

**Community Colleges Addressing Students' Needs:
A Case Study of LaGuardia Community College**

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**Report to the Deputy Chancellor
January 2000**

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the following people for their assistance with the project: Delcy Steffy, Ron Nerio, Nadia Quiroz-Colby and Carol Archer for conducting telephone interviews; Mitch Glodek and Karen Mark for editorial assistance; and Barbara Astone at LaGuardia Community College Office of Institutional Research for providing additional information and assistance. We would also like to thank Deputy Chancellor Patricia Hassett for her support during the studies of both Borough of Manhattan Community College and LaGuardia Community College. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to all the students at LaGuardia Community College who took the time to speak with us about their experiences.

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Preface

This study of leavers from LaGuardia Community College was initiated by Deputy Chancellor Patricia Hassett. In 1998, Deputy Chancellor Hassett asked the Howard Samuels Center (HSC) to explore the question of why students leave community colleges before they complete degrees and whether there were any benefits they may have accrued even though they did not complete degree programs. She suggested that HSC initiate a case study of the Borough of Manhattan Community College. That study published in 1998, concluded that students at BMCC, in fact, registered for full-time degree programs to secure state tuition and other financial aid. Many of them were not necessarily committed to securing a degree or completing a particular program; a good number were exploring post secondary education. Most students left college largely because they could not maintain full-time attendance while working and supporting their families. The study provided some new insights into why students attended community colleges and, not surprisingly, found that student leavers thought they gained significant benefits from their time at BMCC. A very high percentage of them expected to return to BMCC or transfer to other colleges. In response to those findings Deputy Chancellor Hassett supported and encouraged a second case study of LaGuardia Community College to validate the BMCC findings and to gather additional data on the reasons students enter college and the benefits they think they have received even though they have not completed a degree.

Summary of Major Findings

This case study reports the results of interviews conducted with students from LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York and confirms the findings of *The Benefits of College Attendance: A Case Study of BMCC* (Gittell and Steffy 1998). In interviews conducted with students who had originally enrolled at LaGuardia in 1995 and subsequently left before the completion of a degree, students were asked to describe their reasons for enrolling, their reasons for leaving as well as what effect they felt the experience of attending college had on their lives. The findings further demonstrate that students enroll in community college to meet a variety of educational, personal and economic goals, many of which are met en route to, or even without, graduating from college. The findings support the view that community colleges are vital, multi-purposed community institutions which provide important access to post-secondary education for a diverse population.

- **Almost all the students interviewed felt attending LaGuardia had benefitted them.**
 - 94% of the students interviewed said they benefitted in some way.
 - 36% of the students said that attending LaGuardia has prepared them to transfer or for further study.

- **Almost half the students did *not* originally enroll to earn a degree.**
 - 45% of the students interviewed said that they did not enroll with the intention of obtaining a degree.
 - Many of the students left LaGuardia in order to pursue other educational or economic opportunities, or because of pressure from their various work, family and other responsibilities.

- **The overwhelming majority of students want to return to school or have already transferred elsewhere.**
 - 90% of the students told us they either wanted to return to school, had already returned to school, or had transferred elsewhere.
 - 28% of the students interviewed told us that they had transferred to institutions both within and outside CUNY.
 - 59% of students said they wanted to return to school, preferably to LaGuardia.

➤ **Lack of money and issues regarding the difficulties of combining work, school and family responsibilities continue to be students' main reason for leaving.**

- 32% of the students indicated that lack of money, problems with financial aid, or taking on a new job or additional responsibilities to meet increasing personal and family financial needs, was their primary reason for leaving.
- 22% of the students specifically mentioned being “overwhelmed,” unable to balance family, work, and school responsibilities.

Comparison of Students at Borough of Manhattan Community College and LaGuardia Community College (percent)

Primary Reason for Enrolling:	BMCC	LaGuardia
To Earn a Degree	44.9	54.9
To Try College/Take a Few Classes	21.2	15.7
Prepare to Transfer	7.6	15.7
Improve Skills/English	12.7	10.8
Primary Reason for Leaving:		
Financial	34.8	31.4
Personal and Family	23.5	26.6
Transfer	13.5	14.8
Primary Benefits:		
Prepare for Further Study or to Transfer	33.1	36.3
Learn New or Improve Skills/Improve English	12.6	22.6
Improve Self-Esteem/New Friends and Contacts	10.9	9.8
No Benefit	26.3	5.9
Current Enrollment Status of Students:		
Out of School–Intends to Return	44.9	58.8
Transferred CUNY	5.1	5.9

Primary Reason for Enrolling:	BMCC	LaGuardia
Transferred non-CUNY	12.7	22.5
Dropped-out "Permanently"	27.1	7.8

N=118 for BMCC, N=102 for LaGuardia

What the Students Say

There was more support and comradery at LaGuardia. The students worked together to get the job done. The professors are very caring. I was able to achieve more because of that environment. I preferred my experience at LaGuardia because there was much more support.

--Josephine, 30

I went into LaGuardia right out of high-school. I left because I wanted to try working. Now I want to return to LaGuardia because I have decided I want to be a teacher.

