

WHERE ARE ALL THE STUDENTS? AN UPDATE

Mary O’Riordan*

Bronx Community College, City University of New York (CUNY)

This article reviews current issues related to ESL student admissions and programs at the university level. It starts by revisiting Carroll (1998), who first reported a decline in enrollment in college ESL programs at the City University of New York, and Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000), who confirmed the decline in the number of ESL students, who had been graduating and maintaining grade point averages comparable to other students. The present study attributes continuing declines to falling ELL graduation rates in New York City public high schools, increasing tuition, barriers to financial aid, mainstreaming, and academic stratification manifested through the sorting of students not only into four-year and two-year colleges but also into pre-college programs. The author recommends that CUNY set up a faculty ESL Task Force to examine more closely factors that could be contributing to declines and to determine if access to the university or the quality of education for immigrant students has been compromised.

Keywords: academic stratification, admissions of ESL students, college access, college ESL, graduation rates of ESL students

Over one third of the city’s three million foreign-born residents arrived in the US in 2000 or later; 49 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home; and in just 30 years, what was a city with a population of primarily European origins has become a place with no dominant race, ethnic group, or nationality group. Indeed, New York’s unmatched diversity epitomizes the world city. (New York City Department of City Planning, 2013, p. 1)

In spite of an increase in the number of New Yorkers who are more comfortable in a language other than English, the number of ESL students has continued to decline at the City University of New York since Carroll (1998) first published “Where are all the students?” in NYS TESOL’s *Idiom* almost 20 years ago.¹ To provide an historical context and possible answers to this question today, I revisit Carroll (1998) and a more politicized follow-up report by Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000). For this paper, I have reviewed relevant available statistical data, as well as reports, memoranda, web pages, and newspaper articles. Additionally, I have spoken to faculty and staff at CUNY and at the NYC Department of Education. In the following pages, which use the initial articles as a framework for interpretation and discussion of these sources, I will examine some factors that may be contributing to the ESL student decline at CUNY and explain why it may be of concern. At the conclusion of this report, I will suggest directions for further research and action.

Carroll (1998) presented faculty reports showing that between fall 1994 and fall 1998 enrollment in CUNY’s ESL courses had declined 45%. Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000) confirmed this decline with data provided by CUNY’s Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, noting that, in addition, there had been a 36% decline between fall 1994 and fall 1998 in the number of first-time freshmen reporting that they were more comfortable in a language other than English. These declines came at a time of increasing immigration to New York City and were not associated with changes in local high schools or with changes in placement. ESL students had been thriving at CUNY, graduating at rates comparable to all other students and maintaining GPAs comparable to students who had needed no ESL or remediation. Otheguy and O’Riordan discussed the importance of a college education in terms of what it means to the student and society. Factors they cited for the decline were: increasing tuition, decreasing financial aid, more stringent work requirements for parents on welfare, and a plan to admit to senior colleges only those students who had passed all three of CUNY’s assessment tests. Carroll (1998) had also noted measures taken by individual colleges at that time to “toughen admission” by raising the minimum number of required college prep classes (p. 15). There was an “ESL exemption” to the “ban-on-remediation,” to be phased in from 2000 through 2001, which defined ESL students as those students who had failed the CUNY assessment tests in reading and writing, who had received part of their secondary education abroad, and who had passed or were exempted from the CUNY assessment test in math.² Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000) predicted that, nonetheless,

the ban-on-remediation would exclude from senior colleges the great majority of ESL students—who would then have no choice but to attend CUNY’s less well-funded community colleges, which graduate students at lower rates.

So what has happened since?

In the new millennium, immigration to New York City continues to increase, the importance of a college degree continues to grow, and ESL enrollment at CUNY continues to decline.

Now, one out of four adult New Yorkers reports speaking English “less than ‘very well,’ ” 30% more than in 1990 (Bernstein, 2005; New York City Department of City Planning, 2013, p. 101).³ In 1990, the foreign born constituted 28.4% of the population of New York City. In 2000, it was 35.9%; and in 2011, 37.2% of New Yorkers were foreign-born (New York City Department of City Planning, 2013, p. 10).⁴ According to CUNY’s current Master Plan, “This influx is expected to continue, helping to drive the city’s overall population up 8.3 percent, up to 9.1 million by 2030” (City University of New York, 2012, p. 10).

As jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college (The White House, 2009), CUNY, as it has in the past, can be expected to fulfill an important role in the education of foreign-born New Yorkers who speak English “less than ‘very well.’ ” Although there have been no performance data specifically on students enrolled in ESL programs since the ESL Task Force Report (City University of New York, Office of Academic Affairs, 1994), referenced by Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000), foreign-born, non-native speakers of English have continued to do well at CUNY. When Hodara (2012) followed matriculants at CUNY’s community colleges from fall 2001 to fall 2007, she found that students who were non-native speakers of English or were born in a country where English was not the first language surpassed other entrants in terms of pass rates for introductory college-level math, number of college credits earned, persistence, and graduation.⁵ What performance data there are for non-native speakers in baccalaureate programs show that they are less likely to drop out of college than are native speakers (Crook, 2007).

