

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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Monday, November 24, 2025

Start: 1:05 P.M.

Recess: 2:46 P.M.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor,  
Hearing Room 2

B E F O R E: Hon. Eric Dinowitz, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher  
Gale A. Brewer  
Oswald Feliz  
Christopher Marte

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
A P P E A R A N C E S

Sarah Truelsch,  
Assistant Dean for Policy Research, The City  
University of New York (CUNY)

Christine Brongniart,  
Executive Director of ASAP and ACE, The City  
University of New York (CUNY)

Allison Pease,  
Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic  
Affairs, John Jay College, The City University of  
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Jeffrey Rodus,  
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Senior Data Policy Researcher at Center for an  
Urban Future

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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1  
2 SERGEANT KANE: Good morning, ladies and  
3 gentlemen. This is a mic check for the Committee on  
4 Higher Education. Today's date is November 24, 2025.  
5 We are in Hearing Room 2, and this is being recorded  
6 by Mike Kane.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, welcome  
8 to today's New York City Council Hearing for the  
9 Committee on Higher Education. Please silence all  
10 cell phones and electronic devices. As a friendly  
11 reminder, please do not approach the dais. If you  
12 wish to participate in today's hearing, please fill  
13 out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms.

14 Chair, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: [GAVEL] Good  
16 afternoon, I am Council Member Eric Dinowitz, Chair  
17 of the Committee on Higher Education. Welcome to our  
18 hearing on today's Oversight Topic: Examining Student  
19 Graduation Rates at CUNY Campuses.

20 As a proud CUNY graduate as well as a  
21 proud husband of a CUNY graduate, son of a CUNY  
22 graduate, a brother of a CUNY graduate, the  
23 graduation rates at CUNY campuses are important to  
24 me. They're obviously 100% in my family, uh, they're  
25 important to this committee. And now, I have to say,

1 as a proud CUNY 50 Under 50, which is me now. I was  
2 going to do 40 under 40, but I just this Friday  
3 missed that cutoff, and they said, *You can't do it,*  
4 *you're too old.* So now I'm 50 under 50.

5  
6 But this is an important topic for this  
7 committee and, of course, for our city. Nationally,  
8 college graduation rates are not what we might expect  
9 or hope for. Looking at the just over full-time and  
10 part-time 2.3 million students who entered college in  
11 the United States for the first time in the fall of  
12 2018, about 71% who started at a public four-year  
13 institution graduated six years later.

14 So I just want to highlight that again,  
15 at a four-year institution, 71% who started at a  
16 *four-year* institution graduated in six years, and  
17 about 43% who started at a two-year public  
18 institution graduated six years later—that is last  
19 year in 2024. And looking at the results for all two  
20 and four-year students entering all US higher  
21 education institutions in the fall of 2018, the data  
22 show that only about 6% graduated after two years.  
23 13% after three years, and 44% after four years.  
24 Reasoning from these data, we can see that nationally  
25 speaking, a tiny percentage of presumably two-year

1 college students graduate in two years, and the  
2 majority of four-year college students do not  
3 graduate in four years.

4  
5 An article by John Marcus in the  
6 Hechinger Report summed up the national picture of  
7 college graduation rates in its title, which is:  
8 "Most college students don't graduate in four years,  
9 so college and the government count six years as  
10 'success.'"

11 It's a long political story as to why six  
12 years rather than four years became the norm for  
13 judging graduation rates several decades ago, but it  
14 gets even worse. The US Department of Education has  
15 gone one step further. It provides consumer  
16 information on its website for the "College  
17 Scorecard", a tool that compares colleges on many  
18 factors. One of those factors is an eight-year  
19 graduation rate, not even a six-year graduation rate,  
20 but an eight-year graduation rate. Or, as Marcus  
21 wrote in his article, "That's like judging the  
22 performance of an airline by the percentage of its  
23 flights that take up to twice as long as scheduled to  
24 reach their destinations." Marcus noted in his  
25 article that students are partly responsible for not

1 hitting the traditional four-year graduation goal of  
2 students seeking bachelor's degrees for a variety of  
3 reasons, including coming to college underprepared or  
4 unprepared; not taking a full load of courses each  
5 term; and having to meet other personal obligations,  
6 like working or taking care of family members while  
7 in school. But he also noted that colleges are partly  
8 responsible for their students' graduation issues for  
9 a variety of reasons, including not scheduling enough  
10 sections of required courses in a timely fashion,  
11 providing insufficient advising, and being  
12 unnecessarily stingy in accepting transfer credits.

13 David Bergeron, former acting assistant U.S.  
14 Secretary of Education for Postsecondary Education,  
15 observed that with more incoming students bringing in  
16 college credits they earned in high school through the  
17 College Board's Advanced Placement courses and  
18 through dual enrollment credits and other programs  
19 that let students earn college credit while in high  
20 school, "The question we should be asking is why does  
21 it even take four years? Why doesn't it just take  
22 three?" That's a powerful question, especially when  
23 we know that CUNY has many great college credit-  
24 bearing programs in place in New York City Public  
25

1 High School. We even did a hearing on them. And I  
2 even taught in schools that provided these courses.

3 So what are CUNY's graduation rates?

4 According to the data provided in the Mayor's  
5 Management Report for fiscal years 2018 through 2025,  
6 the six-year graduation rate for students earning an  
7 associate's degree has hovered around 37%, showing a  
8 slight increase and then a slight decrease across the  
9 eight-year span and ending up just a bit higher than  
10 it started.

11 Today, CUNY's six-year graduation rate  
12 for students earning an associate's degree is about  
13 36.5%. So let's look at this six-year graduation for  
14 students earning a bachelor's degree: For fiscal  
15 years 2018 through 2025, the six-year graduation rate  
16 has hovered around 60%, showing a slight increase and  
17 then a slight decrease across the eight-year span and  
18 ending up just a tiny bit higher than it started  
19 today--than it started out. Today, CUNY's six-year  
20 graduation rate for students earning a bachelor's  
21 degree is 57.9%.

22 So that was a lot of numbers, but here's  
23 a summary: About one-third of CUNY's associate degree  
24 students earn what their traditional 2-year degree in  
25

1  
2 six years. And just over half of CUNY's bachelor's  
3 degree students earn their traditionally 4-year  
4 degree in six years. Both of these CUNY graduation  
5 rates are lower than the national figures.

6 Interestingly, CUNY's graduation rates have been  
7 largely unaffected by the pandemic.

8 I'm looking forward to hearing how many  
9 CUNY students actually graduate on a traditional  
10 timeline—That is, how many two-year students  
11 graduate in two years and how many four-year college  
12 students graduate in four years.

13 Further, the Committee is interested in  
14 knowing what CUNY programs are in place to improve  
15 those numbers and what targets CUNY has set for  
16 itself—That is, what does CUNY believe those  
17 graduation rates should be? Finally, the Committee,  
18 as always, wants to know what additional support the  
19 City Council might need to provide.

20 I want to thank Adam Staropoli, my  
21 legislative and budget director; Jenna Klaus, my  
22 chief of staff; Julia Goldsmith-Pinkham, the  
23 committee's senior legislative counsel; and Regina  
24 Paul, the Committee's senior policy analyst. And a  
25 very special thank you to Jeff Rodus. This is his

1  
2 last CUNY hearing, and I'm sure he's very thrilled  
3 about this.

4 I swear you in, but I've made a solemn  
5 oath to Jeff. I'm going to raise my hand and swear I  
6 will be nice at this hearing. (LAUGHS) He has a  
7 request--he said, "Be nice." So, I'm saying for your  
8 final hearing, Jeff has been just not only a good  
9 friend to me, but a consummate public servant and has  
10 given so much of himself and his career to our city.  
11 So I just want to thank you, Jeff. We're sorry to see  
12 you go. But I think, like everyone, you're going to  
13 enjoy retirement. (LAUGHS)

14 I want to remind everyone who wants to  
15 testify in person that you must fill out an  
16 appearance card, which is located on the desk of the  
17 Sergeant at Arms near the entrance of the room.  
18 Please fill it out even if you've already registered  
19 to testify in advance. Public testimony will be  
20 limited to three minutes. My colleagues will limit  
21 their questions to five minutes.

22 Now I've already taken my oath to you,  
23 and now, according to the rules of the Council, I  
24 will administer the affirmation. Please raise your  
25 right hand. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the

1 whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in your  
2 testimony before this committee and respond honestly  
3 to council member questions?  
4

5 PANEL: (INAUDIBLE)

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. As a  
7 reminder to our witnesses, please state your name  
8 prior to your testimony for the record.

9 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Good afternoon,  
10 Chairperson Dinowitz. Thank you for the opportunity  
11 to speak with you today about the graduation rates at  
12 CUNY colleges. I am Sarah Truelsch, Assistant Dean  
13 for Policy Research in the University's Central  
14 Office. I am joined today by my colleagues Christine  
15 Brongniart, the University's Executive Director of  
16 CUNY ASAP and ACE, and Allison Pease, Provost and  
17 Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at John Jay  
18 College.

19 I would like to begin by describing  
20 CUNY's current graduation rates and putting them in  
21 the context of the last decade. I will briefly  
22 mention some high-level efforts that CUNY has  
23 undertaken to improve graduation rates before turning  
24 to my colleagues to provide more detail on how CUNY  
25 is working to increase persistence and completion.



1  
2 the pandemic, and the most recent first-year  
3 retention rates were the highest since 2019.

4           The trend in CUNY's associate degree  
5 graduation rates is similar. The six-year system  
6 graduation rate, that is, for the 2018 entering  
7 cohort, was 36.5%, down from 37.6% reported the  
8 previous year. Once again, the rate is likely  
9 influenced by the disruptions of the pandemic. And  
10 again, the longer term trend shows progress. The most  
11 recent six-year graduation rate for associate  
12 students is higher than it was six, seven, eight, and  
13 nine years earlier.

14           Although the longer term trend in  
15 associate graduation rates are positive, since 2016,  
16 more and more CUNY freshmen have been enrolling in  
17 bachelor's programs at CUNY senior colleges rather  
18 than in the community colleges. Many students who  
19 were more likely to graduate from community colleges  
20 in two to three years have made the decision to  
21 pursue their bachelor's degree directly out of high  
22 school and are now attending the senior colleges. The  
23 advantage of this enrollment shift is that it has  
24 given more students more direct pathways towards  
25 bachelor's degrees than in the past. This is a

benefit because bachelor's degrees are generally linked with higher wages and better job opportunities than associate degrees. In academic year 23-24, 67% of the undergraduate degrees CUNY awarded were bachelor's degrees, up from 59% 10 years ago.

