# *"WHO SHALL BE EDUCATED?" The Case of Restricting Remediation at the City University of New York*

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This article retrospectively examines the controversy surrounding the City University of New York's (CUNY's) Board of Trustees and the New York State Board of Regents' decision to phase out remedial coursework at all of the system's senior colleges. Pivotal to this discussion are the ways in which this decision, although similar to many such initiatives across the country, places the historical mission of CUNY at odds with its current policy. In the wake of this policy, many students find themselves systematically barred from full participation in postsecondary pursuits, diminishing their hopes of upward mobility in the name of higher standards.

***Keywords:*** *higher education; educational policy; CUNY; remediation; educational access*

> One reason why we care so much about who gets admitted "on the merits" is because . . . admissions to . . . selective schools . . . pays off handsomely for individuals of all races, from all backgrounds.
>
> Bowen and Bok (1999, p. 276)

Schooling of America's children has always been a political endeavor. The question before decision makers has been and continues to be, "Who shall be educated and reap the benefits of schooling" (Warner, Havihurst, & Loeb, 1944)? Access hinging solely on merit implies those granted opportunities deserve favor because of something of value or worth they demonstrate. As reflected in the opening quote, benefits accrue to these individuals who are already beneficiaries of adequate educational preparation. Conversely, failure to address inadequacies in precollege schooling relegates those who have the potential to achieve to perpetual disenfranchisement.

There are always intended and unintended consequences associated with policy shifts, and changes in admissions practices are not exempt. Rewarding merit in practice has many pseudonyms in the college admissions process to include higher standards and individual accountability. Terminology

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notwithstanding, the rhetoric surrounding merit has resulted in a treatment of excellence and equity as mutually exclusive commodities in some educational circles. Moves to substantively increase higher education entry-level requirements in New York, California, Texas, Maine, and other states has disproportionately restricted higher educational opportunity for persons of color and the poor in general and for African Americans and Hispanics in particular (Evangelouf, 1999).

This article retrospectively examines the controversy surrounding the City University of New York's (CUNY's) Board of Trustees and the New York State Board of Regents' decision to phase out remedial coursework at all of the system's senior colleges. Initiatives of this nature are symptomatic of a national trend limiting access to higher education in the name of higher standards. *Remediation*, for purposes of this article, refers to classes designed to prepare students for college-level academic pursuits who were not adequately equipped in their lower schooling experiences. Pivotal to this discussion of the elimination of remediation are the ways in which this decision places the historical mission of the institution at odds with its current policy. Open admissions historically had been considered paramount to the success of lower status urban inner-city students, the population most of the system was established to serve.

The answer to the question "Who shall be educated?" cannot be considered simplistically. America's higher educational institutions enjoy (or suffer) from a tiered system defining colleges and universities on a continuum ranging from elite to third rate. One has only to consider the fury surrounding the annual release of the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings to find evidence of the importance of public perceptions of quality on institutional reputation and an ability to recruit students. Predictably, less favored postsecondary institutions vie for upward mobility in much the same way dispossessed populations look to educational opportunity to improve their economic lot. One strategy to enhance college standing is to publicize policies designed to increase admission standards. Shifts toward individual student merit, however, can exact a high price not only on poorly prepared students but also adherence to historical missions such as open admissions and broad-based educational opportunity.

The case of the CUNY and its controversial removal of remedial coursework at its 4-year colleges is indicative of similar initiatives across the country. As of 1999, nine states (Arizona, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, and Oregon) raised entry requirements for incoming college freshmen. Five states (California, Maine, Mississippi, Texas, and Washington) have added restrictions to higher education affirmative action programs (Evangelouf, 1999). Not surprising, the very

students who stand to make the greatest gains as a result of a college education, minorities and low-income students, are the ones being systematically barred from admission to 4-year postsecondary educational institutions.

Providing preparatory coursework for students is a strategy widely employed in the higher educational system in the United States. This practice dates back to the early 19th century. As of 1998, 78% of all the colleges in America provided some form of remediation to include nearly all publicly funded community colleges and highly regarded institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Furthermore, remediation works. For adults in need of retooling, immigrants in need of English mastery, or youth ill-served by their lower schools, courses designed to improve mastery facilitate retention and, ultimately, graduation rates. For example, 59% of the 1998 graduating class of Queensborough Community College started in remedial math courses. Of those graduates, 60% earned baccalaureate degrees and 19% earned a master's degree or higher (CUNY Community College Conference, 1998).

