CUNY Programs for Adult Learners

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July 24, 2014
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**Introduction**

In order to meet local workforce demands, address the needs of the many New Yorkers who do not have postsecondary credentials, and preserve the vitality of the University, it is important that CUNY consider mechanisms for expanding access for adult learners and ensuring that adults enrolled in CUNY have a good chance for success. Improving higher education outcomes for adults is a key workforce development strategy. Increasingly employers are requiring postsecondary training, yet research suggests that higher education is not keeping pace with the demand for educated workers. It is projected that by 2018, 63 percent of all jobs nationally will require postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010). To meet the increased demand for workers with postsecondary education, an additional 22 million college degrees at the associate or higher level would need to be conferred, but there is a projected shortfall of 3 million degrees (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010).

In 2008, more than two-thirds of adults in the US had not yet obtained their bachelor’s degree, and about one-third had not obtained any higher education (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). Among students entering New York City high schools, just 48 percent graduate and enroll in college, and just 21 percent successfully graduate from college with an associate or bachelor’s degree (Liu, 2012). Young people who do not earn a college credential represent the future pool of adult learners who may look to CUNY as a vehicle for improving their lives. In contrast, CUNY’s pool of recent high school graduates may be declining. A presentation at the 2013 CUNY Financial Conference by David Godow, Research Analyst at the Education Advisory Board, highlighted these trends. Godow (2013) indicated that the number of students graduating from high school in the northeast is projected to decline by 25,000 students between 2012 and 2022, while adults with some college credits looking to return to higher education to complete degrees represent the largest emerging student segment.

As we consider expanding opportunities for adults, we should be aware of the challenges these students may encounter. Adult students have been away from the education system for some time and may need assistance brushing up on basic skills. Mathematics may pose a particular barrier, as basic skills testing in math is closely aligned with high school math curriculum and is typically not used in daily life. Adults also face challenges balancing the intense demands of work, family, and school. A survey of adult students enrolled in postsecondary education conducted by the Lumina Foundation found that the following factors are integral to success: convenience, affordability, availability of child care, and clear information about the program and processes (Pusser et al., 2007). Adult learners frequently have college credits from one or more institutions they have attended previously, and so it is important for programs serving adult learners to have comprehensive policies for acceptance of transfer credit (Stokes, 2007).

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is another tool that can support the success of adults within higher education. PLA is a mechanism for awarding college credit for learning that has taken
place in the workplace or through other life experiences. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) conducts assessment of prior learning and offers training for faculty and administrators to do so on their own campuses. Funded by the Lumina Foundation, CAEL conducted a study of more than 62,000 adult students from 48 institutions to examine the influence of PLA on student outcomes. CAEL found that students who received credit for prior learning were more likely to earn a degree within 7 years, and among those who did not earn a degree those with PLA credit had accumulated more overall credits than those without (CAEL, 2010).

The American Council on Education has argued that “post-traditional learners,” defined as individuals, who are in the workforce but lack a postsecondary credential, are the “new normal” (Soares, 2013). As a means of survival, institutions of higher education must adapt to serving this population. Stokes (2007) expands on this idea: “Although ‘traditional’ 18-22 year-old full-time undergraduate students residing on campus account for only 16 percent of higher education enrollments, the attention given to this group of students obscures the fact that the vast majority of college and university students are ‘non-traditional’ – largely working adults struggling to balance jobs, families, and education.” Indeed, 82 percent of undergraduates report that they must work while attending school, and approximately two-thirds of students who earn a bachelor’s degree have attended more than one institution (Attewell & Lavin, 2012; Adelman, 2006). Without efforts to adapt the model of education delivery for this population, institutions of higher education may lose market share to other institutions that are more creative in their approach. Stokes (2007) says:

History is littered with examples of industries that, at their peril, failed to respond to- or even see- changes in purchaser behavior, from the railroad industry to the computer hard disk industry to the music industry. When it comes to the adult learner community – those 92 million Americans – our institutions of higher education face similar risks of having their market share substantially reduced and their services increasingly characterized by obsolescence.

CUNY admissions requirements in mathematics

Many CUNY applicants do not meet standards in mathematics required for admission to the senior colleges. In 2007 mathematics standards were raised for admission to the senior colleges, yet there was recognition that adult students who have been away from math instruction for a number of years may have difficulty meeting the higher standards. A December 2007 memo issued by former Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Selma Botman stated, “Students who are enrolled in CUNY’s specialized adult degree programs typically have been out of school for some time, and consequently their academic skills, particularly in math, may need to be refreshed or relearned.” The memo indicated that the University would “ensure continuing access to currently existing adult degree programs” by allowing students in adult
education programs to “matriculate on the basis of the current admissions criteria.” Students in these programs were required to meet the higher mathematics standard by the time they had completed the 24th credit at the college. The memo indicated that as an alternative to retaking the math assessment test, adult students could meet the higher math admissions standard by passing a credit-bearing math course with a grade of C or higher. The adult degree programs named in the memo as qualifying for this policy were City College’s Center for Worker Education (CWE), the Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, Lehman College’s Professional Studies/Adult Degree Program, and Queens College’s Adult Collegiate Education (ACE) program.

