Moving the Completion Needle at Community Colleges: CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)

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To cite this article: Donna Linderman & Zineta Kolenovic (2013) Moving the Completion Needle at Community Colleges: CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 45:5, 43-50

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2013.824350

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Despite enrolling almost half of all undergraduate students in the United States, community colleges have struggled for decades with low degree-completion rates. Only a small percentage of the seven million plus students enrolled in credit-bearing course work at a community college during the 2011 academic year will earn a degree. According to the US Department of Education, only about 22 percent of all students who enroll in community colleges have completed an associate degree three years later, and only 16 percent of students at urban community colleges earn a degree in the same time period.

CUNY community colleges struggle with the challenge of low completion rates even when the degree timetable is expanded. According to the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, within six years, 20 percent of first-time freshmen at CUNY community colleges had earned an associate degree, 8 percent had earned a bachelor’s degree, and 9 percent were still enrolled. These are very sobering figures, especially when the increased earning power and larger societal benefits (higher tax revenues and savings on social services, to name just two) of associate-degree recipients are contrasted with those of high school graduates or GED completers.

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Poor academic preparation, confusion navigating degree pathways and campus culture, and competing demands such as family responsibilities and work are among the many reasons cited for low community college completion rates. At CUNY, 18 percent of community college students are supporting at least one child, most of whom are under five years of age; 33 percent spend at least six hours per week providing care for other people; 66 percent work at least part-time; and 75 percent are from households with annual incomes below $40,000. In addition, while the vast majority of CUNY’s community college students (87 percent) begin their studies on a full-time basis, nearly half (45 percent) drop to part-time status in one or more subsequent semesters, significantly reducing their likelihood of degree completion.

Meeting the needs of students who enter community college with few academic, economic, and family resources is one of the most compelling problems in higher education today. How can community colleges address this challenge and become a part of President Obama’s action plan to significantly increase US college completion rates by 2020? Addressing such issues requires a willingness to critically examine and restructure all aspects of the student experience, from application to graduation, in order to dramatically change the outcome.

In 2007, CUNY and the Office of the Mayor’s Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) established an innovative and comprehensive program designed to significantly increase the number of students who earn an associate degree within three years at CUNY’s community colleges. A SAP brings individual strategies found to be beneficial to community college students together in one comprehensive package.

Program features include:
- financial resources to remove barriers to full-time study;
- a limited number of degree pathways;
- consolidated course scheduling;
- cohort design;
- immediate and continuous movement through any required developmental education;
- use of winter and summer sessions;
- mandatory and intrusive student support services, including advisement, career development, and academic supports.

A SAP’s goal is to graduate half of its students within three years, more than double the graduation rates of fully skills-proficient CUNY community college students at the time of program inception. To date, the initiative has not only met but exceeded its target, with both skills-proficient and developmental-needs students graduating at more than double the rate of similar students.

**BEGINNINGS**

A SAP began in fall 2007 as a pilot program funded at CUNY’s then six existing community colleges (Borough of Manhattan, Bronx, Hostos, Kingsborough, LaGuardia, and Queensborough). CUNY opened the Guttman Community College in fall 2012, which incorporated significant elements of A SAP into its overall design.

The first A SAP cohort consisted of 1,132 students who were deemed fully skills proficient and ready for college-credit coursework at the time of program entry in fall 2007. All subsequent cohorts have been largely composed of students with developmental needs, averaging 71 percent of total enrollments to date.

A SAP students are recruited after they have been admitted to a CUNY community college and been assessed for college-level proficiency in reading, writing, and math. A SAP students are required to meet the following selection criteria:

- Be New York City residents;
- If a continuing or transfer student, have no more than 15 cumulative earned credits;
- Receive some need-based financial aid (federal Pell and/or New York State Tuition Assistance Program);
- Need no more than two developmental courses at the time of application (based on scores on the CUNY assessment tests in reading, writing, and math); and
- Agree to study full time in an approved major (most majors, other than nursing and some allied health majors, are offered).

As of fall 2012, A SAP had served 4,549 students and realized an average three-year graduation rate of 55 percent across cohorts, compared to 23 percent for comparison-group students. Adding the fall 2013 cohort of approximately 1,800 students to the current population will bring today’s program enrollment to 3,225 students. The aim is to have a total of 4,000 students enrolled at partner colleges in fall 2014.

Who are these students? Table 1 shows the profile of A SAP students served to date, whose demographics closely mirror the larger CUNY community college population: 32 percent are black and 42 percent are Hispanic. The majority of A SAP students are recent high school or GED completers, with 66 percent being 19 or younger and 74 percent receiving a Pell grant. Sixty-eight percent are first-time freshmen, and 32 percent are continuing or transfer students. They enter our community colleges with high school GPAs in the C range.