Nevertheless, in fall 2014 the number of ESL students at CUNY was about half of what it was in fall 1998, according to faculty counts from 16 of 17 colleges submitted to the CUNY ESL Discipline Council and to me in 2015 (see the appendix, Table 1).⁶ Despite the ESL exemption, the ban-on-remediation affected enrollment of ESL students in baccalaureate programs, where enrollment was down about 84%. Whereas in fall 1994, 5,606 of ESL students were bachelor’s degree candidates, by fall 2014 there were only about 300 ESL students in baccalaureate programs. The ban-on-remediation was never extended to associate degree applicants, and nobody expected that it would affect enrollment at the community colleges or in associate degree programs at CUNY’s comprehensive colleges other than possibly to cause “an influx of students” (Carroll, 1998, p. 16). However, overall ESL enrollment at community colleges was down about a third of what it was in 1998, the last time these faculty counts were compiled, and ESL enrollment at the comprehensive colleges declined over 60 percent.

The first factors possibly contributing to this decline, examined in the following section, are changes in placement. There are more students who are bypassing instruction in the colleges’ ESL programs either by mainstreaming into Freshman Composition directly or after having spent some time in CUNY’s growing Language Immersion Program. Data indicate, however, that there are drops at CUNY not only in ESL classes but also in the numbers of students who are more comfortable in a language other than English and students with a native language other than English. Factors potentially contributing to these less easily explained declines are examined in subsequent sections.

Fleeing from the Middle: Mainstreaming and Sorting into Pre-College Programs

Increasing numbers of students have been bypassing instruction in the colleges’ ESL programs, placing directly into Freshman Composition. In 1999, shortly before CUNY phased in its ban-on-remediation, CUNY exempted all students passing the NYS English Regents with a score of 75 or above from placement/entrance assessment testing in reading or writing.⁷ The CUNY tests have also become easier to pass (City University of New York, 2012, p. 65; City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2004).⁸ On the latest iteration of the writing test, which uses analytic scoring, pass rates for entering “ESL” students more than doubled from a 6% pass rate to a pass rate of 14% (City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2015d, and calculations based on this source).⁹ In addition, students who have not yet passed the writing test but who have scored in the “high-fail” range and have passed the reading test can place into sections of Freshman Composition, modified either with a companion course or extended hours (Hodara, 2012). Although most of these students, who

are generally in ESL courses at the same time or in sections of Freshman Composition sheltered within ESL programs, are probably included in the faculty ESL counts submitted, this may not be the case for all.

Furthermore, enrollment in the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP), the pre-college program especially created for ESL students at CUNY, grew 62% from 1998 to 2014 (R. Tercero, personal communication, November 13, 2015, and calculations based on this source). In the past, most CLIP students who continued at CUNY eventually enrolled in college ESL programs (Otheguy & O’Riordan, 2000). Any students, however, who eventually pass both the CUNY reading and writing assessment tests and place directly into Freshman Composition would not be included in the faculty ESL counts.

Even though ESL students are passing the CUNY reading and writing assessment tests at higher rates, their pass rates on these tests are still relatively low. In addition, changes in placement, which have surely affected the numbers of students in college ESL programs, cannot directly account for the decline in the numbers of students enrolled at CUNY reporting on their application that they were more comfortable in a language other than English. In 2005, the percentage of students reporting that they were more comfortable in a language other than English was less than half of what it had been ten years earlier, down from 22% to 11% (Crook, 2007; Otheguy & O’Riordan, 2000).¹⁰

CUNY says it has not reported data on “comfort with English” since 2005 because large numbers of students have not responded to this question since students started filling out their application online (D. Crook, personal communication, November 30, 2015).¹¹ However, a decline is also manifest in the indicator “native language other than English,” which CUNY continues to report. A large number of students at CUNY with a native language other than English are second-generation students, whose parents were immigrants, and are actually more comfortable in English (Pereira & Cobb, 1990)—the switch to monolingualism for most immigrant groups usually taking more than one generation (Hurtado & Vega, 2004). Thus, having a native language other than English is not as closely tied to ESL enrollment as is being more comfortable in a language other than English. Even with this indicator, however, there is a decline. Whereas in fall 1995, 53% of community college students and 47% of senior college students reported that their native language was not English, in fall 2014, 48% of community college students and 40% of senior college students reported that they were non-native speakers (City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2002, 2015c). Of course, the numbers of non-native speakers is still high, but this may be partially why CUNY has not done anything in response to the enrollment changes. According to Parker (2005), CUNY administrators may have become complacent with the level of diversity at CUNY (p. 43).

If there indeed have been declines in the percentage of students at CUNY who are more comfortable in a language other than English and in language minorities overall, why might this have happened? Possible causes could be declining high school graduation rates, increasing tuition, testing for financial aid, and anti-remedial policies and practices. CUNY has been swept up in a national race to limit college remediation (Parker, 2007), now funded by Bill Gates (The Gates Foundation, 2010). At CUNY, academic stratification, in which specialized functions are assigned to different units of the university (Gumport & Bastedo, 2001), has led to one of the most restrictive remedial policies in the country (Smith, 2012).