The December 2007 memo issued by Dr. Botman also put in place a policy allowing for transfer students to demonstrate math proficiency with a grade of C or better in a credit-bearing mathematics course taken at CUNY or at an outside institution. In June 2013, former Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Alexandra Logue issued a policy that students with any passing grade in a credit-bearing mathematics course taken at CUNY will demonstrate math proficiency, while students from outside CUNY must continue to present a grade of C or higher in a credit-bearing mathematics course.

Most of CUNY’s adult education programs have taken advantage of these policies to admit adult students who otherwise would not gain admission to the college. For example, in Fall 2013 admission to the senior colleges required test scores of 45 on the numerical skills/pre-algebra component of the mathematics assessment test, and a score of 45 on the algebra component (45-45). However, Center for Worker Education students could be admitted with scores of 37-40, with the stipulation that they pass a credit-bearing math course with a grade of C or better within one semester. Students who do not present scores of at least 37-40 are referred to a particular instructor at Borough of Manhattan Community College known to have good success with this population. These students must pass the CUNY Elementary Algebra Final Exam (CEAFE) for entry to CWE.

Effective for the Fall 2014 semester, the admission standard in math for adult students at Queens College will be 30-30. Called the “Students of Promise” program, all adult students who do not meet the full standard for admission to Queens will enroll in the Immersion program, which offers free developmental mathematics instruction during the summer and winter intercessions. The Immersion program is intensive, meeting from 6:00 to 10:15 in the evening for 9 sessions. During a tenth session students take the CEAFE. Students who have not met the 30-30 standard must pass the CEAFE for admission to the college. Students who have met the 30-30 standard will also participate in Immersion and take the CEAFE, but even those who do not pass the CEAFE will be permitted to enroll in the college. Such students must register for a college-level math course in their first semester at Queens College, and must earn a grade of C or better in the course. Students who are not successful in the credit-bearing math course must retake the course during the next term.
In contrast to CWE and Queens College’s “Students of Promise” program, Lehman College does not use a specific cut score for admission of students in the Professional Studies/Adult Degree Program. All students who do not meet the regular math admission standard may be admitted. Such students are required to take a noncredit Math Bridge course through the Adult and Continuing Education department and take the CEAFE at the conclusion of the course. Students who pass the Bridge course but do not pass the CEAFE must earn a D or better in a credit-bearing math course.

Data from the CUNY Math Mainstreaming Experiment, led by Dr. Alexandra Logue and Dr. Mari Watanabe-Rose, suggest that adults may be well served by nontraditional models designed to help them develop their math skills. Among students with remedial needs in math who were randomly assigned to take a college-level math course with extra support rather than the traditional remedial math course, 78.3 percent of students age 25 and older passed the course compared to 53.4 percent of younger students. These success rates were significantly higher than for students assigned to traditional remediation, or traditional remediation with extra support for both age groups. See Table 1.

Table 1. CUNY Math Mainstreaming Experiment Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th># of students</th>
<th># of students passing</th>
<th>% of students passing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 (traditional remediation)</td>
<td>below 25</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 and above</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2 (traditional remediation + workshops)</td>
<td>below 25</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 and above</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3 (college-level course + workshop)</td>
<td>below 25</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 and above</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>722</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: CUNY Math Mainstreaming Experiment Team (Dr. Mari Watanabe-Rose and Dr. Alexandra Logue)

Finally, of note is a memorandum issued in April 2014 by the Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost, Julia Wrigley, which allows colleges to pilot new approaches to math remediation for students enrolled in non-STEM degree programs. Colleges piloting such approaches are exempt from requiring students to pass the Common Elementary Algebra Final Exam (CEAFE) for exit from math remediation. Pilot projects have been developed such as courses in Quantitative Reasoning and Statistics for students with remedial need. Some of these courses are remedial, while others are credit-bearing courses that offer extra support. For example, Lehman has developed a 3-credit, 6-hour Quantitative Reasoning course for a cohort of 1199 members who do not meet proficiency requirements in math.
Enrollment of adult undergraduates

Data from CUNY’s Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) suggests that much of the enrollment growth at CUNY in recent years has been among younger students. Between 2000 and 2012 there was a 4 percent increase in the number of adult undergraduates enrolled at CUNY, while there was a 64 percent increase in the number of younger students. Growth in enrollment of adult undergraduates occurred within CUNY’s community college sector, while enrollment of these students declined slightly within the senior and comprehensive colleges. In 2000, 38 percent of all undergraduates were 25 and older, yet by 2012 just 28 percent were 25 and older. See Tables 2a and 2b.