Now turning towards plans to improve persistence and completion, in January of this year, CUNY's Central Office of Academic Affairs convened several working groups of faculty and administrators to recommend ways to improve retention and graduation and establish a common standard of care for all CUNY students. The group's draft report identifies strategies that are currently in place and promising, or those that are based on national best practices that aim to improve student persistence and completion. These include:

1. Integrating academic and career advisement to increase students' engagement, persistence, and timely completion by connecting their educational journey to larger life goals.
2. Increasing training and guidance for using the University's academic advising technology.
3. Increasing attention to and resources for courses with high failure and withdrawal rates. On top of

1 these University-wide efforts, the individual  
2 colleges have also undertaken efforts tailored to  
3 the needs of their individual student populations,  
4 some of which Provost Pease will discuss later. In  
5 addition, one of the main drivers of the  
6 substantial increases in CUNY's associate degree  
7 graduation rates over the past decade has been the  
8 expansion of the ASAP program, which my colleague,  
9 Christine Brongniart, will describe.  
10

11 That concludes my testimony. Thank you  
12 for your time. I now turn to Christine Brongniart to  
13 discuss ASAP and ACE.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Good  
15 afternoon, Chairperson Dinowitz and Members of the  
16 City Council Higher Education Committee. I am  
17 Christine Brongniart; I am the University's Executive  
18 Director of CUNY ASAP and ACE. Thank you for the  
19 opportunity to speak with you today about CUNY's  
20 Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, better known  
21 as ASAP, and Accelerate, Complete and Engage, or ACE,  
22 an adaptation of the ASAP model that supports  
23 bachelors-seeking students. These models have proven  
24 to have a remarkable impact on participating  
25 students' retention, persistence, and completion

1 trajectories, and demonstrate what is possible when  
2 robust financial, personal, and individualized  
3 resources are proactively provided to students in  
4 real time as barriers to their persistence emerge.

5  
6 This program model has transformed the  
7 lives of thousands of New Yorkers and stands as a  
8 national model for student success. Since its  
9 inception in 2007, ASAP has served nearly a total of  
10 120,000 unique students, ACE, just over 8,000 unique  
11 students, and has been replicated with fidelity at  
12 nearly 70 institutions across nine states. In the  
13 last year, the model has been scaled across SUNY, as  
14 well as replicated across the North Carolina  
15 Community College system through an unprecedented \$35  
16 million investment from philanthropy.

17 The programs continue to demonstrate  
18 remarkable impact across CUNY and have now  
19 recuperated their enrollment health in the post-COVID  
20 period. This past fall, both ASAP and ACE exceeded  
21 our fall 2025 new student recruitment target by 10.5%  
22 in ASAP and 20% in ACE. This is on the heels of our  
23 robust enrollment performance last academic year,  
24 where ASAP enrolled 22,554 students representing 42%

1 of CUNY's first-time full-time associate degree  
2 seeking population.  
3

4 City support for ASAP remains the largest  
5 baselined allocation to CUNY, supporting an annual  
6 enrollment of up to 24,000 program students and  
7 maintaining a current annual cost per student of  
8 \$3,391. ASAP is currently offered at nine of CUNY's  
9 associate degree granting institutions, and the model  
10 has been effectively adapted to a five-year  
11 bachelor's degree completion model at our  
12 comprehensive colleges, offering a seamless  
13 transition from ASAP to ACE. Due to continued support  
14 from the City and new funds provided by the State  
15 this fiscal year, ACE is offered at ten CUNY  
16 comprehensive and senior colleges, maintaining an  
17 annual cost per student of \$3,447.

18 Both ASAP and ACE have a doubling impact  
19 on degree completion rates when compared to non-  
20 program first-time freshmen. The fall 2021 ASAP  
21 cohort graduated at a three-year rate of 38.5% and a  
22 two-year rate of 22%. This compares favorably to the  
23 prior cohort, which graduated at a three-year rate of  
24 36.2% and a two-year rate of 21.7%. Note that these  
25 cohorts include first time freshmen, continuing, and

1 transfer students with less than 21 credits. When  
2 looking only at first-time freshman graduation  
3 performance for the fall 2021 cohort, ASAP continues  
4 to more than double three-year completion rates when  
5 compared to non-ASAP students 35% vs. 15%.

6  
7 While ASAP's graduation performance has  
8 declined since its ambitious expansion from 4,000 to  
9 25,000 students per year, an updated analysis of  
10 ASAP's impact across the fall 2017 and the fall 2021  
11 cohorts confirmed that ASAP continues to have a  
12 large, significant, and positive impact on all  
13 subgroups. While graduation rates vary by subgroup,  
14 all, regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender,  
15 graduate at much higher rates in the program than  
16 without it, ranging from an estimated 15.6 to 27.9  
17 percentage points higher. As ASAP has scaled to serve  
18 nearly a third of all incoming freshmen and even a  
19 larger percentage of Hispanic and Black freshmen, it  
20 has contributed to notable increases in CUNY three-  
21 year system graduation rates, with the biggest  
22 improvements amongst students of color.

23 ACE, which launched first at John Jay  
24 College of Criminal Justice in 2015, has also  
25 demonstrated remarkable outcomes for both first-time

1 freshmen and associate degree holding transfer  
2 students, with freshmen students graduating at a  
3 four-year rate of 45.7% and transfer students at a  
4 two-year rate of 69.7% for the most recent cohorts.  
5 More striking are the five-year bachelor's completion  
6 rates for students at our comprehensive colleges who  
7 move seamlessly from the associate to bachelor's  
8 track—75.2% of these students complete their  
9 bachelor's within five years.

11 Like ASAP, ACE has been rigorously  
12 evaluated, confirming that the program had a  
13 significant impact on four-year graduation rates, and  
14 more strikingly, the observed differences between ACE  
15 students and controls were almost three times as high  
16 for Black and Hispanic or Latino/a students than  
17 white students.

18 ASAP and ACE offer a comprehensive  
19 support package that ensures all barriers to  
20 maintaining full-time enrollment are alleviated.  
21 Personalized academic advisement is at the center of  
22 the delivery model, and investment in these programs  
23 has provided meaningful staffing infrastructure and  
24 produced viable student success approaches that are  
25 driving professional advisement reforms system-wide.

1  
2           Due to the continuous support of the  
3 City, new support from the State this fiscal year,  
4 and modest private funds, we've been able to grow ACE  
5 to support over 4,400 students this academic year,  
6 including the launch of new ACE programs at Hunter  
7 and Brooklyn Colleges.

8           Experts agree that ASAP and ACE are sound  
9 long-term investments. As noted in previous  
10 testimony, the return on investment is high. For  
11 every \$1 invested by taxpayers in ASAP, \$3.50 is  
12 returned in increased tax revenue and reduced social  
13 service costs.

14           A recent report from Columbia  
15 University's Center on Poverty and Social Policy  
16 examined the long-term benefits and costs from  
17 participation in the ACE, estimating the net social  
18 benefits of nearly \$43,000 per CUNY ACE participant,  
19 primarily driven by greater lifetime earnings. The  
20 report also noted intergenerational benefits for  
21 children of ACE participants, who grew up in higher-  
22 earning families because of the program, bringing the  
23 total net social benefits to over \$125,000 per  
24 participant.

1  
2           There remains enormous potential to  
3 continuously invest in the ACE model CUNY-wide, as  
4 this program model exemplifies the transformational  
5 impact that such comprehensive and personalized  
6 approaches can have on both individual students'  
7 graduation outcomes and on tangible shifts in  
8 colleges' completion culture.

9           To further elaborate on the institutional  
10 perspective, I'm happy to turn testimony over to John  
11 Jay College of Criminal Justice's Provost, Allison  
12 Pease.

13           CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, and  
14 before you begin your testimony, I just want to note  
15 that we have been joined by Council Member Gale  
16 Brewer, and on Zoom, we have Council Member Oswald  
17 Feliz.

18           PROVOST PEASE: Good afternoon,  
19 Chairperson Dinowitz, Councilwoman Brewer, and all  
20 Members of the City Council Higher Education  
21 Committee. I am Allison Pease, Provost and Senior  
22 Vice President for Academic Affairs at John Jay  
23 College of Criminal Justice, the alma mater and  
24 current college of many of your constituents.

1  
2 I want to provide a brief description of  
3 John Jay College, which is celebrating its 60th  
4 anniversary, share how we have significantly  
5 increased graduation rates over the last ten years,  
6 and highlight a few of the interventions that have  
7 helped more students graduate.

8 Located on the Upper West Side of  
9 Manhattan, John Jay is a national leader in criminal  
10 justice, forensic science, and forensic psychology,  
11 and our mission is centered around justice. We enroll  
12 14,000 undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students  
13 in 36 bachelor's programs, 13 master's programs, and  
14 three doctoral programs. John Jay graduates are first  
15 responders, public safety professionals, and elected  
16 officials, and agency leaders in the public sector,  
17 and in the private sector, they excel in law,  
18 finance, healthcare, media, and tech.

19 Our undergraduate population is 15%  
20 Asian, 25% Black, 42% Hispanic, and 18% White. Sixty-  
21 five percent of our students are Pell Grant  
22 recipients, 72% receive Pell and TAP, and 50% are the  
23 first in their families to attend college. According  
24 to the Law School Admissions Council, John Jay ranks  
25 5th in the U.S. for sending Black applicants to law

1 school, 13th for sending Hispanic applicants to law  
2 school, and is in the top 10 among American  
3 universities in student social mobility, according to  
4 the pioneering research led by Professor of Economics  
5 Raj Chetty of Harvard University. This year, John Jay  
6 was ranked number three in Top Performers on Social  
7 Mobility in the North, according to *U.S. News and*  
8 *World Report*.

10 In 2017, when President Karol V. Mason  
11 arrived at John Jay College, the four-year graduation  
12 rate was 26% and the six-year graduation rate was  
13 44%. She galvanized the college leadership to develop  
14 a Vision for Student Success as the College's top  
15 priority. I am proud to say that, in the eight years  
16 that have followed, our graduation rates have climbed  
17 significantly. We increased our four-year graduation  
18 rate by 14 percentage points to 40%. Our six-year  
19 graduation rate increased by 12 percentage points to  
20 reach 56%, though it fell to 53% last year,  
21 reflecting the loss of momentum students experienced  
22 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our four-year transfer  
23 graduation rate is 67%, the second highest in New  
24 York State. The National Center for Education  
25 Statistics, IPEDS, comparison group report of 2024

1 shows that at John Jay, Black students graduate at  
2 11% percentage points and Hispanic students at 7%  
3 percentage points above national peer institutions.  
4 We have been dogged and intentional about ensuring  
5 that we support increasing numbers of students to  
6 graduate, and to graduate more quickly, so they earn  
7 more money over their lifetimes.  
8

9 To fund these efforts, we have worked  
10 with philanthropy to pilot programs and test what  
11 works. Annually, we raise between \$6 million and \$8  
12 million. We are incredibly grateful to the City  
13 Council and New York City, which funds our two cohort  
14 programs with the highest graduation rates, APPLE  
15 Corps and ACE. There are five key practices and  
16 programs that have demonstrably contributed to  
17 student success, and I am just going to briefly run  
18 through those.

