

Testimony of Assistant Dean Sarah Truelsch, The City University of New York (CUNY)

The New York City Council's Committee on Higher Education Hearing on Examining Graduation Rates at CUNY Campuses November 24, 2025

Good afternoon chairperson Dinowitz and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the graduation rates at CUNY colleges. I am Sarah Truelsch, Assistant Dean for Policy Research in the University's Central Office. I am joined today by my colleagues Christine Brongniart, the University's Executive Director of CUNY ASAP and ACE and Allison Pease, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at John Jay College.

Introduction

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

Context for Graduation Rates

Bachelor's degrees

The most recent six-year graduation rate reported in the Mayor's Management Report for bachelor's students was 57.9%, down from 60.0%. The decline in graduation rates no doubt reflects the considerable disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent graduation rate is for students who began as freshmen in fall 2018. For these students, the pandemic lockdowns that started in February 2020 took place during their sophomore year of college and persisted throughout what would have been their third and fourth years of college and interfered with both their education and the larger conditions of their lives.

Despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic, the longer-term trend in CUNY's bachelor's graduation rates is positive. Even with the recent decline, CUNY's most recent bachelor's six-year graduation rate is higher than it was just seven years earlier, (56.6% for the 2011 freshman cohort) and fully four percentage points higher than it was nine years earlier (53.9% for fall 2009 freshman cohort). The longer-term trend in steady improvement in graduation rates represents many efforts to better support students. Also to note, student retention into a first and second year has been increasing since the height of the pandemic and the most recent first-year retention rates (for the fall 2023 cohort) were the highest since 2019.

Associate graduation rates

The trend in CUNY's associate degree graduation rates is similar. The six-year system graduation rate—that is, for the 2018 entering cohort—was 36.5%, down from 37.6% reported the previous year. Once again, the rate is likely influenced by the disruptions of the pandemic. And again, the

longer-term trend shows progress. The most recent six-year graduation rate is higher than it was six, seven, eight, and nine years earlier.

Although the long-term trends in associate graduation rates are positive, since 2016, more and more CUNY freshmen have been enrolling in bachelor's programs at CUNY's senior colleges, rather than in CUNY's community colleges. Many students who were more likely to graduate from community colleges in two to three years made a decision to pursue their bachelor's degree directly out of high school and are now attending senior colleges. The advantage of this enrollment shift is that it has given more students more direct pathways toward 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 2023-24, 67% of the undergraduate degrees CUNY awarded were bachelor's degrees, up from 59% ten years ago.

Interventions

Now turning toward 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 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 in and guidance for using the University's academic advising technology, and
3. Increasing attention to and resources for courses with high failure and withdrawal rates

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

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

Testimony of University Executive Director of CUNY ASAP and ACE
The New York City Council's Committee on Higher Education Hearing on Examining
Graduation Rates at CUNY Campuses

Monday, November 24th, 2025

Good afternoon Chairperson Dinowitz and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, better known as ASAP, and Accelerate, Complete and Engage, or ACE, an adaptation of the ASAP model that supports bachelors-seeking students. These models have proven to have remarkable impact on participating students' retention, persistence and completion trajectories, and demonstrate what is possible when robust financial, personal, and individualized resources are proactively provided to students in real time as barriers to their persistence emerge.

ENROLLMENT AND COST PER STUDENT

This program model has transformed the lives of thousands of New Yorkers and stands as a national model for student success. Since inception, ASAP and ACE have served a total of nearly 130,000 unique students and has been replicated with fidelity at nearly 70 institutions across nine states. In the last year, the model has been scaled across SUNY, as well as replicated across the North Carolina Community College system through an unprecedented \$35M investment from philanthropy.

The programs continue to demonstrate remarkable impact across CUNY and have now recuperated their enrollment health in the post-Covid period. This past fall, both ASAP and ACE exceeded our fall 2025 new student recruitment target by 10.5% in ASAP and 20% in ACE. This is on the heels of our robust enrollment performance last academic year, where ASAP

enrolled 22,554 students, representing 42 percent of CUNY's first-time full-time associate degree population.