Table 2a. Trends in Undergraduate Enrollment: Fall 2000 to Fall 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 &amp; older</td>
<td>Under 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior/Comprehensive College</td>
<td>40,498</td>
<td>64,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>22,505</td>
<td>40,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Total</td>
<td>63,003</td>
<td>104,746</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

Table 2b. Trends in Undergraduate Enrollment: Fall 2000 to Fall 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 &amp; older</td>
<td>Under 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior/Comprehensive College</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Total</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

It is important to note that it has become less common for adult students to enroll in CUNY as first-time freshmen. Between 2000 and 2012 there was a 41 percent decline in the number of first-time freshmen 25 and older. It has become more likely that older students coming to CUNY enter as transfer or readmitted students. While older students constituted 12 percent of all first-time freshmen in 2000, just 5 percent of first-time freshmen were 25 and older in 2012. See Tables 3a and 3b.
In contrast, enrollment of adult students has risen dramatically in the for-profit sector of higher education (Swail, 2009). Data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), available from the National Center for Education Statistics, show that the number of students age 30 to 39 enrolled in public 4-year institutions declined 19.1 percent between 1993 and 2009 (from 518,475 to 419,579), while the number of such students increased 1,437.3 percent in for-profit 4-year institutions (from 22,023 to 338,568) (Croke, 2013). These trends suggest there is a substantial market for providing higher education to adults, and that public institutions, including CUNY, could do more to attract this population to its high quality and affordable academic programs. For instance, to cover their expenses 96 percent of students who attend for-profit colleges borrow money (U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, 2012). In 2005-06, the average federal loan amount after four years for students attending for-profit colleges in New York was $43,880, compared to an average loan amount of $3,212 for students attending CUNY (New York State Education Department, 2009).

Empire State, of the State University of New York (SUNY), provides an example of a large public institution serving many adult students. IPEDS data show that in Fall 2012 approximately 12,000 students were enrolled in Empire State, and 85 percent of all students were age 25 and older. Empire State was created in 1971 and now provides associate, bachelor’s, and master’s programs through eight regional centers and 35 locations, as well as online through the Center for Distance Learning. Students must have a high school diploma or GED and complete a writing
assessment for admission. There is no math requirement for admission, although placement tests are administered. Empire State is transfer student friendly, allowing students to receive up to 96 credits for prior coursework and life experience. Additionally, students may choose to customize their own degree program. Anne Lopes, Dean of Graduate Studies at John Jay College and former Associate Dean of Empire State’s Metropolitan Region, indicated that Empire State operates on a strong culture of faculty mentoring. Faculty is integrally involved in helping students develop their degree programs and is also responsible for conducting Prior Learning Assessment. In fact, faculty workload is calculated in part on the basis of the number of assigned mentees, while there is less emphasis on faculty research.

**Performance of adult undergraduates**

First-time freshmen in baccalaureate programs who are older do not seem to fare as well as younger first-time freshmen. CUNY OIRA found that while older students from the Fall 2012 cohort of first-time freshmen in baccalaureate programs had slightly higher first term GPA (3.05 for those 25 and older, compared to 2.97 for 18-19 year olds), older students were less likely to be retained after one year. Among the Fall 2007 cohort of first-time freshmen in baccalaureate programs, 43.3 percent of students 25 and older earned bachelor’s degrees within six years, compared to 52.4 percent of 18-19 year olds. See Table 4.

Interestingly, older first-time freshmen in associate programs seem to perform as well, or better, compared to younger students. First-time freshmen in associate programs in the Fall 2012 cohort who were age 25 and older had higher first term GPA compared to younger students and approximately the same 1-year retention rate (66.5 percent for those 25 and older, compared to 67.9 percent for 18-19 year olds). Among first-time freshmen in associate programs in the Fall 2009 cohort, 24.6 percent of those 25 and older and 19.9 percent of 18-19 year olds had earned a degree within four years. See Table 5.
Table 4. Performance of Full-time, First-time Freshmen in Baccalaureate Programs, by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Fall 2012 Cohort</th>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2007 Cohort</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Cohort</td>
<td>First Term GPA</td>
<td>1-Year Retention</td>
<td>Total Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 18</td>
<td>3,170</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>3,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>7,962</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>7,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 &amp; Older</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-time Freshmen</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,641</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.97</strong></td>
<td><strong>86.6</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,041</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Retention rates are calculated as the percentage of students who are still enrolled at any CUNY college in the subsequent fall term and have not yet graduated.

**Graduation rates are the percentage of students who earn a baccalaureate degree at any CUNY college within six years.

SOURCE: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

Table 5. Performance of Full-time, First-time Freshmen in Associate Programs, by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Fall 2012 Cohort</th>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2009 Cohort</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Cohort</td>
<td>First Term GPA</td>
<td>1-Year Retention</td>
<td>Total Cohort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 18</td>
<td>3,954</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>3,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>12,308</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>12,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>2,247</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>2,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>1,122</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>1,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 &amp; Older</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>1,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-time Freshmen</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,828</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.18</strong></td>
<td><strong>67.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>21,793</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Retention rates are calculated as the percentage of students who are still enrolled at any CUNY college in the subsequent fall term and have not yet graduated.

**Graduation rates are the percentage of students who earn an associate or baccalaureate degree at any CUNY college within four years.

