

September 1, 2011

## **The City College of New York Academic Roundtables Report**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The City College of New York (CCNY) convened a set of Academic Roundtables on May 11, 2011, involving a broad cross-section of the faculty as well as key members of the administrative staff. The purpose of the roundtables was to recommend actions for consideration as academic priorities for CCNY. These sessions were conceived as a next step from initial deliberations of an Academic Working Group, which for the past academic year has focused on different aspects of the College's current circumstances and future prospects. The Academic Working Group identified the four themes that would be addressed by the roundtables. These were: **(1)** improving student success; **(2)** improving faculty satisfaction; **(3)** developing a more supportive research environment; and **(4)** achieving a clearer alignment of resources and academic responsibilities.

Roundtable participants were welcomed by President Lisa S. Coico, who expressed her hope that the day's discussions would produce open dialogue regarding the actions that the College should be considering as vital elements of its strategic planning for the next several years. Participants were asked to view the roundtable discussions as an opportunity to stress actions that are particularly important to members of the faculty. These discussions would make it possible for the administration to ensure that core elements of the strategic plan would be aligned with faculty priorities.

The CCNY Academic Roundtables were facilitated by the Learning Alliance for Higher Education. Robert Zemsky, Professor and Chair of the Learning Alliance, outlined the process of the four roundtable sessions, which he facilitated along with his colleagues, Ann Duffield, Joan Girgus, and Gregory Wegner. During the course of the day, the concurrent roundtables discussed each of the four themes described above. This summary document identifies broad categories of proposed initiatives within each of the four themes, accompanied by representative examples of actions that the roundtables identified as possible means of achieving particular initiatives.

### **ROUNDTABLE RESULTS**

- A. Improving Student Success** - Retention and degree completion are important measures of educational success. One of the imperatives confronting CCNY is to increase the rate of persistence and degree completion among its undergraduate students. With an approximately 35% six-year graduation rate (data from spring AY-09), the College falls short of what is found both within CUNY and nationally. A recent analysis of undergraduate retention rates indicates that students are even less likely to persist if CCNY is not their first choice. Furthermore, a set of student focus groups convened prior to the roundtables indicated that even students who have chosen CCNY as their first choice convey somewhat less enthusiasm about their educational experience than one might expect. The recommendations to improve student success that are

described below are based upon the premise that CCNY will continue to be committed to its original and ongoing legacy of reaching out to those individuals who have not historically experienced the same degree of educational opportunity and advantage as other students.

Recommendations for increasing student success and representative examples of possible actions are listed below.

1. Develop support systems to increase the likelihood that newly admitted first-year and transfer students will persist to and earn a degree from CCNY
  - a. Create an early-warning system for students who are experiencing difficulty and implement effective intervention strategies
  - b. Strengthen the quality of advising that students receive throughout their college careers, to help them achieve both short-term and long-term success
  - c. Provide all faculty (both full-time and adjunct) with a list of academic support resources that can be provided to students (this is particularly important for first- and second- year students where persistence is a significant challenge)
  - d. Develop improved data systems throughout the College to support the processes of advising, monitoring, and academic progress
  - e. Initiate a process in which each department/program develops a plan for student graduation in eight semesters and then offers the courses that follow the plan
2. Provide increased mentorship (including peer mentorship) to support students in their academic persistence and success
  - a. Establish and implement procedures whereby students experience dedicated support and mentoring, as needed, throughout their undergraduate careers
  - b. Mentoring programs suggested include the following
    - i. Establish a process to enable faculty, staff, and appropriate administrators to be assigned to serve as mentors/advisors for small groups of students; ensure that the process is guided by clear goals and measurable outcomes
    - ii. Ensure that tenured faculty members mentor undergraduates on a regular basis
    - iii. Train and utilize student peer mentors (both undergraduate and graduate) to increase a sense of community within the classroom
    - iv. Help first semester freshmen and transfer students connect to support groups of peers, faculty and staff
    - v. Provide appropriate and ongoing professional development to enhance and increase the effectiveness of mentors and mentoring programs
  - c. Develop shared faculty/student spaces to enhance a sense of community and to support mentoring opportunities
3. Develop strategies to convey CCNY's unique and distinctive strengths to prospective students
  - a. Increase the College's reputation as the "College of First Choice" by:
    - i. Conveying a sharper set of messages to prospective students about what the College is – its unique strengths, heritage, and the range of opportunities offered to students