Falling High School Graduation Rates

Changes in graduation policies at New York City high schools, from which CUNY draws a large number of its ESL students, will invariably affect enrollment at CUNY. As Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000) predicted, after New York State mandated that all students had to pass the English Regents exam to graduate, English language learners, who had had the highest graduation rates of all students, came to have the lowest graduation rates (Advocates for Children & the New York Immigration Coalition, 2002; NYSED Information and Reporting Services, 2014). Four-year dropout rates for ELL students entering high school in New York State in 2008 were 21.3%, compared to 8.4% for all students, 12.6% for Blacks, and 13.6% for Hispanics (Advocates for Children, 2013b).

Increasing Tuition and Barriers to Financial Aid

Tuition continues to increase at CUNY (Professional Staff Congress, 2015). The foreign born in New York City are generally poorer than their native-born counterparts (New York City Department of City Planning, 2013), so any tuition increases might be expected to affect them disproportionately. In addition, although senior college tuition has been higher than community college tuition for quite some time, since 2013 associate degree candidates at comprehensive colleges have also had to pay at the higher rate (A. Chaconis, personal communication, December 4, 2015). Finally, since 2007, students with foreign high school diplomas have faced a

new financial aid barrier in the form of an Ability to Benefit test, a test of English they have had to pass in English in order to qualify for state financial aid (C. Lavington, personal communication, December 4, 2015).

Fewer Course Offerings, Even at Comprehensive Colleges

Changes in course offerings may also have affected enrollment. In the late 90s, CUNY made the senior colleges limit their ESL and remedial course sequences to two semesters, effectively restricting entry to intermediate and advanced ESL students (Carroll, 1998). An opportunity was also lost at comprehensive colleges, to which the two-semester limit and the ban-on-remediation did not apply and where ESL students could have in theory seamlessly transferred to baccalaureate programs. Since the ban-on-remediation, at least one comprehensive college has made CUNY “certification in reading and writing” a prerequisite to many more credit-bearing courses, making it more difficult for ESL and remedial students to earn credits even while enrolled in associate programs.¹² Another comprehensive college has eliminated almost all associate degree programs.

Academic Stratification

In the past there was little tracking compared to today, where students are sorted not only into two- and four-year colleges but also steered into pre-college programs. The process itself is confusing (Parker, 2005) and there is opportunity for misunderstanding and misinformation. For example, CUNY web pages have categorically stated that all applicants to baccalaureate programs must demonstrate readiness for college-level work in English, and some senior colleges have listed four years of high school English as a requirement for admission when neither of these applies to ESL students (O’Riordan, 2004).

Sorting into community colleges. During admissions, students applying to senior colleges are often de-admitted after taking the CUNY tests and told to go to a pre-college program or to a community college. In 2003, only 1,200 of the more than 4,500 de-admitted students actually enrolled in a CUNY community college the following fall (Parker, 2007). *The Chronicle of Higher Education* profiled a Dominican student who had immigrated at the age of 14 and had failed all three tests before the new admissions policy was phased in. He said that if he had been told that he couldn’t attend senior college, he probably would not have gone to college. “It makes you think you are not capable of doing something” (Hebel, 2002).¹³

Less than 30% of associate degree entrants graduate after eight years with either an associate or a bachelor’s, whereas eight-year graduation rates for bachelor’s degree entrants are about 50% (City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2015a, 2015b).¹⁴ First-time freshmen benefit from being around others with the same aspirations (Astin, 1993). In the past, ESL students entering baccalaureate programs not only had higher graduation rates than other bachelor’s degree entrants but also graduated at higher rates relative to ESL associate degree entrants (City University of New York, Office of Academic Affairs, 1994). Hispanic youth beginning at community colleges are half as likely to earn a bachelor’s degree as are White students (Fry, 2004). CUNY’s position has been that associate degree entrants can eventually transfer to baccalaureate programs, but Dowd (2007) has found that “as a route from the lowest rung to the highest rungs of higher education, transfer primarily serves students of middle and high socio-economic status” (p. 5).

Sorting into the CUNY Language Immersion Program. Carroll (1998) had reported on fears that ESL instruction and access would even be restricted at the community colleges, possibly until students had completed “alternative basic skills programs” (p. 16). Indeed, at some colleges, students qualifying for placement into ESL programs have been told that they cannot matriculate (DiRaimo & Crain, 2000), even in associate degree programs. CLIP describes itself “as an option for ESL students who prefer a full-time immersion approach to their English language studies that does not draw upon their financial aid allocation” (CUNY Language Immersion Program, n.d.). Applicants testing at a relatively low level of English who do not want to enroll in an associate program have no choice at CUNY but to enter CLIP or one of the university’s other pre-college immersion programs. CLIP is a high-quality program. It is also free or low cost and a boon for the small percentage of students who do not qualify for financial aid (not including international students, who are ineligible). The problem is that L2 immigrant students are not always properly advised of their options and are often discouraged from matriculating even in associate degree programs (O’Riordan, 2003, 2006). They are told that ESL courses “waste” or “use up” their financial aid (BMCC-CUNY Language Immersion Program, n.d.), and one college even tells students that to be eligible for state aid, courses must “count” toward the student’s major (New York City College of Technology, 2015). Federal financial aid, however, is available for 150% of credits needed to complete a degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), which is more than enough to cover tuition for most ESL students.¹⁵ And New York State allows

students to use most of their financial aid for remedial and/or ESL coursework the first year and much of their second year (Higher Education Services Corporation, n.d.).