SOURCE: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

It has become less common for adult students to enroll in CUNY as first-time freshmen, and programs serving adult students at CUNY often predominantly serve transfer students. Data from City College suggests that transfer students enrolled in the Center for Worker Education, which has been designed specifically to serve the needs of working adults, may fare better than other transfer students. Comparing CWE transfer students with other City College transfer students, CUNY OIRA found that CWE transfer students had slightly higher GPA’s and two-year retention rates. Among the Fall 2010 cohort of transfer students, CWE students had an average
year two GPA of 3.25 compared to 2.96 for other City College transfer students. The two-year retention rate was 54.1 percent for CWE transfer students compared to 51.6 percent for other City College transfer students. Considering graduation rates for students who transferred to City College in Fall 2005, 50.6 percent of CWE students graduated within six years compared to 38.7 percent of other City College transfer students. See Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Persistence of Transfers to City College: Fall 2010 Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Retained after One Year**</th>
<th>Year One GPA</th>
<th>Retained after Two Years**</th>
<th>Year Two GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Worker Education Programs</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Non-Worker Education Programs*</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Non-Worker Education Programs*</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excludes enrollment in programs requiring 128 or more credits for graduation.

**Retention rates are the percentage of students who are still enrolled at the college of entry in the subsequent fall term(s) and have not yet earned the degree pursued.

SOURCE: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

Table 7. Six-Year Graduation Rate** of Transfers to City College: Fall 2005 Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolled Fall 2005</th>
<th>Graduated within 6 Years**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdiscip Lib Arts &amp; Sci (Worker Ed) - BA</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Non-Worker Education Programs*</td>
<td>1,026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Excludes enrollment in programs requiring 128 or more credits for graduation.

**Graduation rates are the percentage of students who earn a baccalaureate degree at the college of entry within 6 years.

SOURCE: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

CUNY programs for adult learners

Adult students are enrolled throughout the CUNY system at all colleges and in hundreds of degree programs, and many thousands of adults participate in programs offered through Adult & Continuing Education. There are also several programs within the CUNY system that have been designed to serve adult learners. These programs frequently offer courses in convenient ways. For example, courses may be offered with 4 or more credits, online, or during evenings or weekends. Many of these programs accept a large number of transfer credits, making it possible for students who have previously been enrolled in higher education to apply their credits toward degree requirements. Credit for prior learning experience is also offered by a majority of these programs, and many have prioritized resources for student advising. Lehman’s Adult Degree
Program and CUNY BA allow students to customize their own degree programs. The information provided about these programs in the sections below comes from publicly available sources such as the college websites, as well as from interviews with program directors (see Appendix), and data provided by CUNY’s Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

City College, Division of Interdisciplinary Studies at The Center for Worker Education (CWE)

The Center for Worker Education was established in 1981 as collaboration between City College and public employee unions. The Center was created with the support of Joe McDermott, who worked closely with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and also with the support of Joseph S. Murphy, who served as CUNY’s Chancellor from 1982 to 1990. CWE was originally located at the 14th Street Teamsters headquarters and then moved to Hudson Street. In 2007 CWE was relocated to 25 Broadway.

CWE offers a BA or BS in Interdisciplinary Arts and Science, BS in Early Childhood Education, and MA in Study of the Americas. Students in the Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences program may select an area of concentration. In Fall 2012 approximately 600 undergraduate students were enrolled (CUNY OIRA, 2013).

Dean Juan Carlos Mercado, who oversees CWE, likens the Division to a small liberal arts college. The downtown location provides services including a library, writing center, tutoring services, and admissions support. There are eight advisors for the CWE population, offering a much lower student-to-advisor ratio compared to City College uptown. Each semester, students are required to meet with an advisor prior to registering for classes.

To be admitted to CWE students must be age 25 or older, although exceptions may be made. Most students admitted to CWE are transfer students with associate degrees or some college credits, and many work full-time. Approximately 40 percent of CWE students attend part-time. Four-credit courses are offered, with courses meeting for four hours once a week. This four-credit structure allows students to earn more credits with fewer course meetings. The Pathways structure, with 10 three-credit courses, was cited as a challenge for CWE. Students are able to earn up to 12 life experience credits, which may be awarded as part of an autobiography course. However, Dean Mercado reports that not many students take advantage of the availability of life experience credits. Additional resources to support faculty training and to advertise the availability of Prior Learning Assessment would be helpful.

Courses are offered after 6pm on weekdays, and from 9am to 5pm on Saturdays. Approximately 10 percent of courses offered each semester are hybrid, offering a portion of the instruction online, while a couple of courses are offered fully online each semester. Dean Mercado indicates that the online courses are especially in demand and are typically the first courses to fill during registration.
Dean Mercado cites as a problem a lack of space. Without additional resources for space, CWE is unable to expand evening course offerings. There has been increasing demand from e-permit students and uptown students for evening courses, but these students often cannot be accommodated due to the lack of space. Dean Mercado would like additional support from CUNY’s Central Office with recruitment and admission of adult undergraduates. Dean Mercado also indicated that CWE would prefer a two-semester grace period (rather than one-semester) for students who have not met the CUNY-wide math proficiency standard to pass a credit-bearing math course. The Center for Worker Education is in the process of an external review and development of a 5-10 year plan.

CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies (CUNY BA)

CUNY Baccalaureate for Unique and Interdisciplinary Studies (CUNY BA) was created in 1971 in response to calls for CUNY students and faculty to have flexibility to create their own programs of study, with access to courses across campuses. As stated on the program website, “CUNY BA is the University-wide, individualized degree. It’s an exciting, versatile, rewarding degree route for highly-motivated, self-directed students whose academic goals transcend traditional majors. Students create their own degree plans working directly with faculty mentors and academic advisors.”

