Bringing CUNY ASAP to Ohio: A Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) in Three Community Colleges

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Background

For first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students entering public two-year colleges, only 20 percent graduate with a degree within three years. Low graduation rates are especially pronounced among low-income students needing to take remedial courses. The City University of New York (CUNY) operates an uncommonly multifaceted, integrated, and long-lasting program for its community college students: Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). Findings from an RCT show that ASAP had unprecedented impacts on retention, credit accumulation, and graduation – nearly doubling three-year graduation rates. A natural next question was whether ASAP could be implemented in other contexts and increase graduation rates for other student populations. We present early finding from an RCT evaluating the effectiveness of an attempt to replicate CUNY’s ASAP at three community colleges in Ohio.

Objectives & Research Questions

This study seeks to understand the extent that CUNY’s ASAP can be implemented in other community colleges and yield similarly dramatic effects for other student populations. Successful implementation in other colleges will provide important lessons to practitioners as well as additional proof points for the field concerning the generalizability and replicability of CUNY’s ASAP. Key research questions include:

- How do the Ohio programs compare with CUNY’s ASAP? How are the programs put into effect, to what degree are they implemented with fidelity, and to what extent is there a service contrast?

- What is the effect of the Ohio programs on academic performance? Are the effects in Ohio consistent with the effects in CUNY?

Setting

The study operates in three community colleges in Ohio. The colleges vary in size and racial/ethnic demographics. All three serve large populations of nontraditionally aged students.

Sample

The study includes 1,500 students. To be eligible, students had to be 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. Student could be new to the college or continuing students with up to 24 credits.

About half of the sample are nontraditional,¹ a risk factor for postsecondary success. Sixty percent of the sample was employed at the time of study intake. Approximately 54 percent of the students identified themselves as non-white.

Compared to the CUNY ASAP evaluation sample, the Ohio sample are older, more likely to be parents, and twice as likely to be working.

**Intervention**

All three Ohio colleges in the study modeled their programs after CUNY’s ASAP. Here the Ohio model is described. Unless otherwise noted, the Ohio program components are the same, or very similar, to CUNY’s ASAP. The Ohio program lasts three-years. Students are required to attend school full-time, are strongly encouraged to enroll immediately in required remedial courses, and the importance of graduating within three-years is emphasized. The Ohio model includes comprehensive and intrusive advising with low advising caseloads, and requirements for tutoring and career service visits. The Ohio model includes financial supports – a tuition waiver and textbook assistance, mirroring CUNY ASAP’s. Like CUNY’s model, in Ohio students are offered a monthly financial incentive (tied to meeting certain participation benchmarks). At CUNY the incentive is a monthly MetroCard. In Ohio this was modified to fit the needs of Ohio colleges, in which public transportation is not ubiquitous.

A notable difference between CUNY’s ASAP and the Ohio model is the program management and oversight structure. Within CUNY, ASAP’s management, data collection, and oversight is handled centrally by a dedicated team, in partnership with the colleges. Ohio’s colleges and universities have decentralized governance, so the Ohio programs implemented a local data collection and management structure, with college leadership providing program oversight. Program management – including oversight, data collection, reporting, and iterative improvement is emphasized in both models.

**Research Design**

The Ohio evaluation is an RCT. Eligible, interested individuals were randomly assigned to a program group, whose members have the opportunity to participate in the program, or to a control group, whose members cannot participate in the program but can access all of their college’s usual offerings and services. The total sample size is 1,500 students enrolled over three cohorts. Pooled results across the three colleges are presented.

The demographic data presented are drawn from a baseline survey all study participants completed just prior to random assignment. The academic results are calculated from transcript data transmitted from the participating colleges.

**Findings**

¹ Based on their age, employment status, being married, having children, or not earning a high school diploma
*Enrollment:* The program increased full-time enrollment. The first-semester impact estimate is 17.5 percentage points (over a control group base of 67 percent). This is noteworthy since all students agreed to attend full-time prior to random assignment, but without the program’s requirement and supports, many more control group students quickly dropped to part-time.

In the second semester, there was a 12.1 percentage point estimated impact on persistence (over a control rate of 69.6 percent). The effect on full-time enrollment is estimated to be 24.2 percentage points (over the control group average of 48.4 percent).

*Credits:* In the first semester, the program group attempted and earned 1.4 more credits, on average, than the control group. In the second semester, the impact on credits attempted grows to 2.3 credits, representing an increase of 28 percent over the control group level of 8.2 credits attempted.

*Comparison to CUNY ASAP:* Like the CUNY ASAP findings, Ohio’s early impact estimates are among the largest in RCTs in higher education. The magnitude of the impact estimates are generally consistent across studies, although the outcome levels vary. For example, CUNY’s control group enrolled at higher rates and earned more credits than the Ohio control group. This may be a result of differences in the types of students served across the two evaluations, as well as different resources, services, and activities offered.

**Conclusions**

This study finds promising early effects on academic outcomes. As the Ohio programs are designed to serve students for three years, the study will continue tracking student outcomes during that time period, including graduation outcomes.
### ASAP Demonstration: Full Ohio Sample

#### Selected Characteristics of Sample Members at Baseline, by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Cincinnati State</th>
<th>Lorain</th>
<th>Tri-C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>62.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average age (years)</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>22.4</td>
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<td>19 years or younger (%)</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>57.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-23 years (%)</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 years or older (%)</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>23.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>36.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>9.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Currently employed (%)</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>62.1</td>
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<td>1-34 hours</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>71.6</td>
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<td>35 hours or more</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>32.3</td>
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<td>Married (%)</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
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<td>Has any children (%)</td>
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<td>35.2</td>
<td>26.2</td>
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<td>First person in family to attend college (%)</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nontraditional student&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>46.4</td>
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<td>Sample size</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>519</td>
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</table>

**SOURCE:** MDRC calculations using Baseline Information Form (BIF) data.

**NOTES:** Italicics indicate statistics calculated only for a subset of respondents.
- Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.
- Respondents who said they are Hispanic and chose a race are included only in the Hispanic category.
- Other includes Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaska Native, multi-racial, and other race/ethnicities.
- Nontraditional students are defined as those who are 24 or older, work 35 or more hours per week, have children, are married, or did not receive a high school diploma.
Figure 1: ASAP Boosts Enrollment

- Enrollment Rate (%)
- Semester 1: Program 2.72, Control 16.82
- Semester 2: Program 10.91, Control 21.89

Figure 2: Ohio Programs Increase Credits Attempted and Earned

- Credits Attempted
- Semester 1: Program 1.3, Control 1.4
- Semester 2: Program 2.2

- Credits Earned
- Semester 1: Program 1.4, Control 1.4

- Credits Attempted
- Semester 2: Program 2.2