RETHINKING COMMUNITY COLLEGE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Traditionally, community colleges have been more affordable than four-year colleges. They offer a broad array of degrees and short-term certificates directly linked to a vocation or as a step in pursuit of a four-year degree to students of all ages. Although this description continues to be true, community colleges today function primarily as the entry point into higher education for low-income and first-generation students, many from schools that have prepared them inadequately for college. Consequently, community colleges have become the new “frontier”—the entry point to higher education for first-generation and low-income students who aspire to become educated citizens and workers.

A postsecondary credential is now considered essential in a job market that is increasingly composed of service and white collar jobs requiring more than a high school education. However, the attainment of a two-year degree remains elusive for the majority of community college students for a variety of reasons. Nationally, 36 percent of public community college students complete a credential at their “starting institutions” or a transfer institution within six years. Sixty percent of students need to take at least one remedial course and many take several. The courses are usually non-credit bearing and often become a major obstacle to degree completion. This and other obstacles to completion have been addressed in various ways at community colleges around the country. Some have launched successful pilot programs with groups of students. But the vast majority of students entering community colleges continue to face multiple barriers that delay and restrict their future options.

The New Community College (NCC) is a model that enhances students’ academic achievement and the timely attainment of degrees. It is the outgrowth of Chancellor Matthew Goldstein’s charge in 2007 to a visionary group at the City University of New York (CUNY) to develop an innovative approach to community college education. These planners were challenged by the dismal, persistent statistics to ask: “What if we take everything we know from research on best practices in supporting student learning and design a college using these practices? What would it look like and what kind of outcomes could be expected?”

In 2008, the planners’ answers to these questions were translated into a Concept Paper that laid the foundation for The New Community College. The goal was to design a college that would increase the graduation rate after three years to 35 percent with students either transferring to four-year colleges or entering careers for which they had been prepared. With approval of the Chancellor and start-up funding from the City of New York, CUNY, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the NCC Planning Team began to turn concept into reality. NCC opened its doors in August 2012 to 300 students who entered through CUNY’s open admissions, most with full financial aid for tuition and expenses. The college will grow to its full enrollment of 5,000 students when it moves to its permanent home.

This case study explores the development of NCC and describes essential elements of the NCC model, as well as lessons learned and considerations for other innovators interested in the development of new education models for community colleges.
# THE NCC MODEL

## FIRST-YEAR PROGRAM
Full-time attendance is required in the first year in a program of study that integrates credit-bearing and developmental course work; participation in a mandatory Summer Bridge Program prepares students for the expectations and culture of the NCC.

## CITY SEMINAR
A two-semester City Seminar in the first year provides an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing critical issues in New York City and other urban centers; it includes reading and writing linked to these areas of inquiry as well as a course in quantitative reasoning that covers interpreting, analyzing, and using data.

## ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS
Innovative and integrated academic and socio-emotional supports are proactive, guided by inquiry, and supported by research. Instructional Teams in each of the four Learning Communities composed of faculty and Student Success Advocates meet weekly to plan, address problems, and discuss how to support students’ learning.

## PARTNERSHIPS
Connections between college and workplaces are supported by engaging partners from businesses, community-based organizations, non-profits, and government agencies in supporting experiential learning, internships, and career exploration.

## CALENDAR ALIGNED WITH LEARNING NEEDS
A calendar with two 18-week semesters, each divided into a 12-week and a 6-week session, allows for further work in areas where students have not reached a college level of proficiency and for students to accelerate their progress in their course work.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES
Rubrics are used to assess individual student progress in achieving learning outcomes, and the learning outcomes drive institutional assessments. Signature assignments throughout a student’s career are stored in an e-Portfolio and provide a record of academic development that follows the student into further education and employment.

## TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION LITERACY
Students use technology in every part of their learning—in classrooms, in their presentations, and in e-Portfolios, which all students use to post drafts and final assignments, and to access course materials and assignments. Students develop information literacy skills with the support of the faculty and library staff so that they will leave the NCC knowing how to access, assess, analyze, and use information critically.

## A HIGHLY SKILLED FACULTY AND STAFF
Recruitment of faculty and staff emphasizes the ability to collaborate and participate in the creation and continuous improvement of an innovative institution. Faculty and staff need to understand and support the NCC’s mission and, in turn, are supported by having access to multiple avenues for growth, service, leadership, and research that includes the “scholarship of teaching and learning.”
The First-Year Experience is the most innovative and signature aspect of the NCC. The First-Year Core Curriculum is an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to a general education curriculum. The design of the first-year curriculum for The New Community College is shaped by a belief that an alternative model of required credit-based coursework for all first-year students—those who traditionally would be assigned to remediation and those assigned to introductory level work—will significantly improve community college student academic performance.

