

**N.Y. STATE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
MAINTAINING QUALITY, EQUITY & AFFORDABILITY IN  
PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE  
PANDEMIC AND BEYOND**



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF KAROL V. MASON, PRESIDENT OF JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

October 25, 2021

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**Thank you Chairwoman Stavisky and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education for giving us this opportunity to tell you about the great work that CUNY and John Jay College of Criminal Justice are doing to support our students through this unprecedented pandemic.**

The City University of New York is the largest urban university in the United States, charged with the responsibility of educating over 250,000 students in its community colleges, senior colleges, and professional schools.

As we all know, in the beginning of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic started to impact America significantly, New York City was at the epicenter of the crisis. Being both a Hispanic- and Minority-Serving Institution, our community at John Jay College of Criminal Justice acutely, and disproportionately, felt the effects of this deadly virus. Our college proudly educates first responders, essential workers, and active duty servicemen and servicewomen, many of whom tirelessly worked on the front lines to ensure the safety of our communities.

Longstanding inequities in the United States labor market have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 health crisis. Pandemic-related job losses have skewed heavily toward Latinx and Black Americans, the [wealth gaps in our country are widening, and it's](#) become extremely competitive for new graduates to find suitable job opportunities, all of which makes the importance of higher education, social mobility, and financial stability even more critical for our communities. We know the [benefits of a four-year degree](#)—better employment, health, and salaries. We also know, based on our experience at John Jay, that our CUNY students can and do earn their bachelor's degree regardless of where they started their academic journey when they're provided with the right resources and supports.

**OVERVIEW OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC**

CUNY has been very intentional in using the federal stimulus money strategically to support the needs of our students during the pandemic, and to keep them enrolled and progressing toward degree attainment. From the Federal Student Emergency Grants, approximately \$236 million has been disbursed directly to CUNY students. An additional \$400 million will be awarded to CUNY students over the Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 semesters.

The CUNY Comeback Program is using federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds to clear students' outstanding tuition and fee balances. It is providing needed relief to our students, their families and their communities, and its impact will bolster New York's overall economic recovery. The CUNY Comeback Program enables our students and recent graduates to push forward in pursuit of their educational and career objectives, and it is one of the country's

largest student debt forgiveness programs of its kind. To date, the University has forgiven nearly \$95 million in unpaid tuition and fees for more than 52,000 students.

At John Jay, we allocated over \$11 million of our federal stimulus money to pay off our students' outstanding tuition and fee balances, **keeping 4,400 students enrolled in college.**

At John Jay, we raised over \$1 million to support the emergency needs of our students, including our undocumented students. This emergency funding allowed us to provide **emergency funding to over 1,700 students, which they used to pay rent, utilities, medical expenses, funeral expenses, and to buy groceries.**

## **JOHN JAY COLLEGE AND OUR ACADEMIC RECOVERY PROGRAM TO PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCESS**

John Jay College of Criminal Justice has an internationally recognized reputation for educating its diverse and dynamic student body to be fierce advocates for justice in their communities, around the country and around the world. A senior college in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, John Jay is a Hispanic-Serving Institution and Minority-Serving Institution that has been ranked third in the nation in Black student success and a top 10 institution for promoting student social mobility.

The undergraduate community of approximately 13,000 students is among the most diverse of the City University of New York's senior colleges. Nearly 75% of students at John Jay are from minority backgrounds, 47% are the first in their families to attend college, and more than half are from low-income households earning less than \$30,000 a year. Many are also managing rigorous college coursework along with part-time or full-time jobs (56% work while in school) and caring for family members (69% of students are caretakers and 10% are parents).

When I arrived at John Jay in August of 2017, student success became my number one priority. Our four-year graduation rate was below 25%. We developed a Vision for Student Success at John Jay that became the foundation of our 2020 Strategic Plan for the college. In our strategic plan, we set a goal of reaching a 40% four-year graduation rate by 2025.

With a multi-million-dollar budget deficit, it was imperative to step up our fundraising efforts to finance our vision for student success. When I arrived at John Jay, we had raised \$2.3 million in that fiscal year. In 2021, we raised \$5.4 million in private support. It is this private support that has enabled us to implement several very successful interventions

We designed student support programs based on what we learned from our very successful SEEK and ACE programs. New students who are not enrolled in a multi-year cohort program are now supported by LEAP (Linking Experience, Academics, and Practice).

LEAP was first implemented in Fall 2019 and has been essential in retention and credit accumulation during the pandemic. The combination of zero-cost summer retention efforts to make up for learning challenges from the pandemic (especially for our incoming freshmen coming from NYC public schools), and our student support programming during the academic year through LEAP was essential in keeping freshman on track to graduation. Because of LEAP, in Fall 2020 we retained 86% of freshmen (goal was 73%) and 70% of our sophomores (goal was 49%). 64% of our sophomores are on track to graduate in four years (goal was 60%).

