

Testimony of Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Wendy Hensel

The City University of New York

**Higher Education Committee Hearing on
Addressing Obstacles Facing Transfer Students**

Monday, June 10, 2024

Good afternoon Chair Dinowitz and other members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education, staff, and guests. I am Wendy Hensel, Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost of The City University of New York. I am joined this afternoon by CUNY's Vice Chancellor for Academic and Faculty Affairs, Dr. Alicia Alvero, and Dr. Sangeeta Bishop, current Faculty Transfer Fellow and former department chair at the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

In Academic Year 2022-23, nearly 9,000 students transferred from a CUNY community college to a CUNY 4-year college program. We are here today to share with you the transformational progress that CUNY has made over the last several years toward the seamless transfer of students between our community, comprehensive, and senior colleges. We will also outline the work that remains to be done and our full commitment to its successful completion. CUNY's founding legislation makes clear that the university system was created in part to facilitate the seamless transfer of our students between associate and bachelor's degree programs. We are motivated not only by this understanding, but also by the moral imperative that the time, resources, and effort our students expend to achieve academic credit and complete their degrees anywhere at CUNY should be recognized fully everywhere across our system. I also note that two of us sitting here have experienced these issues as parents watching our children struggle through a transfer process in which they have lost credits at CUNY and elsewhere. We understand firsthand the challenges and frustrations faced by transfer students, and we are dedicated to ensuring a seamless experience for all CUNY students.

Transfer Initiatives Prior to 2022

While my testimony will focus on the strategic transfer initiative we began in 2022, that was by no means the beginning of our work in this space. For example, in 2013, CUNY's General Education Pathways Initiative was launched with support from a resolution by the CUNY Board of Trustees to facilitate the transferability of general education credits -- coursework that every CUNY student is required to take for degree completion. This work was expanded with philanthropic support to identify more than 1,000 discipline-specific major gateway courses guaranteed to transfer seamlessly within CUNY for credit. At the same time, thanks to support

and collaboration with Ithaca S&R, Lexa Logue, who previously held my position, the staff at Lehman College, and key philanthropic partners, we have developed a tool known as CUNY Transfer Explorer, which provides information on how any course at CUNY transfers to any other CUNY college. It also reflects useful trends and outcome data on transfer to bring transparency to the process.

In addition to these central led efforts, there also have been several extremely effective collaborations at the campus level to affect the seamless transfer of students within specific majors and specific schools. For example, Bronx Community College, Guttman Community College, and Hostos Community College each established blanket articulation agreements with Lehman College that guarantee a minimum of 60 credits will be applied to the bachelor's degree in many common disciplines, resulting in admission with junior status. In addition, several multi-college academies were created, including the CUNY Justice Academy at John Jay, the Baruch Business Academy for business administration majors across four community colleges, the Online Psychology Academy at the School for Professional Studies, and the Urban Academy at CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies. These academies provide seamless transfer from community colleges and include many wrap-around services that facilitate engagement between the community and senior colleges before students matriculate. These programs have been well received and are extremely successful.

It is also important to note that our Accelerate, Complete and Engage (ACE) program -- the baccalaureate version of ASAP -- aims to double timely baccalaureate completion rates not only for first-time freshmen, but also for transfer students with an associate's degree. In FY22, based on outstanding outcomes at John Jay and Lehman, ACE expanded to four additional senior colleges: York, City Tech, CSI, and Queens. The first transfer cohort at Lehman admitted in fall 2019 realized a two-year graduation rate of 61% vs. 30% for the comparison group of students. We are extremely appreciative of the city's \$8.2M allocation for ACE and \$2M for Medgar Evers' CHAMPSS program in FY 24, which allowed us to serve approximately 3,250 students. However, this funding has never been baselined, which significantly hampers our ability to implement these programs effectively. As of today, only \$1M has been allocated in the FY 25 city budget for both programs.