To be admitted students must also be admitted to a CUNY college, and must have at least 12 college credits and a minimum GPA of 2.8. Students must submit a personal statement, transcripts, letter of recommendation, and propose an area of study with course-by-course plan. Dr. Kim Hartswick and Ms. Beth Kneller, who oversee CUNY BA, indicate that approximately 60-70 students are admitted to CUNY BA each spring, and approximately 90-100 are admitted each fall. Because students are self-selecting and vetted through the admissions counseling process, approximately 95 percent of all applicants are accepted. Approximately 160 students graduate each year, such that enrollment remains flat, however, CUNY BA has seen an increase in the number of second Bachelor’s degree students applying. Dr. Hartswick and Ms. Kneller both believe that with more support from Central CUNY for recruitment, growth is not only possible but likely.

About 430 students are currently enrolled, with approximately three-quarters being age 25 and older. CUNY BA students are typically high achieving and academically sophisticated. About 20 Macaulay Honors College students are enrolled at present. On average students enter with 60 credits completed and the average GPA upon entry is approximately 3.35. CUNY BA has a 75 percent graduation rate, and 60 percent or more graduate with academic honors. More than 50 percent of graduates proceed into graduate school.

CUNY BA offers students significant academic flexibility. Up to 68 credits may be accepted toward the CUNY BA from a community college, and up to 90 credits may be accepted from a senior college. The program also offers up to 15 credits for life experience, based on required
attendance at a life experience seminar and subsequent portfolio review, each conducted by the Academic Director, relying on standards and guidance for PLA established by CAEL. Students must complete at least 24 credits of focused coursework at the upper level, with at least half of this coursework completed with CUNY BA. Students have the option of completing two areas of concentration – like a double major; in that instance, the requirement is a minimum of 18 upper level credits in each area. Thirty-five percent of CUNY BA students are pursuing dual areas of concentration. Students are not required to complete any degree requirements of their home campus. The average student takes approximately one-third of their courses through e-permit and two-thirds at the home campus. Upon graduation, students receive their diploma from CUNY (not from the home campus).

Students are required to find a faculty mentor, similar to the process of a doctoral student finding a faculty member to chair their dissertation committee. Relatedly, students must have a firm idea of what they want to study in order to engage a faculty person to work with them. Faculty members who serve as mentors are expected to meet with the student once per semester and are not remunerated for this service.

Dr. Hartswick and Ms. Kneller report that CUNY BA has lost students in the admissions process through the years because some adults are unable to pass the math assessment test, yet have strong potential to successfully complete an individualized degree. Anecdotally, they can report that these students have transferred instead to Columbia University’s School of General Studies, NYU’s Gallatin Division, The Adult Degree at The New School, and SUNY Empire State, to name a few.

The CUNY BA is currently administered under the umbrella of the CUNY Graduate Center. The program is operated with 10.5 staff members, including staff members who focus on recruitment, admissions, student registration and transcripts, scholarships, and academic advising (the program has two full-time professional advisors). Responding to the needs of the high caliber of students, CUNY BA offers students intensive guidance on studying abroad, competing for prestigious scholarships, and applying to graduate school.

CUNY School of Professional Studies (SPS)

The CUNY School of Professional Studies (SPS) was established by the CUNY Board of Trustees in 2003 for the purpose of serving working adults and addressing the needs of employers. SPS offers various credited undergraduate and graduate degree and certificate programs, including eight online bachelor’s degree programs. In Fall 2012, 1,247 undergraduate students were enrolled in SPS, with 75 percent of those students attending part-time. Almost 90 percent of SPS undergraduates are age 25 or older (CUNY OIRA, 2013).

Dr. George Otte, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, indicates that the online baccalaureate degree was originally conceptualized as a completer degree for students who have stopped out of CUNY in good academic standing. There is a large pool of such students who may be eligible to
return to CUNY to complete their degree. However, SPS has also diversified in recent years, drawing increasing numbers of students from non-CUNY schools. In fact, students who live out of state receive in-state tuition rates. An articulation agreement was developed with a California community college during that state’s budget crisis and the inability of California students to move on from associate to baccalaureate programs. To be admitted, students must have at least 24 transfer credits and must be deemed skills proficient. SPS will accept up to 90 transfer credits toward the degree. On average, students have between 50 to 60 credits upon transferring to a baccalaureate program.

Dr. Otte indicates that the model for the SPS online baccalaureate degree was developed in consultation with the former Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Selma Botman. A centralized online degree was created so that services could be focused, rather than using the CUNY BA model with courses dispersed throughout the CUNY system. Courses are offered fully online, although Dr. Otte touts the benefits of courses that blend online and face-to-face instruction. Dr. Otte states that online courses are rigorous, with students spending 12-14 hours per week on each course and with students having more exposure to the instructor and to the work of other students in the online environment.

In terms of outcomes, Dr. Otte points out that the population of returning and part-time students served by SPS is not typically included in commonly cited statistics, such as from IPEDS. SPS has invested in its own institutional research capacity. Dr. Otte reports that between 30 and 40 percent of students who enroll in the online baccalaureate degree ultimately complete the degree.