Remediation in concert with matriculating into the traditional college curriculum increases the retention and graduation rates of students even more. In the absence of credit-bearing coursework, students can find themselves ineligible for financial aid, a severe handicap to economically disadvantaged students. Despite the opinions of those like Robert Berman of the *Daily News*, who stated that corrective coursework "dumbed down" curriculum and enrollees never made adequate progress is, in fact, untrue. According to Judith Watson, who conducts research on behalf of the board of trustees, among B.A. students at CUNY, 75% completed remedial requirements in 1 year, and 90% completed within three semesters. Also according to Ms. Watson, the graduation rates of students who had engaged in remedial coursework was only 5% lower than graduation rates of students who did not take remedial courses (CUNY Community College Conference, 1998). It would appear, then, that given the success of courses and programs designed to facilitate college-level matriculation, they would be retained, particularly in a metropolitan region serving an exceptionally diverse population.

The importance of America's urban centers is rooted in the size of their populations, their historical representation as corporate corridors, and the diverse communities they are charged with educating. Despite their significance, "there has never been a 'golden age' when urban schools (primary, secondary, or postsecondary) provided equal educational opportunity for the mass of students" (Kantor & Brenzel, 1994, p. 395). Furthermore, James Conant and other theorists have warned that educational quality and opportunity foretell much about economic and social stability (Kantor & Brenzel, 1994; Marshak, 1982). Adding to the complexity of the issues facing CUNY

**TABLE 1**
**A Comparison of SUNY and CUNY**

| | *SUNY* | *CUNY* |
|---|---|---|
| Number of senior 4-year and graduate institutions | 30 | 15 |
| Number of community colleges | 34 | 7 |
| Institutional governance | Board of Trustees and Chancellor | Board of Trustees and Chancellor |
| Board and Chancellor appointment authority | Governor | Governor and Mayor of New York City |
| Primary student source | State of New York | Metropolitan New York |
| Mission | 1. To provide a high-quality education<br>2. To provide the broadest possible access | 1. To meet the specialized needs of the urban constituency<br>2. To provide access to the diverse New York City community |

SOURCE: State University of New York (2000), Board of Trustees of State University of New York (1995), City University of New York (2000b), Evangelouf (1999).
NOTE: SUNY = State University of New York; CUNY = City University of New York.

are the state of New York City's public schools, which, as in many cities, have a poor reputation for preparing the masses of linguistic and ethnic minority pupils. New York City lower schools are the primary pipeline for CUNY applicants, and if these institutions are inadequately preparing students, where will the youth go for assistance? CUNY's system is one of the largest megapublic institutions of higher education in the country and, as such, seems an excellent example to focus on to consider some of the intended and unintended consequences of the ban on remediation.

## PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEW YORK

New York State is home to two conglomerate universities, State University of New York (SUNY) and CUNY. Table 1 provides a cursory comparison of the two systems at the time of the decision to abolish remediation at CUNY.

If one disregards size, two of the principal differences between the SUNY and CUNY systems are the populations they serve and their unique missions. Although goals of high-quality education are common to both SUNY and CUNY, theoretically CUNY, until the late 1990s, tailored its programs, support services, and admissions criteria to graduates of inner-city high schools and the metropolitan business community. CUNY serves a concentrated urban population with high percentages of minorities, immigrants, and lower status populations that might not otherwise attend college.

CUNY's population in 2000 numbered 200,000 students, speaking 115 different native languages. The racial breakdown of students was 32% African American, 25% Hispanic, 12% Asian, and 31% White (CUNY, 2000b). New York City is the prime beneficiary of attendees, as 80% of its students remain living and working in the metropolitan region. Subsequently, the state also benefits from the tax dollars produced by CUNY alumni. Individuals that graduated from CUNY between 1970 and 1997 contributed an estimated $700 million more in taxes to New York City and the state than they would have without their degrees (CUNY, 1998). Additionally, CUNY is the major producer of African American and Hispanic engineers in the country and supplies American business with more chief executive officers than any other domestic baccalaureate institution (CUNY, 2000a).

SUNY on the other hand does not profess to meet the particular needs of a municipality, but rather retains the goal of meeting the broader demands of the state. Perhaps as a result, the SUNY system, which is dispersed through the state, serves primarily middle-class White students (Hebel, 1999).

