

FOR THE RECORD

**Testimony of
Carmelita Blake, EdD**

at

**Education Committee
New York City Council Hearing**

**Re: Oversight:
Examining the Challenges and Demands
on Local Community Colleges**

**February 28, 2008
Committee Room
City Hall, New York, NY**

As an educator I commend the Education Committee for conducting this hearing on **Examining the Challenges and Demand on Local Community Colleges.**

The challenges and demands facing the CUNY community colleges are embedded in the notion that community colleges continue to be the gateway post-secondary education for traditional age students and adults. These challenges/demands include:

- Cost of strengthened programs in language skills and developmental education
- Low percentage of degree completing students
- Low percentage of degree transfer students to baccalaureate programs
- Decreased number of full time faculty
- Decreased funding for financial aid
- Increased diverse student enrollment
- Funding for capital improvement

The influx of foreign born students, increased enrollment, and policy changes in graduation requirements, have created pressure on the system to provide strengthened programs in language skills and developmental education. Although these demands are not unique to the CUNY community colleges, the impact of these demands cannot be minimized. The burdens on the system, increased cost, increased need for additional faculty, and the fact that there is no guarantee that remediation has a positive

outcome on completing the degree creates a dilemma. Contrasting research has shown that the probability of completing the degree and transferring to a four year degree is positively related to remedial courses for the older student but not for the younger student.¹

Although the majority of our community college students may not be following this particular pathway, completing a four year degree, there are those whose gifts, ambitions, and motivations place them squarely among the students who could be best served by transferring to one of NYC's major research universities. Yet if that student happens to be an adult student, the mechanisms for facilitating that transition are few. This is not just a NYC issue, it is a national issue for adult students for whom the transition is often impossible because of traditional university course scheduling, the limitations of financial aid for working adult students, and the lack of partnerships with community colleges to counter the phenomenon of "transfer shock". We are indeed fortunate at NYU to have a McGhee Division to address just such concerns.

Additionally, criticisms abound relating to the use of degree completion and transferability as true indicators of student success. However, the reluctance to accept this measure of accountability can be attributed to the reasons why some individuals attend community colleges. Namely, students enroll in community colleges to get a promotion in their present job, to learn a specific skill or that students who enroll in community colleges bring barriers to academic success such as deficient academic preparation, and family and work responsibilities. Students feel that some are unsuccessful because as the cost of community colleges increases, government shifts the expense to students.

To be sure, community colleges serve an important role as the nation faces shortages in sectors and employers realize that community colleges are powerful partners in helping businesses stay competitive. However, if New York City is committed to closing the equity gap and maintain CUNY's innovative, and flexible community colleges the impact of enrollment pathways and enrollment milestones on educational outcomes² must be addressed at the governmental and administrative levels. The community colleges need assistance to build on its strengths to facilitate the persistence of highly motivated students to meet the goal of graduation and beyond.

This can be accomplished by

- Changing the financial aid policy
- Providing incentives to community colleges to find ways to help students raise degree aspirations
- Improving the public school system
- Strengthening the concurrent enrollment of high school students in community colleges
- Encouraging community colleges to increase partnerships with four year colleges to make transferability less burdensome
- Encouraging community colleges to create more partnerships with business and healthcare organizations

- Encouraging more research on enrollment pathways such as remediation and enrollment milestones such as the number of credits successfully completed at given periods following admission
- Providing more funding so that community colleges can engage in capital improvement and hiring of full time faculty

1, 2. Calcagno, J, Crosta, P, Bailey, T. & Davis, J. (2006). Stepping stones to a degree: The impact of enrollment pathways and milestones on community college student outcomes

Testimony of
Eduardo J. Marti
President
Queensborough Community College/CUNY
Before the
Higher Education Committee
New York City Council

February 28, 2008

My name is Eduardo J. Martí. I am the President of Queensborough Community College.

Usually we come to you asking for financial help; today, however, I am asking for your leadership.

I am grateful for the opportunity to spend some time with you sharing an important topic: the ease of transfer of students from community colleges to four-year colleges within CUNY and, more specifically, about the articulation of courses from programs of study offered at the community colleges to programs offered by the four-year colleges.

