

INTRODUCTION

New York City's educational system provides both models and cautionary tales for other nations involved in open access higher education.

It is full of unintended consequences, benign and even malign neglect, political squabbling, and lost and found opportunities.

At LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York, after a period of decline in political fortunes, we are coping with our realities in very deliberate ways.

HOW OPEN ACCESS OPERATES AT THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AND WHAT LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS DOING ABOUT IT

CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

- City University of New York is the largest urban university in the United States, with 19 colleges, 450,000 students, and 2,100 full-time faculty. It has:
 - 11 senior colleges
 - 6 “community” colleges (open-access)
 - One law school
 - One Ph.D. granting graduate school
 - One newly created “honors” college (for which the University received the largest private donation in its history)

HISTORY OF OPEN ACCESS AT CUNY

CUNY began as a series of small liberal arts colleges, which were founded to offer free higher education for the talented sons and then daughters of working-class people as well as for ethnic minorities who were excluded from admission to elite universities such as Columbia, Yale or Princeton.

The first CUNY college, the City College of New York, was founded in 1847, as an all-male institution. It has graduated nine Nobel Prize winners while City University as a whole has graduated eleven. CUNY awards 9,000 Associate degrees (2-year and open access), 14,000 bachelor degrees and 6,400 masters degrees every year. Five community colleges rank among the top in the nation as a source of associate degrees awarded to minority students.

MORE HISTORY

1968 was a year of international student protest. New York City students were also engaged. Black, white and Latino students occupied the campuses of City College and other CUNY campuses demanding broader access for students of color, and for the hiring of more diverse faculty as well as the establishment of ethnic studies courses.

EVEN MORE HISTORY

These protests led to the creation of Open Admissions at CUNY. Now any student graduating from a New York High School would be admitted into one of the colleges or depending on their grades, the community colleges.

Thousands more students enrolled at the campuses. A large percentage of these students were not academically prepared. Almost all were the first in their families to attend institutions of higher learning.

At the four-year schools special SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) programs were instituted for these students providing tutors and special courses. But these were set apart from the mainstream college courses and gradually over the last two decades, de-funded

MISSION

The mission of CUNY's community colleges has always been to prepare students with the basic skills they need for either occupational training or preparation for transfer to a baccalaureate (4 year degree-granting institution.)

Open admissions at CUNY created the need for more community-based colleges. LaGuardia opened its doors in 1971 to meet the demands of its community in Western Queens, New York, so as to include those historically excluded from the academy. The college began with 500 students with an expressed commitment to what were then radical models of pedagogy, including cooperative education.

ADDITIONAL POLITICAL/SOCIAL CONTEXT

Upgrading the university: A 1997 consolidation of CUNY eliminated all but the most minimal remediation from the senior colleges (SEEK designed for African –Americans hangs on). All students “not proficient” in reading or writing in English, or mathematics, were to make up these proficiencies at one of the community colleges and then transfer to a senior college.

City/state divisions: the New York City high schools began to demand that all students receive an academic diploma, and not merely a trade diploma. The intention was to prepare more students for college. Unfortunately, the state did not commit the money for this plan and earmarked money was held up in the governors’ office for decades. Ten years of lawsuits followed, with the City winning , but never receiving its money.

Transformation from an industrial to a technological/service economy required that the workforce possess a far higher level of skill literacy. Result: Increases in number and changes in needs of the populations attending community colleges.