Mission comparisons pinpoint the tragedy of the curtailment of remediation at CUNY. The very institution established to meet the needs of New York City residents and business enterprises is blatantly shifting the mission through the implementation of increasingly restrictive policies. Removal of remedial networks in the 4-year colleges of CUNY will undoubtedly restrict the preparation of numerous racial minorities and lower status persons from becoming better equipped to enter the workforce.

## IN THE BEGINNING . . . CUNY

> The experiment is to be tried, whether the highest education can be given to the masses; whether the children of the people, the children of the whole people, can be educated; and whether an institution of learning, of the highest grade, can be successfully controlled by the popular will, not by the privileged few,

> but by the privileged many. (Dr. Horace Webster, January 19, 1949; cited in Rudy, 1949, p. 29; Marshak, 1982, p. xiv)

During the opening address of the Free Academy, the Principal, Dr. Horace Webster articulated the mission of the institution destined to become CUNY. Following two decades of political turmoil and social change, the Free Academy emerged as an establishment charged with providing educational opportunities for citizens of New York City.

The creation of the Free Academy in 1847 was actually an attempt to resolve conflicts between Catholic and public lower schools amidst a changing political landscape. In 1835, parochial schools administered by the Roman Catholic Church submitted a bid for public funds to support their educational enterprises. Refusal to financially support church-run schools resulted in a controversy that threatened to diminish Democratic support for then governor, William H. Seward (Rudy, 1949).

In response, Governor Seward and the legislature in 1842 passed a bill that created the Board of Education to oversee the operations and funding of common school education in the city of New York. Board members were to be citizens of a ward of the city and were to be elected annually. The commission was to create and oversee the operation of nonsectarian schools supported by local tax dollars (Rudy, 1949).

The Free Academy Act required ratification by the citizens of New York City before steps toward opening the school could begin. A media frenzy ensued because voters were given 1 month between the passage of the act and the voting date. Newspapers sensitive to the Democratic Party supported the institution, whereas newspapers supporting the alternative position, the Whigs, opposed the Academy. In the end, the voters of New York City supported the creation of the Free Academy, 19,305 in favor and 3,409 opposed (Rudy, 1949).

Townsend Harris, the first President of the Board of Education in an effort to forestall competition between the new institution and the pre-existing Columbia University, New York University, and two local seminary schools, clearly defined the mission of the Free Academy. According to Mr. Harris, technical careers such as navigation or chemistry, for example, would be the focus of the Free Academy students rather than medical, legal, or religious preparation. Emphasis was to be placed on the educational access of the children of the laboring class to prepare them in practical disciplines such as architecture, sciences, mechanics, and the arts (Marshak, 1982).

Thus, from the Free Academy's inception, the institution's mission was grounded in access for students that were unable to attend the existing elite

colleges and universities in the city of New York in an effort to prepare them for the world of work.

Although the goals of the infant institution as articulated by the Free Academy's principal and Board of Education appeared inclusive, students of the university were not representative of the diverse population living in New York City. Instead, during the first 60 years of the institution, students were almost exclusively the male children of Northern and Western European immigrants born in the United States (Marshak, 1982).

By the turn of the century, enrollment at The Municipal College of New York, as it was then called, had risen to 30,000. Increasingly, the children of immigrants from European countries sought admission as a step toward increasing employment opportunities. Using the increasing size of the applicant pool, the Depression, and limited space, the Board of Trustees voted in the 1930s to increase admissions standards. In the same time period, four graduates became Nobel Laureates, thus creating the aura that the institution's students were more than the children of immigrants: They were the emerging New York City elite (Marshak, 1982).

The reputation of producing elites continued into the post–World War II period as graduates such as Henry Kissinger and Patrick Moynihan rose to positions of prominence. However, despite the growth in the student body, the institution was still not living up to its creed of providing access to all the citizens of New York City. As a former president of City University, Robert E. Marshak (1982) recounted the "hope associated with access to higher education was reserved for European immigrants and not extended to the offspring of slaves or those escaping island poverty (p. 4)."

Evident from this cursory retrospective view of CUNY's roots is the enduring conflict between the professed mission of the institution and its practices. In the beginning, the Free Academy's goals were borne of political compromise and party protectionism. Competing with highly selective institutions such as Columbia University and New York University was never an aim of the Free Academy's founders. Thus, notions of elitism were more a function of the opportunities afforded college-educated individuals rather than selective admissions filters. Finally, studies at the new college were designed to meet the prevailing need for skilled labor in the metropolitan New York region rather than the professions of clergy, medicine, or law.