City support for ASAP remains the largest baselined allocation to CUNY, supporting an annual enrollment of up to 24,000 program students and maintaining a current annual cost per student of \$3,391. ASAP is currently offered at nine of CUNY's associate degree granting institutions (all community colleges apart from Guttman, and all three CUNY comprehensive colleges). The model has been effectively adapted to a five-year bachelor's degree completion model at our comprehensive colleges, offering a seamless transition from ASAP to ACE. Due to continued support from the city and new funds provided by the state this fiscal year, ACE is offered at ten CUNY comprehensive and senior colleges (7 senior/3 comprehensives), maintaining an annual cost per student of \$3,447.

ASAP|ACE GRADUATION PERFORMANCE

Both ASAP and ACE have a doubling impact on degree completion rates when compared to non-program first-time freshmen. The fall 2021 ASAP cohort graduated at a three-year rate of 38.5% and a two-year rate of 22%. This compares favorably to the prior cohort, which graduated at a three-year rate of 36.2% and a two-year rate of 21.7%. Note that these cohorts include first time freshman, continuing and transfer students with less than 21 credits. When looking only at first-time freshman graduation performance for the fall 2021 cohort, ASAP continues to more than double three-year completion rates when compared to non-ASAP students-35% vs. 15%.

While ASAP's graduation performance has declined since its ambitious expansion from 4,000 to 25,000 students per year, an updated analysis of ASAP's impact across the fall 2017-fall 2021 cohorts confirmed that ASAP continues to have large, significant and positive impact on all subgroups. While graduation rates vary by subgroup, all, regardless of race/ethnicity and gender, graduate at much higher rates in the program than without it, ranging from an estimated 15.6 to 27.9 percentage points higher. As ASAP scaled to serve nearly a third of all

incoming freshmen, and even a larger percentage of Hispanic and Black freshmen, it has contributed to notable increases in CUNY three-year system graduation rates, with the biggest improvements among students of color.

ACE, which launched first at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in 2015, has also demonstrated remarkable outcomes for both first-time freshmen and associate degree holding transfer students, with freshmen students graduating at a four-year rate of 45.7% and transfer students at a two-year rate of 69.7% for the most recent cohorts. More striking are the five-year bachelor's completion rates for students at our comprehensive colleges who move seamlessly from the associate to bachelor's track--75.2% of these students complete their bachelor's within five years.

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

A MODEL THAT SUPPORTS SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER AND PROPELS CUNY'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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

Due to the continuous support of the city, new support from the state this fiscal year, and modest private funds, we've been able to grow ACE to support over 4,400 students this academic year, including the launch of new ACE programs at Hunter and Brooklyn Colleges.

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

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

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

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

**Testimony of Provost Allison Pease, John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
The City University of New York (CUNY)**

**The New York City Council's Committee on Higher Education Hearing on
Examining Graduation Rates at CUNY Campuses
November 24, 2025**

Good afternoon chairperson Dinowitz and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. I am Allison Pease, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the alma mater and current college of many of your constituents.

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

ABOUT JOHN JAY

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

Our undergraduate population is 15% Asian, 25% Black, 42% Hispanic, and 18% White. Sixty-five percent of our students are Pell Grant recipients, 72% receive Pell and TAP, and 50% are the first in their families to attend college. According to the Law School Admissions Council, John Jay ranks 5th in the U.S. for sending black applicants to law school, 13th for sending Hispanic applicants to law school and is in the top 10 among American universities in student social mobility according to the pioneering research led by Professor of Economics Raj Chetty of Harvard University. This year John Jay was ranked #3 in Top Performers on Social Mobility in the North, according to *U.S. News and World Report*.

RISING GRADUATION RATES

In 2017 when President Karol V. Mason arrived at John Jay College, the 4-year graduation rate was 26% and the 6-year graduation rate was 44%. She galvanized the college leadership to develop a Vision for Student Success as the College's top priority. I am proud to say that in the eight years that have followed our graduation rates have climbed significantly. We increased our four-year graduation rate fourteen percentage points to 40%. Our six-year graduation rate increased twelve percentage points to reach 56%, though it fell to 53% last year, reflecting the loss of momentum students experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our four-year transfer graduation rate is 67%, the second highest in New York State. The National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS) comparison group report of 2024 shows that at John Jay Black students graduate at 11% percentage points and Hispanic students at 7% percentage

points above national peer institutions.* We have been dogged and intentional about ensuring that we support increasing numbers of students to graduate, and to graduate more quickly so they earn more money over their lifetimes.

SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS

To fund these efforts, we have worked with philanthropy to pilot programs and test what works. Annually we raise between \$6-8 million dollars. We are incredibly grateful to the City Council and New York City, which funds our two cohort programs with the highest graduation rates, APPLE Corps and ACE.

Five key practices and programs that have demonstrably contributed to student success include:

- 1. Completion of Upper-Division Students Program (CUSP):** Counterintuitively, we discovered that students with 90+ credits were failing to graduate. We worked with DataKind who used machine learning to identify students at risk of dropping out. Now we can focus on those students who most need support and help them cross the finish line. CUSP – supported by the Gray Foundation and the Price Foundation – increased senior student graduation rates from 54% to 86% in its first year. Between 2019-2024, John Jay graduated 3,038 more students than predicted. That’s about 500 additional college graduates per year. (CUSP was featured in a *New York Times* article).
- 2. Accelerate Complete Engage (ACE):** ACE has been well described already. I would simply add that a 2023 study found four-year graduation rates among ACE students at John Jay College were 16 percentage points higher than among the comparison group.
- 3. APPLE Corps:** APPLE Corps is a partnership with the NYPD that serves a cohort of 100 students per year who receive annual stipends, travel support, academic and career advising while they to explore public service, leadership, justice and equity issues in policing and community relations in NYC. The four-year graduation rate of APPLE Corps students in 2023 was 70%, 30 percentage points higher than the college average.
- 4. Winter and Summer Acceleration:** Our Acceleration program helps first and second year students who are not on track to graduate in four years earn credits during summer or winter to increase their academic momentum and get back on track. We started this for STEM students about six years ago and then broadened the program during the pandemic to freshmen and sophomores. This program reversed a downward trend in first-year retention from 75.8% in 2021 to 80.9% in 2022. The program reaches out proactively to invite at-risk students for tuition-free courses and provides time management workshops and tutoring. In the three years we have run this intervention for freshmen and sophomores, we have seen that if a first-year student receives Acceleration support, their four-year graduation rate rises to 51%. If a second-year student receives Acceleration support, their four-year graduation rate rises to 61%. This is a promising practice, particularly in that it only costs about \$1000 per student. We are actively fundraising to support this work.

5. **CUNY Justice Academy:** The CUNY Justice Academy is a dual admission program with CUNY’s seven community colleges. The program has proven to increase the numbers of students completing their associate’s degrees at their colleges of origin, and providing a shortened time to graduation once at John Jay. This program was the subject of an [NYU Research Alliance study](#) in which they found that “John Jay College of Criminal Justice holds the distinction of being the CUNY college that graduates the highest percentage of transfer students of color—43 percent compared to just 29 percent in the rest of the City—as well as the school that serves the highest *proportion* of students of color. Both facts underscore the value of *how* John Jay supports its transfer students, through policies, teaching practices, and program culture.”

That concludes my testimony. I am sincerely grateful not just for your interest in our work but for your support of ACE and APPLE Corps, each of which has changed not just individual lives, but those of our students’ families and communities, and therefore contributed to New York City.

*Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/dfr/2024/ReportHTML.aspx?unitId=190600>



TESTIMONY OF DR. HEATHER JAMES-ZUCKERMAN
LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE, PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
New York City Council Higher Education Committee Hearing
November 19, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Dinowitz. On behalf of the nearly 30,000 faculty and staff represented by PSC/CUNY, thank you for your continued investment in the City University of New York.

As you know, when it comes to student success, there is no substitute for investment. The truisms ‘budgets are statements of priorities’ and ‘you get out what you put in’ are indeed true. That’s why, to improve graduation rates, we must address the long-standing issue of CUNY’s reliance on underpaid, contingent labor. This isn’t just a CUNY problem. It’s a nationwide issue. However, since the City funds more than 75% of community college budgets and all two-year college faculty and staff are city employees, the Council is uniquely positioned to help us make progress at CUNY. First, the Council must work with CUNY to ensure that all full-time vacancies left unfilled due to Mayor Adam’s now-reversed budget cuts are filled in a timely manner. Second, the Council must strive for a New Deal for CUNY by allocating funding to support new full-time faculty hires including adjunct conversions.