- ii. Utilize the College's story, relating key elements of its history and the legacy of its students, as a way to generate community pride and to attract appropriate students who will thrive at CCNY
    - iii. Work to distill and convey distinctive strengths of each of the academic programs as exemplified by successful graduates
    - iv. Develop a cohort of trained volunteer alumni who will serve as CCNY Ambassadors to prospective students
  - b. Provide funding to support a branding and marketing campaign focused on distinguishing CCNY from CUNY
  - c. Build an admissions process that allows CCNY to be more effective in recruiting the most promising undergraduate and graduate students from New York and the surrounding areas
    - i. Consider creating an application process that requires more of students than simply checking a box for CCNY in the common CUNY application
- 4. Seek to attract students who exhibit characteristics most conducive to academic success at both the undergraduate and graduate levels
  - a. Evaluate the admissions process with the aim of developing a formula which will attract the types of students that have been successful at CCNY
  - b. Design challenging master's level programs and recruit excellent graduate students so that faculty interest in graduate programs is elevated
  - c. Highlight master's programs that are more career-focused (i.e., professional master's degrees) to attract more graduate students
  - d. Develop and apply predictive models for student success and seek out more students whose characteristics are consistent with retention and degree completion at CCNY
  - e. Consider incorporating an essay as part of the admissions process to CCNY to help faculty and staff better understand the qualities and characteristics of prospective students before they matriculate
- 5. Create an institutional climate that values effective teaching
  - a. Engage in regularized sharing of best teaching practices; fully evaluate and learn from current teaching/learning pilot studies
  - b. Develop a reward system for outstanding teachers
  - c. Ensure that students encounter the most experienced faculty in their first and second years of study, for example, by assigning more tenure-line full-time faculty members to teach the Freshman Inquiry Writing Seminar (FIQWIS) Program
  - d. Create opportunities for faculty to develop and implement honors theses and capstone courses in all majors
- 6. Support students in the process of planning and developing strategies for affording and completing a college education at CCNY
  - a. Provide more effective information about how to navigate the College's resources utilizing print, web, and other social media platforms
  - b. Create mandatory seminars on how to navigate the CCNY system and require students to attend them before they matriculate

- c. Inform students about the Free Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA) and implement a strategy to aid students in completing and filing the FAFSA
  - d. Make on-campus housing more affordable and available
7. Strengthen the culture of service to students
- a. Impress upon staff members in departments and in central administrative offices the need to treat students with courtesy and respect
  - b. Identify and train highly capable staff members who will provide excellent face-to-face service to students in every department of the College
  - c. Require each department to convene an open house at least once during the academic year to familiarize students and faculty with all aspects of that department, including its offerings and its requirements
  - d. Communicate more effectively with today's students by utilizing social media and other relevant platforms and technologies

**B. Improving Faculty Satisfaction** - A requisite step in building a culture of greater student success is to ensure that the faculty feels a high degree of satisfaction in carrying out the College's mission. If the faculty of an institution feels a significant degree of dissatisfaction with the institution, students will likely perceive that dissatisfaction, which can in turn undermine the students' own sense of the institution as a place of positive growth and development. If students are to develop a sense of pride in CCNY, members of the faculty must also convey a genuine sense of pride and fulfillment in their work. The College needs to understand the commitments it makes to newly hired faculty members, and it must deliver on the promises it has made for research and scholarly support. Part of the challenge includes creating an environment that is more welcoming of faculty initiative than has been the case in the past – an environment that signals in every way that the vitality and engagement of faculty members in teaching, scholarship and service are the lifeblood of the College. CCNY also faces the challenge of building a faculty that more closely reflects the diversity of its student body. The roundtable discussions of increasing faculty satisfaction led to the action recommendations described below.

