

LaGuardia Community College
Fall Report
President Kenneth Adams
The Little Theatre
September 28, 2022

(Abridged version; PowerPoint slides and notes removed)

1. Enrollment

Back in the spring, when we were planning for this fall semester, Paul Arcario, Gail, and I set an enrollment target of 12,000 students. Our goal was to return to the enrollment level of Fall 21 after sustaining a significant loss in the spring semester. The plan was to stabilize at 12,000 and then begin rebuilding LaGuardia's enrollment from there.

Unfortunately, we came up short. We have 10,813 degree-seeking students as of this morning. That's 915 more than in the spring (9,898) but 1,187 students fewer than the 12,000-student goal we set for this semester. At this point we are focused on the upcoming Spring 23 semester, which starts on March 7. We're going to keep the target of 12,000.

This will be a challenge because most new students start college in September rather than mid-year -- making new student recruitment for March an uphill climb. But we have some new plans and resources we're going to put to work. I'll mention them in a moment.

Here are some observations about enrollment at LaGuardia, including some good news:

This semester our admissions team, led by Shannon Lund, hit their goal for *new* students. We fell short in bringing back *returning* students. Keeping our current students -- having them come back semester after semester until they graduate isn't just the work of faculty and advisors, it is a collective responsibility. We all play a role in giving our students such a positive LaGuardia experience that there is no place else they'd rather be.

This fall we welcomed 1,190 *transfer* students. This is actually slight increase over a year ago and an encouraging indicator of LaGuardia's appeal to students already in the CUNY system. (During the pandemic transfer students were down significantly.)

Notably, LaGuardia's decline in enrollment -- we lost ¼ of our students during the pandemic -- has not dented our diversity: we have students from 133 countries who speak 62 heritage languages. And, according to our 2022 Institutional Profile, the overall racial and ethnic diversity of our student body remains basically unchanged.

Now, a note of caution about enrollment data. Before the start of the semester there was a flurry of emails regarding our enrollment challenges, class cancellations, and teaching assignments for adjuncts. Nothing wrong with any of that, of course. But some of the messages were based on faulty data. This can happen because CUNY system data is not always aligned with campus data. And, occasionally, we are guilty of feeding misleading information into the CUNY system -- like data from our old PAR system. We terminated the PAR system earlier this year, but the old PAR data is still out there messing with the metrics.

I remain convinced that a major factor behind our enrollment decline is the economic impact of the pandemic on our students. As we all know, LaGuardia serves predominantly low-income students from Queens, many of them immigrants. When the city lost almost one million jobs in the Spring of 2020 because of the Covid lockdowns, who was most affected? Low-income workers, many of them immigrants, employed in retail, tourism, restaurants, and other service industries. These workers included many of our students, or the family members of our students.

By definition, poor households have limited savings or asset wealth. When low income families suffer a loss of wage income they have no cushion, no safety net. The only path back to economic stability is to find a new job and start making money again.

Many of our LaGuardia students are working now to help their families stabilize their financial situations. They have to pay back rent or face eviction, deal with unpaid medical bills, put food on the table. And because of inflation, the money they earn buys them less, so they may have to work more hours to pay for the same bag of groceries or utility bills.

Fortunately, we have several solutions which we are going to put in motion to drive spring enrollment. For example, we are going to use money that we have raised through the LaGuardia Foundation (Remember the \$15 million campaign we concluded back in the spring?) to help students with outstanding balances lower their debts and return to your classrooms.

Thanks to a recent gift of \$1 million from one of our Foundation donors we are going to double the allocation of our new LaGuardia Merit Scholarships – those \$500 mini-grants that help students with the non-tuition costs of LaGuardia, like fees, books, transportation, and food.

Governor Kathy Hochul's change to the state financial aid program – TAP - is something else we are going to leverage to increase enrollment for the spring. Now we can offer TAP to students who attend LaGuardia part-time, including students that are only taking six credits per semester. Under the old regulations, it was next to impossible for part-time students to receive TAP. We have more than 1,100 students who are eligible for this new Part-Time TAP. Gail and her team will begin reaching out to them on Monday.

Rhonda Mouton, Director of LaGuardia Cares, and I are pursuing new strategies for helping students facing homelessness. Rhonda will tell you that the number one problem students contact her about is the need for an affordable place to stay. It is very hard to be a successful college student if you are worried about where you are going to sleep at night.