--Elizabeth, 23

I dropped out due to family problems. I had no complaints whatsoever about LaGuardia. Everyone was very helpful. When I started school, I didn't speak English well. Attending LaGuardia really helped me a lot . . . I need to complete my major and I want to go back to school but I need money to take care of myself and my family.

--Ahmed, 23

I enrolled to get a better GPA in order to transfer. Yes, I definitely benefitted. It helped me get a better job and I transferred to a four-year school that I wanted to attend. I now attend SUNY: Stony Brook. All of the classes were very helpful.

--Christine, 27

I definitely want to go back. I am trying to go back next semester. I planned to be at LaGuardia for about a year and a half and then transfer to Baruch, but that got shot because my grades dropped—I was doing too much with work —there was too much on my plate and school was the last thing on it.

--Molina, 23

The English and the other classes were helpful [and] I would share what I learned with my husband and kids—especially the English. It amazes me—even my husband then shares things with other people!

--Susanna, 24

Introduction

Community colleges have been viewed as institutions which are more open and accessible to a more diverse group of students, especially non-traditional students, who have limited access to four-year institutions. The mission of community colleges has most commonly been seen as providing the first two years of a liberal arts, baccalaureate education thereby serving a “transfer” function, or providing vocational and other skill developing instruction which most often corresponds to the needs of business in the surrounding community.

Recent research has increasingly highlighted the multiple, changing, and sometimes conflicting, missions of community colleges (Bailey and Averianova 1998, Gittell and Steffy 1998, Valdez and Rhodes 1996, Cohen and Brawer 1996, Dougherty 1994, Griffith and Connor 1994). While research, debate, and discussion is ongoing, it is clear that the mission of the community college continues to expand and change. In addition to providing an Associate’s degree and preparing students to transfer, community colleges are preparing or retraining individuals for the labor market, providing training in specific areas such as English or computer skills, and are performing the equally essential, though often undervalued, role of socialization, which is especially important for immigrants as well as for citizens in multi-ethnic and multi-racial communities.

Another important focus of the discussion of community colleges is centered on the ways in which attending community college affects students. Often analysis has focused on education’s impact on future wages. Some argue that attendance, even when students do not graduate, has a measurable, positive effect on income (Rouse 1993, Kane and Rouse 1999). These benefits have also been identified for students who leave the labor market and return to school (Leigh and Gill 1997). Others have noted non-income related benefits of attendance (Gittell and Steffy 1998, Grubb 1999, Griffith and Connor 1994). However some, such as Brint and Karabel (1989), have argued that attending community college effectively limits future academic achievement and that students who are interested in pursuing a baccalaureate degree are ill-served by community colleges. In contrast, others argue that for many students, especially educationally and economically disadvantaged students, and for students who have performed poorly in high-school, community colleges provide a path to higher quality education beyond the community college (Hilmer 1997).

Although there does seem to be some evidence that some students revise their educational goals downward after attending community college as Kane and Rouse (1999) point out, these studies,

limit their analysis to students who have already started at a college. As a result, they not only miss an important component of the mission of community colleges-to include students

who ordinarily would not attend college—but they also bias their estimates of the effects of having been diverted from a four-year college on educational attainment (71).

The question of whether or not students who begin in four-year institutions and later drop out, also revise their educational goals downward, or whether students who attend community colleges have access to four-year institutions in the first place, have not been adequately considered and are important questions which remain to be examined.

While considerable attention has been focused on examining the income benefits to students who attend community college, far less attention has been paid to considerations of other possible benefits of college attendance. Critics often point to low graduation rates and other factors as indicators of a “crisis” in our community colleges. Interviews conducted with students who left LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York before the completion of a degree, demonstrate that students benefit from attending community college in many ways. Students’ responses also suggest that a continued focus on graduation rates as a primary measure of “success” of community colleges fails to take into account both the reasons why many students chose to attend community college and the reasons they leave.

In 1998, 250,000 students in New York State were enrolled in community colleges, representing half of all students enrolled in post-secondary public institutions and 25% of all post-secondary students in the state (McCall 1999). Because students continue to rely on the opportunities community colleges provide, it is increasingly important to explore the reasons which they cite for attending college, the factors which cause them to leave, as well as the ways in which they perceive they have been affected by the experience. While studies have often focused on whether or not students graduate, it is equally important to ask the questions why they attend and what benefits they feel they have received. The benefits students report may be less quantifiable than the measures of future income, but they represent positive and desirable outcomes nonetheless.

It is critical that we examine the factors which draw students to the community colleges, the reasons they leave, and the ways in which they benefit, in order to have more accurate measure not only of the institution’s “success,” but also to develop a more nuanced understanding of the multiple missions of CUNY’s community colleges and the important and meaningful ways in which students are affected by them. It is likely that many students will not only continue to consider CUNY’s community colleges as one of the *best* ways to have access to the programs and instruction they need, but also, as *the only* way to have it, particularly in light of the recent decision by the CUNY Board of Trustees to limit remediation at the senior colleges.

