8-15-2008

A New Community College Concept Paper Executive Summary

CUNY Guttman Community College

A New Community College Concept Paper
Executive Summary

In the spring of 2008, Chancellor Matthew Goldstein initiated a process for developing a model for a new CUNY community college. Driving this effort was the projected growth in enrollment at CUNY's community colleges and concern to address the persistent challenges of improving retention and graduation rates and preparing students for further study or employment.

A Planning Team was organized to serve as a coordinating entity, responsible for consulting with the larger CUNY community and education professionals across the nation and reviewing relevant research. A Steering Committee of Central Office administrators and community college leaders oversaw the planning process. In addition, a national Advisory Board provided important feedback on the draft concept paper.

This concept paper, which wraps up the exploratory phase of planning, provides a set of key ideas and practices to facilitate achievement of the Chancellor's goals. While some of the proposed ideas denote major departures from traditional approaches, others come from innovative practices at CUNY's six community colleges and from suggestions for changes in policy that prevent community college educators from doing their best work. Some of the defining features of the new community college include: the overarching theme of creating and sustaining a thriving New York City; a significant pre-college component; full-time enrollment, at least during the first year; a merging of remediation/credit coursework; a limited number of programs of study, with well-defined pathways to degree, transfer and/or employment; and an Office of Partnerships to develop and manage connections that will support internships and employment opportunities.

Pre-College Programs, Admission, Assessment and the Summer Program

Because many challenges faced by CUNY community college educators begin in the K-12 system and are exacerbated by the disconnect between secondary and postsecondary systems, the University has invested substantial resources in college preparatory programs for public school students. The new college's admissions staff will build on those efforts, and will work closely with the directors of those programs, and with CUNY GED and Adult Literacy programs, to promote college awareness and increase college readiness. In this context too, the college should further explore the possibility of working closely with one or more of the New York City Career and Technical Education demonstration schools, scheduled to open in fall 2009.

Organizationally, the Admissions Office will be part of a one-stop student service center. Staff will ensure that every student applies for financial aid and that FAFSA and TAP applications are properly submitted and processed. The admission process, which will include mandatory interviews with admissions staff and college faculty, will perform a college preparatory function and help students develop and articulate an educational plan.

We expect that applicants will need to strengthen and expand their skills in reading, writing and math. Participation in a full-time summer program will be required. The summer program goals include: developing the reading, writing and research skills necessary for success in the first-year "City Seminar"; familiarizing students with the college's math program; and acquainting students with available resources to help them develop a sense of familiarity with the college. The summer will also allow for diagnostic assessments in reading, writing, mathematics and quantitative problem-solving.

The Educational Model and Professional Development

The educational model of the new community college is designed to mitigate the common experience of college as a jigsaw puzzle of discrete courses, services and administrative obligations. The program will be designed to enable students to graduate in three years, although students in good standing will have the opportunity to graduate in two years through full-time enrollment during each semester and additional study during intersessions and summers.

A guiding principle of the new community college is a move away from the traditional remediation/credit divide, offering instead an alternative model of required credit-based coursework for all first-year students. Other defining features of the model include: a required first-year core curriculum; the restructuring of semesters into shorter modules; the incorporation of student development and work-place education in the first-year program; and, the full-scale implementation of learning communities.

The educational program will merge the developmental and disciplinary expertise of college faculty and staff, especially in the first year. All freshmen will take the college's first-year core curriculum—an integrated academic and occupational curriculum. The core will consist of three blocks of three courses each. Each block will last for five weeks and include three components. In the first, the "City Seminar," case studies focused on New York City will connect work in reading and writing, quantitative reasoning and Group Workspace (structured time for students to work on assignments). The second component, a Professional Studies course, will consider the majors specific to the college, and will address oral communication, research, and managing information. In the third component, Math Topics, the courses will be designed to provide challenging math content that is relevant to all majors at the college. Continuing assessment of strengths and weaknesses will enable students to move into an appropriate math sequence based on their prospective majors.

Students will register in a full-time program of study grounded in content but with no pre-determined credit value. The number of credits that students earn through the completion of each of the modules in the first-year program will be determined by the quantity and quality of the work they produce. That work, captured in an ePortfolio, will be reviewed by a team of faculty and credit will be awarded on a sliding scale. It will be necessary to determine the number of credits that will be considered as evidence of satisfactory completion of the core requirement, and to establish policies and procedures for determining the status of students who fail to earn minimally satisfactory credits at the end of the first two semesters.

The second year moves students fully into their majors. Courses will follow an 8-week calendar, with students taking two courses in their major and either 1) a program-specific internship and an additional liberal arts course or 2) clinical studies. Prescribed pathways for each major will continue to be highly structured as students fulfill degree requirements in a timely way. The model of the full second- and third-year programs will be fleshed out for each major when a final decision is made about the majors and their degree status (A.A., A.S., A.A.S.).

An institutional commitment to professional and curriculum development is central to the success of the educational model. The college will recognize the importance of faculty collaboration and shared complementary expertise. The City Seminars will be developed and taught in teams comprised of disciplinary, reading and writing, and quantitative/math faculty. Linked courses, likewise, will necessitate close collaboration of faculty from related disciplines. Proposed curriculum will be brought to a curriculum team that includes faculty from other disciplines, reading, writing and quantitative specialists, and student development specialists. All faculty and staff will have a role in ensuring that courses within a program build on each other.

