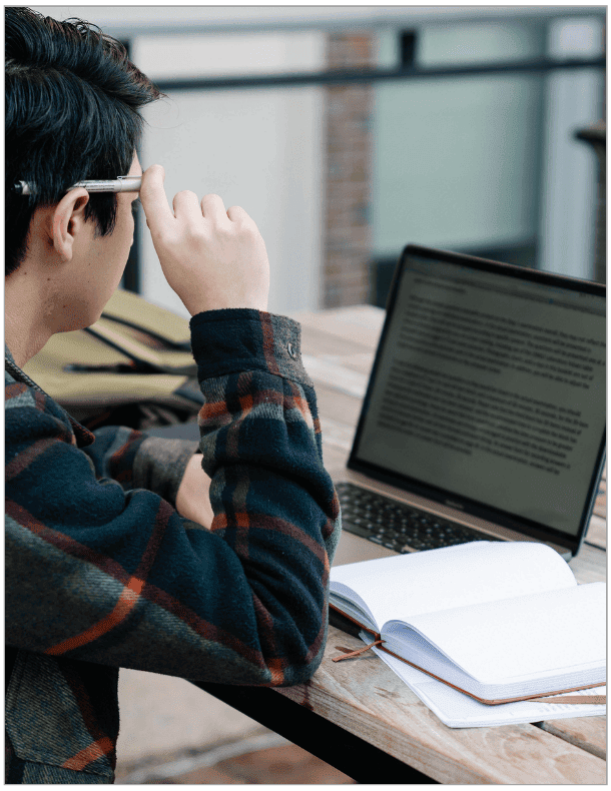
Center for an Urban Future
Innovative Ideas. Independent Policy.



Testimony - June 2024

How NYC Policymakers Can Boost Transfer Student Success at CUNY

In this testimony before the NYC Council Committee on Higher Education, CUF Editorial & Policy Director Eli Dvorkin argues that most CUNY students who intend to transfer from a community to a four-year college and complete a bachelor's won't reach that finish line. He recommends new and baseline investments in CUNY's transfer student initiatives to boost college completion rates.

by Eli Dvorkin

Testimony of Eli Dvorkin
Editorial & Policy Director, Center for an Urban Future
Before the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
on "How NYC Policymakers Can Boost Transfer Student Success at CUNY"
June 10, 2024

Good morning. I'm Eli Dvorkin, editorial and policy director of the Center for an Urban Future, an independent think tank focused on creating a stronger and more inclusive economy in New York. Thank you to Chair Dinowitz and members of the committees for the opportunity.

For thousands of New York City public high school graduates each year, the most accessible path to a bachelor's degree—and with it, a major boost to economic mobility—is to enter CUNY as a community college student and then transfer to a four-year institution.

However, most CUNY students who intend to transfer and complete a bachelor's won't reach that finish line. Roughly eight of every nine new community college students at CUNY intend to transfer and complete at least a bachelor's degree, while only about one in nine does so within six years. Completion rates for transfer students are notably lower for Black and Hispanic students: whereas 52.4 percent of white students graduated within three years after transferring, the rates were 44 percent for Black students and 47 percent for Hispanic students. And transfer performance is wildly uneven across CUNY's dozen senior colleges. Three-year graduation rates following transfer range from a high of 66.6 percent at Baruch College to just

26.5 percent at City Tech.

There are challenges at every point in the transfer process. Many who originally intend to springboard from a CUNY community college to a four-year institution never transfer at all. A smaller number are accepted but do not enroll. Others do transfer, but are unable to complete their degrees. There are issues with credits being lost when transfer pathways aren't baked into curriculum design. The transfer application process itself is hugely cumbersome. And too few faculty and administrative staff have the knowledge and tools needed to help students navigate the transfer experience seamlessly.

Fortunately, CUNY is already doing a lot to address these challenges, as you've just heard from our colleagues at CUNY.

Our research suggests that CUNY's interventions are working. For instance, the rate of transfer students graduating within three years of transfer increased from 38.7 percent in 2012 to 49.2 percent in 2019. Every racial group has registered three-year completion rate gains during this period. And more recent initiatives, like the expansion of CUNY's T-Rex tool for navigating transfer pathways and the launch of a new peer mentorship program will help boost outcomes further.

But CUNY will struggle to achieve the progress needed without a new level of support from the City of New York.

That starts with fully funding CUNY in the FY 2025 budget. The mayor's executive budget cuts nearly $84.9 million in city funds for CUNY, compared to last year's adopted budget. The Council should do everything possible to reverse these cuts and enhance funding for the evidence-backed CUNY programs that are working to boost college and career success.

Arguably the most effective option to help boost transfer student success is a simple one: baseline funding for additional academic and peer advisors at CUNY. Current ratios of students to advisors are unacceptably high and limit the effectiveness of other city and state investments in college-going. The Adams administration and City Council should consolidate support for improvements in CUNY's transfer process by launching a new CUNY Transfer Accelerator initiative, which would invest $5 million annually in operationalizing and scaling up to all 25 colleges the effective tools, supports, and practices that are already delivering results.

Given how many transfer students struggle when they enter a senior college setting, the city should commit to growing the small-scale but highly effective CUNY ACE senior college success program, which is boosting graduation rates by upward of 27 percent but reaches just 3 percent of eligible students today. The city should also consider piloting a new program—call it CUNY Flex—to provide wraparound supports to nontraditional students, including transfer students, older students, and part-time students who may otherwise be ineligible for ASAP or ACE.

At the same time, CUNY should consider additional steps of its own, such as creating Transfer Success teams at each college to harmonize curriculum development and transfer practices, improving data collection and dissemination on the transfer student experience, and launching a new Transfer Academy to boost the knowledge of faculty and administrators around transfer policies, building on the exciting Transfer Initiative Fellowship program.

Helping far more of CUNY's aspiring transfer students to beat the odds and complete a bachelor's degree is among the most effective steps that policymakers can take to boost economic mobility. With this Council's support, CUNY can accelerate and embed what's working system-wide and deliver better results for students at scale—and contribute even more to building a stronger and more equitable city.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE
120 Wall Street, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10005

cuf@nycfuture.org © All Rights Reserved.