The current study of students who left LaGuardia follows-up on and largely validates the findings of *The Benefits of College Attendance: A Case Study of BMCC* by examining the reasons students who left LaGuardia cite for enrolling and for leaving, as well as the ways in which they may have benefitted from attending college. Students were also asked, among other things, about their employment status, both at the time of enrollment and at the time of the interview, what they would need in order to return, to describe programs which were particularly beneficial, and to make specific suggestions about what improvements could be made to increase the likelihood that they would achieve their self-defined goals for attending LaGuardia Community College.¹

As the findings of *The Benefits of College Attendance* (Gittell and Steffy 1998) demonstrate and this report verifies, many students do not enroll with the intention or the expectation of graduating, and furthermore those who do, often change their mind as they revise their plans and educational goals. Sometimes these changes are the result of a personal choice, but more often they are the result of a combination of constraining personal, family and economic factors. It is also important to keep in mind that the majority of students who have left school or have “not graduated,” view this condition as only temporary, and want to return as soon as they are in a position to do so. While it is true that students are in varied degrees of readiness and many will require considerable financial aid and guidance in order to return, most students reported substantial benefits, which again supports the idea that graduation rates do not tell the whole story and are limited measures of success for a community college.

One of the most important findings of the study of students at BMCC was that just over half the students indicated that they had enrolled for reasons other than to obtain a degree, however the overwhelming majority of them also indicated that they want to come back to school. At LaGuardia, the percentage of students wishing to obtain a degree was slightly higher, but still represents only about half of the students interviewed. What the findings of both studies demonstrate is that students use the community colleges for a variety of purposes to meet goals which they set—and continually revise—for themselves. Students we spoke with do not view themselves as “drop-outs” and consider the break in their studies only temporary a status which Griffith and Connor (1994) have referred to as “stop-out.” Many students are unsure when they will be able to return and they are likely to continue to drop-in and out of school as their economic,

¹ The complete survey instrument is provided in Appendix A.

academic, and life circumstances permit.

The students interviewed for this study view community colleges as a place where they can go to find out what they want and sometimes, equally importantly, what they don't want; to acquire necessary new skills; to prepare for further study; or for some, to earn a degree. Ideally, it is a place to learn, to experiment and to figure out where they want to go and what they want to do. Graduation therefore, cannot be considered either the most appropriate or accurate measure of success. It is also probable that as soon as these students are able, they will seek to transfer, often before graduating, as others do now. As Kane and Rouse (1999) conclude:

to the extent that the decision to enroll in college is an experiment for many, the anticipated outcome of that experiment may be sufficient to justify the public and private investment required, even if after running the experiment, students do not finish the degree (77-78).

CUNY community colleges must continue to be evaluated to ensure that articulation between CUNY senior and junior colleges allows those who wish to transfer to do so. At the same time, it is important to continue to explore and take into account the other non-transfer functions of, and the benefits created by community colleges.

It is often noted that non-traditional students are under-represented in much of the research on college attendance in general and on community college attendance in particular (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991, Kane and Rouse 1999, Griffith and Connor 1994). This study contributes to that literature by helping to further clarify the picture of student life at CUNY community colleges. Our research also adds a dimension to previous analysis because it demonstrates that students enter community colleges for different reasons and they benefit in ways which differ from those which have been previously identified. Interviews with CUNY community college students, who are largely non-traditional, demonstrate that students view the reasons they choose to enroll, the benefits which they receive, and the very pattern of their attendance in terms which to date have not fully been examined or expressed. Students at CUNY, like their counterparts elsewhere, continue to value the opportunities which community colleges provide as well as their flexibility which better suits their often changing needs and expectations.

Findings

Earlier studies conducted by the Howard Samuels Center have explored the question of why students leave school, *Why Good Students Leave CUNY*, (Gittell and Holdaway 1996) as well as the important question of why they chose to enroll and how they feel they have been affected by the college experience, *The Benefits of College Attendance* (Gittell and Steffy 1998). This study of students who left LaGuardia Community College before the completion of a degree replicates the study of leavers from BMCC, and again looks at all students, not just those in good academic standing. We interviewed 102 students from LaGuardia who originally enrolled in the Fall of 1995 who left school prior to the completion of a degree program. A total of 1130 students were called, resulting in a sample of 102 usable interviews.² For the most part, the 102 interviewees were similar to the entire group of leavers from 1995 in terms of ethnicity, prior educational background, age, gender, and comfort with English. The students interviewed came from all levels of academic standing and included students who had completed as many as 67 credits and as few as none.

While there is considerable and increasing literature on the economic benefits of sub-baccalaureate college attendance (Rouse 1998, Kane and Rouse 1999, Leigh and Gill 1997), this study along with *The Benefits of College Attendance*, contributes to that literature by providing evidence of other, less quantifiable, benefits. In addition, these interviews provide further insight into the college experience of “non-traditional” students who have often been at times excluded and often under-represented in the literature (Griffith and Conner 1994, Pascarella and Terenzini 1991). Although not without suggestions about how to make their experience better and the institution stronger, for students at LaGuardia, attending school was largely a rewarding experience which most would like, or have already begun, to continue.

² Please see the Methodology section of the paper for a more complete discussion.

