

Doubling Associate Degree Completion Rates:
City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)

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Testimony Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Reauthorizing the Higher Education Act: Access and Innovation
Thursday January 25, 2018

Donna Linderman is the University Dean for Student Success Initiatives in the City University of New York (CUNY) Office of Academic Affairs. Her portfolio includes a broad array of CUNY-wide programs designed to support the academic preparation and degree success of students across the pre- and post-matriculation continuum that will serve 38,000 students in FY18.

Her portfolio includes Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), a nationally recognized associate degree completion program currently serving 21,000 students across nine CUNY colleges (and expanding to 25,000 students in 2018/19); Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE), a four-year baccalaureate version of ASAP currently being piloted at John Jay College of Criminal Justice; CUNY Start/Math Start, pre-matriculation programs for students with significant remedial needs in reading, writing, and math designed to eliminate or significantly reduce remedial need before they enter CUNY degree programs that will serve 5,500 students in 2018/19; CUNY Educate, Develop, Graduate, and Empower (EDGE), a degree completion program for public assistance recipients currently serving 3,000 students at 18 CUNY colleges; CUNY Literacy and Language Programs, which deliver basic education, high school equivalency instruction, and intensive English language instruction to 10,000 students each year across 14 CUNY colleges; and the Fostering College Success Initiative (FCSI), a new residential program with wraparound support services for foster care youth pursuing a CUNY degree.

Dean Linderman oversees ASAP's national replication efforts through provision of technical assistance for community colleges aiming to replicate ASAP (currently in Ohio, California, and New York). She is also co-leading CUNY's Strategic Framework Access and Completion efforts that aim to double CUNY's three-year associate degree completion rates and significantly improve timely baccalaureate rates. Dean Linderman is regularly asked to speak at national conferences and convenings focused on community college completion and her written work has appeared in education journals and conference proceedings.

She was formerly the University Director of the CUNY Middle Grades Initiative/GEAR UP program, served as an Assistant Professor of Theater and Education at Brooklyn College, and has also taught at Lehman College. Before entering academia, she worked professionally in the theater as an actor, director, and dramaturg. Dean Linderman holds a B.F.A. in drama from the University of Southern California, an M.F.A. in theater from Brooklyn College, and is currently pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration at Northeastern University.

Summary of Testimony

I—Introduction

Good morning Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and members of the committee. I am Donna Linderman, University Dean for Student Success Initiatives at the City University of New York. I am pleased to join you to speak about one of our most innovative initiatives that is changing the degree success of thousands of our students.

II-ASAP History and Background

Founded in 2007 with support from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) aims to graduate at least 50% of students within three years.

In 2007, CUNY's overall three-year community college graduation rate was 13% and 24% for students with no remedial needs. To date ASAP has served 33,800 students across eleven cohorts and has an average three-year graduation rate of 53% vs. 25% for similar students.

II--Program Design and Core Elements

A- ASAP offers a robust package of resources and services designed to help students gain and maintain academic momentum.

- a. **Financial Resources:** ASAP financial resources include tuition waivers for students with a gap need between financial aid and tuition and fees, textbook assistance, and unlimited New York City MetroCards.
- b. **Structured Pathway:** We offer a structured pathway that includes required full-time enrollment, block scheduled first-year courses, consolidated schedules (i.e.: am, afternoon, evening), immediate and continuous enrollment in remedial courses, and winter and summer courses.
- c. **Integrated Student Support Services** include comprehensive and personalized advisement, tutoring, career development services, and pre-matriculation engagement

B- Students Served and ASAP Eligibility

- a. ASAP enrolls students who are representative of the CUNY colleges they attend, largely low-income students of color with some initial developmental education needs: 33% Black, 44% Hispanic; *Pell Receipt: 83%; Initial Remedial Need: 74%*

C- Program Management Model

- a. ASAP operates as a consortium made up of CUNY Academic Affairs and nine partner colleges.

- b. The program is committed to use of data for evaluation and program management purposes and operates on a continuous improvement model.

III-ASAP Research and Evaluation Agenda and Program Outcomes

- A.** ASAP has been rigorously evaluated and found to be highly effective.

- B. Key Quasi-Experimental Findings:**

- a. Average three-year graduation rate of 53% vs. 25% for similar students
- b. By race/ethnicity, gender and Pell status, all subgroups met or nearly met the 50% three-year graduation goal; ASAP also reduced gaps in graduation rates between Hispanic and white and Black and white students
- c. Six years after beginning, 64% of ASAP students had earned either an associate or baccalaureate degree (or both) vs. 43% of comparison group students

- C. Key External Findings:**

- a. MDRC conducted a five-year random assignment study of ASAP and found the program's effects are "unparalleled" with nearly double the graduation rate for similar students.
- b. Henry Levin and Emma Garcia from the Teachers College conducted a comprehensive cost study of ASAP and found that despite higher upfront costs, the program is both cost effective and cost beneficial.