The 2022 "One CUNY" Initiative

While these and other efforts have improved transferability, the first comprehensive initiative to address the universal transfer of credits within each major was launched in late 2022 and memorialized in CUNY's 2023 strategic plan. Entitled "One CUNY," this initiative comprehensively addresses transfer through curriculum alignment within each major, the development of transparent policies and efficient technology, and the implementation of best practices for the retention, advisement, and advancement of transfer students. In January 2023, the CUNY Board of

Trustees endorsed this approach by unanimously passing a resolution charging the university with making student transfer within the same major from a community to senior college seamless by December 2024. I am pleased to report that we are on track to accomplish this goal.

A key challenge to the full transferability of credits within each major is the lack of coordination and alignment of academic programs across colleges and schools at CUNY. Recognizing the importance of faculty governance and the faculty's primary role in developing curriculum, in December 2022, CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs partnered with the University Faculty Senate to reimagine curricular alignment across the system. By identifying with disciplinary faculty the universal core competencies within each major that should be achieved within the first two years of the degree path, we will ensure that our community college students retain credits within the major and secure junior standing when transferring to the same major at a CUNY senior college. We began by tackling our largest transfer majors, which account for 85% of all transfer students, and we will continue this process until all majors are addressed. In addition, all new programs developed in the future will be fully aligned across CUNY before receiving approval to launch. Our approach is unique, has been embraced by our faculty, and already has been identified as a potential national model for other systems.

Nevertheless, aligning core competencies and course work alone will not solve the transfer problem. We must also tackle the numerous intentional and unintentional ways in which our policies and systems operate to impede transfer. For this purpose, last year we established a new Transfer Committee on Academic Policy to review existing policies and identify new policies that will support our transfer students throughout their academic journey. For example, we are working on a policy to ensure that the course equivalencies in place at the time a community college student first enrolls in CUNY remain valid until they transfer to a baccalaureate program to avoid unnecessary credits or courses that do not contribute to progress in their major. We likewise are thoroughly evaluating the transfer process from the student's perspective beginning with the transfer application and continuing through admission and registration at a four-year college. We are identifying obstacles and forming cross-functional teams to develop targeted solutions that address issues ranging from technological enhancements to improvements in the advisement process.

We know that to succeed, transfer students also must have the wrap-around support they need when they first begin their journey at a four-year institution. This transition period is a critical juncture when students simultaneously begin to take more advanced courses and lose some of the extra support that is provided at community colleges. CUNY is working on several measures in this space, including a pilot transfer peer mentor program in Fall 2024 that will embed transfer mentors at two community colleges and a senior college. Mentors will work closely with academic advisers across all three institutions to provide transfer students with the

information, resources, and most importantly, the support necessary to create a sense of belonging during their transition.

As I mentioned earlier, CUNY Transfer Explorer is a transformative tool that provides students information and transparency. The transferability of CUNY and non-CUNY courses, credits for prior learning, and advanced placement exams is now clear and accessible across the system. Students can identify how their credits will transfer to specific majors at each college before transferring to help them make the best decisions. Notably, CUNY Transfer Explorer is not just for students; it also serves as an important resource for academic advisers, faculty, and college administrators. Our goal is to have community college students indicate their transfer plan when they enroll so that we can integrate this critical information into our advisement software and enable four-year colleges to provide proactive support from the beginning. Transfer Explorer also contains publicly available leaderboards that indicate how long transfer admission usually takes, the percentage of graduates by transfer and non-transfer status, and much more. CUNY is committed to further enhancing Transfer Explorer's impact and will continue to add features and data to this tool.

One critical challenge we have is our students' limited access to academic and career advisers, which can acutely affect the success and ease of transfer. While our specialized programs like College Discovery, ASAP, ACE, and SEEK maintain low student-adviser ratios, the ratios at senior colleges are significantly higher. While we appreciate the one-time funding we have received from the Council to address this challenge, the necessity for additional *baselined* funding for academic and career advisers cannot be overstated. Advancements in advisement technologies and analytics can alleviate some of the workload each advisor carries, but the ability to dedicate personalized time to each student remains essential, particularly for transfer students. Improved data means little if there is no advisor available to act on the information.