Dr. Otte indicates that SPS could serve more CUNY students through e-permit, but improvements are needed to the e-permit registration and approval processes. Through a partnership with CAEL, Prior Learning Assessment will be offered beginning Fall 2014. Students will have the opportunity to take a 3-credit course that will prepare them to develop a portfolio of their prior learning, for which they could earn an additional three credits. Dr. Otte cited as challenges recruitment of adult learners and career placement services, particularly with identifying internship and clinical practice opportunities for students.

*Lehman College’s Professional Studies/Adult Degree Program*

Created in 1974, the Professional Studies program (also known as the Adult Degree Program), recognizes the needs of working adults by offering flexible admissions and graduation requirements. Over time the program has evolved from serving a population of predominantly women with children seeking personal enrichment, to serving workers seeking to upgrade their skills or change careers. To be admitted students must be age 25 or older and hold a high school diploma or GED. Dr. Marzie Jafari, Vice President of Workforce and Global Partnerships at Lehman College, estimates that slightly less than half of all students in the program have not met
the CUNY-wide math proficiency standard. Dr. Jafari indicates that most adult students have been away from math instruction for a number of years and the math exam is often daunting.

Approximately 1,000 students are currently enrolled in the Professional Studies program, a sharp increase compared to 2008-09 when approximately 650 students were enrolled. Many students enroll in the program with some prior college coursework, including a growing number with associate degrees. Students enroll as a cohort and are expected to complete 6 to 12 credits of multidisciplinary seminars, which may count as electives or toward general education requirements. These courses focus on sharpening students’ skills in areas such as writing and critical thinking.

Professional Studies students may receive up to 15 credits for life experience. To earn such credit, students enroll in a seminar course on Prior Learning Assessment portfolio development. Students may send portfolios documenting their prior learning to the appropriate academic departments for faculty review. Program staff and faculty have been trained to evaluate prior learning for college credit through the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL).

Professional Studies students develop an educational plan aligned to their professional goals. Students may select any major available at Lehman or may design their own major by working closely on their educational plan with two faculty advisors. Dr. Jafari indicates that approximately 10 percent of students choose to design their own major. Program advisors work closely with each student. Dr. Jafari indicates that it is crucial to have advisors who understand the curriculum and workforce needs.

The Professional Studies program is part of Lehman’s Office of Academic Affairs and receives its budget from the college. The program is staffed by a full-time Director, one full-time counselor, and several part-time staff. Approximately 7-8 adjuncts teach the seminars. Students may also receive advising through their academic departments and other supports available college-wide. Dr. Jafari indicates that given the large number of students it would be helpful to have more advisors, but resources are limited.

Queens College’s Adult Collegiate Education (ACE) and Labor Education Advancement Project (LEAP)

The Adult Collegiate Education (ACE) program was created at Queens in 1963 as an accelerated bachelor’s program for adults age 25 and older. Richard Adams, Director of ACE, reports to the Provost and funding for the program is provided by the college. The ACE program is located at 65-21 Main Street in a building that formerly housed the CUNY School of Law. Courses are offered on nights and weekends, and are usually taught by adjunct instructors. Approximately 300 students are currently enrolled in the ACE program.

ACE was designed as an entry-level program for students without substantial prior higher education experience. Students in the program take dedicated general education courses. Mr.
Adams indicates that prior to the implementation of Pathways in Fall 2013 the general education courses met for three hours per week and received six credits. However, the Pathways structure with ten 3-credit courses resulted in those courses being eliminated. Due to the reliance on part-time instructors, it has been difficult to develop new courses to fit the Pathways structure. Another challenge is that it has become increasingly common for adult students to enter the college with many transfer credits. In such cases the ACE general education curriculum may be less useful because these students may fulfill general education requirements with their transfer credits.

Queens College students are eligible to transfer up to 75 undergraduate credits. Since ACE is an entry-level program, the ideal incoming student has no more than 40 transfer credits. ACE students may receive up to 36 life experience credits, with the average student receiving 10 to 15 of these credits. ACE students become eligible to apply for life experience credits upon completion of eight of the 14 core curriculum courses. Many transfer students will have already completed several of the core curriculum requirements; for those students, at least four of the eight courses must be completed at Queens College. To receive such credit students must create a portfolio that is evaluated by faculty from the relevant academic departments. ACE students select any of the majors offered at Queens College.

When ACE was first created, the program predominantly served middle class homemakers. Gradually the program began to attract more immigrant and at-risk students. Dr. Greg Mantsios, Director of the Murphy Institute, indicated that the admissions policy for the ACE program was brought to the Academic Senate at Queens College. The Senate, which consists of one-third students, voted to allow the ACE program discretion over the admission of students to its program.

In 1984, the Labor Education Advancement Project (LEAP) was created at Queens College. This program is similar to the ACE program, but specifically served union members and the curriculum had a focus on work and workers. Due to the large number of adult students with a high number of prior college credits, it became difficult to continue to offer the LEAP curriculum because, like ACE, it was designed as an entry level program. As such, the program decided to hold off on submitting courses to the Academic Senate to meet the new Pathways curriculum. At this time, the LEAP program is following suit with the ACE program with regard to admissions, testing, course offerings, and the option to apply for life experience credits.