19 1. *Completion of Upper-Division Students Program*  
20 (*CUSP*): Counterintuitively, we discovered that  
21 students with 90+ credits were failing to graduate.  
22 We worked with DataKind, which used machine learning  
23 to identify students at risk of dropping out. Now we  
24 can focus on those students who most need support and  
25 help them cross the finish line. CUSP, supported by

1 the Gray Foundation and the Price Foundation,  
2 increased senior student graduation rates from 54% to  
3 86% in its first year. Between 2019 and 2024, John  
4 Jay graduated 3,038 more students than predicted.  
5 That's about 500 additional college graduates per  
6 year—CUSP was featured in a New York Times article.

7  
8 2. *Accelerate Complete Engage (ACE)*: ACE has been  
9 well described already. I would simply add that a  
10 2023 study found four-year graduation rates among  
11 ACE students at John Jay College were 16  
12 percentage points higher than among the comparison  
13 group.

14 3. *APPLE Corps*: APPLE Corps is a partnership with the  
15 NYPD that serves a cohort of 100 students per year  
16 who receive annual stipends, travel support,  
17 academic and career advising, while they explore  
18 public service, leadership, justice, and equity  
19 issues in policing and community relations in NYC.  
20 The four-year graduation rate of APPLE Corps  
21 students in 2023 was 70%, 30 percentage points  
22 higher than the college average.

23 4. Next, a promising practice—*Winter and Summer*  
24 *Acceleration*: Our Acceleration program helps first  
25 and second-year students who are not on track to

1 graduate in four years earn credits during summer  
2 or winter to increase their academic momentum and  
3 get back on track. We started this for STEM  
4 students about six years ago and then broadened  
5 the program during the pandemic to freshmen and  
6 sophomores. This program reversed a downward trend  
7 in first-year retention from 75.8% in 2021, the  
8 (INAUDIBLE) of the pandemic, to 80.9% in 2022. The  
9 program reaches out proactively to invite at-risk  
10 students to tuition-free courses and provides time  
11 management workshops and tutoring. In the three  
12 years we have run this intervention for freshmen  
13 and sophomores, we have seen that if a first-year  
14 student receives Acceleration support, their four-  
15 year graduation rate rises to 51%. If a second-year  
16 student receives Acceleration support, their four-  
17 year graduation rate rises to 61%. This is a  
18 promising practice, particularly in that it only  
19 costs about \$1,000 per student. We are actively  
20 fundraising to support this work.

21  
22 5. My last intervention: *CUNY Justice Academy*: The  
23 CUNY Justice Academy is a dual admission program  
24 with CUNY's seven community colleges. The program  
25 has proven to increase the number of students

1  
2 completing their associate's degrees at their  
3 colleges of origin, and provides a shorter time to  
4 graduation once at John Jay. This program was the  
5 subject of an NYU Research Alliance study in which  
6 they found that "John Jay College of Criminal  
7 Justice holds the distinction of being the CUNY  
8 college that graduates the highest percentage of  
9 transfer students of color—43% compared to just  
10 29% in the rest of the City—as well as the school  
11 that serves the highest proportion of students of  
12 color. Both facts underscore the value of how John  
13 Jay supports its transfer students, through  
14 policies, teaching practices, and program  
15 culture."

16 That concludes my testimony. I am sincerely  
17 grateful not just for your interest in our work  
18 but for your support of ACE and APPLE Corps, each  
19 of which has changed not just individual lives,  
20 but those of our students' families and  
21 communities, and therefore contributed to New York  
22 City. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you so much.

24 My favorite thing, of course, about working in  
25 government is all the acronyms that we have to learn.

ALL: (LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So we heard from John Jay specifically, but what are the year-by-year graduation rates at CUNY for students and associate degree and bachelor's degree programs?

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I think I can speak to that by year-by-year, do you mean... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Two-year graduation rates... (CROSS-TALK)

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: (INAUDIBLE) graduation rate... (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Three, four...

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Oh, yep (INAUDIBLE)...

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Associate, bachelor's...

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: For our bachelor's students from the most recent cohort-- well, we can refer to the same group that we're reporting on for the six-year graduation rates. That's the cohort that entered in 2018. Their four-year graduation rate was 35.3%. Their five-year

1  
2 graduation rate was 52.4%, and their six-year  
3 graduation rate was 57.9%.

4 So there's quite a large jump between the  
5 fourth year and the fifth year, and a smaller  
6 increase between the fifth year and the sixth year.

7 For associate degree students, again, we  
8 can start with the cohort that we report on for the  
9 Mayor's Management Report. That's the group that  
10 entered college as freshmen in 2018. The two-year  
11 graduation rate was 11.8%. The three-year graduation  
12 rate was 24.9%. So again, quite a large jump between  
13 two years and three-year. The four-year was only  
14 slightly higher at 30.4%, the five-year at 31.4%, and  
15 the 6th year at 36.5%. So again, the biggest jump is  
16 between the second year and the third year. So the  
17 100% completion is what we call the 150% completion  
18 time.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Say that again  
20 about 100%?

21 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: The 100-- so in  
22 federal reporting, we call the two-year graduation  
23 rate sort of the, as you described, the two-year  
24 graduation rate for associate degrees as the 100%  
25 graduation. (CROSS-TALK)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And that's 11.8%?

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yes. Yes. And then the 150% rate is sort of the standard and most national federal reporting. So that's 50% more for. So that's the three-year graduation rate for associate students.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I do want to note in...

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yes...

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: In relation to the tests one you gave, that the graduation rates have remained relatively steady throughout-- before, during, and after COVID. And I do also want to point out that there were a lot of accommodations made, and we know there were a lot of discussions made about-- not just shifting to online, but the efforts made to ensure students passed their classes. And there was a lot of work done there. So I don't want to a glide over the impact of COVID, but it was, in terms of graduation rates, it seems, based on the data and based on the experience of students, it seems sort of minimally impacted, at least, the graduation rates-- not to speak of all the other impacts it had.

1  
2           So we know many CUNY students are non-  
3 traditional students who've stopped out of college  
4 for a term or have started college at a later age.  
5 How much has this pattern affected CUNY graduation  
6 rates?

7           ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: It's true that  
8 CUNY serves a wide variety of students coming in at  
9 many different points, at many different entry points  
10 to their college career.

11           Could I speak to the trends we discussed  
12 and the impact on graduation rates? (CROSS-TALK)

13           CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, sure.

14           ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Sure. So it's  
15 true that it's not so easy to say there's a single  
16 year in which we see a change related to COVID. But I  
17 think one thing that's really important to keep in  
18 mind is the lag we see in graduation rates. So the  
19 students we're now reporting on, as I mentioned, our  
20 2018 cohort, these are people who were sophomores in  
21 college, but the cohort that comes after them, they  
22 were freshmen in college. The cohort that came after  
23 them were seniors in high school at the point at  
24 which the pandemic had hit them. So the pandemic  
25 wasn't for our population of students, a one-time

1 event; it was a disruption that occurred at many  
2 different points in their academic careers. So for  
3 many of them, they either experienced disruptions in  
4 high school or at a critical point in their early  
5 college. And those are times that we can't  
6 necessarily correct or go back to prepare for.  
7

8 And if we look at a longer time trend  
9 going into the pandemic, there was a very clear  
10 uptick in CUNY's-- both bachelor's and associate  
11 graduation rates. So, just looking at our associate  
12 students back in 2010, the three-year graduation rate  
13 was 13.6%. Going up to our 2017 cohort, it had  
14 climbed to 25.1% for our three-year graduation rates,  
15 and it was on track to double. So there really  
16 were... (CROSS-TALK)

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Sorry, I... You  
18 said your two-year graduation rate...

19 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: These are three-  
20 year graduation rates.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Your three-year  
22 graduation rates in 2010 were 13.6%... (CROSS-TALK)

23 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: That's for the  
24 cohort that entered in 2010... (CROSS-TALK)

25 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: In 20...

1  
2 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: So we would  
3 report that in 2013... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, in...

5 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: It was 13.6%.  
6 And then it... (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And the cohort that  
8 entered in 2017... (CROSS-TALK)

9 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Was 25.1  
10 (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Was 25.1. And the  
12 cohort that entered in 2018 was 24.9... (CROSS-TALK)

13 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: 24.9. Yes,  
14 exactly.

15 So right before the pandemic hit, so the  
16 2017 number, that's a cohort that got to experience  
17 all of their high school and almost all of college  
18 without the disruptions of the pandemic. And we have  
19 a sort of clear 10-year period going into that of  
20 steady increases in the graduation rate. And that's  
21 part of the reason that we say really do see a  
22 decline in sort of a change in the longer-term trend  
23 we had going into the pandemic, and then the sort of  
24 trends coming out of the pandemic. And every year  
25 that we get further away from the height of the 2020-

1  
2 2021 disruptions, we do see an increase in  
3 improvement in our persistence into a second year of  
4 college and a third year of college.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I want to note that  
6 Council Member Chris Marte has joined us for the  
7 hearing.

8 I don't want to argue about or-- or  
9 sorry, rather discuss COVID, but I just want to say  
10 as a data point, there were impacts. But I also know  
11 that CUNY testified last month that there are really  
12 no issues with things like literacy, that they're  
13 just getting better and better and better, and that  
14 there are no issues there.

15 We've also had hearings where we are  
16 increasing the number of things that you've testified  
17 are helpful in graduation rates. And CUNY courses in  
18 high school, College Now. So those things have helped  
19 increase as well. So there are other factors besides  
20 COVID, things that should be really increasing or  
21 improving the graduation rates. To me, you know, the  
22 numbers aren't great, and you know, how do your  
23 numbers, you know, with all the COVID stuff, all the  
24 things you said before, like national graduation  
25 rates, wouldn't they be affected by everything that

1  
2 you mentioned-- national graduation rates affected by  
3 the trend among college students, especially in  
4 community colleges?

5 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I think the  
6 rates that are most comparable that we get from the  
7 federal government, some of those have an even longer  
8 lag than our time does. So we haven't fully seen the  
9 rates coming out that are affected by COVID. But all  
10 indications so far are that we do expect declines in  
11 national completion rates.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But CUNY is still  
13 sort of, I guess, below the national average when it  
14 comes to graduation rates. Right?

15 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yes, yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And, so, I'm  
17 hearing--we'll get to some of the great things John  
18 Jay and about ASAP, because I do want to discuss  
19 that. But what are you attributing that to? Because  
20 you know, again, if you're testifying last month, you  
21 know, the literacy rates are great, we're doing a lot  
22 more of the college courses in high school. What are  
23 you attributing that to, the lower graduation rates?

