

Early Outcomes Report for
City University of New York (CUNY)
Accelerated Study in
Associate Programs (ASAP)

Executive Summary

November 2009

Report Prepared by





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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg created the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) in December 2006 to implement the City's ambitious and innovative anti-poverty strategy. Since then, CEO has launched a range of new anti-poverty programs, policy proposals, and research projects that represent nationwide best practices and cutting-edge ideas.

The Center's research and development activities focus on several areas including: the design, implementation, and evaluation of innovative programs, the creation of an alternative measure of poverty for New York City, and piloting the nation's first conditional cash transfer program, Opportunity NYC.

CEO's approach includes targeting distinct populations and employing evidence-based strategies. Programs focus on the working poor, young adults, and young children under the age of five, and strategies range from workforce and asset development to interventions for at-risk and disconnected youth.

CEO is committed to evaluating all its programs and policies. The purposes of the evaluations are to collect and report data on program implementation, progress, and outcomes. These findings inform policy and program decision-making within CEO and the agencies that sponsor the programs.

To support this work, CEO manages an Innovation Fund that includes both public and private resources.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2007 the City University of New York (CUNY) received funding from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) to establish the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). The ASAP program is designed to help students earn their Associate's degree as quickly as possible, with a target of 50% of students graduating within three years. In fall 2007 ASAP began with a pilot cohort of 1,132 students who were deemed fully skills proficient in reading, writing, and math. The fall 2007 ASAP cohort included 319 students (28%) who had been conditionally accepted in summer 2007 while they completed any required developmental courses in order to join the program.

ASAP students entered into full-time study in Associate's degree programs closely related to future employment prospects and transferability to 4-year colleges. The program is located at all six CUNY community colleges: Borough of Manhattan Community, Bronx, Hostos, Kingsborough, La Guardia, and Queensborough.

The ASAP program brings together a set of comprehensive services and incentives that have been identified as being helpful to improving the retention, performance, and graduation rates of community college students (Bailey and Alfonso, 2005; Kuh, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007; Tinto, 1993). Financial incentives include tuition waivers for financial-aid eligible students and free monthly Metrocards and use of textbooks for all students. Key program elements include required full-time study, a consolidated course schedule, cohort grouping by majors, small class size, comprehensive advisement, academic, and career development services delivered by full-time ASAP staff, and a range of special programs.

Community college students often have multiple responsibilities, and face significant barriers to full-time study and degree completion. According to the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA), 18% of CUNY community college students are supporting at least one child, most of whom are under five years of age; 33% of CUNY community college students spend at least six hours per week providing care for other people; 66% of CUNY community college students work at least part time; and 75% are from households with annual incomes below \$40,000. While the vast majority of CUNY community college students begin their studies on a full-time basis (87% for the fall 2002 cohort), nearly half, 45%, drop to part-time status in one or more subsequent semesters, significantly reducing the likelihood of degree

completion. Analysis of 6-year CUNY institution graduation rates¹ reveals that for the fall 2002 cohort of first-time, full-time freshmen at the six CUNY community colleges, only 26% of these students graduated six years later.

To determine the impact of the ASAP program, CUNY used a constructed comparison group evaluation method to compare ASAP students' outcomes against a group of similar students. The comparison group from fall 2006 who met the same criteria that ASAP students were required to meet in fall 2007 in order to join the program (See Table 1). An additional comparison group from fall 2007 who met the same criteria was created for socioeconomic analysis. CUNY and CEO have used this framework to measure the performance of ASAP students over the last two years, along with other administrative data and student surveys. Metis Associates, one of CEO's independent evaluators, provided a review of this method and the criteria for comparison group matching (see Appendix I in the full report). Their comments helped to refine this analysis of early program impacts.

OUTCOMES

Having just completed its second year ASAP is well on its way to realizing its ambitious goals of graduating at least 50% of its original 2007 cohort within three years. As of August 2009, a total of 341 ASAP students from the original cohort have graduated with an Associate's degree, representing a 30.1% 2-year graduation rate. A comparison group of similar students from fall 2006 had a 2-year graduation rate of 11.4% (see Table 1). An additional 325 students are currently on track to graduate by September 2010, which would result in 3-year graduation rate of nearly 60%.² Fall 2006 comparison group students had a 3-year graduation rate of 24%.

