A young Black man with short, curly hair is shown in profile, looking out a window. He is wearing a dark blue t-shirt and has a dark bag with a brown strap slung over his shoulder. The background is a bright window with a view of trees.

TODAY'S STUDENTS, TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

A ROADMAP FOR CHANGE AT
CUNY COMMUNITY COLLEGES

SEPTEMBER 2021



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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Opportunity America is a Washington-based nonprofit promoting economic mobility—work, skills, careers, ownership and entrepreneurship for poor and working Americans. The organization’s principal activities are research, policy development, dissemination of policy ideas and working to build consensus around policy proposals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without input from many New York City educators, employers, social service providers, researchers and policy thinkers. Opportunity America is indebted to former university dean for continuing education and workforce programs Angie Datta Kamath for her encouragement and generosity opening doors across the CUNY system. We’re grateful to the workforce education deans and directors in the CUNY Adult and Continuing Education Council who provided essential feedback on many of the recommendations in the report. Special thanks to the organizations that helped organize roundtable sessions with employers, educators, students and community-based organizations: the 1199SEIU Training and Employment Funds, the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, JobsFirstNYC, the Bronx Opportunity Network, Per Scholas, Borough of Manhattan Community College, LaGuardia Community College and New York City College of Technology. Among the many campus-level leaders who helped and inspired us, Kenneth Adams, Sunil Gupta and Jane MacKillop stand out. We thank them for their part in conceiving the project, talking through ideas and reading drafts of the final paper. Cheryl Baldwin also read the full manuscript and made invaluable suggestions. Stephen Sheets tracked down essential institutional data. The project would never have gotten off the ground without the help of Charles Sahn, and it would never have been finished without input from a cadre of superior research assistants. The lead author was Opportunity America president Tamar Jacoby. Special gratitude goes to our funders—the Achelis and Bodman Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, the New York Community Trust and the Pinkerton Foundation—for their generous support of the project.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sprawling, 25-campus City University of New York (CUNY) enjoys a well-deserved reputation as an engine of economic opportunity and upward mobility. But New York City is changing. Automation and artificial intelligence are transforming the economy and with it, New York's need for higher education. Technological change dramatically accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic is creating new opportunities but also challenges for the nearly two-thirds of New Yorkers who lack bachelor's degrees.

No entity is better positioned to address these challenges than the city's storied public university, particularly its community colleges, seven large but often overlooked institutions usually seen as stepping stones to the university's 14 four-year colleges—for many students, a first stop on the way to a bachelor's degree.

The question posed by the changing economy: can these colleges pivot to put career preparation more at the center of their mission and culture, adapting to learners' shifting needs and a rapidly evolving New York labor market?

Why job-focused education

For many Americans, it's an article of faith: the road to the middle class runs through a bachelor's degree—indispensable for a well-paying job, the only reliable ticket to financial security. This conventional wisdom isn't entirely wrong. The tectonic economic shifts of the late 20th

Two-thirds of jobs require some postsecondary education or training, but often less than a bachelor's degree.

century drove ballooning demand for higher education. Bachelor's degree attainment has more than quadrupled since 1960, and for those students who finish college, a four-year degree is generally a good investment.

Yet even as this trend continues, other changes are afoot. A growing number of employers, educators, learners and lawmakers believe that higher education must go beyond traditional academic instruction. At least as important, if not more so: preparing students for the world of work.

The need for better career preparation affects learners at all educational levels. Employers in every industry complain that even highly educated applicants lack the personal and problem-solving skills they need to succeed on the job. In years ahead, as Covid and its aftermath hasten the arrival of the "future of work," workers across the economy will require fast job-focused upskilling and reskilling to keep up with a changing workplace.

But the need is particularly acute for those who don't complete a four-year degree. Automation

CUNY leadership has seen this change coming for more than a decade.

and workplace restructuring, upending industries across the economy, are creating demand for higher-order skills among workers who have not finished college. In the early 1980s, two-thirds of US jobs were open to workers with no more than a high school diploma. Today, two-thirds of jobs require some postsecondary education or training, but often less than a bachelor's degree.

Six in 10 American adults report that their principal reason for attending college is to get a job or a better job. The last decade has seen a revolution in how we as a nation ready learners for the workplace, and some of the most exciting innovation in higher education focuses on linking the educational experience more closely to job opportunities.

CUNY

CUNY leadership has seen this change coming for more than a decade. In 2011, Félix Matos Rodriguez, then president of Hostos Community College, made “21st-century workforce development” a central pillar of his five-year strategic plan. Today, as chancellor of the university, he and his team continue to move in this direction.

The last year or so has seen a burst of promising developments. The university competed successfully for several large infusions of funding, public and private, to develop new job-focused programs. The system is partnering with a powerful consortium of New York employers to train and hire CUNY graduates, and educators across the university are experimenting with new strategies to equip learners for the workplace.

But much remains to be done. Many CUNY

faculty still question the notion that it's their job to ready learners for the workplace; others wonder if it's possible to reconcile academic rigor with career preparation. Pockets of excellence—strong employer partnerships here, innovative credentialing there—have yet to be scaled across the university. And faculty and administrators on every campus agree: the system needs to produce better employment outcomes for students.

One year after graduation, according to the latest data available from the university, the median earnings of CUNY bachelor's degree holders were \$40,255—well below the national average of \$52,135 and hardly keeping pace with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology living-wage threshold for a single adult New Yorker without children, \$41,592.

Bottom line: despite long-standing interest and a decade of progress, CUNY could be doing more—much more—to prepare New Yorkers for careers and meet the city's changing labor market demand.

This project

This report was funded by a consortium of leading New York City philanthropic donors eager to see CUNY focus more intentionally on preparing students for the workplace. Work began just before Chancellor Rodriguez was appointed, and when he took office, he strongly encouraged the project.

The understanding between the chancellor and Opportunity America: that the organization would bring an independent perspective to its research and ultimately speak with an independent voice, but that the aim of the study was to make recommendations that are plausible for CUNY—some implementable in the short term, others goals for the future.

Over the next two years, Opportunity America canvassed the views of more than 200 New Yorkers, some 130 in one-on-one interviews

CUNY COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- 1 Bronx Community College
- 2 Eugenio María de Hostos Community College
- 3 Stella and Charles Guttman Community College
- 4 Borough of Manhattan Community College
- 5 Queensborough Community College
- 6 LaGuardia Community College
- 7 Kingsborough Community College
- ★ CUNY Central



and another 80 in focus-group-like roundtable sessions. An online survey, developed by LaGuardia Community College with input from Opportunity America, explored the opinions of some 1,000 LaGuardia students.

Our goal: to produce a menu of bold, far-reaching recommendations, some of them ambitious in the current moment, but none beyond reach in years ahead.

The scope of the report

Much of the discussion in the pages that follow addresses the unique challenges and opportunities facing adult and continuing education (ACE).

At CUNY, as at other colleges nationwide, the continuing education division serves nondegree-seeking students, often midcareer adults more focused on skills than academic credentials who enroll in short, stand-alone programs distinct from the college's regular offerings. ACE's signature strength is workforce development, and any plan to elevate career preparation at CUNY must include a new vision for these often-neglected units. But job-focused education is too important to be left entirely to ACE, and the scope of this report is broader—recommendations for ACE and for the rest of the university.

Career preparation is also too important to be left solely to community colleges. Opportunity America's initial research focused on two-year institutions. But our hunt for exemplary job-focused programs soon led us to other CUNY campuses, and we believe our recommendations will be apt for institutions across the university—at any two- or four-year campus seeking to better serve job-focused students.

Many of our proposals emerged in conversations with New York educators and employers.

Our top proposals

Many of our proposals—there are nearly two dozen in total—are based on ideas that emerged in conversations with New York educators and employers. Others aim to scale changes already under way at CUNY. Still other ideas come from job-focused community college educators in other states: innovations, many of them pioneered in the past decade or two, that have the potential to address challenges arising today in New York.

Among the proposals we believe are likely to be most impactful:

Monitor the New York City labor market and adjust course offerings to respond as it shifts, teaching skills in demand in today's workplace.

The 21st-century labor market is constantly changing. In-demand skills come and go. College courses debuted five or 10 years ago may or may not be relevant today. Campus-based administrators and instructors make every effort to keep up. But only the CUNY Central Office can coordinate a systemwide response to city-wide labor market demand, including, if necessary, coupling or consolidating programs offered on several campuses.

What's needed starts with a state-of-the-art labor market information research center that provides granular, real-time data on industry trends, job postings, in-demand skills and the supply of talent likely to be available to fill anticipated openings. The next step: strategic, systemwide coordination to ensure that CUNY has

the right programs in place to meet citywide demand—next year and in years ahead.

Create a central employer outreach hub that generates industry partners and job-focused programs for campuses across the university.

There can be no effective job-focused education without employers. Industry partners supply information about business trends and changing labor market demand. They collaborate with educators to design programs and develop curriculum. Most important, they hire graduates and provide feedback on their skills.

What's needed at CUNY: a workforce solutions hub, focused on career education and training, that serves as the system's central portal for employers, marketing what's available at the colleges, recruiting industry partners and sharing business contacts with colleagues on other campuses—a rainmaker for credit and noncredit divisions across the university.

A pilot project that combines credit and non-credit workforce education under one roof in a single division.

Some job-focused education and training is credit-eligible—designed for students seeking academic certificates and degrees. Other workforce programs are housed in a nondegree-granting continuing education division. Both kinds of instruction have advantages, but the rigid bifurcation serves no one.

What's needed in New York: a blurring of the line between the two divisions and better bridges for students seeking to move from one to the other. A pilot project for an enterprising CUNY community college president: bring the two divisions together under one roof to create a continuum of credit and noncredit job-focused programs.

A pilot project, modeled on CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative, to help students chart a path to a high-demand, high-paying job. Many students, especially those from families with little

exposure to higher education, find the college experience confusing. There are too many options to choose from. It's hard to find your place, harder still to chart a course, and what guidance is available focuses overwhelmingly on graduation—not launching a career.

Like ASAP, the initiative we propose would include a varied package of services: “intrusive advising,” instructors with industry work experience, a streamlined sequencing of instruction, aggressive contextualized remediation, experiential learning for every student and financial aid. Perhaps the most important ingredient: an on-campus job placement service on the model of a staffing agency, dedicated to employer outreach and helping students bridge the gap from college to career.

Along with these four targeted initiatives, we recommend that CUNY pursue three more diffuse, foundational changes:

- A more intentional emphasis on mid-career adult learners
- A more aggressive approach to embedding competency-based industry certifications in workforce education programs and using them to facilitate crossover from noncredit to credit education
- Two steps to showcase the payoff to job-focused programs: reform at the campus level to collect nondegree-seeking students' Social Security numbers and making aggregated data on credit and noncredit student employment outcomes—job placements and wages—available to the public on an online platform

Still another priority, among the most critical albeit beyond CUNY's control: public policy reform to make student financial aid available to nondegree-seeking, job-focused students. It's

beyond the remit of this report to make detailed recommendations for state or federal policy. But a few lessons can be drawn from enterprising CUNY colleges and noncredit funding mechanisms in other states.

How to read this report

This study begins with a discussion of why change is needed, followed by an action agenda that groups our proposals into five buckets. Each of the paper's five substantive chapters corresponds to one of these buckets: aligning college offerings with labor market demand, blurring the line between credit and noncredit education, counseling and career navigation, building a regional talent pipeline, and funding.

Each chapter contains a handful of numbered proposals: in each case, a brief description of what, why and how. Each recommendation also includes a suggestion about where change should start, the level of resources needed and the likely impact of the proposal. Scattered through the report, short text boxes highlight challenges, opportunities and innovation already under way on CUNY campuses.

This report is a menu of options. Only CUNY leadership knows what reforms are possible in today's context. But the stakes could hardly be higher. Not just the Covid moment but also the accelerating economic change that lies ahead are all but certain to require a new approach. The question for CUNY leadership: where to start?

CUNY FACTS AND FIGURES

Enrollment headcount (fall 2020)

	Full time	Part time	Total	PT %
Senior colleges				
Undergraduate	108,196	39,281	147,477	26.6%
Graduate	9,631	21,511	31,142	69.1%
Total senior colleges	117,827	60,792	178,619	34.0%
Total community colleges	48,836	33,679	82,515	40.8%
Total university	166,663	94,471	261,134	36.2%

Enrollment full-time equivalent (fall 2020)

Senior colleges	140,868
Community colleges	57,614
Total university	198,482

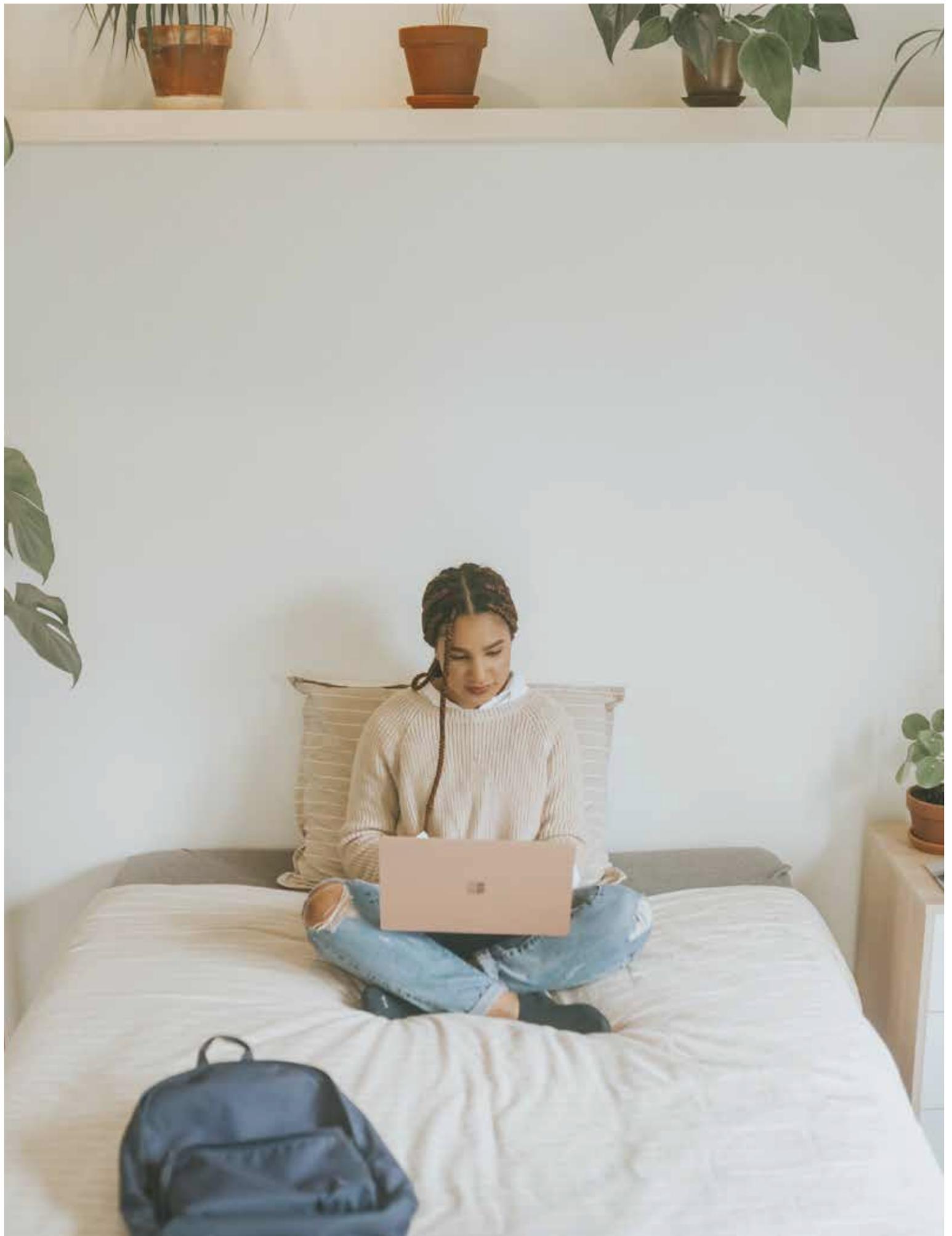
Adult and continuing education enrollment (2018-19)

Senior colleges	104,658
Community colleges	110,315
Total university	214,973

Undergraduate profile (fall 2020)

	Senior	Community
Work 20+ hours per week	51.8%	55.3%
Attended NYC public HS	82.2%	82.0%
Age 25 or older	24.3%	26.9%
Born outside US mainland	34.3%	36.7%
Native language not English	38.2%	40.0%
Ethnicity		
Black	23.4%	29.1%
Hispanic	27.3%	37.5%
Asian	24.9%	17.6%
White	24.0%	15.4%
Native American	0.3%	0.4%
Gender		
Female	57.9%	59.1%
Male	42.1%	40.9%

Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Aligning college offerings with labor market demand

A labor market information research center.

Create a research hub that provides real-time, granular data about local labor supply and demand—information that can be used to market CUNY to employers and guide colleges' decisions about job-focused programs.

Systemwide coordination to meet citywide labor needs.

Coordinate programs offered across the CUNY system to ensure that the university is meeting citywide labor market demand.

A new course for the university.

Make a vocal public commitment to move career readiness to the center of the university's mission and culture.

Academic education and career preparation.

Launch a university-wide campaign—first communications, then incentives for curricular reform—to underscore that what many see as a binary choice between academic excellence and career readiness is a false dichotomy.

A central hub for employer outreach.

Designate an institution or department to serve as the university's central portal for employers, recruiting industry partners and sharing business contacts with other CUNY colleges.

Campus-based employer engagement.

Launch a Central Office strategy to help CUNY colleges develop more intensive and effective employer partnerships.

Work-based learning.

Intensify efforts to expand experiential learning opportunities with a new approach to employer outreach, a wider range of hands-on options for students and granting college credit for time spent in the workplace.

Blurring the line between credit and noncredit education

The one-college model.

On one campus, combine degree-granting and nondegree-granting divisions under one roof in a hybrid entity that serves both degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking students.

Data collection and transparency.

Collect non-credit students' Social Security numbers, enabling colleges to track learners' post-completion jobs and wages, and launch a dashboard to publish data about credit and noncredit students' employment outcomes.

A seat at the table.

Reduce the stigma often associated with noncredit programs and give noncredit educators a voice in critical decisions about campus governance.

Industry certifications.

Intensify efforts to integrate industry certifications—competency-based credentials developed by employer groups—in credit and noncredit programs.

Consolidate and standardize.

Consolidate and standardize job-focused noncredit programs across the university, eliminating redundancies and providing a more consistent student experience.

Counseling and career navigation

Career counseling at intake. Provide intensive advising about job opportunities and the path from college to career when students first arrive on a CUNY campus.

Helping students stay on a path to a job. Provide an array of sustained supports throughout the student's time at CUNY to ensure they stay on the job-focused path they chart at intake.

Job placement. Create an on-campus job placement office to ensure that every student gets the individualized assistance they need to navigate the labor market.

A pilot project focused on employment outcomes. Launch a pilot project, modeled on the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative, to ensure that job-focused students get good jobs in their fields of study.

Midcareer adults. Offer more services for mid-career adult students: targeted outreach and recruitment, tailored program design, scheduling, advising and other student supports conceived more intentionally for older learners focused on employment outcomes.

Building a regional talent pipeline

Partnering to recruit students. Develop deeper partnerships with community groups—community-based social services, faith-based organizations, nonprofit training providers and union training funds—to drive enrollment at CUNY colleges.

Partnering to provide instruction. Leverage the job-focused training offered by community-based organizations, nonprofit groups and union training funds.

Collaborating across institutions. Encourage and reward collaboration among CUNY colleges and between CUNY and other New York City education and social service providers.

Funding

More financial transparency. Encourage greater clarity at all levels—among college divisions, between campus and Central and between CUNY and city government—about how money flows and why.

Better incentives for ACE. Implement reforms at the campus level to adjust how funding is shared between credit and non-credit divisions, creating clearer incentives for noncredit administrators.

Financial aid for noncredit students. Launch a pilot project, funded by private philanthropy or taxpayers, that provides financial aid for noncredit workforce students, establishing a model for state or federal reform.



PREFACE

In early 2019, national research and policy organization Opportunity America embarked on a study of what City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges can do to put preparing students for careers more at the center of their mission and culture.

The study was conceived as a companion piece to another project in the works at Opportunity America: a report by a group of leading educators and education policy thinkers offering a new vision for community colleges nationwide—how two-year public institutions can fulfill their potential as the country’s leading provider of job-focused education and training.¹

The New York project too is grounded in a vision of the potential of community colleges. CUNY’s seven two-year institutions are an unparalleled asset to New York City, today as in the past advancing CUNY’s storied mission as an engine of economic opportunity and upward mobility for a broad array of New Yorkers, traditional college-age and older. The question on the table: how can these institutions redouble their efforts and build on their past success, adapting to learners’ changing needs and a rapidly evolving New York economy?

The project was funded by a consortium of leading New York City philanthropic donors eager to see CUNY focus more intentionally on preparing students for the workplace: the Achelis and Bodman Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, the New York Community Trust and the Pinkerton Foundation. Work began just before

This project too is grounded in a vision of the potential of community colleges.

incoming chancellor Félix Matos Rodriguez was appointed, and when he took office, he strongly encouraged the project.

The understanding between the chancellor and Opportunity America: that the organization would bring an independent perspective to its research and ultimately speak with an independent voice, but that the aim of the study was to make recommendations that are plausible for CUNY—some implementable in the short term, others goals for the future.

Over the next two years, Opportunity America canvassed the views of more than 200 New Yorkers, some 130 in one-on-one interviews and another 80 in focus-group-like roundtable sessions.

The organization conducted nearly two dozen interviews with personnel at the CUNY Central Office and its affiliates. Before the pandemic struck, principal investigator Tamar Jacoby visited nine CUNY campuses, several of them more than once, and interviewed more than 35 campus-based administrators and faculty. Some 30 additional interviews explored the views of personnel at community-based organizations, labor unions and non-CUNY education and

training providers. Opportunity America also had conversations with nearly a dozen policy-makers and policy thinkers in New York City and Albany. Still another 20 interviews explored opinions among employers and employer association executives.

In addition to one-on-one interviews, Opportunity America hosted eight focus-group-like roundtable sessions, some in person, others virtual. Four groups explored the views of employers in industries that hire large numbers of workers with more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree: health care, the skilled trades, new manufacturing and the supply chain and logistics sector. Other roundtables consisted of CUNY students, nonprofit organization staff, labor union training fund officials and CUNY workforce education administrators.

An online survey developed by LaGuardia Community College with input from Opportunity America explored the opinions of some 1,000 LaGuardia students.

Opportunity America was nearing the midpoint of this work when Covid-19 struck New York City. In response, over the next 12 months, the organization produced two unanticipated products. The first, in July 2020, was a short report urging CUNY colleges to respond to the pandemic by elevating and enhancing their capacity for short, job-focused education and training programs.² Second, in late 2020, Opportunity America commissioned the New York City Labor Market Information Service to produce data on how Covid had affected health care workers with some education and training beyond high school but less than a four-year college degree. Then a second paper, released in early 2021, took a closer look at this essential workforce—the role

The goal: a roadmap for a university committed to innovation.

it played during the pandemic, its future economic prospects and the implications for CUNY colleges.³

In June 2020, Opportunity America began testing the recommendations it expected to include in its final report at monthly sessions with a group of CUNY workforce education administrators, the Adult and Continuing Education Council. Ten sessions followed over the next 11 months—among the most important conversations shaping our proposals for CUNY colleges.