## THE ERA OF OPEN ADMISSIONS

The 1960s were noteworthy because of the many fundamental social, political, and educational policy shifts. The civil rights movement, court

decisions in favor of educational access for African Americans, and President Johnson's commitment to affirmative action, to name a few, set the stage for changes in the admissions policies not only of CUNY but of higher education institutions across the United States (Bowen & Bok, 1999).

Even though remediation as a support network at CUNY predated open admissions, in 1966, the New York State legislature approved expanded funding earmarked for facility construction, a larger incoming freshman class, and support for a program designed to increase minority enrollment in the 4-year colleges of the CUNY system. The prebaccalaureate program, called SEEK, Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge, included remedial coursework for students coming from poorly funded inner-city high schools who were ill-equipped to meet the demands of college-level work. SEEK students were of African American or Hispanic descent. One thousand minority students were the beneficiaries of the SEEK program in the fall of 1966 (Lavin, Alba, & Silberstein, 1981).

In 1968, an ambitious plan was approved by the Board of Higher Education (BHE) that detailed entry-level stratification at CUNY. Senior college admission was to be guaranteed for the top 25% of New York City high school graduates and community college admission for the top two thirds of New York City graduates. Six percent of SEEK students were selected to attend senior colleges and 4% for community colleges through a program called *College Discovery.* All other high school graduates would qualify for career-based training. Chancellor Bowker argued that these initiatives were beneficial to the city given the significant influx of unskilled laborers from the South and Puerto Rico at a time when employment criteria demanded skilled laborers (Lavin et al., 1981).

Heightened racial tensions in New York City exhibited by student protests and the forced shutdown of City College became a major campaign issue in a pending mayoral race. Approval of an open-admissions policy, such as the creation of the institution itself, was the result of compromise and an attempt to retain political consensus. Open admissions also affirmed CUNY's mission and the integral role of remediation in collegiate success (Lavin et al., 1981; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996; Marshak, 1982).

Implementation of open admissions ratified by the BHE was based on the following rationale:

1. The primary function of CUNY in accordance with the mission of the institution at its inception was to provide opportunities for upward mobility for all of New York City's citizens. High school grades used as the sole admissions criteria disproportionately barred students from low-income families who might have exceptional potential.

2. The lack of space and facilities at the institution had been the initial impetus to raise admissions standards, not a fundamental change in the mission of the institution.
3. Programs such as SEEK and College Discovery were paramount in the efforts to support students interested in higher education whose grades did not reflect their abilities.
4. Extensive remediation programs would be critical to enhancing the success of students who were poorly prepared for college-level demands. Optimum remediation included more than precollege-level courses; it also included financial and academic counseling, adequate financial aid, and finally, individualized tutoring.
5. Shifts to open CUNY enrollment to a larger population would also begin to meet the demands of unions and employers for high-skilled labor in New York City.

As a result of the five points noted above, the BHE voted to institute the open-admissions policy in the fall of 1970 at all CUNY institutions (Marshak, 1982).

BHE went further by prescribing how CUNY was to comply with the spirit of open admissions. The implemented policy was to meet the following criteria:

1. All New York City high school graduates would be admitted to one of CUNY's programs.
2. CUNY would provide remediation and support services for every student in need of them with an emphasis on retention.
3. Standards of academic excellence would be maintained.
4. Ethnic integration in all colleges of the CUNY system would be a goal.
5. Admitted students would have the opportunity for mobility between institutions of the CUNY system.
6. All students that met admissions criteria in place prior to 1970 would still be admitted to the university (Lavin et al., 1981; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996).

Transition from CUNY's community college to its 4-year institutions was also guaranteed as part of the open-admissions plan. Thus, acceptance to a CUNY community college was not necessarily an educational dead-end (Lavin et al., 1981). Furthermore, BHE directed CUNY to develop programs that would provide needed remediation outside the regular university class schedule. Financial aid counseling and mentorships were also to be instituted as a means of maintaining university admissions standards (Marshak, 1982).

In the words of Robert E. Marshak, City College president in 1970, "the guiding principle [of open admissions] was to be that although CUNY could not guarantee that all students with deficiencies would overcome their

handicaps, each student would be given a chance to prove himself" (Marshak, 1982, p. 48). Thus, open admissions as defined in 1970 clearly placed value on the relationship between remedial support as a means of enhancing the academic success of inner-city students.