I am grateful that this topic was highlighted as one of the recommendations made by the Higher Education Commission, appointed by Governor Spitzer, that called for the community colleges to "better align their curricula and standards so that graduates who wish to enter a four-year SUNY or CUNY school can easily and successfully do so." Clearly, this is a matter of state-wide concern.

This issue gets to the heart of our mission of access and excellence. We cannot permit student to enter our University, without meaningful articulation because this raises false expectations and can have a deleterious effect on our students' progress.

Many times one hears of transfer students who cannot graduate from a four-year college in time because the courses from the community college are not accepted toward their degree. This happens even though the University has taken a clear position regarding the transfer of students from community colleges to four-year colleges.

The CUNY Board of Trustees' policy guarantees transfer of a minimum of 60 credits toward the baccalaureate. Students are required to complete only the difference between the 60 credits granted and the total normally required for a Bachelor degree. Associate degree completers also satisfy all the general education requirements. This sounds great. However, it is the fine print where the students get caught.

The policy also says that **transfer students may be asked to complete additional courses in disciplines required by the baccalaureate program but not required by the associate program. Upper division course work is not recognized unless appropriate pre-requisites have been satisfied.** What this really means is that students can be under the illusion of transferring 60 credits when, in reality, the programs do not match and, **therefore**, they end up having to take additional courses in order to graduate. When programs of study do not match and students have to take additional courses to graduate from the four-year college, their TAP eligibility can be affected. Currently, the State has a limit of 10 semesters for eligibility. If courses have to be repeated or new courses have to be taken to fulfill the requirements of the major, in addition to any remedial courses already taken, community college students can easily run out of TAP and not be able to complete the baccalaureate.

This problem affects many students. In an elegant working paper prepared for the Commission by Dr. David Crook and Dr. Samuel Lavander, they point out that just over one-third (36.2%) of the 8,159 students who transferred into a CUNY baccalaureate program in Fall 2005 came from CUNY's community colleges. Also, using National Student Clearinghouse data, it was found that the total transfer rate for 2005-06 graduates to CUNY four-year colleges was 59.9% for AA/AS and 35.6% for AAS. So, we are not talking about the ease of movement from community college to four-year college; we are talking about the ease of transfer of courses.

New York has taken a laissez-faire approach. In the aforementioned paper, a 2001 review of State policies on transfer and articulation shows that:

- 23 states had created a common core of required courses
- 8 states had established a common numbering system for courses in their two- and four-year systems.

While not recommending a legislative mandate, the Commission took a firmer stance by recommending to the Governor that:

“ Presidents of the colleges must be held accountable for establishing mechanisms under which faculty, within each discipline and across sectors, strengthen course-to-course articulation with a goal to full system-wide articulation of comparable courses and seamless transfer of AA and AS students into parallel programs by 2011-12.”

I am proud to report that CUNY, through its Comprehensive Plan, is already acting on this recommendation. Vice Chancellor Botman is setting up a small group of provosts dedicated to identifying the issues around articulation and developing solutions - the goal being to get faculty to sit down, share syllabi and educational outcomes assessments and agree to accept courses from sister campuses. This is a good step, as it preserves the sanctity of the faculty's ownership of the curriculum while pressing for change. CUNY continues to be a national model in the area of access and excellence.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important matter.

Talking Points on "Bridging the Colleges"

Judith Summerfield

February 28, 2008

- **Who I am:** University Dean for Undergraduate Education, Professor of English at Queens College; at CUNY Central for past five years: created programs to improve quality of undergraduate education. Coordinated Undergraduate Education: focus on critical junctures for students, freshman year; transfer experiences; General Education Project.
- **Focus on one project today**—example of the kind of attention we are paying to transfer issues. Bridging the Colleges, which grows out of the Gen Ed Project, faculty development aimed at bringing greater understanding across CUNY about how best to teach our students - located in the Bronx, bringing together faculty from Lehman, BCC, and Hostos.
- This project, now in its third year, involves faculty from three colleges who are teaching general education courses. They are working to understand the experience of transfer students moving within CUNY.
- They meet in a professional development seminar and study each other's experiences with the students they share, they visit each other's campuses and each other's classrooms, *exchange syllabi, students' writing, exams*
- They are trying to align their expectations of students and of each other, across campuses. This year they have matched faculty closely by discipline (English, Bio and Chem, Math, Nursing). What does the Intro to Biology encompass at the community college and senior college? What material do students struggle with? How can we learn from each other?
- Project has a lot of promise: faculty chosen through a competitive selection process; they present at University-wide conferences. Supported locally by their provosts, and funding through CUE. Similar project between Queensborough and Queens College, between LaGuardia and Baruch, looking at Freshman English and Baruch and the community colleges, aligning pre-BBA courses and Business Majors at Baruch.