Despite ongoing cuts in financial aid, the government still recognizes the importance of remedial and/or ESL coursework in helping to repair leaks in the higher education pipeline and ultimately in redressing social inequality. Some staff take a measured and global approach when advising students, taking into account students' prior education and how much ESL and/or remedial coursework they might actually need (including the possibility that they might have to repeat a course) discussing this with them and balancing these factors with their desire to matriculate and family and/or work-related demands, recognizing that the goal for students is to pursue their education in the manner that will most likely lead to a degree. Sadly, this does not seem to be the approach taken by many advisors, although it is possible that advisement in this regard may vary among colleges.

There was also concern in the past than any "alternative basic skills programs" would be distanced from the university, leading to higher dropout rates and a further decrease in enrollment (Carroll, 1998, p. 16). Though CLIP programs are on college campuses, CLIP students are relatively isolated unto themselves, whereas matriculating ESL students usually take some classes with native speakers in an environment is more genuinely immersive. At seven of nine CLIP sites, the program is offered only on the basis of 25-hour-a-week cycles of 15 weeks.¹⁶ Students who do not want to defer college enrollment or who cannot meet CLIP's scheduling demands may decide not to enroll at the university if they think that it is their only option.¹⁷

Limitations

Given what appear to be decreases in the enrollment of language minorities, should we be worried that CUNY is not living up to its legislative mandate to remain "responsive to the needs of its urban setting" and to provide "equal access and opportunity for students . . . from all ethnic and racial groups" (Section 6201 of the NYS Education Law)? That question is not answered in this quick update. This research would benefit from multiple perspectives. I am but one person, who is familiar with different units within CUNY but has had extensive experience in only a few. Obviously, for enrollment in ESL courses and subsequent performance, and for the percentage of students who are more comfortable in a language other than English, the current data are very limited.¹⁸ Since 2000 (City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2000), no data have been made publicly available for the numbers of students from CLIP that continue on to matriculate in CUNY. Data sources also need to be more transparent. Enrollment data for CLIP is presented by year, which can include up to four cycles, and includes students who have been dismissed from the colleges (who would have been included in ESL faculty counts) as well as students continuing from one year to the next, rather than in terms of first-time enrollees. This makes it difficult to compare enrollment in CLIP relative to enrollment in ESL programs.

The topic of ESL enrollment is a sensitive one at CUNY. For that reason, I feel that I need to make explicit that my objective has been to elucidate reasons for declining ESL enrollment. If I have chosen particular data points for comparison, it was largely because they were the only points available or because I was comparing between one decade and the next. Likewise, if I have not presented certain data and opinions on the subject, it is usually in the interests of readability, constraints of space and time, or because I did not consider them to be relevant or well founded. For example, an interesting dissertation on matters that could be considered related to this study was written in 2013 by Olga Rodriguez, a former research associate with the Community College Research Center, funded by Bill Gates (The Gates Foundation, 2009). Her work, however, was never peer-reviewed and she was not available to discuss with me questions I had about her findings. Thus I do not include them in this paper. CUNY staff have said that there are fewer ESL students because there are more undocumented students, who do not go to college at all or prefer to go to CLIP first, because it does not require financial aid. However, census data for New York City indicate a big drop in the number of undocumented persons since 9/11 (New York City Department of City Planning, 2013). CUNY also reported to the State Education Department that the decline in ESL enrollment was a result of a downturn in immigration and improved English among immigrants (City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2002), and the same argument continues to be made today. There is no support, however, for this argument in the census data as presented by the New York City Department of City Planning. There has also been some evidence, at least in the past, that students not allowed to matriculate at the college of their choice at CUNY have chosen instead to enroll in private colleges (Cordero-Guzman, 2004; Parker & Richardson, 2005). If L2 immigrant students are going instead to proprietary colleges, which have relatively low

lower graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), there is reason for concern. Further collection, disaggregation, and analysis of relevant data from multiple perspectives are needed.

Discussion and Recommendations

According to Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000), the loss of ESL students at CUNY was “the result of a political decision to reduce the size of the University as a whole” (p. 11). Now, however, CUNY enrollment is higher than ever (Chapman, 2014). So the reduction of the university has not come to pass, or has it? The current Master Plan envisions that “by . . . 2016, CUNY will fulfill its current trajectory and be widely recognized as the preeminent public urban university in the world” (City University of New York, 2012, p. 2). Out of the top five colleges listed by *The Washington Monthly* as “Best Bang for the Buck,” four were CUNY colleges (*The Washington Monthly*, 2015). Advertisements for CUNY proliferate in city newspapers, buses, and subways (in English, of course). CUNY has been recruiting students outside of the city, and the percentage of New Yorkers enrolled has dropped (Parker, 2005). All of CUNY’s senior colleges now have residence halls, and at the new Macauley Honors College, which began the same year that the ban-on-remediation was phased in, all students receive free tuition, a free laptop, and a stipend. CUNY’s reputation has indeed changed. However, looking at enrollment patterns, this may not be a change for the better for language minorities.

