

CHAPTER 6:

EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

Including

GENERAL EDUCATION

and BASIC EDUCATIONAL SKILLS

Standard 11: The institution’s educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Standard 12: The institution’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT: PLANNING, ASSESSMENT, AND RENEWAL

Queensborough Community College (QCC), an open admissions institution, is part of the City University of New York (CUNY). Its mission is to foster “a *collaborative, learning-centered* community. The College is dedicated to academic excellence and to the development of the *whole individual* in an environment that promotes intellectual inquiry, global awareness, and lifelong active learning” (see Appendix 1; italics added). In support of its mission, the institution has developed 10 educational objectives that reflect the general education competencies all students graduating with an associate degree are expected to demonstrate. The educational objectives include communication skills, analytical and quantitative reasoning, information and technology literacy, collaborative skills, values differentiation, integration of knowledge, and understanding of core concepts in the sciences, social sciences and history, and the humanities and arts. Fulfillment of these competencies prepares students both for pursuing a baccalaureate degree and for entering the world of work.

The context within which the educational objectives operate is the college’s broad efforts to cultivate cohort education, which seeks to foster *a collaborative, learning-centered environment in which the whole student can thrive*. Over the past 10 years, the college has sought to integrate academic programs and student support services for first-year students. The Coordinated Undergraduate Education Initiative (CUE) and the Campaign for Student Success (combined University and College initiatives) have focused campus thinking and targeted funding toward the goal of graduating 50 percent of associate degree students over six years. CUE comprises a number of programs and initiatives that have become established across campus, including special remedial and ESL efforts; the Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines (WID/WAC) program, which supports the writing-intensive (WI) course requirement; learning communities; the honors program, discipline-specific learning centers; expanded and enriched orientations; and e-portfolios. The culmination of these efforts will be the six Freshman Academies launched in fall 2009.

Since the goal of all these initiatives is improved student learning, the College has adopted a variety of assessment tools and practices with a focus on student learning assessment. The global structure for assessment of the College’s fulfillment of its mission is the annual strategic planning process (see chapter 2). The Strategic Plan responds to the University’s Performance Management Plan (PMP) targets, many of which are student learning outcomes. Besides the Strategic Plan, the principal institutional structures for

assessment and renewal are the academic program review process, the course assessment process, and the annual Year-end Reports for all departments and offices. All course objectives are consonant with curricular objectives, which in turn are consonant with the institution's educational objectives. All program reviews lead to 1) recommendations for the improvement of the program, 2) an action plan that is developed by the departments involved and approved by the administration, and 3) subsequent recommendations to the overall strategic planning process (see chapter 2). It is through this process that courses and programs remain responsive to student needs and current within the field and that student learning is assessed (see chapter 8).

GENERAL EDUCATION

As an integral component of the educational offerings at the institution, general education signifies skills essential to intellectual inquiry, global awareness, and lifelong active learning. Following a review the tradition of general education at the college and some background on the General Education Project (CUNY-wide and college-specific), this section of the report on educational offerings will discuss 1) the ways in which general education is built into the *design* of the educational objectives and the curricular and course objectives and 2) the ways in which the delivery of general education is *reported* at the college.

QCC has prided itself on its general or liberal education emphasis, and new programs adhere to the College's Liberal Arts and Sciences core distribution requirements for each degree: the A.A., A.S., and A.A.S. General education requirements are integrated into the programs of study. For transfer programs, liberal arts and science courses range from 31 to 52 credits; in career programs, from 20 to 31 credits; and in certificate programs, from 3 to 9 credits. General education requirements are listed in the college catalogue under each curriculum, clearly outlining requirements for graduation, and in the College's online advising system. As part of its Assessment Plan, QCC developed a statement of Educational Objectives for associate degree graduates, approved by the Academic Senate in May 2002. Subsequently, QCC joined CUNY's General Education Project and formed its own General Education Inquiry Group, which generated campus discussion and a variety of general education initiatives. In fall 2005, a Special Committee of the Academic Senate was formed to review the Educational Objectives, and a revised statement, along with a list of sample learning outcomes for each objective, was adopted by the Academic Senate in May 2007.

QCC has been active in promoting faculty forums devoted to discussion of the educational objectives as integral to the curricula. Several Conferences of the College (sponsored by the Faculty Executive Committee) and Convocations have focused discussion on general education and featured faculty presentations of pedagogical approaches to general education. In addition, QCC hosted the CUNY-wide General Education Conference in May 2006 and has been active in presenting at this yearly conference. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning also runs pedagogical workshops that address how the general education objectives are integral to students' essential skills. Faculty development in support of the college's writing-intensive requirement (see below under WID/WAC) has been instrumental in training faculty across the disciplines to integrate writing into their curricula.

Design

At QCC, general education is designed to be incorporated across the curriculum. This approach is supported by campus-wide initiatives intended to focus the student experience in the development of essential skills.

Findings and Analysis

Several major initiatives have contributed to student development of essential skills and faculty development in the delivery of instruction. CUE, which is CUNY mandated but college-specific in its implementation, has been an organizing principle for coordinating and integrating instruction and support services in a holistic approach to the undergraduate education experience. The assistant dean for academic affairs is now responsible for supervising both CUE and the Freshman Academies, in an effort to maintain focus and clear

coordination between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Under the Perkins grant and the auspices of academic affairs, an e-portfolio project has been developing an infrastructure that will allow students, working with faculty, to archive and reflect on materials that demonstrate their intellectual growth as students. The College hired an e-portfolio developer three years ago. Since then, e-portfolios have been used in the departments of Basic Educational Skills, Business, and Art and Photography. QCC has received an American Association of Basic Community Colleges (AACC) grant for service-learning; 10 faculty members offered courses with a service learning component in the 2007-2008 academic year. As the logical culmination of efforts to focus and engage students, QCC will institute Freshman Academies in fall 2009. All first-time, full-time students will enroll in a Freshman Academy according to their curriculum. Building on initiatives over the past 10 years, the Freshman Academies will coordinate and integrate instruction and support services (see above and Foreword).