What they have learned so far:

- Remarkable similarities among students at the community and senior colleges: a CUNY-ness, perhaps.
- Understanding of how similar the teaching challenges we face.
- Need system-wide changes to reduce unnecessary complications facing students as they transfer from one college to another.
- Establish liaisons among colleges to facilitate inter-campus cooperation in teaching and learning.
- Concentrate on making the process of transfer and transition more transparent and supportive.
- Increase opportunities for team teaching across campuses.
- More specific analysis of student skills and expected levels of competency.
- More CUNY faculty need this kind of experience.

Next year, plan is to bring students into the project, perhaps in study or research groups, which will bring back reports to the students' own campuses, perhaps to assist in orientation to help fellow students make the transition.

At the University, Office of Academic Affairs, provosts are gathering to identify and address issues of articulation. At the highest levels of authority, we're on the case. One goal is program to program articulation; another is general education articulation, and another is to look at what we can make better for students on the ground.

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

Examining the Challenges and Demands on Local Community Colleges

February 28, 2008

Dr. Lenore Beaky
Professor of English, LaGuardia Community College
Vice Chair, University Faculty Senate

Good afternoon, Councilman Barron and colleagues, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you about our CUNY community college students and faculty. Recently I have had the opportunity to testify before this committee on the need for more full-time faculty, improved transferability for students, and capital funding, so I won't repeat those concerns.

This hearing is focused on the "challenges and demands" on our community colleges. For our community college students, there are two major challenges:

- **tuition;**
- **preparedness for college-level work.**

For our colleges, there are also two major challenges:

- **adequate funding;**
- **improving retention and graduation rates.**

On **tuition**, the Commission on Higher Education revealed that New York State's community colleges charge tuition far above the rates of what it designated as our peer states, including California, Texas and Florida. The New York State average in 2007, according to the Commission, was \$3074, compared to a national average of \$2272. CUNY is even higher: according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2005, CUNY community college tuitions and fees for 2005-2006 ranged from \$3066 at BMCC to \$3104 at Hostos.

TAP reimburses many of our students, of course, but many are left out of TAP financial aid, and as I've said to this committee, the current structure of TAP is disconnected from the real lives and needs of our students. I would repeat my urging that STAP (Supplementary TAP for remedial or developmental coursework) be restored so that students who have developmental learning needs do not exhaust their TAP eligibility before they finish their studies. I would also urge that Part-time TAP be expanded and that there be no 24-credit waiting period for it (this makes no educational sense whatsoever). Per-credit TAP should also be tried out. As it is, many students are either denied TAP, exhaust their TAP prematurely, or are forced to take more credits than they should really take, simply to qualify for financial aid, often without good academic results for the students.

On **preparedness for college-level work**, we know that nearly all of our community college students need at least some developmental work in reading, writing, math, or a combination of

these. This is because our community colleges are “full opportunity” or Open Admissions schools, the last in CUNY. Yet the success of our senior colleges is dependent upon the success of our community colleges. This issue of preparedness creates one of the major challenges for our schools themselves.

For our community colleges, **funding** remains one of our major challenges. My own president, Gail Mellow, has documented the shocking disparities between funding for public community colleges and public senior colleges in the United States: \$9183 per capita for community college students versus \$27,973 per capita for senior college students.

Those are national figures. Here in New York City, the City’s Preliminary Budget presents the usual dance: cutting the Safety Net program, eliminating the Vallone Scholarships, eliminating the Black Male Initiative, LaGuardia’s own Veterans Program, omitting ASAP and College Prep. We hope that the Council will be as successful in restoring these programs as it has been in the past, if they remain off the budget, but this is a dance which distracts us from the possibility of real funding reform.