On the other hand, since the first articles about declining ESL enrollment, the political leadership has also changed. The current president has made the expansion of higher education a national priority (The White House, 2009). The current mayor has set aside tens of millions of dollars for its community colleges (Durkin, 2015). CUNY also has a new chancellor, who, at the University of Nebraska, froze resident tuition, increased financial aid, and “expanded the student body, in part by reaching low-income, minority or first-generation students, who might otherwise not have attended college at all” (Kaminer, 2014, p. A16).

It has been more than twenty years since there has been an ESL Task Force at CUNY. The time is ripe for another. Recently at CUNY, there have been a number of different task forces or working groups, largely or exclusively composed of staff operating from a “student-deficit” framework (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010), employing medical terminology such as “treatment” to refer to ESL or remedial coursework and verbs such as “remediate” (rather than “teach”) and “emerge from” (rather than “complete”) (City University of New York, Office of Academic Affairs, 2011, pp. 7, 18). The current sequential ideology of education concerns itself most with the screening and credentialing function of education, rather than with its personal, transformative, and additive functions, in which teachers themselves are most vested (Otheguy, 1999). A new ESL Task Force should instead be composed of faculty with an academic expertise in language acquisition as well as faculty from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and education, including faculty from the Graduate Center. Working together, they can analyze further the sources referenced herein, including, of course, census data, but also data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and evaluate the dissertations of Hodara (2012) and Rodriguez (2013). The ESL Task Force can look at other data as they become available, including longitudinal enrollment and performance data, which they could examine to see what percentage of CLIP students eventually matriculate and how these students and students who are mainstreamed compare to those who begin their academic trajectory in ESL courses in terms of graduation and GPA (controlling, of course, for variables that tend to be associated with each track). The ESL Task Force should also look at national trends but not draw conclusions too quickly. For example, although nationally an increasing share of immigrants already have college diplomas (Pew Research Center, 2015), in New York City, the foreign born are more likely to have a high school diploma but less likely to have a college diploma than their native-born counterparts (New York City Department of City Planning, 2013).

A CUNY ESL Task Force could also consider ways to help increase ESL graduation rates at the high schools. Not only are ESL students facing additional challenges since the introduction in 2013 of the Common Core (Advocates for Children, 2013a), which places relatively heavy language demands on students, but it is still true, as Otheguy and O’Riordan (2000) observed, that students coming to the United States in the senior year of high school, perhaps even a few months or weeks before the test, have to pass the English Regents.

Parker (2005) noted that one problem has been that goals related to access have not been included in executive compensation plans for college presidents and their staff, who have been inclined to hire less ESL faculty because of the declines. If it is serious about serving this community, however, CUNY needs to continue to invest in its ESL faculty *because* of the declines. At one point, the Chancellory had agreed, at the urging of CUNY’s ESL

Discipline Council, to consider for purposes of entry into baccalaureate programs an alternative to the way the university had been defining ESL students (Hebel, 2002). Now is the time for ESL faculty to resume this kind of work, not only at the university-wide level but also at the college level. ESL faculty, particularly at some colleges, have been discouraged by one policy after another that seem to have as their objective the elimination of ESL students. CUNY needs to value ESL faculty who take the initiative in pursuing avenues that will be most beneficial for their students. It is already scaling up a new ASAP program, which appears promising for full-time students with one or two “developmental course needs” at the community colleges (City University of New York (n.d.)). Many ESL students could possibly benefit, but it appears that at least at some colleges, perhaps to the detriment of students enrolled in ESL programs, ASAP directors are working more closely with CLIP staff to enroll students coming from CLIP than with ESL faculty to enroll students coming from college ESL programs. This may in part be because CLIP has full-time administrative staff, whereas the ESL faculty have relatively little release time to work on program coordination.

The goal of CUNY’s ESL programs has been to integrate ESL students into full-credit college courses as soon as possible (City University of New York, Office of Academic Affairs, 1994). As the ban-on-remediation was being phased in, the Chancellory encouraged the colleges to develop blocked programming for ESL students (Mirror, 2001). To function, however, blocked programming needs a critical mass of students. In 1999, there were 37 ESL learning communities at 10 CUNY colleges (O’Riordan, 2002).¹⁹ Today, many fewer CUNY colleges have learning communities for ESL students. At CUNY, ESL courses have been linked with subjects such as psychology, history, and sociology, as one might expect, but also with subjects such as reading, math, keyboarding, speech, and Spanish to make it possible to link courses at all levels of English language ability. For ESL students enrolled in learning communities, it is not uncommon to drop the prerequisite of CUNY reading and writing certification for existing courses, if necessary, or to develop new ones. If language minorities are taking Freshman Composition courses sooner, English departments also need to take into greater consideration the qualifications for dealing with such a population when hiring new faculty and consider those with degrees in applied linguistics or teaching English to speakers of other languages, not only to teach ESL courses but also to teach a range of English language courses. Language Across the Curriculum is the best way to develop the English of ESL students as well as the English of students who have already passed or were exempted from the CUNY reading and writing assessment tests.

