At many colleges, chemistry poses the largest threat among the sciences, but biology and physics also enter into the equation. Our math initiative will be further informed by a study on math preparation being conducted by Dean David Crook and Professor Geoffrey Askt at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

² The data set was created by selecting all courses with a failure rate of 20% or higher and with an enrollment of 50 students or more. Within these parameters, the top 20 courses with the highest failure rates were listed in descending order. If there were fewer than 20 such courses, all were listed.

At many community colleges, failure rates in developmental reading and writing courses surpass those in math and science courses, especially in those colleges with the highest ESL populations. Nearly all community and comprehensive colleges exhibit high failure rates in composition courses.

Of the 86 courses with the highest fail rates at the senior colleges, 36 of them are math courses (nearly 42%), with the highest numbers in calculus and algebra. Roughly 34% of the “killer courses” at comprehensive colleges are in mathematics (20 out of 59, with the highest number in algebra), and at the community colleges that number is 30% (most of them algebra as well). Out of the 265 “killer courses” identified University-wide, 92 of them are in mathematics, representing 34.71% overall.

Qualitative Data on Retention:

Challenges—At-Risk Students:

- A) Background. Respondents report that many CUNY students have pressing financial challenges and family obligations that act as a deterrent; additionally, many are first-generation college students, are English language learners (ESL), ethnic minorities, and international students.
- B) Psychosocial characteristics: Many students are easily frustrated, and have low self-confidence, personal/family problems, limited social support, uncertainty/indecision, a lack of commitment, and limited problem-solving skills.
- C) Additional challenges: lack of academic preparedness, difficulty identifying a major, or not getting into a desired major (nursing, especially).

“Islands of Innovation”:

Successful programs may not reach large populations. Freshman learning communities, for example, show promise in improving student success, however they often serve only a small percentage of incoming students. WAC/WID programs also are sites where change is occurring, yet some of these programs are also isolated and not living up to their full potential.

Retention Programs:

There is a lack of coordination/integration among retention programs; multiple efforts and services are seldom integrated, especially advisement programs. First Year Experience programs appear to be a successful structure through which to integrate these efforts.

Assessing retention programs:

Evaluation of programs is inconsistent, partially due to difficulty in establishing causal relationships between an activity and improved retention. Some colleges have demonstrated the success of learning communities (improved grades, pass

rates, retention); tutoring, advising, orientations, mentoring and social activities seem more difficult to assess.

V. Key Issues to Address—Towards a Set of Recommendations

University-wide: The University should develop a multi-dimensional, multi-pronged Retention Initiative with the leadership of the University and the colleges at the helm.

This Initiative must be predicated on creating the conditions for student success. In part, this effort involves setting high expectations for students and for the colleges. All the elements of the University must see themselves as integral to the process of fulfilling the promise of CUNY. We must consider “the face” of the University as it is experienced by the student, and ensure that the image that the University projects is one that promotes student success and confidence.

As part of this Initiative, the University must continue to focus on coordinating academic and academic support programs, improving General Education, and providing a top-notch Writing Across the Curriculum program—in short, providing to all of CUNY’s students what is now expected for those in the Honors College.

The Retention Initiative must also address the sinkholes that challenge or impede student success, including the areas of:

- Multiple admissions
- Testing turn-around time
- Financial aid
- Day Care

At the Colleges: Each college community must be engaged in creating a coherent approach to their undergraduate education, incorporating faculty, academic and student affairs, staff and administration in that effort.

As part of this larger goal, each college needs to develop a comprehensive retention plan over the next three years. This plan should analyze student characteristics pertaining to success and retention at critical junctures, particularly between the freshman and sophomore years. Freshman year programs, including learning communities, have shown success in providing both a more coherent educational experience and in retaining students.

In this Retention Plan, each college should address administrative impediments to student success, including:

- Fixing scheduling inflexibility;
- Addressing transfer-articulation programmatically and at critical junctures;
- Integrating advising services and advising technology advancements, and engaging faculty in their role as academic advisors;
- Simplifying and making transparent General Education requirements;

- Addressing the problem of oversubscribed majors;
- Promoting coordinated approaches and structures by bringing “islands of innovation” together, creating the conditions for those innovations to be extended to the larger college community and shared throughout the University.

At the community colleges: can we create an incentive for students to complete the associate degree (the Goldstein Scholar program)? What would happen if baccalaureate programs did not accept students who transferred without an associate degree?

For senior colleges, the “end of remediation” did not mean that incoming students necessarily became well prepared. Should USIP be seen as a way to provide developmental or quasi-remedial education?

And for all the colleges, how can we best address the problem of “killer courses” and get our math and science house in order?

VI. Beginning the Conversation

This report is meant to provide a jumping-off point, from which we can begin a productive and stimulating conversation about the problem of retention within the larger goal of providing a quality undergraduate education. Lee S. Shulman, in an article entitled “Pedagogies of Uncertainty” (*Liberal Education*, Spring 2005), discusses how one hospital sought to solve a problem it was having with high infection rates from transfusions, and applies the insights developed in that situation to liberal education. He writes:

Like infection rates, the failures of liberal education are often procedural. In the Morbidity and Mortality conference, the discussion of acceptable levels of infection sounded like arguments about acceptable levels of student failure. If one-third of students drop out in the first year, some may be ready to claim that those students simply shouldn't have entered college. What if a hospital said that if it lost a third of its patients, those patients never should have been admitted because they were too sick? Faculty and teaching institutions have lots of impediments, just like physicians. But what if at some universities the president was called every time a student failed? We can do so much better, and research in the cognitive sciences and other fields supports this. I know we lack the resources. I know we lack the administrative and policy support. I know some students we inherit are already deeply wounded. Nevertheless, we have to make the commitment. We need to respond to the pedagogical imperative. And if we do, then raising expectations and keeping promises will not be empty rhetoric but prophetic ministry. We can hardly afford to do less.