Positioned at the cutting edge of the national debate about community college workforce education, Opportunity America draws on a wealth of knowledge about innovation taking place on campuses across the country. But not every idea hatched in Texas or Florida or California is right for New York City. Any recommendations for CUNY must be grounded in existing conditions at the university, and CUNY leadership will know best when and how to leverage change across the system.

Opportunity America's goal: to produce a menu of bold, far-reaching recommendations, some of them ambitious in the current moment, but none beyond reach in years ahead—a roadmap for a university committed to innovation, augmenting its value and relevance for a next generation of New York learners.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

In New York City, as elsewhere across America, many educators are rethinking the role of higher education—its purpose, its priorities and how best to address the goals of a changing student body.

From their earliest days, even before they were incorporated as a university, CUNY colleges have sought to serve the social and economic needs of New Yorkers and, when necessary, have pivoted to keep up with those changing needs.

In the late 19th century, as immigrants flocked to the city and their children sought to join the ranks of the nation's educated elite, City College emerged as what some called "Harvard on the Hudson." In the 1950s and 1960s, with New York hemorrhaging manufacturing jobs, new colleges opened and a city university emerged to provide the children of blue-collar families with a path to the middle class.⁴

That traditional academic path is as important as ever today. The economic and socioeconomic shifts that began in 1957, when the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik exposed a global technology gap and highlighted the importance of education, have transformed the nation. Sea changes in the labor market have driven ballooning demand for higher education. Bachelor's degree attainment has more than quadrupled since Sputnik, and a four-year college degree now confers a lifetime salary premium of between \$600,000 and \$900,000.⁵

Yet even as this trend continues, other changes are afoot. As automation and workplace restructuring upend labor markets across the economy, a

The need for better career preparation affects learners at all educational levels.

growing number of employers, educators, learners and lawmakers believe that preparing students for the world of work should play a larger role than it does today.

The need for better career preparation affects learners at all educational levels. Employers in every industry complain that even highly educated applicants—those with bachelor's degrees and more—lack the personal and problem-solving skills they need to succeed on the job.⁶ In years ahead, as Covid-19 and its aftermath hasten the arrival of the "future of work," workers across the economy will require fast job-focused upskilling and reskilling to keep up with the changing workplace.

But the need is particularly acute for those who don't complete a four-year degree. In New York, as across the US, the disappearance of routine jobs is sharpening demand for skilled technical workers and creating new opportunities for the nearly two-thirds of New Yorkers who lack bachelor's degrees. In the early 1980s, two-thirds of US jobs were open to workers with no more than a high school diploma. Today, two-thirds of jobs require postsecondary education or training—but not necessarily four-year degrees.⁷ And renewed

concern about diversity has underscored the imperative of economic opportunity and upward mobility for all New Yorkers.

Six in 10 American adults report that their principal reason for attending college is to get a job or a better job.⁸ The last decade has seen a revolution in how we as a nation ready learners for the workplace, and some of the most exciting innovation in higher education focuses on linking the educational experience more closely to job opportunities.

CUNY leadership has seen this change coming for more than a decade. In 2011, then-Chancellor Matthew Goldstein convened an expert task force to recommend how the university could better prepare graduates for New York City's changing labor market.⁹ That same year, a consortium of CUNY community colleges won a large federal grant to pioneer cutting-edge job training strategies.¹⁰ In the Bronx, current chancellor Félix Matos

Rodriguez, then president of Hostos Community College, made "21st-century workforce development" a central pillar of his five-year strategic plan.¹¹

Ten years later, CUNY leadership continues to move in this direction. The last year in particular has seen a burst of promising developments. The university has competed successfully for several large infusions of funding, public and private, to develop new job-focused programs. The system is partnering with a powerful consortium of New York employers to train and hire CUNY graduates, and educators across the university are experimenting with new strategies to equip learners for the workplace.

But much remains to be done. Many CUNY faculty still question the notion that it's their job to ready learners for the workplace; others wonder if it's possible to reconcile academic rigor with career preparation. Pockets of excellence—strong

THE PAYOFF TO REFORM: MIDLEVEL HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Midlevel health care jobs—positions requiring some education and training beyond high school but not four-year college degrees—are an essential springboard of upward mobility for the nearly two-thirds of New Yorkers who lack bachelor's degrees.

Today's equivalent of the unskilled factory jobs that once vaulted millions of Americans into the middle class, midlevel health care jobs require relatively modest preparation but generally pay decent, family-sustaining wages. In New York City, where one estimate puts the current living wage at \$37,400 a year, typical midlevel jobs like emergency medical technician, paramedic and physical therapist assistant pay around \$50,000, and some positions, like radiation therapist, offer twice as much.¹³

Unlike midlevel positions in some other fields, many middle-tier health care jobs also offer ample opportunity for advancement. After five years on the job in New York, for example, some 45 percent of medical assistants have moved up to more skilled, better-paying health care occupations, including phlebotomist and licensed practical nurse.¹⁴

What's needed to make this stepwise advancement work: a broad spectrum of job-focused education and training programs. Many aspiring midlevel health care workers start with short, nondegree-granting courses that culminate in occupational certifications. Many then head directly to the labor market, and some never come back for more education. But after some time on the

employer partnerships here, innovative credentialing there—have yet to be scaled across the system. And faculty and administrators on every campus agree: the system needs to produce better employment outcomes for students.

One year after graduation, according to the latest data available from the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, the median earnings of CUNY bachelor's degree holders

were \$40,255—well below the national median of \$52,135 and hardly keeping pace with the MIT living-wage threshold for a single adult New Yorker without children, \$41,592.¹² (All amounts are in 2020 dollars.)

Bottom line: despite long-standing interest and a decade of progress, CUNY could be doing more—much more—to prepare New Yorkers for careers and meet the city's changing labor market demand.

Every step along the way is an opportunity for CUNY.

job, those who seek to advance often return to school—whether for another short stint of job-focused training or a longer program leading to a degree.

Every step along the way is an opportunity for CUNY, and most CUNY colleges offer an array of health care programs. But much remains to be done.

Many New York City health care employers say they find it hard to navigate the sprawling, decentralized university—25 different campuses, often with overlapping or redundant course offerings. Health care workers who return to CUNY to prepare for the next step in their careers often find it difficult to leverage prior learning or work experience for college credit. Few CUNY campuses make accommodations for midcareer adult students. And employers and educators agree that better communication is needed to ensure that CUNY programs keep up with changing labor market demand and learners graduate with the skills they need to succeed on the job.

Bottom line: there's no quick, easy fix—many different kinds of reform are needed if CUNY community colleges are to realize their full potential for helping learners navigate the New York City labor market. But the payoff is clear: providing aspiring health care workers with the fast track they seek into the middle class and beyond.



ACTION AGENDA

FIVE PILLARS

Two years of exploration—labor market research, focus groups and interviews with a broad spectrum of New Yorkers—have surfaced a wealth of opportunities, large and small, for CUNY educators seeking to put more priority on preparing learners for the world of work.

Many of our recommendations are based on ideas that emerged in conversations at CUNY and elsewhere across New York City. Other proposals aim to scale changes already under way in New York or to weave existing experimentation into a broader initiative. Still other ideas come from community colleges and community college systems in other states: innovations, many of them pioneered in the past decade or two, that have the potential to address challenges arising today in New York.

Much of the discussion in the pages that follow addresses the unique challenges and opportunities facing adult and continuing education (ACE).

At CUNY, as at other colleges nationwide, the continuing education division serves nondegree-seeking students, often midcareer adults more focused on skills than academic credentials, who enroll in short, stand-alone programs distinct from the college's regular offerings. Although CUNY ACE divisions provide many kinds of programming, from remedial education to personal interest courses, their signature strength is workforce education, and any plan to elevate career preparation at CUNY must include

Their signature strength is workforce education.

a new vision for these often-neglected units. But job-focused education is too important to be left entirely to ACE, and the scope of this report is broader—recommendations for ACE and for the rest of the university.

Career preparation is also too important to be left solely to community colleges. Opportunity America's initial research focused on two-year institutions, but our hunt for exemplary job-focused programs soon led us to other CUNY campuses, including the New York City College of Technology, Lehman College and the CUNY School of Professional Studies. And while most of our recommendations are designed for community colleges, we believe they will be apt for institutions across the university—at any two- or four-year campus seeking to better serve job-focused students.

In some cases, the change that's needed starts at the campus level. In other instances, reform must be initiated by the university. Some proposals require an infusion of resources. In other cases, the most important ingredient will be fresh thinking and thoughtful leadership.

Our proposals are grouped into five buckets. Each bucket includes a range of recommendations, some more arduous than others and likely to be more impactful. Each proposal—there are nearly two dozen in total—includes a suggestion about where change should start and the level of resources needed.

Aligning college offerings with labor market demand. Only university leadership can initiate new thinking of the scope and scale required in New York, and only the CUNY Central Office can coordinate a systemwide response to citywide labor market demand. What's needed: bold leadership and an array of new tools and tactics, including a labor market information research center and a centralized hub to spearhead outreach to employers.

Blurring the line between credit and non-credit education. In New York, as across the US, some job-focused education and training is credit-eligible—designed for students seeking academic certificates and degrees—while other workforce programs are housed in a nondegree-granting continuing education division. Both kinds of programs have advantages, but the rigid bifurcation serves no one. What's needed in New York: a blurring of the line between the two divisions and better bridges for students seeking to move from one to the other. A pilot project for an enterprising CUNY community college president: bringing the two divisions together under one roof to create a continuum of credit and noncredit job-focused programs.

Counseling and career navigation. Many students, especially those from families with little exposure to higher education, find the college experience confusing. There are too many options to choose from. It's hard to find your place, harder still to chart a course, and what guidance is available focuses overwhelmingly on graduation—not launching a career. What's needed: a range of more intensive services to help students navigate paths to high-demand, high-paying jobs.

Building a regional talent pipeline. Few cities nationwide can match the wealth and variety of education and social service providers in New York. Two-year colleges, four-year colleges, high schools, community-based organizations, nonprofit social service agencies, employers, labor unions, the public workforce system and privately owned education and training providers, among other entities, offer parallel services, often to overlapping constituencies. What's needed: better coordination and collaboration to facilitate a regional talent pipeline in which CUNY plays a leading role.

Funding. In New York, as elsewhere across the US, job-focused education and training—especially nondegree job-focused programs—are chronically underfunded. What's needed at CUNY: public dollars to help career-minded students cover the cost of education and training, philanthropic investment to promote innovation, and better campus-level incentives for quality and cooperation between academic departments and continuing education.

CHAPTER ONE



ALIGNING COLLEGE OFFERINGS WITH LABOR MARKET DEMAND

Only university leadership can initiate new thinking of the scope and scale required in New York, and only the CUNY Central Office can coordinate a systemwide response to citywide labor market demand. What's needed: bold leadership and an array of new tools and tactics, including a labor market information research center and a centralized hub to spearhead outreach to employers.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

It was a common experience as we explored CUNY, a recurring theme in our research: to stumble on a new, exciting experiment—or an existing practice no one was talking about—in preparing learners for the workplace.

Many colleges have well-established partnerships with health care employers. Others have been working for years to expand experiential learning. Guttman Community College is pioneering new ways to integrate workforce skills into liberal arts programming. The School of Professional Studies trains more than 40,000

essential city workers a year. Many colleges partner with noncollege training providers like Per Scholas and the health care workers union, 1199SEIU. The university has launched a bold new initiative to expand credit for prior learning. The list goes on and on.

And yet, for all this innovation and emerging potential, few people in the CUNY system or across the city see the university as a significant force in preparing learners for the workplace. Until recently, few employers have looked to CUNY when searching for training partners. Many union and nonprofit service providers say they struggle to sustain relationships with CUNY colleges. And many CUNY educators still reject the notion that what they do should fall under the rubric of career readiness. Committed as they are to providing opportunity and upward mobility, many don't see preparing for the world of work as a path to better prospects.

At CUNY, "workforce" means adult and continuing education—no one else across the system accepts the term as a label or a mission. At one community college where 40 percent of the degrees conferred are in law enforcement, the health professions and business and marketing,

a top administrator told Opportunity America that the institution offered no credit-bearing “workforce” courses.

What’s missing here—what’s lost—goes beyond public appreciation and reputation. The scattered, fragmentary nature of CUNY’s efforts to focus on career preparation has made it hard to build on existing experiments or develop momentum for innovation.

Much of the change of the past decade, promising as it has been, was modest in size and limited in focus, driven by individual rather than institutional commitment and often difficult to sustain when personnel change. Even the

biggest, most impressive initiatives—for example, a 2011 federal Trade Adjustment Act Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant—have been largely transient, one-time experiments at a few institutions with little long-term impact across the university.

Without a driving strategy or systemwide coordination, CUNY has been unable to leverage the economies of scale that should be available to a large citywide network. With a few recent exceptions, potential partners—employers, unions, nonprofits—see no critical mass or sustainable commitment to career preparation. Even employers who would like to collaborate

MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LABOR MARKET RESEARCH CENTER

The last decade or so has seen a burst of innovation in the tools available to track labor market demand, and like many colleges, CUNY looks to private firms—Emsi Burning Glass and others—for job postings data it can use to assess opportunities for graduates. This is an important first step, but it’s only the beginning of what can be done.

Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York, has pioneered a more robust, multi-dimensional approach. Monroe’s Economic and Workforce Development Center (EWDC) unit combines job postings data with a wide array of other quantitative and qualitative inputs, then uses this information to design college programs that deliver improved employment outcomes for students.

The EWDC approach rests on five essential pillars—five different kinds of questions that administrators suggest must be answered if the college is to prepare students effectively.

The first, all-important question: do the college’s job-focused programs match the occupations in demand in the Rochester region? Does every workforce program prepare students for a job that will be available in the area at the time they are likely to graduate? And is there a course at the college that corresponds to every growing occupation?

To answer this question, EWDC needed a common language that bridged the disparate worlds of education and employment, allowing the unit to match course offerings with local job openings. So staff developed a framework linking the US Department of Education’s Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes—a diagnostic tool the college can use to assess the relevance of its course offerings.

The second challenge for EWDC: assessing regional demand for Monroe graduates. Like other colleges, the unit starts with Emsi Burning Glass data—information culled electronically from the millions of openings posted every day on online job boards. These real-time data are an invaluable tool, but not every employer that hires community college graduates posts its vacancies online, and job postings can be misleading, some more complete and accurate than others. EWDC’s solution to this problem: it layers job postings data with a range of other inputs, including state and federal government data and information gathered from employers.

Qualitative input from employers and employer associations is particularly important—a window on industry trends, in-demand skills and changing technology. Feedback from faculty and surveys of recent

are often unsure where to turn—confused by too many doors to knock on across the vast, decentralized university.

Perhaps most troubling, lacking a central capacity to assess or monitor labor market demand, there's no way of knowing if CUNY's scattered education and training programs are indeed meeting the city's needs—and no way to do anything about it if they are under- or over-shooting the mark.

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 A labor market information research center

What. A state-of-the-art labor market information research center that provides granular, real-time data about job opportunities and applicants—information that can be used to market CUNY to New York employers and to guide colleges' decisions about the job-focused programs they offer.

Is there a course at the college that corresponds to every growing occupation?

graduates add important nuance and shading. The result is a far richer and more accurate picture of the local labor market than the college could glean from job postings data alone.

EWDC's third insight: community colleges do not operate in a vacuum. Monroe students compete for jobs with graduates of other local colleges, job seekers trained by the public workforce system, companies' existing workers, recently terminated workers and others. A full assessment of the opportunities available to MCC students must gauge labor market supply as well as demand.

Among the sources EWDC uses to compile a picture of regional supply: internal college data on graduates by field of study, US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) tallies of degrees and certificates conferred by other colleges in the region, information from state education and labor agencies, labor unions, licensure boards, industry certifying bodies and public workforce system databases.

Still a fourth vital question for any college labor market information research unit: how do the institution's graduates fare in the labor market? Do they land jobs in their fields of study? Do they earn a living wage? Do they earn more or less than graduates of other, comparable education and training programs?

EWDC uses a standard tool to assess graduates' employment outcomes: matching administrative data on Monroe students with input on their post-college earnings drawn from New York State Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance (UI) records. Armed with this information, the unit calculates graduates' wage outcomes over a five-year period, broken out by occupation and student demographics.

The fifth and final step for EWDC: packaging and disseminating its assessments of local market supply and demand to Monroe faculty and administrators. Most educators are not data analysts. They need crisp visualizations and concise takeaways, and EWDC staff work hard to condense and present their detailed findings.

The payoff for the college is a complex, multilayered picture of the local labor market that administrators can use to make decisions about what programs to offer. Both sides of the college—credit and noncredit—have come to rely on the information. They use it to develop programs in new fields of study, eliminate obsolete courses, expand and contract existing instruction and tailor curriculum to better meet local industry needs. The ultimate payoff for Monroe students: they're far more likely to graduate with the skills they need to succeed in the occupation of their choosing.

As is, the CUNY system is like an ocean liner without a compass, hoping in a general way to prepare students to succeed in careers but with little information about labor market supply and demand. What's needed: individual colleges must make every effort to understand and meet employer needs, but ultimately only the Central Office can monitor citywide labor market alignment.

Why. All too often, at CUNY as elsewhere across the US, available training lags so far behind the changing labor market that graduates can't find jobs in their field or, once they have been hired, lack the skills they need to do the job.

The problem starts with instructors who don't talk to local employers or keep up with changing technology. Other educators, focused more on academic success than employment outcomes, don't heed the labor market signals telling them to open, close or revamp programs. For years before the pandemic, hospitals in New York City faced a shortage of respiratory therapists but couldn't persuade enough colleges to offer training—a failure that weighed heavily when the virus struck.

There's growing awareness among educators of the need for better labor market alignment. The tools to assess shifting workforce needs have grown more sophisticated in recent years as researchers find new ways to collect and package information about job openings. Many CUNY colleges purchase labor market data, and the Central Office circulates a monthly digest of information about jobs available in the New York area.

But monthly government surveys and off-the-shelf job postings data go only so far. Monitoring the local labor market requires both quantitative and qualitative inputs, real-time data and an understanding of longer-term trends, and information about the supply of workers as well as the demand. Also essential: the capacity to use this information, as one would use a doctor's diagnosis, to make hard decisions about job-focused college offerings.

How. For several pioneering schools across the US, the solution to this problem is an in-house labor market information research center.

These state-of-the-art research hubs synthesize different types of inputs—data on job openings, data on job placements and wages, advice from employers and a running count of workers already being trained in the region. Armed with this information—a comprehensive, three-dimensional picture—institutions are able to tailor programs that match local demand with a right-sized supply of appropriately trained workers.

Among the essential data a CUNY center would track and disseminate across the university: occupation-specific labor market demand, employer input about changing in-demand skills, projections of CUNY completers by occupation and program-level employment outcomes—job placements and earnings.

Among the fundamental questions a center would answer: Does each job-focused CUNY program align with an occupation in demand in the region? What are CUNY's strengths—how many and what kinds of graduates does it produce with the skills sought by New York employers? And what is the gap between citywide demand, sector by sector and job by job, and the number of CUNY students on track to graduate with the skills to meet these needs?

Also critical: information on how local wage thresholds correspond to CUNY credentials. Is an information technology (IT) certification offered at CUNY, for example, enough to land an entry-level job in the field, and is it worthwhile for an experienced worker to return to CUNY for an associate degree—will that boost them to a next pay level?

Building a data hub of this kind is not a small undertaking. But no other step would do as much to advance the changes that are needed at CUNY—better labor market alignment, better strategic cooperation among colleges and better collaboration between credit and noncredit divisions. Few investments are likely to pay off as richly for job-focused learners or the regional economy.

Who. Must be initiated, planned and implemented by CUNY Central.

Resources needed. Would require a significant investment by one or more philanthropic donors.

Likely impact. High.

#2 Systemwide coordination to meet citywide labor demand

What. More strategic, systemwide thinking and coordination to ensure that CUNY programs are meeting the citywide labor market demand identified by a labor market information research center.

Why. Decentralization and campus autonomy confer advantages in many realms. But it makes no sense for CUNY colleges to compete with one another for the attention of employers or to offer programs willy-nilly without regard for their cumulative effect—without asking if the combined output of similar programs across the university is meeting the city's labor needs or exceeding them. Difficult as it can be at CUNY to coordinate across the system, the citywide labor market demands a more strategic approach.

Coordination need not be heavy-handed or intrusive. Even without tangible incentives or direct intervention by CUNY Central, better information about supply and demand, published regularly and widely shared, including with students, can drive a more concerted collective response. A more assertive Central approach would include financial incentives for colleges to coordinate in ensuring that supply meets demand.

It makes no sense for CUNY colleges to compete with one another for the attention of employers.

How. A light-handed approach would rely on information and consumer choice to influence campus decision-making.

Among the steps Central might take to move in this direction: regular assessment and publication of data on citywide labor market needs, collecting information about supply across CUNY colleges and tracking graduates' employment outcomes, college by college and program by program.

How many telemedicine techs, for example, is New York expected to need in years ahead? How many telemedicine techs are CUNY colleges training in total? And which telehealth programs, on which campuses, are best aligned with labor market demand, measured by job placements and earnings? As at the federal level—higher education data collected by the US Department of Education—information of this kind can be a powerful lever for change.

A more assertive effort to drive coordination would include tangible incentives. Imagine that the university's labor market information research center predicted demand for 1,750 respiratory therapists over the next decade. CUNY Central might offer to reward campus-level programs that contributed toward that quota, but only until the threshold had been met. Colleges could continue to launch or expand programs and produce additional graduates after the quota had been filled, but from that point forward there would be no reward from Central. Potential incentives for cooperating colleges might include modest supplemental funding or special consideration in awarding grant opportunities.

Three institutions with complementary strengths could collaborate to serve a single industry.

Also potentially worth experimentation: encouraging some degree of specialization at a single college or consortium of colleges. Among the ideas that surfaced repeatedly in conversations across CUNY: a pilot project establishing one or more job-focused centers of excellence.

How it might work: three different institutions with complementary strengths, perhaps offering three different kinds of credentials, could collaborate to serve a single industry. New York construction engineering firms, for example, face a continuum of labor needs—from entry-level technicians with IT associate degrees to bachelor's-degree project managers to graduate-level engineers. Few if any CUNY institutions are able to produce talent at all three levels, but a handful of schools could coordinate programs and streamline student transfer, then market their combined services as a one-stop shop for the region's construction engineering industry.

Who. Any type of strategic coordination must be initiated, planned and implemented by CUNY Central.

Resources needed. No significant additional resources necessary for coordination by means of better data and consumer choice. More tangible incentives for cooperation would require modest funding.

Likely impact. High.

#3 Charting a new course for the university

What. A more visible commitment by leadership to move career readiness to the center of the university's mission and culture.