As for **improving retention and graduation rates**, these are goals which are intimately connected with the challenges for our students, their financial and academic needs. For students to stay in school and graduate, they need more than moral and cultural support.

Let me describe how I teach writing, and how I would like to teach writing. I have 28 students in my class. This is about twice what my profession says is a maximum number of students for a writing class. Why does this matter? The way that I teach writing now is entirely different from the way I taught it thirty years ago, but always there is writing and reading, the writing and reading of the student and the writing and reading of the teacher. There are essays, of course, but there are also multiple drafts of essays, there are prewriting exercises, study questions, reflective postwriting exercises, discussion board posts in the course management software Blackboard, there is tutoring in our Writing Center and in student-teacher conferences, there is whole-class discussion and small-group discussion of the readings, films, videos that make up the content of the course. Many of our students start out at LaGuardia with very little English; as adults, their first language will always be their first language. (I know this from my own struggles with French at Alliance Francaise.)

My students should **all** have individual dons or tutors, the way they do at Oxford. I imagine my students climbing the stairs to some set of “rooms” in an Oxford college, spending time having philosophical discussions with their tutor. Alas, this does not happen with our students. It’s amazing how much individual attention I can give to each of my 28 students, and how hard it is for our perpetually underfunded Writing Center to give attention to all the students who flock to it.

Yet it’s worth it, of course, as documented in the wonderful new book by David Lavin and Paul Attewell, *Passing the Torch: Does Higher Education for the Disadvantaged Pay Off Across the Generations?* Their answer is yes—it pays off for the students who make it to college, who make it through college, and for the children of those students. But the words “Challenges and Demands” barely begin to describe how hard and how amazing is the work of students and teachers at CUNY.



**TESTIMONY OF THE
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP (NYPIRG)
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

REGARDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2008

Cheryl Lynch, NYPIRG Chairperson

Good afternoon. My name is Cheryl Lynch, and I am Chairperson of the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG).

NYPIRG is New York State's largest student directed non-partisan research and advocacy organization. Our Board of Directors is comprised of college and university students elected from the 21 campuses with NYPIRG chapters, including three CUNY community colleges—Borough of Manhattan Community College, Bronx Community College, and Queensborough Community College. We also have a chapter at SUNY's Nassau Community College. At all of our chapters we teach organizing and communications skills and provide students opportunities to learn while working on issues—like affordable higher education—that matter to them as New Yorkers and as students. Our student board of directors is concerned about the rising cost of higher education, so we are pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you today.

Higher education is becoming more and more important in our economy and our culture. Years ago, one could compete in the job market with just a high school diploma. But today, most jobs need employees with some additional education or training and a Bachelor's degree is often an employer's minimum requirement. With the rising costs of four-year colleges and universities, community colleges offer an affordable entryway to further education and an affordable way to get job training. Now, even community colleges are becoming more expensive. The national average increase of tuition and fees at community colleges over the last two years is 4.2 percent, not far behind the national average increase for four-year public institutions at 6.6 percent.¹

Textbook Prices and Community College Students

Sky-high textbook prices are another reason why attending community college is becoming so expensive. In 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) pegged the average cost of

¹ College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2007*, p. 6.

books and supplies for first-time full-time students at a two-year school at \$886.² If book prices continued to rise at the rate reported by the GAO (about six percent per year, or twice the rate of inflation) in the years since the report's release, then the average student price is now over \$1000 per year—that's equivalent to 36% of CUNY community college tuition.

NYPIRG's recent "sticker shock" project offers some anecdotal evidence of this continuing trend. At the beginning of this semester we stationed volunteers at tables outside of their campus bookstores and collected photographs of students and their textbooks bills. During the project we routinely encountered students who paid more than \$550 for books. That is a lot of money, especially when you pile it on top of students' other expenses.

Increasing Fulltime Faculty at Community Colleges

Community colleges are often the best alternative for students with work obligations or complicated family situations. All students—but these students in particular—benefit from smaller faculty-to-student ratios and more face time with their teachers. The Governor, the state Commission on Higher Education, the unions, SUNY and CUNY all say that our two public university systems need additional full-time faculty. We wholeheartedly agree.