Report of the Task Force on Retention

Section Two Sub-committee Reports and Research

I. Research Agenda Outline/Proposal for Student Success

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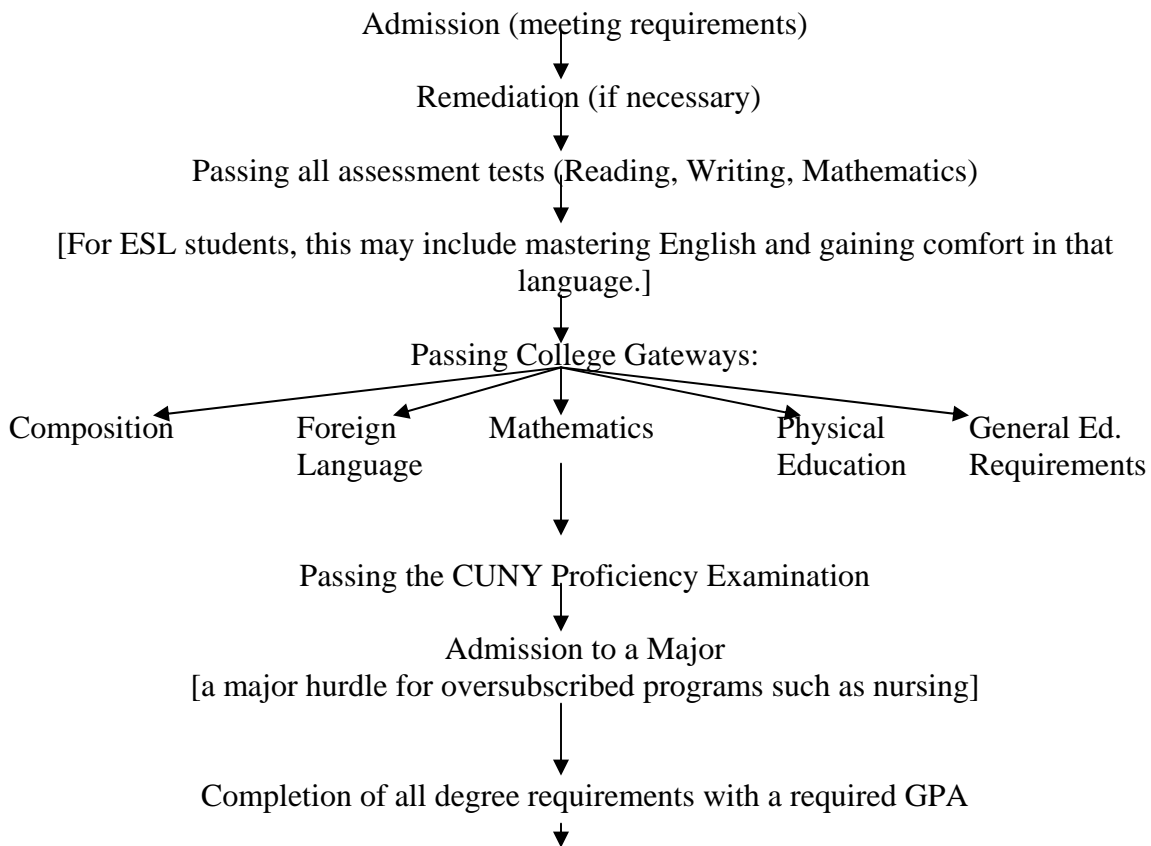
The purpose of the sub-committee for Research on Retention is to develop and suggest a research agenda for CUNY. To fulfill this charge, the committee met to examine and discuss current data and trends in college attendance regarding student types (full-time/part time/transfer), student characteristics, and contextual issues that impact college attendance. In addition, we considered the numerous paths that students may take in pursuit of their degree, and the challenges they may face while in college. We found numerous possibilities for research based on current data and historical data provided by the 1996 Task Force on Retention Report. The Task Force concluded that a comprehensive research project, aspirational in its scope, must reflect an understanding of local and national trends (e.g. economic and legislative) in higher education, and should situate CUNY in the national higher education context regarding areas of concern in higher education, changes in student populations, and graduation rates. The overall goal of this research project should be to delineate pathways of success taking into account the characteristics and needs of the CUNY student population, including issues of diversity within and across CUNY colleges and differences in college missions. It should also determine institutional effectiveness in meeting student needs through programming grounded in the missions of the colleges and the University.

PART A. Moving Beyond Retention: Understanding Student Success and the Quality of Institutional Performance

Higher educational research indicates that the notion of retention encompasses efforts to keep students in the college into which they initially matriculate. While one goal of this project is to increase the number of CUNY students who persist in their CUNY colleges, we also recognize that the concept of retention fails to convey the nuances of effort, achievement, and the steps necessary for students to succeed in the quest for a college

degree. Student success in college is associated with positive experiences and the passage through numerous critical points and events in the college experience. Such critical points and events include college entry (USIP, the first year experience), meeting college requirements (proficiency exams, CPE, general education requirements, preadmissions exams e.g. NLN), and entrance/acceptance into the major course of study. It is important that CUNY understand what happens to students at these critical junctures. As an institution we also understand that diversity in the student population translates into experiential differences in the college journey. Various populations require programming specifically designed to meet special needs (e.g. ESL) or to provide support in overcoming societal marginalization in higher education (e.g. the Black Male Initiative). At the same time, CUNY must evaluate the quality of institutional performance in terms of institutional fit between mission, student needs and programs, and the effectiveness of programs.

The Task Force believes that at *Critical Points of Pathways to Graduation*, there are many possible decisions that students may make as undergraduates. The colleges provide varying degrees of freedom for students, depending upon whether the college has a core curriculum or whether the student selects a structured major. In addition, institutional differences exist between community, comprehensive and senior college requirements. Nevertheless, there are some common points that define progress toward graduation. For example, in a baccalaureate program in a comprehensive college, these points can be represented as:



Graduation

The diagram above portrays a linear process in terms of the relation between steps that may be understood as ‘milestones,’ providing students with a way to mark their progress toward their degree. However, the student’s passage through these steps may not be linear. For example, in some colleges, students may declare a major before they take the CPE. They may not complete all of their general education requirements until after they begin a major. Other students may transfer to or from another institution. For some students, passing these milestones may be tempered by personal constraints, such as balancing familial, job and other personal responsibilities. Each milestone also represents a potential difficulty – a point at which students may experience frustration or failure, which may lead students to stop out or drop out. The research project should investigate what characterizes the successful student and what happens to students who experience difficulty in negotiating the critical points. To this end, our research agenda must be grounded in and informed by systematic assessment including (but not limited to) the assessment of student learning outcomes, programmatic evaluation, and trends analyses. Preliminary analyses of existing data from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment provide some direction for the current project.

PART B. Research Directions Based on Data Analyses

During the summer of 2005, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment served to assist the Retention Sub-committee on Research in developing a research and evaluation agenda, based on univariate and simple multivariate analyses. These analyses focused on retention and persistence rates, and their relation to numerous factors including part- and full-time status, level of college preparation, and student characteristics.

Retention Rates

In general, retention rates have been rising steadily over the last several years. Among full-time associate degree seeking students, one-year retention rates reached 67.6% in fall 2004 (for the fall 2003 cohort of entering freshmen). Although AS students have been retained at consistently higher levels than their AA and AAS counterparts, only about two to three percentage points separate the retention rates for the different degree types. Retention rates for part-timers are also increasing although the trajectory is not quite as smooth. Compared with full-time students, however, part-time students in associate programs are less likely to re-enroll one year after entry. A little over one-half of the part-time associate entrants re-enroll one year later compared with two-thirds of the full-timers.

Retention rates of full-time first-time freshmen in baccalaureate programs are substantially higher than their associate degree counterparts (82.8% compared with 67.6%). Baccalaureate retention rates are also higher for part-time students compared with associate students, but the gap is not quite as large as for full-time students. Just over half of the part-time students at the associate level remain enrolled one year after entry, while almost two-thirds of part-time baccalaureate students are retained.

Only about 4% of full-time freshmen who leave CUNY after one or two semesters re-enroll in a college outside of CUNY the fall after entry. Full-time associate students are slightly more likely to transfer to another CUNY college (4.8%) compared with baccalaureate students (3.5%). The reverse is the case for transfers outside of CUNY; 3.2% of associate students transferred to a non-CUNY college while 4.7% of full-time baccalaureate entrants did so. Almost 80% of full-time first-time freshmen in baccalaureate programs remain enrolled in the college of entry one year later while about 63% of full-time associate students do so. Across the board, full-time students have higher re-enrollment rates than students who enter CUNY part-time.

The research agenda should attempt to determine if the upward trend in retention rates is related to CUNY college interventions, or to systematic differences in the population of students entering CUNY associate and baccalaureate programs. A look at differences in GPA and credits earned for full-time and part-time students, as well as differences in high school backgrounds, may shed some light on how preparation for college, performance in college, and academic interventions affect retention rates for both groups. Additional research should examine how much students' initial educational aspirations relate to their probability of enrolling in the fall one year after entry and how much retention can be influenced by counseling and academic advisement.