Why. Together, CUNY history and the way the university is structured have created a culture focused on traditional academic instruction and degree attainment. Community colleges are seen as just a first step. No matter what their interests, students are encouraged to aim for academic degrees followed by transfer to four-year CUNY institutions, with the ultimate prize of a bachelor's degree and, if possible, further study. The shorthand term used widely across the university to describe this culture: CUNY is said to be a "two plus two" institution.

The challenge for CUNY in the years ahead: not to abandon this identity but to build on it, complementing this traditional academic focus with an equally strong commitment to preparing students for careers.

How. What's needed starts with the bully pulpit, perhaps a citywide marketing campaign—a robust communication strategy, sustained over time, shining a light on job-focused learning in credit and noncredit divisions across the university.

Also essential: expanding the scope of what's measured and recognized in the annual performance management process (PMP). Few steps would send a clearer message than adding additional metrics for job placements and earnings, ideally for all CUNY completers—credit, noncredit, at community colleges and four-year schools.

Progress will inevitably be incremental, and leadership must stress that there's no zero-sum game. Putting more emphasis on career readiness need not come at the expense of the university's other core missions.

But only a declared commitment—full-throated and reiterated—can drive change on the scale that’s needed. And without a cultural shift of this kind, reinforcing the value of career preparation, it’s hard to imagine other steps like a labor market research hub or a wholesale expansion of career services.

Who. Must be initiated, planned and implemented by CUNY Central.

Resources needed. Starts with decisive leadership but may require modest or more substantial resources for a marketing campaign.

Likely impact. Would build over time.

#4 Not either/or— academic excellence and career readiness

What. A university-wide campaign—first communications, then incentives for curricular reform—driving home that what many in the CUNY community see as a binary choice is a false dichotomy.

Why. Far too many educators, at CUNY and elsewhere, see preparing students for careers as the antithesis of traditional academic education—a rigid bifurcation and a gulf that must never be crossed. Nothing could be further from the truth or more damaging for students.

Even liberal arts students need workplace skills—including workplace communication, teamwork, time management, digital proficiency and a basic understanding of data analytics. Similarly, learners preparing to go directly to work need more than technical competency—they too need critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills. Credit and noncredit education aren’t opposites; they’re stops on a single continuum. And transferring from

community college to a four-year institution isn’t a step away from the labor market—it’s a step closer to it.

“We need the whole college thinking about this,” one member of the university leadership team explained in an interview. Preparing students for successful careers is “everybody’s responsibility.” (See appendix for full list of New Yorkers who spoke to Opportunity America for this study.)

How. The change that’s needed starts with university culture—a second, internal communications campaign to persuade the CUNY community that there need be no trade-off between academic excellence and enhanced career-readiness.

But communications are only a first step. Meaningful change will also require campus-level adjustments—curricular reform by both academic faculty and workforce educators, broadening instruction so that all types of students are exposed to a full spectrum of skills.

No matter what the discipline, academic programs should find ways to integrate career competencies, ensuring that every student graduates with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace. And even short job-focused trainings should expose learners to broader perspectives, teaching analytic skills and communication.

Academic faculty and job-focused instructors could collaborate to design courses—they have much to teach each other. College presidents and provosts—not just workforce deans—should be encouraged to drive change at their institutions.

What Central can do: offer incentives, recognize innovation and, when possible, provide tools—standards, metrics, model curriculum—to help educators across the college braid instruction that combines career-focused and liberal arts skills.

Also essential, all CUNY students need better, more intensive career services, starting with

increased resources for campus career centers. (See chapter 3 for more detail.)

Who. Change starts at CUNY Central but must radiate across the university.

Resources needed. Developing new curriculum that braids academic skills and career competencies and will require resources, primarily at the campus level.

Likely impact. Would build over time.

#5 A central hub for employer outreach

What. A designated institution or department, heavily focused on career education and training, that serves as the university's central portal for employers, recruiting industry partners and sharing business contacts with credit and non-credit divisions at other CUNY colleges.

Other schools and systems call it a "corporate college"; a better term in New York might be "workforce solutions hub." Whatever the name, a unit of this kind typically offers its own training programs but also functions as a rainmaker for other campuses, marketing a university system or other network of institutions, attracting employer partners and, when helpful, brokering deals for colleges across the network.

TRAINING CITY WORKERS AT THE SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Many CUNY faculty and staff have never heard of the university's Administration for Children's Services Workforce Institute (ACS WI). For the 7,500 employees of ACS, one of the city's most critical frontline agencies—the people who investigate child abuse, oversee foster care placements and supervise juvenile justice programs, among other services—the institute is close to a household name.

ACS WI is a subunit of the little-known noncredit workforce education arm of the CUNY School of Professional Studies—a division that trains some 40,000 city and state workers a year, from correction officers to homeless shelter staff to midlevel managers in the Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity.

Many two- and four-year colleges nationwide provide customized contract training for employers—usually short, targeted, nondegree courses for incumbent workers selected by the company. CUNY does relatively little customized training for private-sector employers. But SPS's professional education and workplace learning unit has carved out a unique niche as trainer to New York City's largest employer—city government.

"We're the backbone of New York City workforce training," says the unit's executive director, Amy Perez. "We have no branding. We do no marketing. We're not well-known outside of government circles. But we understand how social service agencies work, and we develop and implement training for employees across city government."

It's a \$32-million-a-year business for CUNY and an intriguing hint of what the university could do if it set its sights on serving New York employers, whether with customized contract training or with other programs designed to address their changing labor needs.

ACS is one of the unit's biggest clients. In fiscal year 2020, the ACS Workforce Institute offered 111 courses to more than 9,350 learners. Some classes were online, others in person—delivered at one of the institute's five brick-and-mortar training centers, one in every borough, operated in partnership with ACS.

Most trainings are short: a day or two at most—participants are busy city employees. Many learners

Why. It's increasingly well understood among educators and employers: there can be no effective job-focused education without industry partners.

Providing opportunities for work-based learning is only the beginning of what's needed. As essential for any job-focused program, effective employer partners supply information about industry trends and changing labor market demand. They collaborate with educators to design programs and develop curriculum. Most important, they hire graduates and provide feedback on their skills—critical information for educators seeking to improve career-oriented programs.

When the collaboration works, community colleges become a go-to source for local employers—the first place they turn to address their workforce needs, whether upskilling existing workers or recruiting new hires.

In New York, educators and employers often

The upshot for learners:
better training more aligned
with industry needs.

struggle to connect and form meaningful partnerships. Many CUNY administrators see the business world as a realm apart—difficult to penetrate, on a different schedule and driven by different values. For their part, many employers are confused by what they see as a fragmentary, duplicative system: 25 different campuses, often offering similar programs, yet each with its own culture and a unique administrative structure difficult for a company to understand or navigate.

A workforce solutions hub can help bridge this divide.

SPS has carved out a niche as trainer to New York City's largest employer—city government.

sign up for three or four courses a year. The institute's twin goals: to help people improve their effectiveness on the job and advance in their careers. Among the classes offered for frontline ACS staff and supervisors: coaching, safety and risk assessment, motivational interviewing, and strengths-based client engagement.

These are no abstract, academic courses; program delivery is hands-on and true to life. SPS staff are particularly proud of their three new simulation-based training centers. In one popular program, staff from the ACS child welfare unit that conducts safety and risk analyses are sent into what feel like real city apartments, where they encounter actors playing parents and children in what are sometimes harrowing scenarios—the more realistic, the better. Other ACS simulation-based training recreates a courtroom: judges, prosecutors, lawyers and others enact real-life situations for juvenile justice staff.

As often happens with customized contract training, the relationship between CUNY and ACS has deepened over the years, going beyond upskilling to a broader kind of workforce problem solving that Perez calls "change management."

"We look at what an organization needs," she explains, "its barriers, its constraints, the people it serves. Then we build a team and develop programs to suit the agency's goals."

A recent listening tour of ACS units across the city led to development of a new workshop in safety culture. Also in the last year, an online survey probed the opinions of workers who had taken classes in motivational interviewing to explore if they were using the skills they learned and if training had changed the way they do their jobs. What matters to institute staff: not just the quality of the training they offer, but the real-world impact on the organization they're serving.

It's a world away from a typical CUNY classroom, but it shows what can be done—how the university could step up as the training partner of choice for industries across New York City.

How. Corporate colleges in other states typically recruit and engage employers across a region or metro area. The relationship often starts with customized contract training for a firm's existing workers. But then it evolves as the company comes to trust the college and seeks its help with other labor market needs—not just, for example, skilled technical workers but also, perhaps, middle managers or professionals with graduate degrees.

The next step for the outreach hub is often to share the business contact with one or more other institutions in the region better positioned to provide the additional programs the firm seeks. As the relationship deepens, professional staff of the hub may help employers assess their workforce needs, develop new curriculum aligned with growing demand or bring firms from across an industry together to address shared challenges with a single talent pipeline.

Over time, what starts as a contractual relationship between a single campus and a single company can give rise to a variety of offerings at several colleges, some credit-eligible, others noncredit, and open to a variety of students—potential new hires as well as incumbent workers.

The upshot for learners: better training more aligned with industry needs, better access to employers and enhanced job opportunities.

The term “corporate college” may not be appropriate in New York City, but the model—a central recruitment hub working on behalf of many campuses—could be an ideal solution for CUNY.

A CUNY workforce hub could also advance several other essential changes at the university, driving a more coordinated, citywide approach to career readiness.

It could provide a home for a labor market information research center. It could help coordinate a systemwide response to citywide labor market demand. Its robust, self-funding employer outreach office could help generate work-based learning opportunities for students

All too often, these partnerships are more perfunctory than meaningful: employers attend a meeting once a year or offer occasional advice.

from across the university—workforce, transfer, credit and noncredit students.

A CUNY employer outreach hub could be housed at the Central Office or, alternatively, at an institution like the School of Professional Studies (SPS) positioned to provide the customized contract training that will be the first step for many employers. SPS would need to expand its outreach efforts, looking beyond city agencies to the private sector. And whatever entity houses the hub would have to assume responsibility for sharing its industry partners with other CUNY colleges, generating job-focused programs across the university.

The decentralization of the CUNY system may make it challenging for institutions to collaborate in this way. But the payoff could be significant—for the outreach hub, other CUNY colleges and the university as a whole.

Who. Could be initiated by CUNY Central or an enterprising college president who wanted to step up and take on the role.

Resources needed. Would require substantial funding to launch, but many corporate colleges generate revenue, whether for the hub itself or the home institution.

Likely impact. High.

#6 More effective campus-based employer engagement

What. A coordinated strategy, initiated by CUNY Central, to help institutions develop more intensive and effective employer partnerships.

Why. Most CUNY workforce educators, whether in academic departments or nondegree-granting continuing education divisions, understand the need for collaboration with employers, and many maintain a roster of partners who they consult from time to time. But all too often, these partnerships are more perfunctory than meaningful: employers attend a meeting once a year or offer occasional advice but rarely hire graduates of the programs they advise.

Many CUNY educators focused on recruiting employers see them primarily as providers of work-based learning opportunities—an important potential payoff to collaboration, but only the tip of the iceberg. And even the CUNY schools that focus most intentionally on employer outreach often find it hard to imagine the kind of intensive, day-to-day cooperation that characterizes the best company-college partnerships. Advice offered at an annual advisory council meeting, valuable as it is, is not the same as a commitment to codevelop curriculum or provide detailed feedback on the skills of graduates who have gone to work at the company.

The New York City Jobs CEO Council convened by JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon and others in mid-2020 is an important step forward, but more remains to be done—significant as they are, these are just 28 of several hundred thousand New York City businesses. There’s no silver bullet for employer engagement—it takes skill, patience, practice and resources. But a decade of experimentation nationwide has produced an array of tools and tactics for CUNY to draw on.

The challenge for university leadership: how to initiate change of the breadth and depth that’s needed. Many administrators across the system want more help from Central—a more robust and sustained Central strategy to recruit employer partners—and as the CEO Council proves, this can be effective. But it’s not the full or only answer—it can’t be. Many small and medium-sized businesses are borough-based, and the most effective outreach will be local.

How. Potential stratagems to encourage change across the system might start with a taxonomy of employer engagement—standards and criteria to help colleges understand what’s possible and where their efforts fit on a scale of more and less intensive partnerships.

A university-wide classification system could help colleges understand the difference between, say, an employer sponsor driven by a sense of corporate responsibility who comes to a meeting once a year or contributes to a scholarship fund and—a different category entirely—a fully engaged employer partner who codevelops curriculum, welcomes interns and regularly hires program graduates.

Also potentially useful: a citywide inventory of partnerships and including an employer engagement metric in the performance management process—what gets measured gets improved. Colleges that want recognition for their employer relationships could be encouraged to classify them using the university taxonomy and show progress year over year in developing more intensive, impactful collaboration.

Employer outreach is expensive—it takes time and dedicated personnel. One way to absorb the expense: colleges could be encouraged to collaborate, pooling resources and eliminating redundancies.

As is, all too often, two institutions in the same borough—and often one or more of their credit departments as well as their continuing education divisions—are reaching out to the same employers and coming back with little to show

for their efforts. Among potential incentives for collaboration: recognition in the PMP, modest supplemental funding or special consideration when Central develops and shares opportunities for employer partnerships.

Who. Change starts at CUNY Central but must radiate across the university.

Resources needed. Even with a dedicated outreach hub or a Central strategy to engage large, citywide employers, campuses need resources for local outreach and recruitment—principally, dedicated personnel and instructor staff time for day-to-day communication with industry partners.

Likely impact. Would build over time.

In 2019, one-fifth of CUNY students had an opportunity for an internship.

#7 Next steps for work-based learning

What. A university-wide campaign to expand experiential learning opportunities—a new approach to employer outreach, a wider range of hands-on options for students and granting college credit for time spent in the workplace.

Why. Both CUNY Central and CUNY colleges have put considerable effort in recent years

WORK-BASED LEARNING AT BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Although largely unheralded at CUNY, the automotive technology program at Bronx Community College (BCC) stands out for its stellar record placing students in internships and apprenticeships.

Unlike nationwide, where automotive technology is a community college staple, often in the noncredit division, BCC's credit-eligible automotive program is the only one at CUNY. Some 250 students a year take courses leading to one-year academic certificates and two-year associate degrees.

Forging connections to employers has been a long-time priority for program director Clement Drummond, who came to CUNY as a retiree after three decades in the private sector. Metro-area BMW, Toyota and Chrysler dealerships along with several large company fleets advise the department on adding, revamping and eliminating courses to keep up with industry trends. Among the payoffs, Drummond has leveraged relationships with local employers to develop three separate work-and-learn programs for BCC automotive students.

The most prestigious opportunity is the Nissan Technician Training Academy, one of 25 similar academies at community colleges nationwide. Learners combine classes at BCC with online instruction provided by Nissan. The BCC component includes hands-on learning on seven late-model Nissan vehicles donated by the company. The Queens-based Star Nissan dealership, among others, offers opportunities for short, unregistered apprenticeships.

Students leave the program with an academic credential, either a certificate or degree, and at least two industry certifications from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE)—competency-based credentials prized by employers across the US. Graduates' salaries start at \$30,000 and climb as high as \$70,000. Those hired full-time by a Nissan or Infiniti dealer are eligible for tuition reimbursement that covers the cost of their BCC education.

Other BCC students seeking work-based learning enroll in ACS 50, a credit-bearing course Drummond

into developing industry contacts that can provide experiential learning. Opportunities for work-based learning abound across the system. Several philanthropic funders provide stipends that enable students to gain the experience afforded by unpaid internships. And intermediary organizations like HERE to HERE and the CEO Council are driving exciting innovation, promoting youth apprenticeship and credit-bearing work-based learning experiences.

Still, as the data show, much remains to be done. According to the latest tally available from the Office of Institutional Research, in 2019, just one-fifth of CUNY students had an opportunity for an internship, roughly half of them paid and half unpaid, and the percentage varies widely from college to college.¹⁵

How. We propose four possible areas for experimentation.

First, many CUNY colleges see developing internships or apprenticeships as the first step in a relationship with an employer partner. Other educators in other states often see work-based learning as the crown jewel—a final reward after months or years of building trust and collaborating on a smaller scale. One place to start: more open-ended outreach to a broader range of employers, asking not “Will you take some interns?,” but rather “What can we as a college do to help you meet your labor needs?”

A second potential innovation, this one borrowed from longtime leader in the field of experiential learning, Northeastern University: a more deliberate effort to develop a spectrum of work-based learning opportunities. At Northeastern, the spectrum stretches from virtual internships, where teams of students work together in a classroom or online to solve problems provided by employer partners, to

They put in 50 hours on the job at a New York City dealership or repair shop.

designed and shepherded through a skeptical faculty committee. Advanced automotive students spend 7.5 hours in a classroom, learning shop safety and how to conduct themselves in the workplace. Over the next 12 weeks, they put in 50 hours on the job at a New York City dealership or repair shop.

Roughly 20 students enroll each year; half to two-thirds make it over the finish line. The program is accredited by ASE and prepares learners to sit for an ASE certification assessment. The hard-won concession from the faculty committee: students’ time in the workplace is worth one college credit, and it can exempt them from an art or music elective.

Still a third work-and-learn option for BCC students is a grant-funded, three-year apprenticeship program for diesel mechanics offered in partnership with the New York workforce development arm of the AFL-CIO. The program is designed exclusively for Bronx residents, 18 to 25 years old, who need not matriculate at BCC but can earn college credit along with a US Department of Labor apprenticeship certificate. They combine time in class with paid time on the job and graduate to salaries of \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year.

Asked how he succeeds where many CUNY administrators fall short, recruiting employers to offer work-based learning, Drummond points to his time in the private sector and the priority he puts on hiring instructors with industry experience.

“It’s not easy to get them here,” he explains. “They can make upwards of \$100,000 as a senior technician at a dealership, and to hire them at CUNY, I have to help most of them cover the cost of a bachelor’s degree.”

But this outlay more than pays off, Drummond says. “Employers know us and trust us, and when we call to place an intern, they know they’ll be getting someone with the skills to do the job.”

full-fledged cooperative education opportunities similar to paid internship, but more intensive and advanced.

Third, work-based learning—whether job shadowing, internship, apprenticeship or a co-op job—should be seen as an integral part of a CUNY education, not a nice-to-have extra experience. But until and unless time in the workplace counts for college credit, it will not be seen as integral or essential.

This will be challenging for many educators skeptical of granting credit for noncollege experience, and it will require some experimentation and inventiveness. One place to start: CUNY's new university-wide credit for prior learning initiative could help establish course equivalencies for hands-on experience.

In other instances, work-based learning could be embedded in a traditional college course and required for a passing grade. Still other experiments could build on Guttman Community

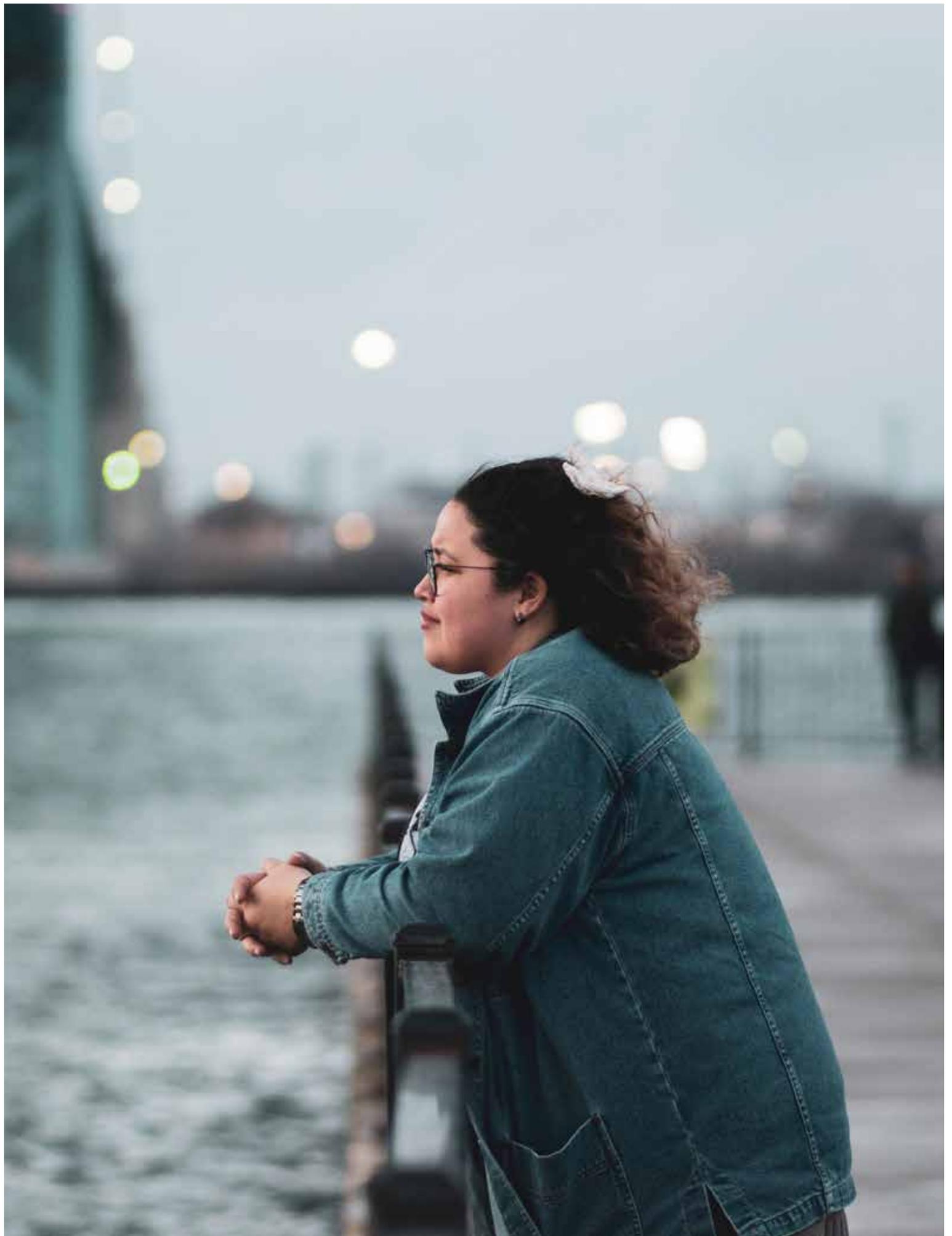
College's groundbreaking ethnographies of work program, where what counts for college credit is primarily how students reflect on and learn from their time in the workplace.

A fourth area for exploration, the next frontier: developing programs that recognize what working students learn in conventional entry-level jobs and reinforce the skills learners pick up at work with related classroom instruction.

Who. Change could start at CUNY Central but must radiate across the university.

Resources needed. Innovation on the scale that's needed could require significant resources, starting with philanthropic funding for pilot programs, ideally across a number of institutions.

Likely impact. Would build over time.





CHAPTER TWO



BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN CREDIT AND NONCREDIT EDUCATION

In New York, as across the US, some job-focused education and training is credit-eligible—designed for students seeking academic certificates and degrees—while other workforce programs are housed in a nondegree-granting continuing education division. Both kinds of programs have advantages, but the rigid bifurcation serves no one. What’s needed in New York: a blurring of the line between the two divisions and better bridges for students seeking to move from one to the other. A pilot project for an enterprising CUNY community college president: bringing the two divisions together under one roof to create a continuum of credit and noncredit job-focused programs.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

At CUNY colleges, as elsewhere nationwide, the nondegree-granting continuing education division is a realm apart, funded and administered separately and often all but invisible to the

rest of the college. CUNY adult and continuing education divisions are responsible for a wide array of instruction, including remedial education, adult basic education, English as a second language and recreational courses. But as with noncredit units everywhere, ACE’s signature strength is workforce education.

