Course Offerings

City University of New York

Spotlight on Education

Audit Highlights

Objective

To determine whether the City University of New York (CUNY) is effectively matching course offerings to student demand. Our audit covered the three academic years ended June 30, 2019.

About the Program

CUNY is a 25-campus university system comprising 11 senior colleges; 7 community colleges; and 7 graduate, honors, and professional colleges. CUNY serves the five boroughs of New York City. As of fall 2019, approximately 162,000 full-time undergraduate degree-seeking students were enrolled at CUNY's 25 campuses.

Historically, many first-time students studying toward a bachelor's degree would earn that degree in four years of full-time study. However, over the past 30 years, time to degree has increased for many students. Based on the most recently published CUNY data, many full-time first-time CUNY college students do not graduate within four to six years of enrollment – just 30 percent received their bachelor's degree after four years, and 53 percent received their bachelor's degree after six years. The increased time to degree is influenced by factors such as the pathways students take, institutional resources available to students, difficulty in registering for courses, available financial resources, and the need to take remedial courses.

Our audit focused on the five senior colleges with the largest enrollment, one in each borough, as of the fall 2017 semester. These five colleges serve approximately 52,500 full-time students. As of fall 2019, the annual tuition was $6,930 for New York State residents.

Key Findings

- CUNY officials attribute low graduation rates to socioeconomic factors that are outside CUNY's control, such as outside employment and academic readiness. However, in a 2018 CUNY Student Experience Survey, 5,067 of the 14,479 responding students (35 percent) indicated they were unable to register for one or more desired (required or elective) courses, thus delaying their graduation.

- We determined that CUNY's Central Office has not established university-wide policies and procedures to address the scheduling of courses. Moreover, there is no system-wide policy specifying when additional course sections should be added. Instead, departments at each college decide which courses and sections should be offered each semester.

- We interviewed 25 department officials at the five senior colleges and were told that course schedules are established using enrollment data from prior semesters. In addition, 13 of 25 officials told us they do not offer online or hybrid courses (courses encompassing both classroom and online formats) because they believe such courses are unnecessary.

- We sent surveys to 5,000 randomly selected students, and 252 of the 678 responding students (37 percent) complained that they could not register for a desired course. More than half of the 252 students indicated the course they could not register for was required for their academic major and necessary to earn their degree. Students who are unable to register for or complete desired courses may take longer to graduate, costing them time and exhausting their financial resources, including financial aid grants, which could ultimately cause them to drop out of school.

- Forty-nine of the 172 students (29 percent) we interviewed at the five campuses indicated that academic advisement was not beneficial to them. Several students across several majors stated they were sometimes incorrectly registered or advised to take courses that were not necessary for their academic program, causing their graduation to be delayed. Additionally, students complained that not enough advisors were available for some majors and advisement days and hours were extremely limited with long wait times to see an advisor.

- We also determined that administrators at CUNY's Central Office and at the five sampled colleges do not comprehensively track students' use of their financial aid or monitor their graduation rates. Information compiled by CUNY at our request showed that approximately 4,923 students had exhausted their financial aid during the three academic years ended June 30, 2019 – 1,533 of the 4,923 students (31 percent) ultimately dropped out (did not graduate from CUNY).

Key Recommendations

- Ensure that CUNY students have opportunities to register for elective courses and courses required for their programs of study.

- Require that department officials responsible for scheduling courses formally survey students in their respective departments about required and elective courses.

- Improve advisor training to keep them up to date on degree requirements.

- Track students' progress toward graduation and their financial aid eligibility. Provide appropriate and timely academic advisement to those students while alerting them of the danger of exhausting their financial aid eligibility.
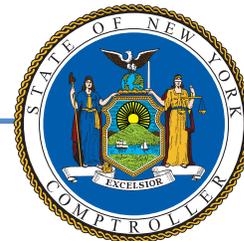
Office of the New York State Comptroller
Division of State Government Accountability

September 1, 2020

Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Ph.D.
Chancellor
The City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

Dear Dr. Rodríguez:

The Office of the State Comptroller is committed to helping State agencies, public authorities, and local government agencies manage government resources efficiently and effectively. By so doing, it provides accountability for tax dollars spent to support government operations. The Comptroller oversees the fiscal affairs of State agencies, public authorities, and local government agencies, as well as their compliance with relevant statutes and their observance of good business practices. This fiscal oversight is accomplished, in part, through our audits, which identify opportunities for improving operations. Audits can also identify strategies for reducing costs and strengthening controls that are intended to safeguard assets.

Following is a report of our audit of the City University of New York entitled *Course Offerings*. The audit was performed pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law.

This audit's results and recommendations are resources for you to use in effectively managing your operations and in meeting the expectations of taxpayers. If you have any questions about this report, please feel free to contact us.

Respectfully submitted,

Division of State Government Accountability

Contents

Glossary of Terms

Term	Description	Identifier
City Tech	New York City College of Technology	*School*
CSI	College of Staten Island	*School*
CUNY	City University of New York	*Auditee*
Hunter	Hunter College	*School*
Lehman	Lehman College	*School*
Middle States	Middle States Commission on Higher Education	*Commission*
PSC	Professional Staff Congress	*Faculty Union*
Queens	Queens College	*School*

Background

The City University of New York (CUNY) – the nation's largest urban public university system – comprises 11 senior colleges; 7 community colleges; and 7 graduate, honors, and professional colleges located throughout New York City's five boroughs. As of January 2019, CUNY offered 1,400 academic programs, 200 majors leading to associate and bachelor's degrees, and 800 graduate degree programs to over a half million students in a single integrated system. As of fall 2019, approximately 162,000 full-time undergraduate degree-seeking students were enrolled at CUNY's 25 campuses.

In 1961, the State Legislature formally established CUNY and determined that there should be full State funding of the operations and debt service of the CUNY senior colleges. The Legislature intended that CUNY be "responsive to the needs of its urban setting" and "maintain and expand its commitment to academic excellence and to the provision of equal access and opportunity" for all students.

Historically, many first-time students studying toward a bachelor's degree would earn that degree in four years of full-time study. However, over the past 30 years, time to degree has increased for many students. Many full-time CUNY students studying toward a bachelor's degree do not graduate within four to six years of first-time enrollment. Only 30 percent of those full-time bachelor degree-seeking students who enrolled in 2015 (the most recent entering class with published four-year graduation rates) received their bachelor's degree within four years. Of full-time students who first enrolled in 2013, 53 percent had graduated with a bachelor's degree within six years. By comparison, the State University of New York's most recently published graduation rates for full-time freshmen who first enrolled in fall 2011 showed that 53 percent of bachelor's degree students graduated in four years, and by six years, 68 percent had graduated.

Generally, students are eligible to receive eight semesters (four years) of New York State financial aid to offset or completely cover tuition costs. Students who continue their undergraduate education beyond four years could exhaust their eligibility for State financial aid.

Our audit focused on the five senior colleges with the largest enrollment, one in each borough, as of the fall 2017 semester: the College of Staten Island (CSI), Lehman College (Lehman), Hunter College (Hunter), New York City College of Technology (City Tech), and Queens College (Queens). Enrollment at the five schools was approximately 52,500 full-time students. As of fall 2019, annual tuition for New York State residents was $6,930.

Audit Findings and Recommendations

Our audit determined that CUNY is not effectively matching course offerings to student demand. Consequently, some students have difficulty registering for required and elective courses and graduating in a timely manner. CUNY officials attribute the increased time to graduate and the lower graduation rates to child care issues, outside employment, academic readiness, and other socioeconomic factors outside of its control. However, CUNY's own Student Experience Survey shows that factors within its control, such as course offerings, are likely contributing to these outcomes.

We concluded that CUNY officials could take steps such as matching course offerings with student needs; offering sufficient numbers of evening, weekend, and online courses; and increasing helpful academic advisement that meet the needs of its students to potentially increase graduation rates and timeliness.

Course Availability

Section 6201 of the State Education Law requires that CUNY "be responsive to the needs of its urban setting." In addition, CUNY's senior colleges are accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Middle States) in order to assure students and the public of the quality of higher education. Middle States' accreditation process ensures institutional accountability, self-appraisal, improvement, and innovation through peer review. To remain accredited, institutions must provide sufficient learning opportunities and resources to support programs of study and students' academic progress and must also have a sufficient number of faculty. Therefore, we would expect CUNY to offer appropriate courses and a sufficient number of class sections so full-time students can earn a bachelor's degree within four years or shortly thereafter.

To determine student satisfaction with course offerings at the five senior colleges, we emailed a survey to 5,000 randomly selected students (1,000 per school) in August 2019. We received 678 responses as follows:

- 252 of the 678 students (37 percent) complained that they could not register for a desired[1] course;

- 139 of the 252 students indicated they were unable to register for a course that was required for their major; and

- 103 of the 252 students indicated they had these problems for three or more terms.

In addition, 14,479 students from the 11 senior colleges and the School of Professional Studies responded to CUNY's 2018 Student Experience Survey. The results, publicized in February 2020, indicated that 5,067 students (35 percent) stated they were unable to register for one or more desired courses.

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1   A required or elective course.

In November and December 2019, we polled 172 students at the five senior colleges about course offerings, and 63 of the 172 students (37 percent) complained that they had problems registering due to closed course sections. Students pursuing various majors indicated that courses they needed to graduate reached capacity quickly, preventing them from registering and delaying their graduation. Furthermore, while CUNY should be responsive to student needs, many students indicated that department officials were not always able to resolve scheduling problems. Chart 1 illustrates the registration results for the 315 total students from our email survey and campus polls who had registration issues.

Chart 1 – Course Registration Issues Among 315 Students Surveyed and Polled
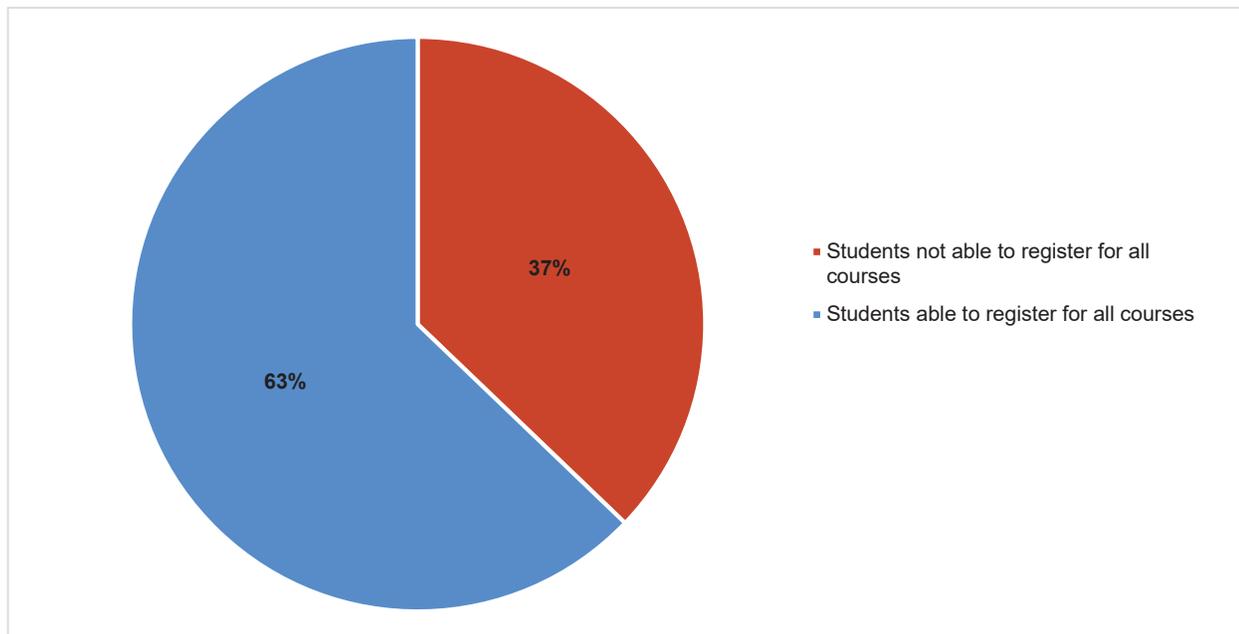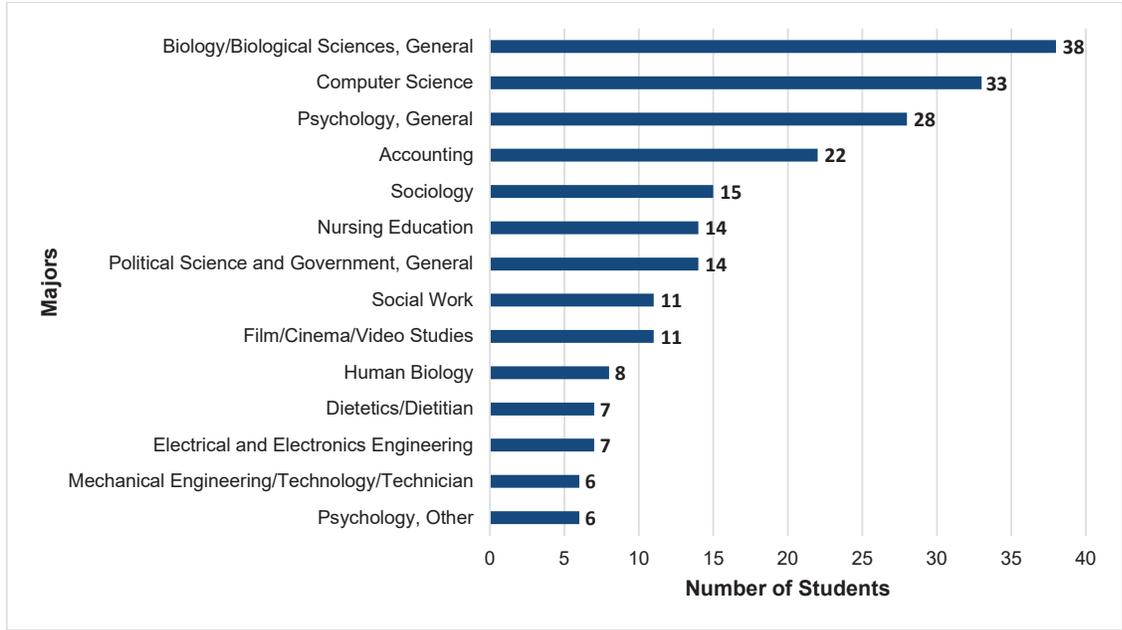

Chart 2, on the following page, identifies the programs of study students cited in our polling and survey as having the most course scheduling issues.

Chart 2 – Surveyed and Polled Students' Registration Complaints by Major*

Majors (Number of Students):
- Biology/Biological Sciences, General: 38
- Computer Science: 33
- Psychology, General: 28
- Accounting: 22
- Sociology: 15
- Nursing Education: 14
- Political Science and Government, General: 14
- Social Work: 11
- Film/Cinema/Video Studies: 11
- Human Biology: 8
- Dietetics/Dietitian: 7
- Electrical and Electronics Engineering: 7
- Mechanical Engineering/Technology/Technician: 6
- Psychology, Other: 6

*The chart includes majors with six or more student complaints.

As shown in Chart 3, 11 percent of our sampled CSI students complained about course availability while 25 percent of Hunter students reported that they could not register for a desired course.

Chart 3 – Percentage of Students Who Could Not Register for a Course (Required or Elective)

College (Percentage of Student With Complaints):
- Hunter: 25%
- Queens: 24%
- Lehman: 23%
- City Tech: 17%
- CSI: 11%
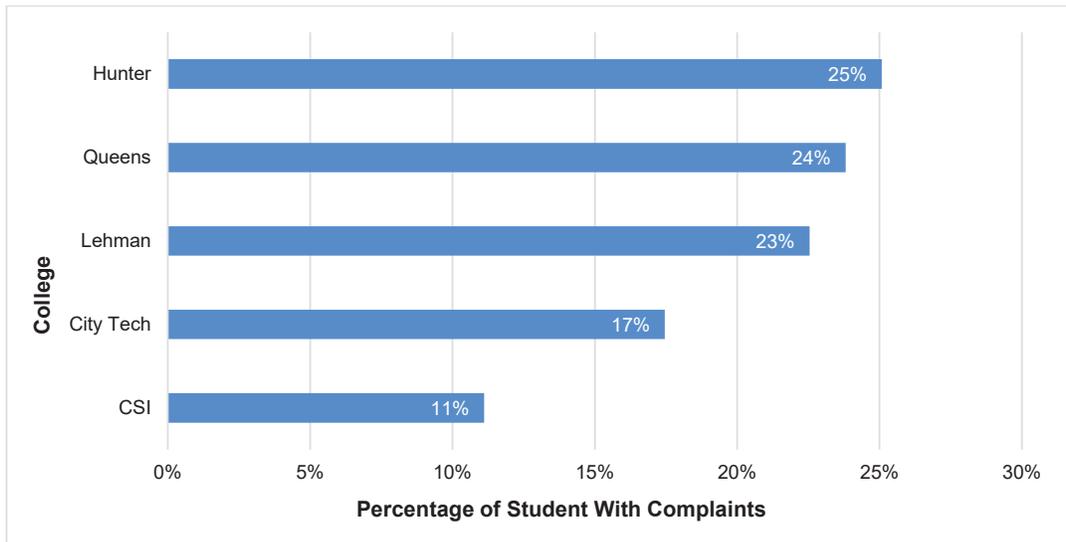
To better understand the course scheduling process at the five sampled schools, we interviewed officials from 25 judgmentally selected departments. We found that course schedules are created using enrollment numbers modeled after previous terms (e.g., the previous year's fall enrollment numbers are used to estimate the number of course seats needed for the upcoming fall semester and the previous year's spring numbers are used for the upcoming spring semester). Moreover, colleges open course sections as they see fit, taking into account variables such as instructor and room availability and budget constraints rather than the needs of students. Colleges should do a better job of meeting the needs of students. Based on these interviews, we identified additional course offering limitations, as follows:

- Officials for 13 of the 25 departments stated that they do not offer either online or hybrid courses (courses encompassing both classroom and online instruction), explaining that they are unnecessary due to the number of course sections offered and budget and faculty issues. They also stated such courses need to be specifically developed and faculty trained to teach them. However, according to the 2018 CUNY Student Experience Survey, 49 percent of senior college students indicated that they would like more online courses and 52 percent of those students were interested in more hybrid courses.

- Faculty at seven departments stated that they do not allow "overtallies" (enrollment in a course that is listed as full in the registration system). However, based on the 2018-19 course schedules, these departments did not offer any courses requiring specialized laboratory space, which could be a rationale for limiting enrollment.

- Officials for six departments stated that they do not offer a full complement of required courses that would allow students to complete their degrees by taking only evening and weekend courses. However, according to the 2018 CUNY Student Experience Survey, 42 percent of senior college students indicated that they would like more evening courses and 35 percent indicated they would like more weekend courses. A Hunter official stated that the school sometimes cancels evening, weekend, and early morning courses that do not reach the required enrollment level. This is a significant issue because, even though enrollment in a class may be low, the students who selected that class may need that time slot.

Based on the CUNY survey, the primary reason students were unable to register for courses was the insufficient number of seats in certain course sections. We met with department officials and registrars at the five campuses as well as officials at CUNY Central Office. They informed us that departments decide which courses and how many sections to offer each semester. Various department officials told us that they do not formally survey students to determine which courses, days, and time slots they prefer, meaning they could not truly know students' needs. Many officials stated that surveying students is not necessary and that they don't believe many students complain about course registration, as students can come to the department to discuss their needs. Some department officials were unaware that CUNY surveys students and considers the results.

We interviewed members of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the CUNY faculty union, and were told that a lack of funding impacts CUNY's ability to provide students the courses they need.

Though it seems many factors may be contributing to the problem of course offerings not meeting student demand, a policy that includes the use of student feedback for determining course scheduling and seat availability could have a positive effect on student satisfaction and graduation rates.

CUNY's Central Office has not established university-wide policies and procedures to address course scheduling, which is handled by the departments at each college. There is also no universal policy specifying when additional course sections should be added and made available to address student needs.

Students who cannot register for required courses may face extra semesters of study. With the additional terms of tuition and related costs, they may be at risk of exhausting their financial aid, which could delay or put them at risk of not graduating. In addition, graduation delays may affect job market opportunities. A more responsive approach to student needs could mitigate these risks and benefit students and the institutions.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that CUNY students have opportunities to register for elective courses and courses required for their programs of study.

2. Require that department officials responsible for scheduling courses formally survey students in their respective departments about required and elective courses.

3. Make CUNY officials responsible for scheduling cognizant of the CUNY Student Experience Surveys and require action plans to address student concerns.

4. Explore offering more online, hybrid, weekend, and off-hour courses as well as the use of overtallies to address student needs, where feasible.

Student Advisement

Title 8, Section 52.2(e)(5) of the New York Codes, Rules and Regulations states that institutions of higher education must provide academic advisement to students through faculty or other qualified personnel. In addition, Middle States requires advisement and counseling programs to enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational experience.

Student demand for course offerings may be tied to their understanding of which courses are needed to succeed in their fields of study or to graduate within four years to maximize access to State aid and job market opportunities. Advisement can help guide students in creating a plan to efficiently complete all courses required to

reach these goals. However, students who responded to our survey and campus polling and certain student government representatives indicated there is inadequate communication between students and department advisors. They complained that some advisors provided no help or incorrect information and, that during registration, the wait to consult with an advisor was often very long. When we interviewed students at the five campuses, 49 of the 172 students (29 percent) indicated that advisement was not beneficial for them. Students across several majors indicated they were sometimes incorrectly registered or advised to take courses that were not necessary for their program – a waste of their time and money, which also caused delayed graduation.

Specific examples of advisement problems that students described at the campuses are as follows:

- A student in Queens' Latin American program (a major with few students) said some department courses are never offered. The student attempted to speak with department officials; however, his advisor was available for only one hour a week, at a time that did not fit into the student's work schedule, and no other department faculty member was available. We telephoned the department several times using the number listed on the department's website, but no one answered the phone or responded to the messages we left.

- A Hunter student who was pursuing an as yet undeclared major stated she found it impossible to get help from advisors or program directors when she was struggling to register for classes.

- A biology major at Hunter indicated that classes are often overpopulated, filling up quickly. When she could not enroll in a course required for her major because it was full, her advisor told her to register for a statistics class. She later learned she did not need that course for her program and added she had to wait until the next semester to take the required biology course, which delayed her graduation.

We found that some departments don't offer early, late, weekend, or walk-in advisement hours. We reviewed the websites for the departments interviewed and found that advisement hours appeared limited (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Advisement Hours

College	Department	Advisement Hours
Hunter	Chemistry	Advisement by appointment only
Queens	Computer Science	• No morning or Friday hours • One office hour on Monday and Wednesday starting at 1:30 p.m. • Advisor only available from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. twice a week

The Computer Engineering department at City Tech had advisement hours posted. However, the hours were from the spring 2015 semester and possibly not reflective of current needs. CSI department websites do not list advisors or their schedules.

It appears that some departments do not have enough advisors to serve students pursuing particular fields of study. Several students indicated they would like to talk to an advisor during registration but, based on the number of advisors for their department, this would result in long waits, even with an appointment. Table 2 identifies a limited number of advisors for 3 of the 25 departments sampled.

Table 2 – Departments With Limited Advisors

College	Department	Number of Advisors	Approximate Number of Students in that Major
Hunter	Psychology	3	2,100
Queens	Computer Science	3	1,400
Lehman	Economics and Business	2	850

Advisement is critical to student success. Students who are not properly advised or not advised at all may be registering for courses they do not need to graduate or failing to enroll in enough courses each term to graduate within four years and maximize their financial aid. This can cause students to pay for additional terms of tuition, as well as related costs, and exhaust financial aid.

Generally, students are eligible to receive only eight semesters (four years) of State financial aid to offset or completely cover tuition costs. Students who continue their undergraduate education beyond four years are not eligible for additional State financial aid. Despite these conditions, administrators at CUNY Central Office and the five colleges we reviewed do not comprehensively track student use of State financial aid. Furthermore, CUNY officials don't monitor the graduation status of these students. They do not know if students who exhaust their State financial aid are forced to discontinue their studies, continue attending without aid, or ultimately graduate. This lack of action appears to contradict Middle States' criteria, which requires colleges to provide students with accurate and comprehensive information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, and loans. CUNY did compile, at our request, a list of 4,923 students from the five sampled colleges who they believe exhausted their State financial aid grants during the three academic years ended June 30, 2019. We determined that 1,533 of the 4,923 students (31 percent) ultimately dropped out (did not graduate from CUNY).

CUNY officials stated they believe it is normal for students to take more than four years to graduate – a trend that exists across the nation. They also indicated that many CUNY students are non-traditional, older students with outside responsibilities who cannot register for the 15 credits required each term to graduate in four years.

However, for the five colleges we examined, the age of students enrolled during spring 2019 indicated that most were traditional students. On average, 68 percent of bachelor's degree students enrolled at the five schools were under age 25. In a 2018-19 report, CUNY calculated that, on average, 75 percent of its students are under age 25. However, despite the large number of traditional students, CUNY's 2019 six-year graduation rate for full-time, first-time freshmen was only 53 percent.

Given the graduation rates and student feedback, more needs to be done to ensure all students understand the courses needed to complete their program of study and are being advised on how to complete their learning as efficiently as possible – thus maximizing the use of financial aid. Tracking use of State financial aid and alerting students when they are in danger of having to pay for semesters without such aid would save them time and money and potentially improve graduation rates.

Recommendations

5. Improve communication between students and department advisors and ensure advisors' hours are varied enough to meet student needs.

6. Improve advisor training to keep them up to date on degree requirements.

7. Track students' progress toward graduation and their financial aid eligibility. Provide appropriate and timely academic advisement to those students while alerting them of the danger of exhausting their financial aid eligibility.

Audit Scope, Objective, and Methodology

The objective of this audit was to determine whether CUNY is effectively matching course offerings to student demand. Our audit focused on the three academic years ended June 30, 2019.

To accomplish our objective and evaluate the relevant internal controls, we reviewed the State Education Law; the New York Codes, Rules and Regulations; and the procedures regarding course scheduling provided by one of our sampled colleges. We interviewed CUNY Central Office, PSC (faculty) union, and college officials for the five selected schools regarding the scheduling process. Our audit focused on the senior college with the largest enrollment in each borough as of fall 2017 (the most recent data available as of April 2019).

We judgmentally selected a total of 25 departments of varying sizes across all five schools. We reviewed the websites for the 25 selected departments; CUNY's 2016 and 2018 Student Experience Surveys; and CUNY's annual performance reports for the 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 academic years. To gain a deeper understanding of the course registration issues faced by students at our selected schools, we selected a random sample of 5,000 students (1,000 per school) of the 83,584 students enrolled at our five colleges as of spring 2019 to electronically survey. We also visited our sampled college campuses in November and December 2019 to speak to students regarding course registration. In addition, we met with CUNY student government representatives. Our samples were not designed to be projected to the entire CUNY population.

Statutory Requirements

Authority

This audit was performed pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law.

We conducted our performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained during our audit provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

In addition to being the State Auditor, the Comptroller performs certain other constitutionally and statutorily mandated duties as the chief fiscal officer of New York State. These include operating the State's accounting system; preparing the State's financial statements; and approving State contracts, refunds, and other payments. In addition, the Comptroller appoints members to certain boards, commissions, and public authorities, some of whom have minority voting rights. These duties may be considered management functions for purposes of evaluating organizational independence under generally accepted government auditing standards. In our opinion, these functions do not affect our ability to conduct independent audits of program performance.

Reporting Requirements

We provided a draft copy of this report to CUNY officials for their review and formal comment. Their comments were considered in preparing this final report and are included at the end of it. CUNY officials agreed with our recommendations and indicated they are addressing the issues discussed in this report.

Within 180 days after final release of this report, we request that the Chancellor of the City University of New York report to the State Comptroller advising what steps were taken to implement the recommendations contained in this report, and where recommendations were not implemented, the reasons why.

Agency Comments

José Luis Cruz, Ph.D.
Executive Vice Chancellor and
University Provost

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The City University of New York
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New York, NY 10017

THE CITY
UNIVERSITY
OF
NEW YORK

July 21, 2020

Mr. Kenrick Sifontes
Audit Director
Office of the State Comptroller
Division of State Government Accountability
59 Maiden Lane - 21st Floor
New York, NY 10038

Re: CUNY Course Offerings: 2019-S-19

Dear Mr. Sifontes,

I am pleased to submit the following responses to the recommendations presented in the OSC CUNY Course Offerings Report. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

José Luis Cruz, Ph.D.
Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost

Recommendation: Ensure that CUNY students have opportunities to register for elective courses and courses required for their programs of study.

> **University Response**
> o **CUNY agrees with the recommendation and is taking the following actions:**
>> o CUNY is currently implementing a **Curriculum & Event Management System** (CEMS) that will unlock significant benefits across CUNY's class scheduling. Through real-time integration with various CUNY information systems, CEMS will provide increased efficiencies, insights, and analytics to ensure informed scheduling based not only on historical analysis but also on future demand. CEMS will provide information that will allow CUNY to identify and prioritize sections with historically high enrollment while moving sections with historically low enrollment to lower priority. This will make it easier for students to enroll in required courses and thereby maintain full-time status, supporting student success and degree completion. CEMS implementation is in progress at

13 colleges with a tentative go live date of June 2020 and planning is in progress for Fall 2020 implementation at all CUNY colleges.

- University Student Schedule Builder, implemented in Spring 2020, and currently in use at 23 CUNY colleges, is an application tool that enables students to plan and register for courses that meet their degree requirements, schedules, and personal constraints (work and/or family obligations). This application shows courses listed in the University's course schedule (i.e., CUNYfirst) and allows students to select those courses based on degree requirements, education plan, desired time, location, availability, and personal preference.

Recommendation: Require that department officials responsible for scheduling courses formally survey students in their respective departments about required and elective courses.

University Response
- **CUNY agrees with the recommendation and is taking the following actions:**
  - Launching more **fully online degree** programs to expand access and appeal to a broader base of students
  - Implementing more online sections of general education and other high-demand courses to help facilitate degree completion and accommodate CUNY students' complex lives
  - Providing increased levels of faculty development and support to aid the creation of more dynamic online course offerings
  - Improving use of the system-wide ePermit policy allowing students to take the classes they need at another campus
  - Refining and monitoring the implementation of Pathways, the university-wide general education framework that is streamlining the transfer of credits between CUNY colleges
  - Adopting a comprehensive policy on prior learning assessment, including credit for military or workplace training and a wide range of standardized tests, to assist returning students with progressing toward their degrees
  - Reviewing under enrolled degree programs, which make sustaining a large number of course offerings fiscally challenging, and encouraging colleges to explore sunsetting or revising such programs
  - Communicating with the College Provosts on establishing a process for regularly surveying student course schedule preferences as well as utilizing the results of the CUNY Student Experience survey to inform curricular planning
  - The COVID-19 pandemic led CUNY to rapidly convert nearly all its course offerings from face-to-face to fully online within the span of a few weeks. While this conversion was largely successful, additional steps can be taken to ensure that faculty are well prepared to teach effectively online. Prior to Spring 2020, 14% of CUNY Faculty had either taught online or participated in some form of professional development; Over the last few months, CUNY has developed a comprehensive series of plans aimed at enhancing online teaching across the entire university.

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This includes the creation and launch of the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) and School of Professional Studies **Online Teaching Essentials workshop**, which provides participants with a deeper understanding of the needs of an online learner; best practices for online teaching; effective instructional design principles; and sharper communication, facilitation, and assessment skills. Already in its second cohort, more than 1,000 faculty have already participated or are currently participating, with plans for an additional cohort this summer. CUNY has also partnered with the National Association of System Heads (NASH) and Association for College and University Educators (ACUE) to have 300 faculty attend ACUE's course in Effective Online Teaching. Another 420 faculty will participate in ACUE's micro credential in effective online teaching practices in one of four areas: (1) creating an inclusive and supportive online learning environment; (2) promoting active online learning; (3) inspiring inquiry and preparing lifelong learning in your online course; and (4) designing learner centered courses. Together, these opportunities will help to ensure that future courses delivered online are done with the utmost attention to quality.

o The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique challenge for course availability as we approach the fall semester. To ensure continued academic progress for our students, CUNY central has drafted guidelines and criteria for colleges to assess course conduciveness to online delivery. The guidance is based on a section-level review of nearly 55,000 CUNY-wide administrative course and facilities records identifying sections with special equipment or facilities requirements that may make a shift to online delivery challenging.

o Determining and scheduling a department's courses for an academic year is a complex task that is the responsibility of the chair. Colleges that are implementing Course and Event Management system will be able to use demand forecasting to assess need and adjust scheduling based on data from CUNYfirst and DegreeWorks. As noted in the Comptroller's report, doing so successfully includes scheduling more courses on evenings and weekends, putting more courses online, and ensuring that courses required to maintain academic momentum and to make progress towards graduation are offered sufficiently and sustainably. Due to scarce resources, this is a delicate balancing act that, as noted by the data, can leave some students without their desired course(s); To that end, CUNY has launched a University-wide effort to provide training and professional development opportunities for chairs. This includes the second annual, Introduction to Being a CUNY Department Chair, a program designed to provide new chairs with some of the basic tools they will need to lead their departments. This program covers topics including the essential duties of chairs; mentoring and motivating faculty at every level; dealing with difficult faculty and staff; understanding enrollment management and the role of chairs in retention and course management; use of standard and new technology tools such as Degree Works, CourseDog and Schedule Builder, and features a panel of experts. The

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Central-hosted professional development program for chairs is complemented by similar chair training programs at the colleges, tailored to local culture, practices and needs. More training and professional development opportunities, as well as content, are in the process of being developed in an effort to ensure that the University's department chairs are fully prepared to effectively schedule courses in ways that are aligned with student demands.

Recommendation: Explore offering more online, hybrid, weekend, and off-hour courses as well as the use of overtallies to address student needs, where feasible.

University Response
o   **CUNY agrees with the recommendation and is taking the following actions:**
  o   University Student Schedule Builder, implemented in spring 2020, and currently in use at 23 CUNY colleges, is an application tool that provides administrators insight into course/class demand and enables them to add/update class offerings as needed throughout the enrollment cycle. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique challenge for course availability as we approach the fall semester and beyond. To ensure continued academic progress and course availability for our students, the University has drafted guidelines and criteria for colleges to assess course compatibility with online delivery. The guidance is based on a section-level review of nearly 55,000 CUNY-wide administrative course and facilities records identifying sections with special equipment or facilities requirements that may make a shift to online delivery challenging. The University is also communicating with the College Provosts on establishing a process for regularly surveying student course schedule preferences as well as utilizing the results of the CUNY Student Experience survey to inform schedule and curricular planning.

Recommendation: Improve communication between students and department advisors and ensure advisors' hours are varied enough to meet student needs

University Response
o   **CUNY agrees with the recommendation and is taking the following actions:**
  o   As a result of the three-part Best Practices in Remote Advising webinar series that ran from May-June that trained 900 advisors across the system, CUNY has taken concrete steps to ensure and improve communication between students and college advisors. CUNY advisors have mastered the technology tools necessary to provide a full complement of advisement services to students virtually, from chat services to online virtual appointments, to group advisement sessions and access to preprofessional advisors in the disciplines.
  o   CUNY Advisement Web sites have been revised and updated to reflect the greater access to advisement services online. Hours are even more varied than before the move to distance learning, as staff are no longer dependent on access to facilities for hours of operation. CUNY Advisement Offices offer easy access to scheduling

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virtual appointments. Contact information is clear and accessible on advisement web sites for students to make appointments and communicate with their advisors.

- o CUNY has provided expanded access to self-paced advisement modules in key areas to support a variety of learning styles, 24/7. Additional guides, degree maps, and support materials have been added to college web sites to improve access to needed information to enroll, register and schedule classes.

Recommendation: Improve advisor training to keep them up to date on degree requirements.

<u>University Response</u>
- o **CUNY agrees with the recommendation and is taking the following actions:**
  - o To ensure that advisors have the critical skills needed to support students in the distance learning setting and beyond, CUNY Academic Affairs launched a set of professional development offerings on best practices in remote advising. Managed & provided by CUNY's signature student success program Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), the three-part Best Practices in Remote Advising webinar series ran from May-June and was open to all CUNY advisement staff. The series focused on current effective remote advising practices within ASAP and college advisement centers and highlighted how technology can be harnessed to guide advisement teams and engage students. Topics include managing and supporting advisement teams; enhancing student engagement via individual and group contacts; developing strategies to deliver new student intake activities virtually; best practices for documenting advisement services.
  - o To date, 900 unique advisors across the University (including but not limited to professional advisors, ASAP, ACE, CUNYStart, SEEK/CD) have participated in the live webinars, which have also been recorded and disseminated for asynchronous use. Smaller discussion forums will be hosted throughout July to allow advisors to discuss webinar content, challenges, and best practices. Discussion forums will be moderated by college practitioners identified through the CUNY Academic Advisement Council and CUNY Academic Affairs/ASAP leaders who organized the webinar series.

Recommendation: Track students' progress toward graduation and their financial aid eligibility. Provide appropriate and timely academic advisement to those students while alerting them of the danger of exhausting their financial aid eligibility.

<u>University Response</u>
- o **CUNY agrees with the recommendation and is taking the following actions:**
  - o University is in the middle of implementing Academic Momentum Campaign, a comprehensive vision and set of strategies that will result in greater success for students. CUNY's Academic Momentum Campaign is aligned with Complete College America's (CCA) three strategies of: corequisite support models, credit accumulation (Take 15/30 campaigns), and degree maps with proactive advising.

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- A key element of the Academic Momentum Campaign is degree mapping. Degree maps are tools that provide students with clear measures and targets to complete their degrees on time. Guided by a semester-by-semester plan of degree requirements, students will understand how prerequisite courses build on each other, when gateway courses should be taken, and how all requirements fit together. When students follow degree maps, they avoid taking unnecessary classes, save time and money, and stay on course for employment after graduation.
- Degree maps are visual, term-by-term representations of the academic path students can take toward **successful and timely completion of their chosen courses of study**. As degree maps are guides, they will be used in conjunction with advisement, the catalog, and degree audits. Degree maps can and is also playing a key role in **proactive course scheduling and planning**.
- Each CUNY college already has a team in place to manage and provide oversight of implementing their Academic Momentum Campaign. The teams are composed of key college stakeholders with expertise in relevant areas, including faculty, advisors, registrars, admissions staff, and IT staff.
- Faculty and academic departments engage in the creation and approval of the degree maps. The process forces good **planning** ahead in terms of **courses and scheduling**— **departments can more clearly determine which courses need to be offered when and for how many students**, and degree maps provide students with clear information about **what will be available when**.
- The Office of the Registrar, as the holder of student data, ensures that timely and accurate information is entered into the student information system (CUNYfirst), which feeds DegreeWorks (Advisement and Degree Audit System), EAB/Starfish (Student Success Management Systems). The registrar is involved in degree mapping to inform stakeholders of the implications of degree maps regarding **credit accumulation and graduation rates**. For students to successfully use degree maps, course catalog information—including prerequisites/corequisites, frequency of course offering (fall only, etc.), financial aid eligibility (FACTS), and applicability of course towards degree requirement (DegreeWorks)—are accurately maintained by the Office of Registrar.
- **Financial Aid Eligibility and Certification Tracking System** is a Web-based financial aid tool designed to determine student eligibility for New York State's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), Excelsior and other state aids. It is available to all degree-seeking undergraduate students. Advisors, faculty, and selected staff have access **for the purpose of monitoring student eligibility through their academic careers**. Based on current and/or prior registered course(s) FACTS **determines and alerts** student eligibility for New York State financial aid program. FACTS display course enrollment financial aid eligibility indicator; is accessible online 24 hours/7 days a week; provides transcript summary identify courses eligible for students' degree and financial aid; and overall financial aid eligibility and financial aid certification information

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