

College Initiative Summer 2010 College Preparation Intensive,

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Program Report Submitted by

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Each year, more than 90,000 people are released from state and local correctional facilities and return to New York City. They are typically from underserved groups and communities that have been failed by the educational system. Research has shown that the cumulative risk of imprisonment is three to four times higher for those who drop out of high school than for high school graduates. In 2009, 68 percent of African American male high school dropouts aged 30-34 had prison records. An estimated 40 percent of State prison inmates, 27 percent of Federal inmates, 47 percent of inmates in local jails and 31 percent of those serving probation sentences have not completed high school or its equivalent compared with 18 percent of the general population. In 2008, Black males ages 18 and over represented only 5 percent of the total college student population but 36 percent of the total prison population. Among those incarcerated in state prisons nationwide, only 12 percent have completed some postsecondary education, while only about 2 percent have a college degree. Data show that the chance of re-incarceration for this population is high and that, with a criminal history, the chance of obtaining long-term employment is low.

College Initiative (CI) is a community based organization working in collaboration with higher education, criminal justice and reentry organizations to create pathways to and through higher education for court-involved and formerly incarcerated residents of New York City. It has developed the strategies, tools, and relationships necessary to enable court-involved students, typically with GEDs, to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

CI believes that postsecondary education can be a pathway to a life-long career and a changed life for people coming out of the criminal justice system, though it is perceived by many as an unreachable goal. If this perception can be overcome, postsecondary education also plays a crucial motivating and legitimating role as well as being a concrete strategy for reclaiming their place in the community and the workplace. Yet, making good on the promise of postsecondary education for those with criminal justice involvement presents many challenges. Without adequate support, the possibility of college and a degree is often beyond the reach of a student who has experienced only indifference and failure in an education context. The vast majority of court-involved students have a GED rather than a

high school diploma and they face the same academic challenges as other GED holders, which include gaining admission, attaining college readiness without extensive remediation and achieving academic success leading to graduation and desirable employment. These educational challenges are compounded by personal and financial barriers that must be addressed for students to enter, persist and graduate. Students must overcome the insecurities and fears that come with a lack of classroom or campus experience, along with the many pressures of reintegration into the community. They must also persist in the face of widespread fear, stereotypes and misinformation about people with criminal justice involvement.

CI has found that college preparation is essential if students are to persist and succeed. In the Fall of 2009, CI began work with Professor Sandy Figueroa, a faculty member from Hostos Community College in designing a comprehensive and intensive college preparation program for CI students. Professor Figueroa and CI Director, Michael Carey, had met through the CUNY Black Male Initiative program and Professor Figueroa had prior experience working with CI students and the children of CI students. The Hostos Academic Learning Center (HALC) was quickly identified as a partner in the design and implementation of the program. HALC offers basic skills workshops during the Winter and Summer sessions each year. These workshops offer over 1,100 slots to students in need of assistance in preparing to take the COMPASS reading, ACT writing and COMPASS mathematics tests. The program serves both incoming freshman and continuing students who need to pass one or more of the CUNY tests.

Unwavering support for the program came from President of Hostos Community College, Dr. Felix Matos-Rodriguez and from the Dean of Special Programs at Hostos, Dr. Carlos Molina. Other collaborators included the CUNY College Transition Initiative (CTI), The Fortune Society and the NYC Justice Corps.

The program was sited at Hostos, thus allowing the students to receive an orientation to college life, and combined academic and non-academic preparation, aiming at not only preparing students for the CUNY placement tests, but also preparing them for a successful college career.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

- To provide workshops in math, writing and reading to those participants in need of remediation prior to the Fall 2010 academic semester;
- to provide the workshops on campus so that the participants would become familiar and comfortable with a college setting;
- to provide a range on non-academic programming, including peer mentoring from trained senior CI students, that would ensure the college readiness of the participants;

- to structure the program so that students could participate without fear of compromising their other commitments, such as work or parole or probation supervision;
- to create a transportable model that could be implemented on other CUNY community colleges and beyond.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Scheduling was a priority in the early planning and design stage of the program. Given the time available during the summer break, it was decided that the program would be scheduled for 10 weeks and would involve three hours of instruction a night, for four nights a week. Scheduling evening instruction allowed students to meet the demands of work and parole and probation supervision. Given the 120 hours available for instruction, finding the right balance of academic and non-academic instruction was a priority. CI and HALC decided on reserving one evening a week for non-academic instruction (30 hours) and three evenings (90 hours) for academic instruction.