While both BMCC and LaGuardia community colleges serve a diverse and largely minority student body, they differ in some notable aspects. At both BMCC and LaGuardia, the two largest groups of students were Blacks and Latinos however, at BMCC the Black student population was largest, while at LaGuardia it was the reverse.³ Fifty-one percent of the students at LaGuardia were born outside the US, while at BMCC that figure was only 39.8%. LaGuardia also has a greater number of students who are non-native English speakers. We were interested in examining any possible differences between native and non-native English speakers especially in terms of reason for leaving and whether or not they benefitted. A number of interviews were conducted in Spanish, and while few students chose “difficulties with English” as a primary reason for leaving, and most felt they benefitted, it was clear that some non-native speakers felt that ESL course work was sometimes burdensome and required a greater number of in-class hours than non-ESL work. Another complaint was that some interviewees felt that ESL students were asked to move into “regular” classes too quickly--in some cases after only one semester. Mixing non-ESL and English classes too soon we were told, caused some students to become frustrated and discouraged.

Table 1
Profile of Respondents
From LaGuardia Community College (percent)

Age	20-21	25.5
	22-23	37.3
	24-25	15.7
	26-29	7.8
	30-35	4.9
	over 40	8.8
Race/Ethnicity	White	16.7
	Black	24.5
	Latino	45.1

³Race and ethnicity are identified in the CUNY data using the terms “Black” and “Hispanic.” In this study Hispanic has been changed to Latino however the terms “Black” has been retained because no distinction is made in the data between African-American students and students of African descent who are not US citizens. In terms of the ethnicity question, a smaller percentage of the sample of students from LaGuardia chose “other,” only 2% ,as compared to 10.2% at BMCC.

	Asian	11.8
	Other	2.0
Place of Birth	USA	49.0
	Outside USA	51.0
Credits Completed	0	6.9
	0.5-12	30.4
	12.5-24	30.4
	24.5-36	18.6
	36.5-48	6.9

(table 1 continued)

	48.5 and above	6.9
GPA	0-.99	19.6
	1.0-1.99	31.4
	2.0-2.99	27.5
	3.0-4.0	21.6
Language	English	50.0
	Other	17.0
	Both	32.4

N=102

Most of the students we interviewed were 25 or under, and just over half told us that they were born outside the US. Half of the interviewees told us they were most comfortable speaking English, 32.4% said that they were equally comfortable in English and another language, and 17% indicated they were most comfortable in a language other than English.

Of the students interviewed, 32.4% had earned more than 24 credits, 13.8% of which had earned more than 36 credits. Some of the students, 6.9%, had earned no credits, indicating that they had either taken only remedial and other non-credit courses, or that they had dropped out before the completion of any course work. About 30% earned between .5 and 12 credits, and another 30.4% earned between 12.5 and

24 credits. About half the students we interviewed had GPA's below 2.0 while the other half had GPA's over 2.0. Almost 20 % of the students interviewed had a GPA of less than 1.0, and 21.6% had a GPA of 3.0 or better.

Aside from the differences between the students at LaGuardia and those at BMCC noted earlier, the students differed in terms of GPA and credits earned. Many of the students we spoke with at LaGuardia had completed more credits than those interviewed at BMCC. At LaGuardia 32.4% of the students interviewed had completed more than 24 credits, while at BMCC the percentage was 23.7% and while 37.3% had completed less than 12 credits, the corresponding figure for BMCC was 56%. In terms of students' GPAs, although percentages were comparable in the 1.0-1.99 GPA range, at LaGuardia a higher percentage of respondents had GPAs over 2.0 and fewer had GPAs below 1.0. While the students at BMCC were more likely to be positive the more credits they had earned, students at LaGuardia who had earned only a few credits were also positive. For the students interviewed at LaGuardia, length of time studying (based on credits earned) was not a predictor of negativity in terms of assessing possible benefits.

Status of Respondents

Student leavers are very positive about their college experiences and the majority of respondents told us that they either intended to return, had transferred elsewhere, or were already back in school. Only 7.8% of the students who left LaGuardia told us that they had done so permanently. Almost 59% percent told us that they intended to return, 28.4% told us that they had transferred to schools both within and outside CUNY, while 4.9% said that they were on a leave of absence or were already back in school at LaGuardia.⁴

Table 2
Current Academic Status of LaGuardia Respondents (percent)

"Dropped out" –Intends to Return	58.8
"Dropped out" –Permanently	7.8
Transferred CUNY	5.9
Transferred non-CUNY	22.5
Leave of Absence	2.0
Back in School	2.9

N=102

⁴In the time that elapsed between when the list of "leavers" was generated and when the students were interviewed, they were able to return to school.

The majority of students told us that they had left school temporarily, and only 7.8% of the interviewees from LaGuardia considered leaving school to be permanent. Furthermore, another 28.4% of students told us that they had already transferred to another school.⁵ Students often describe their patterns of attendance as necessarily intermittent due to a variety of pressing economic, personal, and academic concerns. They often note that they will more than likely continue to leave and return to school as their circumstances demand. While students often express a desire to attend on a more continuous basis, many are realistic about the fact that it is unlikely that they will not be able to do so at anytime in the near future.

The majority of students we spoke with (86.3%) told us that they were registered as full-time students and most told us that they had enrolled as full-time in order to receive financial aid. Those who registered as part-time were students who did not qualify for aid because they were foreign or did not meet economic requirements, those who recognized that they would be unable to handle full-time school combined with other work and family responsibilities, or those who registered full-time because they had wanted to finish their programs as quickly as possible, regardless of financial aid considerations.

