

## Synthesizing a Decade of Experimental Research on CUNY's ASAP

Weiss<sup>1</sup>, Michael (presenter); Sommo<sup>2</sup>, Colleen; Cullinan<sup>3</sup>, Dan; and Manno<sup>4</sup>, Michelle

**Background:** For full-time, first-time, degree-seeking students entering public two-year schools, only 20-25 percent graduate with a degree within three years. To address this challenge, the City University of New York (CUNY) designed, developed, and implemented an uncommonly multifaceted, integrated, and long-lasting program for its community college students: ASAP. ASAP is a three-year program that aims to address multiple barriers to student success. In 2010, MDRC began a randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluation of CUNY's ASAP, which yielded remarkable results. Since that time, ASAP has expanded within CUNY. Additionally, CUNY and MDRC partnered on a replication project at three colleges in Ohio, including another RCT. By the time of SREE, estimates of the 3-year graduation and transfer effects of the ASAP-derived programs in Ohio and estimates of the 8-year graduation and transfer effect of CUNY's program in New York will be available. This presentation will synthesize what we've learned from CUNY's lauded program.

**Objectives & Research Questions:** The synthesis will examine research questions including:

RQ1: What is the average effect of ASAP/ASAP demonstration programs (pooled across CUNY and Ohio) on 3-year completion and transfer rates and do the effects vary?

RQ2: What are the effects of ASAP on 8-year graduation rates (associate and bachelor's degree completion) among the CUNY sample?

**Setting:** The studies operated in three community colleges in New York City and in three community colleges in Ohio. The colleges vary in size and racial/ethnic demographics.

**Sample:** The full synthesis (CUNY and Ohio) includes 2,400 students randomly assigned either to a program group and or a control group. Eligibility criteria include:

- Pell-eligible,
- college-ready or in need of some remedial courses
- degree-seeking
- willing to attend full-time, and
- in a major where a degree can be completed within three years.

**Intervention:** ASAP is a multi-faceted three-year program – all components were the same within CUNY colleges and within the ASAP demonstration programs at the Ohio colleges. Most components were the same between CUNY and Ohio.

---

<sup>1</sup> Affiliation: MDRC, email: [Michael.Weiss@mdrc.org](mailto:Michael.Weiss@mdrc.org) (contact)

<sup>2</sup> Affiliation: MDRC, email: [colleen.sommo@mdrc.org](mailto:colleen.sommo@mdrc.org)

<sup>3</sup> Affiliation: MDRC, email [Dan.Cullinan@mdrc.org](mailto:Dan.Cullinan@mdrc.org)

<sup>4</sup> Affiliation: MDRC, email: [Michelle.Manno@mdrc.org](mailto:Michelle.Manno@mdrc.org)

#### *REQUIREMENTS AND MESSAGES*

- *Full-time enrollment*: Required in fall and spring. Summer attendance encouraged and financial supports provided.
- *Taking developmental courses early*: Encouraged consistently and strongly.
- *Graduating within three years*: Encouraged consistently and strongly.

#### *STUDENT SERVICES*

- *Advising*: At the time of the RCT evaluation in CUNY, students were required to visit an advisor twice per month throughout the duration of the three-year program. Since that time, CUNY has modified their program and now requires students to visit advisor twice per month in first semester and as directed based on need after that (i.e., a triage approach). In Ohio, the latter model was used.
- *Career services*: Students required to meet with campus career services staff or participate in an approved career services event once per semester.
- *Tutoring*: Students required to attend tutoring if taking developmental courses, if identified as struggling by faculty/adviser, or if on academic probation.

#### *FINANCIAL SUPPORT*

- *Tuition waiver*: Any difference between financial aid and tuition and fees is waived.
- *Monthly incentive*: In New York, students were offered a monthly MetroCard, contingent upon meeting program expectations (e.g., meeting with an advisor twice per month). In Ohio, this was modified to fit the needs of Ohio colleges in which public transportation is not ubiquitous. Instead, a \$50 monthly gas/grocery card was given, contingent upon meeting program expectations.
- *Textbook assistance*: At the time of the evaluation, CUNY lent students all books and then collected them at the end of the semester. In Ohio, this was provided in the form of a voucher, either for a set amount or to cover all books.

#### *PROGRAM MANAGEMENT*

- *Program management*: Within CUNY, much program management, data collection, and oversight is handled centrally by a dedicated ASAP team in partnership with the colleges. Since Ohio's colleges and universities have decentralized governance, the Ohio programs implemented a local data collection and management structure, with college leadership providing program oversight.

**Research Design:** The evaluations use a random assignment design. Eligible, interested individuals were randomly assigned (by MDRC). The total sample size for the synthesis is 2,400 students (for the 8-year follow-up at CUNY, the sample is 900 students).

**Findings: Graduation:** In CUNY, ASAP had an estimated effect on 2- and 3-year graduation rates of 5.6 and 17.7 percentage points, respectively<sup>5</sup>. In Ohio, ASAP had an estimated effect on 2-year graduation rates of 11.1 percentage points<sup>6</sup>.

For the SREE conference, 3-year graduation rates in Ohio will be available, allowing us to present pooled findings across New York and Ohio, as well as evidence regarding whether effects varied across sites and colleges. Using data from a student survey administered to both research samples using similar questions, we will also assess the extent that serviced receipt (e.g., visits to advisors, tutors, etc.) varied across the six colleges in New York and Ohio.

In CUNY, after six years, the estimated effect on graduation was 10 percentage points. By the time of the presentation, 8-year graduation rates will be available. At the 8-year mark, the rate of new degrees conferred may be low enough that it will be plausible to estimate the extent that ASAP caused some students who would not have earned a degree, to ever earn a degree.

**Conclusions:** ASAP is widely considered one of the most effective models to improve graduation rates among community college students. It is a rare to find a community college program, evaluated via an RCT, with substantial impacts on graduation rates. It is exceptional for such a program to be replicated in new setting and again have substantial impacts on graduation rates. For the first time, this synthesis will bring together what we have learned from over a decade of RCTs of CUNY's program.

---

<sup>5</sup> MDRC calculations using CUNY Institutional Research Database (IRDB) and National Student Clearinghouse data.

<sup>6</sup> MDRC calculations using Ohio colleges and National Student Clearinghouse data.