24 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: So, graduation  
25 rates being lower than the overall public four-year

1 colleges, that is true. But, it is important to  
2 remember that those overall graduation rates included  
3 many highly selective residential colleges with much  
4 higher tuition price tags, and a much more selective  
5 population... (CROSS-TALK)

6  
7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But even among the  
8 community... Right, that's what I'm saying, even  
9 among the community colleges, the rates are lower.  
10 Right?

11 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: They are  
12 slightly lower, but if we look only at community  
13 colleges, also in other large cities, they are very  
14 similar to CUNY's.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: How similar?

16 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I think within  
17 two percentage points.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

19 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yeah.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Here's why it's a  
21 concern. I mean, it's a concern because we want our  
22 students to graduate. And I think you probably  
23 testified to one of the other reasons it's a concern,  
24 not just because it's morally the right thing, but  
25 there's a fiscal responsibility we have as stewards

1 of the government, right? We vote on budgets, and we  
2 invest money. We expect to return on it, and it's one  
3 of the reasons we fight so hard for ASAP and ACE  
4 funding, because we know that dollar that goes in is  
5 a savings to the taxpayer of \$3.50, not to mention I  
6 think \$15.00 to the student themselves. Did I get  
7 that right?

9 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I read that.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, yes. But then  
11 the inverse would be true, right? Right. And meaning,  
12 we're investing this money, but when the graduation  
13 rates are low, that's sort of a waste to the  
14 taxpayer.

15 So I mean, don't we have a  
16 responsibility? What would your response be to a  
17 taxpayer who's concerned that they're investing in  
18 CUNY, but not getting the return on investment that  
19 they deserve? All the tough ones are for you. I'm so  
20 sorry. (LAUGHS)

21 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I could start,  
22 though, I would invite others...

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah.

24 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: So I think it's  
25 also really important to remember that CUNY, along

1  
2 with many other public institutions and especially  
3 our community colleges, has this historic commitment  
4 to being open access institutions. We will enroll, at  
5 our community colleges, any student who has the  
6 equivalent of a high school credential without any  
7 selective admissions requirements, such as previous  
8 grades, letters of recommendation, or all of the  
9 things that more selective and elite colleges use to  
10 ensure that they have a population they can guarantee  
11 will graduate.

12 We could raise graduation rates tomorrow  
13 by implementing more selective admissions criteria,  
14 but that's not our mission. Our mission is to balance  
15 both the success of students with incredibly broad  
16 access for students. There is an inherent trade-off  
17 between access and the fact that we're willing to  
18 serve any student and then open to any student, you  
19 know, willingly encouraging enrollment, regardless of  
20 their previous level of academic preparation or the  
21 other kind of life circumstances or challenges that  
22 those students might be juggling with college. And  
23 the effect is that that kind of broad access means  
24 it's harder to guarantee that all of those students  
25 will graduate. They're coming with many, many things.

1                   CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Has CUNY research  
2  
3 calculated the loss to its institution, to the  
4 taxpayer, for each student that goes in and doesn't  
5 graduate? Those are sunk costs, right? Has CUNY  
6 calculated the loss to the taxpayer and the loss to  
7 its institution?

8                   ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I'm not aware of  
9 a direct loss, uh, a version of that calculation. I  
10 am aware of some research that suggests even the  
11 completion of college credits has some long-term  
12 benefits and payoff in the job market. So while the  
13 largest benefits come from students completing  
14 degrees, research from the Community College Research  
15 Center suggests that even a couple of courses in  
16 college are helpful in students' long-term career  
17 trajectories. So it's not so clear that it's  
18 necessarily a loss or sunk cost. There is some return  
19 to all levels of college experience.

20                   CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I mean, is the  
21 return a net positive or a net negative? Do we...

22                   ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I would have to  
23 look into that more.

24                   CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, I mean,  
25 that's a fundamental question we have—we pass a

1 budget every year, and we fight for the dollars for  
2 CUNY, particularly for the ASAP and ACE programs,  
3 because we know they work. But we want to know that  
4 we're investing in good programs. Right? And CUNY  
5 overall, again, is great for, not just me and my  
6 family, which I think everyone in my family, but also  
7 so many of my students. It is life-changing for so  
8 many people, and yet there are still--what did we  
9 say, the 2017 cohort, the three-year graduate--74.9%  
10 of people just aren't graduating in three years. And  
11 that's more and more money we're putting in that, you  
12 know, it just sounds like different approaches need  
13 to be made to ensure that we're doing right by the  
14 students and that we're doing right by the taxpayer.

16 What does it mean to be a part-time  
17 student at each campus? Is there a minimum course  
18 requirement or credits per semester or a year?  
19 That's for anyone.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: It's 12  
21 credits per semester is considered full-time  
22 enrollment.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Really?  
24  
25

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: So students who fall under the 12 credit threshold are considered part-time students.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Did I do it wrong when I was in college?

ALL: (LAUGHTER)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I did 16 per semester or 20... (CROSS-TALK)

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Not that... You did it right.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I actually did more. I graduated with too many credits. It was embarrassing. (LAUGHS)

So anything under that is part-time?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So they could take a one-credit band course, and they're a part-time student?

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay. What percentage of CUNY students are part-time students, and how many of those students enter the programs intending to be part-time students as opposed to dropping down to part-time status?

1  
2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: So, in  
3 terms of a program perspective on this, we conduct A  
4 funnel analysis year to year in the fall. So for fall  
5 2024, our kind of widest pool of potential  
6 eligibility was about 18,000 students. And then we  
7 kind of funneled down due to residency requirements  
8 and filing for need-based aid, and then part-time  
9 enrollment status is kind of at the narrow end of the  
10 funnel, and we lose about 3,500 students due to that  
11 narrowing of the funnel. So that is one of the more  
12 restrictive aspects of a program like ASAP. It does  
13 require full-time enrollment continuously.

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Well, for ASAP--  
15 just what percentage of CUNY students over-- because  
16 I do want to get to ASAP in a second...

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Oh, sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But overall, what  
19 percentage are part-time students versus full-time  
20 students?

21 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: So the overall  
22 percentages vary quite a lot, campus to campus. Part-  
23 time enrollments are much more common at the  
24 community colleges than at the senior colleges. The  
25 first time, freshmen cohorts are sort of across the

1  
2 system, and 90% of freshmen start as full-time  
3 students. As you say, many of them do become part-  
4 time at some point in their careers. That tends to  
5 be-- as they've gone further and accumulated more  
6 credits, we sometimes see students dropping to lower  
7 credit accumulation levels as they may be taking on  
8 more work or balancing more demanding course  
9 schedules.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And so they drop  
11 down to part-time status?

12 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: That sometimes  
13 happens, yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But to what degree  
15 does that happen? Where students are so overwhelmed  
16 by the work and the course schedule that they drop  
17 down to part-time status?

18 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Again, it's not  
19 only that they're so overwhelmed, but they may be  
20 doing things like taking unpaid internships or other  
21 types of work. And there's some variation from campus  
22 to campus. There's not a sort of clean point in time  
23 in which we see a sort of direct drop off. But we  
24 know that many of the current students who are  
25

1  
2 currently part-time were at some point earlier full-  
3 time.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But you don't have  
5 that percentage of students who funnel down? Is that  
6 what your phraseology was?

7 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yeah, we don't  
8 track it as the (INAUDIBLE) funnel sort of term by  
9 term basis. We could probably develop that for you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And your internship  
11 programs, the paid internships, are not credit-  
12 bearing?

13 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Some of them  
14 are, but students have lots of different ways of  
15 accessing job experience, some of which--the minority  
16 of which is through credit-bearing experiences. Much  
17 more common is students taking on various types of  
18 work, and that being part of what they're balancing,  
19 especially as they're getting closer to the  
20 completion of their degrees.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But wouldn't CUNY--  
22 I don't know, isn't CUNY incentivized to provide  
23 credits or make internships credit bearing? I mean,  
24 what are some of the roadblocks to these internships  
25

1 providing credit so students could stay on track to  
2 graduate?  
3

4 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: CUNY is very  
5 interested in supplying and connecting students to  
6 paid internships. There are certain requirements for  
7 a type of work and the educational components it has  
8 to have for it to be credit-bearing. And there is  
9 sort of quite a process, and not all work that  
10 students are going to engage in is going to fit  
11 within those kinds of criteria. But it is a goal we  
12 have over the next five to 10 years to increase  
13 offerings and paid internships that are also  
14 connected to credit.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, I mean, two  
16 months ago, I feel like this is...

17 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yeah...

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: At the last  
19 hearing, I feel like we're doing a retrospective,  
20 retrospective, you know, those flashback episodes?  
21 So let's go back two months ago to the hearing on the  
22 CUNY Cultural Corp, where it was testified, I think  
23 90-something--someone's gonna give me the number—92-  
24 98% of internship applicants were rejected, because  
25 CUNY just wasn't offering enough of these slots. And

1 I would imagine that if it's a CUNY Cultural Corp, a  
2 CUNY program, that it's also credit-bearing.

3  
4 And so it just seems that, as of now, at  
5 least in that one area that was testified to, the  
6 investments are not being made. So, what does  
7 increasing investment in internships and credit-  
8 bearing internships look like for students?

9 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Sorry, I don't  
10 have the details about that specific program. I'm not  
11 sure if anyone else can speak to other aspects.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, I think we'll  
13 do-- I think you're going to get some sort of answer  
14 soon. Are you testifying?

15 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: I'll testify for a  
16 second.

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, then, I have  
18 to swear you in. Have you ever been sworn in before?

19 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: You swore me  
20 before.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I did? Lucky me.

22 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Only by you.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Do you swear to  
24 tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the  
25 truth, so help you God?

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VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: I do, sir.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Wait, let me get the actual text, lest we get... Okay, where is the actual... I just want to read the affirmation. Okay, please raise-- sir, please raise your right hand.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: I do, sir.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, sir.

VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: So, and quickly...

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And state your name for the record?

VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Jeff Rodus, Vice Chancellor of Government Affairs for CUNY.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you.

VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Honestly, I don't have the exact answer you want. But, I will say this about internships—you have to be careful with internships, because it is very important that they are paid.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Mm-hmm?

1  
2 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: If you do credit  
3 only, people will not pay our students. And that is  
4 one of the key things about our internships: we  
5 demand they be paid. So, understand that credit-  
6 bearing depends on the course; it depends on what  
7 they're doing, and so on and so forth. But it is  
8 important for it to be a paid internship. So we are  
9 very careful about that, because I get calls of the  
10 time from everybody wanting to have CUNY students and  
11 get them credit. And, I'm like, no, you have to pay  
12 them.

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah.

14 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: So, I just wanted  
15 to make that comment.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And just to be  
17 clear... (CROSS-TALK)

18 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: (INAUDIBLE)

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I agree with you  
20 100%. The example I am giving is of the CUNY Cultural  
21 Corps, which includes paid internships.