The College has a broad array of initiatives that support general education, including advisement and learning centers (see chapter 4), writing-intensive courses and learning communities (see below), and Freshman Academies. Freshman Academies will offer students a structured learning experience that focuses on career and transfer goals, student support activities, and cornerstone, milestone and capstone courses (see Foreword). Two major CUNY-wide efforts with a great impact on pedagogy at QCC are the “Decade of Science” and IMAC, “integrating mathematics across the curriculum.” Two others, integrating information literacy in degree programs and Speaking Across the Curriculum, also deserve consideration.

The Decade of Science at CUNY, 2005 to 2015, demonstrates renewed commitment to science. The Decade of Science encourages science and mathematics students to progress beyond their associate degree to bachelor’s and master’s degree programs. In one case, mathematics and sciences faculty members at QCC mentor students and groom them for the University Teacher Academy, which provides free tuition for highly motivated mathematics and science majors that seek teaching careers in the city. In another case, QCC had developed with John Jay College, CUNY, a dual/joint degree program in forensic science. Following the model of WID/WAC, QCC should explore Science Across the Curriculum, providing students with skills and experiences necessary to appreciate science as a subject of learning and interest for everyone, not just scientists. Students need to discover for themselves how much the humanities and the social sciences depend on advances in science and technology and how developments in society can encourage, or inhibit, scientific and technological progress. Examples of this integration across curricula already exist and should be expanded: “Chemistry in the Arts,” “Chemistry for Nursing and Allied Health,” and extensive research opportunities in the sciences. As with other initiatives, faculty development will be necessary to support the restructuring of courses across curricula to incorporate science in these ways.

Likewise, CUNY’s Integrating Mathematics Across the Curriculum (IMAC) seeks to promote an appreciation for mathematics. Numeracy is essential for success within the university and in an increasingly advanced global society. This initiative helps students to see the relevance and importance of understanding mathematical concepts in the real world, fosters confidence in using mathematics independently, and enables more complex problem-solving skills. Through a number of learning communities at QCC, integration of mathematical principles has already occurred, including learning communities of mathematics and reading. Once again, faculty development will be necessary to support the effort.

A major component of general education is information literacy, which is the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information, and the acquisition, evaluation, and manipulation of information requires a set of skills critical to informed independent thinking. The Library Information Literacy Advisory Council proposes a set of information literacy learning goals and objectives for CUNY students to achieve by the time they have completed 60 credits. Although the Library faculty provide classes in information literacy skills (207 in 2007), information literacy is not designed into the curriculum, and discussions about incorporating it into the degree programs have foundered on the restrictions on credit limits.

An essential skill that deserves further cultivation at the undergraduate level is oral communication skills. With this in mind, Speaking Across the Curriculum would enable students 1) to use clear, effective oral communication skills across curricula and 2) to foster student confidence by improving performance in public expression in academic and professional contexts. The Honors Program promotes the cultivation of this skill, as all students in the program make a presentation at the annual honors conference. Some departments have also begun to address this issue. For instance, in a collaboration between the Nursing Department and the Speech Communication and Theatre Department, one section of Speech 005, Speech Skills for ESL: Sound Structure of American English, open only to prospective Nursing students, involved a Speech faculty member teaching the pronunciation component of the course while a Nursing faculty member taught the communication workshop. The Business Department is developing debating skills among its business students through mock-trial components in the law courses and competition in the Fed Challenge in economics courses. Departments whose programs are accredited by TAC of ABET are required to include an oral communication component in their course work and to record and evaluate student presentations. Though these efforts have been successful and will be repeated, additional ways of integrating “speaking across the curriculum” should be considered.

In all cases, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) will be instrumental in coordinating faculty development in support of pedagogical initiatives.

Strengths

- The design of curricula and the incorporation of educational objectives into curricular and course objectives ensure that the essential skills of general education inform all instruction.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Degree Programs

QCC offers 34 degree and certificate programs in the humanities, social sciences, arts, technologies, business, health, mathematics, and sciences. Associate degree programs require a minimum of 60 credit hours and are divided between transfer A.A. and A.S. programs (for entry into a baccalaureate institution) and career A.A.S. programs (for immediate entry into the workforce). According to New York State requirements, students in the Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree program devote at least three-quarters of their course work to the liberal arts and sciences; students in the Associate in Science (A.S.) degree program devote at least one half; and students in the Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree programs devote at least one third. QCC also offers a variety of one-year certificate programs, which provide job entry or advancement skills.

The College features a highly qualified faculty with excellent scholarly credentials (see chapter 5 on faculty). Through the Academic Computing Center and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), the use of innovative pedagogy, including educational technology, is promoted. To help to ensure excellence in teaching and learning, QCC promotes research on community college pedagogy and supports scholarly accomplishments and professional advancement among its faculty and staff (see Appendix 6, CETL offerings). To help to ensure that human subjects are protected in pedagogical research, QCC has a strong Institutional Review Board that meets regularly during the academic year to review and approve protocols for research; faculty liaisons on reassigned time provide support to faculty in the preparation of applications for research.