Contrary to images open admission might conjure, the policy never professed to ensure unselective admissions to all of the varying levels of higher educational institutions part of the CUNY system. Admission to CUNY did not guarantee entry for example, to the senior elite 4-year colleges in the CUNY system. City College of the CUNY system, for example, admitted students that had maintained an average of 80% or better or who finished in the top half of their respective class. Students with lower averages or class placement could enroll in one of the system's community colleges (Marshak, 1982).

Such a sweeping initiative as open admissions did not take place without significant backlash. Opponents suggested CUNY would lose its elite status in the switch from standards to quotas and that lowering admissions standards would result in the lowering of high school graduation requirements. In 1975, just 5 years after the policy was instituted, a fiscal crisis and growing dissent about open admissions prompted the Board of Trustees to set a course toward increased admissions standards and a dismantling of remedial programs (Lavin et al., 1981; Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996; Marshak, 1982; Traub, 1994).

However, despite the illusions of elitism held by some, CUNY's attempts to reverse open admission and undermine remedial programs backfired in a way. In 1976, tuition charges were assessed and standardized entry exams were required for all freshmen in math, reading, and writing. The result was a marked reduction in the number of eligible White students entering CUNY. Thus, the increase in standards in the mid-1970s did not decrease the numbers of African American, Hispanic, and immigrant students attending CUNY, but it concentrated their proportion of the population in the community colleges (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996).

## UNDERMINING ACCESS

The current assault on remedial support services has a ring of déjà vu. Republican Mayor Guiliani of New York City and Republican Governor Pataki have essentially used the rationale of the 1970s and 1930s to justify the need for higher standards to restore the elite stature of CUNY. We would do well to remember, however, that CUNY never enjoyed the elite stature enjoyed by Columbia and New York Universities.

CUNY's Board of Trustees developed a master plan amendment. One of the goals of this reform was the phasing out of remedial courses in all of the 4-year colleges of the CUNY system. Although the plan was approved by the Board in 1998, it was not ratified by the Board of Regents until November 22, 1999. Effective January 2000, four of the senior institutions, Baruch, Hunter, Brooklyn, and Queens Colleges would no longer offer remedial courses for incoming students. By September of 2001, the remaining senior institutions, City College, John Jay, Lehman, Medgar Evers, New York Technical, Staten Island, and York Colleges of the CUNY system would also completely phase out remedial coursework (Goldstein, 1999). Ironically, the SUNY colleges, whose primary clientele is middle-class White students, are not required to eliminate remediation.

Students who fail to pass entrance exams or their equivalent (e.g. SAT and Regent examinations) will be relegated to CUNY's community colleges for coursework and will subsequently be required to test out of remediation before earning credits toward college degrees. Options for college readiness include a summer intercession program or enrollment in a community college's "Prelude to Success" program. The plan also includes a new articulation policy designed to ease transfer from community colleges to 4-year senior colleges in the CUNY system. Students may request permission to take credit-bearing classes while complying with Prelude to Success requirements, however, even if granted, no credit is earned until such time as students test out of remedial coursework. Finally, a request for increased funding to hire faculty and support staff was included (CUNY, 2004; Goldstein, 1999).

Rationale for reform through the elimination of remedial education, according to Matthew Goldstein, chancellor of the CUNY system, was needed for baccalaureate classes to function at a higher level. Negotiation was to take place between departments, programs, and faculty members to meet the remedial needs of students who did not fall under the proposed mandate (Goldstein, 1999).

Advocates of the Master Plan referred to it as a victory for access with standards. Advocates also pointed to the fact that remedial coursework is still available, even if as of 2001, it will be exclusively available at community colleges within the system (Hebel, 1999). Opponents of the Master Plan filed a lawsuit in an attempt to protect access opportunities for New York City's minorities. The basis for the suit was the comparison between SUNY and CUNY. SUNY, which serves predominantly middle-class Whites, was allowed to continue to offer remedial coursework, whereas CUNY who served large numbers of minorities, immigrants, and low-income students had been ordered to eliminate remedial courses at 4-year colleges (Hebel, 1999).