I conclude by noting that our efforts to improve the transfer experience are yielding positive results. Fall 2024 transfer student enrollment is currently up by 6.9% compared to the same period last year. By December 2024, we will have achieved the full transfer of credits earned within the same major for most of our community college students, a goal established by the Board of Trustees last year. Importantly, our work will not stop there. Transfer will continue to be at the forefront of every conversation and prospective curricular decision, as reflected by its prominence in our 2023-2030 Strategic Plan – CUNY Lifting New York. We know that addressing the transfer challenge requires a comprehensive and holistic approach, and we are confident that we have the strategies in place across the system now to finally reach this goal on behalf of our students.

Testimony of Eli Dvorkin
Editorial & Policy Director, Center for an Urban Future
Before the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
on
“How NYC Policymakers Can Boost Transfer Student Success at CUNY”
June 10, 2024

Good morning. I'm Eli Dvorkin, editorial and policy director of the Center for an Urban Future, an independent think tank focused on creating a stronger and more inclusive economy in New York. Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and members of the committees for the opportunity.

For thousands of New York City public high school graduates each year, the most accessible path to a bachelor's degree—and with it, a major boost to economic mobility—is to enter CUNY as a community college student and then transfer to a four-year institution.

However, most CUNY students who intend to transfer and complete a bachelor's won't reach that finish line. Roughly eight of every nine new community college students at CUNY intend to transfer and complete at least a bachelor's degree, while only about one in nine does so within six years.

Completion rates for transfer students are notably lower for Black and Hispanic students: whereas 52.4 percent of white students graduated within three years after transferring, the rates were 44 percent for Black students and 47 percent for Hispanic students. And transfer performance is wildly uneven across CUNY's dozen senior colleges. Three-year graduation rates following transfer range from a high of 66.6 percent at Baruch College to just 26.5 percent at City Tech.

There are challenges at every point in the transfer process. Many who originally intend to springboard from a CUNY community college to a four-year institution never transfer at all. A smaller number are accepted but do not enroll. Others do transfer, but are unable to complete their degrees.

There are issues with credits being lost when transfer pathways aren't baked into curriculum design. The transfer application process itself is hugely cumbersome. And too few faculty and administrative staff have the knowledge and tools needed to help students navigate the transfer experience seamlessly.

Fortunately, CUNY is already doing a lot to address these challenges, as you've just heard from our colleagues at CUNY.

Our research suggests that CUNY's interventions are working. For instance, the rate of transfer students graduating within three years of transfer increased from 38.7 percent in 2012 to 49.2 percent in 2019. Every racial group has registered three-year completion rate gains during this period. And more recent initiatives, like the expansion of CUNY's T-Rex tool for navigating transfer pathways and the launch of a new peer mentorship program will help boost outcomes further.

But CUNY will struggle to achieve the progress needed without a new level of support from the City of New York.

That starts with fully funding CUNY in the FY 2025 budget. The mayor's executive budget cuts nearly \$84.9 million in city funds for CUNY, compared to last year's adopted budget. The Council should do everything possible to reverse these cuts and enhance funding for the evidence-backed CUNY programs that are working to boost college and career success.

Arguably the most effective option to help boost transfer student success is a simple one: baseline funding for additional academic and peer advisers at CUNY. Current ratios of students to advisers are unacceptably high and limit the effectiveness of other city and state investments in college-going.

The Adams administration and City Council should consolidate support for improvements in CUNY's transfer process by launching a new CUNY Transfer Accelerator initiative, which would invest \$5 million annually in operationalizing and scaling up to all 25 colleges the effective tools, supports, and practices that are already delivering results.

Given how many transfer students struggle when they enter a senior college setting, the city should commit to growing the small-scale but highly effective CUNY ACE senior college success program, which is boosting graduation rates by upward of 27 percent but reaches just 3 percent of eligible students today. The city should also consider piloting a new program—call it CUNY Flex—to provide wraparound supports to nontraditional students, including transfer students, older students, and part-time students who may otherwise be ineligible for ASAP or ACE.

At the same time, CUNY should consider additional steps of its own, such as creating Transfer Success teams at each college to harmonize curriculum development and transfer practices, improving data collection and dissemination on the transfer student experience, and launching a new Transfer Academy to boost the knowledge of faculty and administrators around transfer policies, building on the exciting Transfer Initiative Fellowship program.