One key to cultivating critical thinking skills across the curriculum is a focus on developing writing skills. Writing is at the center of the CUNY and college program, WID/WAC, which promotes and provides faculty development for writing-intensive courses. Effective in fall 2005, a policy was adopted by the Academic Senate that required all QCC students to take at least two writing-intensive classes. To ensure that

all students have the opportunity to complete this requirement, the career programs have designated certain required courses in their curricula as writing intensive (WI). In this way, students in these programs fulfill the requirements automatically as they progress. For students in transfer programs, however, departments offer a wide range of WI sections of courses so that students in these curricula have choices of the courses in WI they wish to take. The WID/WAC program provides ongoing faculty development for new and more seasoned faculty in WI pedagogies and makes annual reports to the campus community through the Academic Senate. In addition, the Campus Writing Center focuses on critical thinking and research skills in its support of writing generally and in its support of WI classes specifically. Tutors are trained in the use of critical thinking strategies and educational technology to help students enhance their competencies.

The goal has been, and remains, to integrate the educational undergraduate experience of students. Examples of this effort include the proliferation of learning community offerings and linked courses and the CUNY-sponsored ASAP program (see below); the deconsolidation of tutorial services into discipline-specific learning centers (see chapter 4); baccalaureate articulations like the Bridge to Transfer programs with Queens College and York College (see below); and—most illustratively—the planned Freshman Academies.

Honors Program

QCC's Honors Program, initiated in spring 2001 and currently directed by the chair of the Chemistry Department, is a campus-wide program that offers highly motivated students an opportunity to work more closely with faculty and like-minded students in smaller classes, with more discussion and independent work in areas of interest. The official consultative body that works with the director, consisting of faculty and the CUE director, began first as an honors task force and then became an official honors committee in fall 2005.

Each semester, students have the choice of sections of honors courses or honors contracts, or both. Students must have a GPA of 3.0 or recommendation of the instructor to enroll in an honors course or to sign up for a contract or have a high school average of 85 percent. Students who graduate with a GPA of 3.4 or better with a minimum 12 honors credits receive an honors diploma. Honors courses have been offered in Chemistry, Mathematics and Computer Science, English, Foreign Languages and Literatures (Italian, Spanish, French), Social Sciences, Physics, and Speech Communication and Theatre Arts. In addition, the College hosts each year since 2005 an honors conference in which all honors students present their work and research to the entire campus in a full morning of classroom and poster presentations. Under the guidance of faculty mentors, students typically go on to present their research at regional and national forums. For example, Chemistry students have presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium of the New York American Chemical Society; Biology students have presented at venues sponsored by the National Institute of Health.

Findings and Analysis

Overall enrollment shows a very slight increase over the past five years. College enrollment continues to be very diverse, with 13,000 students representing 132 countries and 60 percent of students at age 22 or under. Equally committed to open admissions access for all learners and to academic excellence within an environment of diversity, QCC utilizes the close integration of academic and support services with a focused attention to pedagogy.

New program development is responsive to the needs of the community and to emerging technologies. CUNY's Master Plan notes that "health care is one of the most important sectors of the local economy, accounting for one in seven jobs in New York City" and that an effort will be made to "enhance the University's collaborations with the health care industries and its unions." In 2008, of the top 10 employers in the Borough of Queens five were from the health care and social service sectors and four were from the airlines. Over the past eight years, the college has developed degree and certificate programs to meet the emerging needs of students and community, including Massage Therapy (A.A.S.), Medical Office Assistant (A.A.S), and two programs with John Jay College—the

Dual A.S. in Science for Forensics with B.S. in Forensic Science and the Dual A.S. in Criminal Justice with B.A. in Criminal Justice. The college also created an evening degree program for its Nursing program. At the same time, the college has developed degree programs in New Media Technology (A.A.S. and certificate), Digital Art and Design (A.A.S.), and Gallery and Museum Studies (A.S.); established a weekend-only college leading to the Associate in Arts degree in Liberal Arts; increased its web-based courses and technology available for students; added a January intersession; expanded summer school sessions from two to five; and created an honors program.

QCC is working to increase its offerings of weekend/evening classes. To date, however, there has been no significant increase in the number and variety of course offerings in the evenings and on weekends over the past decade. Enrollment in the evening/weekend has remained static since the previous self-study report. For evening and weekend students, the Business Department provides students with an opportunity to earn a degree by taking only weekend/evening courses. The Liberal Arts and Science A.A. degree is also offered through a weekend-only degree program. So far there have been only two graduates.

To address the issue of information and computer literacy, several campus areas offer services. The Library offers non-credit classes on information literacy that cover online references and search techniques on course subject matter. After completing this workshop, students are prepared to use the PC as a research tool. An experimental, one-credit course (LB-101 Fundamentals of Information Literacy) was offered in the Spring 2005 semester; it was discontinued after two semesters because of inadequate space in most curricula. During 2007 (winter, spring, summer, and fall), 207 non-credit classes were scheduled with 4,116 students participating. In addition, the Campus Writing Center offers workshops that develop critical thinking and support WI classes. The Departments of Business and Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology offer courses that develop computer literacy skills. Finally, the Academic Computing Center offers workshops to faculty that assist with integrating asynchronous modalities into course work.

The Center for Excellence in Teaching Learning and the Academic Computing Center offer a schedule of faculty development workshops and seminars to address teaching and learning issues. Workshops cover the use of technology and Blackboard, e-portfolio, service learning, and pedagogical issues concerning student preparedness (see Appendix 6, CETL calendar of events).