The prevailing policy of eliminating remedial coursework is just one of several initiatives that will severely limit the access of urban minorities to the colleges and universities of the CUNY system. Exit exams have been proposed by the Board of Trustees as an additional gatekeeper between remedial coursework and college-level classes (CUNY, 1999). Changes are also proposed that would separate the pool of funds designated to support remedial networks from funds that underwrite community colleges and 4-year colleges (Evangelouf, 1999).

## THE NARROWING OF OPPORTUNITY

Technological advances and the international nature of competition have made education a most pivotal individual and national investment. Yet despite overwhelming evidence that society gains when citizens earn college degrees, overt and covert strategies are being employed across the United States that restrict access to colleges and universities.

Calls for higher standards have fueled an elevation in higher education entry requirements and a concerted attack against programs in which African Americans and Hispanics were beneficiaries. Restrictive entry policies that intentionally or unintentionally bar the entry of African Americans and Hispanics from the nation's colleges and universities appear not only discriminatory but also economically foolish. In the name of "reason," increased standards without the supports to mitigate historic disadvantage perpetuates disenfranchisement by the very institutions that were originally designed to aid in work preparation and social elevation. There is nothing rational about failing to prepare tens of thousands of minority and immigrant students for work in a country that will soon host minorities as a majority of the population.

Justice Blackmun, as quoted by Bowen and Bok (1999), once said, "to get beyond racism, we must first take an account of race" (p. 289). The rhetoric of increasing standards without equalizing opportunity for certain segments of the population propagates victimization and unveils underlying racial bias. The broad social and economic benefits afforded a nation with an educated workforce appear to be of less importance than advancing educational policies designed at blocking African Americans' and Hispanics' admission to colleges and universities.

Consider the five main premises for the recent CUNY policy: (a) raising standards is necessary to recapture the elite stature of CUNY; (b) remediation is still offered at community colleges; (c) raising admissions criteria will

raise the quality of graduates; (d) remediation is expensive; and (e) diversity will be maintained in the CUNY system. There are inherent contradictions and inconsistencies in the aforementioned as the basis for phasing out remediation at CUNY.

First, CUNY was never an elite institution of the magnitude of Columbia and New York University. Its mission has always been to provide access for individuals desiring a college education who by reason of inadequate preparation or limited funds had no such option. Steps to restrict admissions to this urban institution run counter to recent policies enacted by the other mega-university in the state (SUNY) that serves primarily White, middle-class students. Whereas the CUNY board has eliminated remedial support systems at its 4-year colleges, SUNY retains its remedial course offerings (Board of Trustees of State University of New York, 1995).

Steps to shepherd inadequately prepared minority, immigrant, and low-status students, who primarily come from publicly underfunded city high schools, into precommunity college-level courses, represent a concerted effort to change the historical mission of CUNY. Yet CUNY Chancellor Goldstein unapologetically stated, “my resolve is not to recreate the University of 30 years ago. It is to create a new sense of purpose” (Goldstein, 1999, p. 3).

Perceptions of elitism, however, should not be underestimated. Reference to the “university of 30 years ago” is clearly an assault on the open-admission policy instituted in 1970. That university of 30 years ago represented unprecedented opportunities for minorities to earn postsecondary degrees that translated into viable employment. Chancellor Goldstein, himself a product of the CUNY system, is leading the charge to fundamentally alter the nature and vehicles of opportunity afforded him and previous generations of White ethnics. For the thousands of African Americans, Hispanics, immigrants, and lower status students, who are largely the contemporary byproducts of the city’s public schools, he offers no such vehicles for social mobility. In other words, the chancellor is interested in burning the metaphorical bridge he crossed in favor of a much narrower and guarded passage.

Second, remedial courses may still be offered at the CUNY community colleges, but the remedial network of support services has been eroded. Articulation agreements between community and senior colleges are irrelevant if students remain in a perpetual holding pattern. As it is currently structured, entering students not only test into precollege-level courses, they must now test out to begin earning college credits (CUNY, 1999).

Research indicates that there is an inverse relationship between precollege-level classes and graduation rates. The longer it takes for students

to begin earning college credits, the less likely they are to graduate (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996). Remember that applicants to CUNY largely come from inner-city high schools. Urban centers, such as New York City, are home to tens of thousands of linguistic and ethnic minorities and poor children attending lower schools that are woefully inadequate by every conceivable measure. From these crippled facilities emerge students who, since 1970, believed that the door to higher education was CUNY.