Table 3
Registration Status of Respondents
at the Time of Original Enrollment (percent)

Registered Full-time	86.3
Registered Part-time	13.7
Registered Full-time in Order to Receive Aid	60.8

N=102

⁵The results from LaGuardia differ from BMCC in two ways, a slightly higher percentage of interviewees from LaGuardia told us that they had already transferred while 27.1% of BMCC students told us that they had “dropped-out permanently,”

The majority of students we interviewed were employed at the time they enrolled. Many were working full-time and were often working not only to support themselves but also their families. Sometimes students were supporting children of their own but often they were contributing to the support of parents and/or extended family. Other students indicated that while they were unemployed when they began college, they later had to take a job to meet new responsibilities that arose after they began school.

Table 4
LaGuardia Leavers Employment Status
at Time of Original Enrollment (percent)

Employed When Began College	55.9
Not Employed When Began College	43.1
Not Working Because Student	33.3
Working Only Part-time Because Student	11.8

N=102

Most of the students we spoke with were also currently employed. These who were not were often students or homemakers, although many were working in addition to caring for their children and families or in addition to being students elsewhere. Sometimes interviewees told us they were working two jobs, or were working jobs with particularly long hours which seriously limited their ability to return to school. Some of those who were not currently working told us that they were not working by choice, mostly because they were currently students or because they were caring for their children

Table 5

Current Employment Status of LaGuardia Leavers (percent)

Currently Working Full-time	52.0
Currently Working Part-time	13.7
Currently Not Working	33.3
Not Working/Not Looking for Work ⁶	14.7
Unemployed /Looking for Work	17.6

N=102

⁶ Those who were unemployed and not looking for work included those who were currently students, those who were currently caring for their children, and those, who for other reasons, were no longer looking for employment.

When asked if they would have attended part-time had financial aid been available, 35.3% said yes, 30.4% said no, while another 21.6% were not sure. While some students were certain that they would have attended part-time if they could have received financial aid, those who said they were “not sure” or “no,” expressed concerns about getting through their programs or finishing their work as quickly as possible. When considering their present circumstances, most students agreed that financial aid for part-time study would be very helpful. While students were interested in receiving comprehensive aid which would include money for tuition, books, and “support” in order to continue school on a full-time basis, the general consensus was that more aid was necessary for full-time and part-time study in order for them to be able to succeed.

To say that 58.8% of the students intended to return does not however, indicate that they will be able to at any particular time or that they have taken any specific steps or made a plan to do so. It is clear from the interviews that the serious economic and personal factors which often combine to present intractable obstacles, cannot be quickly or easily overcome. While some students have taken steps to re-enter such as beginning to make payments on tuition balances they owe or by retaking failed exams, others describe the process of coming back to school as daunting. Many will need not only financial help, but also guidance counseling and tutoring as well.

Reasons for Enrolling in College

The students at LaGuardia, like their counterparts at BMCC, cite a variety of reasons for enrolling in college. While 54.9% told us that they had originally intended to earn an Associate’s degree almost half, 45.1%, cited reasons other than “to earn a degree.” Some students told us that they had wanted to try college or to prepare to transfer to another school. Others indicated that they wanted to take a few courses or to study English. About 17% of the students told us they enrolled in order to “try college” or “for a few courses,” while 15.7% stated from the beginning they had intended to attend LaGuardia in order to “prepare to transfer.” While some students were quite focused about the programs they wanted to pursue at LaGuardia or were certain that they wanted to transfer, others had no specific plan for attending college.

Table 6
Leavers’ Primary Reason for Enrolling
at LaGuardia Community College (percent)

To Earn an Associate’s Degree	54.9
To Prepare to Transfer to Another School	15.7

To Earn an Associate's Degree	54.9
For a Few Courses	8.8
To Study English	6.9
Get a Course Not Offered at Another School	1.0
Improve Skills/Help Get a Job	3.9
Try College	6.9
Other	2.0

N=102

Students who were interested in transferring were often quite directed in their plans. As one student explained, "I enrolled to get a better GPA in order to transfer. I now attend SUNY: Stony Brook. All of the classes were very helpful." This student transferred after completing 24 credits but without completing an Associate's degree. Another student who is now at St. Johns University told us that, "from the beginning I knew that I wanted to transfer to a four-year school." After completing 17 credits with a 3.74 GPA he did move on to a BA program. Other students were realistic about the fact that they were not as prepared as they needed to be in order to enter a four-year institution and chose to attend LaGuardia in order to improve their skills. While some had previously been turned down by a four-year college, most chose to attend LaGuardia without having applied to a four-year institution.

Especially for recent immigrants and foreign students, attending community college was seen as a way not only to learn English but also to become acculturated and more familiar with the American educational system. One 39-year-old student told us that she went to high-school in Korea and originally wanted to attend a four-year college but realized she was not fully prepared to enroll. She applied to LaGuardia to improve her English and to get ready to transfer. One foreign student noted that community college in particular, provided a more affordable way to get the courses she needed to prepare to enter a four-year institution in the US, while at the same time providing her the opportunity to become more familiar with the American college system. As another student explained, "I went to LaGuardia to study English and to improve my skill to help me get a job, but also to get acquainted with the American college environment."