The necessity for incentives for retention was discussed early in the planning process and CI was able to secure funding to cover Metrocards for all students. Other incentives included fast-tracked eligibility for CI scholarships and, through a generous grant from The Sunshine Lady Foundation, free netbook computers for every student who completed the program. A program launch and graduation were planned early and were seen as integral to creating a welcoming environment for the students. Recruitment of the students was the responsibility of CI and was built into the organization's schedule of student orientations. The students recruited for the program had been accepted into CUNY community colleges for Fall 2010, so the program had a CUNY-wide scope.

The necessity for a coordinator and liaison between HALC, college administrators and CI was recognized early in the planning stages and this role was taken on by Professor Figueroa, who was present each night to take attendance, give counsel and troubleshoot. Professor Figueroa also worked tirelessly to ensure clear and timely communication and problem resolution between CI, HALC and college administrators.

Academically, HALC administrators felt that it was important to design activities that specifically prepared students for one or more skills tests and provided them with a solid foundation to succeed in their CUNY tests and in their college-level courses. To this end, and based on students' CUNY test results, HALC decided to prepare study plans for each student.

Training and well-planned lessons were fundamental to the success of the program. To provide a deeper immersion in skills development, the curriculum linked study skills and test taking techniques to ensure that each student was quickly engaged with the areas they needed to enrich to pass their CUNY tests. Comprehensive facilitator manuals and accompanying student handbooks focused on strategies to improve developmental skills in reading, writing and math. The same lesson plans and syllabi were used for each workshop.

The syllabi included instructions, explanations and exercises for the different activities to be covered in each workshop. The workshop instructional model included HALC Hostos-prepared manual and practice tests.

Specially trained, non-faculty facilitators delivered workshop instruction. To prepare facilitators for workshops, it was essential to hold training sessions during the spring 2010 semester. Development activities provided facilitators with the opportunity to improve their teaching techniques and strategies by reading essays on current teaching practices, observing other facilitators during workshop sessions, and by participating in discussion groups led by HALC staff. This development requirement served to improve their knowledge of writing, reading and math theories, their ability to use a variety of pedagogical approaches during workshop sessions, and their understanding of the role that they played in the learning process. Participation of developmental activities was required of all basic skills facilitators.

Students' test scores were essential to the structuring and design of the program. CI and HALC worked with the testing office at Hostos to ensure that the students could test in a timely manner and as a cohort. Since most of the participants needed to pass one or more skills test, the 90 hours of instruction would be divided between reading/writing and math. Because all of the participants needed to pass at least one part of the COMPASS math exam, the first 45 hours of instruction, during the first five weeks of the program, would be assigned to math instruction. Students would be placed in either Mathematics 1 (pre-algebra) or Mathematics 2 (algebra) workshops based on their test scores. Of the fifteen participants, ten students needed to pass both Mathematics 1 and Mathematics 2 while five needed to pass only the Mathematics 2. One student finished the program early by passing the Mathematics 2 exam.

At the end of the first 45 hours of instruction, students would be retested for their math exams. Students who successfully completed their math requirements would then be placed in a writing/reading workshop, while those who needed more assistance would continue to receive math instruction for the remaining 45 hours of the program. During the second part of the program, seven students prepared for their reading/writing exam, six for Mathematics 2 and one for Mathematics 1.

CI provided training for HALC instructors on the characteristics of the reentry population and the criminal justice system, while developers from CUNY CTI provided two seminars on their work with GED-to-college transitions.

Non-academic programming was overseen by CI administrators and included workshops on: identifying and realizing the elements that go into a successful college career; understanding requirements and taking responsibility for academic progress; fulfilling corrections and educational commitments by developing a strong partnership with supervision agents; the stages of an academic career and the opportunities for and obstacles to a satisfying and sustainable career path.