Given the program’s ambitious graduation target, the first A SAP cohort consisted of students who began college with no developmental needs. Nearly 30 percent (319) of cohort one students had some developmental need when they were recruited for A SAP and took required remedial courses over the summer in order to join the program in the fall. Summer remedial classes were offered free of charge through the University Skills Immersion Program (USIP).

Based on cohort one students’ success at the two-year mark (a 30 percent graduation rate for A SAP students vs. 11 percent for comparison-group students), A SAP began to
admit students with developmental needs in 2009. The intent was to replicate the success of the first ASAP cohort with a group of students who were less prepared academically. For subsequent cohorts (2009-2012), 83 percent of students applied to the program with one to two developmental needs. Despite entering their associate studies with greater academic challenges, our second cohort also had a 55 percent three-year graduation rate, compared to 22 percent for its comparison group.

**Key Elements**

A SAP’s significantly higher graduation rates have been realized by first identifying and then addressing the most pressing needs of community college students, including the removal of roadblocks and the provision of essential services at key junctures. We identified four key elements based on research findings on what works to increase student retention, performance, and ultimately graduation (Adelman, 1999; Karp, O’Gara, & Hughes, 2008; Tinto, 1993):

- structured and incentivized full-time degree pathways, including addressing any developmental needs immediately;
- early engagement;
- comprehensive and mandatory wraparound services; and
- connected community.

What distinguishes ASAP from many other programs is that it combines these elements into one comprehensive program to increase the likelihood of timely degree completion.

**Structured and Incentivized Full-time Degree Pathway**

In order to help students graduate in a timely and efficient manner, we established a structure that positions students for success. As part of that structure, ASAP students are required to study full time so they can maintain academic momentum and graduate within three years.

Fully aware that community college students generally come from low-income families, we enable full-time study by waiving any gap between need-based financial-aid awards and tuition and fees so that there is no cost of attendance for financial-aid-eligible students. Additionally, all students receive free monthly New York City Transit M etrocards and free use of textbooks. We also provide financial support for summer and winter courses to help students build credit momentum.

A SAP students are required to address any developmental need(s) on an immediate and continuous basis, starting in the summer before they matriculate or in their first semester, so they can begin to earn college credit as quickly as possible. Students with more than one need are required to enroll in a developmental course during the summer prior to program entry, and students with only one developmental need are strongly encouraged to do so.

Summer courses are offered at no cost, and books and MTA Metrocards are also provided. Students with outstanding need in the fall semester are immediately programmed into blocked ASAP-only developmental course sections and are required to attend tutoring sessions.

A nother feature of the structured pathway is consolidated course scheduling in the morning or afternoon, or (at some colleges) in the evenings or on weekends so that students can balance their studies with outside responsibilities. Advisors provide students with a structured course-sequence plan so that they are aware from day one what their course load will look like over the next two to three years.

The program offers a limited number of majors based on their transferability to senior colleges (in and out of CUNY) and/or linkage to the workforce upon graduation. Limiting the number of majors allows the program to reserve seats in general education and required courses for ASAP students so they can have a predictable schedule for the duration of their studies.

**Early Engagement**

Student recruitment begins in early spring; it is confined primarily to the accepted freshmen pool and to continuing

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Profile of Combined ASAP Cohorts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native Alaskan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 or younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 to 22</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 to 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 or older</td>
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<tr>
<td>Admission Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-time Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developmental Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Time of Application to ASAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Time of Entry into ASAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED Recipients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell Receipt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment
students who have earned a minimal number of credits. Once students are accepted into ASAP, we employ a variety of engagement activities to help them become more comfortable with campus culture and program expectations.

Students meet with their assigned advisors over the summer to plan for the fall semester and to discuss any challenges they may be facing that could impede their academic progress. ASAP advisors refer students to a variety of campus and local resources when the program cannot meet their needs.

In the summer, ASAP colleges not only support developmental course taking, but also offer group meetings and workshops on a variety of topics, from study skills to time management to career assessments. All new students also participate in a one- to two-day ASAP Summer Institute in August. The Institute’s goal is to share important college and program policies in a safe and engaging forum and to help build rapport between staff and students through community-building activities.

Students move through a series of workshops in large and small groups led by program and college staff, and they also have the opportunity to meet with faculty. Each campus selects an assigned reading or viewing of TED Talks for workshop discussions. All of these early engagement components work together to help students feel more comfortable in their new environment, allow them to identify themselves as college students, and connect them to the program and their fellow ASAP students.