Students are required to attend full time at least during the first year. This requirement is shaped by the belief that underprepared students require more sustained time to develop skills and knowledge that they need for associate degree completion, baccalaureate transfer, and/or workplace readiness. Students are accepted on a “first come, first served” basis. All students, starting with Summer Bridge (a 12-day introduction to the NCC curricular model and the demands of college-level work) and continuing in City Seminar I and II, are in Learning Communities called Houses for the entire first year.

An innovative feature of the Houses is the Instructional Teams, consisting of faculty and support staff who meet once a week for an hour and a half to discuss students, pedagogy, and curriculum. There are no disciplinary departments at NCC; rather faculty are appointed to the college as a whole and form one body, who are assigned to Houses for teaching purposes. Student Success Advocates (SSA), Graduate Student Coordinators, and Peer Mentors are also assigned to each House. NCC has a layered structure of academic and personal support that planners hoped would identify and support students who might otherwise drop out unnoticed for academic reasons or for challenging life circumstances.

The NCC First Year Core consists of City Seminar I & II (Critical Issues, Quantitative Reasoning, and Reading & Writing Skills; in second semester Composition I is linked to City Seminar II); Ethnographies of Work I & II; and Statistics. City Seminar I & II are extended learning communities anchored in problem-based learning focused on Critical Issues facing New York City and other global urban centers. The only course that is not attended by the entire heterogeneous cohort is Statistics, in which students are grouped by math proficiency.
NEW COMMUNITY COLLEGE FIRST-YEAR CORE

A learning community comprised of:

FALL
City Seminar I
Ethnographies of Work I
Statistics

SPRING
City Seminar II & Composition I
Ethnographies of Work II
Statistics

Composition I (CS II)

Content

Quantitative Reasoning

Learning Outcomes

Assess Assignments

Learning Outcomes

Reading/ Writing (CS I)

Learning Outcomes

Ethnographies of Work

LABSS*

*Learning about Being a Successful Student

Office of Partnerships

Student Engagement & Support

Staff in Student Development and the Office of Partnerships will provide significant support for the model.

From the beginning, the goal of preparing students to be both educated citizens and professional workers was never thought of as an either/or proposition. The two-semester course Ethnographies of Work (EoW) brings together academic and occupational knowledge. The aim of EoW is to introduce students to the basic concepts and approaches of sociology and anthropology, train students in critical observation and analysis through the use of ethnographic methods, and provide and help students to think in depth about their future pursuits both academic and career-related. Attached to EoW is a once a week 90 minute LABSS (Learning About Being a Successful Student) run by the Student Support Advocates where students investigate their academic and professional goals and are introduced to the majors.

NCC will offer eight programs of study: A.A. in Business Administration; A.A. in Human Services; A.A.S. in Information Technology; A.A. in Liberal Arts & Sciences; A.A. in Urban Studies; A.A.S. in Health Information Technology; A.A.S. in Energy Services Management; and A.S. in Environmental Science (A.S.). The NCC team conducted extensive research on labor market projections and trends and consulted with experts within and outside CUNY in order to identify the most attractive, relevant, and transferable programs of study. This small number of majors and well-defined course pathways are in direct response to research that many students get caught in confusing menus of general education choices and possible courses for majors, which ultimately impedes their progress to a degree.
SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING INNOVATIONS

An innovation is a work in progress—it is work that is messy, has fits and starts, and is filled with uncertainties. The following themes and issues are important considerations in the planning of innovative approaches to community college education.

OUTREACH & ACCREDITATION

**Develop a Concept Paper:** Having a well-researched plan is essential and inputs from critical friends within and outside of the postsecondary system throughout the planning period anchors a framework for action.

**Select Leadership for Innovation:** Leaders must advocate for the innovation externally while at the same time address the needs of the collaborating faculty and staff most directly involved in the ‘heavy lift’ of mounting the innovation.

**Promote Continuous Communication:** Continuing dialogue is essential with critics of the innovation. While internal dissent and criticism is to be encouraged, it should be based on a clear understanding of what is being proposed.

**Ensure an Insulation Period:** Innovations need interim shields from existing and new policies that might challenge a nascent model before it has been implemented.

INFRASTRUCTURE & ALIGNMENT

**Create a Bridge Group within the University Administration:** Innovations bring inevitable incompatibilities between the new and the established postsecondary policies and practices. A ‘bridge group’ charged with timely mediation of inconsistencies in policies and practices without undermining the intent of the innovation is needed. This would greatly facilitate efforts in the planning and the scale-up of the model.

**Set Clearly Defined Deliverables:** Planning with clear guidelines, protocols, responsibilities, deadlines, and deliverables reduces tendencies toward prolonged discussions and decreases frustration levels.

