

CUNY Campaign for Student Success: A Plan in Four Parts

This document describes a four-part plan to improve the conditions for student success at The City University of New York. In recent years, the University has made substantial progress in creating new academic programs, raising academic standards, hiring new faculty, lifting retention and graduation rates, and engaging the faculty in a spirited re-examination of general education. The CUNY Campaign for Student Success challenges faculty and administrators to build on these accomplishments by re-examining practices, reflecting on the messages communicated, and re-evaluating established structures.

At the heart of the Campaign is a focus on “culture,” on scrutinizing the messages, assumptions, structures, and services—the business—of the college, in every academic and administrative corner of the University from recruitment to admission and matriculation, from freshmen year through graduation. This is not just the job of a single group but must be embraced by the faculty, staff, and student leaders. Its goal is to improve student achievement and to raise graduation rates. In order to achieve those objectives, it is essential that we develop new, effective curricular and instructional strategies to help students who are struggling academically, especially in developmental and gateway courses. In this collective enterprise, we must set clear expectations, send consistent messages, and make sure we connect the parts. We owe it our students to do everything possible to help them make the most of their educational opportunity. Success must belong to them.

The Campaign is a collaborative enterprise between the Central Office and the colleges and between administrators and faculty. The Office of Academic Affairs is committed to working with the colleges to facilitate the sharing of information, targeting of resources, and clearing of roadblocks that impede student progress. The Campaign presupposes that each college is different and that each college may craft a set of strategies that builds on existing programs and strengths. And yet, there may also be common approaches that address widespread problems.

Institutional research can help us identify the indicators of success as well as provide information about why students leave college. We intend to establish a think tank, where faculty, academic and student affairs administrators, and members of my senior staff can come together to study and discuss these issues and develop effective practices. We will use the new OAA website for disseminating information about effective practices, compelling data and research, and our progress.

If cooperation between the Central Office and the colleges is important, close collaboration between administrators and faculty is crucial. The success of the Campaign depends on our ability to work effectively with faculty governance and other faculty groups toward a common goal.

1. Changing the Culture: Communicating Expectations of Success

At every step of their academic careers, students must receive the consistent and clear message that we expect them to succeed as college students. They should read the message in promotional materials, hear it again from admissions counselors, have it reinforced in orientation sessions and from advisors, perceive it every day in their interactions with faculty, and sense it in every office they enter. They should understand what it means to be a student, what the expectations of success are, and how they can achieve their goals.

We are all aware of the many challenges that our students face in their lives. It is our responsibility to work with them to develop effective strategies that enable them to respond to those challenges in ways that are most conducive to success.

Your Campaign should advance the following objectives:

- At every step of their academic careers, students must receive a consistent message that, if they dedicate themselves to their studies, they can succeed at CUNY. This is a message that must be delivered by full-time faculty, adjuncts and administrative staff at every college in the University.
- In our baccalaureate programs, students should hear the message that they are expected to take a full course load of 15 credits each semester, and that they should use summers, the winter session, evenings and week-ends to help them complete their degrees. Timely graduation is academically sound, cost-effective and provides the most successful route to career success. Part-time study should be discouraged, when possible; however, when it is selected as an option, students should be provided with a pathway designed to enhance their chances for completing their degrees in good time.
- In associate programs, students should be required to begin developmental coursework upon entry, preferably in the summer before the freshman year, and continue with basic skills work until they achieve skills proficiency. Full-time study should be encouraged, whenever possible.
- Completing their studies should be our students' central priority. The Campaign should reinforce this value. Student success should be recognized and celebrated publicly with receptions, awards, and honors programs.

2. Improving Teaching and Learning: Faculty Development, Pedagogical Innovation, and Academic Support

We have identified a number of promising initiatives to reform curriculum, particularly in general education, to enhance faculty development, and to explore innovative pedagogical approaches. These include augmenting learning communities and freshman, sophomore, and transfer year programs, strengthening WAC, and supporting centers for teaching excellence.

Many CUNY colleges currently have learning communities in place or in formation, and the national literature on learning communities indicates that they can work to create more coherence, especially in the general education curriculum. They also reinforce the sense of "belonging" to a campus and a community that can help us to retain students on our commuter campuses. Some have experimented successfully with integrative learning and block scheduling. The Campaign might include:

- Expanding the size of freshman learning communities as rapidly as resources allow.
- Establishing learning communities for transfer students.
- Experimenting with the inclusion of mathematics courses in block programming to encourage early completion of math course work and collaborative learning.