In conclusion, there is a need to make sure that New Yorkers of all different walks of life who speak English less than very well but who would like to pursue a higher education have equitable access to excellence at the city’s public university and to all it has to offer, not only for their benefit, but for the benefit of New York City and New York State.

Appendix

Table 1. Enrollment in ESL Courses: Fall 1994–Fall 1998 and Fall 2014

Senior Colleges*	Fall 1994	Fall 1996	Fall 1997	Fall 1998	Fall 2014
Baruch	1,517	1,243	442	256	NA
Brooklyn	827	636	596	328	40
City	1,290	729	296	252	27
Hunter	620	547	400	211	15
Lehman	683	446	401	319	18
Queens	336	294	246	219	63
York	333	235	174	109	97
TOTAL	5,606	4,130	2,549	1,649	260
% loss 1998–2014					–84.2%
Comprehensive Colleges					
College of Staten Island	360	409	371	243	200
John Jay	256	248	231	210	40
Medgar Evers	NA	NA	91	113	26
New York City College of Technology	1,908	1,697	766	720	196
TOTAL	2,524	2,274	1,368	1,173	462
% loss 1998–2014					–60.6%
Community Colleges					
BMCC	1,597	1,300	1,349	1,532	1,120
Bronx	948	931	637	541	313
Hostos	1,901	1,659	1,266	1,019	371
Kingsborough	891	527	356	365	167
LaGuardia	1,427	1,475	1,028	1,087	1,048
Queensborough	605	695	858	1,047	702
TOTAL	7,369	6,587	5,494	5,591	3,721
% loss 1998–2014					–33.5%
TOTAL	15,499	12,991	9,411	8,458	4,443
% loss 1998–2014					–47.4%

*Not including Baruch, for which data were not reported for 2014.

Note: The numbers are approximate, as different colleges may have different methods of counting. The discrepancies, however, are estimated as minor.

Sources: Carroll (1998); ESL Discipline Council (2015, October 9). [Summary of ESL program data]. Unpublished raw data.

Benesch, S., personal communication, November 30, 2015; Cummings, M., personal communication, December 16, 2015; Kherief, A., personal communication, November 24, 2015; Klages-Bombich, personal communication, December 1, 2015; Lesnick, H., personal communication, November 6, 2014, and calculations based on these sources.

References

- Advocates for Children (2013a). *Common Core state standards*. [Pamphlet]. New York, NY: Author.
- Advocates for Children (2013b). *Rethinking pathways to high school graduation in New York State: Forging new ways for students to show their achievement of standards*. New York, NY: Coalition for Multiple Pathways to a Diploma.
- Advocates for Children & The New York Immigration Coalition (2002). *Creating a formula for success: Why English language learners are dropping out of school, and how to increase graduation rates*. New York, NY: Authors.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). What matters in college? *Liberal Education*, 79(4), 4–16.
- Bernstein, N. (2005, January 19). Proficiency in English over a decade. *The New York Times*, p. B1.
- BMCC-CUNY Language Immersion Program (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/clip/>
- Carroll, J. (1998). Where are all the students? *Idiom*, 29(1), 1, 14–16.
- Chapman, B. (2014, September 23). Exclusive: CUNY enrollment hits all-time high this fall as officials cite affordability. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://nydn.us/1x4MScZ>
- City University of New York. (n.d.). ASAP. Retrieved from <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/asap/about>
- City University of New York (2012). *Investing in our future: The City University of New York's Master Plan 2012–2016*. Retrieved from <http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/12/masterplan.pdf>
- City University of New York, Office of Academic Affairs (1994). *Report of the CUNY ESL Task Force*. New York, NY: Author.
- City University of New York, Office of Academic Affairs (2011). *Proposals to improve success rates for students in developmental education at CUNY*. New York, NY: Author.
- City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2000). *An overview of trends in ESL enrollment: The City University of New York, 1995–1999*. New York, NY: Author.
- City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2002). *The admission and enrollment of ESL students before and after implementation of CUNY's Master Plan amendment: A review*. New York, NY: Author.
- City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2004). *Trends in ESL enrollment and performance on CUNY assessments: Presentation to the Council of Chief Academic Officers*. New York, NY: Author.
- City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2015a, April 17). *System retention and graduation rates of full-time first-time freshmen in associate programs by year of entry: Total university*. Unpublished data analysis.
- City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2015b, April 17). *System retention and graduation rates of full-time first-time freshmen in baccalaureate programs by year of entry: Total university*. Unpublished data analysis.
- City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2015c, June 18). *A profile of undergraduates at CUNY senior and community colleges*. Unpublished data analysis.
- City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (2015d, December 7). *Initial pass rates by ESL status*. Unpublished data analysis.
- Cordero-Guzman, H. (2004, June). The demographics of the college age population in New York City. Presentation to the Open Access Committee, Professional Staff Congress, CUNY.
- Crook, D. (2007, March). *A profile of native and non-native English speakers at CUNY*. Presentation at the Conference on Teaching, Language and the CUNY Student, New York, NY.
- CUNY Language Immersion Program (n.d.). CLIP students. Retrieved from <http://www.clip.cuny.edu/Public/html/Forstudents.htm>
- DiRaimo, S., & Crain, B. (2000, February 21). [Letter to Zeev Dagan]. New York, NY.
- Dowd, A. (2007). Community colleges as gateways and gatekeepers: Moving beyond the access “saga” toward outcome equity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 77(4), 407–419.
- Durkin, E. (2015, May 4). DeBlasio: \$29M will be added to budget for STEM programs at CUNY colleges. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://nydn.us/1bsXc84>
- Fry, R. (2004). *Latino youth finishing college: The role of selective pathways*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.