**Hire Experienced Administrators Who Advocate for the Model:** Experienced administrators bring operational knowledge and informal networks. However, they need to believe in the innovation, demonstrate a willingness to be hands on, and adapt procedures in line with the innovation.

DESIGNING THE MODEL

**Align Recruitment with the Innovation:** Start-ups require an up-front investment. Traditional formulas for determining student-staff ratios must be revisited in line with the model and its development. The challenges of implementing an innovation must be conveyed to all prospective candidates.
DESIGNING THE MODEL (CONTINUED)

**Focus on Curriculum as well as Pedagogy:** There must be a continuous focus on the relationship between the design of the curriculum and the use of appropriate pedagogies that are responsive to the assets as well as needs of students. For the faculty and staff involved in the innovation both ongoing professional development and professional learning is required.

**Manage Impact of the “New” on Professional Identities:** New non-traditional roles assumed by faculty and staff in innovative institutions may generate conflicting perspectives and concerns.

**Plan an Induction Process:** The orientation of new faculty/staff is a critical period for reinforcing a positive culture of innovation while acknowledging the challenges that will be faced; this helps build ownership.

**Design Appropriate Incentives:** Innovations require transparent motivating strategies to sustain the innovation. These would include linking incentives to retention, promotion and tenure for faculty and staff.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON PLANNING INNOVATION

What is exciting about the efforts described in this case study is that a new college is being designed that is focused on student learning and success, works to bridge the traditional vocational/academic binary, and seeks to build an ongoing capacity to use data to continuously improve a rigorous program of study for a non-traditional and growing student population. This case study has highlighted some of the difficulties and roadblocks and offered suggestions for consideration in adapting this process in other settings. It has also highlighted the creative thinking and tremendous amount of work that has been done each step of the way to make The New Community College a reality.
**NCC AT A GLANCE**

**NAME:** The New Community College (NCC) at CUNY  
**LOCATION:** 50 West 40th Street, New York, New York 10018  
**TELEPHONE:** 646 313-8000  
**WEBSITE:** www.ncc.cuny.edu

**LEADERSHIP:**

Scott E. Evenbeck, President of The New Community College at CUNY  
José Luis Morín, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost  
Larian Angelo, Vice President of Administration and Finance

**PLANNING PERIOD: 2008–2012**

**PLANNING TEAM AS OF 2010:**

John Mogulescu, NCC Chair  
Senior University Dean for Academic Affairs and Dean of the School of Professional Studies, CUNY

Tracy Meade, NCC Project Director  
Current: Director of Strategic Planning and Program Development, CUNY

Stuart Cochran, NCC Deputy to the Project Director  
Current: NCC Dean of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research

Toni Gifford, NCC Associate Director

Eric Hofmann, University Director of Collaborative Programs, CUNY

Steve Hinds, Mathematics Education Specialist, CUNY

Stephanie Benjamin, NCC Consultant

Laurence Mucciolo, NCC Consultant

Joseph Capobianco, NCC Registrar Director

Jennifer Lee, NCC Director of Communications and School Partnerships  
Current: NCC Director of College Admissions and Access

Angie Sadhu, NCC Program Assistant
MISSION:
The New Community College at CUNY is an urban public institution that offers associate degree programs in an environment that nurtures student success. Based on extensive research, NCC integrates excellence in teaching, proactive and responsive student supports, and external partnerships. Our primary objective is to increase the number of students, especially those not effectively served in higher education, to persist in their programs of study and attain a degree in a timely manner.

EDUCATIONAL MODEL:
All first-year students are full-time and attend a summer bridge program. They are placed in cohorts with instructional teams comprised of faculty, student support staff and librarians. The common core curriculum is organized in learning communities (The City Seminars and Ethnography of Work courses) in which students earn college credit and have opportunities to practice academic skills as well.

PLANNED MAJORS:
- A.A. in Business Administration
- A.A. in Human Services
- A.A.S. in Information Technology
- A.A. in Liberal Arts & Sciences
- A.A. in Urban Studies
- A.A.S. in Health Information Technology
- A.A.S. in Energy Services Management
- A.S. in Environmental Science

ADMISSIONS:
A three-step process that includes 1) an online CUNY application designating NCC as one of the choices; 2) a group information session during which applicants become familiar with the NCC’s educational model; and 3) an individual information session where applicants meet with faculty, staff, or peer mentors to discuss their plans for achieving their educational goals. Students are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

FIRST CLASS:
300 students on August 2012. Enrollment will grow to approximately 5,000 when the college moves to its permanent home at 59th Street and 10th Avenue. Current demographics are similar to those of all CUNY community college students: 36 % Latino, 25 % African American, 21 % Caucasian, 11 % Asian, 2 % Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 4 % data not provided. Fifty-four percent are female demonstrating an almost even gender distribution.