1. Address disparities in the professional experience of different faculty members
  - a. Appoint a "Status of Women Faculty Committee" modeled after the MIT Committee that produced the 1999 report entitled, "A study of the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT"
  - b. Take proactive steps to increase the diversity of the faculty, through a recruitment approach that looks beyond the standard markers of academic distinction to consider the broader impact a given candidate could have as a member of a department and the institution as a whole
  - c. Increase faculty diversity, recognizing the challenges for the College in terms of becoming more financially competitive
2. Support faculty in all aspects of their careers as members of the CCNY academic community
  - a. Invest more deliberate effort in faculty orientation to:
    - i. Acquaint new faculty with the faculty handbook
    - ii. Offer strategies for navigating the organizational and cultural environment of the College

- b. Rethink institutional policies to create a more faculty-friendly approach to family leave and/or stop the tenure clock to accommodate the birth or adoption of a child (this may have PSC contract implications)
  - c. Open an on-campus day care center that is open to faculty, student and staff children
  - d. Implement a “Service Center” concept/strategy to provide technical research services to principal investigators and other faculty
  - e. Develop a post-tenure/mid-career program that allows tenured associate professors, in particular, to recharge their research programs in order to qualify for promotion to full professor
  - f. Continue to improve communication regarding all aspects of faculty members’ professional lives within the College
  - g. Establish a more transparent merit system for supporting faculty members – one that is based on criteria clearly defined and broadly affirmed among the faculty
  - h. Design a robust faculty seminar series that draws upon the intellectual interests of the faculty, facilitates interdisciplinary participation, and draws students into a more academic dialogue across campus
  - i. Invest in housing in the neighborhood that can be rented to the faculty
3. Celebrate and reward faculty achievement
- a. Develop a broader and more resilient concept of the faculty role – a model that recognizes that different faculty members may have different emphases in the balance between teaching and scholarship at different stages of their careers
  - b. Offer professional development to help faculty members become better teachers while also building a successful research portfolio and engaging in service
  - c. Recognize faculty members publicly when they accomplish noteworthy things or receive awards or honors
  - d. Establish a President’s initiative that recognizes the achievement of faculty members, departments, or units that significantly advance CCNY in fulfillment of its core missions
4. Develop common and social spaces for faculty and/or students
- a. Provide a faculty pub from 2-5 PM every weekday
  - b. Strengthen the sense of connection among members of the academic community at every level, including the development of common venues and gathering places that are conducive to conversation
  - c. Create incentives to increase the amount of time each week that faculty spend on campus and increase the student access to the faculty
  - d. Create two or more showcase physical spaces with state-of-the-art technology
  - e. Use development of space to force cooperation among the support functions responsible for creating and maintaining the space

5. Develop procedures that are meaningful and supportive of faculty achievement and success

- a. Build a formal mentoring process that explicitly involves all faculty members in mentor-mentee relationships as a way of creating an academic community that is more supportive and inclusive
- b. Formally institute a step in the tenure review process in which the chair meets with a faculty member before the third-year review for a conversation to review the junior faculty member's progress, make suggestions and offer support prior to the formal third-year review.
- c. Provide the opportunity for the chair to serve as a mentor and advocate for untenured faculty members
- d. Develop a strategy for achieving a better culture of evaluation – both the “why” and the “how” of evaluation
- e. Use outside assessors for teaching to ascertain whether a faculty member is effectively communicating what he/she wants the students to learn

**C. Developing a more supportive research environment** –There is a clear expectation within the College that faculty research/scholarship constitutes one of the pillars of its academic strength. Despite the importance of research, the College has had difficulty in providing an environment that supports faculty research in an effective and timely manner. A delayed or unfulfilled promise of support can have significant impact on a faculty member's research agenda and timeline for tenure. It is imperative for the College to find the ways of supporting the research potential of its faculty in more effective ways. The roundtable discussions on developing a more supportive research environment led to the following recommendations.

1. Develop an infrastructure that supports progress and continued advancement in research across disciplines

- a. Develop a system of calculating workload that will provide time for research in a systematic way that gives individual faculty members the basis for planning
- b. Develop faculty-sanctioned procedures for both the allocation and reallocation of research space
- c. Invest in the library's capacity to provide online access to research materials
- d. Increase the number of staff members, such as laboratory technicians, to support the research process
- e. Explore the use of federal work-study funds to create research assistantships in the social sciences and humanities
- f. Increase the number of College-sponsored faculty colloquia
- g. Explore expanding the Spitzer School of Architecture's program that provides a faculty member with an editor for one year for a book being written under contract
- h. Invest in staff for research core facilities which will aid the research enterprise
- i. Develop a program of research and travel fund accounts for faculty
- j. Develop a strategy to provide bridge funding for faculty in transition from one funding source to another
- k. Provide help to faculty searching for new and different sources of funding
- l. Invest in doctoral student support