**Comprehensive and Mandatory Wraparound Services**

Too often, community college support services are optional or require minimal contact between staff and students. ASAP offers an array of comprehensive services to support the students, both academically and personally, from entry to graduation. The program has a fully dedicated team at each campus consisting of a director, advisors, a career and employment specialist, support staff, and tutors. These staff members make it clear from a student’s first program contact that they are there to help them succeed.

One of the most important ASAP services is high-touch advisement. Every student is assigned to an advisor upon admission to the program and remains with that advisor through graduation. Students are required to be in contact with their advisor monthly to receive comprehensive academic, social, and interpersonal support through face-to-face, group, phone, and electronic interaction.

ASAP advisors are described by students as non-judgmental, knowledgeable, and caring individuals—people who are always there for them and ready to go the extra mile to provide guidance and direction. Year after year—on surveys, in focus groups, and through print and video testimonials—ASAP students overwhelmingly credit their advisors with being critical to their success in college.

The current ASAP student-to-advisor ratio is 85:1 and is expected to increase to 140:1 with planned program expansion by 2014. A part of a year-long expansion planning process, ASAP staff members from all campuses and the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs developed a needs-based advisement model that was launched in fall 2012. This model allows advisors to work with larger caseloads while still maintaining strong personalized student connections.

In their first semester, all ASAP students are seen by their advisors twice monthly. Before each subsequent semester, the advisors sort their caseloads into three needs groups (high, medium and low) based on a review of students’ academic standing, personal resiliency, and program-requirements compliance.

High-needs students continue to be seen twice each month; medium-needs students are seen once a month and may use electronic or phone interaction if approved by their advisors; low-needs students are seen every other month, may use phone or electronic contact with their advisors, and are encouraged to become members of the ASAP student leadership program. The advisors can require more frequent contact with students in any group at any time if there are concerns about academic or personal matters.

Career-development services are another essential component of the ASAP program. Students want to connect their current studies to future careers, but many have a limited understanding of the pathways into various fields and the range of jobs available within a particular industry.

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Career-development services are another essential component of the ASAP program. Students want to connect their current studies to future careers, but many have a limited understanding of the pathways into various fields and the range of jobs available within a particular industry. To support emerging career interests and any immediate employment needs, each campus program has a full-time career and employment specialist (CES).

A SAP CESs meet with students individually and in groups to conduct career assessments; arrange job-site visits...
and career fairs; and deliver workshops on interviewing, job skills, and career planning. Students who need employment are placed in job situations that allow them to balance full-time studies with work and personal responsibilities.

The CESs also work closely with advisors to help ASAP students with post-graduation plans such as transfer to four-year colleges or entering the workforce. They also help the advisees apply for a range of scholarship and opportunity programs, many of which carry significant financial benefits. As a result, ASAP students have an excellent success rate in securing highly competitive awards that are open to all students, including those at four-year CUNY and private colleges.

ASAP provides students who need additional academic support with dedicated tutoring, including individual and group sessions for developmental and college-credit courses. Students enrolled in developmental courses and those who have failed a course or been identified by faculty as struggling are required to attend weekly tutoring. During the fall 2012 semester, those students received an average of 15 tutoring hours.

Advisors monitor that tutoring and follow up with students if there are attendance issues. Successful ASAP students have indicated that mandatory tutoring was invaluable to them, especially in high-failure-rate classes such as math, physics, chemistry, and writing-intensive courses.

Finally, ASAP advisors regularly ask faculty members to provide feedback on students’ academic performance. They especially want to know about students with academic challenges so that they can intervene before it’s too late. Feedback is provided electronically, but faculty members also have the option of calling, emailing, or meeting in person with the ASAP advisors.

This open-door policy encourages faculty connection to the program. While providing feedback on ASAP students is completely optional for faculty, the program has an excellent response rate, with almost 70 percent of blocked-course faculty responding on average in any given semester.

ASAP programs host drop-in events each semester to keep new and continuing faculty informed about program developments, and advisors are often invited to departmental meetings. ASAP directors also meet with academic chairs once each semester to discuss program development and course needs for the coming semester.

This regular interaction has fostered strong relations between ASAP and academic departments. Participating faculty frequently encourage colleagues to teach ASAP blocked courses—and at one college, a faculty mentoring program has evolved based on faculty interest in working more closely with these students.