QCC continues to perform well on several key CUNY performance indicators: almost 91 percent of students pass the CUNY Proficiency Examination, which exceeds the CUNY community college average; the college's fall-to-fall retention rates among full-time freshmen shows over 68 percent continuing into their second year, which again exceeds the University total; 93 percent of QCC students passed the last Nursing licensure examination. A snapshot of student retention to graduation measures over the past six years shows:

- An increase in survey responses from fall 2005 (n = 5,553) to fall 2006 (n = 9,051)
- Increases in planning to graduate (62.7 percent to 66.7 percent) and planning to transfer (20.4 percent to 22.7 percent); more students are planning to complete a degree, whether at QCC or another college
- Graduation rate for transfer programs has increased 52.75 percent over the four-year period, January 2002 to May 2006.
- Career programs exhibited a four year decline of 2.2 percent.
- One-year growth for transfer programs is 15.92 percent; one-year drop of 7.06 percent for career programs.
- During a four-year period (2003-2007), the number of degrees or graduates has increased by 7.52 percent; career programs declined by 20.75 percent.
- Of the 2,057 first-time matriculated freshmen in fall 2000, 303 graduated in 2006 and then enrolled at Queens, Baruch, Hunter, and New York City College of Technology; 671 students of that cohort, however, transferred before graduation.

- Of the first-time matriculated freshmen in fall 2001, 237 graduated in 2007 and then enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program; 754 students of that cohort transferred before graduation.
- The six-year graduation rate for the fall 2001 cohort is 24.35; within these six years, 6.7 percent graduate from a CUNY college and another 2 percent earn a bachelor's degree from a non-CUNY college.
- QCC students usually go on to another CUNY senior college like Queens College and Baruch College, but others enroll in non-CUNY colleges like SUNY Albany, Stony Brook, and Binghamton or private colleges like Columbia, St. Johns, and Hofstra.

The six-year trend illustrates that student concerns for degree completion and educational attainment have begun to overshadow any immediate concern for job placement. Students may realize that more jobs require a baccalaureate degree. In an article in *The Chronicle*, Peter Schmidt writes of a recent federal report, "Many community-college students previously thought they would be going through four-year colleges, while others initially planned on earning two-year degrees but have since revised their plans to progress much further."¹ At QCC, the decline in numbers in career programs is matched by a corresponding increase in transfer programs. This is one of the major challenges facing community colleges, along with academic preparedness, particularly as it relates to retention and graduating rates.

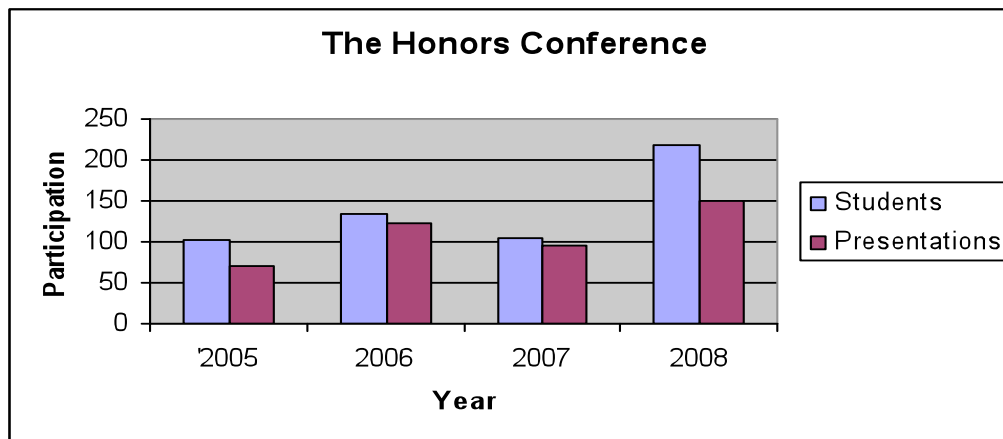
Students who have remained focused on obtaining a position right after college and have completed a career degree have excelled and entered the work force satisfied with their educational preparation:

- In 2006-2007, there were 1,131 graduates. The curricula with the most degrees were Liberal Arts and Sciences, 338, Business Administration, 171, and Nursing Sciences, 142.
- The College's pass rate on the NCLEX licensure examination is 93 percent for the year 2006 compared to 88 percent in 2005. The National Council Licensure Examination is a standardized examination that each state board of nursing uses to determine whether a candidate is prepared for entry-level nursing practice.
- The pass rate for the Massage Therapy licensure examination for graduates is 94 percent.
- In the spring 2006 graduate satisfaction survey, 96 percent of Nursing graduates were employed full-time as an RN, and an equal percentage reported that QCC had prepared them well for their current position; 79 percent of the remainder of the graduates were employed full-time in 2006 compared to 84 percent in 2005.
- In the spring 2006 graduate satisfaction survey, 74 percent of students reported that QCC had prepared them well for their current position, compared to 72 percent in 2005.

Participation in the Honors Program is steady. The College offered the highest number of honors courses (25) in fall 2006. Since then, the number has leveled down to 16 to 18 except for a slight increase to 20 in fall 2008. Recruitment of students and enrollment in honors courses remain a challenge. Honors contracts occur in a wide range of disciplines, and the number of contracts per semester rose to 75 in spring 2008. In fall 2008, an information literacy requirement was added to honors contracts in association with the Library. The administration of honors contracts makes it difficult to identify honors graduates. Presently, the program is working with Information Technology staff on resolving this issue.

The first Honors Conference was held in spring 2005 with 70 presentations by a total of 103 students. In spring 2006, 134 students presented their honors research in 123 presentations to the college community. After a slight decline in 2007 (105 students, 96 presentations) the number exploded to 219 students and close to 150 presentations in spring 2008 (see table below).