22 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Right.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And it seems to me,  
24 here is a very tangible solution to at least this  
25 part of the problem that we've identified, or that

1  
2 you have identified, really. Which is students taking  
3 a smaller course load so that they can get  
4 internships. It seems to me that if more (INAUDIBLE)  
5 to ensure that they are not only paid, but credit-  
6 bearing, at least for that section, we can increase  
7 graduation rates at CUNY, which is our shared goal.

8 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Not for nothing, I  
9 am not going to name colleagues of yours who approach  
10 me about helping on campaigns and getting credit for  
11 it. It doesn't work like that. You know what I'm  
12 saying? So, yes, you're right, but, you know, there  
13 are only certain things you can get credit for.  
14 Right? And that is up to the academics, the  
15 professors. So, I don't disagree with you. CUNY  
16 Cultural Corps, remember, that was cut a couple of  
17 years ago. So, when it was cut by the City and then  
18 restored, it's wonderful, but at the same time, it  
19 really ruined the program. And it hurt a lot of  
20 students who were getting those internships and  
21 getting those credits. And all of a sudden, they  
22 didn't have it anymore, because someone decided to  
23 cut it at City Hall. So, anyway...

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah.  
25

1  
2 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Thank you very  
3 much. Always a pleasure... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you for your  
5 (INAUDIBLE) going out with a bang.

6 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Vice Chancellor  
8 Rodus.

9 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

10 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Why not?

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. (LAUGHS)  
12 Why not? Yeah, just specific to the CUNY Cultural  
13 Corps, that was a funding from the City from the  
14 other side of City Hall, that was kept flat. Which  
15 resulted in, I guess, with inflation, is worth less  
16 over the years. It has been flat for many years. But  
17 this is, again, CUNY Cultural Corps doesn't just have  
18 to be funded by the City. There were private  
19 philanthropies, CUNY itself putting money into it.  
20 And, again, is it reasonable to say that if CUNY  
21 invested--If you have identified this problem of  
22 students taking fewer courses to do internships;  
23 therefore, then they are graduating late, if CUNY  
24 invested time to make sure the professors and deans  
25 or whatever ensured that more of these internships

1  
2 were credit-bearing, and money, to make sure that any  
3 credit-bearing internships were paid, that we could  
4 help close the gap for that section of students—  
5 that was a long way of saying...

6 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Sounds like a  
7 good idea, yes... (CROSS-TALK)

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It sounds like a  
9 good... (CROSS-TALK)

10 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: So, I...

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yes. So...

12 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: And the issue  
13 isn't only students having lower credit loads to take  
14 on internships. Internships are part of it. Work is  
15 part of it. I wanted to simply make the point that  
16 many of our students--most students start college  
17 full-time. Those who are part-time are often a single  
18 semester or something, uh, a way that they are  
19 changing their intensity over a period of time for a  
20 variety of reasons, which can include internships,  
21 working for pay, as well as other personal  
22 responsibilities, ways of wanting to balance their  
23 workloads in college. But, in general, we really  
24 think the idea of paid internships is very promising;

1  
2 we are pursuing it very directly. We think this could  
3 be (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, on the  
5 Council, and it's the question we have, on the  
6 Council, is the increase in funding to help support  
7 the paid internships. But the question on the CUNY  
8 end is, one, the data, of course, it's very hard, you  
9 know, you sort of identified--I don't know if it was  
10 an anecdote or just in broad strokes, that there are  
11 students who dropped courses to take internships;  
12 therefore, they're graduating later. And that is sort  
13 of like a hypothesis, which you could prove with  
14 data. But, also, again, ensuring that the paid  
15 internships that you have identified don't all get  
16 paid (sic), uh, don't all get credits, do get  
17 credits.

18 But I noticed that you have dissension...

19 PROVOST PEASE: (INAUDIBLE)

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: A dissension in the  
21 ranks. (LAUGHS)

22 PROVOST PEASE: Well, I have a different  
23 experience. Right? So, I'm at a four...

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS) That is  
25 the best way to phrase it. (LAUGHS)

1  
2 PROVOST PEASE: I'm at a four-year  
3 college, I don't... I don't know the aspects of the  
4 experience at community colleges. But I am concerned  
5 hearing you talk about part-time and going slower,  
6 taking fewer credits, because (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-  
7 TALK)

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: To be clear, that  
9 was... That was what was testified to, that there are  
10 students who do that in order to take... (CROSS-TALK)

11 PROVOST PEASE: In order...

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: an internship. And  
13 those are the students that I was...

14 PROVOST PEASE: Right.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: identifying, and  
16 trying and discussing the ways here at the hearing...

17 PROVOST PEASE: Right.

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: To ensure that they  
19 get the credits they deserve, that they are working  
20 towards, and graduate on time.

21 PROVOST PEASE: Okay.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: To clarify that.  
23 But please continue.

24 PROVOST PEASE: Well, thanks. I think one  
25 of the dimensions of the student experience that we

1 haven't discussed here is the socioeconomic pressures  
2 that are on students, right? And one of the reasons  
3 why I made clear the Pell and TAP stats of John Jay  
4 students is to demonstrate that three-quarters of our  
5 students are in a state of financial precarity, which  
6 means that they are also working. Right? So, in  
7 addition to taking these grants, a large proportion  
8 of our students work more than 20 hours a week,  
9 right? And that is in direct conflict with what they  
10 are trying to do, which is earn a degree, right? It's  
11 why they start as full-time students and then  
12 eventually end as full-time workers, often going in  
13 their last few years at part time. And they also tend  
14 to run out of aid by that point, which is why they  
15 need to be working, right? So, one of the main drags  
16 on CUNY graduation rates and certainly four-year  
17 student graduation rates at the senior colleges is  
18 that economic piece. It's why a program like ASAP and  
19 ACE are so successful, because they pay students a  
20 stipend to be in college so that the student doesn't  
21 have to work. It's why APPLE Corps does the same  
22 thing. You know, anytime that you can pay a student  
23 so that they can remain a full-time student focused  
24 on their studies and have a smaller part-time job, 15

1  
2 hours or fewer a week, you are more likely to see  
3 them graduate, and we see that in every program we've  
4 ever run.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So why don't we  
6 just call that college? You know? Like, if the ASAP  
7 program is so successful, why doesn't that just be  
8 college?

9 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Yes, yes,  
11 I love this question...

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS)

13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Well,  
14 precisely. And I think the University is moving in  
15 that direction in terms of the ability to extrapolate  
16 the most promising practices of the model. There are  
17 aspects that are fiduciary; they're an alleviation of  
18 the out-of-pocket costs. But I think the most  
19 prominent feature of the program's success is the  
20 advisement approach, which is really again that  
21 intrusive, intensive, individualized real-time  
22 support, it does require this mutuality of  
23 engagement. So I think that is the part of ASAP that  
24 is often, you know, lifted as the most signature  
25 aspect and attribute. But again, it does require a

1 student to fully commit to that engagement, which  
2 takes time and maybe time that they don't have  
3 because of other draws on their time, such as family  
4 responsibilities or employment.  
5

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm going to get  
7 back to ASAP in a second. But what would a good  
8 graduation rate be for the two-year colleges and  
9 four-year colleges?

10 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I'm reluctant to  
11 describe this as definitively a good graduation...

12 (CROSS-TALK)

13 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What is CUNY's  
14 goal? (CROSS-TALK)

15 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: But CUNY has  
16 committed to raising graduation rates for both  
17 associate and bachelor students by five percentage  
18 points by 2030 as part of our CUNY Lifting New York  
19 Strategic Plan.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: By five percentage  
21 points.

22 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yeah.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So you'd go from  
24 11.8 to 16.8.

25 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Uh...

1                   CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Your two-year  
2 graduation... (CROSS-TALK)

3                   ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: No, those--  
4 Sorry, those are goals for three-year graduation  
5 rates for community colleges and six-year graduation  
6 rates for senior colleges.  
7

8                   CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So your ultimate...

9                   ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: to go from 27%,  
10 which was the baseline when this report was-- when  
11 the CUNY Lifting New York was released, to take that  
12 to 32% for associate graduation rates and for senior  
13 colleges to go from 55% to 60%.

14                  CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And CUNY views that  
15 as...

16                  ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Progress.

17                  CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, okay, but so,  
18 so you're saying by 20?

19                  ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: 2030.

20                  CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: By 2030?

21                  ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yeah.

22                  CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So it's what, 2025?  
23 So your goal is for each year to go up one percentage  
24 point?

25                  ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yes.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And what led you to  
3 that particular number?

4 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: This was a  
5 combination of what was sort of realistic, building  
6 off the trends and the past. What we, you know, as I  
7 mentioned, going into the pandemic, CUNY was at the  
8 bachelor's level pretty consistently, raising  
9 graduation rates by one point per year. So we know  
10 that's something we can achieve, and then sort of  
11 recognizing that we had a lower rate from the  
12 pandemic and that we wanted to be cautious about how  
13 much change was possible given how much rebuilding  
14 had to be done.

15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, and do you  
16 have two-year and four-year graduation goals?

17 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: We don't have  
18 publicly stated two-year and four-year graduation  
19 rate goals as part of the strategic plan that I'm  
20 aware of.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You were trained in  
22 answering questions, weren't you?

23 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Did a good job,  
25 Jeff. It wasn't you? Well, I would just say while,

1  
2 and this goes back to ASAP, and it's good that the  
3 goals are increasing, but I would say it seems that  
4 32% and 60% still seem rather low for students  
5 graduating in more time than is described in the  
6 title of the institution, which is two and four year.

7 So, ASAP, what are some of the ways that  
8 you're looking to expand these programs more broadly  
9 across all the campuses?

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: So ASAP is  
11 currently considered at scale or...

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm sorry, not  
13 (INAUDIBLE) for more students.

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Just to  
15 increase the...

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yes.

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: overall  
18 enrollment rate.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah.

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: So, year  
21 to year, we have been, you know, regaining our  
22 enrollment health as was stated in the testimony, we  
23 still have the potential for much greater enrollment,  
24 and we feel very confident that we're going to get  
25 there. We've increasingly incorporated a transfer, a

1 vertical transfer support aspect of the model. We  
2 understand that many of our incoming associate  
3 degree-seeking students have the goal to transfer  
4 within the system and attain their bachelor's degree.  
5 So I think part of our work is to ensure that  
6 students on their way in the door of our community  
7 colleges understand that the model is going to  
8 support them to both attain their associate degree in  
9 a timely manner and also seamlessly transfer to  
10 pursue their longer-term goals. So I think that kind  
11 of shift in the programmatic support model, the  
12 advisement model, is very helpful in terms of  
13 maximizing enrollment for our entering community  
14 college students.  
15

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So it's time for  
17 another flashback to the time when we did a hearing  
18 on ACE and ASAP, or ASAP rather, and it was testified  
19 that you are repeatedly hitting your goals in terms  
20 of graduation rates among your ASAP cohort. But then,  
21 when it was asked, Are you increasing your goal, the  
22 answer *then* was no.