Although most of the analyses examined retention for full-time students separately from part-time students, OIRA carried out a few analyses to examine how movement from full- to part-time status affects retention rates. For students in associate programs, changing to part-time status after full-time entry had little effect on retention. However, at the baccalaureate level, data indicate that over two years, students who change to part-time status have a lower retention rate by more than 10 percentage points compared with students who remained enrolled full-time. A related analysis, looking over only one year, indicates that students who change to part-time status after the first term are retained at substantially lower rates than students who re-enroll full-time. Further, students enrolled full-time make progress towards the degree faster than students enrolled part-time. The research agenda should address more directly the question of whether counseling students to enroll full-time at entry improves student retention, encourages subsequent full-time attendance and/or shortens time to degree.

Student Characteristics

Retention rates vary not only by full- and part-time enrollment status, but also by age, gender and race/ethnicity. For example, students who enter CUNY in their twenties have lower retention rates than both their younger and older counterparts. For associate programs, the 20 to 29 age group represents a larger proportion of first-time freshmen than for baccalaureate programs, which have a higher percentage of traditional age students (17 to 19). Females have higher retention rates than males by three to five percentage points, a pattern that holds across degree level and full-time versus part-time entry. Retention rates vary widely across racial/ethnic groups for full-time first-time freshmen in associate degree programs (from 77% down to 64%), and though variation still exists at the baccalaureate level, the differences are smaller (from 86% to 79%). In general, full-time Asian and white students have higher retention rates than black and

Hispanic students. Among part-time students, associate student retention rates for black students are higher than for white and Hispanic students, while for part-timers in baccalaureate programs Hispanic students are retained at higher rates than white and black students. These group differences warrant further examination in the context of academic preparation and academic support services offered as well as consideration of contextual factors that might impede student persistence.

Level of College Preparation

Research suggests that preparation for college plays a role in student persistence. At CUNY, lack of math basic skills proficiency, alone or in combination with other skill areas, seems to affect retention the most. At both the associate and baccalaureate levels, entering freshmen who failed the math basic skills test were less likely than students who were math proficient to re-enroll one year after entry. Reading proficiency has a much more tenuous relationship with retention. In fact, for both associate and baccalaureate freshmen, the small number of students who were math and writing proficient, but not reading proficient, were actually more likely to re-enroll one year after entry than students who were fully proficient in all basic skills upon application. The relationship between writing proficiency and retention is also fairly weak, which may explain why ESL students, who, on average, encounter the most difficulty with the writing test have higher or equal retention rates to students whose primary language is English. Further research should address differences between depth and breadth of remedial needs in terms of their effects on student persistence.

Though none of the analyses directly evaluates the effectiveness of academic interventions on student retention, there is some evidence to suggest that certain interventions may help students remain enrolled. Special program students (SEEK and College Discovery) have retention rates that are five percentage points higher than their regularly admitted counterparts. SEEK students at the baccalaureate level have lower retention rates than regularly admitted students, but only by about three percentage points. Given the relative success of special program students, further research should address the extent to which interventions available to SEEK and CD students may moderate drop out for students with educational and economic disadvantage.

Persistence rates

Persistence rates vary across academic programs, particularly for juniors (at the baccalaureate level) where persistence is defined as being still enrolled in the degree pursued. About 10 percentage points separate major categories for both full-time and part-time students in baccalaureate programs, though retention rate rankings by program differ for full-time and part-time students. Persistence in associate programs varies by only six percentage points for full-time students and by 20 percentage points for part-time students. These differences point to the possibility that programs differ in the support offered to students in those programs and that students in certain majors will be more likely to persist. The different rankings for full- and part-timers may indicate variation in how different programs respond to the needs and limitations of part-time students. However, there are several possibilities for explaining these retention rate differences that are not accounted for in these relatively simple analyses, such as differences in the

aspirations and/or preparation of students choosing particular majors. Further examination should develop hypotheses and provide evidence to support or refute them.

Areas of Vulnerability

Preliminary analyses point to a number of barriers impeding student persistence, some of which are within the control of institutions and others which lie outside institutional control. Many CUNY students have obligations that compete for time with academic obligations. Family responsibilities such as childcare or adult care as well as work for pay mean that students have less time to devote to attending courses and the work outside of class required for academic success. CUNY may not be able to remove these barriers to retention, however, certain kinds of interventions and student support may make the barriers easier to overcome.

Freshman year appears to be a particularly vulnerable time for students in terms of establishing a pattern of success that leads to persistence towards a degree. For both associate and baccalaureate students the drop out rate is highest between the first and second semester, and then the rate starts to decrease as weaker students are “weeded out” and stronger students “survive.” A number of academic events that precede dropping out should serve as red flags to help faculty and administrators identify students who may need help. These include slow credit accumulation, low GPA, course failure and remedial need at the start of the term (for associate students). The results of an analysis tracking students who are academically successful in their first semester indicate that this early start to success has important implications for retention and continued success. Students who are successful in their freshman year are more likely to persist and remain successful than are students who encounter course failure during that time. Likewise, students who accumulate credits towards the degree in their first term are more likely to remain enrolled compared with students who make slower progress as result of remedial course enrollment or failing one or more courses. Colleges may be able to use data on course failure rates to identify courses where students are likely to need additional help. An analysis of course failure rates indicates that math courses are highly represented among courses with high failure rates at virtually all colleges. Freshman composition, as well as chemistry and computer science courses have high failure rates at many CUNY senior colleges, while remedial writing and math are represented on the list of courses with high failure rates at all community colleges.

These univariate and simple multi-variate analyses suggest the need for more complex modeling to determine what factors are most likely to influence student retention. In addition to a quantitative research agenda, there is a need for qualitative data about programs and interventions, and perhaps a survey research effort to identify and investigate factors that are not accounted for in the data currently available for institutional research.

PART C: Action Plan

Goals

- To identify relations between student characteristics (part-time, full-time, etc.) and passage through critical points.
- To evaluate the institution's programmatic response to student needs.
- To develop improvement suggestions based on research.
- To develop a feedback loop for the implementation of improvement plans.
- To develop a timeline for the effective implementation and re-evaluation of the research project.

Suggested Projects

The research agenda should include short- and long-term (longitudinal) projects with objectives that provide feedback for institutional improvement and accountability. Even in the case of longitudinal projects there may be short-term objectives. For example, of the following items, a study of USIP³, Black Male Initiative and ESL could be immediate and completed over a year, whereas a First Year Experience study and the study on Student Success are more long term. The First Year Experience should be completed over about 2 years and the Student Success study could develop into a longitudinal project with multiple cohorts, 2-4 years minimum.

1. USIP: Who are the students who need USIP and how effective is the programming? A self-study should examine USIP programs, pedagogy, pass rates and efforts to increase pass rates. USIP participants should be tracked in order to understand their college journey.

2. Black Male Initiative: What are the entrance, persistence, and graduation rates for black males on your campus? Is there a support program in place? What are the critical points for black males on your campus? What programmatic response has been developed for this population? Describe the program. Evaluate its effectiveness.

Some CUNY colleges with larger Hispanic/Latino populations, such as Lehman, Hostos, and John Jay, find that enrollment, retention and persistence deficiencies of Latino males parallel those of Black Males. In these instances, there is also a need to establish interventions that address the needs of Latino males.