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE OF LAGUARDIA

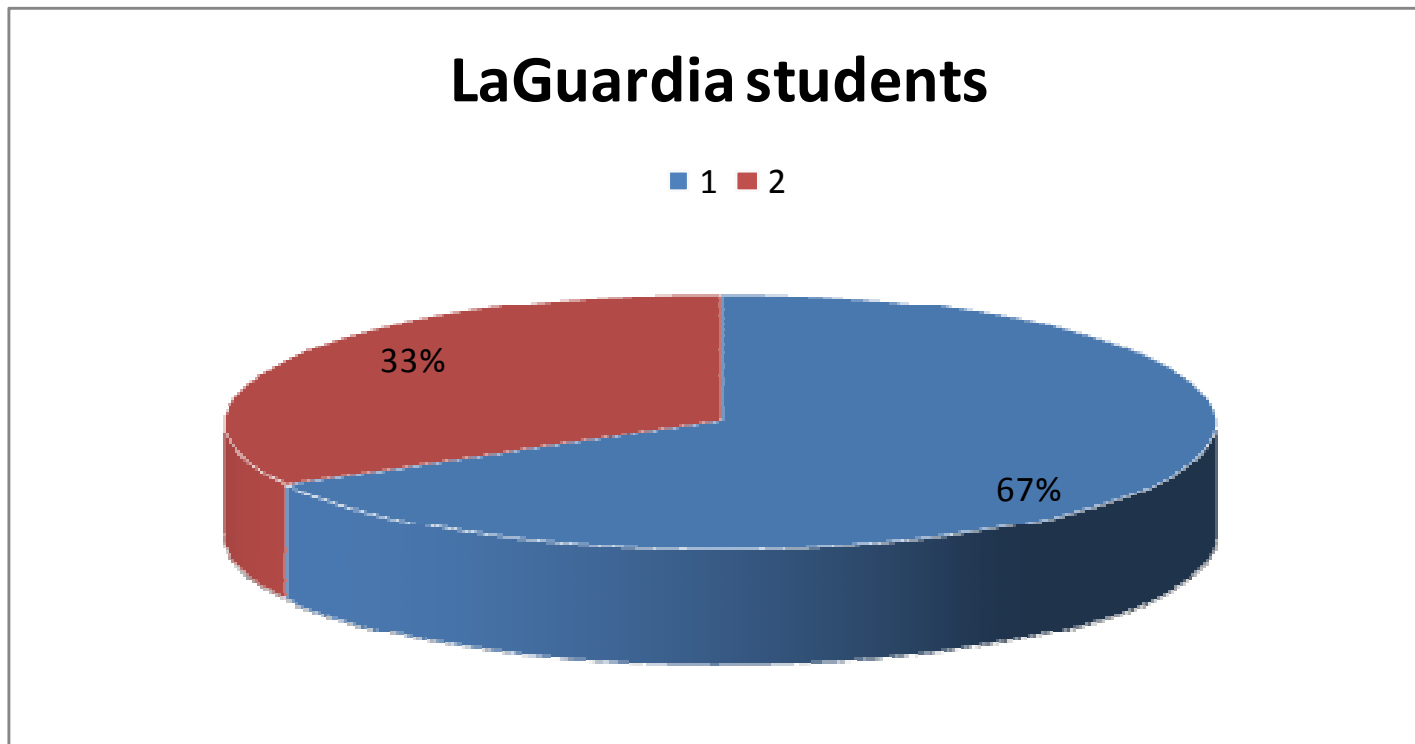
Nationally, 1 in 8 people in the U.S. are foreign born. New York State ranks third in the U.S. for the number of adults who speak little or no English with approximately 660,000. Many more cannot write English. Today, Queens, New York is the most ethnically diverse county in the United States, and the only county in the U.S. in which the incomes of its non-white residents is higher than its white residents.

LaGuardia is The City University of New York's most ethnically diverse college. It has students from 110 nations, representing about 80 different languages.

2 out of 3 LaGuardia students are foreign born.

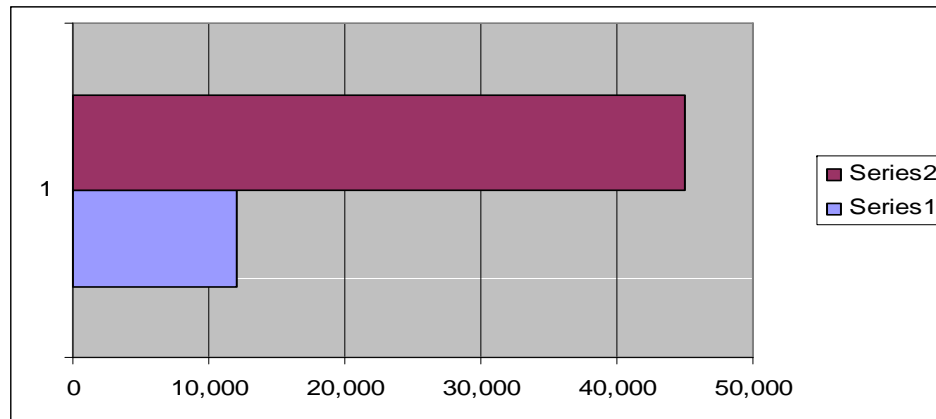
NATIONAL AND FOREIGN BORN STUDENTS COMPARED