23 Have you since decided to increase or to  
24 improve the goals so that more students graduate on  
25

1  
2 time, to set your sights higher for our students so  
3 they graduate on time?

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: And goal  
5 meaning the 50% three-year graduation rate... (CROSS-  
6 TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I think it was  
8 50%-- It's been 50% since the inception of the  
9 program.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: And we,  
11 yes, we have experienced a dip since then, so we are  
12 kind of clawing our way back towards that 50% and  
13 always maintaining the same basic metrics and  
14 benchmarks with regard to retention and credit  
15 accumulation that all rolls up to that 50% within  
16 three years. I think we've increasingly looked at  
17 other metrics to gauge the success of the program,  
18 such as transfer rates, ensuring that there is a  
19 seamless transfer from associate to bachelor's track,  
20 again maximizing the use of need-based aid, ensuring  
21 students, you know, maintain that academic momentum  
22 and ideally they will land into an ACE structure at  
23 their senior college so that there is a accelerated  
24 two-year completion pathway for their bachelor's  
25 degree.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And the Provost  
3 stole some of your thunder, but there were some other  
4 programs mentioned, CUSP-- was it CUSP, and was it  
5 APPLE?

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Mm-hmm.

7 (INAUDIBLE)

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So I'm just-- APPLE  
9 Corps, (BACKGROUND NOISE), and Winter and Summer  
10 Acceleration, and it seems like you're sort of  
11 incubating methods or programs to increase graduation  
12 rates.

13 To what degree are you turnkeying these,  
14 or to what degree are you working with CUNY Central  
15 to ensure other campuses are utilizing similar models  
16 to perhaps get more than one percentage point  
17 increase in graduation rates per year?

18 PROVOST PEASE: Yeah, I actually think  
19 that Community Central is now working with DataKind  
20 as well, and the other colleges are going to adapt  
21 their own models of CUSP. DataKind has a grant from  
22 Google to do this work. They are prepared to try to  
23 open up these programs throughout the other colleges.

24

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So given that-- and  
3 so you testified that you've seen-- think your Winter  
4 And Summer Acceleration saw a significant jump in...

5 PROVOST PEASE: Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: It's 5.1%, which is  
7 more than five, in retention, first-year retention,  
8 for example, for STEM students. You've testified  
9 about 70% four-year college graduation rates; you  
10 increased senior graduation rates by 32%. I mean,  
11 some of the numbers you testify to seem significantly  
12 higher than what CUNY's overall goal is.

13 So to what degree? So you said Google,  
14 and which camp-- or CUNY Central is using...

15 PROVOST PEASE: So, DataKind...

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: DataKind...

17 PROVOST PEASE: which is a not-for-profit  
18 data crunching group, received money to do this work  
19 with CUNY colleges and SUNY colleges.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So I mean, given  
21 the results that you testified to at John Jay,  
22 wouldn't CUNY expect to see similar results at least  
23 across its four-year schools?

24 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: We're...

25 PROVOST PEASE: Yes, we should.

1  
2 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

3 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I'm not aware of  
4 sort of the timeline of the full rollout of  
5 (BACKGROUND NOISE) of making that effort available,  
6 and when we would exactly be seeing any impacts from  
7 it.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Right. Well, if  
9 it's within five years, it'd be more than 5%, I would  
10 think.

11 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yes, it's a  
12 symptom we keep coming back to, though, is sort of  
13 the lag and how we report on graduation rates. So if  
14 we begin working with freshmen this year, it's six  
15 years until we see a benefit in their graduation  
16 rate.

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But I mean, even  
18 one of the programs they started working with second-  
19 year students, right? And as you testified, people  
20 come in to their first year full-time, and maybe it's  
21 by the third year they start going part-time.

22 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Yeah.

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So there is work to  
24 do with the third-year and fourth-year students. I  
25 mean, I'm specifically--obviously talking about four-

1  
2 year colleges, but that you're going to see results  
3 if the investments are made. I just, I mean, it just  
4 seems to me that for a system that testifies that  
5 they have a lot of great programs, they're getting  
6 some of this private funding, there's no lag in  
7 literacy rates or in literacy, that the goals should  
8 be set a little higher. I mean, it sounds like you  
9 have good models to work from, that you have the ACE  
10 and ASAP, you have the APPLE, the CUSP, working with  
11 DataKind, that the goal should just be higher. Like  
12 we should be setting the standard for community  
13 colleges and four-year colleges across the nation,  
14 not a lagging behind or even on par with them.

15 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I think we'd  
16 certainly like to make better than the five  
17 percentage point progress.

18 I do want to clarify, though, that CUNY  
19 has made progress in the on-time graduation rate.  
20 That again, sort of going into the pandemic, the  
21 four-year graduation rate had increased by 13  
22 percentage points from the 2010 cohort to our 2017  
23 cohort.

24 So, we had again, prior to the pandemic  
25 starting in 2017, had begun investing in a

1 university-wide academic momentum campaign that  
2 encouraged students to take heavier credit loads,  
3 which encouraged credit taking throughout the entire  
4 academic year. That also came with institutional  
5 policy changes to make it easier for students to take  
6 credit-bearing courses by changing our remediation  
7 structures. We did see benefits for that. So we have  
8 made progress in the four-year graduation rates,  
9 really considerable progress, again, going into the  
10 pandemic that has just declined a little bit since  
11 then, but we're in a much better place with these  
12 four-year graduation rates than we were even five or  
13 six years ago.

14  
15 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: On the flip side,  
16 all those kids who went to UPK they're going to have  
17 better academics and social-emotional health, I  
18 guess, starting 2014-15. You're going to see the  
19 dividends from that in a few years, too.

20 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Uh-huh. That'd  
21 be great.

22 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I believe that.

24 So, another flashback—This is the  
25 flashback episode of Friends.

1  
2 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

3 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: At the hearing on  
4 *Removing Small Financial Barriers for CUNY Students*  
5 in April, students testified that they were not being  
6 able to pay fees sometimes, which meant they didn't  
7 register for classes on time. And spots for the  
8 required classes filled up before they could  
9 register. This must impact their ability to graduate.

10 How many students report that they cannot  
11 graduate because of late registration for required  
12 classes?

13 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I'm sorry, I  
14 don't have that number on hand. We can look into that  
15 for you.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah. Has CUNY  
17 considered a forgiving some of the smaller fees that  
18 prevent students from enrolling in classes, thus they  
19 fill up?

20 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: I believe so. I  
21 don't know if there are any college-level  
22 perspectives on that.

23 PROVOST PEASE: We can't afford to.

24 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

1  
2 PROVOST PEASE: Right? The bottom line. We  
3 did try that for a while, but I mean, our budget  
4 won't balance if we actually do that. So we've raised  
5 funds, we call them Student Emergency Funds, and we  
6 do pay sort of last-minute release of bars, etc., and  
7 holds.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Uh-huh?

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: And I'll  
10 add the very generous \$4.5 million ASAP For All  
11 funding for last year, we had been able to repurpose  
12 to provide some of this balance relief for our ASAP  
13 students, which has proved to be quite beneficial in  
14 terms of ensuring that they do have a seamless  
15 retention, say spring to fall this year.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, and you  
17 helped them with the books. You purchased the books  
18 in the first place, and the (INAUDIBLE) yeah...

19 (CROSS-TALK)

20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Yeah, the  
21 financial supports are the tuition and fee gap  
22 scholarship for students, though many of them receive  
23 need-based Pell TAP-- summer, winter is also on top  
24 of that. So we ensure as a strategy that the  
25 intercession of the full academic year is utilized.

1  
2 Again, I really want to underpin the value of this  
3 stipending or investment in students as they pursue,  
4 particularly summer coursework. Because we, again, it  
5 is low cost and we've seen within ACE in particular  
6 that there is a really high retention when moving  
7 from summer to fall with regard to that robust summer  
8 experience. And then textbook stipends and, of  
9 course, OMNY cards are the crown jewels of the  
10 financial resources.

11 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Mm-hmm.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, I can tell  
13 just by your testimony that you really love the  
14 program.

15 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Mm-hmm, we all  
16 love the program.

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Like a very ex...

18 UNIDENTIFIED: We love the program. The  
19 program's great.

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Should ASAP for  
21 everyone.

22 So I want to go back to just that  
23 financial-- to stick with the financial impact,  
24 rather than what is the financial impact for a  
25 student enrolled in more semesters than expected in



1 increasing academic momentum (TIMER) and increasing  
2 the rates at which students accumulate credits and  
3 graduate more quickly. We also recognize that many  
4 challenges to doing that that students experience for  
5 a variety of reasons in their lives.

6  
7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, I would say  
8 on a personal note, because I did grad school, I  
9 started when I was like 21, and I was teaching, that  
10 the idea of like going--because I was working full  
11 time and going to school, and I didn't need to sleep.  
12 Like, the idea of going back to grad school full-time  
13 and working full-time, I'm just tired. Remember 50  
14 under 50, not 40 under 40, not 40 under 40 anymore.

15 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But I think that...

17 UNIDENTIFIED: Twin boys (INAUDIBLE)

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: What's that?

19 UNIDENTIFIED: Twin boys (INAUDIBLE)...

20 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I have twin boys  
21 who are 10. They tire me out. I joke, I say I'm 25,  
22 and I look like this because of my twin boys.

23 But I think you're right. Those  
24 opportunity costs, as you extend them out, have an  
25 impact on the student. But also, again, as I

1 mentioned earlier to the taxpayer, that's fewer years  
2 there working in the market for the same reason. ASAP  
3 is such a good program. You know, savings for the  
4 students and for the taxpayer. That's why these long  
5 delays in graduation are bad for the student and bad  
6 for the taxpayer.  
7

8 So, I'm interested to know what your--I  
9 know you didn't want to use the word "good"...

10 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Mm-hmm.

11 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: But what is your  
12 opinion of the graduation rates? Right. That's a  
13 little different question. How do you feel about the  
14 numbers that you're testifying to today?

15 PROVOST PEASE: I can tell you. I am, on  
16 the one hand, enormously proud of the work we've done  
17 at John Jay to get to where we are and completely  
18 unsatisfied. It is not okay that basically one out of  
19 every two students who start at John Jay doesn't  
20 finish there. It's not okay.

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I appreciate that  
22 answer. I do. And you know, that's why we're here to  
23 have open, honest conversations about what's going on  
24 and to help.

25 PROVOST PEASE: Frustrated by it.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, I mean, I want it to be 100%. I don't want to say it's too much to ask, but it's probably too much to ask.

So if you can, I don't expect it today. Still, if you can share with the Committee at a later date—By the way, I do want to say another public important thank you to Vice Chancellor Jeff Rodus for his incredible work and for testifying today. I mean, I mean, you three are great, but he really, he really swooped in, gave great testimony.

VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: (UN-MIC'D)

(INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS)

VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: You know, you're getting me in trouble because I'm leaving early. And now everyone knows.

