Testimony of Vice Chancellor for Community Colleges
Eduardo Martí
The City University of New York
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“Evaluating the Impact of College Remediation at Community Colleges and Other Postsecondary Institutions”
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VC Martí: Good morning, Chairperson Rodriguez, and members of the Higher Education committee. My name is Eduardo Martí, and I serve as The City University of New York’s first vice chancellor for community colleges. My role today is to situate CUNY’s community college policies and practices, specifically concerning remediation, in a national context.

As you know, our community colleges operate under an open admissions policy. This policy allows all New Yorkers who possess a high school diploma or a GED to enter CUNY regardless of past grades, test scores, or educational background. The community colleges are the true portals of entry, the access points to higher education and professional success. Open admissions policies, therefore, provide crucial benefits by allowing us to marshal the intellectual potential of our entire population and facilitating steps up the economic ladder for those of limited financial means and scarce socioeconomic opportunities.

That is the beautiful promise of open admissions. These ideals also help us understand what happens during economic downturns such as the one we are now experiencing. In these times, many people who might otherwise have proceeded directly from high school to employment cannot find work. They turn instead to community colleges for further education and training. They understand that the very tight job market has made it all but impossible for even the most accomplished high school graduates to obtain a good-paying job without having first received at least an associate degree. Again, CUNY welcomes all of these students, and our ever-increasing enrollments prove it.

But the additional enrollments bring us challenges, including the fact that many of these students are coming to us with remedial needs. If you take one message from my testimony today, let it be this: Without effective remediation, the open door becomes a revolving door. And when the students go out that door, the promise and the potential inherent in open admissions policies are lost.

You have heard from my colleagues on the panel about many of the specific programs and practices that CUNY has implemented in response. On a broader level, we are rethinking and reimagining our community colleges in order to manage our students’ needs, ensure their
academic success and graduation, and prepare them for working citizenship in the global economy.

This work is taking place nationwide, and people across the country are taking note of our energetic work here at CUNY. Last fall, I had the privilege of representing CUNY at the White House Conference on Community Colleges. More recently, just last month, more than 250 community-college educators—including representatives from 26 states and 55 college presidents—came here to New York, to the CUNY Graduate Center, to attend CUNY’s first national colloquium on community colleges.

The overarching theme of this event was how to scale up pilot programs, programs that are similar to the ones you have heard about this morning. And the researchers, faculty, and staff from other colleges came here because they know that important work is happening at CUNY. They wanted to learn from us at least as much as we hoped to learn from them.

Before I conclude, let me reiterate that we are thinking boldly about how to meet the needs of our most vulnerable students—including those with the weakest academic preparation and most serious remedial needs. Our chancellor, Matthew Goldstein, has made community colleges a priority. There is perhaps no more obvious evidence of his commitment than The New Community College (NCC), which will admit its first class for the fall 2012 semester. The NCC aims to replicate the graduation-rate successes of the ASAP program. It has many exciting features based on research and successful practice. But in the interest of time, perhaps I will simply offer to share details with any of you who may request them.

Similarly, I will be pleased to expand on the role of CUNY’s extraordinary community-college faculty. In addition to their outstanding teaching and discipline-based scholarship, many of them are undertaking major pedagogical research focused specifically on community college education. The University is supporting some of this research.
In conclusion, permit me to thank you for your consistent and long-standing friendship to CUNY and its community colleges. Advancements in community college education owe so much to your support. Thank you very much.