3. ESL: What are the entrance, persistence, and graduation rates for ESL students on your campus? What are the critical points for this population? What programmatic response has been developed for this population? Is there a need for programming beyond ESL classes? Describe additional programming. Evaluate its effectiveness.

4. General Education: All colleges should engage in a self-study of their general education and core curriculum with special attention to understanding the relevance of courses and their articulation with the majors. How are General Education courses

³ During the spring of 2006, following the recommendations of this report, an extensive study of the University Skills Immersion Program (USIP) resulted in the re-conceptualization of summer programs, which now fall under the aegis of CUE.

sequenced and delivered? Who teaches the courses? Do students understand the relevance of these courses to their careers or courses of study?

5. First Year Experience: All colleges should participate in the self-study and improvement plan through the Foundations of Excellence in the First College Year through the Policy Center on the First College Year.

6. Understanding Student Success, Persistence, and Graduation—Identifying Other Critical Points:

The Research Sub-committee of the Retention Task Force reviewed the considerable work that the CUNY OIRA has done over the past decade to clarify the elements that are related to student success. We found that students who succeed in their coursework and can identify their progress toward their academic goals are more likely to persist in school, and therefore, to graduate in a timely fashion. Our findings corroborated the national literature that demonstrates that full-time students are more likely to stay in school longer and to graduate. Students who are intentionally part time are somewhat less likely to persist in college.

The work of this sub-committee as well as that of the previous Task Force looks extensively at the variables that are most often associated with student persistence and student success. The following variables may influence student progress:

Demographic/environmental contextual factors

- Race/ethnicity
- Income
- Father's/Mother's educational attainment
- Language other than English spoken at home
- Marital status
- Need to work, number of hours
- Responsibility for other family members, including children

Level of pre-college educational preparation and initial readiness for college

- CAA
- CPI (or regent's test scores)
- SAT/PSAT
- Freshman Assessment Test results
- Remedial needs
- Type of high school diploma/GED

Aspirational factors

- Pursuit of a degree and level desired
- Field of interest

Issues regarding college standing

- Re-admit
- Probation

- Transfer

The 1996 study of retention looked extensively at the relationships among these factors with student success and retention. The results, very similar to national studies of these factors, suggest that students who come to college without supportive role models, life experience with higher education, or adequate academic preparation to cope with college-level course work struggle to find success or are discouraged. These students are more likely to drop out of college altogether or to engage sporadically with college, impeding their progress and making success harder to attain.

The Research Sub-committee proposes that the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment analyze data on a cohort of entering students to examine the relations between the variables mentioned above, the difficulties encountered at critical points and their relation to attrition rates. This information may be used develop interventions to effectively help students to avoid difficulty and failure and to promote student success.

Timeline

SHORT TERM PROJECTS	
Project	Duration of Study
USIP ESL	Both USIP and ESL have existing data that could be used for immediate analysis and program evaluation. There have been two CUNY-wide USIP surveys over the past three years.
Black Male Initiative Latino Male Initiative	These projects could have immediate initial evaluations as the basis for long term comparisons, with program evaluation and analysis by cohort.
General Education/Core Curriculum	A general education self-study should include curriculum mapping, faculty engagement studies and self-assessed faculty development activities.
LONG TERM PROJECTS	
FYP	Participation in the Foundations of Excellence self-study would require a 1-2 year commitment with ongoing systematic assessment that may lead to immediate programmatic modifications (i.e. occurring during the 1-2 year study) and long-term action/improvement plans.
Identification of factors related to student success/failure, such as: demographics, level of college preparation, college standing	A longitudinal study following 1-3 cohorts. This project may include short-term goals and reporting points to implement and evaluate programmatic changes.

Possible Limitations

- Campus culture/resistance to assessment projects.
- Variance in reporting structures.

- Variance in institutional research organizational structures.
- Funding (where there are needs to collect additional data and to implement new data collection techniques/protocols).
- Conflicts with other campus-based research projects.

Prospective Outcomes

- To identify factors related to student success.
- To improve programming based on research.
- To establish a dynamic research agenda that addresses issues of accountability and includes a mechanism for revisiting and revising programming based on a heightened understanding of the college and its students.
- To provide appropriate information to legislators for decision-making and budget allocation.

II. Mapping Retention Issues and Practices Across the University

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The sub-committee on “mapping” retention issues and interventions at CUNY devised a questionnaire that was sent to all CUNY campuses in June, 2005. In some cases, colleges had more than one respondent, affording multiple perspectives on the institutions. Respondents included the following titles: Vice President, Dean, Associate Dean, Assistant Dean, Institutional Research Director, CUE Director, faculty, counselor, and program director.

PART A: Retention Issues

Colleges were asked to identify retention issues and/or particular group or groups of students who were at highest risk for retention problems. Respondents were also asked to indicate what data collection/tracking regarding retention was being undertaken.

At-risk students were most often identified according to three major categories: demographic profile, what can be called “psychosocial” characteristics, and academic-related factors.

Demographic Profile. Colleges repeatedly identified several groups as at-risk: poor students, with resulting financial pressures; working students; single mothers; students with family responsibilities; first-generation college students; English language learners (ESL); students unfamiliar with U.S. and/or collegiate culture; minorities; male minorities; part-time students; international students (due to post-9/11 financial and legal issues); and SEEK students.

Psychosocial Characteristics. Respondents mentioned the following characteristics of students at risk for attrition: low level of tolerance for frustration; lack of self-confidence; emotional distress factors; personal/family problems/challenges; limited social support network; uncertainty/indecision (particularly in regard to choice of major); lack of commitment; limited problem-solving skills.

Academic-related Factors. A frequently cited issue was academic under-preparedness. Students on probation (or those with academic difficulties but not picked up by the probationary system) were also identified as at-risk. Another oft-mentioned factor was the inability to connect with a major, including not getting into the desired major (nursing

being the most frequent example); selecting a major not congruent with one's own strengths; or remaining undeclared for too long.

It should also be noted that several campuses identified the first year (or in the case of some senior colleges, the first two years) as being the time of greatest attrition. Community colleges also stated that early transfer (before obtaining the associate degree) has a major impact on their retention rates.

Colleges appear to be placing increased emphasis on data collection and analysis and well as tracking. The reporting on this issue was inconsistent, however, and further questioning would be needed in order to judge to what extent individual colleges are able to utilize data to guide and inform their retention initiatives. Some examples reported include identifying at-risk students based on their demographic profile, identifying retention issues based on opinion/satisfaction surveys (e.g., ACT Opinion, Your First Year in College, National Survey of Student Engagement, Community College Survey of Student Engagement) and/or "leaver" surveys, and identifying critical points when students are most at-risk for leaving.

PART B: Retention Programs/Activities

Colleges were asked to describe their activities and programs designed to increase retention to degree completion.

Retention activities currently undertaken at the CUNY campuses for the most part attempt to address several broad goals: providing academic support, facilitating social integration, improving pedagogy, providing financial support, and improving systems.

Academic Support. There is a wide variety of academic support available at CUNY. Listed most often was tutoring, including writing centers, tutoring or learning centers in specific discipline areas (e.g., science), CPE tutoring, and supplemental instruction (peer tutoring). Also listed as key interventions were CUNY-funded programs such as College Discovery, SEEK, and USIP. Many colleges offer an array of support workshops: study-skills seminars, probation workshops, conversation groups for ESL students, and career development workshops. Difficult courses and/or key courses required for admission to majors are also targeted for interventions, such as pre-course "prep" workshops or additional tutoring. Campuses also have activities targeted to specific groups, e.g., programs for freshmen, sophomores, transfer students, minority males, students not yet enrolled in a major, students with disabilities, students on probation, and Honors students.