These adult programs have faced a number of challenges. Mr. Adams and Joanne Mason, who coordinates Murphy Institute programming at Queens College, report that the math requirement for admission represents a significant barrier for adult students. More than half of the adult students who are interested in being admitted to Queens College do not meet math admissions standards. However, they perceive that many students who struggle with the math placement test could excel in college. Dr. Mantsios indicates that in recent years the LEAP program has been weakened by resource issues and the loss of some supportive faculty members.
Mr. Adams indicates that there are not sufficient resources dedicated to student recruitment and program marketing.

Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies at the CUNY School of Professional Studies

In 2005 the Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies was established as part of the CUNY School of Professional Studies. The Institute is the outgrowth of the LEAP program and the Center for Labor, Community & Policy Studies, which were created at Queens College in the 1980’s.

The Murphy Institute offers educational programs for working adults and union members at its location in midtown Manhattan, including undergraduate and graduate certificates in Public Administration and Policy, Health Care Administration, and Labor Studies; master’s degrees in Labor Studies and Urban Studies; and a bachelor’s degree in Urban and Community Studies. The Institute offers basic skills preparation in writing and mathematics. Students interested in the BA program complete the CUNY Assessment Tests through Guttman Community College.

The Institute also works with unions to provide other educational programs hosted at various CUNY campuses. For example, the LEAP-to-Teacher program has been offered since 1984 in collaboration with the United Federation of Teachers and offers paraprofessionals employed by the NYC Department of Education up to six credits of free tuition each semester, as well as academic supports. The LEAP program is offered at Brooklyn College, Lehman College, Queens College, and College of Staten Island. Additionally, the Institute engages in research on labor issues, hosts conferences, and publishes the journal New Labor Forum.

Queens College remains one of Murphy Institute’s strongest CUNY partners. Joanne Mason, who coordinates Murphy Institute programming at Queens College, indicates that the Institute provides precollege preparation for anyone in the community. During the spring and fall semesters, Ms. Mason facilitates remedial workshops for community members who lack the skills proficiency needed for entry to the college. Other services offered for union members include technology workshops, teacher certification exam preparation, and third party tuition processing. Approximately 400 union members are served by the Murphy Institute at Queens College.

Dr. Greg Mantsios, Director of the Murphy Institute, reports that in Fall 2013 approximately 1,100 students were enrolled in Murphy Institute programs across CUNY at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Funding for the Murphy Institute has come from the NYC Council, New York State, and from CUNY.

To be admitted to the bachelor’s degree in urban studies, students must have 24 credits. Dr. Mantsios reports that first-time freshmen may be admitted for the 16-credit undergraduate certificate program, but technically must then go elsewhere for an additional 8 credits prior to
being admitted to the bachelor’s program. This policy is problematic for the Institute’s labor advisory board, which questions the ability of the Institute to serve workers who may not have prior college experience. Dr. Mantsios suggests that CUNY should consider having an associate degree program tailored for working adults. Dr. Mantsios also indicates that CUNY’s basic skills testing policies pose a barrier for working adults seeking higher education. When asked about the future direction of adult education at CUNY, Dr. Mantsios suggested that a more strategic approach be taken by CUNY to address the needs of working adults.

Recommendations

There are a number of actions CUNY could consider to attract and retain more adult students.

1. **Dedicate resources for advertisement, recruitment, and capacity building for existing adult learner programs.** Several program directors indicated that they would welcome CUNY Central’s support with student recruitment. Adults may be a difficult group to recruit, in contrast to the more direct approach of recruiting students from the NYC DOE high schools. However, we know there are many adults with a need to upgrade their skills for career advancement who do not have a postsecondary credential. We also know that the adult population is expanding rapidly in the for-profit sector of higher education. With increased attention to recruiting adults, CUNY could expand the number of adults served. Furthermore, a lack of resources may inhibit these programs from expanding. CWE cited a lack of space as a hindrance to expansion.
   - CUNY should highlight the flexibility and extra supports available to adults who pursue higher education through all of the existing adult education programs.
   - CUNY should review the resources available for these programs.
   - CUNY should consider assigning Central Office staff to support and convene these programs.

2. **Maintain flexible admission standards in math for adults seeking enrollment in existing adult education programs, and expand this flexibility to other programs serving adults.** Although precise data is not available at this time, program directors indicate that many adults seeking admission to a senior college do not achieve the score in mathematics required for admission. There has been a long standing practice that adults may be admitted to some of these programs without meeting the CUNY-wide math proficiency standard, and there are a variety of models for how best to support adult students in the development of their math skills. Further, as detailed in an April 2014 memorandum issued by Interim Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost, Julia Wrigley, colleges now have the option to pilot new approaches to math remediation for non-STEM students.
• CUNY should allow adult education programs to continue admission for adult students who do not earn a 45-40 on the math assessment test.
• Following the successful model highlighted by the CUNY Math Mainstreaming Experiment, adult students should be permitted to demonstrate proficiency by passing a credit bearing math course, with extra support available.
• Students should have at least a two-semester grace period at the college to meet the math standard.
• Programs that include a detailed, individualized review of applicants, such as CUNY BA, should have the option of waiving the math requirement based on the overall quality of the application.
• Adult education programs should be encouraged to consider developing new approaches to math remediation for non-STEM students, in consultation with CUNY’s Office of Academic Affairs.