2. Budget and Finance

Needless to say, our enrollment decline has a negative impact on our budget. Normally, declining enrollment reduces our revenue in two ways: we collect less tuition from students (directly, or from their sources of government financial aid – Pell and TAP) and, since our state aid is based on enrollment, we receive less funding from Albany.

Fortunately, we have been spared the latter blow this year because Governor Hochul and the State Legislature passed a hold-harmless measure as part of the budget to keep our state subsidy at the prior-year amount, even if our enrollment dropped, as it did.

SVP Shahir Erfan and Budget Director Anthony Garafola estimate that our overall FY 23 revenue will be approximately \$135 million, assuming we hit our tuition target. This includes \$7 million of the last of the federal stimulus funds that will be allocated to us by the central office.

Projected college expenses total \$142 million; almost all of that is personnel -- specifically, salaries, since the City of New York pays for our health insurance and other employee benefits. That leaves us with a projected operating deficit on June 30, 2023 of about \$7 million. This is a problem.

Sorry, but I don't expect any new federal aid. One could hope for increased support from Albany or City Hall, but given current economic conditions, the threat of recession, tanking equity markets and property values, and the City's fiscal belt-tightening, I am not sanguine about that. We will need assistance from the CUNY central office to address our budget deficit this year.

Several weeks ago, I got an email from a faculty member suggesting that we set up a reserve fund for emergency situations, like a steep drop in enrollment triggered by a global pandemic. This is an excellent idea. In fact, under normal circumstances CUNY requires us to set aside up to 3% of our operating budget in a reserve account. Unfortunately, during the pandemic we had to spend the funds in the reserve. Its balance today is zero. As we begin to rebuild our enrollment and revenue we will gradually restore this important "rainy day" reserve account. Let's just hope we don't have another rainy day for a while...

Let me take a moment to give you an update on LaGuardia student debt – a problem that got much worse during Covid.

Today, there are almost 5,000 LaGuardia students that owe the college approximately \$10 million. The math is easy: that is an average unpaid bill of \$2,000. From FY 20 to this year the number of LaGuardia students with outstanding tuition balances more than quadrupled. This is unprecedented.

Say what you will about President Biden's Student Loan Forgiveness Plan it has little relevance to us since few, if any, of our students take out federal student loans to pay for LaGuardia. But when a student doesn't fully pay their bill, they incur a debt to the college. If they don't pay Tony Abreu, the bursar, within a year, he turns their debt over to a collection agency and it starts to incur interest. This is not specific to LaGuardia – this is CUNY policy.

I mention this to make the point that when officials boast that CUNY students graduate with no or very low student loan debt, they are not telling the full story. It is true that CUNY students may not take out federally guaranteed student loans, but when they have an unpaid balance to their college, CUNY, in effect, is the bank and that unpaid balance is like a loan that has to be paid back.

Frankly, I worry less about CUNY *graduates* and their unpaid balances (because of a policy change during Covid now you can collect your CUNY degree without paying your bill) and more about the thousands of low-income students that start at LaGuardia but then drop out with an unpaid bill. In many cases they walk away from LaGuardia disappointed, demoralized, and in debt. It seems to me that we need to do more to improve our students' financial literacy and money management savvy. Our MoneyBoss program is a good start. But we need to do more.

By the way, I know some of you gripe that I am too focused on our bottom line, that I run LaGuardia too much like a business. Well... guilty as charged. Unless we want to give up our salaries and benefits, and

work here as volunteers, I have an obligation to ensure the financial health of the college, to provide our students with the best educational experience their money can buy (yes, they are paying customers), and to be a prudent steward of our assets since, after all, they belong to the public. And, of course, we are beholden to the taxpayers, because they pay for most of this, which is why sound fiscal management, transparency, and accountability are a must.

Trust me -- at a time when people across America are questioning the value proposition of a college education, I firmly intend to give LaGuardia students and their families a compelling argument. More on this in a moment.

3. Student Success.

Information regarding Student Success can be found in the 2022 Performance Management Process (PMP) Preliminary Data Book. Thanks, as always, to Dean Nava Lerer and her team in the office of Institutional Effectiveness. By the way, over the summer we moved Nava's office from the Office of Academic Affairs to the Office of the President. This is because Nava's office leads planning and assessment for *all* divisions of the college, not just Academic Affairs. The move is meant to enhance Institutional Effectiveness as a college-wide service.

Unfortunately, the pandemic erased some of our prior gains in student retention and completion.

Our 3-yr graduation rate fell back to 29%. Notably, if you give students an extra year to graduate, the rate increases to 37%. This, no doubt, is because half of our students attend LaGuardia part-time. Clearly, many of our students need more than six semesters to complete their degree requirements.