¹ Institution graduation rates are calculated as the percentage earning a degree at the college of entry any time prior to the start of the subsequent fall term(s). Source: CUNY OIRA.

² Three-year graduation projections are based on analysis of students' current credit accumulation, GPA, academic history of course completion, and CUNY Proficiency Exam (CPE) outcomes; successful completion of the CPE is required for graduation from a CUNY community college.

2-Year Graduation Rates for Original ASAP Cohort Compared to Comparison Group Students													
College		Total		Summer 2008 Graduation		Fall 2008 Graduation		Spring 2009 Graduation*		Summer 2009 Graduation		Total 2-Year Graduation	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Fall 2007 Original ASAP Cohort Students</i>													
BMCC		249	0	0.0	2	0.8	26	10.4	31	12.4	59	23.7	
Bronx		118	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	7.6	11	9.3	20	16.9	
Hostos		82	0	0.0	0	0.0	17	20.7	4	4.9	21	25.6	
Kingsborough		247	1	0.4	8	3.2	77	31.2	28	11.3	114	46.2	
LaGuardia		208	0	0.0	1	0.5	25	12.0	34	16.3	60	28.8	
Queensborough		228	0	0.0	1	0.4	31	13.6	35	15.4	67	29.4	
TOTAL		1,132	1	0.1	12	1.1	185	16.3	143	12.6	341	30.1	
<i>Fall 2006 Comparison Group**</i>													
College		Total		Summer 2007 Graduation		Fall 2007 Graduation		Spring 2008 Graduation		Summer 2008 Graduation		Total 2-Year Graduation	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
BMCC		496	0	0.0	5	1.0	33	6.7	6	1.2	44	8.9	
Bronx		63	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.6	1	1.6	3	4.8	
Hostos		41	0	0.0	1	2.4	5	12.2	3	7.3	9	22.0	
Kingsborough		404	1	0.2	10	2.5	37	9.2	24	5.9	72	17.8	
LaGuardia		289	0	0.0	7	2.4	7	2.4	22	7.6	36	12.5	
Queensborough		498	0	0.0	3	0.6	25	5.0	13	2.6	41	8.2	
TOTAL		1,791	2	0.1	26	1.5	108	6.0	69	3.9	205	11.4	
*Includes spring semester at BMCC, Bronx, Hostos and Queensborough and first 12-week spring session at Kingsborough and LaGuardia.													
**Fall 2006 full-time Associate students who started the term with 12 or fewer credits, are proficient in reading, writing and math, are not enrolled in developmental courses, are not enrolled in College Discovery, are residents of NYC, and are enrolled in majors offered to ASAP students in fall 2007.													
Date: September 18, 2009													
Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment													

As of fall 2009, more than 90% of ASAP 2-year graduates indicated plans to transfer to 4-year colleges to work towards a Bachelor's degree. According to an exit survey of graduating students, 75% of ASAP 2-year graduates planned to attend a CUNY senior college and 15% planned to attend other 4-year colleges.³ The remaining 10% of ASAP 2-year graduates planned to enter the workforce, with the vast majority indicating plans to return to college to continue their education in the near future. On the 2008/09 annual student survey and at end-of-year celebrations, ASAP graduates overwhelmingly credit the financial incentives and comprehensive advisement support as key reasons why they were able to complete their Associate's degrees in record time. One student from LaGuardia, who immigrated to the United States less than four years ago without speaking English, completed his Associate's degree in less than two years with

³ ASAP graduates' enrollment at CUNY senior colleges will be verified once fall 2009 enrollments are finalized in the CUNY Office of Institutional Research Database (IRDB). A request will be submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse in winter to verify enrollments at non-CUNY colleges.