Our summer 2021 recovery plan was focused on providing a bridge to the Fall for new and continuing students, and was crucial for addressing summer melt, retention, and academic momentum loss. Without this creative approach to helping our students thrive through the pandemic, our four-year graduation rate for 2021 would have been 37%. As a result of our 2021 summer academic recovery program, **we raised our 2021 graduation rate to 41%**. This is tremendous success story. **We achieved our 2025 target graduation rate four years early, and during a pandemic.**

What did we do? There were three key components to our summer strategy:

### **Summer Tuition Assistance**

- 94% of students (n=641) receiving tuition assistance received a passing grade in their summer course.
  - Approximately 87% of students (n=593) received a successful grade of C or higher.
- 49 students were awarded their undergraduate degrees after receiving assistance through the Academic Recovery Program. **This helped propel the College's 4-year graduation rate to over 40% for the first time in College history**
  - 4 other students have applied for fall graduation after completing a summer course with tuition assistance.
- 93% (n=100) of the 107 Early Start freshmen participants passed their summer courses with a grade of C or higher
  - 100% of Early Start freshmen matriculated in the fall; 84% (n=90) registered for 15+ credits
- 80% of Early Start transfer students (n=43) successfully completed their course with a Grade of "C" or higher
  - 93% of transfers (n=50) matriculated in fall 2021.

### **Summer Bridge**

- 98% (n=1742) of freshmen (SASP bridge n=1360; Early Start bridge n=107; SEEK Summer Academy n=225; Honors Bridge n=50) participated in an intensive summer onboarding/bridge program
- 100% of SASP, Early Start, and Honors bridge students matriculated; 88% (n=199) of SEEK Summer Academy students matriculated
- 18% of transfers (n=306) participated in a bridge program exclusively for transfer transitions

### **Academic Acceleration Workshops and Clinics**

- 11 continuing students enrolled in gateway English Workshops and 100% improved their grade; 12 continuing students enrolled in gateway Math and 83% (n=10) improved their grade
- 218 continuing students participated in recovery clinics targeted toward at-risk rising juniors. The three-week clinics were led by faculty in Computer Science, Organic Chemistry, Political Science, Criminology, Sociology, History, Statistics, and Math.

- We know that when students do not successfully complete a gateway or major prerequisite like English Composition 101 or College Algebra MAT 105, they are at major risk of losing momentum and are likely to lag behind for the rest of their academic journey. Academic Acceleration Workshops (AAW) a non-credit bearing intervention for students to improve upon an unsuccessful grade earned in a major gateway or general education course during the semester, without incurring additional costs or use of financial aid.
- Clinics are discipline-focused academic interventions to prepare students for key courses and milestones in their academic program. Students complete guided activities to self-assess and identify strengths and areas for development/review at the beginning of the clinic and access resources and complete activities to supplement prior knowledge and skills development in preparation for upper-level courses.

## **SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, INCLUSIVE AND ANTI-RACIST CURRICULUM**

The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed the depth of inequities that impact the students we serve at CUNY and John Jay College. We also experienced a second national pandemic of racial injustice, resulting in our students demanding that we address these inequities in our curriculum.

I am proud to share with you the Seven Principles for a Culturally Responsive, Inclusive and Anti-Racist Curriculum that John Jay College created as a community. These principles were vetted and shaped by more than 100 faculty members who joined us in conversations or sent feedback. We were also guided by discussions with student leaders, the Undergraduate Curriculum and Standards Committee, the Faculty Senate Subcommittee on Racial Justice and Inclusion, and the Faculty Senate. The principles were adopted by *unanimous vote* at the College Council on April 8, 2021 and reflect the culmination of the beginning of our work to move the curriculum forward.

As is clear from the collaborative effort, the Seven Principles for a Culturally Responsive, Inclusive and Anti-Racist Curriculum represent the faculty's shared commitment to enact John Jay's values and mission through what and how we teach.

As a college, we agreed that John Jay curriculum and teaching should reflect the following principles:

1. We center **Critical Engagement**  
*by forming learning communities that engage in critical (self) reflection, alongside empirical analysis, about how Anti-Black racism, institutional racism, and all forms of racism inform the subject matter of our courses and the interactions of members of our learning communities.*
2. We grapple with evolving perspectives about **Criminal Justice Education**  
*by interrogating the origins, facts, and effects of institutional racism and individual acts of discrimination in the criminal justice system.*
3. We normalize discussions about **Complex Social Challenges**  
*by anticipating and addressing the challenges of engaging with racism, institutional*

*racism and exploitation, as well as social justice and racial equity in a diverse classroom through dialogue and reflection.*

4. We practice **Embodied Learning**  
*by using trauma-informed pedagogy and strategies to incorporate the lived experiences of students and faculty, promote cultural competence, and increase social and emotional intelligence.*
5. We use **Diverse Content**  
*throughout the learning experience through incorporating course materials that are diverse by author identity, form, medium, and/or voice.*
6. We design for **Equitable Assessment**  
*by employing varied opportunities for students to demonstrate learning and self-assess their progress.*
7. We promote **Democratic Education**  
*which affirms that education is participatory and non-hierarchical, and that student learning is experiential, characterized by an on-going collaborative process of problem solving grounded in discussion, consultation, research, and debate as ways to engage in informed decision-making by people with diverse interests.*

We are truly inspired by what has been accomplished in under a year. Our departments and academic programs are actively immersed in plans to revise and update their major and minor curriculum to reflect these principles. With this shared set of ideals, our curriculum will continue to evolve to serve our students with and in the name of justice.

## **CONCLUSION**

As has been recognized by many, CUNY is critical to the long-term recovery of the State of New York. CUNY is an engine of social mobility for not just our students, but also for their families and communities.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to why your support for CUNY is critical to the success of our students, their families, their communities, and our state.