Helping far more of CUNY's aspiring transfer students to beat the odds and complete a bachelor's degree is among the most effective steps that policymakers can take to boost economic mobility. With this Council's support, CUNY can accelerate and embed what's working system-wide and deliver better results for students at scale—and contribute even more to building a stronger and more equitable city.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Ibrahim Xavier Johnson. I thank this committee for your interest in successful transitions in CUNY. I am a veteran of the US Army and graduate of CUNY. When I started Lehman College, I had 140 undergraduate credits, from 4 different colleges and universities, with only an associate degree. After 2 years of intense academic instruction, I successfully graduated from Lehman College with a GPA of 3.7 and a cash award from the History Department.

CUNY students, like me, are primarily working class and face all the life barriers that often bar or delay graduation. Working class lives are beset by one crisis after another which can discourage many from pursuing higher education. CUNY offers many flexible solutions to help offset and mitigate the challenges of proletarian life. Any legislation that would help CUNY achieve its mission is welcomed. I am proud to be a CUNY graduate and I am proud to be part of this great city that houses CUNY.

Sincerely,

Ibrahim Xavier Johnson

Harlem resident and graduate of the Lehman College.



**New York City Council
Committee on Higher Education
Challenges to Transferring for CUNY Students
Submitted by Jared Martino, Young Invincibles
Monday, June 10th 2024**

Good afternoon. My name is Jared Martino and I am a graduate student in Higher Education Administration at SUNY Stony Brook University, the Coordinator for Activities and Engagement at Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology. I want to thank the New York City Council, especially the Committee on Higher Education, for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. I am here today to share my thoughts and experiences on the CUNY Transfer process on behalf of myself and as a NY Youth Advisory Board member at Young Invincibles.

I began my collegiate journey in 2016 as a SUNY student, and by the fall semester of 2018, I had begun my transfer process into the CUNY system. From the beginning of my collegiate career in the SUNY system, I felt comforted and capable due to the wealth of resources available and a clear understanding of what my degree progression would look like. While I recognize that the transfer process itself comes with challenges to that clarity, there are considerable opportunities for CUNY to improve this process and increase transfer student retention and persistence.

Upon beginning my experience at CUNY, I struggled with the lack of outreach to transfer students, and a number of fellow transfer students I met confirmed they shared this experience. Anecdotally, the most successful transfer students I noticed in my time were CUNY Associate to CUNY Bachelor transfer students who had already networked with current CUNY students and were able to learn more about the upcoming challenges they were to face from peers.

My own transfer acclimation process was based on applying the new student experience I had recently had at SUNY and challenging the limits of a Google search. Then I faced the largest challenge, the academic credit approval process. The time it took to have my credits evaluated by CUNY City College was significant, and it took weeks before I had concrete knowledge of what I had received credit for. Ultimately, a majority of the courses I had taken from SUNY were only accepted as elective credit, despite being for the same major and nonsensically covered a diverse range of course levels. Much of my time was spent retaking intro-level courses that were identical in content to intro-level courses that I took at SUNY, leaving me without the opportunity to apply my knowledge and expand my studies in higher-level courses and electives.

Since graduating from CUNY, I spent a year supporting first-generation college students toward their degree aspirations. I supported many students who elected to transfer into the CUNY system, all facing considerable challenges in a lack of communication, a lack of understanding of the entry process, and a lack of collegiate cultural capital. First-generation college students, in particular, are at risk of this pitfall, as the considerable amount of red tape, and formal policy required to maintain matriculation at universities can be dizzying. The CUNY transfer process has struggled to bridge the gap between where

aspiring college students are, and where they need to be to succeed. We often consider the transfer process as a leftover, treating these students as an afterthought whose educational aspirations motivate them to succeed regardless of any challenge. Yet many transfer students struggle with the same challenges new college students face, yet are given minimal support and resources to overcome said barriers.

I recommend the New York City Council and the Committee on Higher Education expand transfer resources on campus and funding to better serve students entering the CUNY transfer system. I also recommend that the CUNY system model transfer resources more heavily through programs like HCAP Transfer Pipeline Program at Hunter College, which supports Asian American first-semester transfer students with direct peer mentorship, and community development events to ease the collegiate transition process.