In addition, we must engage faculty in a process that systematically assesses the developmental sequences in our associate programs and the gateway courses in both associate and baccalaureate programs, with the following priorities in mind:

- Failure rates are particularly high in mathematics courses, both in our developmental sequences and in key credit-bearing courses. Consonant with the recommendations of the Math Study, each college should work closely with mathematics departments and other departments or centers with appropriate pedagogical expertise in teaching and learning to review the alignment of courses within sequences, to re-assess pre-requisites, pedagogy, and academic support. We should determine which strategies and curricula work for students and try to replicate them.
- Together with faculty, we should identify effective teaching techniques – both inside CUNY and outside the University – in developmental and gateway courses and disseminate them.
- We must systematically review the prerequisites for gateway courses with high failure rates.

Carefully targeted academic support services are vital to student success and fundamental to the Campaign. Each college should survey its own landscape in the area of academic support, and consider the following questions:

- Are students who experience academic difficulty being identified accurately and quickly?
- How are these students being referred to learning centers or tutors, and is this process effective? Is their progress being monitored after the referral?
- Are colleges effectively using already available online tutorials and other technology as resources for student learning?
- Is student academic advisement linked with career and personal counseling? What is the relationship between general academic advisement and advisement in the major?

Faculty development is already a priority at many of our colleges, and should be a central feature of the Campaign. We should intensify our efforts to:

- Engage the Centers for Teaching and Learning in a discussion of effective teaching practices in mathematics, writing, and gateway courses at CUNY,
- Identify or recruit effective teachers, especially in mathematics, who can reinvigorate discussions about teaching in the departments,
- Design and implement development opportunities for adjuncts and mentoring experiences for new faculty,
- Make full use of student evaluations to assess teaching effectiveness,
- Offer faculty training in the use of technology to enhance student learning.

3. Coordinating Services for Students: Scheduling, Advising, Navigating Degree Requirements

We have identified numerous initiatives to improve communication with students, implement Degree Works, and expand advising services, extending them to transfer and other under-served students. We have much to learn from one another, and the Office of Academic Affairs will make it a priority to facilitate an exchange of information on this front.

Every college should engage in an intensive review of its efforts to help students to navigate the college system and complete their degrees. The review and subsequent planning process should be conducted with the following criteria in mind:

- Each college should have a strategy for clearly presenting University, college and degree requirements. Attention should be paid to general education requirements since they can be particularly confusing to students and advisers. Information should be easy for students, faculty, and advisors to locate —and preferably be placed in a central location on the college website.
- Each student should have regular customized advising opportunities beginning at initial admission and continuing through his or her academic career.
- Students should receive an email account at registration, and email should become the primary medium for targeted communications outside the classroom.

- All students – freshmen and transfers – should develop an academic plan early in their career at CUNY. This process will be facilitated by the implementation of Degree Works. This technology and other monitoring and alert systems can assist in advisement, and will be particularly important in reaching students who are not on track for timely degree completion or who are having academic difficulties.
- Colleges should use the capabilities of Degree Works to develop information about demand for particular courses. This information should be mined to maximize course availability through better planning. Students must have the courses they need to advance toward graduation.
- Colleges should review not only their system for identifying off-track and at risk students but also their mechanisms for referring students to appropriate services and following up.
- Colleges should maximize the available advising resources by:
 - consolidating and coordinating decentralized advisement services where feasible,
 - developing peer counseling programs,
 - developing online modes of communication among groups of students,
 - inducing faculty to spend more time advising students.
- Colleges should create opportunities for students to better utilize weekends, evenings, and on-line access to courses as a means to further their academic options and increase their success. Careful attention should be devoted to providing these students with a full college experience.

4. Assessing the Campaign

The success of the Campaign must be measurable. Data should be used to identify those students who are at risk, to evaluate the effectiveness of courses and services, and to guide improvement. Every college should devote resources to sustain a well-developed assessment program and to disseminate the results to faculty and administrators.

Assessment will be a cooperative endeavor between the colleges and the Office of Academic Affairs. Over the next several months, the Office of Institutional Research will develop a series of indicators and reports that will assist you in tracking your progress in the areas outlined above. At the same time each college should formulate its own objectives for each component of the Campaign as well as a set of outcome measures.

Role of the Central Office

The Office of Academic Affairs will work cooperatively with the colleges on the CUNY Campaign for Student Success. The Central Office will:

- Facilitate the sharing of information about effective teaching practices,

- Target available resources for academic support and advising,
- Develop indicators to track progress,
- Re-examine academic policies, including testing, that may be impeding the success of our students,
- Review admissions procedures, including the timing of allocations, the direct admissions process, and multiple admissions,
- Make investments in technologies that directly support and enhance student success.

We have much to do, and much to learn from each other.