¹ "Federal Report Documents Volatility of Community-College Students' Plans," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 21, 2008).



Through the guidance and mentorship of faculty in Chemistry, Biology, and Theatre Arts, students have presented research at national conferences alongside baccalaureate and graduate students. Completion of an honors diploma is recognized as extraordinary achievement by many local baccalaureate institutions, including CW Post, Metropolitan College, and Hofstra University. Three students have been accepted to honors baccalaureate chemistry and biochemistry programs at Stony Brook and Buffalo in the last two years.

Strengths

- QCC has a record of successful transfer of students to baccalaureate institutions.
- QCC has a record of successful placement of students in careers; 80.6 percent of graduates indicate positive perceptions of how well QCC prepared them; among professional programs, 93 percent of Nursing students and 94 percent of Massage Therapy students passed their licensure examinations.
- That students are required to complete two writing-intensive courses to be eligible to graduate is indicative of an institution that embraces both academic rigor and attention to student learning.
- The Honors Program has promoted intellectually challenging mentorship and learning through courses, contracts, and opportunities to present both at the College's own annual conference and at regional and national conferences.
- QCC has an extensive array of articulation agreements with CUNY and non-CUNY institutions, including dual/joint programs in childhood education, criminal justice, and forensic science.
- With the seasoning of CETL and a strong Institutional Review Board, the College is poised to become a significant contributor to the research on teaching and learning at the community college.

Weaknesses and/or Concerns

- Identification and recruitment of honors students remains a challenge, which discourages some departments from offering honors classes.
- There are no established guidelines for faculty for what constitutes honors activity in the classroom and through contracts.

Basic Educational Skills

In the self-study, “basic educational skills” refers above to the component under standard 13 on related educational activities.² Since QCC has a department by the same name, a review of departments, courses, and learning centers involved in ESL and remedial instruction and tutoring is necessary. There are four

² This section of the chapter covers basic educational skills, which is normally part of the chapter on related educational activities. Since ELS and remedial programs, however, are such an integral component of curriculum and support services discussed in chapter 6, this section is more logically placed here.

departments that offer ESL and remedial courses. The Department of Basic Educational Skills offers courses at various levels in reading and writing and their ESL equivalents, and the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science offers remedial courses in arithmetic and various levels of algebra. In addition, the Speech Communication and Theatre Department offers remedial speech courses for students whose pronunciation skills need work, and the English Department offers select ESL versions of composition courses.

Tutorial services are widespread. The Basic Skills Learning Center offers tutoring to students and a laboratory where student in department classes receive additional, sometimes, required instruction. The Mathematics and Science Learning Center offers tutoring to all students in mathematics courses, including remedial ones, and review sessions at pivotal moments in the semester. In addition, the Campus Writing Center offers tutoring to all students who need assistance with their writing; at the remedial level, this mostly takes the form of test preparation. All tutorial services are free.

All incoming students are required, unless exempted based on SAT or Regents scores, to take placement tests in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students who pass bypass remediation. Those who do not are placed into the appropriate remedial courses. At the completion of the highest levels of remediation in each area, students must take and pass exit-from-remediation tests. Those students who complete the highest level of remediation but do not pass the exit-from-remediation test are allowed to retake the test but only after an intervention in the appropriate tutoring center. Students who still need to pass the reading test may obtain tutoring from the Basic Skills Learning Center; students who still need to pass the writing test may obtain tutoring either from that center or from the Campus Writing Center. Both offer regularly scheduled tutoring modules of varying length and scheduling. Students who still need to pass the mathematics test obtain tutoring from the Mathematics and Science Learning Center.

Overview of Remediation and ESL

On average, 70 percent of incoming students need at least one remedial course. These students are also eligible to enroll in regular credit-earning courses, an important factor for student motivation and retention. Students enrolled in remedial courses often have difficulty in credit-bearing courses because they lack the reading, writing, and analytical skills necessary for success. Students are placed in Basic Skills (remedial) courses because they have not passed the ACT reading and /or writing tests, which are required by the University before a student can enter a credit-bearing English course. To help students reach their goals, QCC has established placement procedures, a progression of Basic Educational Skills (BE) courses supported with tutoring, Write-Prep workshops, a series of English (EN) courses, writing-intensive (WI) courses, tutoring for EN and WI courses, and CPE workshops. As of fall 2006, 70.5 percent of students who have reached 30 credits meet basic skills proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics, up from 63 percent in fall 2003. See Appendix 7, Exhibit BG1, for additional background.

Reading and Writing Courses

The reading sequence for native-speakers is BE 121 (Development of Reading Skills), designed for students requiring substantial review and remediation in reading, followed by BE 122 (Development of College Reading and Study Skills), which provides instruction in organizing ideas and improving the comprehension and interpretation of academic material. To address the special needs of English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) students, Basic Skills offers five non-credit developmental courses: two in reading and three in writing. Students are placed according to scores from the ACT reading and writing examinations but may be waived to a higher or lower level with departmental approval. Three sequential ESL writing courses are offered: BE 201 (Beginning Composition), BE 203 (Intermediate Composition), and BE 205 (Advanced Composition), which prepare students to write a five-paragraph expository composition. The ESL reading course sequence begins with BE 225 (Basic Reading for ESL Students), offered to students requiring intensive instruction in fundamental reading and communication skills. Next, BE 226 (College Reading and Study Skills for ESL Students) concentrates on the development of college-level comprehension and study

skills, patterns of organization, note-taking skills, test-taking skills, library reference techniques, vocabulary, and English idioms. See Appendix 7, Exhibit BG2, for additional background.