Social Integration. Another category of activities are those that seek to create a sense of belonging and connectedness to the institution: establishing a more student-friendly environment; developing shared, common experiences for students; promoting faculty-student and student-student relationships; and helping students understand academic culture, expectations, and protocols. Activities falling under this category include orientation programs, freshman seminar courses (though not all colleges have a required

course), common reading programs, learning communities and block programming, mentoring programs, student-faculty activities (luncheons, discussion sessions, new student welcome sessions), co-curricular/student life activities, and clubs.

Pedagogy. It may well be, as one respondent put it, that “the most important retention effort at an institution...is good instruction in every class.” Two pedagogical approaches were widely cited as being effective: learning communities and the CUNY-funded WAC/WID program. A few respondents, in terms of facilitating student engagement and learning, also mentioned teaching with technology. Although quality instruction was thus widely acknowledged as critically important for retention, faculty development designed to enhance pedagogy was cited as being a retention tool by only a few colleges.

Financial Support. Given that financial pressure was one of the most oft-mentioned risk factors for attrition, a number of colleges have implemented financial supports beyond state and federal financial aid, including temporary and emergency loans, scholarships funded by the college’s foundation, free courses at critical points (i.e., to help students reach 60 credits by the junior year), and scholarships for students to graduate in two years.

Systems. Colleges are also attempting to improve retention by offering better services, such as “One Stop” student service centers; reducing institutional and policy barriers, including reviewing course offering and scheduling patterns; enhancing advisement through technology; and implementing “early alert” and tracking systems that enable the college to monitor student progress and offer timely interventions.

In reviewing the myriad retention programs offered across CUNY, three general observations can be made. While all campuses are engaged in multiple efforts, services and programs seldom appear integrated, particularly between the academic and student affairs sides of the institution (though efforts in that direction are now being made under the aegis of CUE). The lack of integration seems most acute around advisement [See Part C below], as one respondent reported, regarding advising, “different units do different things with little coordination.” On the other hand, the most established efforts at integration tend to be the First Year Experience programs offered at many colleges; these initiatives typically attempt to integrate academic support with social integration activities.

Another observation that can be made is that while there seem to be many successful programs, many of them represent “islands of innovation,” as they may be difficult to ramp up to scale for the entire institution. Perhaps the most prominent example is the freshman learning community. While widespread across CUNY, learning communities often seem to serve only a relatively small percentage of the incoming class.

Finally, it can be noted that evaluation of retention programs remains inconsistent. While all colleges have become more adept at tracking which students are or are not retained, and at what point they drop out, nevertheless the actual efficacy of retention programs and activities is not assessed across the board (though a number of colleges reported that

they were at the beginning stages of such assessment). This may be due to the difficulty of establishing causal relationships between a particular activity and improved retention, particularly given that students are engaged in multiple activities and in many cases there is a self-selection factor. Some interventions seem to lend themselves more readily to assessment; for example, a number of colleges have data demonstrating the success of learning communities (showing better grades, pass rates, and/or retention for participating students). Interventions such as tutoring, advising, orientations, mentoring, and various social integration activities seem to be more difficult to assess; a few attempts at such evaluation were reported, however, including comparing retention rates for students participating in a particular intervention vs. non-participants and comparing responses on particular survey items between participating and non-participating students. Clearly, CUNY campuses are moving toward a “culture of assessment,” but much work remains.

PART C: Advisement/Counseling

Colleges were asked to provide a description of their advisement and counseling services and how such services were assessed.

While respondents reported a long and varied list of advising and counseling services, the most common model is a two-phase approach: advising services for pre-majors provided by one or more units housed in student affairs, academic affairs, or in both (e.g., Advising Center, Counseling Department, Office of Academic Advisement), followed by advising in the academic departments once students have declared a major. This is oversimplifying somewhat, as, for example, counseling departments also provide advisement and/or personal counseling even after students have declared majors and moved on to departmental advising, and at one college faculty are assigned a caseload of incoming students before they have declared majors. There are also numerous “pockets” of advisement through special programs, for students on probation for example. In addition, many colleges report an increased use of technology in advisement services, including online advisement, informational websites, Degree Works, and the development of CD-ROMs with advisement information.

Two comments about the state of advisement at CUNY were made repeatedly: first, that advisement services tended to be uncoordinated (perhaps not surprising given the array of services, particularly during the first year and pre-major period); and, second, that counseling/advising services were usually understaffed.

In general, colleges do not seem to be conducting ongoing assessment or evaluation of advisement. In particular, while all colleges appear to have departmental advising in the major, it remains unclear as to how extensive, or effective, faculty participation is.

PART D: Retention Factors

For each of the categories below, respondents were asked to describe the factors that most facilitate or hinder retention and progress toward the degree:

Student Characteristics/Challenges (e.g., inadequate academic preparation; indecision about major/career; financial difficulties; childcare issues).

Responses in this section tended to reiterate points made Part A, though some additional detail was provided. Inadequate academic preparedness was once again emphasized as a major retention factor by both senior and community colleges; as one campus stated, “we believe that inadequate academic preparation is the one factor that underlies all of the others. We view academic preparation in terms of information about attending college as well as academic preparation for particular course subjects.”

“External” factors were again frequently mentioned as major challenges for our students, including financial pressures, personal and family difficulties, and outside commitments (e.g., children, work). One respondent observed that “any factors that interfere with students’ ability to take a full-time load – financial issues, health problems, or family and other outside responsibilities – will put students at risk for dropping or stopping out.”

Helping students connect with a discipline (major) was viewed as critical. Barriers to making this connection cited by respondents included uncertainty about choice of major and career direction, mismatch between abilities and requirements of a particular major, lack of alternatives for students unable to meet the requirements for desired majors, lack of awareness of available academic programs, and lack of awareness of intended major requirements.

Policies/Processes/Procedures at the local campus or university level (e.g., admissions policies; registration difficulties) and other institutional factors.

Respondents generally reported that improvements were needed in terms of registration, advisement, and amount of faculty-student contact.

Registration problems mainly centered around not having enough seats in high-demand programs and/or courses. Regarding the actual registration process, opinions were mixed, with some respondents stating that the process needed to be simplified and improved, while others reporting that the process had been improved through new online registration systems, Degree Works, and One-Stop enrollment services.

Concerns around the advisement system focused mostly on two issues: first, staffing, including not having enough counselors/advising staff and not having enough faculty involved, which is a particularly acute problem in the summer when campuses are generally unable to provide a faculty presence; and second, complicated and/or confusing requirements for general education and basic skills sequences. Requirements include

prerequisites that can make it difficult to declare a major, or for students in basic skills, to find enough credit-bearing courses for financial aid or full-time status.

Many respondents felt that interaction between students and faculty outside of the classroom needed to be increased, primarily through advisement, mentoring, and extra-curricular and research activities. One respondent suggested that “expansion of discipline-based organizations, i.e., Psychology Club, Journalism Club, etc. can provide a useful structure to connect students with members of the faculty.”

PART E: Improving Retention Rates

Respondents were asked to list the top three programs/activities/services listed in items 1, 2, and 3 above, that they believed had the greatest impact on retention.