CUNY ACE divisions are ideally poised to provide fast, job-focused education and training for New Yorkers in a hurry to get a job or a better job. Programs focus on just the skills learners need to improve their position in the labor market. Courses are often scheduled to be convenient for working adults and job seekers.

The continuing education division can move much more quickly than the rest of the college to respond to employer needs. Unlike an academic department, ACE is not subject to regional accreditation or faculty approval and can stand up a timely job-focused program in a matter of weeks or months. Also important and in contrast to much of the rest of CUNY, ACE administrators see no shame or stigma in preparing learners for the workplace.

The challenge at CUNY and elsewhere: some noncredit learners may eventually want to return to college, matriculating in traditional academic programs and earning associate or bachelor's degrees. But bridges between credit and noncredit divisions are wobbly at best, often nonexistent. And few CUNY colleges take full advantage of their ACE divisions, integrating the noncredit arm in a meaningful way into the life of the institution.

ACE enrollments account for a robust share of the student body at many CUNY colleges. Systemwide, before the pandemic struck, they totaled 54 percent of CUNY community college enrollments. At most institutions, in normal times, the ACE division also generated significant revenue—according to one 2018 tally of the total citywide at two- and four-year institutions, some \$122 million a year.¹⁶

Yet many ACE administrators feel that the CUNY ethos—its ingrained identity as a “two-plus-two” institution, focused above all on helping students obtain academic credentials—leaves little room for them or what they do. Many also feel put upon financially by what they see as a punishing business model.

This isolation is a problem for ACE deans but also for the university—among the most significant obstacles for leadership seeking to elevate career preparation. Although not all job-focused programs at CUNY are housed in an ACE division, many are—and ACE is widely viewed as the workforce arm of the university. So as long as ACE is seen as a world apart—second-tier and somehow not really “college”—CUNY is unlikely to fulfill its potential as the city's premier provider of job-focused education and training.

Better integration of the two divisions would start with sturdier bridges for students—opportunities for learners on both sides of the college to take advantage of what's available across campus. The ultimate goal: a busy two-way street that makes it easy for continuing education students to matriculate in academic programs and for degree-seeking students to earn

Neither arm of the college
does enough to weave
academic and career skills.

industry certifications in noncredit job-focused courses.

As is, data limitations make it all but impossible to track this kind of crossover between CUNY credit and noncredit programs. Information about ACE enrollments is not collected in the university-wide database for matriculated students, CUNYfirst. Most ACE divisions keep only minimal student records. And even those with more robust information are unable to match it with records from CUNYfirst. The few estimates that exist—all based on self-reported data by college-level administrators—suggest that crossover in either direction is unusual.

One 2018 analysis found that just 5,728 of some 115,000 ACE community college students matriculated at the institution where they took a noncredit course.¹⁷ Some continuing education administrators believe this is an undercount—that a better data system would capture more robust crossover traffic. But preliminary results from Opportunity America's forthcoming national study of community workforce education appear to confirm the 2018 estimate.¹⁸

Most of the CUNY colleges that responded to the survey reported that fewer than 5 to 10 percent of noncredit students eventually enroll in credit-bearing programs, and vice versa—at most colleges, fewer than 5 percent of degree students take advantage of noncredit courses that prepare learners to earn industry certifications.¹⁹

What goes largely unnoticed at CUNY as elsewhere: the costs of this segregated, two-tiered system—costs to the college and to students. The college misses out on what could be robust

re-enrollments—ACE students making the transition to academic programs, with all the potential revenue that could generate. The lack of collaboration and cross-pollination means that ACE administrators rarely share employer contacts or labor market savvy with colleagues on the other side of the campus.

Neither arm of the college does enough to weave academic and career skills in ways that would benefit both credit and noncredit students—career competencies for degree-focused students, critical thinking and communication skills for those preparing to go directly into the workforce.

Most damaging are the lost opportunities for learners—noncredit students who might, with better information and advisement, eventually earn college degrees and academically oriented students who could boost their postgraduation incomes by earning one or more industry certifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 The one-college model

What. Among the boldest and most innovative stratagems pioneered in recent decades at institutions seeking to bridge the gulf between credit and noncredit education is what some administrators call the “one college” model—combining the two divisions under one roof in a hybrid entity that serves both degree-seeking and nondegree-seeking students.

Why. Although perhaps challenging to implement—on most campuses, a dramatic departure from the status quo—bringing the two divisions together under one roof can pay off in several significant ways.

It creates efficiencies for the college, reducing redundant spending on student services for credit and noncredit learners. It opens the way to better integration of academic skills and career

Most important for students, it creates a seamless path for learners moving up a career ladder.

competencies in courses across the institution. It's a potential windfall for the credit side of the college, generating increased enrollments for academic departments.

Most important for students, it creates a continuum of credit and noncredit job-focused programs: a seamless path for learners moving up a career ladder over time—from relatively easily accessible entry-level jobs to more advanced positions requiring one or more university degrees.

The goal is not to merge the two divisions, obliterating the benefits of the two distinct approaches, but rather to marry them in a way that draws on their comparative advantages. A well-designed hybrid entity enjoys the best of both worlds, combining the agility of the noncredit division and its relationships with employers with the academic prowess, better student services and more robust resources often found on the credit side of the college.

How. One possible way to proceed at CUNY: start by exploring interest among college presidents in launching a voluntary pilot program. Among other appealing features of such an initiative, it could be implemented incrementally.

A place to start at the campus level: merging student services, including registration, intake, academic advising and career services—a step that pays off for both divisions, eliminating redundancy and stretching scarce resources.

One of the first institutions in the country to implement the one-college model, North Carolina's Johnston Community College, began by

closing duplicative offices. “We recouped significant savings,” president David Johnson recalls, “by combining two business offices, two admissions offices, two financial aid offices and two marketing arms.”

The next step at Johnston and other institutions that have implemented the one-college approach: pairing job-focused departments in credit and noncredit divisions—perhaps allied health, computer science or advanced manufacturing—and requiring each pair to report to a single dean. Though this can be challenging for personnel on both sides of the college, administrators report that anxiety and mistrust eventually give way to buy-in as instructors see the benefits—synergies for their departments and better outcomes for students.

Combined governance does not dictate course equivalencies or eliminate the need for credit and noncredit educators to negotiate articulation agreements. Academic faculty still answer to their own department chairs and must be persuaded to cooperate in building a combined credit-noncredit sequence of courses. But integration under one roof often makes the process easier, as instructors and administrators build trust and a sense of common purpose.

Among the biggest payoffs for academic departments: the noncredit side of the house often has more robust relationships with employers. Combining employer advisory councils creates a single point of entry for companies interested in collaborating with the college, and instead of competing, credit and noncredit instructors look for ways to complement each other. A common pattern at Johnston and elsewhere: continuing education instructors work with a local employer to incubate a program that eventually migrates to the credit side of the college, adding academic content and earning approval by academic faculty.

Another essential step at colleges that have pioneered this approach: charting student pathways that begin with short, nondegree, job-focused trainings and lead eventually to

‘What matters is no longer the institutional silos. It’s what the student needs.’

longer, more comprehensive credit-bearing programs.

As in any continuing education division, many learners come and go at the institution, first earning industry certifications, then stopping out for a stint in the labor market and then returning later in life for additional education. But the one-college model makes it much easier to return, facilitating crossover from noncredit to credit instruction and increasing enrollments in academic programs leading to credit-bearing certificates and degrees.

The result is a win-win for the college and for students. “The student is the focus,” David Johnson explains. “We work with each arriving student to determine what he or she needs—whether it’s credit or noncredit or a combined, hybrid approach. And whatever it is, instructors and student advisers are well equipped to help that student find a successful path. What matters is no longer the institutional silos. What drives the decision is what the student needs.”

Who. The leadership that will matter most for a CUNY college moving toward a one-college model is campus-based—an enterprising president seeking to distinguish themselves with a bold, new approach that could lead to national recognition. But CUNY Central could open the door by endorsing the idea and, if necessary, smoothing the way for administrative reforms.

Resources needed. Launching a one-college pilot program at CUNY would be a major undertaking, likely to unfold over several years of iterative trial and error. Philanthropic funding can help, freeing up administrators’ time to plan and

implement the transition. But over the longer term, the hybrid model should produce significant savings.

Likely impact. High.

#2 Data collection and transparency

What. Use data to ensure quality control of job-focused programs and level the playing field for nondegree-granting continuing education divisions.

The change that's needed starts with three essential steps: better data collection by ACE, compatible databases for credit and noncredit students and making information about post-completion employment outcomes for credit and noncredit students easily available to anyone at the university.

First step: CUNY Central should encourage and incentivize ACE divisions to collect noncredit students' Social Security numbers and use them to track post-completion employment outcomes.

Second, as on the credit side of any college, ACE division student records should be housed in an integrated database that streamlines and standardizes demographic, academic and financial information. All ACE divisions across the university should use the same data system, and it should be compatible with the database used to house credit-eligible student records—or better yet, the same system.

Also needed: a public-facing data portal to make information about employment outcomes—program-by-program job placements and earnings for both credit-eligible and noncredit learners—more accessible to students and educators.

Why. On CUNY campuses, as at many colleges, the nondegree-granting continuing education division is a black box. Administrators collect little if any data. What information they

Neither reform is possible without noncredit students' Social Security numbers.

gather is rarely reported to authorities—CUNY Central, the state, the federal government or a regional accreditor. This lack of data and external accountability is a major obstacle to meaningful quality control.

It's all but impossible to track what percentage of ACE students eventually return to the college and matriculate in credit-eligible courses. Worse still, unlike their counterparts in CUNY academic departments, ACE deans are unable to assess graduates' employment outcomes—does the education students receive at CUNY lead to jobs in their fields of study?

How. A critical first step: encouraging and incentivizing ACE divisions to collect noncredit students' Social Security numbers.

Many ACE administrators are reluctant to move in this direction, concerned about student privacy and immigration status. But ACE divisions cannot hope to be considered full members of the CUNY community unless they can account for the value they add, providing information that can be used to track crossover between divisions and report employment outcomes.

Better understanding of crossover by credit and noncredit students would enhance credit-side administrators' respect for the ACE division—as a source of new credit-side enrollments and supplementary trainings for degree-focused students.

Equally important, matching ACE student records with state wage record data, currently done in Albany only for degree-seeking students, would help ACE educators showcase their success in preparing learners for the workplace.

Neither reform is possible without noncredit students' Social Security numbers.

CUNY's deep-seated tradition of decentralization and campus autonomy may make it impossible to mandate a change of this magnitude. But the Central Office could start with an internal communications campaign highlighting the intrinsic advantages of better data collection.

Also essential, a second way Central could encourage the change that's needed: providing legal guidance for campuses that consider collecting Social Security numbers. Campus-level CUNY administrators resist mandates, but they welcome assistance from Central, including tools and how-to advice. What's needed in this case: guidelines for protecting student privacy and avoiding legal liability for information breaches.

The next critical question: where to house this and other essential information about continuing education students—in what database, maintained by whom?

CUNY Central has made important strides in this realm in recent months. A new initiative launched in mid-2021 will make a single cloud-based data system marketed nationwide under the brand name Xenegrade available to all CUNY ACE divisions. Uptake will be voluntary, and many campuses may hesitate—migrating to a new data system is no small undertaking for a large organization. Xenegrade and CUNY-first are not fully compatible, but some comparisons and communication will be possible. And Xenegrade will allow for collecting students' Social Security numbers if campus administrators choose to move in that direction.

This is a significant step forward—a potential turning point for continuing education. But there is more that can be done. What's needed in the longer term: a data system fully compatible with the system housing information about degree-seeking students—or better yet, eventually, a single system for the university.

A potential opening on the horizon gathering momentum in 2021: CUNY Central is advancing a plan to move credit-eligible student

Make data about employment outcomes—graduates' job placements and earnings—accessible to students and educators.

records from a server-based data system to a cloud-based approach. Why not use this opportunity—a once-in-a-generation digital transition—to help bridge the gap between academic and continuing education by including ACE data in the new cloud-based system? Among the payoffs to a single, unified approach: it would make it possible to track crossover between divisions, allow comparisons of student employment outcomes and paint a fuller picture of the benefits the university provides for New York learners.

Few steps could do more to integrate continuing education into the rest of the university or help ACE administrators overcome the data limitations that stand in the way of effective accountability and quality control.

Third, a related but separate reform long overdue at CUNY: making data about employment outcomes—graduates' job placements and earnings—more accessible to students and educators across the university.

Without information of this kind—a yardstick to measure the ultimate value added by a CUNY education—the university can have little hope of providing effective job-focused instruction or career services.

Like many other states, New York tracks information that can be used to assess employment outcomes: data sets that match student records with employment and wage information collected on a quarterly basis by the state agency that handles unemployment insurance.

Legislation passed in Albany in 2013 made this information available to the CUNY Office of Institutional Research. But the data are

voluminous and unwieldy, difficult for anyone but a trained data analyst to use effectively, and they are not currently made available in a public format—a consumer-friendly public portal of the kind maintained by many colleges and college systems in other states.

Indeed, many CUNY administrators, including one top-tier campus leader interviewed for this study, do not know that the university has access to this information—an essential tool they could be using to track if their programs improve graduates' employment outcomes.

Continuing education students cannot be included in this critical state data set until ACE administrators collect learners' Social Security numbers. But nothing stops the university from launching a public portal to showcase information about the employment outcomes of matriculated students. Creating a dashboard of this kind is neither difficult nor expensive—and it's hard to imagine another single step that could do more to help CUNY colleges serve job-focused students more effectively.

Who. The changes needed to provide greater transparency about noncredit students and student outcomes could start at CUNY Central but must then take hold across the university.

Resources needed. Modernizing data collection across CUNY's 25 far-flung campuses is a vast, expensive undertaking, and including continuing education in a new system would surely add to the cost. Collecting the Social Security numbers of nondegree students is a more manageable task, but it will require staff time and legal advice. One place to start might be a pilot project at a single college or a handful of colleges—a modest investment for one or more philanthropic donors. Modest philanthropic funding should also be enough to cover the costs of a public-facing data portal and the staff needed to maintain it.

Likely impact. High.

#3 A seat at the table

What. A set of strategies to reduce the stigma often associated with continuing education and give ACE educators a voice in critical decisions about campus governance.

Why. Relationships between credit and non-credit educators vary widely across CUNY colleges—from close collaboration to uneasy coexistence. But even in the best cases, where the ACE division is held in the highest regard, administrators complain that they don't always have a seat at the table at their colleges or that their concerns aren't taken as seriously as those of academic faculty and deans.

This is a loss for CUNY colleges and for workforce education across the university. Among the benefits squandered: potential input by employers, richer understanding of the local labor market, potential credit-side enrollments and potential opportunities for students—including degree-seeking students who could improve their labor market prospects by earning occupational certifications.

How. Continuing education administrators from across the university agree on the ingredients of a successful relationship with the academic side of the college. Their recommendations fall into three buckets—mostly reforms at the campus level.

Administrators complain that their concerns aren't taken as seriously as those of academic faculty and deans.

The first, essential step is recognition—greater respect and appreciation.

The change that's needed starts with campus leadership—a president who understands the value of the ACE division, both as a standalone entity and as an asset for the rest of the college. Among the selling points that can and should be emphasized: ACE as a potential source of future credit-side enrollments and a source of training for credit-side students seeking the labor-market boost of an industry certification. Next, beyond talk to action: including ACE in the president's cabinet and the college strategic plan.

A second set of stratagems aims to bring the two divisions closer together by creating paths for students.

One approach that appears to be working well at several CUNY community colleges relies on dedicated advisers who seek out students in a position to cross over from noncredit to credit, then help them understand and navigate what is often a mystifying transition.

Another step in this direction, an innovation being considered at Borough of Manhattan Community College: academic and career communities, organized by field of study, open to both credit and noncredit students. Among the services that can be offered, ideally to every student, no matter what division they are enrolled in: help matching personal interests with possible careers and exploring the instruction available at the college.

Still another potential tactic being pioneered in other states is sending credit and noncredit learners through the same intake process, with individualized counseling to help every student map a path to a four-year degree, but also, in the short term, decide whether credit or noncredit is a better first step for them.

A third broad bucket of reforms, also crucial and rarely seen at CUNY, would open the way to increased cross-pollination between credit and noncredit instructors and administrators.

Many educators on both sides of the divide have only a shadowy understanding of the other

Many educators on both sides of the divide have only a shadowy understanding of the other division.

division—who the instructors and administrators are, how they think, what they do. Educators from across the college need forums to meet and exchange information. Credit and noncredit personnel should be required to come together on a regular basis to negotiate and review credential equivalencies. Programs preparing learners for the same industry should consider joint employer advisory committees.

ACE instructors can help credit faculty integrate career skills into degree programs, and vice versa—academic faculty can help noncredit programs weave critical thinking and problem solving into technical instruction. Both sides of the house have much to learn from each other, and both could benefit by sharing their resources more equitably.

The change that's needed starts at the campus level—new thinking by presidents, provosts, academic deans and continuing education administrators. But CUNY Central can help by setting a tone and recognizing the achievements of the ACE division. A first step for Central: elevating continuing education and underscoring the essential role it plays by including one or more questions about ACE in the annual performance management process.

Who. Mostly campus-level, but CUNY Central can set the tone and pave the way.

Resources needed. Starts with thoughtful leadership but may require modest resources for staff time or philanthropically funded pilot projects.

Likely impact. Would build over time.

#4 Industry certifications

What. Robust continued efforts to integrate and recognize stackable credentials, especially competency-based industry certifications.

Why. The most important tools for students seeking to bridge the gap between credit and noncredit divisions are stackable credentials—a common currency recognized by educators on both sides of the divide that noncredit learners who matriculate at the college can leverage for academic credit.

There is much talk among CUNY administrators, ACE and non-ACE, about stackable credentials. The ongoing initiative supported by the Education Design Lab and the New York City Jobs CEO Council to help colleges collaborate with employers to develop programs that lead to microcredentials is an important start. The new systemwide credit for prior learning policy approved by the board of trustees in mid-2020 is a major step forward. But there is more to be done.

Among essential tools that don't always get the attention they deserve at CUNY: the subset of stackable credentials developed by employer associations—industry certifications.

At CUNY, as at many schools, educators are often perplexed by the many different types of alternate credentialing that have emerged in recent decades. Certificates, certifications, microcredentials: it's easy to confuse them. "Some people put a lot of store by the distinctions," one top-tier CUNY campus leader said in an interview. "To me, they're all the same. We just need more of them."

In fact, the differences are subtle but important. Like degrees, certificates are academic awards granted by institutions of higher education signaling that students have attended and completed a course of study.

Certifications, in contrast, are issued by noncollege groups, usually professional

What the credential recognizes: not time spent in class, but what learners know and what job-related tasks they can perform.

organizations or industry trade associations, signaling that learners have passed standardized skills assessments—tests administered by someone other than the college responsible for instruction. What the credential recognizes: not time spent in class, but what learners know and what job-related tasks they can perform—occupation-specific knowledge and skills identified by employers.

Microcredentials are also generally competency-based—a way for students to demonstrate mastery of a skill or body of knowledge. But they aren't always developed by independent third-party groups. Some are created by educators and granted by educational institutions and as a result may or may not signal competencies in demand in the labor market. Others, created by educators working with local employer partners, may or may not be "portable"—recognized industry-wide and equally valuable in other labor markets.

What industry certifications promise students: to provide a better bridge between what they learn in class and the skills they need to succeed on the job. Instead of traditional academic subjects that may or may not be relevant in the workplace, students study topics and sharpen skills specified by potential employers.

Noncredit learners in a hurry to acquire skills with immediate value in the labor market look to certifications, often attainable after just a semester of instruction, as a fast track to a job. Students preparing to earn degrees—associate, bachelor's or professional degrees—often seek to top up their academic learning with a more

practical skill set, and in many occupations, an industry certification can add tens of thousands of dollars to a graduate's annual salary.²⁰

The promise to educators: programs that embed certifications or prepare students for certification assessments are more likely than other education and training to be aligned with labor market demand. A well-developed certification widely used in the industry it serves is a proxy for employability, and college programs that prepare students to earn that award can be confident they are preparing learners with the skills they need to succeed on the job.

Finally, the payoff for the institution, industry certifications are an essential tool for educators seeking to build bridges between credit and noncredit divisions.

Reduced to its essence, an industry certification is a list of skills—a compendium of competencies needed to succeed in an occupation. Certification exams measure mastery of the skills on the list. Educators seeking to prepare students for the test use the list to structure curriculum. And when administrators come together to build bridges from noncredit to credit education, they need only compare the competencies required for the certification to the topics taught in a related credit-bearing course. If the curriculum and task list match, it's clear, objective evidence: the certification holder has mastered the knowledge and skills required to earn college credit for that portion of the course.

Preliminary data from the Opportunity America community college workforce education study suggest that nationwide, nearly one-third

INTEGRATING CREDIT AND NONCREDIT EDUCATION AT KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE

One of CUNY's most remote two-year campuses, located at the end of a subway line not far from Coney Island, Kingsborough Community College (KCC) was among the earliest to see the promise of integrating continuing education into the mainstream life of the college.

Kingsborough serves roughly 24,000 students per year, some 35 to 40 percent of them nondegree-seeking. Like many noncredit administrators, KCC continuing education personnel would like more recognition from their academic colleagues. But they acknowledge, as one explained to Opportunity America, that "by comparison to some other schools, our glass is probably half full."

The ACE division's top administrator carries the title of vice president and plays an active role in campus governance. ACE educators participate fully in an array of campus committees. Staff feel that the flow of funding to and from the college is reasonably equitable, and they say they get at least a hearing from colleagues when they make a case for their core mission—preparing learners for the workplace.

This modus vivendi is no accident. Former KCC president Regina Peruggi made integrating the noncredit division a priority when she arrived at the college in 2005. "On many campuses," she explains, "continuing education is an outlier. But I saw it as integral. Among other things, it's a place to experiment—a laboratory where we could try out new ideas for the rest of the college."

More than 15 years and several presidents later, KCC ACE administrators are still working to blur the line between credit and noncredit education. Among their most important tools: competency-based industry certifications designed to validate that learners have the skills employers say they need to succeed on the job.

KCC is not alone. Campuses across the CUNY system are working to establish equivalencies between credit-bearing instruction offered in academic classes and noncredit courses that prepare

of job-focused noncredit students earn industry credentials. But few CUNY ACE divisions offer more than a handful of courses that prepare students for industry assessments, and only a small number of agreements across the university allow learners to leverage certifications for college credit.

How. The first step for CUNY leadership seeking to elevate stackable credentials: reforms to realize the full promise of the credentialing initiatives launched in 2020.

The new credit for prior learning policy promises systemwide recognition of standardized academic exams, portfolios and industry certifications—a critical breakthrough for the university. The challenge for Central as the policy is implemented: to ensure robust buy-in at the

CUNY administrators want help identifying credentials of value to New York employers.

campus level. A policy designed to produce a consistent student experience across the university works only if all the colleges in the system participate actively.