**Connected Community**

A connected community is essential to a successful program. It allows students to feel that they belong, to pursue common goals with their classmates, and to know that a group of adults is in place to support them unreservedly and without judgment. ASAP is frequently described by students as being like a family, with lasting bonds forged among students and between students and staff. ASAP graduates regularly remain in touch with one another and with program staff, even when they are abroad or across the country in graduate school.

To foster this sense of community, in their first year students take three to five of their general education or developmental classes with fellow ASAP students and two to four out-of-block courses with some ASAP students and the general college population. Class sizes usually do not exceed 25, allowing for more interaction between students and faculty.

We have also developed an ASAP Seminar, which consists of mandatory weekly, non-credit group advisement sessions that address common academic and personal-growth issues faced by students as they enter into and move through community college. The ASAP Seminar fosters students’ confidence, communication skills, and goal-setting while addressing academic, career, and transfer topics. The curriculum content and delivery methods are regularly adjusted to meet students’ interests and needs. Led by ASAP staff and trained facilitators, the seminar has received positive satisfaction ratings from students on end-of-semester surveys.

Students also build community outside of class by attending cultural and social events and participating in cross-campus initiatives such as the ASAP Student Leader Program. Each winter, teams of ASAP students are selected from each campus to participate in a series of leadership training workshops that focus on teamwork, public speaking, and engagement strategies.

These leaders are then charged with supporting their college’s recruitment efforts by participating in ASAP
information sessions, speaking directly to prospective students, and providing general support for the ASAP program team. ASAP also maintains a student speakers bureau for those who are willing to participate in public events such as testifying at city council hearings and meeting with funders and other interested parties to speak about their ASAP experiences.

**ASAP Evaluation and Outcomes**

Since the program's inception in 2007, the CUNY Central ASAP team has conducted a rigorous internal evaluation to assess the program effectiveness by tracking students’ retention, academic performance, and graduation outcomes. We also administer annual and exit surveys, conduct student focus groups, and collect student-advisor contact data to obtain a snapshot of ASAP’s inner workings and students’ satisfaction with the program.

The program operates on a continuous-improvement model. So we review student data on a regular basis with program staff from all the colleges and the Central Office and then make adjustments to polices and service delivery using the data and consensus-building across the ASAP team.

ASAP evaluation uses a quasi-experimental design, whereby the outcomes for ASAP students are compared to those for similar CUNY community college students. We identify the comparison group for each cohort using administrative data from the CUNY Institutional Research Database (IRDB) and limit it to students who met the same admissions criteria that ASAP students had to meet.

Our most complete evaluation to date is for the first and second ASAP cohorts, who began in fall 2007 and fall 2009, respectively. We analyzed CUNY administrative data for ASAP and the comparison groups using propensity score matching for the first cohort and regression analyses for the second cohort, in an attempt to obtain the most accurate and least biased treatment effect.

As indicated earlier, the retention, credit-accumulation, and graduation outcomes have exceeded our expectations, supporting our theory that the four key ASAP elements do indeed contribute to student success. The matched results in Table 2 show that ASAP students have a 12 percentage point higher third-semester retention rate and earn an average of seven more credits than comparison-group students. Most importantly and impressively, 55 percent of cohort one students have earned an associate degree in three years, compared to 27 percent of comparison-group students.

The second cohort, 76 percent of whom entered with developmental education need(s), have very similar results to the first cohort’s. Table 3 shows that one year later, only 16 percent still needed developmental work (vs. 39 percent of comparison-group students). The second cohort’s students also had an 18 percentage point higher third-semester retention rate than their comparison-group counterparts. Moreover, like the first cohort, 55 percent graduated in three years, compared to 22 percent of comparison-group students.

Chart 1 depicts the graduation rates of the second cohort and its comparison group by developmental need. ASAP

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**Table 2**

**Fall 2007 ASAP Cohort One Outcomes After Matching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Fall 2007 ASAP Cohort One</th>
<th>Fall 2006 Comparison Group</th>
<th>Statistical Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd Semester Retention %</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>11.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Semester Cum Credits mean</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>3.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Graduation %</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>19.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Year Graduation %</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>28.4*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the .05 level.

Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

**Table 3**

**Fall 2009 ASAP Cohort Two Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Fall 2009 ASAP Cohort Two</th>
<th>Fall 2008 Comparison Group</th>
<th>Observed Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd Semester Dev Ed Need %</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>22.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Semester Retention %</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>18.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Semester Cum Credits mean</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>3.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Graduation %</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>20.3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Year Graduation %</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>33.2*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the .05 level.