Activities and programs, in order of frequency cited, were:

- First Year Experience programs and learning communities
- Effective Advisement (including career development)
- Summer Immersion programs
- Tutoring (including supplemental instruction/peer tutoring)
- Faculty-student interaction
- CD/SEEK
- Interventions for key “gateway” courses
- Integration of programs/activities
- Community building
- Extra-curricular involvement
- Technology-infused courses
- CPE workshops/tutorials
- Smaller classes

Campuses were asked to list the “critical points” where interventions need to be made to promote retention.

Colleges identified a number of critical points at which students may be making decisions to stay or leave:

- Admission, pre-freshman programs, and first registration
- First Year, particularly between the 2nd and 3rd semesters, which is when many first-year support programs end
- Second Year (senior colleges tended to group the first two years as a difficult time for students)
- Exit from developmental courses; transition between developmental and discipline-area courses
- Declaring or changing a major

- Gateway Courses that are required for entry to majors (particularly high-demand majors)
- CPE
- Students with a substantial number of credits, but with no clear plan or direction for graduating in a timely fashion
- Transfer

In addition, critical points within the semester were identified:

- First month of the semester (which is when early interventions should be made if student is experiencing difficulties)
- Withdrawal period
- Before midterms
- After midterm grades are received

Respondents were asked what retention program/activity they would want to institute (or expand) on their own campuses.

The most frequent response was advisement, including better training for advisors, hiring more staff, more faculty advising, more counselors, more one-on-one advising, and more peer advising.

Other programs cited included:

- Increasing tutoring/supplemental instruction (peer tutoring)
- Expanding immersion programs
- Developing mentoring programs
- More involvement of students in research and co-curricular activities
- More programs that fund students to be engaged on campus (e.g., paying students to be mentors/tutors)
- Ongoing attention to strengthening pedagogy and the development of new teaching strategies to improve student engagement in the learning process
- Developing an integrated freshman year program
- Better use of technology, which can contribute significantly to improving interaction and communication among faculty, counselors, and students
- Increasing student scholarship budgets, or providing other forms of financial support/incentives
- Interventions for multiple repeaters
- Institute early alert and develop better monitoring, tracking, and data mining systems.

III. Reviewing the National Literature on Retention and Student Success

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Overview

Discussions concerning retention and student success within CUNY are predicated, more frequently than not, upon two curious preconceptions: CUNY's issues are uniquely its own, and comparison with other institutions of higher education are not really possible. Certainly, the University's size, complex organizational structure, and diversity distinguish it from many other colleges and universities, but almost any institution can make the case that its characteristics and situation make it unique as well. These preconceptions also speak to the cultural reality of CUNY's location in a famously insular urban context, uniqueness and incomparability being New York City's *sine qua non* in American popular culture.

Nevertheless, the national literature on retention and student success has a great deal to contribute to this report's discussion, providing a context for CUNY's self-evaluation through the larger pool of data that describes higher education in the United States. Careful consideration makes it clear that CUNY is far more like other American colleges and universities than not. The University's problems and its efforts to address them are also considerably more effective than CUNY's highly self-critical faculty, staff, and administrators often presume.

Moreover, as the nation's largest urban, public university, CUNY does not just reflect national data: it drives such data. Trends in academia across the nation are often felt most quickly, most deeply, most urgently here. It is CUNY's responsibility to take its place on the national scene, forging links with national bodies such as the Carnegie Foundation and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. CUNY faculty, administrators, and students must always be aware of CUNY's potential leadership in the ongoing effort to improve undergraduate education in this nation.

The following subsections represent the dominant themes of the national conversation on retention in higher education:

The Lengthening Time to Degree Completion

Students throughout the United States are taking longer to complete baccalaureate degrees. Laura Horn's and Rachael Berger's November 2004 National Center for Education Statistics report *College Persistence on the Rise?: Changes in 5-Year Degree Completion and Postsecondary Persistence Rates Between 1994 and 2000* (NCES 2005-156) is a descriptive analysis of two longitudinal surveys of beginning postsecondary students (the 1990/94 and 1996/01 *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Studies*). Noting that college completion rates have changed little since the 1970s (iii),

Horn and Berger conclude that there is a definite increase in persistence beyond five years. Their careful analysis of persistence data describing the 1990/94 and 1996/01 BPS cohorts indicates that “the likelihood of still being enrolled in a 4-year institution after 5 years increased, from 16 to 21 percent” (21). These findings “held for both men and women and across all income levels . . . [and] also for White students” (22—see 19-24 for entire analysis).

Lutz Berkner, Shirley He, and Emily Forrest Cataldi analyze the 1996/01 BPS data in exhaustive detail in their *Descriptive Summary of 1995-96 Beginning Postsecondary Students: Six Years Later* (NCES 2003-151). Their findings on student persistence and attainment of a degree are also telling. Only 36 percent of the 1995-96 beginning students in four-year institutions achieved a degree anywhere within four years, with 43 percent still enrolled but without a degree and 13 percent having left entirely. Even at the end of the sixth year, only 63 percent of these students had achieved a bachelors degree, with 14 percent still enrolled and 18 percent having left (167). CUNY figures are consistent with both of these studies and compare favorably.

National Responses to Attrition Rates

A recent set of reports from the ACT—*What Works in Student Retention? Two Year Public Colleges* and *What Works in Student Retention? Four Year Public Colleges* (both 2004, both by Wesley Habley and Randy McClanahan)—explores institutional responses to high attrition rates. Although retention has become a critical topic nationally, only 40.7% of the nearly 400 public two-year colleges surveyed and 48.7% of the over 200 four-year public institutions surveyed “identified an individual response for coordinating retention strategies.” Of four-year public institutions, 45.6% had set goals for increased degree completion rates, with only 19.9% of two-year public institutions setting similar goals. Further, the reports indicated that both two-year and four-year public schools were significantly more likely to attribute attrition to student—rather than institutional—characteristics, with underpreparation, lack of motivation, lack of financial resources, poor study skills, and family and job demands leading the list of reasons students leave college. The ACT’s recommendations are clear: institutions must study their own practices together with student characteristics, and the responsibility for retention rates must become an institutional concern. Leading the list of recommendations for both two- and four-year colleges is the suggestion that institutions “designate a visible individual to coordinate a campus-wide planning team” and that institutions “focus on the nexus of student characteristics and institutional characteristics” while establishing “realistic short-term and long-term retention, progression, and completion goals” (7). CUNY’s Campaign for Success asks colleges to do exactly this, while the CUE Council provides the structure for highly visible individuals or teams to lead efforts at retention. Several colleges have set explicit retention goals and have committed to discovering the roadblocks their students face; it is expected that the others will follow.

The Importance of Remedial Coursework for Under-prepared Students

National data match the findings of this Task Force—students who are placed into remediation have a better chance of graduating than those with similar backgrounds who are not. In a 2005 study released by the National Bureau of Economic Research, “Addressing the Needs of Under-Prepared Students in Higher Education: Does College Remediation Work?” (NBER Working Paper 11325), Eric. P. Bettinger and Bridget Terry Long report that “remediation does have a positive impact on the college outcomes of under-prepared students. Students placed in remediation are more likely to persist in college in comparison to students with similar test scores and backgrounds who were not required to take the courses. They are also more likely to transfer to a higher-level or more selective college and to complete a four-year institution” (3). In the *What Works in Student Retention?* reports cited above, Habley and McClanahan note that two-year public institutions, when asked to identify successful retention practices, overwhelmingly responded with “mandated course placement testing” (20.7% of respondents) and “required remedial/developmental coursework” (19.2%) (6).