Both full and part time faculty at CUNY are instructors of the highest caliber. However, the very structure of contingent labor stymies success. Adjunct faculty earn less than their full-time counterparts, and often teach at multiple CUNY campuses as well as other universities. An office on campus, knowledge of which classes one is teaching with enough time to prepare, professional development, and administrative support are all disproportionately unavailable to adjuncts. Unsurprisingly, these working conditions impact the student experience. As such, students whose first year courses are taught mostly by contingent faculty are less likely to graduate than their otherwise similar peers.¹

¹<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775721000959>

Moreover, a study by the CUNY University Faculty Senate found that CUNY campuses with more students of color have fewer full-time faculty. This sends the wrong message to CUNY's diverse student population and contributes to the same racial and economic hierarchies that negatively impact many of their lives.

Throughout the CUNY system, adjuncts teach approximately 22,000 courses a year, making a huge contribution to the university. They are highly educated, and yet they often live as working poor, with exploitative work conditions, low wages, unpredictable access to health benefits, and little retirement or job security. Your support for a ratio of 65 full-time faculty members for every 1,000 full-time students would align CUNY with national averages to increase retention. When our CUNY budget values labor, it also values student success.

Further, we must fully fund CUNY in the following areas:

Advising improves graduation rates. Expand community college advising by lowering the ratio of advisors to one advisor per every hundred students. We need to hire 352 culturally competent advisors to achieve this ratio.

ACE: Expand ACE - "The most recent ACE freshmen cohort admitted to John Jay College realized a four-year graduation rate of 60 percent vs. 41 percent for a matched comparison group of non-ACE students, and the first transfer cohort at Lehman College realized a two-year graduation rate of 61 percent vs. 30 percent for a matched comparison group of non-ACE students."

ASAP: In an ASAP-for-all model, all community college students receive the academic and wrap-around support provided by CUNY's most successful community college program. As more students enroll in community colleges, the program needs additional funding to expand and thrive. In addition to lowering advising ratios, and providing free transit, expanding the ASAP program to include more students. In 2024 CUNY reported that, "the ASAP three-year graduation rate [was] 53%, more than double the 25% rate observed in a historically matched statistical comparison group... The most recent average three-year graduation rate across ten ASAP cohorts (fall 2009-fall 2020) [was] 49.1%. The majority (85%) of ASAP graduates enroll in a bachelor's degree program within six years of entering ASAP, with over 93% doing so within one year of earning their associate degree. Of ASAP graduates who enroll, 59% earn a bachelor's degree within four years of transfer."

Too many New Yorkers need but cannot access **mental health counselors**; CUNY students are no different. Today, the demand for services vastly exceeds the access to services. Hire an additional 119 mental health counselors at the community colleges to lower the ratio of counselors to students to one counselor for every 500 students.

Conclusion

The PSC/CUNY deeply appreciates your focus on student success. In that regard, we are your greatest partners. We have no profession without students. We work with them closely and see firsthand their struggles and triumphs. We know that CUNY creates tomorrow's critical thinkers, tomorrow's economic contributors, and tomorrow's city leaders. Our greatest hope is for every student to reach their full potential. Chairman, as an educator yourself, you know that education is a team effort. Over the past three years, this Council has worked with us to help our great public university not only survive, but thrive. Let's continue that effort together.

Thank you.

Heather James-Zuckerman

Improving Graduation Rates at the City University of New York (CUNY)

November 24, 2025

To the Committee on Higher Education:

My name is Molly Senack, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) as their Education and Employment Community Organizer. This testimony is supported by Sharon McLennon Wier, Ph.D., MEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director of CIDNY.

Much of the focus on improving CUNY's graduation rates has centered on financial accessibility, and rightfully so: financial accessibility is a critical component of students' overall access to higher education. The Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP) provides textbook fees, transportation stipends, free tutoring, and tuition funds for CUNY students who are enrolled in the program. The success of the program at improving graduation rates (53% vs. 25% of a statistically matched group) helps illustrate an obvious point: the more a student's needs are met, the less likely they are to drop out.

