

Hearing of the New York City Council Concerning ASAP
Selma Botman's Testimony
December 12, 2007

Thank you, Chairman Barron, and all of the members of the New York City Council Higher Education Committee, for this opportunity to share with you some of the recent accomplishments of the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, a visionary initiative at the City University of New York that City funding has made possible.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce my fellow CUNY representatives: Annalisa Lewis, Director of the ASAP Program at LaGuardia Community College in Queens; Richard Rivera, Director of the ASAP Program at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn; and Kevin Jones, a current ASAP student at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in downtown Manhattan. We are here today to provide you with a clear picture of what this program is doing to transform community college education at CUNY and to express our gratitude for the support that the City has provided to enable this vital work.

Statistics tell us that, nationwide, only about 20% of community college students complete their degrees within six years. We are not satisfied with this, and cannot be complacent about it. If our community colleges function as holding patterns rather than as forces for educational and economic advancement, these institutions fail our students—jeopardizing not only our economy, but also their futures.

Nationally, no one has yet focused on creating new models for community college education. Last year, we at CUNY took a step back. We reflected critically on and reassessed our own community college system. We

asked ourselves what factors hold our own community college students back. We examined census data to anticipate job demands for the coming decades to identify fields with long-term value to the economy and substantial earning potential for our graduates.

In ASAP, we have developed a resource-rich model program that removes traditional barriers and provides the support that community college students need to accelerate the course to graduation. As of Fall 2007, ASAP is running at all six CUNY community colleges. Ms. Annalisa Lewis and Mr. Richard Rivera will describe some of the program resources to you in fuller detail, but this brief sketch should give you a sense of ASAP's ambitious design:

- Block scheduling condenses coursework so that students can balance school, work, and family obligations.
- Tuition waivers (which cover the gap between financial aid awards and tuition fees), free metro cards, and use of free books reduce financial stress on students.
- Small classes, close-knit cohorts of students who move through the program together, tutoring, and intensive academic advising make for an enriched learning environment in which students feel a sense of belonging, focus, and motivation.
- Job development specialists help ASAP students find relevant employment to support themselves while in school and provide career counseling to prepare students for the transition to careers or higher studies for which they have been well-trained.

We have set a very high bar for ourselves. In Fall 2007, we exceeded our 1000-student target by enrolling 1132 young men and women. Our goal is

to graduate 50% of these students in three years and 75% in four years. Though minority males are underrepresented in American higher education, almost half of our ASAP students are young men (46% male to 54% female), and about 80% of our students are from minority groups. Approximately 75% of ASAP students receive financial aid. Students have elected majors in such fields as Liberal Arts, Business Administration and Management, Community and Mental Health, Computer Engineering Technology, Radiologic Technology, and Early Childhood Education. The program is still young, but its students have developed strong community bonds and its faculty members are deeply engaged and enthusiastic. Mr. Kevin Jones is here to give you his own personal insight into the promise that the ASAP program represents to him and to his peers.

We would like to thank Mayor Bloomberg for including ASAP in the City's broader anti-poverty work through the Center for Economic Opportunity, and for their confidence in funding the program \$6.5 million in the initial year. It is our hope that the evaluation process will highlight positive outcomes that will impact all City institutions.

ASAP funding is a continuation of all the good work and support that comes from the City Council. We are grateful for the Council's support of our community colleges, our Black Male Initiative, and many other programs. And ASAP is a natural progression in our attempt to create successful pathways for all students.

What we achieve and learn through the ASAP model, we will apply to the broader community college population at CUNY. This positions us to become a key model for a transformed approach to community college education nationwide. Through our combined efforts, CUNY and the City

of New York will remain national leaders in urban public higher education. We at CUNY thank you and your colleagues on the City Council most sincerely for your wisdom and foresight in supporting our important mission.



Office of Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Testimonial by Richard Rivera
Director of ASAP Program at Kingsborough
Role and Importance of Advisement

December 12, 2007

Good afternoon Chairman Barron, esteemed Council members, and Executive Vice Chancellor Botman. I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on the importance that advisement plays in ensuring ASAP's success. My goal in this brief presentation is to answer two important questions: what is advisement and why is advisement critical to student success in ASAP?

In its simplest form, advisement is the creation and ongoing development of a healthy relationship between an advisor and student. The advisor is a facilitator, coach, teacher, counselor and mentor.

This relationship is built and based on the following pillars:

1. **Mutual expectations:** The advisor and student come to an agreement of what is expected from each other. The role of the advisor is to help the student articulate his or her own goals and work with the student to develop a plan of action.
2. **Clear lines of communication:** The advisor and student agree to communicate (i.e. catch up and check in) both formally and informally on a regular basis. At Kingsborough, students participate in a weekly student development class led by their advisor. Outside the classroom, advisor and student communicate via email, calls and scheduled /as well as non-scheduled meetings a few times a month.
3. **Stability:** The student and advisor work together throughout their entire experience. This allows them to get to know each other and develop their relationship over time. This also enables the advisor to observe habits (both good and bad) and share these observations with the student.
4. **Support:** The advisors role is not to do for students but to help students learn to do for themselves. This role falls between "just listening" and letting the student share what's going on in his or her life and includes referring the student for additional services such as counseling.