YOUNG INVINCIBLES

New York City Council
Committee on Higher Education
Oversight Hearing on Transferring at CUNY
Submitted by Onyekachi Okeke, Young Advocate, Young Invincibles
Monday, June 10, 2024

Good morning everyone. My name is Onyekachi Okeke, and I am a Senior attending Hunter College studying Human Biology & Sociology. I am also a proud alumna of the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

As someone who attended a 2-year and 4-year school, the transferring process between both schools was a difficult and arduous one. After leaving BMCC and entering Hunter, I found I was significantly struggling in almost every area (academically, financially, mentally, and personally). The first semester was one of my toughest semesters to date. I do not believe I had adequate support regarding advising; I had no one to explain to me how Degreeworks functioned and consequently, I picked random classes to fulfill the full-time requirement so I could qualify for student loans— a decision I still regret to this day. I picked classes that I shouldn't have been enrolled in due to the pressure of enrolling in classes right before the start of the semester. I am assured that if I had more support via an orientation or crucial advising, I would have not made those costly mistakes that negatively impacted me academically that semester. My academic standing was important because, at the time, I participated in the Community Scholars program, a specialized program for high-achieving transfer students. Through this program, I received help with choosing my major and having a mentor, which I believe helped me significantly. However, due to my low academic performance during my first semester, I was removed from the program. I wished that I could have had a second chance to redeem myself and remain in the program. Had I received more professional support from the program, I believe would've been able to stay and do much better afterward.

Additionally, at Hunter, I was mandated to take a Sociology 101 course to begin my Sociology minor. While I had already taken the class at BMCC, I discovered on Degreeworks that my Sociology 101 credit had not been fulfilled. I contacted the Vice President for Academic Affairs about this issue and thankfully she was able to obtain my previous transcript and manually update my Degreeworks so that my Sociology 101 requirement would be fulfilled. Unfortunately, I cannot say that others in my shoes had the same outcome when encountering this problem.

Another issue that I encountered was the difference in resources when transferring from BMCC to Hunter. At BMCC, I struggled daily – often, I endured the day with nothing to eat, no money to purchase anything, and, on top of this, I was unable to secure a job, both on or off-campus. I was blessed with the opportunity to learn about Single Stop, which is now known as the Advocacy and Resource Center, through a friend. It

had everything I needed and more. Through the substantial support of Single Stop, I obtained semesterly Metrocards (I was in dire need of this), food vouchers to purchase lunch from BMCC's cafeteria, groceries from the campus food pantry, and tax filing preparation services. I was so grateful for this help. But, the next year, when I transferred to Hunter, I was shocked that Hunter didn't have this resource center. Having Single Stop at Hunter College would have significantly helped with the previously mentioned resources.

My story is just one of thousands of students, who experience this but do not have a platform to share their sentiments. I am asking my City leaders today to hear my story, and fully invest in additional support for all CUNY campuses. Not only should every CUNY campus have a Single Stop or resource hub but also have increased transparency in credit transferring, and have access to counselors and advisors who clearly understand the transfer process so that the students are not wrongly advised or delayed in graduating.

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

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Name: Onyekachi Okeke

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I represent: Young Invincibles

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Name: Colin Chellman

Address: Senior Univ. Dean - Office of Applied

I represent: Evaluation & data Analytics Research

Address: CONY

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Name: Ibrahim Xavier Johnson

Address: _____, NY, NY 10030

I represent: myself

Address: N/A

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CUNY
3 of 3

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Name: Sangeeta Bishop, Prof. BMCC

Address: Faculty Transfer Fellow

I represent: CUNY

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CUNY 2 of 3

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Name: Alicia Alvero

Address: Vice Chancellor for Academic and Faculty Affairs

I represent: CUNY

Address: _____

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CUNY Panel
1 of 3

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Name: Wendy Hensel

Address: Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost

I represent: CUNY

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Name: ELI DVORKIN

Address: 80 8th AVE

I represent: CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE

Address: _____

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Date: 6.10.24

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Name: Jen Gaboumy

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn 11220

I represent: PSC CIVIC

Address: 25 Broadway 10004

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 in favor in opposition

Date: June 10, 2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: 130-10 140 Street

I represent: Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Address: Suite 1 Jamaica NY 11436