At the inception of open admissions, CUNY administrators understood that the probability of graduation of inner-city youth would be diminished in the absence of a strong network of services, counseling, and courses. It was also presumed that although CUNY was open to all New York residents, it was primarily in place to meet the needs of the concentrated minority, immigrant, and lower status population of New York City. Thus, activities associated with remediation and open admission were unabashedly offered.

Policies that restrict entry to the university system's community colleges essentially segregate and stratify the student population. Poorly prepared minority and low-income students will be relegated in increasing numbers to the community colleges, whereas students from private and suburban schools will qualify for admissions to 4-year institutions.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that New York City will experience a decline in the numbers of minority and poor students attending public schools. As per the current chancellor of New York City Public Schools, Joel Klein, almost 75% of the students in New York City are minorities or living in poverty. Only 9% of the African American and Hispanic students who began high school in 1998 earned a Regent's diploma (the equivalent to a college-preparatory diploma) in 4 years. In short, despite decades of reform, little has changed (Klein, 2004). Projections grounded in current trends become increasingly alarming when one considers that the same individuals orchestrating the reform of CUNY also control educational reform policies in the lower schools. If students who graduate from public high schools are underprepared for higher education are then denied practical and affordable remedies that provide genuine opportunities for betterment, it is not only individuals who will suffer.

Third, there is no evidence that raising admission requirements will raise the quality of CUNY graduates, lower high school graduation requirements, or dilute the value of a CUNY degree. Evidence to the contrary suggests that the more comprehensive the support mechanisms that undergird students in need of remediation, the more likely youth are to not only graduate but also to go on to obtain professional and graduate degrees. Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) also found that students needing remedial coursework, who were

enrolled in 4-year colleges, were more apt to graduate with bachelor's degrees than students needing remediation who were initially enrolled as community college students.

The excuse that lenient admissions policies have created the current crisis in inner-city lower and upper schooling is more political hyperbole than truth. The work of educational historians such as David Tyack (1974) chronicled the disparities and inequitable distribution of resources common in urban schools that date back to the 1800s. Glaring inequities in urban schools were more the result of restrictive reforms that perpetuated selective educational opportunity as opposed to purposefully influencing college entry standards (Kantor & Brenzel, 1994). Again, research supporting the importance of access to 4-year institutions was ignored, as policy makers in New York further stratified both university systems by establishing so-called flagship colleges and encouraging each college to re-define its mission, while phasing out precollege-level courses. Stratification within the CUNY system is actually an example of history repeating itself. In the late 1960s, CUNY had what were called elite senior institutions that were more difficult to enter than the other senior colleges (e.g., City College).

The fourth rationale for eliminating remediation is its financial cost. According to Erika Yamasaki (1998), 29% of first-time freshmen attending the nation's public institutions required some form of remedial coursework. The costs associated with offering courses to equip underprepared students are high because costs are not normally included within the context of regular instructional budgets (Yamasaki, 1998). As a result, institutions that serve large populations of students in need of academic retooling experience a significant drain of resources.

In the name of rewarding merit and systematically raising standards, the CUNY Board of Trustees and the New York State Board of Regents seem indifferent to the masses that will one day either contribute to the state's economy or become a drain on it. Without comprehensive remedial programs patterned after those in the 1970 open-admissions plan, prospects of attaining degrees beyond high school wane for broad segments of the urban population. Would the city be better off if ill-prepared students graduating from New York City's high schools failed to earn degrees? After obtaining high school diplomas, for what positions would urban graduates apply? More importantly, for what occupations will future lower status urban youngsters aspire?

As previously stated, 80% of CUNY's graduates remain in the New York metropolitan area after graduation. More than 90% of CUNY's faculty and staff live in New York State. According to CUNY's own sources, a 40-year career after earning a bachelor's degree affords individuals an increase of

nearly $700,000 in income. Consider the impact on the city's tax base if more than half of CUNY's students in the late 1990s who came from families with combined incomes of lower than $25,000 never earned college degrees (CUNY, 1998). The income potential afforded degree candidates not only breaks the cycle of poverty for individual students but also benefits New York City and state.

Have policy makers so set on phasing out remediation at CUNY's 4-year colleges factored the loss of tax revenue that will result when students fail to secure upper income positions because of the absence of educational opportunity? According to CUNY's own Economic Impact Web site, New York City and New York State derived $708 million more in tax dollars from the 1970 to 1978 graduates of CUNY than would have been available had these students not had access to higher educational opportunities (CUNY, 1998). Although remediation is expensive, so to is the failure to remediate in an attempt to equalize education opportunity. New York would do well to remember the words of Sir Claus Moser (1993) who related, "education costs money, but then so does ignorance".