The Education Design Lab initiative under way at six CUNY colleges focuses on embedding microcredentials in credit-eligible academic programs—an important step forward. Next steps, also essential: better integration of competency-based credentials in continuing

'I saw it as a laboratory where we could try out new ideas for the rest of the college.'

students for third-party certification exams—an objective, external metric that can be used to compare the content of the two courses. But KCC administrators see their campus culture as an advantage—a unique legacy that makes it easier to build bridges between divisions.

Establishing credential equivalencies is still a painstaking process. ACE administrators spend hours negotiating with department chairs and the office of academic affairs, comparing what they call the “learning outcomes” validated by certification exams and the syllabi of similar or related academic courses.

They haggle over the number of hours it takes students to absorb content and the number of college credits that should be awarded for each certification. It helps when the same instructor teaches the course in both divisions, as is often the case at KCC. But even then, negotiations can take several months.

Among the payoffs for students when the deal is finally done: more options to choose from as they chart a course from college to career. Learners who come to KCC seeking skills to get a job as quickly as possible may enroll in a 225-hour noncredit course for emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and graduates who pass the state EMT certification exam can expect to earn \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year in New York City. For some, that may be enough education—they may never come back to college. But others who later decide to return to Kingsborough to enroll in a paramedic degree program can leverage their EMT certification for six college credits—a good start toward an associate of applied science degree.

“Not everyone is going to continue,” Peruggi explains. “But you want to give them that opportunity. And for those who were afraid even to come to community college in the first place, that initial training can be an important step. It shows them they can succeed on a campus, and many will eventually come back for more.”

education courses and encouraging their use as a leverageable common currency for students seeking to make the transition from one division to another.

Moving beyond these existing initiatives, the next step for CUNY would be a university-wide campaign—a combination of incentives, encouragement, tools and technical assistance—to encourage broader uptake of industry credentialing.

One place to start: tracking attainment of industry certifications in the performance management process.

A second step, mentioned frequently in Opportunity America's New York interviews and focus groups with CUNY personnel: providing tools for campus-level administrators to identify credentials of value to New York employers.

At CUNY, as elsewhere across the US, educators struggle to determine which certifications give students a meaningful boost in the local labor market. Although industry certifications are issued by business groups, many are not widely known to rank-and-file employers. According to a study by labor market data analytics firm Burning Glass Technologies, online want ads posted over a 12-month period before the pandemic mentioned some 2,500 certifications, but two-thirds of the requests named the same top 50 credentials.²¹

The states across the country that do the best job of preparing students to earn industry certifications have pioneered sophisticated quantitative and qualitative techniques for identifying the awards with the greatest labor market value in their region and tracking them on a state-approved certification list.

Even small monetary incentives could drive significantly increased credential attainment.

This is beyond the reach of CUNY Central. But the university could start by canvassing New York employers and culling lists developed in other states, identifying, say, several dozen national credentials commonly endorsed in regions where the employer profile resembles New York's. One potential place to start: IT, health care and supply chain management certifications.

The states that have been most successful in encouraging educators to embed industry certifications also provide financial incentives. In Florida, for example, where institutions are awarded \$1,000 for every industry certification earned by a Florida college student, annual attainment jumped from 954 in 2008 to 164,792 in 2018.²² Although financial rewards of this size are likely out of reach for CUNY, experimentation in other states suggests that even small monetary incentives can drive significantly increased credential attainment.

Still another potential tool: a systemwide credential attainment goal modeled on the credentialing statutes on the books in 45 states. A typical state policy targets a percentage of state residents: in Texas, for example, that by 2030, 60 percent of state residents will hold postsecondary credentials with value in the labor market.²³ New York is one of just a few states with no mandated attainment goal, and it would be ambitious for CUNY to set a goal for all of New York City. But why not a goal for CUNY students—a target that includes degrees, certificates and industry certifications?

Broader uptake of industry certifications would pay off in many ways for CUNY: more employable students, programs more aligned with labor market demand and real-time guidance for instructors seeking to update courses to keep up with industry trends. It would also provide an essential tool for building stronger bridges between credit and noncredit divisions.

A few CUNY colleges alert to this potential have developed credential equivalencies for a handful of industry certifications. How this

works: credit and noncredit divisions at the campus level work together to explore how well the competencies certified by a third-party credential test match the topics covered in an academic course curriculum, then assign a fixed number of advanced-standing college credits for the award.

In the months ahead, educators expect, these campus-level agreements will feed into the new CUNY credit for prior policy, standardizing credential equivalencies across the university. The bottleneck: many CUNY academic educators have been hesitant to consider any comparison of credit and noncredit education. Many don't understand the need or value, ACE administrators say, and few CUNY colleges have established more than four or five third-party credential equivalencies, if that many.

What's needed, ideally as part of implementing the new credit for prior learning policy: a university-wide initiative to encourage and assist campuses in developing equivalencies, assigning college credit for industry certifications.

College-level administrators need help understanding the process and the potential payoff. They need tools, templates and technical assistance. More tangible incentives could include financial support to cover the cost of faculty time—the process sometimes requires intensive negotiations—and recognition in the performance management process. Also essential: endorsement by CUNY Central—putting priority on the use of industry awards to build bridges between credit and noncredit divisions.

Who. The change could start at CUNY Central but must then take hold across the university.

Resources needed. A university-wide campaign to encourage uptake of industry certifications would require modest to significant resources, depending on the size of the awards promised to colleges for every certification earned.

Likely impact. High.

#5 Consolidate and standardize noncredit workforce programs

What. Consolidate and standardize job-focused ACE programs across the university, eliminating redundancies and providing a more consistent student experience.

Why. Today, as before the pandemic, at least seven CUNY colleges offer programs training students as EMTs. Some courses are offered at community colleges, others at four-year institutions. Some but not all include on-the-job training in an ambulance. Some—a minority—are covered by philanthropic funding. A handful are embedded in broader, credit-bearing programs, but most are not—a pivotal difference for students relying on federal financial aid, which cannot as a rule be used to cover the cost of nondegree programs.

All of these programs prepare students to sit for the same New York State Department of Health EMT certification exam. But even that does not guarantee consistency across the university. Curriculum and quality still vary from college to college. So does the academic value of a state certification. On some CUNY campuses, the credential can be leveraged for college credit if the student later enrolls in a program leading to a degree—generally a paramedic associate of applied science degree. At other institutions, the same certification is worth nothing on the academic side of the college.

The upshot for students: less a wealth of choices than a confusing maze. And the challenge is even worse in the case of programs that

The upshot for students: less a wealth of choices than a confusing maze.

do not prepare learners for external certification tests—there is no independent quality control to ensure consistency across the CUNY system.

Several other states and large urban college systems have addressed this problem by consolidating and standardizing noncredit workforce programs.

The payoff: better quality assurance for non-degree programs, a more consistent and predictable experience for students and a framework to facilitate large-scale crossover from noncredit to credit education.

How. The process would start with a detailed inventory. What job-focused programs, in what fields, are offered by ACE divisions across the university? How robust is student demand, campus by campus? Do programs meet student demand? Exceed it? What about labor market demand? And how do student outcomes—completion, credential attainment, job placements and wages—compare from college to college?

In some cases, like EMT training, there may be sufficient demand to sustain a large number of parallel programs. And demand may vary enough—different types of students, different job opportunities, different funding models—to justify an assortment of course offerings. In other cases where there is less demand from either students or employers, efficiency may argue for consolidating or eliminating programs.

This will not be easy at CUNY: it goes against the system's ingrained culture of decentralization and campus autonomy. But a thoughtful, well-designed consolidation would pay off across the university.

Instead of two or three struggling programs that generate little revenue for any college, one strong program would cost less to run and likely generate increased demand—additional enrollments and funding. Colleges that closed programs could be encouraged—and perhaps assisted financially—to launch new course offerings in other fields of study with growing appeal for students. Campuses could be encouraged to

Efficiency may argue for consolidating or eliminating programs.

identify their comparative advantages and look for ways to complement one another. Also possible: jointly sponsored programs that draw on resources from two or more campuses and generate increased revenue for all of them.

Here too, as with coordinating colleges to meet labor market demand, Central has two tools at its disposal: information and financial incentives. The growth of online education will help, reducing the pull of geography. Students armed with knowledge about program outcomes—the information gathered by a university-wide inventory of nondegree programs—will make informed choices, opting for higher quality, and over time consumer choice will drive consolidation. Meanwhile, modest funding from Central can help colleges replace weak programs with stronger offerings and reward campuses that collaborate or find other ways to complement each other.

In other cases, where demand is robust and there is no need for consolidation, it may pay off to standardize job-focused nondegree programs. A July 2020 report endorsed by administrators at five CUNY community colleges recommended that the university move in this direction, aligning and codifying similar programs offered on disparate campuses.²⁴

One place to start: with several courses from across the university that prepare students for the same industry certification exam. All programs leading to, say, the EMT assessment share a common corpus of basic content. Different colleges may organize and enhance that content in different ways, appealing to different types of students, and they should retain some leeway to customize course offerings. But core

curriculum, contact hours and pricing could be standardized. The 2020 CUNY report recommended that they should be, calling for not just standardization, but “uniformity.”

The next step would be standardized articulation agreements. Once an individual college has established that a certification is credit-worthy and negotiated the number of credits to be awarded for the assessment, the new CUNY credit for prior learning policy should kick in, promulgating that equivalency across the university and opening the way for universal recognition. A certification worth, say, three college credits on one campus should be worth three credits everywhere in the CUNY system, ensuring that the student experience is consistent across the university.

Standardization need not be a straitjacket. EMT programs, for example, might still vary significantly across CUNY colleges. But all would meet a certain baseline for quality.

No matter who covers the cost of tuition—the student, the government or a philanthropic funder—value would be consistent from campus

to campus. Students could move easily from one college to another to take advantage of other campus-specific course offerings.

Colleges could pool resources to market a standardized program, increasing enrollments—growing the pie—in a way no single campus is able to do. And the new transparency and predictability would encourage more ACE students to matriculate in degree programs, augmenting academic enrollments across the university.

Who. Change could start at CUNY Central but must then take hold across the university.

Resources needed. The most likely obstacle to an initiative of this kind is less the expense than bureaucratic inertia. But resources would help create incentives to consolidate programs and cover the cost of staff time for faculty who participate in negotiations about credential equivalencies.

Likely impact. High.



CHAPTER THREE



COUNSELING AND CAREER NAVIGATION

Many students, especially those from families with little exposure to higher education, find the college experience confusing. There are too many courses to choose from. It's hard to find your place, harder still to chart a course, and what guidance is available focuses overwhelmingly on graduation—not launching a career. What's needed: a range of more intensive services to help students navigate paths to high-demand, high-paying jobs.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

Among the many memorable moments in the dozens of site visits, interviews and focus groups Opportunity America conducted for this study, few stand out as vividly as our conversations with students. Many learners we spoke with were thrilled to be at CUNY. Some were the first in their families to attend college; others were exhilarated by the exposure to ideas or scholarly research. Among the proudest were the midcareer adults—people who had never imagined that college was in the cards for them but

found themselves just a few steps away from graduation.

Still, hopeful as these conversations were, they often came with a caveat—a common complaint heard from many different kinds of learners that the institution they attended hadn't done enough to help them chart a course through college, whether toward a degree or a career.

"There are so many opportunities at college," one woman explained. "There's so much to learn. But it's so easy to get lost. You need someone there all the time telling you, 'This is the direction you need to go in.' Without that—without a clear, marked path—you're going to veer off to the wrong side."

This is a problem at institutions of higher education across America, especially community colleges. Young people "drift" aimlessly through college.²⁵ They struggle to choose courses from an overabundant "cafeteria" of choices.²⁶ Student supports are often inadequate. Resourceful, entrepreneurial learners and those with private networks to fall back on—educated parents, robust social capital, a sponsoring employer—stand a better chance of mapping a successful path. But far too many

Students need information about labor market demand.

students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, lose their way before finishing.

CUNY recognized this problem more than a decade ago and moved to address it with the now nationally renowned Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) initiative. The results have been spectacular. Graduation rates have more than doubled, with the three-year average now hovering around 50 percent, and the program has grown from just over 1,000 students to more than 25,000.²⁷ ASAP's answers for students struggling to find their way at college: "intrusive" advisement, robust remediation and tutoring and an array of financial supports, including last-dollar scholarships that kick in after other financial aid has been exhausted.

A second approach to the same challenge, developed in the same years just across town at the Community College Research Center at Columbia University Teachers College, the guided pathways model has a slightly different focus. It too emphasizes advisement and reinforces an array of student supports. But it also restricts and restructures the academic offerings available to students, then helps learners plan and stay on a path through a tightly streamlined sequence of courses. As of late 2020, the guided pathways model was being implemented at some 300 institutions, and it too is producing impressive results.

Together, ASAP and guided pathways are accelerating degree attainment for an untold number of college students across the US. But a core component of the student body has been left out. Both programs drive students toward traditional academic goals—degree attainment and transfer to a four-year institution. Neither has much to offer job-focused learners, and far too many workforce students, credit and noncredit,

lose their way at CUNY and elsewhere, leaving college with few skills or credentials of value in the labor market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The CUNY students and former students we interviewed identified three moments in the college experience when they need more job-focused advising and navigational supports: at intake, as they proceed through their coursework and when they make the transition from college to career.

#1 Career counseling at intake

What. Intensive advising "at the gate"—when students first arrive on a CUNY campus.

Why. A key lesson from guided pathways: few moments are as important as intake. Counselors need to listen to students and help them identify their goals, then map backward to chart an individualized path through the college experience.

How. Many students we spoke with seconded this notion, emphasizing that what they want most at intake is help planning an instructional path that leads to a career—advising laser-focused from the start on an employment outcome.

"I wish they'd helped me start to think about a job on the first day," one young man told us, "instead of waiting until the week before I graduated."

Students need information: about labor market demand, the employment payoff to a range of majors and the likely return to a variety of credentials—both academic awards and industry certifications.

Many students also want assessments to help

The key ingredient is high-touch human attention.

them match their interests and aptitudes with potential careers. Still others said they'd like college orientation sessions to include presentations by employers and CUNY graduates already working in the sector that interests them.

Still another option sometimes seen on campuses in other states: a stand-alone, noncredit "career course" offered in the student's first weeks or months on campus that exposes them to their career of choice—perhaps with a day or two of job shadowing—and charts a plausible path for them to get a good job in that field.

Several CUNY community colleges are moving in this direction, layering in additional career guidance at intake or shortly after. Some have invested in detailed career maps. Others make the Emsi Career Coach—a 60-question online assessment designed to surface personal interests and aptitudes and match them with potential careers—available to all students.

But learners need more than online tools. The key ingredient is high-touch human attention—intensive, individualized advising to help students make sense of labor market information and psychological assessments, personalizing their path through college to a high-demand, high-paying job.

Several ACE administrators interviewed for this study underlined the difference high-touch help can make for job-focused students. CUNY campuses often make intensive advising available to nondegree students in grant-subsidized workforce programs. But most ACE students, paying out of pocket for the ordinary tuition-funded programs in the college catalog, get no personalized assistance of any kind.

Learners paying for tuition are often stronger students than those in grant-funded programs. But post-completion follow-up suggests that

their employment outcomes are often weaker—lagging behind those of grant-funded learners who received wraparound student supports.

Who. This is a job for campus-level leadership and administrators, but Central can set goals and showcase exemplary campus initiatives.

Resources needed. What's needed is mostly staff time, and funding should be permanent—not a special expense covered by a one-time grant, but rather built into the budget and sustainable over time.

Likely impact. Would grow over time.

#2 Helping students stay on a path to a job

What. An array of sustained student supports, available as long as learners are enrolled at CUNY, to ensure that they stay on track, pursuing the job-focused paths they charted for themselves at intake.

Why. Staying the course in college can be difficult for any student. But CUNY students, degree-seeking and nondegree-seeking, often face steeper than usual odds.

More than three-quarters of CUNY undergraduates identify as underrepresented minorities, more than one-quarter are 25 years old or older, one-third were born outside the US mainland and 37 percent start with a native language other than English.²⁸ These percentages are even higher on community college campuses and, anecdotal evidence suggests, higher still among nondegree students. At least half the students at most CUNY colleges work more than 20 hours a week, and depending on the campus, some 70 to 80 percent of first-time, full-time CUNY community college students are eligible for means-tested federal student aid.²⁹

What this means for the student experience: it's easy for even the most devoted learners to be distracted by competing demands. Many must juggle school, work and family. Others need help meeting academic standards. Rates vary from campus to campus, but it's not unusual for three-quarters of entering CUNY community college students to require remedial instruction in either English or math.

Still other learners face even more daunting challenges: homelessness, hunger and mental health issues. No wonder it's hard for many to stay focused on college—even in a short, job-centered nondegree program.

How. At the heart of both ASAP and the guided pathways model is intensive advisement—often a package of services that includes academic advising, tutoring, career workshops, financial services, mental health services and referrals to a still broader array of community supports. Job-focused students need this kind of traditional help, but they also need additional services to prepare them for the world of work.

The first, essential step is individualized career counseling. Workshops can be valuable. Group sessions have their place. But the need for high-touch human help doesn't end when the student has settled in at college.

Whenever possible, career counselors should have recent industry work experience. Advisers hired out of the private sector can be more expensive than traditional academic advisers. But they bring invaluable knowledge about changing technology, workplace trends and recruiting practices, plus personal contacts at local businesses where students are likely to look for jobs.

Whenever possible, career counselors should have recent industry work experience.

As important as who provides it is when career counseling is available: not just one session when the student arrives on campus and another before graduation, but throughout their college experience, week to week, if not more often.

The students we spoke with for this study strongly underscored this point. "It is not one and done," one woman explained. "I need help at every step along the way." Students specified that they wanted advisers hired out of industry, and they want as many kinds of advice as possible from a single person who would work with them throughout their time in college to help them stay on the path they mapped for themselves at intake.

Still another idea that surfaced several times in our conversations with students: job-focused advisers who help them make the most of their coursework.

Even more than traditional academic tutoring or along with it, the students we spoke with said they want help identifying what's most important in what they're learning and what they should be taking away from classes, particularly general education courses, which many learners see as tangential to their employment goals.

"The best adviser I ever had," one CUNY graduate recalled her prior experience at a college in another state, "met with me weekly and told me, 'Here's why you're learning that subject. Here's what you need to be getting out of the course, and here's how it's going to help you later, on the job.'"

What's needed doesn't end with counseling. Job-focused learners also need an array of other supports to help prepare them for the world of work. Several learners we spoke with asked for a second type of career course, credit or non-credit, less focused on career exploration than on life skills, including job search skills and financial literacy.

Whenever possible, remedial education should be contextualized: not an English language class followed by technical training, but a

Staff would match companies and candidates and introduce students to potential employers.

single program that braids the two curriculums and keeps learners focused on the employment outcome that's motivating them to get through college.

Job-focused learners also need help with employability skills: general competencies like time management and job search strategies, but also occupation-specific soft skills—for example, for allied health students, patience, empathy, listening and verbal communication.

Finally, even more than other students, job-focused learners need work-based learning opportunities, supplemented whenever possible by dedicated advising that prepares them for a workplace experience and helps them reflect on it afterward.

Bottom line: for many learners, student supports are as important as instruction. “Counseling matters as much as curriculum,” one young man told us. And for job-focused students, that means sustained supports to help them stay centered on their employment goals.

Who. The change that's needed starts with campus-level leadership and administrators, but Central can create incentives and recognize exemplary initiatives.

Resources needed. Sustainable funding for staff time, including subsidies to hire advisers with industry work experience.

Likely impact. Would build over time.

#3 Job placement

What. An on-campus job placement office to ensure that every student gets the individualized assistance they need to navigate the New York labor market.

Why. Students say they need help—much more help—finding and landing jobs, especially good jobs in their fields of study. Advising is essential, and internships sometimes lead to employment. But few reforms could make as much difference for student success as an office devoted to helping students bridge the gap from college to career.

How. The services offered by an office of this kind would start with information and advice but go much further, on the model of a staffing firm or recruitment agency.

As at a professional placement firm, staff would match companies and candidates, introduce students to potential employers, provide individualized job search assistance, work with learners to hone their career skills and stay on the case, offering real-time advice as they navigate the first few weeks or months on the job.

Like a staffing firm, a placement office would also screen job applicants, and it would vouch for those it sends to partnering companies. The goal over time: to build a reputation for the office and for CUNY students—essential for gaining entrée with employers and the best way to guarantee return business.

The office would be staffed with advisers recently hired from the private sector, and it would be judged on results—not services offered, but job placements.

A dedicated office of this kind would be an expensive undertaking, perhaps beyond the reach of most CUNY colleges. But campuses could start by revamping existing career services, adding personnel and introducing

employment-focused performance metrics—job placement and retention.

The most important ingredient would be advisers recruited out of industry. An enterprising CUNY president might start by hiring a counselor in a single sector or two—positions potentially filled with philanthropic funding or hired in partnership with employer groups.

As in ASAP, the counselor's caseload would be critical—no more than 150 students per adviser. But a single industry counselor could play a variety of roles on campus—advising at intake, arranging internships, helping students understand what they need to get out of courses and making the all-important introductions that position students to land desirable jobs.

Who. Another job primarily for campus-level leadership and administrators. What Central could provide: additional resources to supplement payroll costs for advisers with industry experience.

Resources needed. Significant.

Likely impact. High

#4 A pilot project focused on employment outcomes

What. A pilot project, modeled on CUNY ASAP, that combines the essential services career-focused students need to chart a path through college to a well-paying job in their field of study.

Why. Among the essential features common to ASAP and guided pathways: both offer a package of services designed to have a cumulative effect greater than the sum of the parts.

By all accounts, free MetroCards are among ASAP's essential ingredients—an indispensable

feature of the program. But free transportation alone would not drive a significant increase in graduation rates. So too intensive advising, full-time attendance, strictly sequenced courses, even last-dollar financial aid: none alone is likely to have the impact of a full suite of services offered under the umbrella of a single program. What makes a difference is the package and the way the pieces fit together.

How. Opportunity America and LaGuardia Community College are developing a plan for a package of services, to be offered initially as a pilot program, for nondegree-seeking, job-focused students.

The new program would build on stratagems pioneered by ASAP and guided pathways. Many components would be similar: ASAP's intrusive advising, guided pathways' streamlined sequencing of instruction, aggressive contextualized remediation and financial aid, among other elements. But instead of a path to a degree, educators would help learners find and stay on a more direct route to employment. The metric by which the program would be judged: job placements.

The core elements of the model:

- **Up-to-date labor market information to help learners make choices about programs.** Which New York City industries are growing? What kinds of workers are in demand today and likely to be in demand in years ahead? A pilot project would combine labor market information purchased from a data analytics firm with input from New York employers. Career counselors would work with entering students to help them understand this information and use it to make decisions about what to study.
- **Individualized skills assessments, career maps and instructional maps.** What skills and interests do learners bring to the table? What's the shortest route between

the skills they have and what's needed for the job they want? Many tools exist to measure students' abilities and help them choose a path that's right for them. A pilot project would work with each student individually to assess their skills and interests and help them chart a course.