- The Gates Foundation (2009, June 30). Community College Research Center to identify strategies to help students earn a degree. [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2009/06/Community-College-Research-Center-to-Identify-Strategies-to-Help-Students-Earn-a-Degree>
- The Gates Foundation (2010, April 19). Gates Foundation giving \$110 million to transform remedial education. [Press release]. Retrieved from [http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2010/04/Foundation-Giving-\\$110-Million-to-Transform-Remedial-Education](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2010/04/Foundation-Giving-$110-Million-to-Transform-Remedial-Education)
- Gumport, P. J., & Bastedo, M. N. (2001). Academic stratification and endemic conflict: Remedial education policy at CUNY. *The Review of Higher Education*, 24(4), 333–349.
- Hebel, S. (2002, March 1). A new look for CUNY. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. 20.
- Higher Education Services Corporation (n.d.). Satisfactory academic progress. Retrieved from <http://www.hesc.ny.gov/tap-coach/94-satisfactory-academic-progress>
- Hodara, M. (2012). *Language minority students at community college: How do developmental education and English as a second language affect their educational outcomes?* (Doctoral dissertation). Columbia University Academic Commons, New York, NY. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10022/AC:P:13123>
- Hurtado, A., & Vega, L. A. (2004). Shift happens: Spanish and English transmission between parents and children. *Journal of Special Issues*, 60(1), 137–155.
- In CUNY Language Immersion Program, students learn English the right way, the hard way. (2005, November). *CUNY Matters*, pp. 6–7.
- Kaminer, A. (2014, February 18). From Plains to NYC, new chief is “coming home.” *The New York Times*, p. A16.
- Mirrer, L. (2001, April 16). [Memorandum to Chief Academic Officers and to ESL Discipline Council]. New York, NY: New York City College of Technology (2015). *TAP, APTS, PTAP* [Pamphlet]. New York, NY: Author.
- New York City Department of City Planning (2013). *The newest New Yorkers: Characteristics of the city’s foreign-born population, 2013 edition*. New York, NY: Author.
- NYSED Information and Reporting Services (2014, December 8). Graduation rate data. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/pressrelease/20141218/home.html>
- O’Riordan, M. (2002, April). ESL across the curriculum at CUNY. In *Learning community challenges, caveats and success stories*. Proceedings of colloquium at the international TESOL convention, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- O’Riordan, M. (2003, July 30). [Memorandum to Brian Keener]. Brooklyn, NY.
- O’Riordan, M. (2004, March 26). City University of New York, minutes of the meeting of the ESL Discipline Council.
- O’Riordan, M. (2006, September 27). [Memorandum to Alan Huffman]. Brooklyn, NY.
- Otheguy, R. (1999). Keynote address. 26th Annual CUNY ESL Council Conference, Bronx, NY.
- Otheguy, R., & O’Riordan, M. (2000). The CUNY celebration and the disappearing guests: The search for ESL students in the City University of New York. *College ESL*, 9(1 & 2), 1–18.
- Parker, T. L. (2005). *Changing the rules for access and equity: The elimination of remedial education*. (Doctoral dissertation). New York University, New York, NY.
- Parker, T. L. (2007). *Ending college remediation: Consequences for access and opportunity* (ASHE/Lumina Policy Briefs and Critical Essays No. 2). Ames, IA: Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Iowa State University.
- Parker, T. L., Bustillos, L. T., & Behringer, L. B. (2010). *Remedial and developmental education policy at a crossroads*. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.188.7104&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Parker, T. L., & Richardson, R. C. (2005). Ending remediation at CUNY: Implications for access and excellence. *Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 5(2), 1–22.
- Pereira, J., & Cobb, E. (1990). *The first year college experience of entering SEEK freshmen: Findings from a longitudinal study of Special Programs students in the City University of New York*. New York, NY: City University of New York.
- Pew Research Center (2015). *Modern immigration wave brings 59 million to U.S., driving population growth and change through 2065: Views of immigration’s impact on U.S. society mixed*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Professional Staff Congress (2015, November 20). Governor Cuomo is failing CUNY students. Retrieved from <http://www.psc-cuny.org/contact-campaign-mass-meeting>