Source: CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment
clearly outperforms the comparison group at every level. At every time point, students who entered ASAP ready for college-level work progress at higher rates than their peers who need developmental help. This trend is the same for comparison-group students, but the graduation rate difference between ASAP developmental students and fully proficient students is slightly smaller than that of the comparison group.

Our aggregate ASAP outcomes across cohorts are just as impressive as those of cohorts one and two: The one-year retention across all cohorts is 78 percent, compared to 67 percent for the comparison group. And there is practically no difference in retention between those who entered the program with a developmental need (80 percent) and those who were fully proficient (82 percent).

ASAP students with developmental needs move quickly: Only 16 percent of re-enrolled students in the combined cohorts still required developmental education in the third semester, compared to 41 percent of the comparison group. That figure dropped to eight percent with the most recent cohort for which we have one-year outcomes data, compared to 31 percent for the comparison group. This finding most likely reflects our policy of requiring students to enroll in remedial courses immediately and continuously.

ASAP is also engaged in external evaluation efforts. MDRC, a not-for-profit research organization, is currently conducting a random-assignment study of the ASAP program involving 900 students at three of our six community colleges. MDRC’s first report, with preliminary findings, was released in 2012; it documented positive and large differences between ASAP and the control group (Scrivener, Weiss, & Sommo, 2012), with results that closely mirror internal ASAP evaluation findings. MDRC will release a second report that will include two-year outcomes in early 2014.

**ASAP Costs**

ASAP’s comprehensive model has greater upfront costs than the traditional community college pathway. The FY14 annual cost per ASAP student is $4,000 over and above regular full-time equivalent (FTE) allocations made to CUNY community colleges. ASAP funding covers all personnel and OTPS costs required to successfully administer the program across six community colleges and the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs.

But ASAP is now recognized as an important University program that will be sustained and significantly expanded to serve many more CUNY students. CUNY has committed to scale ASAP from its original enrollment of 1,132 students to 4,000 students by 2014, with 1,800 new students joining the program in fall 2013. As the program expands, fixed costs will continue to be spread over more students, so the annual ASAP cost per student is expected to drop to $3,700 when the enrollment reaches 4,000.

Because of the program’s success, original pilot funding from the Office of the Mayor’s Center for Economic Opportunity was made a permanent allocation to the University’s annual operating budget by the City of New York in 2010. Additional funds from New York State and several major private foundations have also been raised to support program expansion.

### Chart 1

**Fall 2009 ASAP Cohort Two and Fall 2008 Comparison-Group Graduation Rates by Developmental Education at Time of Entry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASAP</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev Need</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Prof</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Yr Grad</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev Need</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Prof</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5-Yr Grad</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev Need</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Prof</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Yr Grad</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The program has engaged in a robust benefit-cost analysis to determine if the higher investment in student success is worth the greater upfront costs. Henry Levin and the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education (CBCSE) at Teachers College conducted a comprehensive two-part benefit-cost study. His analysis found that even though ASAP costs more per student, the cost per graduate is currently $6,500 less for ASAP than for comparison-group students (Levin & Garcia, 2012).

Levin’s benefit-cost analysis demonstrates significant returns on the ASAP investment for both the individual student and the taxpayer. The report points out that ASAP produces dramatically higher net benefits (benefits less costs) in the form of increased lifetime earnings and tax revenues and reduced costs for social services, public health, and criminal justice (Levin & Garcia, 2013).

In an era of declining resources for public higher education, it is reasonable to ask if a comprehensive reform effort like ASAP is only possible with an infusion of new funding. While fully acknowledging that large effects such as doubling graduation rates require sufficient resources and personnel, we unequivocally say that it is not.

We urge colleges to look critically at existing resource allocations to see where funds can be shifted away from programs that are not meeting expectations and towards a focused, large-scale completion effort. Continuing to do business as usual results in most students’ leaving the institution without a degree in hand—a much greater long-term price to pay when the ineffective use of financial aid, reduced earning power, lower tax revenues, and increased public expenditures are considered.

A postsecondary credential has become a necessity for a secure future in a complex economy and rapidly changing workforce. Community colleges are essential portals for the millions of low-income students of all ages who are determined to move towards that goal. For models showing how to respond to President’s Obama action plan to significantly increase US college completion rates by 2020, we can look to the lessons learned from CUNY’s ASAP.

ASAP has consistently shown that meeting an ambitious 50+ percent three-year graduation rate is possible for students with and without developmental needs when the right program elements are combined and delivered in a systematic manner. Given robust research findings, impressive cost-benefit results, and our successful student outcomes, we strongly believe that combining the four key ASAP elements is a successful strategy for dramatically increasing the success of community college students.

### Resources