Bettinger and Long further report that “Over five years, math and English remediation are estimated to reduce the likelihood of dropping out and increase the likelihood of completing a degree. Moreover, English remediation appears to reduce the likelihood of transferring to a less selective or lower level college” (19). A focus on math and English remediation is underway at CUNY: now it remains crucial to study what works within remediation and identify best practices—both in teaching and curriculum structures, and in advisement and student services outreach.

Transition from Remediation to College Credit Courses

Most community college students need at least one remedial course, yet the more time spent in remediation before reaching college-level courses, the less likely the student is to succeed. This is true nationally as well as at CUNY, and the challenge is to find ways of linking remedial and college-level courses so that students may move through remediation as quickly as possible, while gathering college credits and so participating in the “mainstream” academic experience. Richard Kazis and Marty Liebowitz affirm, in “Changing Courses: Instructional Innovations that Help Low-Income Students Succeed in Community College” (MDRC report from the Opening Doors Project, 2003), that the ways remedial courses “are integrated with, linked to, or aligned with credential programs is as critical as their success” (5). Linking remediation to career paths, majors, and certifications increases a student’s chance of success, as does, from the administrative side, alternative night and weekend scheduling and the possibility of online education. Kazis and Liebowitz further emphasize the need for “transparent pathways” between remediation and credit bearing courses, noting that “the level of collaboration in program design, curriculum development and instructional delivery between credit and non-credit faculty” is an indicator of program success (31). Overall, their recommendation is to locate remedial programs within the college mainstream and situate the budget for such programs within the mainstream budget. While many CUNY colleges are experimenting with learning communities that link remedial and credit

courses, others retain basic skills departments severed from other academic programs. Higher integration is called for.

Introductory and Gateway Courses

While this report calls for attention to the design and implementation of introductory and gateway courses, national literature has also emphasized the need to restructure introductory courses, most notably through the use of technology. Carol A. Twigg's *Increasing Success for Underserved Students: Redesigning Introductory Courses*, released in 2005, describes a Program in Course Redesign (PCR) developed by the National Center for Academic Transformation. Twigg argues that introductory courses are a potential site for the engagement and ultimate retention of low-income and minority students, who often are not reached by retention efforts that target full-time, traditional-age, residential students at four-year liberal arts institutions. All students are required to take introductory courses; why not redesign these courses to meet the needs of a student population that is increasingly described as "under-prepared"? According to the report, community colleges see drop, failure and withdrawal rates of 40 to 50% in introductory courses—data that echo the CUNY situation. Introductory courses are gateways to English, mathematics, social and natural sciences, and business: "In addition," Twigg writes, "to suffering from a high rate of academic failure, these courses affect literally every student who goes to college" (2).

In response to this situation, the PCR set out to "demonstrate how colleges and universities can redesign their instructional approaches by using technology to achieve quality enhancements as well as cost savings" (3). Redesign efforts here focus on active learning, computer-based learning resources, and on-demand help. CUNY's connection to Carnegie's Visible Knowledge Project reflects its investment in the national movement to improving education through technology, as does the increasing use of ePortfolios and online course offerings. Yet, this report serves as a reminder that careful rethinking of both pedagogy and course sequence design in introductory courses is critical.

Negative Association between Transfer and Persistence

Transfer students are less likely to attain a degree and to remain enrolled in college than students who stay at the college of original enrollment. Another NCES study, using data drawn from the 1996/01 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:96/01) and the 2000/01 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B:2000/01), demonstrates the negative relationship between transfer and degree attainment within six years. Kathleen Peter's and Emily Forrest Cataldi's *The Road Less Traveled: Students Who Enroll in Multiple Institutions* (NCES 1005-157) notes that a substantial, and increasing, number of students are transferring between institutions. These students are typically independent, older, and have more persistence risk factors (51). Among students beginning their academic careers in community colleges who continue their studies toward a bachelors degree at one other institution, there are "about 8 years between initial enrollment and bachelor's degree attainment, while students who enrolled in three institutions took about 11 years, and those who attended four or more

institutions took an average of 14 years to do so” (40). The persistence rates of CUNY transfer students are consistent with the national data. Indeed, since students at risk are more likely to attend multiple institutions, and since CUNY’s elimination of remedial education at the four-year colleges requires that many students begin their academic careers at community colleges before transferring into a four-year college, the structure of the University appears complicit in the factors leading students to spend more time achieving a bachelors degree.

Financial Aid

Students who receive grants (need-based or not) in their first year are six percent more like to persist than nonrecipients, according to Donald E. Heller’s, *Informing Public Policy: Financial Aid and Student Persistence*, published by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in 2003. Heller’s work, supported by the Lumina Foundation, found that financial aid “is positively related to higher rates of persistence” and that this “holds true even in those multivariate analyses that control for many of the other factors related to persistence and degree attainment” (6).

A 2004 report from the Pell Institute—*Student Retention and Graduation: Facing the Truth, Living with the Consequences*—offers these sobering statistics from the College Board: Costs for four-year public institutions represent 6% of income for students from high-income families, 19% for middle-class families, and 71% of total income for low-income families (12). CUNY students, many of whom come from low-income families, are especially implicated here.

With 33% of CUNY students facing a household income of less than \$15,000 annually, the need for financial aid is even more dire. In fact, the students’ need to qualify for government loans often dictates their selection of courses and thus affects their paths through college. With financial need driving academic choices, CUNY must turn its attention to ways to provide economic support to its students.

Need to Improve Connections Between K-12 and Higher Education

The increasing numbers of students who aspire to college degrees expose a disconnect between K-12 and postsecondary education. As Andrea Venezia, Patrick M. Callan, Joni E. Finney, Michael W. Kirst, and Michael D. Usdan point out in the September 2005 report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *The Governance Divide: A Report on a Four-State Study on Improving College Readiness and Success (National Center Report #05-3)*, high schools in the United States have not been designed traditionally to focus on college preparation (8). This creates a huge gap in expectations between high school students and institutions of higher education, since a high school diploma has not traditionally been designed to provide college preparatory outcomes for most students. *The Governance Divide* makes a compelling case for building new organizational bridges between K-12 and postsecondary education in order to ensure that high school students are both aware of and prepared accordingly for college, through both curriculum and assessments (29). These goals argue for “high-quality data systems that

span the K-16 curriculum” (32), providing a more seamless record of academic progress, a continuous data set for longitudinal analysis, and diagnostic assessments to inform student educational choices. Consequently, accountability systems should also more accurately reflect “the reality of students’ educational paths” (30), connecting K-12 and higher education as another means of helping smooth the path of student academic progress beyond high school. Most recently, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education released four “policy levers” that states can use in reforming K-16 education: connecting secondary and postsecondary student expectations and assessment, reforming state education finance systems to unite secondary and postsecondary budgeting, creating data systems that span the K-16 continuum, and connecting accountability for K-12 and postsecondary education.

Drawing together K-12 and higher education should be an imperative within CUNY since its mission is so closely connected with educating not only students from the New York City public schools but also their teachers through the University’s schools of education. CUNY’s new initiative to educate future high school teachers of math and science—the Teacher Academy—proceeds in this spirit.