ASAP and transferred to a CUNY senior college. He indicates that “ASAP has given me all the tools I need to work, learn, and achieve my goals. But the most important lesson that they have taught me is the ability to remain focused and to believe in myself.”

Based on high 2-year graduation rates for the original cohort, ASAP admitted 431 new students across all six community colleges for fall 2009. In order to determine if the ASAP model could be similarly successful for slightly less academically prepared students and to ensure that students with the greatest financial need were served, new skills proficiency and income thresholds were established. The fall 2009 ASAP cohort is primarily made up of students who require up to two developmental courses in reading, writing, or math⁴ and who are Pell eligible or have family income within 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. Entering students are also required to meet existing ASAP selection criteria including New York City residency, no more than 12 credits previously attained, and full-time enrollment in an ASAP-approved major. Fall 2009 ASAP students will receive the same incentives and comprehensive services as the original fall 2007 cohort with the goal of completing an Associate’s degree within three years. Adjustments were made to several key program areas to improve student success including standardization of the mandatory ASAP Summer Institute, adoption of a weekly group advisement seminar at all colleges, and program-wide staff training and professional development, among others.

Thanks to successful outcomes, ASAP has received outside funding to increase enrollment, expand evaluation capacity, and support students in continuing their education. In July 2009, ASAP received a 2-year grant for \$190,000 from the Jewish Foundation for the Education of Women (JFEW) to launch the ASAP Transfer Scholarship Program. The program provides scholarships and targeted advisement for high-performing ASAP students with financial need who matriculate to select CUNY senior colleges: Baruch, Hunter, Queens, or Brooklyn in fall 2009.

In August 2009, ASAP also received a 3-year grant for \$3.7 million from the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust to expand the program at Borough of Manhattan and Kingsborough Community Colleges in spring 2010, conduct a 5-year random assignment study of the program at both colleges led by MDRC, and support the Transfer Scholarship Program.

In November MDRC received a grant for \$1.1 million from the Robin Hood Foundation to support the ASAP random assignment study and to expand the study to include LaGuardia

⁴ The fall 2009 ASAP cohort is comprised of 75% students with developmental course needs and 25% of students who completed developmental courses over the summer and were fully skills proficient by the start of the fall semester.

Community College in fall 2010. Between the three colleges, a total of 900 students will be recruited to participate in the study, who will all be low-income students who require developmental course work and meet ASAP income criteria (See Next Steps section of the full report for more detailed information).

ASAP has also been identified by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg as a key component of his new “Gateway to the Middle Class” community college initiative, announced in August 2009. The \$50-million initiative has a goal of significantly increasing the number of city residents that graduate from CUNY community colleges by 2020. Mayor Bloomberg has indicated an intent to invest up to \$27 million to support ASAP, which would permit the program to serve up to 2,000 students over the next four years.⁵

PROFILE OF ASAP GRADUATES

The ASAP program began in fall 2007 with 1,132 students across CUNY’s six community colleges. The ASAP cohort is generally representative of CUNY community college full-time students by gender and ethnicity, but they are slightly younger and have higher incomes. As seen in Table 2, in all demographic subgroups as well as admission type, ASAP outperforms comparison group students in graduation rates. The overall 2-year graduation rate for ASAP students is 18.7 percentage points higher than that of the comparison group: 30.1% vs. 11.4%.

Analysis of graduation rates by ethnic group reveals that both ASAP and the comparison group are proportionally graduating students across all racial groups, although ASAP is graduating a larger percentage within each race category. Hispanic students, followed closely by Black students, graduated at lower rates than White and Asian students. When examining student graduation rates by age, both ASAP and the comparison group are graduating older students (24 or older) and continuing students (those who began with 12 or fewer college credits) at the highest rate.

Of all ASAP continuing students who entered the program, 39.3% graduated by August 2009 compared to 29.5% of first-time freshmen. For the comparison group, 13.1% of continuing students graduated by August 2008 compared to 9.2% of first-time freshmen. It is very likely that continuing students in both ASAP and comparison group are graduating at the highest rate because they have entered into the ASAP program or into the comparison group with accumulated, although no more than 12 credits.