In short, The Advisors at Kingsborough Community College provide academic advisement to motivate and maximize development and growth to a diverse group of students. They assist students in gaining knowledge and awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as well as the skills that are necessary for academic and personal success.

So now to the second question - why is advisement key to our success? Advisors are the bridges and safety nets to ensure student success. Advisors give a face to the college. The college experience becomes personable very quickly. Students are not just a designated number on campus.

ASAP has incorporated Block Programming as another tool to help its students, in which the advisor's role is critical. First, the advisor works with the student to design a schedule that meets the student's interests and needs. Secondly, the advisor works closely with faculty communicating regularly via bimonthly meetings, phone calls and emails. When students miss class or fall behind in work, faculty members contact the advisor. The advisor follows up with the students to identify any issues and develop a corrective plan. By communicating with the advisors on a regular basis and receiving their feedback, faculty have developed a greater appreciation for the many challenges students face outside the classroom. A byproduct of block programming and the advisement model is greater communication and collaboration amongst faculty. We are witnessing faculty working together across disciplines to develop curriculum and communicate their observations on shared students.

For many of our students, advisement is a new cultural experience in learning how to communicate. They begin to learn how to act rather than react. As the relationship between advisor and student matures, the advisor is better able to address the personal and academic needs of their students. Referrals to counseling, tutoring and other services are taken more seriously. Students become more willing to work on strengthening their weaknesses. Trust is earned on both sides and with greater trust, students become more open to new ideas.

Many of our students come from underserved communities and struggle with a lack of confidence which they mask as indifference. I have come to realize that it is not only the academic challenges but also the personal challenges that ultimately determine if students succeed or fail. Advisors can assist in both of these realms.

I am consistently reminded and humbled by the fact that people's lives can be extremely hard. For our students to be successful both in school and life they need to learn to be resilient. The advisement and cohort model of ASAP is a strategy for students to develop this skill. Our students develop resiliency in the company of their peers by supporting each other and learning from one another. Our students develop resiliency by connecting with positive adults, their Advisors, who have high expectations for their students and most importantly, encourage their students to search from within identify and pursue their dreams.

Thank you for your time.

Borough of Manhattan Community College

In my attempt to express my appreciation and the importance of ASAP, I would first like to congratulate mayor Bloomberg and his administration, Chairman Charles Barron, CUNY Executive Vice Chancellor Botman and the members of the committee for creating the fund I call the "second chance" fund. My reason for re-naming ASAP is because it gives students who have not put their best foot forward in their previous academic career, a second chance at getting a formal education. Traditional scholarship opportunities make it mandatory for your academic performance to be in the top 1% of your graduating class. Unfortunately, the problem with this requirement is that students at this stage of their lives develop differently. While one student is able to focus and excel due to the privileges of his or her environment, another may not be as fortunate as such. The door of opportunity has opened and that door is ASAP. I want to mention a few opportunities that ASAP offers:

- ASAP has an excellent administrative team, a team that cares about the success of the students.
- Professors take your growth in the course personally
- ASAP provides help for those students who may not be able to grasp information as quickly as their fellow students with one-on-one tutoring.

- Tutors who share in-class experiences are better able to relate to students with day-to-day operations
- Students don't have to worry about how they will be able to commute to class because of the MetroCard system.
- ASAP provides students with all of their course materials, including textbooks.
- All courses are reserved. You don't have to worry about them closing.
- Job assistance is provided.
- Small class size ensures that no student is left behind.
- The many seminars, such as Dress for Success, Resume Writing, as well as guest speakers from business who come with current market expertise, provide out of class enrichment.

As an active student of ASAP, I feel as if I am part of an exclusive club, a club that wants their students to do nothing more than succeed in life. I count my blessings everyday to be able to be amongst a team and faculty with great leadership and vision. According to General Colin Powell, "The City University of New York is the underprivileged student's Harvard". ASAP gives every disadvantaged young adult the opportunity to make a mark in this great country we call home—the United States of America.

Learn more at collegeboard.com



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Targeting Time Toward Degree

This semester, more than 1,000 students at City University of New York's six community colleges are entering into a new program with unusually clearcut benchmarks. If 50 percent earn their associate degrees and find employment within three years and 75 percent do so in four years, the program is, by its own definition, a success.

Only 21 percent of students who enroll in a community college in New York City end up receiving such a degree — a percentage that is slightly lower nationally and that typically is quite low at institutions like CUNY's community colleges, where most are enrolled part time and many come from disadvantaged backgrounds. But those behind the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, as the initiative is called, are confident that their approach will keep students more on track.