Learning Centers

The College has three learning centers that support students in remedial or ESL courses: the Basic Skills Learning Center, the Campus Writing Center, and the Mathematics and Science Learning Center (see chapter 4). Corresponding addenda for background and data are in Appendix 7, Exhibits BG3 and G7B-A.

Findings and Analysis

After two years, about 10 percent of those placed in remediation have passed in all three areas (reading, writing, and mathematics) and are ready to progress to credit-bearing courses. Although remediation slows down entry into credit-bearing courses, it does not preclude graduation. There is, however, a direct relationship between remedial needs and chances of graduation. Of those who enter needing triple remediation (at least one course in all three areas), approximately 25 percent eventually graduate. Of those entering with no remediation needs, approximately 45 percent graduate.

One-Year Retention. One year retention rates for full-time freshmen initially placed in remedial/ESL classes range from 67.9 percent in 2003 to 64.7 percent in 2006. These figures are just slightly lower than those for full-time freshman not required to take any remedial courses—from 70.8 percent in 2003 to 67.0 percent in 2006. Figures for all first-time freshmen range from 65.8 percent in 2003 to 68.4 percent in 2006. (See Appendix 7, Exhibits B and C, for data.)

Two-Year Retention. After two years, retention rates for full-time freshmen initially placed in remedial/ESL classes drops considerably—41.8 percent in 2003 to 44.2 percent in 2005. Once again, however, these two-year retention rates are not much different from the figures for full-time students who were not in remedial/ESL classes—43.4 percent in 2003 to 44.7 percent in 2005. (See Appendix 7, Exhibit D, for data.)

Graduation Rates. Very few students initially placed in remedial classes in fall 2003, 2004, and 2005 graduated within two years—28, 13, and 23. But the numbers of graduating non-remedial students are similar and, in fact, lower for two of the three reported years—25, 21, and 17. (See Appendix 7, Exhibit D, for data.)

Number of Basic Skills Courses. Each semester, the Department of Basic Educational Skills runs over 100 courses. More courses are offered in the fall than in the spring, and remedial courses for non-native speakers outnumber ESL courses 9-15 percent. (See Appendix 7, Exhibit E, for total number of courses for academic years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 and Exhibit E³.)

Exit from Remedial Classes. To exit from the Basic Skills remedial/ESL program, students must pass ACT examinations in reading and writing. Pass rates for all students taking the ACT *reading* exit examination are: fall 2005 – 57.3 percent; fall 2006 – 52.6 percent; fall 2007 – 57.2 percent (for students in BE 122 and BE 126 only). Pass rates for students taking the ACT *writing* exit examination are: fall 2005 – 53.6 percent; fall 2006 – 47.0 percent; fall 2007 – 41.6 percent (for students in BE 112 and BE 205 only). (See Appendix 7, Exhibit F.)

Exit from Remedial Classes by ESL Designation. When the figures above are categorized by ESL/non-ESL designations, a difference emerges between the pass rates in reading and writing. For reading, ESL pass-rates were 17-25 percent less than for non-ESL classes. For writing, ESL pass rates were 11-14 percent less than for non-ESL classes. (See Appendix 7, Exhibit F.)

³ Source: Department of Basic Educational Skills.

Tutoring. Since September 2005, almost 9,500 Basic Skills students have participated in small group tutoring and have received instructional technology support since September 2005. In the 2005-2006 academic year, a total of 4485 students were served, and from September 2006 to June 2007, the total was 4,918. During this timeframe, almost three quarters of the students using BSLC services (72 percent) used instructional technology support services provided by the BSLC computer laboratory. (See Appendix 7, Exhibit G4.) From July 2005 to December 2007, a total of 2,617 students came to the Writing Center as “NC” students from Basic Skills and participated in ACT writing workshops. Of these, 1,153 or 40 percent were ESL students and 1464 or 60 percent were non-ESL. Pass rates on the ACT Writing Exam for all students who took the CWC workshops are as follows: 7/05-6/06 – 59 percent; 7/06-6/07 – 66 percent; 7/07-12/07 – 57 percent. When divided into ESL and non-ESL categories, the numbers show that the pass rates for non-ESL students are at least 11 percent higher than those of ESL students in each of the three year periods. From 7/05-6/06, the ESL pass rate was 53 percent while the non-ESL pass rate was 64 percent. For 7/06-6/07, the ESL pass rate was 60 percent while the non-ESL pass rate was 72 percent, and for 7/07-12/07, the ESL pass rate was 42 percent while the non-ESL pass rate was 65 percent. (See Appendix 7, Exhibit H5.)

Strengths

- Courses in basic educational skills offer students with language and numeracy challenges an extraordinarily rich array of opportunities to meet the requirements of college-level work.
- Basic Skills and Mathematics and Computer Science encourage experimentation, including an initiative to review the curriculum and course objectives for reading courses, establishing a committee to refine performance standards in select writing courses with the purpose of developing a new exit instrument, and experimental mathematics courses at the lowest remedial level.
- Students who took Basic Skills courses and remained at the college for two years graduated at the same or better rate than students who were not in remedial classes.

Weaknesses and/or Concerns

- As with non-remedial students, two-year graduation rates are very low (an average of about 1.2 percent each year for remedial and non-remedial students) as a percentage of the total number of students per year of enrollment who remain at the college.
- In fall 2007, the cutoff for demonstrating minimum proficiency on the COMPASS mathematics examination was raised from 27 to 30 by the University. Since then, all community colleges/comprehensive colleges showed a drop in the pass rate on exit from remediation. While still not acceptable, QCC ranked third among the 10 colleges offering remediation (see Appendix 7, Exhibit G7B-B).
- Academic reading and writing continue to challenge many Basic Skills students, particularly ESL students. In writing, QCC ranks below the community college average; in reading, higher.
- There is a lack of success or progress in students placed in the lowest level of remediation. Students facing two or three semesters of remediation are less likely to continue with their studies.