V-ASAP Expansion and Replication

- A.** ASAP will expand to 25,000 students by academic year 2018/19 with support from the City and State of New York. ASAP expansion will serve more STEM majors and includes a college-wide expansion at Bronx Community College that will serve most full-time freshmen at scale.

- B. Estimated Impact on Overall CUNY Associate Degree Completion**

- a. ASAP now makes up 30% of all CUNY full-time associate freshmen, next year will be 50%
- b. CUNY expects that ASAP at scale will help double the overall 3-year associate graduation from a 2013 baseline of 18% to 36% for the 2019 full-time freshmen cohort.

- C. Expansion into Baccalaureate Space**

- a. CUNY has started to expand ASAP into the baccalaureate space. John Jay College Accelerate, Complete and Engage (ACE) modeled on ASAP is demonstrating significant improvement in degree momentum and narrowing of achievement gaps.

C-Replication Work Outside CUNY

- a. ASAP is being replicated in other states. Three Ohio community colleges (Lorain, Cuyahoga, and Cincinnati State) have adopted the ASAP model. Early findings from MDRC's study of the Ohio demonstration indicate strong fidelity to the ASAP model and promising early outcomes.
- b. CUNY is also supporting Skyline Community College in San Bruno, CA and Westchester Community College in Valhalla, NY (SUNY) to replicate ASAP.

VI—Recommendations for Federal Policy

- A. Federal policy could be very helpful to support for community colleges to adopt evidence-based models to improve graduation rates.
- B. Colleges need the resources to create comprehensive programs like ASAP that integrate rigorous evaluation and use of data.
- C. I urge the Senate to consider legislation like the House's Community College Success Act that proposes a discretionary grant program to support replication of ASAP-like models.

Thank you for your support and interest in the work we are doing at CUNY.

Good morning Chairman Alexander, Senator Murray, and members of the committee. I am Donna Linderman, University Dean for Student Success Initiatives and the Executive Director of CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) in the City University of New York Office of Academic Affairs. I am pleased to join you to speak about one of our most innovative and successful initiatives that is changing the degree success of thousands of our associate degree-seeking students. ASAP has become a national model recognized for its outstanding impacts to improve the graduation rates of CUNY students and make rigorous use of data to demonstrate success.

City University of New York is the largest urban public university in the country, with an enrollment of nearly 275,000 degree seeking students and 250,000 adult/continuing education students across 24 institutions across New York City. We are deeply committed to ensuring that our students receive an affordable, first rate education and have every opportunity to achieve their education goals and increase their social mobility. ASAP has proven to be an outstanding vehicle for realizing these goals.

ASAP History

Founded in 2007 with support from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (Now NYC Opportunity), ASAP aims to graduate at least 50% of associate seeking students within three years through provision of comprehensive support services and financial resources that remove barriers to full-time study, build student resiliency and engagement, and support timely degree completion. At ASAP inception, CUNY's overall three-year community college graduation rate was 13%, similar to the national urban community college rate of 16%, and 24% for fully skills proficient students with no remedial needs. We believed we could do much better and with the support of the Mayor, CUNY created a comprehensive, structured model designed to help students gain and maintain academic momentum with integrated and structured supports. ASAP has consistently not only met, but exceeded its ambitious graduation goals. To date, ASAP has served 33,800 students across eleven cohorts since inception and has an average three-year graduation rate of 53% vs. 25% of similar comparison group students.

The program has grown from an initial enrollment of 1,132 students at six CUNY community colleges to an expected FY18 enrollment of 21,400 students across nine CUNY colleges (Borough of Manhattan Community College, Bronx Community College, Hostos Community College, Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, Queensborough Community College, College of Staten Island, Medgar Evers College, and New York City College of Technology) ASAP is expanding 25,000 students in FY19 thanks to generous support from the City and State of New York and ASAP students will make up 50% of all CUNY full-time associate-seeking freshmen. Additionally, the program model is being replicated in a CUNY baccalaureate setting and at several community colleges around the country.

Program Design and Core Elements

ASAP offers a robust package of resources and services designed to help students gain and maintain academic momentum and provide a connected community of staff and peers. ASAP financial resources include tuition waivers for students in receipt of financial aid with a gap need between award and tuition and fees, textbook assistance, and unlimited New York City Transit MetroCards to allow them to travel freely between work, school and home.