From a community college student's point of view, efforts to improve full-time to part-time faculty ratios at CUNY are especially welcome. Full-time faculty are available for longer office hours, make better mentors and are more likely to become invested in the campus community. Part-time adjuncts often just don't have the time to do all that, no matter how talented or dedicated they may be. Also, more full-time faculty means more course offerings, which will help ensure that students who have to schedule courses around their work schedule or their family obligations have timely access to required courses.

In regards to full-time faculty, CUNY have been tightening their belts for a long time. The Professional Staff Congress notes that CUNY has 1 full-time faculty member for every 35 students enrolled today compared to 1 for every 21 students enrolled in 1972, and that it would take 2,300 hires to meet CUNY's goal of 70%.³ Last fall, CUNY requested funding enough to increase their full-time faculty ranks by 500 but the request was met because of the projected deficit. **Students need the continued vigorous support of the Council in order to spur the kind of investment we need to address the fulltime faculty shortage at CUNY.**

Restoring and Increasing Operating Budgets for Community Colleges

As you know, the formula established in state law for the funding of community colleges requires the state to pay up to 40% of a community college's operational budget.⁴ It also caps the student's share at 33% and leaves a share of 26.7% to the county.⁵ Currently, the City provides 36.6% of the CUNY community colleges operating budget.⁶ Beyond that, at the community colleges the City also funds the Safety Net Program, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), a

² United States Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Requesters, *College Textbooks: Enhanced Offerings Appear to Drive Recent Price Increases*, July 2005, page 2, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05806.pdf>.

³ Professional Staff Congress, *Proposal for Restoring CUNY Excellence* at www.psc.cuny.org/HigherEdCommission.htm.

⁴ New York Education Law, §6304a.

⁵ New York Education Law, §6304d.

⁶ Figure provided by staff at the City University of New York University Budget Office

Veteran's Resource Center and other programs. All told, the City supplied 37.1% of all the funds spent on operating the community colleges and supporting community college students in 2007.⁷

Unfortunately, every year the State "not withstands" its own funding requirements and shortchanges community colleges. Even accounting for increases in the last two state budgets, the State's 2007-08 contribution of \$2,675 per Full Time Equivalency (FTE) still amounts to less than 40%. This shortage has led to tuition hikes at the SUNY community colleges. Thankfully, the City has stepped up and community college tuition at CUNY has remained stable at \$2,800.

Students were especially thankful when the Council stepped up last year. By adding \$36.7 million in restored cuts and additions to the Mayor's Executive Budget, you helped keep college within reach of many of CUNY's community college students. Unfortunately, you may have to do the same thing again this year.

As you know, the Governor's Executive Budget included \$50 less funding per full time equivalent (FTE) for the state community colleges. SUNY has already said that such a cut could lead to another round of tuition hikes at their community colleges.⁸ We can't let that happen at CUNY or at SUNY for that matter. NYPIRG, and many other organizations, have been urging the legislature to restore and increase funding for our underfunded community colleges. We ask you to join us in this effort.

The softening economy has been hard on cities and states, but it also been very hard on students and families. Keeping college affordable—especially our community colleges that do so much to strengthen our workforce and empower students of the most modest means—must remain a priority for the City and the State. **That's why I'm here to urge you to fight for every State dollar CUNY so desperately needs and, if the need arises, to restore any cuts to Community College funding contained in the final State Budget or the City's Executive Budget.**

In Closing

We know this year's budgets will be tight but that should not stop us from taking important steps to strengthen and improve CUNY. As always, we are thankful for the Council's firm commitment to improving the quality of higher education while protecting affordability and accessibility, and we look forward to working with you to invest in CUNY because we know doing so will stoke the economy, strengthen our workforce, attract new business and investment, and ultimately improve the tax base.

⁷ City University of New York University Budget Office and the Office of Facilities Planning, Construction and Maintenance, *New York City 2007-2008 Adopted Budget Preliminary Analysis*, June 22, 2007.

⁸ Parry, Mark, Times Union, "SUNY Leader Decries Budget Cuts," January 31, 2008.