Women Increasingly Represented in College

Women are enrolling in college and attaining degrees at higher rates throughout the United States than men. In *Gender Differences in Participation and Completion of Undergraduate Education and how They Have Changed over Time* (NCES 2005-169), Katherine Peter and Laura Horn point out that: “Between 1970 and 2001, women went from being the minority to the majority of all undergraduates, increasing their representation from 42 percent to 56 percent of undergraduates” (1). Although women have been traditionally overrepresented in at-risk populations in the student body (19), better-prepared women are beginning to enroll in college and attain degrees at higher rates than men (34). The rise throughout CUNY of women being admitted and attaining degrees once again parallels the national data. Some attention, however, must be paid to the fact that, “despite these changes, as of 2001, women were still less likely to be employed full time 1 year after graduation. . . . Considering bachelor’s degree recipients who were employed full time 1 year after graduation in 2001, the average earnings for women were lower than for men. Further, the gender gap in salaries may, in fact, be widening” (43).

First Generation and “Minority” College Students

In her July 2005 report, *First Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at Their College Transcripts* (NCES 2005-171), Xianglei Chen utilized the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS) of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/00) to find that first generation students “are consistently associated with lower bachelor’s degree completion rates even after controlling for a wide range of interrelated factors, including students’ demographic backgrounds, academic preparation, enrollment characteristics, postsecondary course taking, and academic performance” (53). The effects on academic performance last

throughout these students' academic careers, meaning that the lack of parental educational achievement that influences early educational achievement as well as eventual academic preparation for higher education continues to be felt throughout postsecondary education. This combination of risk factors affecting first-generation college students suggests that institutions like CUNY, with large numbers of such students, will continue to confront significant demographic challenges to persistence and degree attainment that may not be easily addressed through postsecondary remedial interventions, concentrated—as they usually are—at the beginning of a student's college career.

An April 2005 Educational Policy Institute three-part study, *Latino Students & the Educational Pipeline* describes in considerable detail the many risk factors affecting enrollment in higher education, persistence and degree attainment that face Latino students. Drawing on data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study started in 1998 (NELS:88/00), this study's authors—Watson Scott Swail, Alberto F. Cabrera, Chul Lee, and Adrian William—describe the significant hurdles in terms of educational legacy faced by Latino students, making them much more likely, as a group, to begin their postsecondary educations in community colleges, despite the fact that beginning their academic careers in a four-year institution would increase their chances of attaining a bachelors degree by 29 percent (III, 14). CUNY's highly represented Latino population makes this data particularly pressing.

It is a commonplace of higher education studies that black men are seriously under-represented in colleges and universities. According to the February 2, 2006 edition of *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, the nationwide college graduation rate for black men stands at 34% (45% for black women), as compared 61% for white students. At CUNY, the numbers are even more dire. According to the December 5, 2005 edition of *Inside Higher Education*, Medgar Evers is 92% black, but only 23% of those students are black men. CUNY's Black Male Initiative, created in response to this situation, is garnering a great deal of national attention. As an institution where only 29% of students identify as “white,” CUNY has an obligation to help redefine the “minority” experience in higher education nationally.

Commonalities among Colleges with High Graduation Rates

Institutions that successfully educate large numbers of low-income students provide useful insights into what colleges can do to improve retention and degree attainment. Lana Muraskin and John Lee's 2004 Pell Institute-sponsored report *Raising the Graduation Rates of Low-Income College Students* identified numerous commonalities among such colleges. Intentional academic planning, small classes, special programs, a dedicated faculty, educational innovation, modest selectivity, and a retention policy that has “set ambitious goals well beyond current performance” (3) appear conducive to success for low-income students. CUNY has employed many of these approaches for years, but Muraskin and Lee provide a reminder of the efficacy of these efforts as well as testimony to their continuing value for this University.

The *What Works in Student Retention?* reports confirm these claims, adding that an emphasis on academic advising, learning communities, and centers/labs in reading, writing, and mathematics are hallmarks of high-performing two- and four-year institutions.

A recent Education Trust report by Kevin Carey, *One Step from the Finish Line* (January 2005), notes that universities with high graduation rates “have invested considerable time, energy, and resources in analyzing their internal data to better understand patterns of student progression, uncovering chokepoints and hurdles to completion” (20). A similar commitment at CUNY is evident in the work of this Task Force and in the new Campaign for Student Success, which builds upon it. Also key, Carey reports, is the need to “put strong emphasis on academics” and invest in “innovative approaches to teaching and learning” (20). Carey notes that successful universities align “the incentives and rewards that motivate faculty with the academic needs to students” (20). According to this national report, universities determined, like CUNY, to raise graduation rates, could benefit from an increasing correlation between tenure and promotion and excellence and innovation in teaching.

Academic Advising and Links between Student Services and Academic Programs

In identifying the practices responsible for “the greatest contribution to retention,” the *What Works in Student Retention* reports list academic advising as the most effective practice for both two-year and four-year public institutions. CUNY must respond to this data and improve the availability of academic advising. Habley and McClanahan call for “advising interventions with selected student populations, integration of advising with first-year programs, and increased advising staff” (6).

Administrative, Faculty, and Student Engagement

A recent Carnegie publication, *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons* (2005), by Pat Hutchings and Mary Hubar, calls for increased attention to teaching and pedagogy as subjects of scholarly research and as a unifying core within colleges and universities. Hutchings and Hubar imagine the entire faculty operating together in a conceptual “community of practice,” to borrow a phrase from social philosopher Etienne Wenger. CUNY has now joined the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) project, which “seeks to support the development of a scholarship of teaching and learning that: 1) fosters significant, long-lasting learning for all students; 2) enhances the practice and profession of teaching; 3) brings to faculty members’ work as teachers the recognition and reward afforded to other forms of scholarly work” (Carnegie website).

The “teaching commons” is marked by faculty and administrative engagement in college life, broadly construed. The annual Community College Survey of Student Engagement, by the Community College Leadership Program at The University of Texas at Austin, studied 152 community colleges in its survey, *Engagement by Design: 2004 Findings*. They recommend four strategies to increase faculty, student, and administrative

engagement, all reflective of the findings of this Task Force: “engage early, engage often,” “stress academic advising,” “emphasize effective developmental education,” and “redesign educational experiences” (6-9). CUNY’s focus on first-year experiences, its efforts to link student services with academic programs, its ongoing efforts to unite developmental and mainstream education, and its interest in curricular renewal and innovative pedagogy all mark it as a place invested in student engagement and student success. The national literature on engagement reinforces the need to continue in this research and experimentation.

Postscript:

At the time of completion of this report, the U.S. Department of Education published *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College* (Clifford Adelman, Feb. 2006). A replication of an earlier study, *Answers in the Tool Box*, this longitudinal study followed a nationally representative cohort of students through high school and college. Many of the report’s conclusions reinforce the findings printed here. The five most influential factors on bachelor’s degree completion are:

- 1) Garnering credits in the first year
- 2) Avoiding excessive no-penalty withdrawals from courses and no-credit repeating of courses
- 3) Utilizing summer terms
- 4) No delay of entry into college
- 5) A rigorous and full high school curriculum

The Toolbox Revisited is especially pertinent for CUNY because it demonstrates that the degree completion gap between whites and Asians on the one hand and African Americans and Latinos on the other may be narrowed by attention to these five areas. Adelman reports that “minority” students are over-represented in the student populations that are negatively affected by these factors. Focused attention to these areas, including meaningful cooperation between secondary and postsecondary schools and the involvement of academic advising, could result in significantly increased retention rates for CUNY’s students.

Appendix
Student
Demographics and
Retention Data

Office for Institutional Research and
Assessment, 2005