- **Program requirements codesigned with employer partners.** Only employers know what skills are needed in their industry. Only employers can predict how their business is likely to change in years ahead. A LaGuardia pilot project would start with existing ACE curriculum, then enlist employer partners to vet and refine it—updating as needed or customizing programs to meet current labor market demand.
- **All programs culminate in industry certifications.** No student should leave CUNY without a credential of value in the labor market, and in many industries—especially those that rely on workers without bachelor's degrees—the credentials with the most currency are industry certifications. All of the proposed pilot's programs would culminate in third-party certifications recognized by New York employers.
- **Intensive advisement by people with industry work experience.** Like ASAP, a LaGuardia pilot project would offer mandatory, comprehensive, proactive advisement through the student's time at CUNY. Counselors would be hired out of industry, familiar with current workforce trends and changing labor market demand. The student-adviser ratio: no more than 150 students to one adviser.
- **Emphasis on employability skills.** Along with technical instruction, job-focused students need an array of nontechnical skills: basic work habits, career skills and higher-order soft skills like critical thinking and problem solving. The proposed pilot would embed essential workplace skills in every program.
- **Experiential learning for every student.** Work-based learning gives students an opportunity to explore their career interests and learn the professionalism that will be expected of them on the job. It also makes them significantly more appealing in the eyes of future employers. All students in the proposed pilot would have an opportunity for a 50-hour work-based learning experience with compensation covered by a stipend.
- **A cohort model.** Even in short, intensive, job-focused programs, people learn better in groups—in tandem with similarly situated peers aiming for the same goals and navigating the same challenges. Students in the proposed pilot would move through the program in cohorts of 25 learners.
- **Robust job placement services.** The pilot project would hire dedicated staff to scout local employers' needs, connect students with job opportunities, teach job-navigation skills and counsel graduates through their first months in the workplace.
- **Financial aid.** The proposed pilot would build on LaGuardia's recent success raising money to subsidize tuition for low-income nondegree-seeking students—no student in the programs would be asked to cover more than 20 percent of tuition and fees. Additional funding would be needed to cover the cost of internship stipends, MetroCards, textbooks, lab fees, industry certification assessments, loaner laptops and IT support.

Who. Campus-level leadership.

Resources. Would require significant philanthropic funding.

Likely impact. High.

#5 Midcareer adults

What. More attention and services for midcareer adult students: targeted outreach and recruitment, tailored program design, scheduling, advising and other student supports conceived more intentionally for older learners focused on employment outcomes.

Why. Nearly one million New Yorkers lost their jobs in the first three months of the Covid pandemic, and the economic shock sharply accelerated the automation and workplace restructuring that Americans once called the “future of work.” Housebound consumers turned to technology for convenience. Businesses adopted it for safety's sake and to increase productivity, unleashing what many observers expect will be a period of prolonged change driven by automation and

Most marketing is geared toward younger students—just look at the photographs displayed on college websites and in course catalogs.

artificial intelligence. The upshot, in New York as elsewhere in America, will be the transformation of jobs across an array of industries, leaving thousands of midcareer New Yorkers in need of fast, job-focused upskilling and reskilling.

The challenge for CUNY: rethinking and revamping to meet these learners' needs.

A growing number of community colleges nationwide see adult learners—25 or 26 years old and older—as a core component of their

A BRIDGE TO COLLEGE FOR WORKING ADULTS

Virtually every CUNY campus grapples with the challenge: students who look to the college as a stepping stone to high-demand, high-paying health care careers but arrive on campus unprepared for the academic rigors of a health care program.

For three CUNY institutions, including Lehman College, the solution is collaboration—a decades-long partnership with the workforce training arm of the health care workers union, 1199SEIU.

The union training fund serves primarily midcareer adults: mostly women of color, many of them immigrants, working full time in relatively low-paying service or clerical jobs—cleaning staff, home health aides, personal health aides and the like. Their pathway to the middle class runs through a college credential. But many come from poor-performing high schools. Most have not been in a classroom in many years. Others may be intimidated by college or confused by college requirements.

The 1199SEIU Health Careers College Core Curriculum (HC4) program addresses these challenges with a package of services tailored for union members who have been admitted to CUNY colleges. The key elements of the package: college-level instruction in health care prerequisites ranging from English and math to anatomy and physiology, tutoring, counseling, case management and financial aid.

Lehman faculty provide the academic content, and Lehman instructors teach it. But the training fund, which pays for the instruction, leaves nothing to chance, structuring every other aspect of the program to maximize student success.

Classes must be taught at times and locations that are convenient for working adults, either at Lehman or at a nearby 1199SEIU training center. Students move through the program in cohorts, encouraging and learning from each other.

student body, at least as important as younger learners, if not more so.

This is not the case, or rarely the case, at CUNY. Although older learners make up a significant share of nondegree-seeking students at CUNY community colleges, by national standards, they are underrepresented among degree-seeking students. And few CUNY colleges go out of their way to recruit older learners or make accommodations for them when they arrive on campus.

Degree-seeking community college students at CUNY skew considerably younger than the national norm: before the pandemic, just 27 percent were 25 or older, compared to 35 to 40 percent nationwide.³⁰ What data are available suggest that the ACE student profile is considerably older, and it bears a strong resemblance to the noncredit student profile elsewhere in the US. At CUNY, as in several other states, between

75 and 85 percent of noncredit community college students are 25 or older.³¹

Yet most CUNY two-year colleges treat working adults as an afterthought. Most classes are scheduled on weekdays in the late morning or early afternoon—ideal for traditional college-age students but not for most working adults. The lion's share of CUNY community college marketing is geared toward younger students—just look at the photographs displayed on college websites and in course catalogs. Corequisite remedial courses that combine academic supports with substantive college-level curriculum—essential for adults who have been out of school for many years but have only so much time for college—are few and far between.

Among CUNY colleges, only the School of Professional Studies markets itself intentionally to older learners, and although it fills an important gap for New Yorkers with some

'Now CUNY needs to make adults a priority.'

The fund provides the all-important student supports: individualized tutoring, group tutoring, intensive counseling and a range of small-group workshops in topics like time management, study habits, test-taking and digital skills.

Students can earn up to 34 credits—more than half of an associate degree. A recurring issue between the fund and its CUNY partners: what kind of credits and are they applicable toward the student's major or general education requirements?

Why this matters: midcareer students are in a hurry. They can't afford to waste time on classes they don't need, and the longer it takes to get a degree, the less likely they are to obtain one. Effective counseling is key, but so is cooperation from CUNY faculty to ensure that HC4 participants can be admitted to selective health care majors, whether at Lehman or at a community college.

HC4 has a superlative track record. More than 6,000 learners have passed through the program since it was founded in 1996. More than 90 percent complete their prerequisite coursework within two years. The lion's share choose to continue in nursing programs—the most competitive health care major—generally earning associate of applied science degrees. But many come back to college later in life for bachelor's degrees and higher-level professional credentials.

The training fund sees the collaboration as a win-win and Lehman in particular as an excellent partner. But fund officials are frustrated by the lack of consistency across CUNY campuses, each of which maintains its own standards for prerequisite courses and articulation of credit.

"They need a more consistent approach," one union official says, "especially to adult learners, who need very different services than traditional college-age students. The HC4 program shows what can be done. Now CUNY needs to make adults a priority."

college experience but no degree, it offers primarily online instruction leading to bachelor's degrees—not the right fit for all older students.

What makes midcareer adults different goes well beyond their age. Many are holding down full-time jobs while also juggling school and family. Others may be out of work and looking for intensive, full-time instruction. Employed or unemployed, they are much more likely than younger students to be focused on improving their position in the labor market. They may or may not be interested in earning academic degrees—what most seek are job-related skills—and many are likely to look first to an adult and continuing education division.

Bottom line: midcareer learners need many of the same services that traditional college-age students need, but also some additional services and supports.

How. There are few institutions in New York City better positioned than CUNY to serve working adults seeking fast, job-focused education and training, and the university could be doing more—much more—to realize its potential in this realm.

The first step is scheduling. CUNY colleges seeking to accommodate older learners should rethink when instruction is offered, scheduling more classes, credit and noncredit, in the evenings and on weekends. Obvious as this sounds, it often proves difficult on CUNY campuses, where old habits die hard and many personnel don't understand the need. So too with student services: an adult learner with a full-time job can't stop in at the financial aid office in midafternoon—that office too needs to be open in the evenings and on weekends, and services should be made available online.

A second critical issue: program design. Even more than younger students, working learners need short-form, applied courses that can help them get a job or a better job as quickly as possible. Traditional semester-length programs can be pared back to teach just the skills learners

An adult learner with a full-time job can't stop in at the financial aid office in midafternoon.

need to be successful on the job, and whenever possible, remedial instruction should be folded into job-focused programs—corequisite developmental education.

As important as what is taught is how it's delivered. Many midcareer adults pressed for time will gravitate to online instruction and hybrid offerings. But not all older students are comfortable with virtual learning. Many lack digital skills or have limited access to technology. And like all students, what they need, whether virtually or in-person, goes beyond instruction—advising and other supports that may or may not be delivered most effectively online.

The rule of thumb for CUNY colleges in the wake of the pandemic should be flexibility and student choice. What's needed is experimentation with a broad range of options: instruction and student services offered in a variety of formats, in-person, online and hybrid.

Third, adult learners need a different kind of advising than traditional college-age students—different in tone and content and more focused on navigating the labor market.

Among the most effective stratagems, an approach borrowed from the latest thinking about dislocated workers, starts with the concept of an “adjacent job”—helping learners build on the skills they bring from a previous job to chart the shortest course to a better, new position.

The process starts with skills assessments and credit for prior learning. No student, traditional college-age or older, should have to retake courses or relearn skills they have mastered in another setting. The new CUNY credit for prior learning policy is a critical step in the

right direction. Implemented properly, it could transform the opportunities available to midcareer New Yorkers, sharply enhancing the appeal of returning to college.

The next step in the advising process is individualized career mapping to help adult learners find the shortest route to a new, well-paying adjacent job. For an unemployed bartender or retail clerk, this might mean online customer service—a position requiring customer relations skills not unlike those they developed in their old job, supplemented by a short business course or IT training. Similarly, a midlevel health care worker seeking to move up on the job could earn a big boost in pay from a course or two in data management.

The goal is to keep training as brief as possible, appealing and achievable for an adult learner, facilitating rapid reattachment to the labor market. What's needed from the college: dedicated advising and an array of short, flexible course offerings—modules that can be arranged and rearranged like building blocks

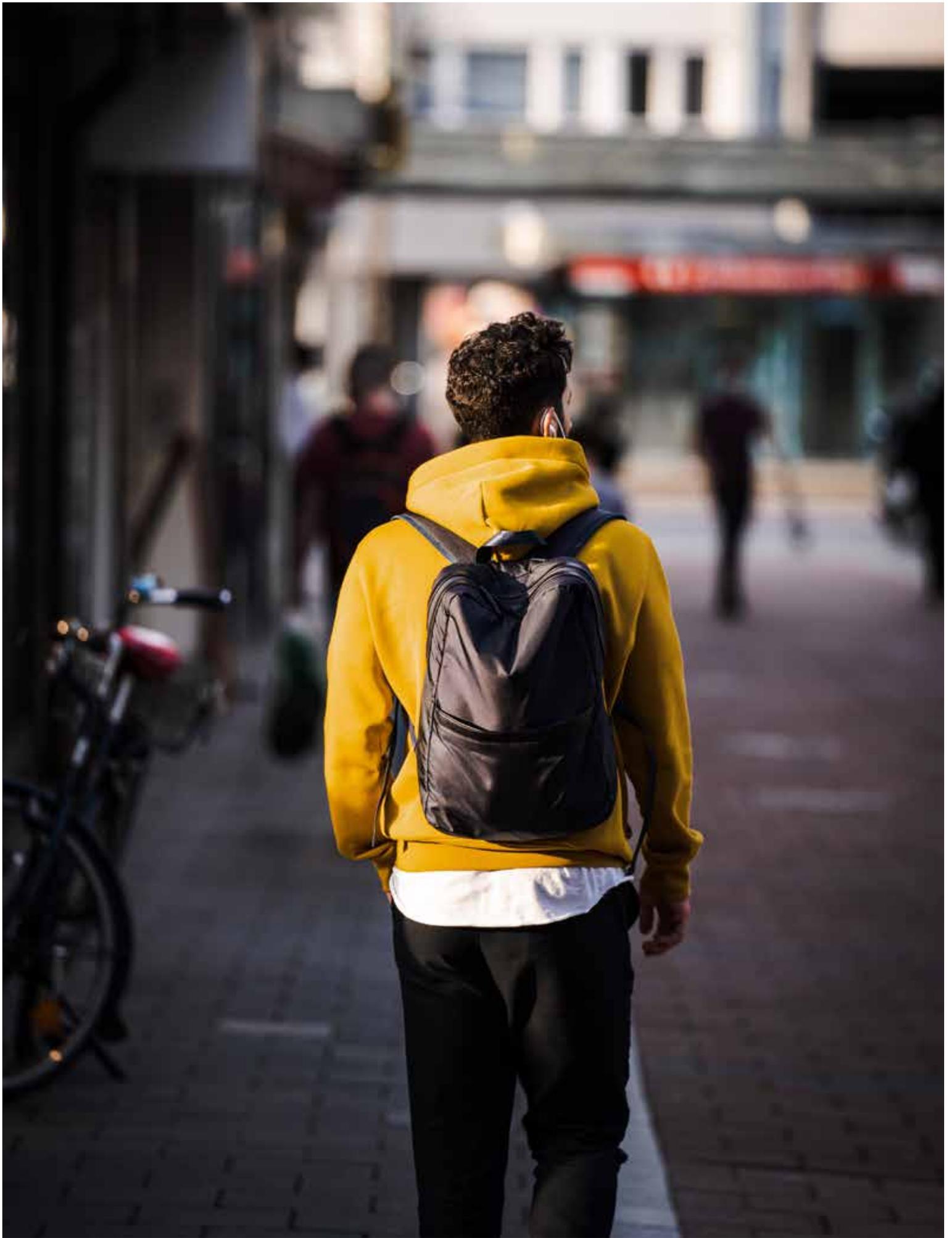
to help learners leverage the skills they have, augmenting where necessary to maximize their labor market value.

Finally, as essential for midcareer adults as for traditional college-age students, all workforce programs should culminate in stackable credentials that learners can use in the short run to get jobs but also trade in later for college credit if and when they decide to continue their education.

Who. A university-wide strategy to make CUNY more appealing to midcareer adults would require change at many levels—a new approach to marketing, new flexibility in program design and significantly enhanced resources for advising, among other shifts. It's a job for Central and campus-level leadership working together to chart a course and sustain it over time.

Resources needed. Incremental but significant.

Likely impact. High.



CHAPTER FOUR



BUILDING A REGIONAL TALENT PIPELINE

Few cities nationwide can match the wealth and variety of education and social service providers in New York. Two-year colleges, four-year colleges, high schools, community-based organizations, nonprofit social service agencies, employers, labor unions, the public workforce system and privately owned education and training providers, among other entities, offer parallel services, often to overlapping constituencies. What's needed: better coordination and collaboration to facilitate a regional talent pipeline in which CUNY plays a leading role.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

Community-based organizations, labor union training funds, nonprofit training providers and other New York educators delivered a consistent message in Opportunity America interviews and focus groups. Many are eager to collaborate with CUNY. They see a wealth of opportunities for fruitful cooperation. But all too often, these potential partners report, collaboration is stymied either by bureaucratic obstacles or by a lack of sustained interest.

Decades of generous philanthropic funding have created an unparalleled nonprofit sector in New York City.

Decades of generous philanthropic funding have created an unparalleled nonprofit sector in New York City, much of it centered on education. Some organizations focus on providing cutting-edge job training. Others offer a gateway for disadvantaged youth with few other paths to postsecondary instruction. Still others seek to support nontraditional learners as they make their way through college.

Far from competing with CUNY, these organizations are often a natural complement. Potential synergies abound—opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships that could funnel learners into CUNY and facilitate their success. But all too often, these opportunities go begging. “It’s like we’re on different planets,”

one nonprofit leader complained. “Two roads running parallel. But they never meet, and in the end everybody loses.”

Potential partnering organizations level two different kinds of complaints about CUNY—two kinds of challenges that must be overcome to realize the potential for collaboration.

The first challenge is organizational. Like employers seeking to partner with CUNY colleges, nonprofits often don't know which door to knock on. Each college is different; each department is unique. Each institution has its own confusing organizational structure and looks to a different office or division to develop relationships with community groups.

Many nonprofits have managed to establish a beachhead at CUNY—a one-time collaboration here, some promising cooperation there—and worked hard to deepen it, only to watch the relationship fizzle when their CUNY counterpart moves on to a different job. “We don't have partnerships with CUNY,” one training fund manager explained. “We have partnerships with individuals at CUNY, and by definition that is transient.” Still other organizations report that they have recruited a willing partner and developed a way of working together but find it impossible to scale or replicate the collaboration elsewhere across the system.

The second challenge is cultural. Many community-based organizations that manage to develop partnerships with CUNY colleges complain about what they see as a lack of familiarity with the nontraditional learners they bring into the university. Many colleges don't understand the challenges facing disadvantaged youth, nonprofits say, or don't provide the supports they need to overcome these barriers. Many instructors are blind to the special needs of midcareer adults. Many nontraditional students, young and old, often feel like outsiders on a CUNY campus, and not enough is done to help them feel that they belong.

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 Partnering to recruit and support students

What. Better partnerships with community groups—community-based social services, faith-based organizations, nonprofit training providers and union training funds, among others—to drive enrollment at CUNY colleges.

Why. The Covid-19 pandemic dealt a body blow to CUNY community colleges, shearing away 15 percent of enrollments between fall 2019 and fall 2020.³² As the pandemic ebbs, students are trickling back. But even in the best of times, CUNY struggles to reach many potential students, particularly underprivileged students of color, who could benefit from attending college, whether in credit or noncredit programs.

Nonprofit groups, known and trusted in their communities, are ideally positioned to function as feeders for CUNY colleges. When the collaboration works, the community group recruits learners, screens them and often provides instruction to prepare them to succeed at college. Then, when students enroll at CUNY, the nonprofit often continues to provide supports or partners with the college to ensure that its support services are effective.

But according to many community groups, this is where the relationship often breaks down. College-provided supports are inadequate. Nontraditional learners aren't made aware of

Nonprofit groups are ideally positioned to function as feeders for CUNY colleges.

campus services or helped to feel comfortable using them. When personnel from the community group step in to help bridge the gap, educators brush them off or ignore their advice.

How. What’s needed, the nonprofits and union training funds say, starts with better communication—much more regular, structured communication between the college and the community group.

When things work well, the community partner serves as an essential go-between. Nonprofit staff know their clients’ needs and can help the college understand and serve them better. And this in turn positions the group to help nontraditional learners understand what’s available at college and how to take advantage of it. But according to many nonprofit groups, communication is often perfunctory and superficial, if it happens at all.

One way to address this at the campus level would start with dedicated personnel—an office whose sole function is to facilitate relationships with community service providers. Some CUNY colleges have community outreach arms, but nonprofit leaders say they are often more focused on fundraising than collaboration, and few community groups find these offices effective in solving the granular problems that can arise when nontraditional learners arrive on campus.

In an ideal world, this office would serve as a clear front door for nonprofit groups looking to collaborate with the college. It could open and oversee channels for regular communication between community groups and campus personnel, whether advisers or instructors. A liaison office of this kind could ensure continuity as instructors come and go at the college—an institutional commitment to sustained collaboration.

It could be responsible for making sure no learner falls through the cracks, guaranteeing that someone—campus or community-based—is providing the all-important supports and “cultural translation” many nonprofits say their

clients need to succeed at college. It could also coordinate joint fundraising. Instead of duplicative, overlapping appeals, often to help the same group of learners, college and community group could combine forces to submit proposals to philanthropic funders.

Who. The change that’s needed starts at the campus level, but Central could encourage and reward innovation.

Resources needed. Would require institutional support to establish and sustain campus outreach offices.

Likely impact. Would grow over time.

#2 Partnering to provide instruction

What. A second area where CUNY colleges and community groups could be collaborating more productively: leveraging the job-focused training offered by organizations across the city.

Why. From Per Scholas and NPower to 1199SEIU and the operating engineers union, dozens of nonprofit and union groups provide specialized, technical, nondegree instruction that complements CUNY colleges’ academic offerings and could be combined with them to boost graduates’ earning power.

Dozens of nonprofit and union groups provide specialized, technical instruction that complements CUNY’s academic offerings.

Many of these groups collaborate in some way with CUNY colleges, and some maintain well-established partnerships. But even those with the best relationships say the collaboration is often difficult or limited in scope—that the input they provide isn't recognized and potential synergies go unrealized. The two most commonly mentioned flashpoints: college credit and funding.

How. A project launched at the School of Professional Studies in late 2020 demonstrates what can be done to leverage technical instruction provided by a community group. Learners who complete IT training at three well-vetted New York nonprofit organizations—Per Scholas, NPower and Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow—can earn college credit for their noncollege

learning if they matriculate at SPS. The payoff for learners: a college credential. The payoff for the college: enhanced enrollments.

The new citywide CUNY credit for prior learning policy can help extend the reach of relationships like this and may encourage other CUNY colleges to experiment. But there is still much to be done—what are now a few isolated experiments should become common practice across CUNY.

Still another option, apparently untapped anywhere across the university: the Higher Education Act permits postsecondary institutions to outsource up to 50 percent of the content and instruction of any college program to a nonaccredited, noncollege education or training provider. Both Democrats and Republicans have supported proposals to expand the permissible

GUTTMAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS TOP OFF THEIR DEGREES AT PER SCHOLAS

Administrators at CUNY's newest two-year institution, Guttman Community College, knew from the get-go that what some call "soft skills"—critical thinking, problem solving, communication, teamwork—are as important as academic content. So when an external assessment showed that not all Guttman students were graduating with these critical abilities, the college decided to partner with the nonprofit Per Scholas, offering complementary training and counseling to upperclassmen majoring in information technology.

Per Scholas' perceived value-add was threefold. Students would prepare for industry certification tests and earn valuable competency-based credentials not offered at the college. They would receive intensive career coaching: not just occasional workshops in resume writing and interview skills of the kind provided at most community colleges, but also weekly advising sessions to ensure they understood the job market and were charting a course that was realistic for them.

Finally, and perhaps most important, they would have access to the nonprofit's extensive network of employers: some 500 companies, large and small, across the New York region that look to Per Scholas as a trusted source of career-ready IT technicians.

The first thing Per Scholas staff noticed when the program launched in spring 2019: Guttman students were different from the nonprofit's usual learners. Both groups were roughly 90 percent minority, often the first in their families to continue their education after high school, and most had some work experience—often in retail or the fast-food industry.

Where they differed: Guttman students were much younger—average age 19 to 21, in contrast to 29 at Per Scholas. Virtually all were focused on bachelor's degrees, and most had given relatively little thought to their future careers. Per Scholas students, in contrast, tend to be laser-focused on the job market. This is what drives them to return to a classroom as working adults, and a strong sense of purpose and direction is one of the main criteria for admission to the program.

share from 50 to 100 percent.³³ But meanwhile a growing number of colleges in other states are taking advantage of what is allowable.