However, students have other significant unmet needs that must be addressed in order for graduation rates at CUNY to improve. Although there is no data specifically tracking the correlation between disability and post-secondary education dropout rates, in 2021 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that students with disabilities were twice as likely to drop out of high school as their nondisabled peers (10.7% vs 4.7%). This is consistent with 2022 data from the American Community Survey (ACS), which shows that people without disabilities are almost twice as likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher than people with disabilities (38% vs 21%). Both statistics indicate there is a significant gap between meeting the needs of disabled students and meeting the needs of nondisabled students.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students with disabilities are entitled to an accessible college campus, and it is important to acknowledge how broad the definition of "accessible" is. Accessibility must exist in all forms (accommodations can be physical, technological, sensory, etc.), in all spaces, and at all stages of the college experience, from application through graduation.

However, many CUNY campuses continue to fall short of what the ADA stipulates: classrooms, libraries, students housing, dining facilities, and offices are not always physically accessible. Elevators remain out of service for weeks at a time. Signs, including those in bathrooms and classrooms are not always available in large print or Braille. There are shortages in assistive technology (e.g. screen readers). Students with learning, mental, or developmental disabilities

who are entitled to accommodations within the classroom must often depend on professors who do not know how to offer aid. This issue is not limited to CUNY; it reflects a national problem: a 2022 NCES report found that of the 37% of students with disabilities who reported their disability to their school, almost 40% did not receive accommodations when they asked for them.

This lack of accessibility promotes an unfortunate cycle, where the majority of students with disabilities on college campuses choose not to report. According to the 2022 ACS, 21% of undergraduate students and 11% of graduate students reported having a disability during the 2019-2020 school year. Yet only 8% of students, or about a quarter of students who privately reported having a disability, registered as having a disability with their institutions. This discrepancy is consistent with the same NCES 2022 report mentioned above, which found that only 37% of students who acknowledged having a disability registered as such with their institution.

If students are discouraged from seeking accommodations, and are not guaranteed those accommodations if they do seek them, then those students are not receiving the supports and resources that they need to graduate.

The National Center for College Students with Disabilities has found that the most significant barriers to access and participation on college campuses include fear of discrimination or feeling unwelcome, challenges navigating necessary campus procedures, being unaware of resources and services the student might qualify for, faculty being unaware of resources and services they might qualify for (or the faculty being aware of these supports, but being unresponsive or uncooperative in providing them), and receiving inadequate accommodations from the school.

To address these issues, CIDNY has several recommendations:

- **Require in-depth training for campus staff and faculty** that uses more comprehensive definitions of both “accessibility” and “disability” with a focus on mental health and chronic medical disabilities.
- **Improve digital inclusivity on institutional websites** through the use of inclusive language, the inclusion of statistics on the prevalence of disabled students/staff/faculty on campus, and by ensuring that information on disability services is easily located on the website in an effort to ensure students with disabilities feel represented, supported, and unstigmatized.
- **Standardize and centralize accommodations processes across all CUNY campuses** to make it easier for students to gather the necessary documentation to seek accommodation.
- **Provide funding to ensure campuses’ assistive technology is up to date**, especially when it comes to software compatibility.
- **Allocate sufficient funding specifically for staffing and operations**, since accessibility on college campuses will only improve if there is funding to ensure the offices responsible for administering support and services are sufficiently staffed.

We thank the Council for their time and effort, and ask that you consider our recommendations to better support students with disabilities as you continue your work on improving overall graduation rates at CUNY.

Sincerely,

Molly Senack (She/Her)
Education and Employment Community Organizer
Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York
Email: msenack@cidny.org Phone: (917)415-3154

From: [New York City Council](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Mon, Nov 24 2025 @ 1:00 PM - Committee on Higher Education
Date: Wednesday, November 26, 2025 10:03:24 AM
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Attendee will be: Submitting written testimony

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Attendee name (Zoom name): Crystal boone

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Good morning, Council Members, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

Across the country, about 37% of college students do not graduate, and at one point, I was part of that statistic. As a continuing student, I have personally felt how financial hardship, family responsibilities, and unexpected life challenges can derail academic progress. These experiences are what motivate me to advocate for expanding and strengthening student support programs across CUNY especially programs like ASAP, which have proven to increase graduation rates and keep students on track.

However, not every student who needs support qualifies. I did not qualify for ASAP for several reasons, even though I would have received help from it. And I know I am not alone. Many students fall into a gap student who do not meet eligibility requirements but still desperately need academic, financial, and emotional support. Reforming and broadening ASAP eligibility would ensure that more students can access the resources they need to not just enroll in college but graduate.

