

CUNY RISING ALLIANCE

Platform for Change

Occupy Wall Street, the Fight for \$15, and Black Lives Matter have ramped up the debate about racial and economic inequality. In the U.S. presidential campaign, the debate about inequality has focused increasingly on the question of access to and quality of public higher education. The future of the City University of New York must be part of that debate. At a time when New York City is more diverse than ever and economic polarization has reached intolerable and unsustainable levels, a free high-quality CUNY is of the utmost importance.

More students are graduating from New York City public high schools than ever, and 60 percent go on to enroll at CUNY. Today, 75 percent of CUNY undergraduates are students of color, half come from families earning less than \$30,000 a year and 40 percent are immigrants. Nearly half are among the first generation in their families to attend college.

It is critical that the quality of education and access offered by CUNY continues to be strong so that these students, and those that follow them, can succeed in college and earn a degree. Anything less is a betrayal of the promise to fix the K-12 educational system to better prepare students for college. Now, more than ever, a college degree is the key to obtaining a job that pays a family-sustaining wage.

These healthy trends of high school completion and college aspiration are being threatened by other policies. Greater reliance on SAT scores in CUNY's admission process has contributed to a reduction in black and Hispanic enrollment at CUNY's selective four-year colleges, and students' (and their credits') ability to transfer successfully from two-year to four-year colleges continues to be a challenge.

The pattern of public disinvestment in CUNY also makes access and quality less and less possible. Tuition for students has increased by \$1,500 over the past five years (a 31 percent increase at senior colleges and a 46 percent increase at community colleges), and CUNY has proposed an additional tuition hike at senior colleges next year. Tuition increases have been accompanied by New York state's disinvestment in CUNY's operating budget over the past five years. Since 2008, state investment in CUNY four-year senior colleges has fallen 17 percent when adjusted for enrollment growth and inflation.

To meet the needs of low-income, minority, immigrant and working-class students across the five boroughs, the city and state must change course and commit to ongoing, predictable public investment to advance the five planks in our Platform for Change:

1. Keep CUNY accessible to low-income, working-class students.

As public investment has declined, CUNY has sought authority to raise tuition. Even with financial aid, the other costs of attending college—books, fees, transportation and lost work time—are still a burden for many. As important, many low-income students, including working adults and undocumented students, get no financial aid at all. We demand:

- Make CUNY free and open once again, and start by freezing tuition at this year's level;
- Raise the maximum state Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) grant and fix gross inequities that bar part-time students, financially independent students without dependents, and undocumented immigrant students from receiving aid;
- Pass the New York State Dream Act; and
- Encourage policies and programs that consider the whole cost of college, such as offering free or reduced-price Metro cards and bus passes to all CUNY students.

2. Provide every city high school graduate with a high-quality CUNY education.

Higher tuition and growing enrollments have disguised the impact of the state's disinvestment. Courses and programs have been cut, faculty and staff hiring has been curtailed. The CUNY workforce has gone without a wage increase for six years, and full-time faculty are beginning to leave. Many clerical and other semi-skilled workers earn far below \$15 an hour. This hurts the quality of students' education. We demand:

- Expand college curricula with more general, introductory courses and specialized courses, so students have access to diverse, rigorous learning opportunities and can graduate on time;
- Ensure that older adults who graduate from high school also receive high-quality CUNY education;
- Restructure faculty workload so they have time to mentor students, and to involve students in active research, experiential learning and independent study;
- Raise faculty salaries to be competitive nationally, so CUNY can continue to hire the best scholars, teachers and researchers, and better recruit minority faculty who reflect CUNY's student body; and
- Improve the wages of CUNY part-time faculty and support staff as well as expand the workforce, so that students will be better served.

LIST IN FORMATION:

United Students Against Sweatshops
Greater New York
Labor-Religion Coalition
Strong Economy For All Coalition
Citizen Action of New York
Young Invincibles
Alliance for Quality Education

NYPIRG
CUNY University Student Senate
NY Working Families Party
NY Communities for Change
PSC CUNY
DC 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO
Make the Road New York
Coalition for Educational Justice

Hispanic Federation
Urban Youth Collaborative
Federation of
Protestant Welfare Agencies
Community Voices Heard
New York Immigration Coalition
American Federation of Teachers
NYC Central Labor Council
CWA 1180

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3. Expand supports that improve students' ability to transition successfully, stay on track and make progress toward obtaining a degree.

CUNY has several enrichment programs with proven records of helping first-generation students, educationally disadvantaged students, and students with learning disabilities, as well as those with deficits in their high school preparation. These programs should be significantly expanded so that CUNY students who would benefit from them have access to them.

- Expand the number of students who can enroll in Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), CUNY Start and CLIP;
- Provide more counselors and other academic and social supports for incoming freshmen to ensure they make a good transition to college;
- Ensure that these programs and all student support programs are accessible to all students, including those who are not in the traditional age range, who work or who have families of their own;
- Expand academic tutoring, mental health, and career services; and
- Keep libraries, language labs and other facilities open when students need them.

4. Increase equity within CUNY by narrowing the race-based differences in the time it takes to graduate.

CUNY's graduation rates are on par with national rates for urban public universities. However, CUNY's black and Latino male students experience significantly greater time to graduation, and many do not finish at all. If New York City is to make good on its historic promise of "equal opportunity" for all of its citizens, this problem cannot continue.

- Expand programs like the state-funded SEEK Program for educationally disadvantaged students enrolled in senior college;

- Improve CUNY's admissions process to address low representation of students of color in the freshman class at CUNY's selective senior colleges; and
- Allow high school grades and other measures to be assessed for admission—instead of relying almost exclusively on SAT scores—to promote greater fairness and access to CUNY's most selective senior colleges.

5. Address infrastructure needs and maintenance, in addition to new buildings.

CUNY students lack adequate space to study, meet and socialize outside class, as well as space dedicated to student organizations. Having adequate space where students and staff can engage with one another should be an accepted part of a high-quality education. CUNY facilities are often too cramped or worn out to accommodate students or faculty and staff comfortably. Libraries throughout CUNY often cannot purchase current books and journals. Investments in various forms of technology remain inadequate to support the growing needs of students and faculty.

- Invest in infrastructure resources at CUNY to provide students with the learning spaces, library materials and access to technology available to their counterparts in private schools, and to provide a quality higher education in the 21st century; and
- Support CUNY's capital budget request.

Without concerted public attention and new investments, CUNY will not be able to maintain its historic mission to provide a high-quality education to the people—all people—of New York City. Together, students, faculty and the community can build the power to demand increased investments in CUNY.

Today, as in the past, access to and quality of education at CUNY is one of the most crucial justice issues the city faces.