How it works: the college lists the program in its course catalog, assigns an instructor, enrolls students and provides classroom instruction covering at least half the curriculum. The noncollege partner's role: to provide instruction—often hands-on, online or technical instruction—that complements what the college provides, and in return the college reimburses the noncollege provider out of Higher Education Act Title IV funding.

A CUNY college interested in taking advantage of this provision, sometimes called the non-institutional provider rule, could start small: an experiment in a single department or two, perhaps encouraged and supported by university leadership.

Who. The change that's needed starts at the campus level, but Central could encourage and reward innovation.

Resources needed. Modest.

Likely impact. Could be significant.

#3 Collaborating across institutions

What. A more intentional strategy at the Central Office to encourage and reward collaboration, both among CUNY colleges and between CUNY and other New York City service providers.

Virtually all were focused on bachelor's degrees, and most had given relatively little thought to their future careers.

The upshot for the first Guttman cohort, some 20 IT majors just a few months short of graduation: virtually all completed the Per Scholas course, but fewer than 10 percent passed the culminating external exam to earn an industry certification. "We had to adapt our model," one Per Scholas administrator recalls. "They just hadn't done the kind of applied work that prepares you for a high-stakes assessment."

That winter, Per Scholas pivoted to offer the next Guttman cohort more hands-on experience. The centerpiece was a virtual internship: the nonprofit's industry partners provided real-world business problems, and Guttman students worked in teams to develop and present solutions, as a professional team would be required to do in a company setting. Another Per Scholas partner, Salesforce, recruited managers to volunteer for weekly mentoring sessions, and the nonprofit switched to a different certification test—Cisco rather than CompTIA.

These adjustments bore fruit. Even with the pandemic, virtually all of the 2020 class got through the course, now online. All but one passed the industry certification test, and although virtually all were headed off to a four-year college, the majority took advantage of Per Scholas' signature job-placement services—counseling, an internal job board, personal recommendations from Per Scholas instructors—to land full or part-time work.

The program was paused in mid-2021 pending reassessment after the pandemic. But Per Scholas staff say they learned an essential lesson about serving younger learners.

"We felt we filled an important gap," one nonprofit administrator reflected, "offering something most students don't get at community college. It went beyond technical or even soft skills. We helped them understand that to get a job, they need to start planning much earlier."

Why. The existing fragmentation serves no one, and the unseen costs run high—opportunities lost when high school pathways stop short of college, nondegree nonprofit training ends without a recognized credential or community college programs leave students stranded on the edge of a non-navigable transfer process. New Yorkers and the evolving New York economy demand better.

In this realm, as in others, CUNY's ingrained culture of decentralization and campus autonomy can make it difficult for Central to assert a new set of norms. But only Central leadership can offer the strategic vision that's needed—a vision of diverse New York education and social service providers coming together to build a citywide talent pipeline. Only university leadership can address the problems that stymie would-be partners trying to forge relationships with up to two dozen CUNY campuses. And only Central can coordinate across the university, encouraging and incentivizing campus leaders to look beyond their institutional interests to the needs of New York learners—students who inevitably rely on a range of service providers.

How. There are many ways for university leadership to help foster relationships at the campus level.

A first step: reward campuses that collaborate effectively, whether with feeder nonprofits or nonacademic instructional partners, by recognizing this cooperation in the annual performance management process.

Second, in cases where an outside group has developed a relationship with one campus and seeks to replicate it elsewhere in the university, Central could facilitate communication among colleges or bring campus leaders together and offer to coordinate a systemwide response.

Still another way that Central could help: encouraging campus-level administrators to think more collaboratively about other CUNY colleges, partnering more frequently with one another to create pathways for students,

including job-focused students.

Among the innovations being pioneered in several large higher education systems in other states, “transfer partnerships” guarantee that students can move seamlessly between two-year institutions and four-year colleges or universities. The Bronx Transfer Affinity Group formed in 2018 by four CUNY colleges seeking to facilitate the transition from community colleges to four-year institutions is an important step forward. But there is more than could be done.

New Yorkers and the evolving New York economy demand better.

In a full-blown transfer partnership, a nursing student might enroll simultaneously at Bronx Community College (BCC) and Lehman College. A typical learner would spend most of their first two years on the BCC campus, earning an associate degree and one or more third-party industry certifications. But even first- and second-year students would occasionally go to Lehman for a class or lab time, and some four-year faculty would offer instruction at the community college. The two institutions could share resources and combine duplicative student services.

The two colleges would be positioned to speak with one voice when reaching out to employers and other noncollege partners—in this case, perhaps, a health care system seeking students to fill nursing clinicals. Dedicated advisers would split their time between campuses, helping students prepare for transfer and stay on track once they make the leap to a four-year institution. Then, when it came time to transfer, it would happen automatically, with no need for negotiation or case-by-case consideration.

Creating a transfer partnership at CUNY would likely start with campus-level leadership, but Central could encourage it and help by addressing administrative obstacles.

Still another area for experimentation is dual enrollment for careers—bridges to help job-focused high school students make the transition to postsecondary education and training. The first step at many schools that have established pathways of this kind is aligning high school career and technical education programs with job-focused community college offerings.

Also key to success, many institutions find: instead of requiring career-focused dual-enrollment students to start with general education courses, pique their interest in attending college by exposing them to technical instruction in a field that they're excited about. The Borough of Manhattan Community College has pioneered a job-focused dual enrollment program that could be expanded and replicated across the CUNY system.

Finally, a last critical ingredient of a citywide talent pipeline, CUNY colleges need to find new, better ways to partner with government job training offered by the public workforce system. In New York, as elsewhere across the US, two vast publicly funded systems devoted to preparing learners for the world of work exist side by side but rarely work together. Some CUNY educators balk at the idea of collaborating with a government job training program, but the costs of not collaborating run high: millions of federal dollars flow to New York through the public workforce system.

There have been some successful initiatives in recent years, usually involving sector-specific employer partnerships like the Tech Talent Council. But both potential partners—CUNY colleges and the New York City Workforce Development

In a full-blown transfer partnership, a nursing student might enroll simultaneously at Bronx Community College and Lehman College.

Board—complain that it can be difficult to work together. And CUNY pulls down only half of the roughly \$10 million that the board spends annually on workforce education and training.

Building a better relationship will take time and adjustments on both sides. But CUNY colleges can start by addressing workforce board concerns that college administrators aren't focused on employment goals and are unable to maintain relationships with employers. A potential first step: a pilot project at a CUNY community college willing to collect some ACE students' Social Security numbers and track post-completion employment outcomes, proving that workforce board metrics can be applied to college programs.

Who. Effective Central leadership could trigger change across the university.

Resources needed. Modest.

Likely impact. Would build over time.



Credit: Laguardia Community College

CHAPTER FIVE



FUNDING

In New York, as elsewhere across the US, job-focused education and training—especially nondegree job-focused programs—are chronically underfunded. What’s needed at CUNY: public dollars to help career-minded students cover the cost of education and training, philanthropic investment to promote innovation and better campus-level incentives for quality and cooperation between academic departments and continuing education.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

Few topics came up as regularly in Opportunity America interviews and focus groups with campus-level leadership. Presidents, provosts, deans and others, on the academic side of the college and in the ACE division: virtually all were unhappy with some aspect of the college or university business model.

This isn’t unique to CUNY. Community college educators across the US are perennially strapped for cash and unhappy with the rationale behind their funding allocations. Noncredit workforce deans, in particular, struggle to make ends meet. The technical instruction they offer is often more expensive than academic courses, yet most noncredit students are ineligible for

federal financial aid—Pell Grants or student loans. This leaves noncredit administrators scrambling to find alternative funding—Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act dollars, means-tested federal benefits, employer contracts, student tuition, whatever limited state funding is available for noncredit programs—and many operate on a razor-thin margin.

Yet, even in this context, the CUNY system seems unusually Byzantine and in need of rethinking. The flow of funding is perplexing not just to an outside observer, but also apparently to many people at the university. Even long-serving administrators complain about a lack of transparency. Others, particularly ACE deans, feel put upon by what they see as an unfair business model. And administrators on both sides of the college, credit and noncredit, point to perverse incentives that they say hinder teaching, learning, innovation and student success.

Most noncredit students are ineligible for federal financial aid—Pell Grants or student loans.

Most noncredit deans seem resigned to the basic discrepancies between credit and noncredit funding.

The concern heard most often on the credit side of the college: that competition for enrollments and the state money that follows them discourages collaboration among colleges. Funding that depends solely on head counts with no reward for student outcomes—full-time equivalent (FTE) state subsidies—creates skewed incentives at any institution. But it has a particularly perverse effect at a university like CUNY where 25 colleges connected by a single mass transit system compete to attract potential students.

Campuses that depend for their survival on per-student subsidies can't afford to lose a single learner, so they can't close low-quality programs or those made redundant by similar courses at a nearby college. Campus-level leaders hesitate to come together to recruit employer partners or collaborate with community groups—any effort to align offerings might invite unfavorable comparisons, causing the colleges to lose enrollments. Even when there is a clear payoff to cooperating with another institution, offering braided services or complementary instruction, administrators are wary, fearful of losing per-student subsidies.

Noncredit CUNY deans have a different set of complaints. Every college treats its ACE division a little differently, and some administrators feel more appreciated than others. But most seemed to agree that the way money flows—whether between Central and the college or between credit and noncredit divisions—reinforces their standing as a less important, less

valuable, second-tier arm of the institution.

Community college ACE divisions rely on three principal sources of funding: state and city subsidies, contracts and philanthropic funding, and student-paid tuition and fees.

The state share comes in the form of FTE dollars. But unlike academic departments, which receive FTE funding for every student, ACE per-student subsidies cover only learners in remedial programs and other courses designed to lead to matriculation at the college—a relatively small share of all noncredit programs at most institutions. ACE per-student subsidies are also considerably smaller than the FTEs allocated for degree-seeking students—\$1,800 to \$2,000 compared to nearly \$3,000. And the money flows to ACE through its host college's budget office, which skims off some share of the total to cover the cost of campus amenities made available to the noncredit division.

An additional allotment of public funding—what CUNY calls “Ledger 7” dollars—flows to the ACE division from Central at the beginning of each fiscal year. But this isn't revenue—more like an annual advance. Unlike academic departments, the noncredit division is expected to be self-supporting, and ACE is required to pay this money back to the university within 12 months, along with an additional 17.5 percent of the advance, which Central passes on to city government.

As for grants and contracts, by and large, college personnel raise their own philanthropic funding, though Central may help, introducing campus-level educators to donors and alerting them to opportunities. These dollars too flow through a central office, the university Research Foundation, that takes a percentage of the total.

Some CUNY ACE divisions cover between one-quarter and one-half of their budgets with grants and contracts; for others, it's a much smaller share. What's left must come out of student tuition and fees—a heavy burden for learners ineligible for state or federal financial aid.

Most community college ACE deans seem

resigned to the basic discrepancies between credit and noncredit funding—that their per-student subsidies are smaller, that they receive FTE dollars for only a fraction of their students, that they must be fiscally self-sufficient and even the 17.5 percent tax ACE alone is required to remit to the city.

What they bristle at starts with state and federal policy—why neither Albany nor Washington provides financial aid for noncredit students. Others ask why Ledger 7 funding must be repaid within 12 months—a requirement they say inhibits planning and investment that could ultimately generate increased revenue.

But by far the most common complaint is about the lack of transparency. Many say they have no idea how much of the FTE funding they generate flows back to them from their host college. And virtually no one knows what happens to the 17.5 percent of their annual budget that they pay to the city. Most seem resigned to paying it, but many say they would like a better understanding of what it's used for.

The other all but universal complaint: no matter what share of its FTE allocation the continuing education division contributes to the college where it's housed, virtually all ACE deans say they are last in line for campus amenities—classroom space, computer lab time and other essentials.

There are changes needed in many quarters to reshape financial incentives, some of them beyond CUNY's control and many outside the scope of this report. Our recommendations center on what can be done at the campus level, at the Central Office, in Albany and in Washington to elevate ACE and create incentives for superlative job-focused education and training.

Where does the funding go?

What is it used for?

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 More financial transparency

What. Move toward a culture of greater financial transparency, encouraging greater clarity at all levels—among college divisions, between campus and Central and between CUNY and city government—about how money flows and why.

Why. Nothing frustrates ACE leadership more than the lack of transparency around the flow of funding at CUNY. Perhaps administrators are uninformed—perhaps the information is available to those who look hard enough. But even a few small steps could make a big difference for noncredit administrators across the system.

The problem starts with the 17.5 percent of their annual budget that ACE divisions are required to remit to the city. Longtime budget office personnel say it once contributed to a construction fund that eventually flowed back to the college for capital investments. But this is apparently no longer the case—at least as far as anyone knows.

One senior university-level administrator told Opportunity America that he had tried repeatedly in past decades to persuade the city to abolish the assessment, to no avail—and perhaps that is out of the question. But where does the funding go? What is it used for? How does it serve adult and continuing education? And what's the rationale for taxing only ACE divisions and not also academic departments?

So too, on many campuses, ACE leadership is left to guess about how money flows between their division and the rest of the college. Noncredit deans understand in a general way that they benefit from being housed at a CUNY institution, and those who can trace the money they generate have no complaint when it's spent on

salaries, classroom space and other campus services for their division.

But many are unsure what they're paying for, and several said that what they pay in bears scant relationship to what they get back. "Supposedly, we're paying for classroom space," one dean told Opportunity America. "At least that's what they tell us. But then why don't we get some kind of break or help when we have to offer instruction in an off-site, rented space because there is no room left for us on campus?"

"We get that we need overhead," another administrator reasoned, "but we want a clearer picture of what goes in and what comes out, including what we're contributing to the college. And by the way, that isn't just money. Marketing, community engagement, employer engagement, ACE personnel time devoted to college business and the pipeline we provide that funnels students into degree programs: we want all that enumerated too. It's part of what we contribute."

How. Every campus is different—each college and its ACE division work out their own financial arrangement. And the CUNY culture of campus autonomy may prohibit Central from intervening. But it's hard to imagine a persuasive argument against financial transparency.

Among steps the Central Office could take to encourage greater clarity: urge the city to reveal what the 17.5 percent tithe pays for and why ACE alone is required to remit it. A second step: create incentives for college presidents to be more open about how money flows on campus.

Even a few small procedural reforms could make a big difference, ACE administrators say. Among other changes, more up-to-date vocabulary and reporting systems would help them give a clearer account of what they contribute and in turn to understand what exactly they get back from their host college.

Still another option, a more assertive approach: Central could require campus leadership to be more transparent. A group of continuing

education administrators who came together in 2021 to review the standard operating procedures that govern ACE finances would like to see a periodic review—university-wide and conducted every five years—of what exactly ACE divisions contribute and what they get in return.³⁴

Who. The change that's needed could start at Central—with incentives and encouragement—or at the campus level.

Resources needed. Modest.

Likely impact. Would build over time, helping to boost morale and augment respect for continuing education.

#2 Better incentives for ACE

What. Campus-level reforms to adjust how funding is shared between credit and noncredit divisions, creating clearer incentives for ACE administrators and encouraging appreciation for ACE's contribution to the college mission.

Why. Even when ACE administrators understand how funding flows, many feel that the arrangement slights the noncredit division, casting doubt on the value of their work and hindering their efforts to serve students.

Some noncredit deans say little or nothing changes no matter how many FTEs their division generates. Increased ACE enrollments don't necessarily lead to increased revenue for

Administrators must make do with what they see as inferior campus amenities.

the division. Administrators still feel like what one called “second-class citizens,” and they still must make do with what they see as inferior campus amenities.

Other administrators complain that the research grants they bring into the college are unfairly allocated across departments. Most troubling, money doesn’t always follow success, undermining trust and discouraging effort by the ACE division.

“I’m making money,” one ACE dean explained before the pandemic. “My revenues are up 15 percent this year. But the rest of the college has a deficit, so I can’t hire anyone. What kind of signal does that send?”

How. Campus leaders seeking to create clearer incentives for ACE divisions have several tools at their disposal—several opportunities to convey respect and create rewards for superior performance.

What’s needed starts with new thinking about FTE subsidies. One potential first step: a written agreement—negotiated at the campus level and codified in the college strategic plan—that allows the ACE division to keep a fixed share of the FTE subsidies it generates. Bolder still, a formal or informal annual negotiation process would give the ACE division an opportunity to itemize its contributions and have a voice in decisions about the allocation of resources.

A second potential reform centers on grant dollars. Noncredit administrators scramble to win philanthropic funding that flows through the university Research Foundation and on to the college, which then funnels some of the money to the ACE division. But on many campuses, ACE personnel say, the college skims off the line item allocated for indirect costs, leaving nothing—and creating no incentive—for the ACE team that secured the grant.

In this case, too, as with FTE funding, it may be appropriate for the college to keep some or most of the money. But even a small adjustment

Leadership should find ways to reward activity that generates enrollments for the college.

could make a difference to administrators, encouraging initiative and innovation.

Third and perhaps most impactful, campus leadership should find ways to reward ACE activity that generates enrollments for the credit side of the college, encouraging noncredit students to matriculate in academic programs.

Few things would be more valuable for learners, for the college or ultimately for the New York City economy. Matriculation in more advanced programs creates new opportunities for students. Re-enrollments generate revenue—increased per-student subsidies—for the campus. And over the long haul, they would drive up citywide educational attainment, boosting labor force productivity and helping New York attract and retain businesses.

Yet no CUNY college appears to encourage crossover activity by offering ACE a financial incentive—say, a larger share of the FTE subsidies the noncredit division brings in for the institution—to help learners bridge the gap between credit and noncredit divisions.

Who. In all three areas, the reform that’s needed is campus-level—these are opportunities for college presidents to encourage dynamism and creativity in their ACE divisions. But Central could help by making a case for rethinking perverse incentives, then encouraging best practices and eliminating administrative obstacles at the university level.

Resources needed. Minimal.

Likely impact. Could be significant over time.

#3 Financial aid for non-credit students

What. A pilot project, funded by either private philanthropy or taxpayers, that provides financial aid for nondegree-seeking, job-focused students, establishing proof of concept and a model for broader state or federal reform.

Why. At CUNY, as at other community colleges across the US, arguably the biggest obstacle to job-focused education and training is policy—the limits of public higher education funding.

Occupational education is expensive. Many technical programs must purchase costly equipment or consumables. Instructors with industry work experience expect private-sector-level salaries, and unlike, say, English or sociology, phlebotomy cannot be taught in a lecture hall—hands-on learning requires a significantly lower student-teacher ratio. Yet credit-eligible workforce programs receive the same funding as other academic programs. And the nimble noncredit college divisions best positioned to collaborate with employers and provide flexible, timely workforce education receive far less.

New York State stints CUNY community college noncredit education in two significant ways. First, institutional support—per-student subsidies—covers only remedial noncredit programs, not job-focused course offerings that help students acquire the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. Second, in New York, as nationwide, nondegree students are largely ineligible for federal financial aid. Yet unlike in some other states where lawmakers have managed to set aside money for noncredit workforce education, neither of New York State's two student aid initiatives—the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) or Excelsior Scholarships—make funding available to nondegree-seeking students.

The upshot for ACE deans seeking to serve New Yorkers who want job-focused education: they have no recourse but private philanthropy

Unlike English or sociology, phlebotomy cannot be taught in a lecture hall.

and wishful thinking about policy change. It's beyond the remit of this report to make detailed recommendations for state or federal policy. But a few lessons can be drawn from enterprising CUNY colleges and noncredit funding mechanisms in other states.

Philanthropy

Ultimately, only state or federal policymakers can provide funding on the scale that's needed to cover costs for the nondegree-seeking learners likely to turn to CUNY in years ahead for job-focused education and training. But philanthropy can help, exploring what's possible and piloting potential solutions that can eventually be scaled with taxpayer dollars.

New York City philanthropic funders already invest heavily in CUNY community colleges. Philanthropic dollars cover the cost of academic scholarships. Other funders invest in building bridges between organizations—often a CUNY campus and one or more community-based service providers. Still other grants pay for targeted noncredit programs—tuition and wrap-around supports for less-advantaged students in in-demand fields like IT or health care. But this still leaves many learners—particularly nondegree-seeking learners in workforce education programs—to fend for themselves, reaching into their own pockets to cover the cost of tuition.

The time is ripe for an initiative to help learners looking for fast, job-focused upskilling and reskilling. As the Covid crisis lifts and the city reopens, thousands of unemployed New Yorkers will need to acquire new skills for new jobs,

often in unfamiliar industries. Automation and business restructuring triggered by the pandemic are expected to accelerate sharply in coming years, driving still more demand for fast, flexible career education. And few strata-gems could do more to stem the flight of companies from New York City than investment in a well-trained talent pool—a ready supply of digitally savvy workers with industry-specific technical and nontechnical skills.

The opportunity for philanthropic donors: to invest in a high-profile pilot project that demonstrates what can be done—a scholarship fund for nondegree-seeking, job-focused students that can serve as a model in years ahead for state and federal policymakers.

The LaGuardia Community College Foundation took a step in this direction in late 2020, committing to raise \$500,000 to cover the cost of tuition for 500 noncredit workforce students. This was an important breakthrough: donors grasped that learners need jobs as much as they need degrees and that midcareer adults, too, may need financial aid to get through college.

Donors grasped that learners
need jobs as much as they
need degrees.

A next-generation initiative would refine the design of the LaGuardia program and expand it to other colleges.

Among the issues to tackle: How to ensure the quality of noncredit programs not subject to approval by academic accreditors or faculty committees? How to increase the chances that courses are aligned with local labor market demand and that students get well-paying jobs in their fields of study? How to guarantee that learners who later decide to continue their educations can leverage what they learned in a

noncredit program for college credit? How to ensure that the college has a financial stake in the student's success? How to ensure that the student has a financial stake?

A decade of experimentation and innovation across the US has surfaced answers to these and other, related questions. The opportunity for one or more New York philanthropic donors: to combine these ingredients in a single initiative and demonstrate the difference it can make for students and for the New York economy.

Who. A consortium of philanthropic funders working closely with CUNY Central.

Resources needed. Significant.

Likely impact. High.

Public policy

Policymakers in Washington are crafting proposals to make community college free to degree-seeking students, an increasingly popular idea among both Democrats and Republicans. But few envision including nondegree-seeking, job-focused learners.

Most of the proposals circulating on Capitol Hill are designed to augment existing funding streams, not break new ground or create new incentives. And even as consensus builds to make more dollars available to learners, powerful forces are poised to defend the core assumptions of the status quo, ensuring that federal financial aid remains exclusively for degree-seeking students in traditional academic programs.

The battle lines are drawn. What's needed now is advocacy from job-focused educators and employers in New York and elsewhere, making a case for including job-focused students in any overhaul of community college financial aid.

Policymakers seeking to expand the scope of a free community college initiative need look no

further than a popular proposal circulating on Capitol Hill that would expand Pell Grant eligibility to students in noncredit, job-focused programs shorter than a semester. Many versions of the legislation have been proposed over the years by Democrats and Republicans. Several authoritative research studies lend support to the idea.³⁵ And when the two senators who first proposed it, Democrat Tim Kaine of Virginia and Republican Rob Portman of Ohio, reintroduced their legislation, the Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act, in spring 2021, it was cosponsored by 31 senators—a strong show of bipartisan support.