For other recent immigrants, attending LaGuardia was an important opportunity to learn English and to prepare for further study. One woman from Peru had enrolled at LaGuardia after earning her GED. She said that her primary goal was to improve her English skills, but she hoped to eventually continue her studies

toward a degree. Another woman from the Dominican Republic told us that she recently moved to the US with her two children. Although a doctor in the Dominican Republic, she enrolled at LaGuardia to improve her English skills which she described as “limited.” She also wanted to pursue a degree in physical therapy and to eventually become a certified physician in this country. For her, LaGuardia was one of the first steps in an extended educational plan.

A substantial number of students told us that they were not really sure what they wanted to do and had enrolled at LaGuardia to try to find out. As one student put it, “I enrolled at LaGuardia to explore—to learn what I could learn.” Another student explained, “I knew I wasn’t going to a four-year college—I wanted to go to school to learn a few subjects—to try some things.” Others expressed the feeling that after graduating from high-school they were uncertain about where to go or what to do and thought going to LaGuardia was a relatively inexpensive and “low-stress” way to figure it out. While it is clear that many students were quite directed in their intentions and had specific expectations of outcomes, others were more uncertain. It is also evident that students adjust their plans both by choice and out of necessity. Students often indicate that they want to be able to continue but as noted earlier, they are uncertain when, or sometimes if, they will be able to return.

In a study of entering freshman in 1997 by the LaGuardia Community College Office of Institutional Research, students were asked about their reasons for going to college and about their expectations and plans (*1997 New Student Survey Report 1998*). Although the questions were asked differently and at different points in time than in this study, students indicated that, “discovering personal and career goals,” “to be able to earn more money,” “to become an educated or cultured person,” “to get a better job,” or “to prepare for further college” as very important to them. One notable difference was that 70% of the entering freshman students indicated that they intended to stay at LaGuardia until they graduated. This figure is considerably higher than the percentage of leavers who told us they intended to earn a degree and is likely the result of the difference in the way the question was phrased and the point in time at which the question was asked. Only 15% of the entering freshman indicated that they planned to stop at an Associate’s degree and 71.5% indicated that they intended to transfer. These numbers are not necessarily incompatible with our findings as interviewees in this study were not specifically asked how far they planned, or wanted to continue their studies. While there are differences, considerable numbers of entering freshman indicate in the survey that they feel there is some possibility that they will transfer to another school, will need more than two years to graduate, or will attend some semesters part-time.

The 1997 New Student Survey Report concludes that:

...by and large the students are working-class people, many of color who come from families not likely to have a college tradition, most enjoyed few educational resources previously and did not excel in school. Arriving at community college they are unfamiliar with higher education protocols and expectations, are uncertain of future possibilities and concern, perhaps doubt, about their ability to perform well in college. They seek guidance and hope to find opportunities to develop their potential as well as to prepare for satisfying and well-paying work (1998 15).

The same can be said of the students we interviewed who have left LaGuardia. Because they have left school, they are perhaps even more uncertain about their future and are even more concerned with receiving the guidance which they hope will enable them to achieve their goals. However, while they are equally hopeful about continuing to study, they are perhaps sobered by the reality of the financial and time burdens that post-secondary education and the responsibilities of their everyday lives present.

Reasons for Leaving LaGuardia

Students rarely cite a single reason for leaving school and often viewed having to leave as the result of a connected series of factors. As with the earlier studies for why students leave school, overall the primary reason for leaving was financial. Students lacked either money to meet their responsibilities outside of school and had to take on additional job responsibilities, or sufficient money to pay for school in addition to those responsibilities. Insufficient aid or problems with financial aid were also a factor. Though not entirely unrelated to the financial reasons for leaving, the second largest category was personal and family issues followed by education related issues. Interviews were conducted in Spanish with students who felt more comfortable doing so in order to specifically address concerns about the effects that a lack of English proficiency has on students. While clearly English proficiency is a complicating factor (sometimes for native speakers as well, as indicated by failure rates on CUNY writing and reading exams), only 3.9% of the students cited “difficulties with English” as their primary reason for leaving.

The one major difference in reason for leaving between men and women was that while men cite “lack of money” as their primary reason for leaving, women cite “pregnancy.” By necessity pregnancy includes issues of family, economic, and time concerns which combine to make attending college difficult. The interviews clearly demonstrate that additional financial burdens coupled with the critical lack of affordable childcare either at LaGuardia or elsewhere, is a significant barrier to women’s continued attendance.

Similar to the findings of earlier studies of students who left CUNY schools, LaGuardia students, unless they had already transferred elsewhere, are interested in returning and consider being out of school only a

temporary setback. While some students are specific about what they would need to return to school such as financial aid, access to more and better guidance counseling, access to childcare and more convenient class schedules, others are less certain, and have simply chosen to transfer or indicated that they have achieved their immediate educational goals.