But there are diminishing returns when you go farther out on the time axis. Give LaGuardia students *eight* years to earn a 60-credit degree and the completion rate only inches up to 38%. Just a nine-point gain with five more years of college.

A key metric of Student Success (really, *our* success at meeting our students' needs) is retention. Year-to-year retention of LaGuardia students decreased during the pandemic to 60%. Fall to Spring retention dropped from 80% to 74% in 2020. You can guess why.

As we emerge from the pandemic we need to recover lost ground in Student Success and then continue our slow but steady improvement in student retention and graduation.

When thinking about Student Success let's remember that there are only two successful outcomes for LaGuardia degree-seeking students, since an associate degree alone has little more value in the New York City labor market than a high-school diploma. Those outcomes are transfer to a baccalaureate program at a senior college, or a living-wage job in the field of one's AAS degree, such as Nursing.

And, there is a big footnote here: success for the transfer student comes not when she *starts* at Baruch or Hunter or Queens College, but when she *graduates* with her BA or BS and gets a good job in her field of study. Only then can we feel confident that we have delivered on our LaGuardia promise to her.

As you all know, helping our students achieve these outcomes is not easy.

Here's a simple exercise – imagine a group of 100 first-time, full-time students sitting here in the Little Theatre for a new student orientation meeting. As you know from that earlier slide 29 will graduate

within three years. Of those, 70% or 20 will transfer to a four-year school within two years of their LaGuardia graduation. Of those 20, 60% or 12 will earn their BA or BS within three years.

What happens to the other 88 students sitting there in the Little Theater? Some will earn their degrees over a longer period of time as I mentioned a minute ago, but not many.

CUNY still doesn't track employment and wage outcomes for individual students with precision, so our knowledge of their ultimate career success is sketchy.

But think about that for a moment – for those 100 students sitting here in the Little Theatre only 12 will get a baccalaureate degree in up to eight years. We have to do better than that.

There is another important cohort of students to consider – Students in AAS degree programs. Interestingly, 44% of AAS-degree graduates actually transfer to a four-year school despite CUNY's assertion that an AAS degree is a terminal degree that leads straight away to a good job. And since AAS degrees are not designed for transfer many of those students will have to take courses over at the receiving college. Perhaps those students would have been better off pursuing AS degrees with clear transfer pathways to four-year colleges locked in by articulation agreements.

And what about employment outcomes for our AAS graduates? After all, gainful employment is the goal of every AAS program. An analysis by Bain and Company completed for the chancellor last year concluded that only about 5% of AAS students at LaGuardia graduated and got a job. We need a thorough review of our AAS and Academic Certificate programs. Billie and her colleagues in Academic Affairs will be working on that this fall.

I am sharing this with you today to mark where we are as we emerge from the pandemic. Let's acknowledge these indicators of student success, and resolve to improve them. We must redouble our efforts to deliver on the promise of a LaGuardia education to a much greater percentage of our students.

4. Adult and Continuing Education (ACE)

Lots has been going on in ACE lately. According to VP Sunil Gupta, we served over 9,400 students in workforce training, English as a Second Language (ESL), youth, and pre-college programs in FY 22. ACE enrollment is recovering well. For example, 1,744 students enrolled in ESL classes in the TELC (The English Learning Center) in FY 22. (LaGuardia is the largest provider of ESL training in New York City.) Registration for fall ESL classes is up 28% over last year.

The boost in enrollment in our ACE programs can be explained in part by our new ACE Scholarships. Thanks to generous support from the Foundation, LaGuardia is one of only a few community colleges in the country that offer scholarships to students in non-degree programs. Since the summer of 2021, we have provided over \$1.3 million in scholarships and other support to low-income New Yorkers in ACE adult education and workforce training programs.

As low-income Queens residents struggle for economic security as we emerge from the pandemic, the availability of scholarships that cover 80-100% of the tuition for Plumbing, Electrical, Pharm Tech, ESL and dozens of other ACE programs is extremely helpful.

I have mentioned the importance of the LaGuardia Foundation a couple of times, so let's pivot to an update on Institutional Advancement.

5. Institutional Advancement

This summer we restructured this important division. Moving forward, think of IA as two offices that work closely together: The Grants Office, led by Laura Bartovics, and the Foundation, led by Jay Golan. (Jay joined LaGuardia about a month ago; given the financial constraints I mentioned earlier it is important to note that Jay's salary is paid for by the Foundation.)