I spend a lot of time talking to younger students, and I constantly hear the same concerns: *"I feel alone."* *"I don't know who to ask for help."* *"I didn't know that program existed."* These statements reveal a deeper issue—students are not being informed early enough about the support systems available to them. We should not expect students, especially first-generation or low-income students, to navigate college blindly.

One simple but powerful solution would be proactive outreach. I believe CUNY should mail a pamphlet or information packet to students before their first semester—even before registration—clearly outlining all support programs, advising services, financial resources, tutoring, mental-health services, and student opportunity programs. A student should know what help exists before they walk into their first class. Early awareness can prevent students from dropping out, burning out, or feeling like they must struggle in silence.

I also want to highlight the importance of expanding programs like SEEK and College Discovery. When I started college, I had no idea these programs existed. Many students from underrepresented or low-income backgrounds miss out simply because they are not aware. Expanding these programs and increasing outreach could significantly improve retention and graduation outcomes.

As an honors student, I have experienced another challenge the financial pressure of fees attached to honors programs. These added costs can discourage students who are working hard to excel academically. I strongly encourage the Council to consider supporting fee waivers or offering flexible payment plans so that honors students are not forced to choose between financial stability and academic opportunity.

In closing, I share my story not just as an individual, but as a voice for the thousands of students who face obstacles that many decision-makers never see. Expanding program eligibility, improving early outreach, and reducing financial barriers are not small adjustments; they are meaningful investments in student success, workforce development, and the future of New York City.

I urge the City Council to consider these reforms so that every student regardless of background, income, or circumstance has a genuine opportunity to graduate, succeed, and contribute to our city.

Thank you for your time and thank you for your commitment to supporting CUNY students.

My name is Mariam Wali and I am a current CUNY student at Borough of Manhattan Community College. In an effort to address why graduation rates for CUNY have been historically low, we must first look at the different lifestyles and demographics found in students attending CUNY schools and students attending other schools such as private institutions with higher graduation rates that are statistically attended by non-New-Yorks (Columbia and NYU). When doing this, it'll become clear that low graduation rates are not the result of a lack of student effort or commitment. They instead reflect the structural realities that students with a disproportionately low-income, working-class, first-generation, and juggling employment and family responsibilities live. Many CUNY students I have met and including myself, work while attending school and many of these jobs are full-time and extensive. A large share of CUNY students also support dependents. It is then reasonable and expected that these pressures can slow degree progress and increase the risk of people dropping out, even for academically capable students.

CUNY also serves a high percentage of recent immigrants, students from underfunded high schools, and first-generation college attenders who need expanded academic advising, tutoring, mental-health support, and pathways programs. When students have yet to experience individuals like themselves succeeding academically and financially, and have been economically burdened from certain advantages that wealthier classes receive such as tutors and after-school, it becomes a deeply engraved and normalized idea that they are systematically sabotaged from climbing the social ladder. Therefore, many CUNY students require their city to have support and faith that they can achieve better opportunities through funding and creating more inclusive and accessible programs. Programs like ASAP and ACE have already demonstrated that productive investment produces better grades and graduation rates.

Overall, the lower graduation rate should not be interpreted as institutional failure or purely CUNY student's fault, but as evidence that there is a need for stable and increased support. Continued funding is incredibly vital to closing equity gaps, ensuring economic mobility for New York families, and maintaining CUNY's role as one of the most effective engines of upward mobility in the country. Cutting funding would only deepen the challenges students face and enable failure upon a great majority of New Yorkers who wish to better themselves financially and academically. By investing in them, there's an opportunity for improved

completion outcomes and produces more capable and educated New Yorkers that'll give back to their city.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/27/25

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Name: Jellison Rodas, Vice Chancellor

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY government Relations

Address: _____

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Date: _____

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Name: Rachel Neches

Address: 80 8th Ave

I represent: Center For an Urban Future

Address: _____

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Name: Jose Aulic

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: BMCC

Address: 199 Chambers

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 4433 Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ryan Janowski

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/24/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christine Brongniart - Deputy Executive

Address: Director AS/HR

I represent: CUNY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Allison Pease Provost & Schur

Address: Vice President

I represent: John Jay, CUNY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Truetsch - Associate Dean

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms