



STATE OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

October 25, 2023

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

Re: Course Offerings  
Report 2023-F-7

Dear Dr. Rodríguez:

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 have followed up on the actions taken by officials of the City University of New York (CUNY) to implement the recommendations contained in our initial audit report, *Course Offerings* (Report [2019-S-19](#)).

**Background, Scope, and Objective**

CUNY comprises 11 senior colleges; seven community colleges; and seven graduate, honors, and professional schools located throughout New York City's five boroughs. As of fall 2022, approximately 226,000 students were enrolled at CUNY's 25 campuses. The annual tuition in fall 2022 for a New York State resident pursuing a bachelor's degree full time at CUNY was \$6,930.

Many full-time CUNY students studying toward a bachelor's degree do not graduate within 4 to 6 years of first-time enrollment. Based on CUNY data, only 33% of those full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students who enrolled in 2018 (the most recent entering class with published 4-year graduation rates) received their bachelor's degree within 4 years. Similarly, just 55% of full-time students who first enrolled in 2016 graduated with a bachelor's degree within 6 years.

CUNY students receiving financial aid generally have to maintain certain eligibility requirements to continue receiving financial aid. While programs vary, the number of credits and the courses taken are important requirements to ensure students continue receiving aid. Further, some financial aid programs are limited to specific time frames (such as 4 years) or number of semesters. Students must enroll in specific coursework to ensure continued financial aid.

The objective of our initial audit, issued in September 2020, was to determine whether CUNY was effectively matching course offerings to student demand. The audit covered the 3 academic years ended June 30, 2019 and focused on five senior colleges, one in each borough, with large enrollments in 2017: the College of Staten Island (CSI), Lehman College (Lehman), Hunter College (Hunter), New York City College of Technology (City Tech), and Queens

College (Queens). Specifically, the audit found that CUNY was not effectively matching course offerings to student demands; was not comprehensively tracking students' use of financial aid or monitoring their graduation rates; and did not formally survey students to consider their feedback when preparing course schedules. In addition, students reported that advisors did not provide beneficial academic guidance, which caused their graduation to be delayed.

The objective of our follow-up was to assess the extent of implementation, as of August 2023, of the seven recommendations included in our initial audit report.

### **Summary Conclusions and Status of Audit Recommendations**

CUNY officials have made progress in addressing the problems we identified in the initial report. Of the initial report's seven recommendations, two were implemented, three were partially implemented, and two were not implemented.

### **Follow-Up Observations**

#### **Recommendation 1**

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

Status – Partially Implemented

Agency Action – Since our initial audit, CUNY completed the full deployment of two applications to facilitate course scheduling and registration: the Curriculum and Event Management System (CourseDog) and Schedule Builder. Students can use Schedule Builder to prepare a term-by-term schedule of courses they plan to take. CourseDog then uses this information to address student demand when scheduling classes. CUNY officials demonstrated that CourseDog allows them to add classes during registration to meet students' demands. We interviewed department chairs from five academic departments: Computer Science at Queens, Computer Engineering and Nursing at City Tech, and Biology and Chemistry at Hunter. Each explained that they also use past enrollment data to estimate the number of sessions to offer in upcoming semesters and adjust the number of sessions to satisfy students' needs.

However, we noted that the 2022 Student Experience Survey (SES) showed that 30% of the respondents could not register for the course(s) they needed. Of these, 55% could not register for a major course required for their program of study, 24% could not register for a course they needed to graduate, and 23% could not register for an elective course.<sup>1</sup> The SES also indicated that the primary reasons students could not register were non-availability of seats (47%) and required courses not being offered (26%). Notably, these results were similar to the results of the 2018 SES, indicating that students are still struggling to register for elective and required classes. CUNY officials responded that the survey also reflects students' satisfaction with the schedule and mode (i.e., in-person, hybrid, or online) of an available course, not only whether they can register for the course.

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents who could not register for a needed course were asked about the type of course they could not register for.

### **Recommendation 2**

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

Status – Not Implemented

Agency Action – CUNY officials stated that the department chairs responsible for scheduling courses do not formally survey students in their respective departments about required and elective courses. This was confirmed during interviews with the Chairs of Computer Engineering and Nursing at City Tech and Biology and Chemistry at Hunter. In response, CUNY officials provided documentation of one instance when an academic department (Computer Science) at Queens had surveyed students about required and elective courses.

### **Recommendation 3**

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

Status – Not Implemented

Agency Action – CUNY did not implement this recommendation. CUNY officials explained that the adoption of Coursedog and Schedule Builder (the two applications used to facilitate course scheduling and registration) and increasing the number of online courses was CUNY's response to student scheduling concerns. However, as detailed in the Agency Action to Recommendation 1, the most recent SES revealed that a significant number of students still could not register for a course they needed. Despite the results of the survey, no specific action plans were developed to address the scheduling concerns.

CUNY officials stated that student surveys are not the best way to assess student needs and that the SES was intended to be a tool to guide decision making at CUNY's Central Office and colleges. Nevertheless, the SES also functions as a way for anyone inside or outside of CUNY to monitor student satisfaction, including aspects of academic experiences and course availability.

### **Recommendation 4**

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

Status – Implemented

Agency Action – In response to our initial report, CUNY increased the percentage of online and hybrid courses from 14% of the total courses offered in spring 2019 to 44% in spring 2022 at all its campuses. Additionally, online courses quadrupled from 8% of the total courses offered in spring 2019 to 32% in spring 2022. Over this same period, the percentage of hybrid courses doubled from 6% to 12% of total courses offered. According to CUNY officials, this increase was mainly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of weekend and off-hour courses was relatively constant during the same period. CUNY officials stated that they researched opportunities in December 2022 for additional online programs and are working to add 110 more online programs.

### **Recommendation 5**

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

Status – Implemented

Agency Action – CUNY officials have improved communication between students and department advisors. In January 2020, CUNY introduced Navigate at its senior colleges. Navigate is a predictive analytics and case management tool used for advising and communication. Students schedule appointments via Navigate, and college advisors use it to record student advisement sessions and correspondence. Navigate also allows college advisors to interface with other CUNY applications to obtain student academic records and course details. For example, advisors at Queens demonstrated the use of Navigate to communicate with students who registered for fewer than the required number of credits each semester. Students can also meet with their advisor in person or virtually. Additionally, CUNY uses multiple types of online communication between advisors and students. This includes emails, texts, and other messaging systems. In addition, four of the five sampled colleges from our initial audit – Queens, CSI, Hunter, and Lehman – offer online assistance using live chats during working hours, and Lehman also uses bots that are available to students outside of business hours.

We compared the advising hours and times for academic departments at four of the five sampled colleges from our initial audit and determined that advising hours generally increased. Some colleges also offered more evening and weekend hours.

### **Recommendation 6**

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

Status – Partially Implemented

Agency Action – Since our initial audit, CUNY has made some improvements in advisor training to keep advisors up to date on degree requirements. We interviewed advisors from three of the five sampled colleges in our initial audit. Advisors at Queens, CSI, and Lehman indicated that training was provided to keep them up to date on degree requirements. While college officials at each of the three colleges explained they provided training on degree requirements, we did not find relevant documentation supporting that this type of training was provided at Queens. Specifically, Queens officials explained that biweekly staff meetings are used to communicate updates. Although CUNY officials provided the dates of the staff meetings and the names of staff in attendance, they did not provide us with the content of these meetings.

### **Recommendation 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.*

Status – Partially Implemented

Agency Action – CUNY has made progress in implementing this recommendation. CUNY officials stated that they use an application called Degree Maps as a resource for both advisors and students. Degree Maps provides a semester-by-semester plan of degree requirements, enabling students to understand when to take prerequisite and elective courses. Advisors and students also have access to the Financial Aid Certification and Tracking System (FACTS), which flags courses students register for that do not meet degree requirements for financial aid purposes.

We asked academic advisors from Queens and CSI for copies of recent correspondence with students regarding the exhaustion of their financial aid. The correspondence provided by the colleges varied in detail. For example, an email from Queens to a student addressed the risk of losing loan eligibility because the student did not take enough credits in the most recent semester. However, the response from Queens was not timely advice, as it was sent after the student completed the academic semester rather than during registration for that semester. CUNY officials responded that the student could have taken summer classes. Communications with students at CSI were generic and not specific to whether the student had registered for an appropriate number of courses to maintain financial aid. CUNY officials explained that Navigate, an advising tool, has the potential to track students' financial aid eligibility and use; however, that functionality has not been implemented. In addition, CUNY officials responded that financial aid advisors are available to provide specific financial aid-related guidance.

Major contributors to this report were Hardat Singh and Margarita Ledezma.

We would appreciate your response to this report within 30 days, indicating any actions planned to address the unresolved issues discussed in this report. We thank the management and staff of CUNY for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this follow-up.

Sincerely,

David Schaeffer  
Audit Manager

cc: Gordon Taylor, CUNY  
Shaini Mathew, CUNY