3. **Highlight the School of Professional Studies as a central hub for adult learning.** SPS offers online courses and degree programs that are tailored for students with prior college credits. Such features are crucial in any model serving large numbers of adult students.
   • CUNY should support SPS in the expansion of offerings.
   • CUNY should carefully consider Empire State’s model.
   • Additional supports should be made available for adult students seeking to customize their educational experience to correspond with professional goals.

4. **Develop an associate degree program tailored for working adults.** There is currently no associate degree offered at CUNY that is specifically tailored for adult students. It may be of great benefit to students to have the opportunity to earn an academic credential that will prepare them for a better job in the near term.
   • CUNY should work with one or more partner colleges to develop and offer an associate degree program for adult learners.
   • The curriculum should emphasize professional skill building and allow students to apply academic concepts and skills to real work settings, such as through internships or through their existing jobs.
   • The curriculum should be flexible, allowing for acceptance of transfer credit toward degree requirements.
   • The use of Prior Learning Assessment should be explored for the awarding of credit toward the degree.
   • Credits earned in the degree program should be transferrable to the bachelor’s level, allowing students the opportunity to further their education as desired.
5. **Maximize flexibility for working adults by expanding online education, e-permit opportunities, and evening/weekend course offerings across the CUNY system.** Models of education delivery should be developed to enhance convenience and support for adult students.
   - CUNY should work to expand the number of online course offerings, and should consider expansion of evening and weekend courses.
   - E-permit procedures should be reviewed to ensure that students are able to enroll in courses offered at other CUNY colleges as needed.
   - A directory of online courses should be made available on the CUNY website, and students should be able to easily search the online course catalog for online courses.
   - Policies and procedures related to e-permit opportunities should be included on the CUNY website.

6. **Support faculty training for Prior Learning Assessment, and advertise the availability of PLA on CUNY campuses.** For older students, who often have substantial life and work experience, PLA is an appropriate means of advancing and engaging students. When done in a rigorous and structured way, PLA enables students to demonstrate a high standard of knowledge, skills and abilities in connection to existing coursework.
   - Workshops and other training materials should be made available for faculty members interested in conducting PLA.
   - The availability and benefits of PLA should be described on the CUNY website, and other methods of marketing PLA should be explored.

7. **Forge partnerships with employers and labor unions to encourage enrollment and leverage available resources.** Labor Unions often fund tuition benefits for members, and these can reduce financial barriers to attending college. CUNY has a long history of examples of university-labor-employer models of workforce development. For example, from 1990 to 2008 more than 80,000 members of 1199SEIU attended CUNY, many with the support of tuition vouchers, paid release time, childcare, or courses offered on-site at health facilities (Ebenstein et al., 2009). CUNY also has an existing MOU with NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation which pays tuition and fees for eligible employees who take courses at CUNY.
   - CUNY should advertise existing partnerships and the benefits available, and should also explore the development of new partnerships to promote workforce development and college attainment.
Conclusion

This report provides an orientation to some of the key issues related to higher education opportunities for adults and to CUNY programs focused on adult learners. Adult learners are an important constituency within higher education which is expected to grow in coming years. Functional mechanisms to recruit, enroll and support these students are necessary in order to retain them, and several CUNY campuses are engaged in this targeted work, providing examples for consideration. Further research and discussion is merited for thoughtful deployment of resources towards expansion. For example, adult learners in these specialized CUNY programs are not necessarily flagged by existing data systems, making analysis and comparison difficult. Student experiences vary widely, and an understanding of student perspectives would be important for developing academic support systems. Additionally, industry partners may lend insight on how workforce development initiatives could be created to bolster the success of working students. Implementation of short- and long-term evidence-based strategies to increase the enrollment and retention of adult learners at CUNY could be mutually beneficial for students, the University and New York City.
Appendix

Interviews with Program Directors

January 22, 2014 – Richard Adams, Director, ACE Program, Queens College; Joanne Mason, Site Coordinator, Joseph S. Murphy Institute at Queens College

January 28, 2014 – Dr. Gregory Mantsios, Director, Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies

January 28, 2014 – Dr. Kim J. Hartwick, Academic Director; Beth Kneller, Deputy Director, CUNY BA

February 11, 2014 – Dr. George Otte, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, CUNY School of Professional Studies

March 5, 2014 – Dr. Howard Kleinmann, Director of Academic Support Center, Queens College

March 6, 2014 – Dr. Juan Carlos Mercado, Dean, Division of Interdisciplinary Studies at The Center for Worker Education, City College

March 19, 2014 – Dr. Marzie Jafari, Vice President of Workforce and Global Partnerships, Lehman College

March 28, 2014 – Dr. Anne Lopes, Dean of Graduate Studies, John Jay College (formerly served as Associate Dean of Empire State’s Metropolitan Region)
References