Table 7
LaGuardia Community College Students' Primary Reason for Leaving (percent)

Education Related:		Personal and Family Issues	
Low Overall GPA	7.8	Pregnancy	10.8
Difficulties with English	3.9	Overwhelmed by Work, School, Family	6.9
Problems with a Professor/Class	2.0	Unspecified Personal/ Family Problems	4.9
Failed CUNY Writing Exam	1.0	Moved	2.0
Failed CUNY Math Exam	1.0	Death in the Family	1.0
Financial and Job Related:		Devote More Time to Children	1.0
Lack of Money	20.6	Administrative and Scheduling:	
Financial Aid Problems	6.9	Class Not Offered/Schedule Conflict	2.9
New Job/Additional Job Responsibilities	3.9	Lack of/Poor Counseling	2.9
Transferred to Another School Because:		Closed Out of Classes	1.0
Wanted Specific Program/Changed Major	13.8	Problems with Registration	1.0
Different/Better Faculty	1.0	Other	3.9

N=102

Table 8
LaGuardia Community College Students' Secondary Reason for Leaving (percent)

Education Related:		Personal and Family Issues	
Found Work Too Difficult	4.0	Devote More Time to Kids	3.9
Failed Reading/Writing Test	3.0	Got Married	2.9
Not Accepted in Program/Low GPA	1.0	Pregnancy	2.9
Problems With a Professor or Class	1.0	Unspecified Personal /Family Problems	2.0
Financial and Job Related:		Childcare Needs	1.0
Financial Aid Problems	11.7	Illness	1.0
Lack of Money	7.8	Administrative and Scheduling	
New/Additional Job Responsibilities	5.9	Registration	2.9
Increase in Tuition	1.0	Closed Out of Class	2.0
Transferred Because:		Course Not Offered	2.0
Wanted a Specific Program	6.9	Lack of/Poor Counseling	1.0
Wanted Better Faculty	1.0	Other	
Wanted Smaller Classes	1.0	No Second Choice	
			31.4

N=102

Money and Time

The picture of student life that emerges from the interviews with students is a schedule crowded with too many classes coupled with too many job and family responsibilities. While 7% of the students we spoke to told us that their primary reason for leaving was that they were overwhelmed by work family and school responsibilities, another 22% specifically mentioned “being overwhelmed” at other points during the interview. As one student described her experience, “I left because I was ill. I basically had a nervous breakdown. I was working two jobs and attending LaGuardia full-time.” While her case may seem extreme, many students feel that it was a combination of economic and academic factors which caused them to leave school. Students describe being unable to put together a schedule of classes that was compatible with their work schedules. Others noted that even if they could get the necessary classes, they had no time to study. Several acknowledged that while there was support available at LaGuardia such as guidance and tutoring, these sources were not always offered during the hours which the students were available. For

many students, in the competition between work, family, and school, it was school that had to be sacrificed. Some students noted that although they needed financial aid, they did not qualify according to the guidelines. Others said that although they started school receiving financial aid, they later lost it. Students lost their aid in some cases because they got married or their circumstances changed in some way causing them to become ineligible. A few interviewees told us that they lost their aid because their grades dropped. These students felt that their grades had dropped primarily because they were working too much to be able to keep up with full-time class loads.⁷

As noted, students rarely separate their reasons for leaving but instead describe them as connected issues. For example, if students cite a low GPA as a reason for leaving, they often describe the cause of that low GPA as taking on a new job or new family responsibilities which took time away from their studies and resulted in poor grades. As one student described, “I planned to be at LaGuardia for about a year and a half and then transfer to Baruch, but that got shot because my grades dropped—I was doing too much with work –there was too much on my plate and school was the last thing on it [but] I want to go back in the fall.” As another student described:

I was going to school full-time but then my average dropped too low because I was trying to work full-time and go to school full-time and I realized that’s kind of impossible to do. When I started school, I was working part-time but I left that job for a work study job but it wasn’t enough. So, I found a full-time job at night but my GPA dropped so low I lost my financial aid.

Although some students want to attend full-time in the hopes of completing their programs quickly, many register for full-time course loads because it is the only way to qualify for financial aid. Most quickly realize that attending full-time, working full-time and keeping up with their family responsibilities is difficult, if not impossible to do.

⁷Financial aid continues to be a major concern for students. While aid is primarily awarded to eligible full-time students, based on the data from the interviews with students at BMCC, Interim Chancellor Kimmich was able to push for the initiation of a pilot program to award financial aid to part-time students.

While most of the problems which cause students to leave school could be viewed as either the direct or indirect result of economic considerations, the specific lack of money to pay for tuition, books, and even transportation was a major primary and secondary reason for leaving for both men and women. Some students had to leave because they were unable to register because they were behind in their payments, while others left before their financial situation got out of hand, knowing that it was headed in that direction if they were to continue. Students often leave to get their finances back in order before returning as in the case of a woman who told us, “I had a really positive experience at LaGuardia. I only left because I got behind in paying my tuition. When it’s paid off, I want to return.” Similarly another man told us, “my options about returning are open—there were many benefits to attending. Above all, LaGuardia was a great, great school—the professors really cared. I only left because financial problems caused me to leave.” Community college students who are often in continually precarious financial positions, are likely to drop in and out of school and change schools as their financial situations demand.