Laura and her team secure and manage government grants and contracts, as well as grants from foundations and corporations – basically the money we raise for LaGuardia that flows through CUNY's fiscal conduit, the Research Foundation, or RF. They raise a lot of money on their own, and they also support faculty and staff who secure grants and act as PIs or principal investigators.

Jay and his team at the Foundation, working with Karen Dubinsky and the Board of Directors of the Foundation, which is chaired by Suzie Scanlon Rabinowitz, focus on individual giving and certain foundation opportunities, such as those related to family trusts or endowments.

Not to be overly competitive, but the LaGuardia Grants Office ranks high compared to other CUNY colleges. In grants under management we are the top community college, and the eighth college overall in CUNY. (I should know this; I am a trustee of the Research Foundation.)

If you think I am obsessed with fundraising you're correct. Now more than ever we need flexible, non-tax-levy resources to support our students. Outside funding is essential for us to be able to innovate, to try new approaches like our Merit Scholarships, or the ACE Scholarships. Or to guarantee a stipend for every LaGuardia student in an internship – a promise born from the collaboration between the Foundation and project SOAR, the LaGuardia internship initiative developed and launched this summer by Jessica Perez and her colleagues in the CCPD, which is now part of ACE.

6. The Road Ahead

A few weeks ago there was a clever meme going around that made me out to be the Career Services guy, you know, the president obsessed with jobs and careers for his students. It was pretty funny. Well, I can't deny it: I am absolutely committed to ensuring that our students leave LaGuardia well prepared for career success, so that they can get a good job at a living wage in their field of interest. This is no more than giving them what they came here for. If you don't believe me, just ask them. They will tell you they're here to get a college education that will help them get a good job. Not an education alone, as some kind of abstraction, but one that enables them to earn a decent living, and, for many, lift themselves out of poverty.

CUNY boasts that it propels almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class as all eight Ivy League schools, plus Duke, M.I.T., Stanford and the Univ of Chicago, combined. That's an incredible achievement, and one to be proud of. The mission is clear – CUNY as transformative engine of social mobility.

If we are committed to social justice we must recognize that a just society can't be achieved without addressing income inequality. And one of the best ways to address income equality is to help people

get the education and training they need to secure good jobs and jumpstart their economic mobility. Think of economic mobility as a driver of social mobility and a foundation for a more just society.

Our LaGuardia students seek that economic mobility. No one wants to stay poor.

I define success for most LaGuardia students as the completion of these milestones: graduation, transfer to a senior college, graduation there with a BA or BS, and a living-wage job. In some cases, passing a professional licensing exam, like the CPA exam, the NCLEX, or NYS Teacher Certification is a key part of that educational pathway. As I mentioned earlier, for some of our AAS majors, success will be a good job upon graduation.

All our students (degree-seeking and ACE) need *four* things from their LaGuardia education: skills, knowledge, experience, and relationships. LaGuardia faculty provide the first two. LaGuardia staff help students develop additional skills, but, as a whole, we don't do enough to help our students gain the experience and relationships they are going to need for career success.

Fixing this is vital for enhancing the value proposition that I referred to earlier. I am convinced that the community colleges that enhance their value propositions will attract new students and increase their enrollment. For colleges that don't develop something new and compelling to offer prospective students in this day and age, well... we don't want to be part of that group, trust me.

So, what do we have to do?

- We need to offer a meaningful, paid internship to every LaGuardia student that wants one.
- We need to help our part-time students find employment in their fields of study, instead of at Starbucks.
- We need to provide more career advising at the point of matriculation, when new students are choosing their major as a requirement for receiving financial aid.
- We need to connect students to career mentors, especially volunteers from industry, drawn from a growing network of employer partners. We need LaGuardia alumni to help with this, too.
- We need employer partners to work with our faculty to ensure that our academic programs are teaching competencies aligned with current industry requirements.

And we need to remember that career success -- lifelong economic mobility -- requires excellent oral and written communication skills, math and analytical skills, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and more. All of which, of course, are developed and refined in our academic programs, from the humanities to STEM, social and health sciences, business, and beyond.

These fundamentals -- some refer to them as *essential skills* -- are not mutually exclusive from technical skills. They should be complimentary. So, no one here is off the hook -- none of us is -- when it comes to preparing LaGuardia students for career success.

In the coming weeks, Billie and I will tell you more about initiatives we are developing to meet these needs. Don't be surprised by a few calls for volunteers. We will need all the help we can get.

Thank you.