ALL: (LAUGHTER)

VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Everyone knows.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: No, what they know is you are so important. Just for the record, if you can't hear him, he said I'm getting him in trouble because he's leaving early. And what it actually is, he has so many important things to tend to, to make

1  
2 sure CUNY runs smoothly, and that his transition out  
3 is smooth.

4 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: You can be my PR  
5 guy in my next...

6 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

7 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: Obviously, what  
8 are they going to do with me anyway at this point?

9 ALL: (LAUGHTER)

10 VICE CHANCELLOR RODUS: I thank you very  
11 much.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you so much.  
13 Thank you.

14 And so if you can provide for the  
15 Committee the breakdown of graduation rates by race,  
16 ethnicity, gender, income, age, other demographic  
17 characteristics, and disability status, if you're  
18 still tracking that.

19 So what do CUNY advisors, ASAP or  
20 otherwise, tell entering freshmen about graduating in  
21 two years or four years, depending on the degree  
22 they're seeking? And what percentage of entering  
23 freshmen expect to graduate on a traditional  
24 timeline? Are they expected to even graduate on a  
25 traditional timeline?

1  
2 PROVOST PEASE: We just surveyed our first  
3 semester freshmen, that very question, right? "Do you  
4 expect to graduate in four years?" Eighty percent  
5 said yes. I'm struck by the lack of confidence. One  
6 out of five does not expect to graduate in four  
7 years.

8 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Hmmmm.

9 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Wow.

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Yeah. And  
11 I think similarly, the advisement practice,  
12 particularly within a program like ASAP and ACE,  
13 very, very careful work is done to ensure a student  
14 understands what the sequencing looks like, what the  
15 prerequisites look like. If they are to get off track  
16 in one key gateway course, how do they correct  
17 course? So I think there is a very tactical aspect of  
18 this, too. There's an aspirational aspect. But then  
19 again, the advisement practice is very deliberate  
20 with regard to ensuring students fully understand the  
21 courses they need to take in the sequence they need  
22 to take them for, even the longer-term goal of  
23 bachelor's completion.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: So, CUNY's goal is  
25 the system-wide goal of three-year graduation rates,

1 let's say for the two-year colleges. But let's say in  
2 ASAP or in your school, in your case, a four-year  
3 program, do your advisors go in and say, "Hey, your  
4 goal, despite you... (CROSS-TALK)

5 UNIDENTIFIED: (INAUDIBLE) credits every  
6 semester... (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You're the one in  
8 five-- You're one in five who doesn't need to  
9 graduate in four years. But we're going to help  
10 program you for a four-year course load. You're gonna  
11 program for a two-year course load. Even though your  
12 stated goal is three years, even though for ASAP and  
13 ACE is six years?

14 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Yes, but I  
15 would say the two-year rate is again, every student  
16 does have an aspiration to complete in two years. We  
17 built the three-year as that buffer. Again, we allow  
18 students to drop to part-time status within the  
19 program, inevitably because of, you know, some  
20 disruptions or what have you, but the three-year  
21 program is really, you know, as needed. So we do  
22 aspire for a two-year completion,

23 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I guess you've  
24 testified, but how many ASAP students come in and you  
25

1 say, we've got the two years, they take their first  
2 semester, and they're sweating the whole time, and  
3 they're like, from now on, I'm going to try to spread  
4 out to three years—compared to students who do two  
5 years and they fail out. Right? They fail courses,  
6 and they have to retake courses. Like, do you have  
7 breakdowns of the different scenarios students go  
8 through?  
9

10 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: Yeah, I  
11 don't, I can't quantify that in terms of, say, you  
12 know, fail versus withdraw. There's a multitude of  
13 scenarios with regard to...

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: To those  
16 aspects.

17 ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: It's relatively  
18 rare for students to consistently enroll for 15  
19 credits every semester. Though it is a goal, it is  
20 sort of an aspiration, but I believe the-- And again,  
21 there's a substantial variation from campus to campus  
22 that tracks pretty well with selectivity of that  
23 campus. So our most selective campuses have much  
24 higher percentages of students registering for and  
25 completing 15 credits per term. It's much more common

1  
2 at the senior colleges than it is-- much, much more  
3 common at the senior colleges than it is at the  
4 community colleges. So we think some of that is  
5 students strategically balancing the course load that  
6 they feel academically prepared for.

7 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And then lastly,  
8 what is it-- we kind of touched on this earlier, but  
9 what can help the City Council-- what help can the  
10 City Council be in helping CUNY campuses improve  
11 graduation rates to 100% in two-year or four-year?

12 PROVOST PEASE: So I'm going to jump in  
13 for advocacy. With regard...

14 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: That's what we're  
15 looking for!

16 PROVOST PEASE: With regard to ACE  
17 baseline funding...

18 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay.

19 PROVOST PEASE: We've been operating year  
20 to year and just this year, as mentioned in  
21 testimony, received \$8 million from the State to  
22 level up our enrollment. There's so much more  
23 potential. We serve about 3% of the potential  
24 population. Again, you know many of our ASAP  
25 graduates would flow very nicely from an ASAP to an

1  
2 ACE structure. Again, that's all very contributive to  
3 the larger five-year associate degree completion  
4 metrics goals that Sarah referenced.

5 So ACE baseline, plus terms of really  
6 being able to match the scale of ASAP, would  
7 certainly help boost completion rates systemwide.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: And then for the  
9 broader CUNY community, that if, for whatever reason,  
10 is not enrolled in ASAP or ACE?

11 PROVOST PEASE: Well, I concur, the more  
12 ACE, the better. Because you know, the more of our  
13 students in that program, the more they graduate,  
14 right? So the higher their levels. If we had to save  
15 money, we would just break down parts of ACE, and  
16 they tend to help us as well, right? So our  
17 acceleration program is basically the tuition for one  
18 course, which helps a student who fails—students  
19 fail in their first year of college very frequently,  
20 and that's what gets them off track to graduate in  
21 four years. So we are basically making up for that by  
22 paying for a summer course for them. That's a big  
23 deal. The other is OMNY cards. The travel, I don't  
24 know why, but that just seems to make a--move the  
25

1  
2 needle on students just not having to worry about how  
3 they get to college.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BRONGNIART: So, on the  
5 OMNY benefits, we know that to be the highest value  
6 both in terms of drawing students to the program, but  
7 we are, because of the generous add-on funding from  
8 last year's City Council, experimenting with the  
9 ability for our ASAP graduates who graduate in under  
10 three years to port that OMNY benefit with them as  
11 they seamlessly transfer to a bachelor's degree. So,  
12 again, we're looking at ways to continue that  
13 benefit, and imagine that an OMNY benefit for all  
14 students would have great value in terms of  
15 incentivizing timely completion, or at least  
16 alleviating out-of-pocket costs that are a burden.

17 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Unsurprisingly, I  
18 think 100% of the time students have testified...

19 UNIDENTIFIED: Mm-hmm. Is that what they  
20 say?

21 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Transportation  
22 costs...

23 PANEL: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: has been a topic of  
25 their testimony.

PANEL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Anything else the City Council can do to help support improving graduation rates?

ASSISTANT DEAN TRUELSCH: Universal support for the OMNY cards, and beyond that, I think we would be very pleased to prepare a more detailed request for you for the next budget cycle.

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Please do.

I want to thank you for your testimony today, and for coming in and sharing, you know, about the graduation rates and how, you know, in my view, they're not where they need to be. And we need to set our sights a lot higher. We are partners here in the City Council to make sure that our students are achieving everything they can, both to benefit themselves and, of course, our entire city at large.

Thank you so much for coming today.

PANEL: Thank you.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: As a reminder, if you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out a witness card with a Sergeant at Arms in the back. Wait to be recognized.

1  
2 I will now call the first panel: Jose  
3 Avila and Ryan Janowski. Sit. Have a seat. And when  
4 you're ready, please turn on the microphone, state  
5 your name for the record, and you may begin your  
6 testimony.

7 JOSE AVILA: Good afternoon, Chair,  
8 Members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen, my  
9 name is Jose Avila, and I am a proud student of  
10 Borough of Manhattan Community College. I am here to  
11 express my strong support for continued and expanding  
12 funding for the BMCC. BMCC graduation rates the last-  
13 -I won't say the full story, but there are more  
14 beyond the numbers, there is the qualitative impact  
15 that the opening or the mission has, uh, of many sons  
16 and daughters of the constituents of New York City.  
17 The community members and the Council members are  
18 elected with the mandate of the people to uplift  
19 communities. And despite the background, despite the  
20 race, despite their religion, they are accepted at  
21 BMCC. They have the opportunity to receive education,  
22 higher education, and live a transformative  
23 experience of higher education, which is something  
24 that impacts not only them, they impact their  
25 communities, the neighborhoods, their friends, and

1  
2 they make them an example to follow. So it's true as  
3 a responsible people who have to exercise their  
4 fiscal responsibility, you have to follow, you have  
5 to, we have to be careful with what they are doing  
6 with their resources-- what institutions are doing  
7 with the resources.

8           But as I said at the beginning, a number  
9 can define everything. There's always like an  
10 iceberg. Maybe you see the top of the iceberg, but  
11 you don't see what is under the water. And what is  
12 under the water is the chances that people have to  
13 improve themselves. That they even make it possible  
14 for communities where they live, they can revive the  
15 economy. Because as students, we buy MetroCards, we  
16 buy food, we buy meals, we buy notebooks, and the  
17 money that we receive and we produce is here in New  
18 York City, it doesn't go away. Just to support what  
19 was discussed here, that is a concern of all of us to  
20 lift the rate of graduation. But we have to  
21 understand that there is a structural inequality here  
22 in New York City. And most of the students who are  
23 attending classes right now come from that  
24 inequality. So when we are subject to a reduction of  
25 the budget, it's not about the performance of the

1 institution or the performance of the student. It is  
2 about what is behind the structural inequality. Thank  
3 you.  
4

5 RYAN JANOWSKI: Hello, I would like to  
6 preface everything, uhm, I am a student--what? Oh,  
7 I'm so sorry, this is my first time. My name is Ryan  
8 Janowski, and I am a proud CUNY alum, graduating from  
9 LaGuardia Community College and Hunter College in  
10 2021. So, I was part of the class that was  
11 transitioning from COVID to online learning. I  
12 graduated within the designated-- well, two years for  
13 my bachelor's, because I got my associate's at  
14 LaGuardia.

15 I would like to preface this, I am also  
16 pursuing my master's right now in Arts Leadership and  
17 Management. So this is an assignment to come and  
18 speak at a public event. And I just couldn't think of  
19 a better, you know, hearing to be at. But, I  
20 definitely, after graduating, worked in the Office of  
21 Undergraduate Advising at Hunter College, as well.  
22 So, I played a great role in students' success, and I  
23 am a firm believer in student success and CUNY's  
24 success rate as well, uh, assisting the students to  
25 get on the right path for graduation, and I just

1  
2 believe that it's truly important. And CUNY has made  
3 great efforts to improve the student success rate.  
4 And I believe that more funding should be allocated.  
5 So, thank you for your time.