The primary challenge for the JOBS Act, as for any initiative to fund for noncredit workforce education, is quality assurance. Job-focused, noncredit programs are not vetted by regional accreditors or academic faculty committees—that's what allows them to respond nimbly to the labor market needs of students and employers. Most track far fewer data than academic departments, and under current law, they are not required to report information to federal education authorities.

The JOBS Act addresses this challenge with an array of metrics. Eligible programs must demonstrate that they are aligned with local labor market needs; they must be recognized by employers and approved by several different entities at the state and federal levels. Eligible students must earn credentials with proven value in the labor market, and community colleges must ensure that those who seek to continue their education can leverage their noncredit learning for college credit.³⁶

The JOBS Act enjoys strong support across the political spectrum, including from the Business Roundtable and the American Association of Community Colleges.³⁷ But it also has powerful enemies among higher education policy thinkers and the education establishment. And it remains uncertain whether the proposal or something like it covering tuition costs for job-focused learners can be passed this year,

The first option: make strategic use of post-pandemic federal spending earmarked for education.

alone or in tandem with legislation making community college free for degree-seeking students. As this report went to press, it was still too soon to tell.

Prospects for reform in Albany are equally uncertain. State revenue and spending will rise as the economy rebounds from the Covid crisis. Yet no New York State policymakers—neither the governor nor the legislature—have shown interest in expanding TAP or the Excelsior Scholarship Program to accommodate noncredit workforce students.

But that does not exhaust their options. Several promising initiatives pioneered in other states offer alternatives for New York—state-level reforms to help job-focused students that wouldn't affect either TAP or the Excelsior program.

The first option: making strategic use of post-pandemic federal spending earmarked for education. With money flowing freely from Washington and likely to continue to flow in years ahead, it's worth looking back at how a handful of states used discretionary Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding—usually the flexible Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund—to subsidize short, job-focused, nondegree college programs.

Texas earmarked \$46.5 million in targeted financial aid for displaced workers reskilling at community colleges.³⁸ Florida set aside \$35 million to help learners pay for short community college programs that led to credentials with value in the local labor market.³⁹ And Virginia dedicated \$30 million to subsidize noncredit programs retraining workers for high-growth, high-demand industries.⁴⁰ What these initiatives

had in common: lawmakers in all three states saw the potential of noncredit workforce education to help the state recover from the Covid crisis, and they were confident they could craft measures to guarantee rigorous quality control.

New York State elected to spend its GEER allocation exclusively on K-12 education.⁴¹ But there will be more federal stimulus funding coming in months ahead, some of it surely earmarked for education and workforce development, and Albany will have other opportunities to direct spending to job-focused programs, including at community colleges.

A second potential model for New York, also developed in Virginia, would create a new stream of funding, parallel to TAP and Excelsior, devoted exclusively to noncredit students preparing for jobs in a few priority industries—dynamic, high-demand sectors expected to drive state economic growth in the decade ahead.

Virginia's New Economy Workforce Credential Grants debuted in 2016 with just \$5 million and an ingenious design that ensured the quality of job-focused noncredit programs by giving the student and the college they attended a financial stake in the student's success.⁴²

Now known as FastForward, the program rests on a foundation of stringent economic vetting. The state workforce development board produces an annual list of high-demand Virginia industries. Regional employers validate the list, attesting that they need workers to fill jobs in those sectors. State education authorities work with industry to identify nationally validated third-party credentials that signal workers have the skills to succeed in these priority jobs. And funding is restricted to community college programs that prepare learners to earn these targeted credentials.

Equally important, a second level of quality assurance, is FastForward's pay-for-performance spending schedule. Students put up the money for a first tuition payment: the first third of the cost of a noncredit, job-focused program. If they complete the program, the state covers the

A noncredit program preparing students to be dental technicians would receive a larger subsidy than a credit-eligible program in journalism or sociology.

second third—if not, the learner is on the hook for that cost too. If the student passes the relevant third-party credential test, the state then picks up the final third of the tuition cost. But if the student neglects to take the test or fails it, the college is on the hook—an incentive for colleges to offer high-quality programs and supports that maximize the chances of student success.

FastForward has proven so successful that its appropriation has grown fivefold in the last six years, and graduates routinely boost their take-home pay by 25 to 50 percent.⁴³

Yet a third potential model for New York, also rooted in a vision of regional economic development, is North Carolina's tiered-FTE funding. Instead of equal per-student subsidies for all community college programs, North Carolina ranks course offerings on the basis of the economic value they deliver—if they prepare learners for high-demand jobs in high-growth industries—and adjusts funding accordingly.

Priority industries in North Carolina include the health professions and advanced manufacturing, and college programs that prepare learners to work in those fields are eligible for larger per-student subsidies than programs in, say, cosmetology or political science. More striking still, the formula is indifferent to whether or not courses are credit-eligible—so a noncredit program preparing students to be dental technicians is entitled to a larger FTE subsidy than a credit-eligible program in journalism or sociology.⁴⁴

Bottom line: in New York State, as elsewhere, there are countless creative ways, even on a constrained budget, to design state education spending to give more priority to job-focused programs. The challenge for educators across the city and the state: to come together around a workable proposal and make the case for it in Albany.

Who. What's needed starts with advocacy: by educators, employers, students, local elected

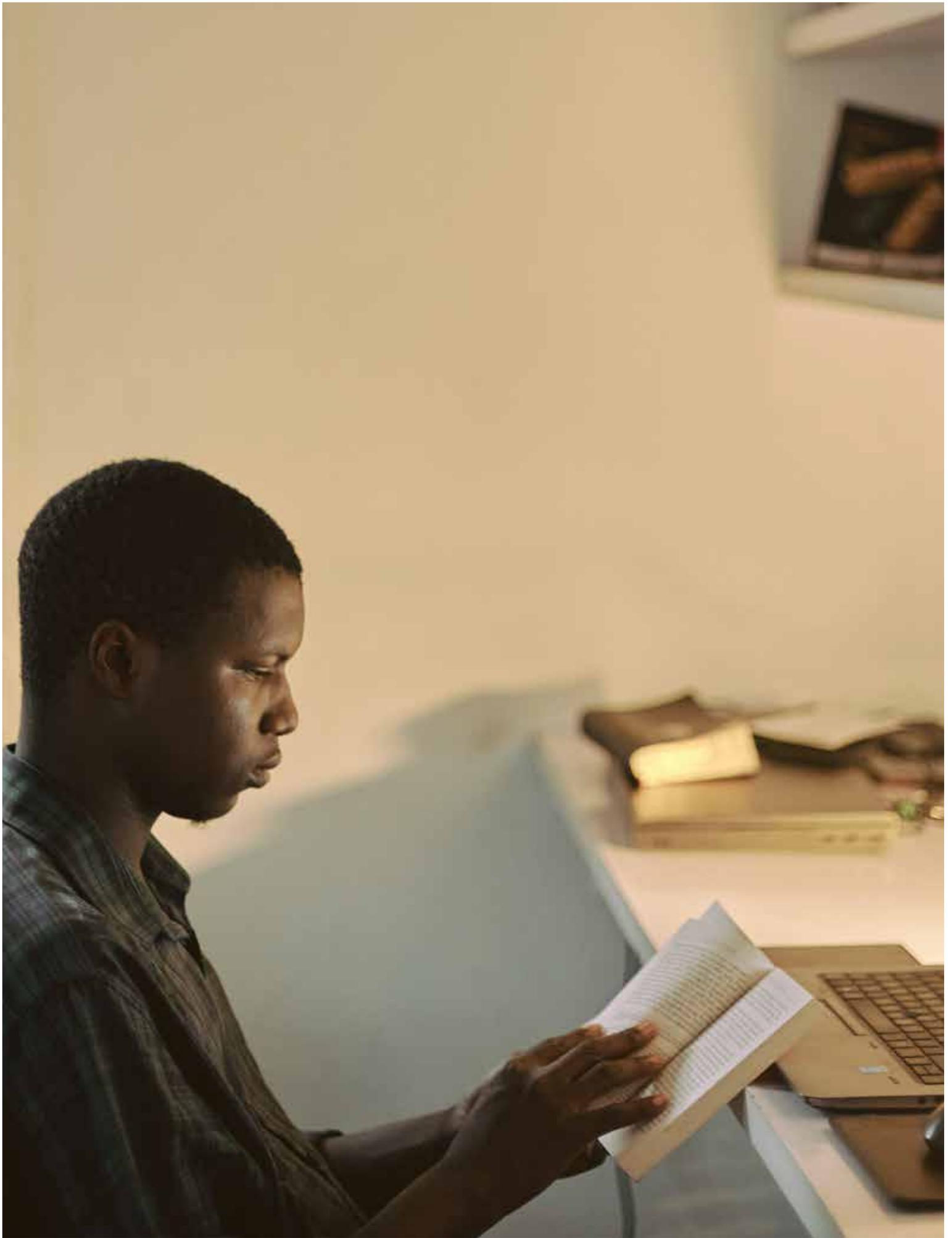
officials, concerned citizens and the media. Both CUNY and SUNY would be essential voices. Also critical: an economically minded governor focused on attracting and retaining high-growth industries in New York City and across the state.

Resources needed. Significant.

Likely impact. High.



Credit: Laguardia Community College



CONCLUSION

Opportunity America’s interviews and focus groups with New York students, educators and employers surfaced a wealth of ideas, large and small, for potential experimentation and innovation at CUNY—more ideas than any institution could possibly implement at any one time.

The question for CUNY leadership: where to start?

The challenge for CUNY leadership: Where to start? Which reforms are most urgent? Which are likely to have the most impact? How might a few of the most impactful be packaged in a single initiative that could make a difference now but also pave the way for broader, more deep-seated change in future years?

Many of the proposals in this volume complement and reinforce each other.

- Developing Central Office capacity to monitor citywide labor market demand goes hand in hand with coordinating a strategic, university-wide approach to New York employers’ hiring needs, including by standardizing and consolidating continuing education course offerings across the university. (See chapters 1 and 2.)

- A central employer outreach hub could house a labor market information research center and also be responsible for coordinating a more synergistic, university-wide response to New York industry needs. (See chapter 1.)
- An enterprising college president who consolidated credit and noncredit job-focused programs in a single division could also build a job placement office modeled on a professional staffing agency and launch a pilot program adapting CUNY ASAP for job-focused students. (See chapter 2.)

There are many possible combinations, and all would be enhanced by three essential foundational changes:

- A more intentional emphasis on midcareer adult learners. (See chapter 3.)
- A more aggressive approach to embedding competency-based industry certifications in workforce education programs and using them to facilitate crossover from noncredit to credit education. (See chapter 2.)
- Two steps to showcase the payoff to job-focused programs: reform at the campus level to collect nondegree-seeking students’ Social Security numbers and making data on credit and noncredit student

employment outcomes—job placements and wages—available to the public on an online platform. (See chapter 2.)

Still another priority, among the most critical, albeit beyond CUNY's control: public policy reform to make student financial aid available to nondegree-seeking, job-focused students. (See chapter 5.)

Many but not all of these proposals require action by university leadership, and the ideal scenario would combine complementary reforms in several places: university-wide, at the campus level and by a self-selected consortium of CUNY colleges—perhaps several community colleges collaborating to scale an in-demand program or all the institutions in a single borough cooperating to create a sequential career pathway.

The other critical variable is funding. Some of the reforms we propose would require significant resources: a state-of-the-art labor market information research center, for example, or a pilot project adapting CUNY ASAP for job-focused learners. Other proposals, like a public-facing portal displaying data on employment outcomes, could have a dramatic impact for a relatively modest cost. Still other investments—in an employer outreach hub or consolidating credit and noncredit instruction—are likely to produce savings and perhaps, eventually, generate revenue for the university.

Still another way for CUNY leadership to approach planning for the change that's needed in years ahead would start from the challenges that loom largest for the university. The two that stood out most pressingly in our research:

Credit and noncredit. Bridging the gaping divide—apparent on every campus, at the Central Office and in university-wide funding flows—between academic instruction and noncredit continuing education.

Job-focused education and training are too important to be left solely to the adult and continuing education division. But without robust,

The challenge for the university:

how to harness the strengths of the noncredit division.

dynamic noncredit divisions across an array of two- and four-year campuses, it's hard to see CUNY stepping up to meet New York labor market needs or respond to growing demand from midcareer adults seeking short, job-focused reskilling and upskilling.

The challenge for the university, as for institutions nationwide: how to harness the strengths of the noncredit division—its flexibility, agility and ability to respond quickly to local labor market demand—while enabling learners to return to college later in life to pursue an academic education.

Putting workforce education more at the center of the CUNY mission and culture can't mean relegating job-focused learners to a second, inferior, noncollege track—an educational dead end. It requires elevating and enhancing continuing education but also encouraging collaboration between credit and noncredit divisions and building bridges between instructional options.

What's needed might start on a single campus—with a president who brings credit and noncredit job-focused programs together in one division. But it's also a challenge for university leadership.

Twenty-five campuses, one university. Balancing CUNY's deep-seated tradition of decentralization and campus autonomy with the strong central governance required to respond strategically to a single, citywide labor market and a single regional ecosystem of education and social service providers.

Finding the right mix of centralization and decentralization is a perennial challenge for CUNY—it's not unique to job-focused education.

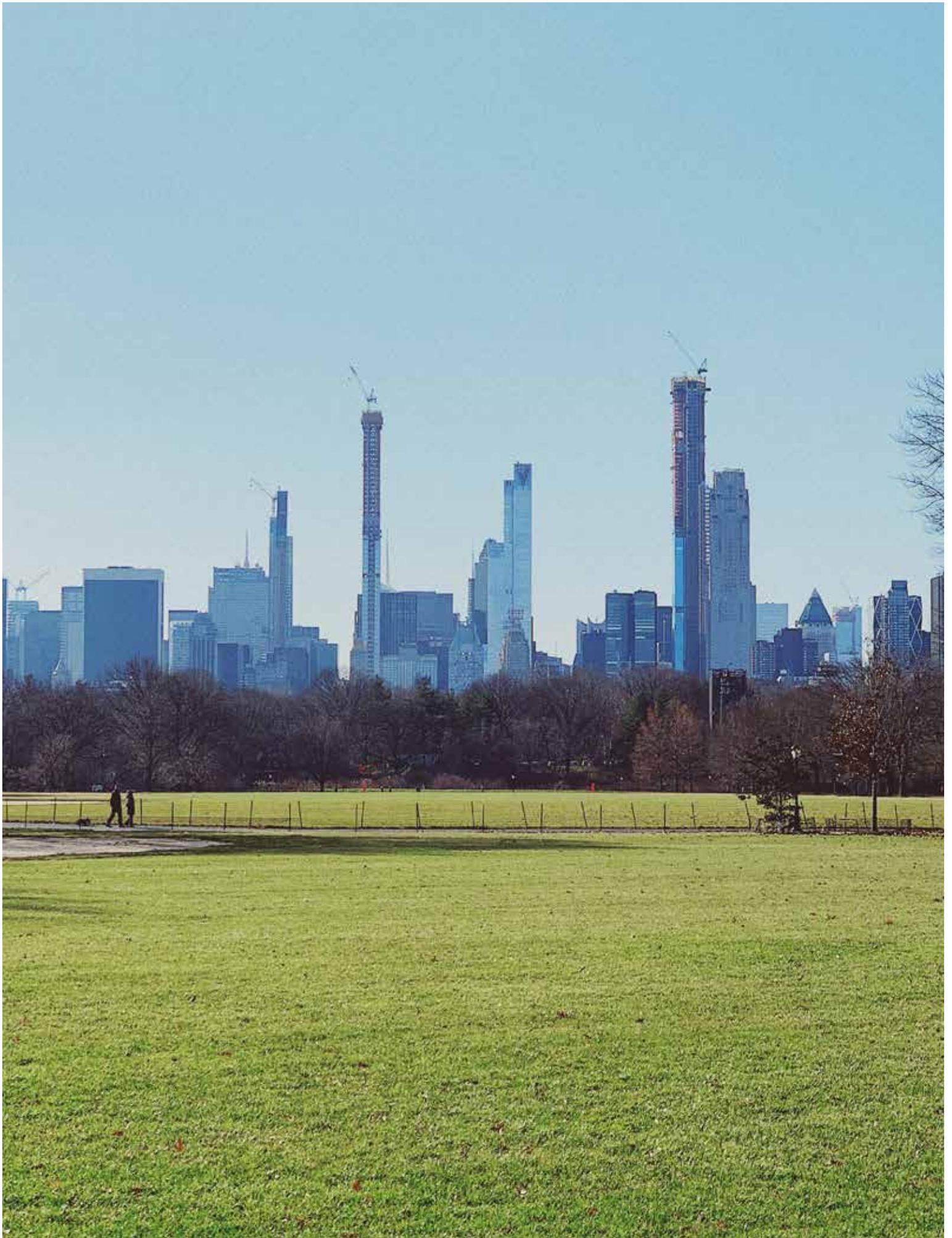
Some skeptical observers have argued that the existing balance is unworkable: that no level of governance—the board of trustees, the Central Office or campus-level leadership—has enough power to initiate meaningful change, but each has just enough power to thwart innovation by the other two. And many CUNY chancellors have struggled to adjust the equilibrium they inherited, sometimes at considerable political cost.

Getting the balance right is a recurring theme of this report. We propose a variety of stratagems for leadership seeking to bring CUNY campuses together to respond to citywide labor needs—from data and consumer choice to financial incentives to coalition-building that aligns institutions

based on comparative advantage.

This report is a menu of options. Only CUNY leadership knows what's plausible in today's context. But the stakes could hardly be higher, as accelerating technological change transforms the New York City economy, requiring new skills—technical and nontechnical skills—from thousands of New Yorkers.

CUNY's priority today, as in the past, must be students—creating opportunities for students. These opportunities are changing as the economy changes, but the imperative remains the same, and it must remain the North Star for the university.



Appendix

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

CUNY CENTRAL AND AFFILIATES

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, chancellor

José Luis Cruz, executive vice chancellor and university provost[^]

Andrea Shapiro Davis, interim vice chancellor for university advancement

Jonathan S. Gagliardi, assistant vice chancellor for academic effectiveness and innovation

Robert Maruca, associate university provost for planning

John Mogulescu, senior university dean for academic affairs and dean of the CUNY School of Professional Studies[^]

Lucinda Zoe, senior university dean and vice provost of academic programs and policy

Patricia Simino Boyce, university dean for health and human services

Angie Datta Kamath, university dean for continuing education and workforce programs[^]

Colin Chellman, university dean for institutional and policy research

Kenneth Norz, senior university director of academic affairs and graduate studies

Ekaterina Sukhanova, university associate dean for academic affairs

Cheryl Baldwin, assistant dean and chief of staff for continuing education and workforce programs[^]

Christine Brongniart, university executive director, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs and Accelerate, Complete, Engage

Alyssa Vine, university director of adult learner initiatives and communications

Micah Gertzog, associate director, strategic

partnerships, CUNY Research Foundation

Ancy Skaria, assistant director of program management, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs and Accelerate, Complete, Engage

Jaclyn Kelly, director, Labor Market Information Service at the Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center

Linda Kleinbaum, senior fellow, CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance

Shaun Edwards, senior policy associate, CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance[^]

Taylor Swabb, policy associate, CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance

You Zheng, senior research associate, Labor Market Information Service at the Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center

CUNY COLLEGES

Kenneth Adams, president, LaGuardia Community College

Thomas A. Isekenegbe, president, Bronx Community College

Anthony Munroe, president, Borough of Manhattan Community College

Claudia Schrader, president, Kingsborough Community College

Karrin Wilks, interim president, Borough of Manhattan Community College[^]

Regina Peruggi, former president, Kingsborough Community College

John Mollenkopf, director, Center for Urban Research, CUNY Graduate Center

Bonne August, provost and vice president for

All titles reflect interviewees' positions when they spoke with Opportunity America.

academic affairs, New York City College of Technology[^]

Christine Mangino, provost and vice president for academic affairs, Hostos Community College[^]

Erwin Wong, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, Borough of Manhattan Community College[^]

Sunil Gupta, vice president of adult and continuing education, LaGuardia Community College

Jay Hershenson, vice president for communications and marketing and senior adviser to the president, Queens College

Simone Rodriguez, vice president for workforce development, continuing education and strategic partnerships, Kingsborough Community College

Jane Schulman, former vice president of adult and continuing education, LaGuardia Community College

Christine Beckner, dean of continuing education, Kingsborough Community College

Hui-Yin Hsu, dean of continuing education and workforce development, Queensborough Community College

Jane MacKillop, dean, School of Continuing and Professional Studies, Lehman College

Peter Mertens, interim dean, Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development, Hostos Community College

Gerarda Shields, academic dean, School of Technology and Design, New York City College of Technology

Christopher Shults, dean for institutional effectiveness and strategic planning, Borough of Manhattan Community College

Anthony Watson, dean, Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development, Borough of Manhattan Community College

Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham, executive director of workforce development, Hostos Community College

Amy Perez, executive director of professional education and workplace development, CUNY

School of Professional Studies

Ann Clarkson, associate dean and director of continuing and professional studies, Baruch College

Alexander Ott, associate dean for curriculum matters and academic programs, Bronx Community College

Jennifer Sparrow, associate dean of academic affairs, CUNY School of Professional Studies

Felix Cardona, assistant dean, Hostos Community College[^]

John Hunt, interim assistant dean for pre-college academic programs, LaGuardia Community College

Christine Zagari-LoPorto, interim assistant dean for workforce development and continuing education, Kingsborough Community College

Philip Gimber, chair of health sciences department and associate professor, LaGuardia Community College

Jason Weinstein, senior director of career services and career and technical education partnerships, LaGuardia Community College

Hannah Weinstock, senior director of workforce development, LaGuardia Community College

Fern Chan, director of professional studies, John Jay College

Lori A. Conkling, continuing education director of labor market research and workforce development, Queensborough Community College

David Daza, director, veterans workforce initiatives, LaGuardia Community College

Maryam Esfarayeni, director of worker education and workforce development, CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies

Richard Finger, director of enrollment and graduate studies, Lehman College

Kimberly Kendall, director of workforce education programs, Lehman College

Alissa Levine, director of programs, Center for Economic and Workforce Development, Kingsborough Community College

Orlando Lopez, director of community outreach programs, Bronx Community College

Daliz Perez-Cabezas, director of academic

affairs, Hostos Community College

Tina Quiñones-Cabrera, director of allied health programs and contract training, Hostos Community College[^]

Lisanette Rosario, director of career services, Hostos Community College

Karen Saca, director of finance and budget, LaGuardia Community College

Samuel Byrd, transition and advising coordinator, Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development, Hostos Community College

Jessica Cinelli, manager of workforce development, Kingsborough Community College

Amy McIntosh, strategic adviser, CUNY School of Professional Studies

Karen St. Hilaire, special project manager, Kingsborough Community College

Alexandra W. Logue, research professor, Center for Advanced Study in Education, CUNY Graduate Center

Andy Zhang, professor, mechanical engineering technology, New York City College of Technology

Lesley Rennis, associate professor, Borough of Manhattan Community College

Diane P. Banks, assistant professor of biological sciences, Bronx Community College

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[^] Title has changed since Opportunity America interview.

** Opportunity America also spoke with many unidentified students on campus visits.

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