⁵ Source: Mike Bloomberg’s Gateway to the Middle Class. <http://www.mikebloomberg.com/middleclassgateway.pdf>.

TABLE 2						
Graduation Rates of ASAP and Fall 2006 Comparison Group Graduates						
Graduation Rates based on Original ASAP Cohort						
ASAP (Fall 2007)¹				Comparison Group (Fall 2006)²		
	Original Cohort	ASAP Graduates Through August 2009		Original Cohort	Comparison Group Graduates Through August 2008	
	N	N	%	N	N	%
Headcount	1,132	341		1,791	205	
2 Year Graduation Rate	~~	~~	30.1	~~	~~	11.4
College						
BMCC	249	59	23.7	496	44	8.9
Bronx	118	20	16.9	63	3	4.8
Hostos	82	21	25.6	41	9	22.0
KBCC	247	114	46.2	404	72	17.8
LaGuardia	208	60	28.8	289	36	12.5
Queensborough	228	67	29.4	498	41	8.2
Gender						
Male	516	120	23.3	838	68	8.1
Female	616	221	35.9	953	137	14.4
Race/Ethnicity³						
American Indian/Native						
Alaskan	2	2	100.0	3	0	0.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	116	53	45.7	279	43	15.4
Black	357	90	25.2	481	40	8.3
Hispanic	421	114	27.1	523	48	9.2
White	236	82	34.7	505	74	14.7
Age⁴						
18 or younger	660	210	31.8	628	65	10.4
19 or 20	251	62	24.7	646	74	11.5
21 to 23	96	28	29.2	296	31	10.5
24 or older	125	41	32.8	221	35	15.8
Pell⁴						
Receiving Pell	633	199	31.4	983	130	13.2
Not Receiving Pell	499	142	28.5	808	75	9.3
Admission Type						
First-Time Freshmen	852	251	29.5	660	61	9.2
Transfer Students	107	22	20.6	400	48	12.0
Continuing Students	173	68	39.3	731	96	13.1
¹ Excludes 37 students who were permitted to join ASAP in spring 2008: 11 at Hostos, 6 at Bronx, 6 at Kingsborough, and 14 at LaGuardia permitted to "shadow" the ASAP cohort in fall 2007.						
² Fall 2006 full-time Associate students who started the term with 12 or fewer credits, are proficient in reading, writing and math, are not enrolled in developmental courses, are not in College Discovery, are residents of NYC, and are enrolled in majors offered to ASAP students in fall 2007.						
³ Ethnicity imputed by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research for students who did not select an ethnicity or selected "other" on their CUNY application.						
⁴ Based on data at time of entry. For ASAP students based on fall 2007 semester and for comparison group students based on fall 2006 semester.						
Date: September 21, 2009						
Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment						

ASAP PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The CUNY ASAP program assists students in earning an Associate's degree within three years. Students take most of their classes in a consolidated morning, afternoon, evening, or weekend block schedule to help them balance school, work, and domestic responsibilities. ASAP students take 12 credits each semester, making them eligible for more financial aid, if applicable, and positioning them for graduation within three years. The program also provides comprehensive financial incentives and support services to ensure student success. A graduate of the Hostos ASAP program now at a CUNY senior college shares the following about her ASAP experience: "ASAP gave me the opportunity to pursue my education full time. I was scared, because I also work full time. I thought when I started that it was not going to be easy and that I might drop out and not make it, but ASAP gave me a chance to prove myself. Thanks to ASAP, my dreams are coming to pass."

ASAP graduates are qualified for positions in a range of career fields, including health, hospitality, and education. These areas have been identified by New York State's Department of Labor as having favorable employment prospects in the New York City region with median salaries of at least \$40,000. Liberal Arts and business majors are also offered at all colleges, both of which generally allow ease of transfer to 4-year colleges for completion of a Bachelor of Arts or Science degree.