WID/WAC

From its inception in 1999, the Writing in the Disciplines/Writing Across the Curriculum Program (WID/WAC) asserted the need for a focused, year-long series of professional development workshops to support the development of discipline-specific WI classes and to certify faculty to teach WI classes. In the initial year, approximately 14 self-selected faculty members participated in workshops for developing WI courses and received the support of Graduate CUNY writing fellows. Today, over 168 full and part-time

⁴ Source: Basic Skills Learning Center.

⁵ Source: Campus Writing Center.

faculty members have participated in the professional development program and a majority regularly teaches WI classes. There were nearly 150 sections of WI courses offered in the spring 2008 for 3,531 students across all curricula. The professional development workshops and the writing fellows remain essential components of the program. Participation in the workshops of previously certified faculty members is also increasingly being used to broaden the perspectives offered about how WI classes might be taught.

In fall 2005, QCC instituted a policy that requires students who enroll in degree programs to complete two credit-bearing courses designated as WI. These courses must be completed for the award of an associate's degree. The implementation of WID/WAC has led to an increase across departments in the number of courses designated as WI and an increase in the number of trained full- and part-time faculty. Course outlines and syllabuses reflect a continual effort on the part of the faculty to ask students enrolled in WI courses to analyze and synthesize their class materials. This is further demonstrated by the need for students to engage in both low-stakes (or informal writing assignments) and high-stakes writing assignments (or formal writing assignments using disciplinary or professional discourses). Additionally, college policy requires faculty members to require students to submit multiple drafts of the same document, allowing students to receive important feedback during the writing process.

Findings and Analysis

Overall assessments of the program have been carried out in several formats since 1999. From 2002 to 2005, in collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research, the WID/WAC program carried out both faculty and student surveys to monitor the implementation of the WI program, evaluate student needs, and assess faculty perception of the program. From these studies, WID/WAC produced *A History of WID/WAC Assessment at QCC and What We Have Learned, Fall 2005* (see Appendix 1), which cited nine types of course writing assignments. A majority of students in the pilot, approximately 92.5 percent, stated that their writing had improved as a result of the course. An essential component of assessment in programs like WID/WAC is the use of longitudinal data. Current literature in the field of WI courses indicates that improvements in writing occur over time. In fall 2007, the WID/WAC program and Institutional Research began another assessment project over several years to measure the effectiveness of the WI program.

Since the implementation of the WI program, the College has offered enhanced services to students enrolled in WI courses. The Campus Writing Center (CWC) provides onsite and asynchronous tutoring services for students. In addition, the CWC provides a multitude of student workshops every semester to assist students with writing assignments. The CWC has also implemented the iPASS learning system, currently being used by faculty and students enrolled in WI courses. The online system allows students to submit written assignments to a trained e-tutor for feedback. CWC has five to eight certified iPASS e-tutors available to respond to student submissions, 24/7. In fall 2007, 88.8 percent of students using iPASS for support of English classes and WI course work achieved a grade of C or better; in spring 2008, 90.9 percent of students using the system achieved a grade of C or better.

Finally, through a Perkins grant from the State Education Department, a major effort of the college is devoted to the implementation of an e-portfolio system. In fall 2006, the college ran a pilot of several WI courses utilizing an e-portfolio. Students utilized the e-portfolio for posting writing assignments and developing an online portfolio to use throughout their academic career. The goal now is to expand this initiative into other courses and curricula and to incorporate it in the new academy model.

Strengths

- Like its CUNY counterparts, QCC's WID/WAC program has changed the conversation about the value of writing in the development of critical thinking skills and deeper learning of course material.
- The decision of the Academic Senate to require students to complete two WI courses to be eligible to graduate ensured that the value of WI courses has been thoroughly institutionalized.

- Faculty planning the Freshman Academies for fall 2009 have designated writing-intensive courses as one of two “high-impact” activities, from a selection of five, central to the academy experience.

Weaknesses and/or Concerns

- There is some concern among faculty, supported by student survey results, about WI courses without writing prerequisites. Programmatically, this is not an issue—writing at any level is intended to improve and strengthen learning. Practically, however, faculty whose first training is not in writing may have difficulty working with students at lower levels of competency.
- The staffing level for the program remains at program implementation levels. As a result, no WI faculty have been recertified to date, which is required in the Academic Senate resolution.
- WID/WAC and the Campus Writing Center should work cooperatively.

Learning Communities

Learning communities have at least a decade-long history at QCC. Before CUE, when the University mandated a Coordinated Freshman Program, including summer and intersession immersion programs, reading and writing remedial courses, remedial reading and other content courses, were linked. Since then, through CUE, learning community offerings have increased. Remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics have been linked with each other and with content courses in the social sciences and humanities and sciences. Faculty development has played an important role in the development of learning communities. Both WID/WAC and CETL have been involved in assisting faculty collaboration. WID/WAC runs an institute each year for this purpose. The idea of cohort education envisioned in the Freshman Academies has informed the development of the academy model at QCC. The learning communities will form one component of the educational experience of students in their first year in the Freshman Academies.