Two evenings were devoted to workshops by mentors from CI's peer mentoring program. CI mentors are students who have at least two semesters of college experience and a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Mentors receive training structured as a college course during regular CUNY academic semesters and have five mandated one-on-one meetings with mentees as well as regular group meetings and mentor support meetings during the semester. The focus of the contacts is on assessing and facilitating the student's academic progress and preparation for the academic milestones that occur each semester, as well as providing connections as needed to supportive services. The mentoring services are provided for at least two semesters to each participating student. During the first workshop, eleven CI mentors spoke about their experiences with the criminal justice system and the role postsecondary education played in realigning their lives after incarceration. An open discussion followed. During the second workshop, CI mentors worked with the students in small groups to develop six-month, one-year, three-year and five-year goals. The students then presented these goals to the group. Each student in the cohort was matched with a CI mentor for the Fall 2010 semester and beyond.

The program began with a dinner during which the President of the College, the Provost of the College, the Director of the CUNY Black Male Initiative and the Director of CI welcomed the students to the program. The students then introduced themselves and spoke of their goals and aspirations. The program ended with a graduation dinner during which the President of the College addressed the students, certificates and netbook computers were awarded and the mentors congratulated their mentees on their success.

OUTCOMES

All objectives of the program were met or exceeded.

Seventeen students began the program and fifteen completed all requirements. At the end of the summer, though ten students needed Mathematics 1, the eight who completed the coursework passed the Mathematics 1 exam. Eleven of the fifteen students needing Mathematics 2 instruction completed the coursework; six of these students passed. Seven students participated in a writing/reading workshop. Of these seven students, three needed both exams, while the other four needed the writing only. Three of these students passed the reading and two passed the writing (Please see Appendix A for the July 12 test results and Appendix B for the August 12 test results).

Overall Student Performance at the end of the program (90-hours of instruction)

Workshop	Students needing intervention	Completed and tested	Passed	% Tested who passed
M1	10	8	8	100%
M2	15	11	6	54.00%
Writing	7	7	2	30.50%
Reading	3	3	3	100%

At the time of writing, ten students were currently enrolled and in good academic standing on CUNY campuses; one student had enrolled in a vocational program; two students had enrolled in CTI transitional programs and intend to go to college in Spring 2011; one student had deferred and plans also to enroll in the Spring 2011 semester, and one student had received an administrative withdrawal because of the nature of his conviction. All enrolled students and students in transitional programs are currently being mentored by CI mentors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Hostos and HALC provided CI the opportunity to work on the design a contextualized and rigorous college preparation program for its population. The program design was conceived, from the very start, as a model to be reproduced and refined. The implementation of the program allowed CI, Hostos and HALC to troubleshoot particular problems and also to define the network of administrators, instructors, counselors and mentors required for students to succeed. This work has allowed CI and its partners to create a transportable model that can be implemented on other CUNY community colleges and beyond

Replication and refinement of the program will require:

- the support of senior CUNY administrators on each campus and in the CUNY central offices;
- early identification of campus-based academic partners, such as HALC;
- close collaboration between CI and CUNY partners with clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- early testing of cohorts;
- individual learning plans for each student;
- a central funding source.

APPENDIX A

JULY 12 MATH TEST RESULTS

Passing Score is 30 points

Student	Pre-Algebra	Algebra
1		30
3	39	
4		27
5		27
6	32	
7		28
8		68
9	34	
10		45
11	39	
12		21
13	26	
15	40	
16	42	
17	44	

APPENDIX B

AUGUST 12 TEST RESULTS

Passing Score for M1 and M2 is 30 points

Passing Score for Reading is 70 points

Passing Score for Writing is 7 points

Student	Writing Score	Read Score	M1 Score	M2 Score
2	7			
3				16
4	6	71		
5				66
6	6	79		
7				63
8	5	71		
9	6			
11	6			
13			37	
14	8			
15				31
16				23
17				15