ASAP provides several incentives to remove financial barriers to full-time college study. Any gap between financial aid award and tuition and fees is waived so there is no cost of attendance for financial-aid eligible students. Nearly 84% of ASAP students received Pell or New York State Tuition Assistance Plan (TAP) for the 2007/08 academic year.⁶ All students receive free monthly Metrocards and free use of textbooks for their classes.

ASAP students are grouped in cohorts based on their majors. During the first year of the program, students take 3-5 of their classes in cohort blocks with ASAP students and 2-4 out-of-block courses with the general college population. Class sizes usually do not exceed 25 students, allowing for more regular interaction with classmates and faculty. All students also participate in the ASAP Seminar, a weekly non-credit advisement program facilitated by ASAP staff. In year two, students take required classes with small cohorts of 5-7 ASAP students and the general college population in addition to the weekly ASAP Seminar.

⁶ Analysis is limited to students who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

ASAP advisors meet with their assigned caseload of students at least twice a month. Advisors provide comprehensive academic, social, and interpersonal support and are considered one of the most valued elements of the ASAP program by students and college leadership. Frequent contact between faculty and advisors has ensured that every student requiring support is referred to tutoring or counseling in a timely manner. ASAP career and employment specialists⁷ on each campus also meet with students and deliver workshops on interviewing, job skills, and career planning. Students who require employment are placed in an appropriate job situation to allow them to take a full-time course load. Advisors and career and employment specialists work together to provide all students with support in transferring to a 4-year college and/or entering the work force as they near graduation.

ASAP also provides dedicated tutoring at all sites by qualified undergraduate or graduate students. ASAP tutors provide general subject area support and conduct regular review sessions for particularly challenging courses such as statistics or advanced chemistry. The number of tutors at each college varies based on ASAP enrollment. Struggling students are mandated to attend weekly tutoring for a minimum number of hours to help them improve their grades.

Other program elements include arts and cultural programs, trips to 4-year colleges, a student leadership program, graduate interns through the Hunter College School of Social Work, social events, and celebrations of student success, among others. Close and regular contact between ASAP students, staff and faculty has led to a strong sense of community within the program. A student at Hostos says “the ASAP staff is like a second family to me. I’m more than ‘one of their students’. They care for me as a person.”

ASAP EVALUATION

Two comparison groups of students similar to ASAP students were created from similar 2006 and 2007 CUNY community college students. The 2006 constructed comparison group (N=1,791) is used to evaluate performance, retention, and graduation. Because socioeconomic data are not available for CUNY students who were enrolled in 2006, a 2007 comparison group (N=1,692) was constructed to evaluate socioeconomic status. Both comparison groups are restricted to non-ASAP students who met the same criteria that ASAP students were required to meet at the beginning of the program. Comparison group students were full-time Associate students who started the fall semester with 12 or fewer credits, were proficient in reading,

⁷ Formerly job developers; at the recommendation of college ASAP staff, job developers now have the working title of career and employment specialists to help students better understand the broad range of career services they provide.

writing and math, were not enrolled in developmental courses, were residents of NYC, were enrolled in majors offered to ASAP students in fall 2007, and were not enrolled in College Discovery, a special opportunity program with similar services to ASAP.⁸

The initial analyses between ASAP students and the 2006 comparison group revealed that the two groups differed on important demographic variables, such as age, admission type, and Pell receipt (see Table 2 in the full report). In spring 2009 ASAP initiated propensity score matching (PSM) to ensure an even more rigorous analysis by creating a more comparable subset of students from the current fall 2006 comparison group. PSM is a statistical procedure that allows the prediction that a subject in the treatment or comparison group will be assigned to the treatment group based on matching variables, such as demographic variables, that are measured prior to the participants' joining the treatment group. Through this procedure a subset of 625 matched pairs was obtained.

Although the PSM analysis was deemed successful in terms of eliminating differences between ASAP and comparison group students, the method significantly reduced the number of students in the matched sample. This raised obvious concerns regarding generalizability of the findings. Based on conversations with CEO and Metis Associates, CEO's external evaluator, a decision was reached to attempt optimal full matching, which allows for most students to remain in the analysis using a one-to-many matching approach. Optimal full matching successfully improved the matching results over PSM, where fewer than 2.5% of the ASAP students were lost. With the more robust matched samples CUNY ASAP was able to confirm that most of the results obtained in all prior analysis, including PSM, held after optimal full matching was employed.

