Water Fountains at CUNY

Healthy CUNY¹

Summer 2011

¹ For more information, go to www.cuny.edu/healthycuny.
Introduction

The Healthy CUNY Initiative is a campaign to make CUNY the healthiest urban university in the United States by 2016. A component of the Initiative is to increase healthy food and beverage options at CUNY. Water is the healthiest, and cheapest, beverage option available for CUNY students, faculty and staff and Healthy CUNY encourages CUNY to ensure that all campuses offer access to clean and functioning water fountains and water bottle-filling stations. Data collectors assessed the status of water fountains at fourteen CUNY campuses according to six criteria:

1. Functional for drinking
2. Functional for filling a water bottle
3. Water pressure
4. Presence of trash or dirtiness
5. Taste of water
6. Temperature of water

Data collectors assessed between 13 and 25 water fountains on twelve CUNY campuses. Most campuses reported relatively functional water fountains but a number, most notably College of Staten Island and Kingsborough Community College, received low marks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>No. of fountains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronx Community College</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brooklyn College</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNY Graduate Center</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Staten Island</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostos Community College</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunter College 68th St.</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunter College Brookdale</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingsborough Community College</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaGuardia Community College</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lehman College</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York City College of Technology</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensborough Community College</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. Functional for drinking

The first assessment tests the functionality of water fountains to determine if it is possible to drink from the water fountain safely. The functionality of the water fountain is measured on a three-point scale:

1 = Fully functional, possible to drink safely
2 = Partly functional, water comes out but is difficult to drink
3 = Not functional, your mouth would have to touch the fountain in order to drink or no water comes out

Chart 1 below reports the percentage of water fountains that are fully functional, partly functional or not functional in 13 of the 14 campuses assessed. On all campuses, with the exception of Hostos Community College and Kingsborough Community College, most water fountains are fully functional. At five campuses, at least 80 percent of the assessed water fountains are fully functional (Bronx Community College, Brooklyn College, Hunter College Brookdale, LaGuardia Community College, NYC City College of Technology, and Queensborough Community College). The majority of assessed water fountains at Hostos Community College and Kingsborough Community College are partly functional; while the fountain worked, it would be difficult to drink from. College of Staten Island, CUNY Graduate and Hunter College at 68th St. also have relatively high rates of partly or not functional water fountains.
2. Functional for filling up water bottle

Water fountains were then tested to see how easily it would be to fill a bottle with water. This measure was suggested since students often fill up their bottles with water in order to have a drink with them. If the majority of fountains make this task difficult, whether because of its design or because of weak water pressure, a student could be encouraged to buy a bottled drink at a vending machine. The criterion has a similar three-point scale as the first assessment, asking whether or not the water fountain is functional for filling up a water bottle:

1 = Fully functional, possible to fill up a water bottle safely
2 = Partly functional, water comes out but is difficult to fill up a water bottle
3 = Not functional, the mouth of the bottle would have to touch the fountain in order to drink or no water comes out

Five campuses report over 80 percent of water fountains are fully functional for filling up a bottle (these campuses had the same results for the first criteria of functional). Hostos Community College and Kingsborough Community College again report high partly functional water fountains, with Hunter College Brookdale and Lehman College reporting lower functionality. Over 20 percent of assessed water fountains at CUNY Graduate Center, Hostos Community College and Hunter College at 68th St. are not functional.²

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² However, at the CUNY Graduate Center, people have access to kitchenettes where they can fill up bottles at the sink.
3. Water pressure

The third assessment, and related to both the first and second criteria, is water pressure. The three-point scale for water pressure is as follows:

1 = Good water pressure
2 = Okay water pressure (possible but slow to drink or fill up a bottle)
3 = Poor water pressure (defined as difficult or impossible to drink or fill a bottle)

Chart 3 shows that the majority of water fountains have good water pressure on most campuses. Hunter College Brookdale and Kingsborough Community College report a high percentage of fountains that are functional but slow to drink from because of low water pressure. CUNY Graduate Center, Hostos Community College, Hunter College at 68th St. and Kingsborough Community College have at least 20 percent of their water fountains with low water pressure that makes it difficult or impossible to drink from.