After the first year the college will implement an annual Summer Institute for faculty and staff that will serve as a cross-departmental forum for sharing materials, curricular innovations, and feedback from students and for reviewing progress toward the college's goals.

Student Services

The goal of college preparation, progress to degree, and completion will shape the culture of every office that provides services—admissions, financial aid, counseling—to admitted students.

Student advisement will play a central role in the new community college. Student cohorts organized for the first-year program will each be assigned an advisor who will be, at the same time, one of their first-year core faculty. During "Group Workspace" these faculty, with support from student services staff, will hold individual and small group advisement sessions to follow up on attendance, academic performance, social integration, and other issues. Through the summer program, and these advisory sessions, students will become familiar with college policies and procedures, degree requirements, on-campus support services and services linked to external partners. Also, they will begin to develop educational, personal, and career goals.

An important feature of the new college will be its articulation agreements with baccalaureate programs. All students will receive information about these agreements in their interviews and as they begin to develop educational goals. During the second year, students who intend to transfer will participate in transfer advisement sessions in which staff will help them complete the applications and connect with faculty and staff at the receiving college.

To ensure that students receive the services they need, the college will seek to establish partnerships as well with community-based organizations that have a record of success in helping individuals apply for benefits and programs, including health insurance, nutrition, federal and state subsidies for childcare, housing assistance and tax credits.

In addition, to encourage student interaction, the college will develop a wide range of co-curricular activities and clubs to enable students to develop leadership skills, make connections with other students, staff and faculty, and have a strong voice in college governance.

Fields of Study

The fields of study, and the majors that derive from those fields, were considered in the context of their likely impact on retention and graduation rates, their relevance to developing and sustaining the future of New York City, probable student interest and economic opportunity. The choices followed many hours of research and were suggested, confirmed and/or reinforced through consultation with people in the field, at CUNY and across the city, state and country.

For purposes of research and discussion, possible majors were divided into Liberal Arts, Health and Human Services, Information Studies and Urban Systems (i.e., urban infrastructure and issues of sustainability). Many of the programs are technology-rich and reflect concerns about the environment, the health and well-being of our populace, the needs of the business community, and the urban experience. Many of them complement each other, strengthening the possibilities for interdisciplinarity. Each curriculum will include intensive and early field work, place-based learning, and/or internships. And each highly structured major will lead to employment or transfer to a baccalaureate program.

As the college opens, twelve majors (with tentative titles) are recommended: Nursing, Surgical Technology, Environmental Technology, Energy Services Management, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Information Studies, Geographic Information Systems, Supply Chain Management (including Logistics), Community Health Worker, Disability Studies, Urban Education and Urban Studies.

The Office of Partnerships

A Partnership Office will focus on developing and sustaining relationships with industry, employers, community organizations and government agencies for purposes of curriculum planning and developing internship and employment opportunities. In the partnership paradigm the employer, or industry, or organization, works with the college faculty to develop curriculum. They also provide hands-on training for students in relevant college programs. This facilitates the college's emphasis on the integration of work-based and classroom learning. It gives students a leg up in future job searches, and it can ensure the company a steady source of skilled workers. The Partnership Office will be staffed by specialists in different sectors of employment.

Accountability

In order to approach accountability from a whole-college perspective, we propose to locate accountability and institutional research in a Center for College Effectiveness that will continually disseminate information derived from data analysis to faculty, students, staff and administrators as well as college and university officials.

Any evaluation of the new college will take place within the framework of the Chancellor's Performance Management Process. The defining goal will be the graduation of students with an associate degree who are prepared for work and/or for success in a baccalaureate program. We propose an initial target of 30% graduation and readiness for next steps, within three years – commencing with the first entering class. Our four-year target will be 35% and our fifth year target 40%. Goals are also set for the CUNY Proficiency Exam, licensure or certification exams and employment or enrollment in further education.

The College must seek accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and therefore we recommend that a Standing Committee on Accountability and Self-Study be established to oversee the ongoing review of all aspects of the college's operations and effectiveness, including annual review of programs and majors, academic and student support services, articulation, accreditation, faculty and staff performance and resource management.

Technology

Technology will not replace but will extend and enhance access, feedback and interaction. It will extend contact with faculty, student peers, and advisors, provide new outlets for socializing and extracurricular activity and augment classroom instruction. It will enhance individualized instruction, collaborative learning, community, and cross-curricular connection. The required technology will not place unusual demands on infrastructure, networks, or users. A laptop leasing program would ensure a level of compatibility, but, short of that, laptops and ubiquitous access through wireless networks will suffice, providing that access includes a course management system, a social network, and additional online tools like wikis, blogs and podcasts.

Facility

The new facility will be designed to U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED) silver certification, as are all new CUNY buildings in line with PlaNYC 2030. The instructional space will be designed for maximum flexibility; the laboratories will include software that can be utilized by multiple academic areas. Office space will be clustered to foster interdisciplinary collaborations and a centrally located teaching and learning commons will function as a "hub."

The North Hall Building, at Tenth Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street in Manhattan, currently in use by John Jay College, has been identified as the most likely site for the new community college. It will be emptied in 2011 when John Jay occupies the new building currently under construction nearby. Its location and allowable space make it a prime candidate for a public/private partnership.