The results in Table 3 summarize the results of optimal full matching and indicate that ASAP students had an average 19.9 percentage point higher 2-year graduation rate than the comparison group. In the final matched sample the ASAP students' 2-year graduation rate was approximately two and-a-half times higher than that of the comparison group. In other words, for every one comparison group student who graduated within two years, 2.5 ASAP students graduated. ASAP students are also retained at a significantly higher rate than the comparison group, with statistical mean difference of 11.9 percentage points between the two groups when looking at retention at college of entry, and a statistical mean difference of 6.4 percentage points in retention in ASAP where ASAP students had re-enrolled in the ASAP program in their third semester. The final significant outcome between the two groups was third-semester cumulative

⁸ ASAP students were not permitted to join both ASAP and College Discovery.

credits where the ASAP students had earned an average of 3.7 more credits than the comparison group students after completion of their third semester.

Table 3						
Outcomes of ASAP and Comparison Group Students After Optimal Full Matching						
		ASAP		Fall 2006 Comparison Group		Statistical Mean Difference
		Observed Means				
		N*		N*		
2-year Graduation	%	1,104	30.2	1,242	12.1	19.9**
1-year Retention in College	%	1,104	80.0	1,242	65.5	11.9**
1-year Retention in ASAP	%	1,104	75.2	1,242	65.5	6.4**
3 rd Semester Cumulative Credits	Mean	889	39.3	880	36.5	3.7**
3 rd Semester Cumulative GPA	Mean	894	2.68	888	2.62	0.06
*Sample size is based on students who are included in the analysis after optimal full matching procedure.						
**Significant at .05 level						
Date: October 19, 2009						
Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment						

NEXT STEPS

Random Assignment Study with MDRC: CUNY ASAP has commenced recruitment for a five-year random assignment study of the program led by MDRC. The study will begin in spring 2010 at Borough of Manhattan and Kingsborough and is funded by the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust. A recent award from the Robin Hood Foundation through MDRC will allow inclusion of LaGuardia, where students will be recruited for fall 2010. The study will provide further analysis of program impact on low-income students who require developmental course work.

Additional New Cohorts: Spring and Fall 2010: The four colleges not participating in the random assignment study are also recruiting for spring 2010 with a continued focus on low-income students with developmental needs. Hostos, Bronx, La Guardia and Queensborough Community are currently recruiting 150-170 students to return the cohort to its original 1,000-student enrollment. All colleges will continue recruiting through spring semester with the goal of admitting 350-400 new students for fall 2010.

Annual Student and Exit Surveys: CUNY ASAP is preparing its annual student and exit surveys for a December administration at all colleges. Survey findings, including aggregate and subgroup analysis, will be presented to colleges, University leadership and CEO in early

February. Survey findings will also serve as a key discussion topic for the annual ASAP staff retreat, which will be held in February 2010.

Tracking of Students at Four-year Colleges: Because of high 2-year graduation and transfer rates, ASAP will initiate tracking of students at four-year colleges. ASAP students attending CUNY senior colleges will be tracked using outcomes measures that are consistent with current retention, performance and graduation analysis. ASAP students will be compared against similar CUNY community college transfer students at CUNY senior colleges. ASAP will also submit a request to the National Student Clearinghouse, which will provide retention and graduation data on ASAP graduates attending non-CUNY 4-year colleges. Initial requests will be submitted in early 2010.

Wage and Income Analysis: ASAP is working with CEO to initiate collection of wage and employment data for ASAP students and graduates through the New York State Department of Labor (DOL). CUNY will secure student consents and submit the request to the DOL. De-identified student data would then be provided to CEO for evaluation purposes. Consent forms and a data sharing agreement are currently being drafted with plans to seek student consents by January 2010.

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