Accelerated Study in Associate Programs

One special learning community effort, sponsored by the City of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s Center for Economic Opportunity, is the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which began in fall 2007 and continues in the 2008-2009 academic year. The mission of ASAP is to enhance students' ability to graduate from a community college in a timely manner and be prepared to enter the marketplace or to transfer to a four-year institution. Community college students are often unable to complete their associate degree for a variety of reasons. Nationally, the community college graduation rate is very low over a six-year period, approximately 17 percent.⁶ ASAP helps to reduce reasons for failure by providing select community college students with the academic, social, and financial support they need to graduate with an Associate in Arts or Associate in Applied Science degree in no more than three years (see Appendix 7, Quick Facts).

ASAP emphasizes enriched academic support services, mentoring, block programs, and graduation with an associate degree within two to four years. At QCC, the seven ASAP majors include: Accounting, Business Administration, Business Management, Electronic Engineering Technology, Computer Engineering Technology, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Music Electronic Technology. QCC welcomed 228 ASAP students for the Fall 2007 semester. Since then, QCC continues to develop program policies that best address student and institutional needs. All ASAP students receive the use of free textbooks, monthly Metro Cards, enroll in block programs, meet with the ASAP job developer and on a bi-weekly basis with ASAP freshman managers, receive enhanced tutoring, and attend enrichment activities related to their field of study. All students receiving any federal or state financial aid have the remainder of their tuition and fees subsidized by ASAP. ASAP aims to assist students to graduate from QCC at the rate of 50 percent in three years and 75 percent in four years. New York City residents are eligible if they are triple exempt from mathematics,

⁶ U.S. Department of Education (2003). *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study of 1996-2001*.

writing, and reading, based on Regents, SAT scores, or CUNY ACT placement exams *or* need one remedial course, which was passed during summer 2007 *and* enroll in one of the seven QCC ASAP majors offered.

MDRC

MDRC,⁷ whose motto is “Building Knowledge to Improve Social Policy,” is coordinating with CUNY community colleges and other colleges in the nation, to study the effects of learning communities on student persistence. The name of the project is the Learning Communities Demonstration, in partnership with the National Center for Postsecondary Research. The Learning Communities Demonstration, which was launched in 2007, is a longitudinal study that uses random assignment to test models of learning communities at six community colleges, including QCC. The study is designed to answer three sets of questions: 1) How can learning communities be designed to address the needs of academically underprepared students? 2) What are the effects of learning communities on student achievement, as measured by test scores, credits earned, and grades? What are the effects of learning communities on student persistence in higher education? 3) What do learning communities cost, and how do these costs compare with the costs of standard college programs for students with low basic skills?

In the project, QCC’s learning communities target first-year students placed into the lowest levels of developmental mathematics (MA 005 and/or MA 010). Each learning community links a developmental mathematics course with a credit-bearing course in English, Speech, Sociology, Business, or Astronomy. Instructors meet before and during the semester to coordinate assignments. Students who are eligible to participate are randomly assigned either into the program group or into the control group. Program students are placed into a study learning community while control students are placed into stand-alone courses.

Findings and Analysis

QCC ASAP began in fall 2007 with 228 students, followed by 212 students enrolled for spring 2008: 111 students opted to take one or two summer classes; 193 students enrolled in fall 2008 classes, a one year retention rate of 84.6 percent. Program staff document all student and faculty contacts. Cohort faculty meet periodically as a group during the semester and are in contact with Freshman Coordinators twice during each month regarding ASAP students. Reports are submitted to CUNY on a monthly basis; others on a weekly basis. Because of its initial successes, the ASAP model has in many ways informed the College’s Freshman Academy model. Freshman Coordinators will be hired for each academy, along with faculty coordinators. This student management component has been deemed essential to the success of the Freshman Academy model.

Strengths

- Learning communities, particularly in the ASAP program, remain an exciting means to fostering faculty and student collaboration both inside and outside the classroom.
- Support of faculty both by WID/WAC and by CETL is strong.
- Course offerings have increased over the years
- Survey results and anecdotal evidence from students indicate that the educational experience of learning communities is a positive one.

Weaknesses and/or Concerns

- Involving faculty members and recruiting students for learning communities remain challenging; efforts coordinated between the Office of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs need the guiding hand of supervision at the dean’s level.

⁷ MDRC is not an acronym or abbreviation but the actual name of an organization that is partnering with educational institutions to study pedagogy.

Distance Education

The Blackboard course management system was introduced in 2001, distance education courses first appeared as a separate listing in the Schedule of Classes in spring 2002, and the use of online, partly online, and Blackboard enhanced courses has grown ever since. For distance education at the college, see chapter 7.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Support services for students include academic support services, under the purview of the Office of Academic Affairs, and student support services, under the purview of the Office of Student Affairs. For more detailed information and analysis of the support services provided, see chapter 4.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The college should expand information literacy across the curriculum.
- The college should prioritize efforts to incorporate mathematics, science, and speech concepts and methods across the curriculum.
- Given the large number of students who transfer before graduation, data should be collected on a semester-by-semester basis to identify reasons and design appropriate interventions.
- ST 100/ST 101 should be considered as a mandatory class with computer literacy component
- The honors committee should establish guidelines and sign-off on honors courses and contracts.
- The College should continue to develop linked courses and learning communities.
- To allow the program to continue to provide the services needed to the faculty involved with teaching WI courses, staffing to the program should be increased.
- Design and conduct a study on the impact of WI on student learning.
- Involve the Campus Writing Center more intrinsically in WI faculty development.
- A coordinator should be appointed to oversee interdepartmental scheduling, publicizing, faculty partnerships, and faculty development to ensure the success of learning communities and academies and to increase the identification and recruitment of students into the Honors Program.