![Chart 3. Water Pressure](image-url)
4. Presence of trash or dirtiness

Next, we address the cleanliness of water fountains. Cleanliness is measured by the presence of trash (such as gum or paper) or detritus (such as algae or rust) that would make it unappealing and/or unhealthy to use. The scale is as follows:

1 = No trash, not dirty
2 = Some trash, slightly dirty
3 = Substantial trash, dirty

Only five campuses (Bronx Community College, CUNY Graduate Center, Lehman College, NYC College of Technology and Queensborough Community College) report more than 60 percent of their water fountains as clean (no trash or detritus). Of the remaining campuses, Brooklyn College, College of Staten Island and Hunter College at 68th St. report a high percent of fountains as having substantial amount of trash or being dirty (43, 40 and 25 percent, respectively).

![Chart 4. Trash in and around water fountain](image-url)
5. Taste of water from water fountain

This report also considered how appealing it would be to drink from the water fountains by assessing taste and temperature (next section) of water fountains. By taste, we meant any unusual taste, such as chemical or metallic. Taste was measured as the following:

1. Neutral taste
2. Slight taste
3. Strong taste

With the exception of College of Staten Island, Lehman College and NYC College of Technology, on all campuses, less than 60 percent of water fountains have a neutral taste. At Brooklyn College, Hostos Community College, Hunter College Brookdale, Kingsborough College and LaGuardia Community College, more than a third of the water fountains have a slight taste. Hostos Community College, Hunter College 68th St. and Kingsborough Community College have high rates of fountains with a strong taste (25, 15 and 15 percent, respectively). This assessment leaves out fountains that were reported as dirty, as these were not tested for taste.
6. Temperature of water from water fountain

Our last assessment looked at the temperature of the water, as this could also make a water fountain unappealing for use. Temperature was measured as:

1. Ice cold
2. Room temperature
3. Warm

At nearly all campuses, over 70 percent of water fountains had ice-cold or room-temperature water. But over a third of the water fountains at Brooklyn College, Hunter College at 68th St. and Kingsborough Community College had warm water. Similar to the taste test, if a water fountain was dirty, it was not tested for temperature.
Conclusion

The status of water fountains varies across campuses; yet, it is clear that some campuses provide access to free, clean water more so than do other campuses. Bronx Community College, NYC College of Technology and Queensborough Community College stand out with the greatest number of fountains with high scores across the six measures, while College of Staten Island and Kingsborough Community College score less well, with a high percentage of water fountains receiving low and medium scores.

Table 2 reports the “grades” of CUNY campuses according to the results from this research. Grades were determined by the percentage of water fountains that received a high score across the six measures: 100-76% receive an A; 75-51% receive a B; 50% or less receive a C. Only NYCCT and Bronx Community College received an A, six campuses received a B while Hunter College at 68th St., Hunter College at Brookdale, Lehman College, and CUNY Graduate Center received the lowest score.

Table 2. CUNY Campus Grades for Water Fountains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Campus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>New York City College of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Bronx Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Queensborough Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>LaGuardia Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<td>Lehman College</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CUNY Graduate Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Hunter College at 68th St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Hostos Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Kingsborough Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>College of Staten Island</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Grades are determined by the percentage of fountains receiving a high score across the six measures.

In addition to water fountain maintenance, accessibility to water fountains needs to be considered. Some data collectors noted fountains were difficult to locate in certain areas or that they did not have any at all. For example, the dormitory floors at Hunter College at Brookdale do not have any water fountains. Students could go to the ones located at classrooms, but one student commented that they were dirty and students used personal water filters or containers. On other campuses, there needs to be better signage for restrooms (where fountains are usually located), such as the Graduate Center and the library at Queensborough Community College.

Healthy CUNY suggests a number of policy recommendations to increase access to water for CUNY students, faculty, and staff:

**Short term recommendations**
- Ensure that water fountains are fully functioning, including having adequate water pressure.
- Keep water fountains clean of trash and detritus.

**Long term recommendations**
- Place water fountains in high-volume areas, near beverage vending machines
- Ensure that students have quick access to water fountains wherever they are on campus
- Purchase water bottle-filling stations