Finally, Chancellor Goldstein, when referring to the diverse population of New York City, employed the metaphor of a ladder. He said one "should see CUNY as a ladder spanning the distance from high school through college, graduate school, and post-professional training" (Goldstein, 1999, p. 3). Yet none of the programs included in the master plan developed by the chancellor and board of directors promises to increase, much less sustain, the numbers of minority students earning baccalaureate degrees, the degree that is the greatest predictor of earning potential. One has only to reflect on the history of CUNY to conclude that stratification of institutions and an absence of remedial support systems will predictably result in no college degree (i.e., no ladder at all for some students).

## REFLECTIONS

Since the open-admissions policy of 1970, decision makers in New York have been chipping away at the pillars that made open admissions a valuable commodity for minority and low-income students. There is little question that the students most apt to be negatively affected by the curtailment of remedial programs are the students who most need remediation: minorities and the poor who attend inner-city public schools.

Perhaps most troubling is the realization that the beneficiaries of a CUNY education are the same individuals orchestrating the demise of open access.

CUNY's Chancellor Goldstein reflects, "I am proud to be a product of the City College. My family had limited resources, so the public university was my only hope for a better life" (Goldstein, 1999, p. 3). Sentences prior, he adamantly supported the restriction of opportunity for subsequent generations of aspiring students. Once again, behind the veneer of standards and meritocracy stands the age-old specter of bias and animus.

Predictably, there are differing opinions relative to the intended and unintended consequences associated with this policy designed to increase the admissions standards and thereby the reputation of CUNY. On one hand, Richard P. Mills, the commissioner of education for New York State, and CUNY officials laud the change (Hebel, 2003). Early reporting does indicate an increase in the applicant pool, average SAT scores, and student enrollment since the 1999 implementation, and public officials would argue that remedial courses, although not as widely available and fundamentally changed in entrance and exit protocols, are still available to students. Freshman enrollment at CUNY's senior (more elite) institutions has risen 23% during the fall of 2000. The Honors College has seen an application pool increase of 90% when comparing prospective freshman in the fall of 2000 and fall of 2001 (Hebel, 2002). Yet despite the celebration surrounding increased enrollments, these numbers mask the distribution of the ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities in the student body.

Before any formal data collection validating support for increased standards, the New York Board of Regents in 2004 voted to affirm the policy of banning remediation until an evaluation of student population shifts was presented in the fall of 2004. Sources of increased applications and improved prospective student quality have not been articulated. Nor has the method of head counting enrollees been released. Nevertheless, CUNY's vice chancellor for university relations identified the ongoing policy as a step toward advancing high academic standards while maintaining student diversity (Hebel, 2003).

There are those, however, who argue that CUNY's attempts to increase admissions standards are already reaping serious consequences on minority students and in particular, students for whom English is a second language (i.e., ESL students). For example, in the fall of 2001, there was a 7% decrease in ESL students taking at least one class when compared to the fall of 1990 and a 46% decrease from the 1995 to 1996 school year. Furthermore, whereas Honors College students enjoy the perks of free tuition, a computer, free admission to many city attractions, and even an expense account of $7,500 to pay for enriching academic experiences such as studying abroad, ESL students find it difficult to even attend language skill classes, many of which are not scheduled to begin after 5 p.m. As another example, at Herbert

Lehman College, one of the 4-year colleges of CUNY located in the Bronx, only 63 students were registered in the ESL program for the academic year 2001 to 2002 as compared to 718 in the 1994 to 1995 academic year. Students and faculty voice concerns that the additional criteria associated with the precredit-earning coursework, to include scheduling and psychological barriers, will make participation increasingly unlikely for the city's linguistic minorities (Hebel, 2002).

Controversy about who shall be educated continues to rage. One has to wonder whether modern-day alumni, such as General Colin Powell and Nobel Laureate Rosalyn Yalow, would earn the degree that set them on their paths to success under the current policies. Time will tell the far-reaching impact of this narrowing of access to higher education on New York City, New York State, and the nation. Unfortunately, for the thousands of African Americans, Hispanics, immigrants, and low-income individuals, prospects for access to higher education and social mobility are slipping like sand through their fingers.

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