Each of the system's community colleges accepted students into ASAP based on their high school record, score on the CUNY placement test and need for a "minimal amount of remediation." Those who required some remediation took basic skills workshops over the summer to prepare them for degree credit courses this fall.

The idea is to provide a free education. Students eligible for federal or state financial aid receive additional ASAP funding to pay the balance of tuition and college fees. In order to be eligible for these benefits, students have to apply for financial aid. ASAP students are also provided their textbooks for free. Tuition at CUNY's community colleges is typically \$1,400 per semester for a New York State resident attending full time, and \$120 per credit for those going part time.

Students are grouped by academic interest, with the majority choosing to focus on business or liberal arts, according to Selma Botman, CUNY's executive vice chancellor and university provost. Each college offers its own curriculum, and students for the most part take classes together with a cohort of roughly 25 others.

The courses are offered in a block schedule, grouped together either in morning or afternoon sessions, so that it's convenient for students who work or have family obligations. Students generally take four courses at once, and academic advisers lay out for students a mock five- or six-semester schedule so they can see what it will take to graduate on time.

Throughout the year, students meet with tutors, a full-time adviser and “job developers” who offer placement advice. Beyond the goal of getting students to graduate within three years (ahead of the national norm of four to five), Botman said she’d consider the program a success if graduates go for their bachelor’s degree or take a job that increases their salary.

“Higher education literature suggests that students who go through college on their own may at times hit bumps in the road,” Botman said. “Never mind the class being challenging; colleges are big bureaucracies. When students hit the bump they can give up. But if they are taking classes together, having academic advisement together, they bond with one another. It’s an important connection.”

John Davis, director of the ASAP program at Bronx Community College and a professor of biology, said he’s already noticed the camaraderie building among the 115 students enrolled in the program. Of that group, the average age is roughly 19, and the gender ratio is about equal. That’s much different than the college’s overall student population, which tends to be late 20s and be much more skewed female.

At Bronx, students are grouped into business administration, radiologic technology and liberal arts and sciences, with the latter track being the most popular. Students take general education courses all together, and the liberal arts students can decide among a range of options, including political science, criminal justice and speech pathology.

Davis said he wants instructors to speak on a bi-weekly basis to the faculty advisers about each student’s performance.

“That’s pretty tight control — something you don’t normally see at a community college,” Davis said. “It may sound like micromanagement, but it’s appreciated by students who are right out of high school.”

The ASAP program, unveiled in the spring, is funded over three years at \$20 million overall by the Center for Economic Opportunity out of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s office. It is one of many programs being funded by that office in an effort to reduce poverty in the city.

It’s unclear whether new sources of funding would allow another cohort would start at the six colleges next year. Bronx has also started a health sciences academy — a near-duplicate of the ASAP program — that focuses on getting nursing and nuclear medicine technology students out in three years or less.

“That’s an indication of the college’s interest in establishing something long term,” Davis said.

— Elia Powers

*The original story and user comments can be viewed online at
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City University fast-track program gets you a college diploma, ASAP

BY TANYANIKA SAMUELS
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

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Barnuevo for News

Joanna Castro, 26, is a first-year student in the new accelerated degree program.

For Bronx Community College student Joanna Castro, balancing school and work used to be a difficult juggling act.

Now her school schedule revolves around her work schedule.

Castro is one of about 1,100 students enrolled in City University's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), launched this fall at six community colleges.

"It's going really well," said Castro, 26, of Mott Haven.

"It's very flexible with my schedule. Now I'm able to get in three classes in the mornings, then go to work in the afternoons."

The program was designed to help community college students graduate in two to three years, compared with the national average of four to five years.

Associate degree programs typically are a two-year commitment, but many students take longer due to family and work obligations, said John Davis, who runs the ASAP program at Bronx Community College.

"These are huge responsibilities for community college students, responsibilities that can get in the way and keep them from staying and graduating," he said.

An estimated 60% of the city's community college students have full-time or part-time jobs.

ASAP students study in blocked classes - in morning, afternoon or evening sessions.

They can receive special mentoring and career counseling, as well as loaned textbooks, laptops and free MetroCards.

Major state and federal financial aid is also available.

Admission is based in part on high school transcripts and performance on the CUNY placement exams.

The brainchild of CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, the program was announced last spring as part of Mayor Bloomberg's efforts to combat poverty.

Bloomberg has committed \$20 million over the next three years to fund the experiment.

Students at Hostos, Borough of Manhattan, Kingsborough, LaGuardia and Queensborough community colleges are also participating in the program.

For BCC student Daniel Torres, the ASAP program means he'll reach his goal of being a high school music teacher that much faster.

"I'm hoping to get my degree in a year and a half," he said.

Castro, who works in the MRI department at New York-Presbyterian Hospital Columbia, said that, without the program, her degree might have been delayed indefinitely.

A waiting list for the radiology program at BCC meant she would have had to wait a year or longer to get in. With ASAP, her spot was guaranteed.

She expects to graduate in two years.

"It would have been time wasted," she said. "But now I'm able to get my degree that much faster."

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