We offer a structured pathway that includes required full-time enrollment every semester, block scheduled first-year courses with fellow ASAP students, consolidated course schedules (i.e.: am, afternoon, evening), immediate and continuous enrollment in any required developmental education courses, and winter and summer course-taking. Integrated support services include comprehensive and personalized advisement, tutoring and supplemental instruction, career development services, and early pre-matriculation engagement opportunities to build a connected community.

One of the hallmarks of the ASAP program, is close, personalized attention by caring staff members. Every ASAP student is assigned to a specific advisor who meets with their students, currently caseloads of no more than 150 students with whom they meet regularly. Meetings are conducted in both individual and group formats, and advisors provide academic and interpersonal support. Students consistently talk about the importance of the close bonds they form with their advisors and cite these relationships as essential to their success. Frequent contact between faculty and advisors ensures that students requiring additional support are referred to tutoring or counseling in a timely manner. A 2013 study found that the number of ASAP student advisor meetings had a significant impact on timely graduation (Kolenovic, Lindermnan & Karp, 2013).

ASAP students also have opportunities to develop their leadership skills and enhance connected community. The ASAP Student Leader Program provides an opportunity for ASAP students to build leadership skills and support campus-based recruitment for ASAP. Every year, a set of Student Leaders is selected from each college to participate in a series of interactive cross-site workshops that help students develop new skills in the areas of team building, public speaking, and self-assessment. The ASAP Peer Mentor Program provides an opportunity for advanced ASAP students or recent alumni to support key ASAP advisement and career development activities. Peer Mentors participate in a series of cross-campus training sessions to develop leadership skills; improve communication, advocacy, and problem-solving skills; learn group facilitation strategies; and, strengthen their own ties to ASAP and the campus community.

ASAP Students and Eligibility Criteria

ASAP enrolls students who are representative of the CUNY colleges they attend and are largely low-income students of color with some initial developmental education needs. A current profile of students finds the following characteristics: *Race*: 12% Asian, 33% Black, 44% Hispanic, 11% White; *Mean Age*: 21; *Gender*: 57% female, 43% male; *Pell Receipt*: 83%; *Initial Remedial Need*: 74%.

ASAP sets ambitious enrollment targets each year and broadly recruits students as they are admitted to CUNY partner colleges or currently enrolled students who meet the following criteria. Students are recruited until all program slots are full:

- Eligible for New York City resident rate tuition (community colleges) or New York State resident rate tuition (all other colleges);
- Agree to study full-time (minimum 12 credits a semester; 15 recommended) in an ASAP approved associate major (most majors are offered);
- Are deemed fully skills proficient or have no more than two outstanding developmental course needs in reading, writing, and math based on CUNY Assessment Test scores (Note: Students with more than two developmental course needs are guided to ASAP's sister program CUNY Start, which provides intensive instruction for up to one semester at low cost. Students are then welcomed into ASAP the following semester);
- Have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) application. Students must apply for financial aid each year and accept any need-based grant aid offered; and
- If a continuing or transfer students, have no more than 15 college credits and a minimum GPA of 2.0.

The program also conducts extensive citywide outreach across the New York City Department of Education, community based organizations, city agencies, and affiliated CUNY pre-matriculation programs. Prospective students, counselors who work with them, and family members are all targeted to ensure all stakeholders are aware of ASAP benefits and opportunities. All promotion and recruitment materials are available online and in print form, and ASAP also has a broad social media and marketing presence.

Program Organization and Management

ASAP operates as a consortium of the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs and a set of nine partner colleges that each have a set of specific roles and responsibilities that maximize program success and effective operations. Each college has a fully dedicated ASAP program team that delivers led by an experienced director, an associate director, a set of trained advisors with a maximum caseload of 150 students, a career specialist, program coordinators, and administrative support staff. College teams

deliver recruitment, direct services to students, support program integration across campus units, and monitor student data. The CUNY Office of Academic Affairs provides overall administrative support, fiscal oversight, research, evaluation and data management, and program wide staff training and professional development. The program is deeply committed to use of data for evaluation and program management purposes and operates on a continuous improvement model. Staff across the program work towards a common set of benchmarks to help reach overall program graduation goals and use a standard data management system that is used to produce reports and run queries to measure program efficacy at all levels.