6 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: First of all, the  
7 most important question: where are you at grad  
8 school? CUNY? Are you at CUNY?

9 RYAN JANOWSKI: It's not a CUNY school  
10 right now, but it's Wichita State University. So all  
11 online right now.

12 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Okay, should be a  
13 little sad that it's not a CUNY, but we won't...

14 RYAN JANOWSKI: I know, I understand, I'm  
15 sorry.

16 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: (LAUGHS)

17 RYAN JANOWSKI: CUNY has been a part of my  
18 life for the last 20 years. My aunt was the Associate  
19 Dean at Hunter College before she passed away last  
20 year. So, it's definitely-- CUNY has been part of my  
21 family for over 20 years.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: You're a CUNY guy  
23 through and through.

24 RYAN JANOWSKI: Yes.  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Jose, you spoke  
3 about inequality, and I'm interested, you know, kind  
4 of leading into CUNY and addressing that. I'm just  
5 interested in whether you could speak a little bit  
6 more about what inequality looks like or how  
7 inequality is experienced, and then how that impacts  
8 the college experience.

9 JOSE AVILA: If I may, the community  
10 college doesn't make a distinction—it doesn't put  
11 the filters for a student to enter. And this is  
12 important, because they offer tremendous services for  
13 minority groups, for people who are not traditional  
14 students, uh, for low-income people. This is the  
15 answer we are looking for, because we don't belong to  
16 privileged classes. And, we need that support, the  
17 guidance, and the chance to enter. Once we are in  
18 higher education, we look to move on our own path.  
19 Because we want to graduate in two years, but we are  
20 parents, we are dealing with at least two jobs to  
21 cope with all our needs, to pay rent. On the other  
22 hand, we receive the support of the programs, and  
23 that's the reason, because I'm here to say that it  
24 works, that ASAP and ACE out of two work at BMCC. So,  
25 there are the formulas. We know that education is in

1  
2 trouble, and the result of all these politics is not  
3 going to be seen immediately. They take time. So  
4 when they talk about the seven years, it's possible,  
5 it is possible to see that (INAUDIBLE) and to produce  
6 the professionals the City needs, and at the same  
7 time, to create this army of students or pastors or  
8 others, uh, professionals that are going to give that  
9 (INAUDIBLE) it is possible and are going to reduce  
10 that inequality. Because when we get more graduates,  
11 the unemployment rate reduces, they reduce the  
12 dependence on social aid, and at the same time,  
13 everybody wants to live in a city where young people  
14 study. We don't want to live in places where there is  
15 insecurity, where people are related to the judicial  
16 system in a bad way. No, we want workers for the  
17 judicial system. We don't want people to be  
18 prosecuted. So every dollar that is invested in  
19 education is always producing a benefit, a return.  
20 Maybe sometimes it's tangible, and sometimes it's not  
21 tangible, but it's there. And I think that the  
22 citizens of New York City are not going to reject any  
23 investment in education.

24 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. And,  
25 Ryan, first of all, you're going to get extra credit

1  
2 in your class right now if you say something nice  
3 about your professor. But, before you do that, you  
4 went to two different CUNY schools, and you said you  
5 graduated on time. And I am interested to know, in  
6 your experience, if there were any particular  
7 programs or elements of your college experience that  
8 helped you graduate on time that we should be  
9 leveraging, leaning on, and investing in for other  
10 students.

11 RYAN JANOWSKI: Honestly, what I will say  
12 is getting an associate's degree in two years, but  
13 then also CUNY offering for your bachelor's degree, I  
14 got that in two years as well. So, having all of my--  
15 a lot of my CUNY Common Corp and having that transfer  
16 over to my four-year school, and graduating within  
17 two years, that was a great incentive. It just  
18 shortened the time of graduation.

19 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you. Thank  
20 you both so much for testifying.

21 RYAN JANOWSKI: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Did you say  
23 anything nice about your professor?  
24  
25

1  
2 RYAN JANOWSKI: Yes, I am very grateful to  
3 have this opportunity to speak with you in this  
4 assignment.

5 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yeah, you just got  
6 an A+ on your paper. Congratulations.

7 RYAN JANOWSKI: Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: I'm not your  
9 professor, by the way, I can't... That was implied.

10 (LAUGHS)

11 So, this concludes the in-person portion  
12 of our public testimony. Is there anyone on Zoom? If  
13 you are on Zoom and you want to testify, use the Zoom  
14 Raise Hand Function. Oh, you're in person? Join us.

15 You may go. Thank you so much for your  
16 testimony.

17 Okay, we are un-concluding the in-person  
18 testimony. Thank you. You may turn the microphone on  
19 and begin when ready. And, of course, please state  
20 your name for the record.

21 RACHEL NECHES: Okay, good morning,  
22 everyone. My name is Rachel Neches, and I am the  
23 Senior Data Policy Researcher at the Center for an  
24 Urban Future. We're an independent think tank focused  
25 on building a stronger and more equitable New York.

1  
2 Thank you, Chair Dinowitz, and Members of the  
3 Committee, for the opportunity to testify.

4 I'm going to start off sharing some data  
5 that was, you know, discussed earlier today, to give  
6 some framing on today's conversation: college degrees  
7 matter for economic mobility. As we see in New York  
8 City, residents with a bachelor's degree earn twice  
9 as much as those who only have a high school diploma,  
10 \$78,000 versus \$40,000. That's why any effort to  
11 build a more equitable economy will fall short  
12 without bold new commitments to ensure many more New  
13 Yorkers can earn a college credential.

14 Despite steady progress in recent years,  
15 New York City still has a long way to go in boosting  
16 college attainment. New York ranks just 15th out of  
17 25 major cities for residents with a bachelor's  
18 degree or higher. Today, most good jobs go to those  
19 with postsecondary degrees, yet wide disparities in  
20 college attainment rates drive unequal economic  
21 outcomes. Just 24% of Hispanic New Yorkers and 31% of  
22 Black New Yorkers hold a bachelor's degree, compared  
23 to 69% of white New Yorkers. And in many communities,  
24 from Mount Hope and Mott Haven to East New York and  
25

1 East Elmhurst, fewer than 30% of working adults have  
2 a college degree.

3  
4 No institution is better positioned to  
5 change this trajectory than CUNY. Still, too many  
6 students, especially low-income students, first-  
7 generation students, part-time students, and working  
8 adults, struggle to complete their degrees. And while  
9 graduation rates have improved meaningfully over the  
10 last decade, the system still has a long way to go.

11 Today, grad rates range widely across  
12 CUNY campuses, programs, and students—as we heard  
13 today. The six-year graduation rate for first-time,  
14 full-time students seeking a bachelor's degree at  
15 Baruch College is 75%. At Medgar Evers, it's 26%.  
16 Among first-time full-time students seeking  
17 associate's degrees, the three-year graduation rate  
18 at Kingsborough is 27.7% and at Hostos it is 16.2%.  
19 And challenges vary across student populations. While  
20 the six-year system-wide graduation rate for full-  
21 time, first-time students is 57.9%, it's 50.7% for  
22 Hispanic students, 45% for Black students, 43.1% for  
23 students over 25, and 21.6% for part-time students.  
24 Yet these are often the students who stand to benefit  
25 most from a CUNY degree. (TIMER)

1  
2 I just have a couple of recommendations  
3 if that's okay. Like, here's the meat of it.

4 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Yes, please  
5 (INAUDIBLE).

6 RACHEL NECHES: Okay. So the Center for  
7 Intermediary and Future recommends that the City  
8 pursue three key strategies to get more students to  
9 the finish line, which you can read more of our  
10 research on our website.

11 The first is to set a bold 10-year goal  
12 to achieve a 50% increase in the number of Black,  
13 Latino, and Asian New Yorkers with a college  
14 credential, with a focus on closing gaps in the  
15 city's lowest-income communities. A long-term goal  
16 can help keep college attainment outcomes front and  
17 center, but only if supported by the right policies  
18 and investments to get there. We recommend that the  
19 City Council and the Mayor's Office establish this  
20 tenure target for boosting college attainment  
21 citywide, with a focus on New Yorkers who are  
22 underrepresented among college graduates today. This  
23 should be coupled with new efforts to boost  
24 graduation rates across CUNY by investing in proven  
25 college success programs.

1  
2           The second recommendation is to scale up  
3 CUNY ACE to match the transformative impact of ASAP,  
4 as we talked about today. CUNY ACE provides students  
5 attending CUNY senior colleges with academic  
6 advisement, career development, scholarships,  
7 textbooks, and transportation assistance, and has  
8 boosted graduation rates for its participants by as  
9 much as 40%. But limited funding means it serves just  
10 3% of all eligible students. As it effectively did  
11 for CUNY ASAP, the Council should scale up CUNY ACE  
12 to reach many more full-time senior college students.

13           And the third recommendation is to pilot  
14 the launch of CUNY Flex. Part-time students  
15 consistently graduate at much lower rates, as we've  
16 talked about. We urge the Council to support a CUNY  
17 Flex pilot, a program modeled on CUNY ASAP and ACE  
18 for part-time students, offering flexible scheduling,  
19 OMNY cards, one-on-one advising, and free technology.  
20 CUNY Flex would better meet the needs of working and  
21 adult learners who find it impossible to enroll full-  
22 time.

23           CUNY has made real progress in improving  
24 student success, but significant gaps remain. With a  
25 long-term, clear vision and sustained investment, the

1 City can help far more students earn a degree, secure  
2 good jobs, and move up the economic ladder.

3  
4 Thank you for the opportunity to testify  
5 today and for your commitment to boosting graduation  
6 rates at CUNY and expanding pathways to a college  
7 degree for more New Yorkers.

8 CHAIRPERSON DINOWITZ: Thank you, Rachel.  
9 And I want to thank the Center for an Urban Future,  
10 which, if you're not familiar with them, has a lot of  
11 good research in its reports. In fact, some of them  
12 have inspired hearings, uh, Higher Education hearings  
13 that we have done over the past few years.

14 I want to thank CUNY again for coming. I  
15 mean, this is a critically important issue, making  
16 sure our students graduate and graduate on time.  
17 There seem to be programs that work which need  
18 continued investment, but it also seems like there  
19 are some steps CUNY needs to take as well in terms of  
20 increasing its goals. I believe the goals that they  
21 set are not what CUNY and our students are capable  
22 of. I believe CUNY and our students are capable of a  
23 lot more than a 5% increase in graduation rates over  
24 the next five years. And, as always, we in the City  
25 Council stand ready to make those investments in CUNY

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and to continue our partnership to make sure CUNY continues to be the greatest engine of social and economic mobility in the nation.

The hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is no interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date December 20, 2025