- Over 25% of our students have degrees from foreign high schools
- 23% have General Equivalency Degrees



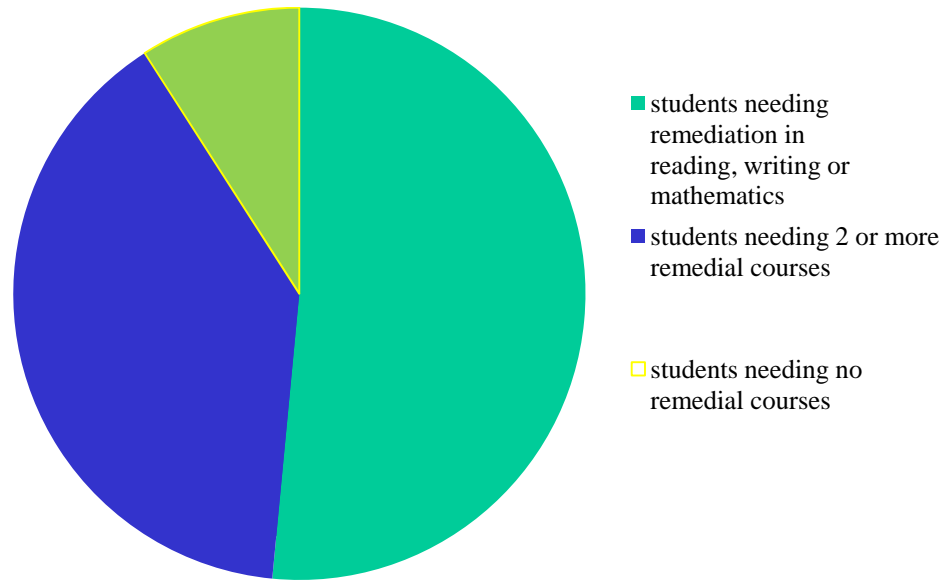
POVERTY

Our students' reported average annual family income approximates \$12,000.00, as compared to a New York State average of \$45,000.00. (2005 census figures)



COLLEGE SKILLS PROFICIENCY

Over 85% of our students enter the college needing some form of remediation in reading, writing, or mathematics. 65% fail two or more competency exams. (2003 data)



U.S. / COMMONWEALTH DIFFERENCES

Unlike commonwealth countries, where testing is standardized, general competency exams for open access students are a local, politically charged issue in the United States. The U.S. has traditionally left responsibility for managing public education to the individual states and localities, rather than the national government.

Thus, curriculum, funding, and assessment measurements become local political issues and continuously subject to shifts in public opinion.

President Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act" was an unsuccessful attempt to bring greater standardization to education. It's punitive aspects and partisan enforcement exacerbated many of the existing problems.

COMPETENCY EXAMS AND OPEN ACCESS

It is here where much of our work as reading and writing instructors begins and where issues of politics, power and social justice enter...

SOME FACTORS AFFECTING COMPETENCY EXAMS

- Public image of open access institutions
- Costs / taxes
- Racial and ethnic tensions
- Largest immigration influx in a century
- Transformation of New York from an industrial to technological/service economy
- Rise of small public charter and private (fee-paying) high schools that segregate higher-performing students from lower-performing in separate specialty schools rather than in separate classes in the same school

PUBLIC IMAGE AND POLITICS

Once CUNY instituted Open Admissions in the early 1970s under political pressure from students and neighborhood activists, many more students of color and varying ethnicities entered the city university system. American “affirmative action” policies (the attempt to address structural inequalities due to racial segregation and class inequities), created various resentments in those groups that believed they might be disadvantaged by the changes. The large number of incoming students swelled budgets and due to a fiscal crisis in 1976, the City University instituted its first tuition. Despite tax windfalls, tuition has only risen.

PUBLIC IMAGE AND POLITICS (CONT.)

This resentment was exploited by conservative politicians. Former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani opposed public education and CUNY's open admissions particularly, portraying it as an inferior educational institution and undeserving of public funding. Despite a boom economy, this coincided with a resurgence of social-Darwinist attitudes that distinguished between "worthy" and "undeserving" members of the underclass. In 1998, Open Admissions was ended at the CUNY 4 year colleges.

\$MONEY\$

- Cost of remediation and public education
- Anti-tax attitude of citizens
- Upstate versus “Down-state” budget conflicts

LAGUARDIA STUDENTS PROTESTING THE END OF OPEN ADMISSIONS IN 1998



FUNDING

- In 2004 New York State was 41st of 50 states in spending on higher education.
- In 2005, after a rise in the budget allocation of 9%, the State allocated 701.6 million dollars for CUNY's senior colleges. Since it splits the cost of the community colleges with the city, it only allocated only 3.1 million for those, the rest of the costs to be met by New York City. They pay \$2,235.00 per student while the cost per student per year is closer to \$9,183.00 (the national average for community colleges in 2006). The shortfall is met by federal grants and other national, state, city, and private charitable monies, but these are continually in jeopardy. Though citizens want community colleges available, they prefer tax cuts and have received rebates from the national and city governments in recent years.
- However, it is politically risky to blatantly restrict access to higher education given the obvious need for a better trained and technologically adept workforce.

“SOLUTION” = TESTING

- Move from full access for all New York City high school graduates to temporary access at community college for many and a “double-gated entry”
- Interior gate is guarded by standardized testing in basic skills courses created by private independent corporations
- Assessment models

ASSESSMENT AND “HIGH-STAKES” TESTING

CUNY replaces old exams with new ones designed by a national testing service (ACT). The ACT test is produced in Iowa, a farm state over 2000 miles away, with a radically different population from ours.

Faculty and the college are measured by pass rates and both administration and students pressure faculty to spend class time on test preparation, though this is dubious reading and writing pedagogy and does not prepare students for subsequent coursework.

FACULTY DISCONNECT

Faculty are hired with doctorates in disciplines but their intellectual training is incomplete for the type of work they need to do to help students. Furthermore, few are trained in the assessment models by which they and the college will be judged.

Most community college faculty teach 9 three-hour courses per year, sit on committees and head service projects at the colleges. They receive minimal time off for scholarship and often find it difficult to do research and remain current in their discipline. Yet there is increased pressure to produce scholarship for tenure and promotion.

SOLUTIONS ATTEMPTED

- Innovation via “high tech” and “low tech”
- Faculty development in new pedagogies
- College/High school collaborations
- New funding streams

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS: HIGH TECHNOLOGY

- ePortfolio: students create electronic portfolios, which feature their resumes, career goals, and course work
- The creation of Blackboard courses to engage students in collaborative on-line learning, thus enhancing their technological skills and the way they communicate with their professors and with each other
- Faculty use the Internet, avatars, email and design on-line courses. Faculty participate in year-long training to expand their technological skills

PROGRAMS: “LOW” TECHNOLOGY

- Learning communities: first year students enroll in paired and theme-based courses that group them with other first year students needing basic skills courses, thus creating a mutually supportive environment.
- Common Reading: A book is chosen by committee and distributed free to entering freshmen. Speakers, films and other activities are organized throughout the year on the theme and faculty is encouraged to use the book in their courses
- Black Male Initiative: American-born black males participate in a program that tracks their progress in classes and intervenes if they are in danger of failure.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- *Designed for Learning*: Teaching with technology seminar: faculty are taught how to enhance instruction through web design, Blackboard, digital stories, photographs and film clips, etc.
- *Writing in the Disciplines*: Seminar on how to integrate writing across the disciplines; encourages instructors to make all disciplines “writing intensive”
- *Building Information Literacy in the Disciplines*: faculty from across the college work together to develop and test a range of strategies to build students’ critical research and information literacy skills
- *Carnegie Seminar on the Scholarship of Teaching*: introduces the scholarship of teaching and learning and its method of self-directed inquiry. Faculty projects are developed into course portfolios and publications
- *Focus on the Learning Community*: a seminar for faculty who are teaching in various learning community structures the chance to meet together with partners, learn new pedagogy for interdisciplinary teaching, and plan their shared courses.
- *Project Quantum Leap*: mathematics and other disciplinary faculty come together to adapt the SENCER approach of teaching science and higher-level mathematics in “compelling contexts”