ASAP benchmarks that pull from CUNY official data systems and the ASAP database are assessed on a timed basis and include: Enrollment and progress toward enrollment targets, college and program retention, credits attempted/earned, GPA, movement through developmental education if required, skills proficiency, graduation (2, 2.5 & 3 year), contacts with advisor (number, type, and code), participation in career development activities, contacts with the ASAP Career Specialist, contacts with peer mentors, satisfaction and experience in first year (survey), future plans, experience and satisfaction at exit (survey), advisement support level, exit code and exit date. ASAP staff meet regularly within partner colleges and across CUNY to review data, share best practices, and discuss and address common challenges.

ASAP Costs

The comprehensive nature of the ASAP model has higher upfront costs, which have declined dramatically as the program has expanded and fixed costs are spread over larger cohorts of students. Currently the additional ASAP cost per student per year is \$3,456 over and above usual CUNY FTEs. This cost is expected to decline an additional \$100 per student per year in FY19 when the program reaches planned scale. As noted in the next section, despite higher upfront costs, ASAP has been found to be both cost effective and cost beneficial by external evaluators.

ASAP Research and Evaluation Agenda

ASAP has been rigorously evaluated since inception and has been found to be highly effective. ASAP outcomes as evaluated by the ASAP Research and Evaluation team. To date, across eight cohorts that have graduated, ASAP has an average three-year graduation rate of 53% vs. 24% for matched comparison group students. The most recent graduating ASAP cohort that entered in fall 2014 (N=2,278 students) had a three-year graduation 55% vs. 28% for comparison group students.

After three years, 46% of ASAP students with developmental needs (who make up 74% of all ASAP students) and 61% of fully skills proficient ASAP students have graduated vs. 20% of non-ASAP comparison students with developmental needs and 33% of fully skills proficient non-ASAP comparison students.

Examining ASAP impact by race/ethnicity, gender and Pell status across cohorts: All subgroups of students met or nearly met the 50% three-year graduation rate goal; ASAP had a significant and positive effect on three-year graduation rates for all subgroups; and ASAP reduced gaps in graduation rates between Hispanic and white and Black and white students, especially for male students (Strumbos & Kolenovic, 2016),

When longer-term outcomes are considered, ASAP students are more likely to earn a degree. Six years after beginning, 64% of ASAP students had earned either an associate or baccalaureate degree (or both) vs. 43% of comparison group students. In addition, more ASAP students had transferred to a baccalaureate program (59% vs 50%) and more ASAP students had earned a bachelor's degree (27% vs. 18%). ASAP students also earn degrees more quickly than other students (Strumbos & Kolenovic, 2017).

MDRC conducted a five-year random assignment study of ASAP and found the program's effects are "unparalleled in large-scale experimental evaluations of programs in higher education" (MDRC, 2015) with nearly double the graduation rate for similar students. In a follow-up study of the random assignment study cohort six years after program entry MDRC found "that ASAP both continues to increase graduation rates and enables some students to earn their degrees faster than they would have otherwise" (MDRC, 2017).

Drs. Henry Levin and Emma Garcia from the Teachers College, Columbia University Center for Benefit Cost Studies in Education conducted a comprehensive cost study of ASAP and found the program is both highly cost effective and cost beneficial. Despite having higher up-front costs, the average cost per ASAP graduate is *lower* than for comparison group graduates. ASAP also realizes large financial returns for both the taxpayer and the student in the form of increased tax revenues, social service savings, and increased lifetime earnings (Levin & Garcia, 2018).

ASAP Expansion and Impact

Thanks to generous support from the City and State of New York, ASAP will expand to 25,000 students by academic year 2018/19. ASAP expansion will have a special focus on serving more STEM majors to ensure that more low-income, minority New Yorkers have every opportunity to graduate with in-demand skills across a broad array of employment sectors.

In addition to expanding ASAP enrollments at individual partner colleges, CUNY is supporting a campus-wide expansion of ASAP at Bronx Community College. This ambitious undertaking will aim to enroll most incoming first-time, full-time freshmen into an ASAP pipeline by academic year 2018/19 with the goal of graduating at least 50% of students within three years. This undertaking has the potential of not only changing the lives of thousands of low-income minority students who make up

the majority of Bronx, but the future economic prospects of whole families and entire communities in the City's poorest borough.

In addition to serving more associate degree-seeking students, ASAP is also beginning to broaden its scope to meet the needs of bachelor's degree-seeking students. CUNY received funding from the Robin Hood Foundation, NYC Opportunity and the Jewish Foundation for the Education of Women to adapt the ASAP model to a baccalaureate setting at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. John Jay Accelerate, Complete, and Engage (ACE) launched in fall 2015 with a pilot cohort of 250 students with plans to double four and five-year bachelor's attainment rates. A second cohort was added this past fall.

