The City University of New York

Testimony of Bronx Community College President

Dr. Carole M. Berotte Joseph

The City University of New York

New York City Council Committee on Higher Education

“Evaluating the Impact of College Remediation at Community Colleges and Other Postsecondary Institutions”

October 24, 2011
Testimony of Dr. Carole Berotte Joseph, President
Bronx Community College/CUNY to the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education, October 24, 2011

Good morning. My name is Carole Berotte Joseph and I am the President of Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. As a proud CUNY product myself (as a graduate of York College, a faculty member and an administrator at City College and an administrator at Hostos Community College) I am particularly conscious of the significant impact that this great University can make on the lives of individuals and in our communities.

Bronx Community College students, like those at community colleges across our country, experience a number of barriers to their academic success. These barriers include a lack of academic preparation; unfamiliarity with college expectations and organization; multiple and competing social roles; and socio-affective factors, such as motivation and sense of self-worth.

Most entering BCC freshmen are not prepared for college-level work. While approximately three-quarters (74%) of entering freshmen are recent high school graduates (having graduated high school within 15 months prior to entering BCC), the vast majority of them (85%) require at least one or more remedial courses (in reading, writing and mathematics) based on their entering skills test scores – and almost one-third (29%) require remediation in all three skills areas. In addition, almost half of the entering freshmen (48%) were born outside of the United States and speak a language other than English. More than 80 languages are spoken on the BCC campus.

BCC students, like other urban, commuter community college students have multiple responsibilities in addition to their academic responsibilities. More than one-half (58%) are employed and approximately one-quarter (23%) support children. Family incomes are low (56% have a household annual income less than $20,000) and one-fifth (22%) are the first in their family to attend College.

Since I began serving as the President of Bronx Community College less than four (4) months ago, I have observed a number of successful programs and practices at the College and I have identified
a number of areas where I believe we can make significant improvements. CUNY-sponsored programs like ASAP (a program my colleague Donna Linderman, will explain more about in a few minutes), College Discovery, the Language Immersion Program and others provide structured supports within well-designed programs that result in concrete improvements in student retention and graduation outcomes. For example, recent entering cohorts of ASAP students at BCC have similar demographic characteristics as the overall student population. The majority (90%) require remediation in at least one skill area upon entry to the College. Students in our ASAP program receive specialized academic and career advisement, block programming and linked courses, supplemental instruction and other benefits, such as metrocards and laptops. Of the 90% of entering ASAP students who required one or more remedial courses upon entry, 100% completed all remedial requirements in one year. This remedial success for the ASAP cohort is clearly associated with a significantly higher three-year graduation rate of 50% compared to 16% for a comparable cohort.

Additional research conducted at BCC affirms the relationship of success in remedial coursework in the first year and college completion. Average grades earned in both credit and developmental courses in the first semester are positively associated with both retention and graduation. In addition, the probability of graduating increases significantly with each skills test passed in the first year.

As President of Bronx Community College, I am committed to providing excellent opportunities for success for all of our students – not just the few who are the beneficiaries of special programs. The success of programs like ASAP demonstrates that community college students with incoming remedial needs can successfully complete associate degrees. Our challenge is to provide the structure and support with limited resources. This is a national challenge, as well. Prior to joining BCC, I lead a community college in Massachusetts which also had low graduation rates even though the demographics were much different. We do know what works, therefore based on the best practices, we built our programs on a thorough review of all our business processes from the time that a student was
admitted through graduation. We focused on using pedagogies that are research based so that a culture of evidence developed on campus. We provided development opportunities for faculty and staff so that they would use the latest technologies along with new pedagogical methods. After planning a pilot summer program, called Summer Scholars, where students were paired in learning communities, the students excelled and were able to test out of their remedial classes. We were able to turn the tide built on a combination of research-based practices, student support, programmatic overhaul and faculty and staff development. Needless to say, the graduation rate improved significantly and the program was expanded.

To this end, at Bronx Community College, we have embarked on a major effort to significantly improve the first year experiences and outcomes for all BCC students. As a first step, we reviewed many of the same sources used by CUNY to develop the concept and structure for special programs, including ASAP and the New Community College. We then synthesized those findings along with our own institutional research findings to identify systemic barriers to freshman year success at the College and to develop corresponding, analytically-based, scalable solutions. I have invited the entire campus community to join in our efforts to improve freshmen student experiences and outcomes. Over 80 faculty and staff members have volunteered to participate in one or more working groups charged with developing action plans with corresponding accountabilities and timelines. In addition, I have redesigned a Presidential Grant Program to support efforts that will improve student success in, and progress through, remedial courses and sequences (with a particular focus on progress through mathematics remediation). These efforts are being centrally managed to ensure a well-coordinated and structured effort that utilizes technology and management tools to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and ultimately improve the rates of student success.

Some of the specific initiatives include: (1) the redesign of a new First Year seminar course, which will strengthen student engagement and prepare students for successful collegiate academic
behaviors within the context of exciting academic content and use of e-portfolios; (2) the development of an academic advisement training and certification program; (3) the creation of standard curricular programs for students in major program categories for the first year; (4) the development of materials and experiences for students to prepare for the CUNY Placement Tests prior to the first exam and prior to the first semester; and (5) innovations in remedial pedagogy.

By the Fall 2012 semester, we will provide a cohesive first year experience for all students that includes a redesigned First Year seminar course; an effective organizational structure for freshmen activities; clearly articulated academic pathways; meaningful assessment in all First Year efforts; and the systematic use of analytics in all academic and business processes that will ensure we monitor student progress in the first year, including progress through remedial requirements. Of course, we will continue to seek and welcome additional fiscal resources, but also understand that we have an obligation to provide opportunities for all students to succeed – not just those who participate in specially created and funded programs. Thank you very much.