- Rodriguez, O. (2013). *Examining the effects of academic English as a Second Language pathways at the community college: A mixed methods study*. (Doctoral dissertation). Columbia University Academic Commons, New York, NY. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10022/AC:P:20589>
- Smith, M. (2012). *Choosing who delivers: The impact of placing limits on the delivery of remedial education at four-year institutions*. Getting Past Go Project, Education Commission of the States.
- Tseng, V. (2004). Family interdependence and academic adjustment in college youth from immigrant and US-born families. *Child Development* 75(3), 966–983.
- US Department of Education (2012, February 15). Federal Pell grants. Retrieved from <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/grants-scholarships/pell>
- US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics (2014). Graduation rate from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institution, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and acceptance rate: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2007. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_326.10.aspx
- The Washington Monthly* (2015). The other college guide. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/rankings-other-college-guide/best-bang-for-buck-northeast-rank.php
- The White House (2009, July 14). Excerpts of the President's remarks in Warren, Michigan and fact sheet on the American Graduation Initiative [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/excerpts-presidents-remarks-warren-michigan-and-fact-sheet-american-graduation-init>

Notes

¹ESL is used here for students who have enrolled in ESL classes while matriculated.

²CUNY ESL faculty have noted that the math assessment test itself is embedded in English. Perhaps this is why many ESL students fail the math assessment text when applying to CUNY, although foreign-born, non-native speakers do better than others when they take math courses (Hodara, 2012).

³*The Newest New Yorkers* reports on “not English proficient” or “speaks less than ‘very well’ ” and “speaks a language at home other than English.” It does not report on “native language other than English.”

⁴The census figures do not include the many New Yorkers born in Puerto Rico.

⁵The only educational outcome in which they fell short was Freshman Composition, which they passed at a rate of 54.4% compared to the 57.1% pass rate for native speakers.

⁶There are no comparable longitudinal data available at this time for the period between fall 1998 and fall 2014. Now, CUNY has 19 colleges. The two new colleges, the Macaulay Honors College and the Guttman Community College, do not have ESL programs. ESL faculty at Baruch College did not report on enrollment.

⁷Students can also be exempted if they score 480 or higher on the Verbal or Critical Reading sections of the SAT or 20 on the ACT English. Foreign-born and older students are less likely to have taken the tests that can lead to exemption.

⁸Various CUNY documents show that the percentages of students with “remedial need” have fallen in years when the reading test became untimed and when new writing tests were introduced.

⁹As this article goes to online publication, it is unclear how these students were identified by CUNY as ESL. It is likely, however, that CUNY used “spoke a language other than English at home” and “more comfortable with a language other than English” as a proxy for enrollment in ESL programs as it has in the past (City University of New York, Office of Institutional Research and Analysis, 2000).

¹⁰In a newsletter article, CUNY presented a decline at the senior colleges in the percentages of students more comfortable in a language other than English from 18.9% in 1995 to 7.5% in 2004 as a CLIP achievement, even though these data are taken from the CUNY application before actual enrollment in CUNY or in any CUNY program (CUNY Language Immersion Program, 2005).

¹¹The application went online in 2008 (G. Meyer, personal communication, January 5, 2016). Increases over time in the percentages of students “directly admitted” to CUNY probably have also affected response rates, as these students do not usually fill in the application that has these questions. In fall 2015 55% of students filling in the application online with these questions indicated whether or not they were more comfortable in a language

other than English, 82% indicated whether or not they were born outside the United States, and 88% indicated whether or not their native language was English (M. Shields, personal communication, December 29, 2015).

¹²New courses in this college have also had prerequisites that would make it impossible for ESL students to enroll.

¹³As Parker and Richardson (2005) have observed, telling students that they must go to a community college not only affects their self-perception but also stigmatizes the community college.

¹⁴The actual eight-year graduation rates over the past few years for either an associate or bachelor's degree have been: for fall 2004, 49.2% for bachelor's programs but 26.4% for associate programs; for fall 2005, 50.7% for bachelor's programs but 27.2% for associate programs; and for fall 2006, 51.6% for bachelor's programs but 27.5% for associate programs.

¹⁵For low-level ESL students who also need to do more than one semester of work in math, this may not be enough, especially if they have to repeat classes.

¹⁶The other two CLIP sites have two cycles of 12 weeks and two intersession cycles of 6 weeks.

¹⁷A study of New York City immigrant college students found that they typically work more than 15 hours a week than their native-born counterparts (Tseng, 2004).

¹⁸CUNY's Office of Institutional Research and Analysis says it is working on making more data available on ESL students (D. Crook, personal communication, October 2, 2015).

¹⁹There is extensive research at CUNY and elsewhere showing that learning communities, or blocked programming, promote retention and are associated with higher grades in both ESL and content courses, and higher pass rates in subsequent English courses (O'Riordan, 2002).



*Corresponding author: maryoriordan.bronx@gmail.com