Analysis of most recent outcomes for the first ACE cohort, demonstrate they are making excellent progress towards timely graduation. Fall 2015 ACE students have higher retention rates and take and earn more credits than similar John Jay comparison group students. As of fall 2017, 65% of the fall 2015 ACE cohort are on track to graduate within four years (based on credit accumulation and academic standing) moving into their third year of study vs. 37% of matched comparison students. Additionally, achievement gaps are significantly narrowed between race subgroups in the areas of retention, credits attempted/earned, and being on track to graduate within four years.

Importantly, ASAP is having a major impact on CUNY's overall associate degree graduation rates. In FY18, ASAP students comprise 30% of all CUNY full-time associate seeking freshmen. In FY19, they will comprise 50% of the total pool. ASAP growth and strong outcomes has helped CUNY significantly increase overall three-year associate degree completion rates over the past few years from 10% in 2006 to a current high of 19%. CUNY expects that at scale, ASAP will help CUNY double the overall CUNY 3-year associate graduation from a 2013 baseline of 18% to 36% for the 2019 entering full-time freshmen cohort. These bold goals are further animated by CUNY's recently launched strategic framework that commits the entire University to embracing a culture of completion for current and prospective students.

Replication of ASAP Outside of CUNY

ASAP has received much interest from colleges across the country and is being replicated in several states. Through a partnership with the Ohio Department of Higher Education, Great Lakes Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation, and MDRC, CUNY ASAP provided technical assistance to three Ohio community colleges that implemented programs based on the ASAP model. As part of the Ohio ASAP demonstration project, CUNY ASAP staff worked with Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, Cuyahoga Community College, and Lorain County Community College for two years (2014-2016) to support the start-up and implementation of their ASAP-like programs. MDRC is conducting a random-assignment study of the Ohio demonstration project. Early findings published by MDRC (2016) indicate that students in the Ohio programs based on the ASAP model have higher enrollment rates

and credit attainment than students in the control group. These short-term impacts are similar to those the MDRC found in their evaluation of ASAP at the same point in time.

Effective fall 2017, CUNY ASAP is providing technical assistance to support replication efforts in two additional states – New York and California – through a grant from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation “Moving the Needle” initiative. Westchester Community College in Valhalla, New York and Skyline Community College in San Bruno, California will develop their own ASAP-like programs for launch in academic year 2018-2019. Skyline College will launch their Promise Scholars program at scale, serving an estimated 500 eligible full time first time students, while Westchester Community College will launch their Viking ROADS (Resources for Obtaining Associates Degree & Success) with a pilot cohort of 100 students.

Recommendations for Federal Policy

We believe ASAP demonstrates the power of comprehensively supporting associate-degree seeking students, especially underrepresented minority and low-income students, at all stages of their degree pathway. An upfront investment in their success has yielded astonishing impacts on the degree attainment rates of our students and is helping them improve their future economic prospects. ASAP is part of CUNY’s proud legacy as a powerful engine of social mobility, as demonstrated by a recent study by a group of esteemed economists led by Raj Chetty at Stanford. Their 2017 study found that CUNY moves more students from the lowest income quintile into the middle class and beyond than multiple Ivy league colleges combined. We are proud to have the opportunity to expand this sort of impact through ASAP to see many more CUNY students improve their economic mobility in the coming years by earning a CUNY degree.

We are also honored to have ASAP serve as a model for colleges and policy makers who wish to improve the degree attainment rates of students who all too frequently struggle realize their higher education goals. This should be mission critical to all levels of higher education and government and federal policy would be incredibly important to ensure it happens.

It is essential that community colleges have necessary resources and are encouraged to adopt evidence-based models to improve graduation rates to help more low-income students attain degrees. In an era on constrained resources and increased accountability, it is important to invest in what works. A group of House Democrats introduced the Community College Success Act last year that proposes a discretionary grant program to support replication of ASAP-like models that fully integrates comprehensive supports for students with rigorous use of data for program management and evaluation purposes.

Colleges need the resources to create comprehensive programming and to infuse rigorous evaluation and use of data to demonstrate success, which will ensure federal funds are well used. This sort of support should be seriously considered across both the House and Senate.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for your interest in ASAP and in supporting higher education innovation that aims to help many more students of all backgrounds and means earn a college degree. Helping them realize this dream is a collective responsibility across all levels of society and it is an honor to be part of the group of stakeholders who are actively working towards this goal.

Thank you.

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