2. Formalize and adhere to procedures for providing new faculty with start-up space and equipment in a timely way upon their arrival to CCNY
  - a. Inventory available space and facilities to ensure that a faculty member will be able to begin his/her research program upon arrival to CCNY
  - b. Develop a college-wide, uniform “Start-up Package and Commitments” template similar to the spreadsheets currently employed in some school/divisions; templates must include a timeline as to when promised items will be delivered to the new faculty member
  - c. Extend research support to adjuncts
  - d. Coordinate services to support the research environment and monitor compliance

**D. Achieving a clearer alignment of resources and academic responsibilities** – In order for CCNY to realize its future potential, it is important to align resource allocation with academic priorities. The purpose of the roundtables, and of the larger planning process of which they are a part, is to identify those actions that should become true priorities for the College as a whole along with its faculty, staff, and administrators. An important dimension of this challenge is to rethink current practices within the College with the aim of asking how one might approach past practices differently. Part of the task is to build systems that yield a better understanding of how the College spends its money and what results those expenditures yield. Just as important is to make more effective use of resources currently available – for example, by distributing the utilization of classroom space more broadly through the five days of a workweek. As a college, CCNY cannot execute a plan for the future by simply asking people to begin doing things they don’t currently have the resources to achieve. One of the key tasks in the years ahead will be to find new sources of funding for planning initiatives. The College must also, however, focus existing resources on the actions and programs that align most closely with the needs of an urban college in the twenty-first century. The roundtable discussions of the alignment of resources and academic responsibilities led to the following recommendations.

1. Build systems that create greater transparency and accountability in budgeting
  - a. Work to achieve greater clarity and transparency in CCNY budgets, thereby helping instill a better understanding of institutional revenues and costs
  - b. Commit to improving data management and information transparency by employing a fully functioning data warehouse
  - c. Make an institutional commitment to report what things have been accomplished as a result of money spent
2. Seek greater efficiency and eliminate redundancy
  - a. Streamline the curriculum, with particular emphasis on reducing the number of courses that are similar in content
  - b. Emphasize and support the *Degree Works* project as a tool that allows students to understand clearly the degree requirement in their field of study, their progress toward fulfilling those requirements, and the steps needed to fulfill those requirements

3. Seek to achieve a better utilization of time and space
  - a. Increase the proportion of space that is controlled and assigned by central administration; at least 65% of all space should be centrally assigned
  - b. Develop and implement full-week teaching schedules to substantially increase classroom utilization from the current rate of 65%
  - c. Provide adequate parking to ensure a substantially greater faculty presence on campus Monday through Friday
4. Improve academic administration at both the department and College levels
  - a. Inventory current issues/concerns/problems and identify whether the most effective solutions will result from problem solving at the unit or institution-wide level
  - b. Review administrative responsibilities with chairs and identify those responsibilities that should be shifted from the departmental level to central administration
  - c. Establish a policy that only full professors should serve as department chairs
  - d. Increase the incentives and rewards for chairs
    - i. Give chairs more control over their budgets
    - ii. Increase the level of capable administrative support
    - iii. Provide each chair with an HEO support person
    - iv. Create flexibility between faculty and staff lines
  - e. Connect faculty and administrative staff more purposefully so that both sides understand the other's respective needs
  - f. Determine how to change some of the cumbersome system-level structural issues

## **PROMISING PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS**

At the conclusion of the day, participants in each of the four roundtable sessions conveyed a sense that the discussions had been rich, candid, and productive. The exchanges had avoided falling into a mode of simple complaint and focused instead on actions that have the potential to set CCNY on a different trajectory in the years ahead. The discussions had been generative not just of good thinking, but also of a positive spirit among the participants. No one left the roundtables expecting that the College would be able to act on every idea put forth in the conversations. Yet a pervasive impression emerged that these discussions contained the germs of ideas that could have a transformative impact on the City College of New York.

The next steps will be to bring the report of the roundtable discussions back to the Academic Working Group, with the aim of developing a list of top priorities that the College may wish to include during the development of strategic initiatives over the next several years.