Personal and Family Issues

While meeting family responsibilities was also a consideration for men and a few men we spoke with specifically indicated that they left school in order to work to support new families, women continue to bear the primary burden of dealing with pregnancy and the needs of their children, or the pressures of a new marriage. The responsibility for caring for children and dealing with other family issues remained squarely on the shoulders of the women we spoke with and continues to be an obstacle to finishing school. As one new mother described it, “I couldn’t work and go to school while I was pregnant and I knew that I had to keep my job. I was working like a dog and going to school at night and on Saturday—it was too much.” As another student explained, “I left LaGuardia because it was too difficult to be a parent and go to school full-time. I enrolled in the New York Restaurant school where I can go to class two days a week on Saturday and Sunday.” By going to school on the weekend, other family members were able to look after her children. She also indicated that she chose her program because even though she was only going to school on weekends, she would be able to finish school more quickly and graduate with what she felt were immediately marketable skills. In addition to being better suited to her life in terms of demands on her time, her new program was also providing much needed financial aid.

Table 9

**LaGuardia Students' Primary Reason
for Leaving by Gender (percent)**

Men	
Lack of Money	30.0
Low GPA	12.5
Overwhelmed by Work/School/Family	10.0
Women	
Pregnancy	17.7
Transferred	16.1
Lack of Money	14.5

N=102

While a few women said that they were happy with their new role as mothers and described staying home as a “choice,” others noted that their decision was strongly influenced by their economic situation and the lack of available childcare. Most mothers including the “homemakers by choice,” specifically mentioned a need for greater access to childcare. The availability of quality affordable childcare, preferably at LaGuardia, was often described as a basic necessity in order to be able to return to school.

One woman who had completed 23.5 credits began attending LaGuardia full-time, switched to part-time when she became pregnant and finally dropped out after giving birth. At the time of the interview, she had just returned to school because her daughter had finally been accepted into the day care program at LaGuardia after being on the waiting list for a long time. As she explains:

having childcare available made all the difference. They were talking about cutting the program, but I definitely think that there are a lot of people who wouldn't make it to school without the childcare. I love our program. My daughter has a speech problem. She has made so much improvement the doctor says she might not even need additional therapy. She has made such an improvement just from the teachers there and talking there.

While happy with her current situation she adds that, “there was a long waiting list and I tried for a year to get my first children in the program but they kept telling me they couldn't do it.” Although she feels the

childcare and access to it has improved, she is concerned that it remains limited.⁸

From the interviews, it is clear that much needs to be done to support mothers in their efforts to return to school. It is also important to note that these issues were obstacles for married women as well as single mothers and that it is often a combination of factors which cause women to drop out. For example, one woman explained to us, "I had to work and then I no longer qualified for financial aid. I also had a baby so I had to drop out. It was a combination of having a baby and financial aid problems." Women who left school because of pregnancy were often enthusiastic in their desire to return and specific about what they would need in order to do so. As one woman put it, "I definitely want to come back but I need that nursery! That, and financial aid!" Another young mother suggested that a "scholarship for new mothers who are good students," would be a particularly good idea. In general, women with children felt that more needed to be done to address their particular needs. Access to childcare must be increased and financial will have to be adjusted to better address the needs of working and non-working mothers in order for them to be able to stay in school.

Academic and Scheduling Problems

Often, students who indicated that they left school because they had low GPA's or had failed their CUNY assessment exams, felt that their grades had suffered because they had to work too much or because work and family responsibilities left them with too little time to devote to studying. There were some students who felt that they did not have adequate or appropriate counseling or tutoring. One student whose particular problem was with the CUNY Math Exam explained, "I took the remedial math class . . . It was a fast track class and the students were not prepared to take the test. We got no assistance. The math lab had only two tutors to tutor 40 or more students. I put in so much time but I did not get the help I needed." Although frustrated, she wants to return and has already retaken the Math Exam in order to do so. While math was a stumbling block for a number of students, English (especially writing) was a concern for some native and

⁸ Several respondents stated that their children had benefitted from childcare programs at LaGuardia Community College and many noted the importance of having daycare available close to where they would be taking classes.

non-native speakers alike and a number of students expressed the need for additional tutoring in specific subjects.

Another issue for students, cited as both a reason for leaving and expressed as a general concern, was the availability of classes or specific programs. One student told us that while he liked LaGuardia and felt that it had prepared him well, he had to transfer due to the lack of availability of classes in the program he wanted. “The Physical Therapy Assistant program, which is a two-year program, would have taken five years to complete because of the wait for classes. I would have stayed at LaGuardia if it weren’t for the wait for classes,” he explained. Another older student left LaGuardia for another school after just one semester. While he had done well and liked the professors and the school, he was surprised and disappointed to learn of the limited availability of his desired program:

I don’t think that the professors and coordinators of the Occupational Therapy Program were honest with the students with regard to the number of seats for the program. Something like 400 candidates apply for 35 seats! I think they should have been more honest and told the students that the program was over-crowded.

Again, this student would have preferred to remain at LaGuardia but felt that he had to transfer in order to pursue his immediate educational goals.

The times classes and support programs such as tutoring were available was also mentioned as problematic. One student told us that “the classes need to be offered when I am free to take them. I had problems putting together a schedule.” Another student told us that he left LaGuardia because “the required classes were not offered in a logical sequence. I was at school from 8:00am to 8:00pm—it was too much!” For many students getting the classes they needed or were required to take, was difficult due to lack of availability of classes coupled with their demanding work schedules and other family concerns.

For some, availability of counseling was a major issue. One student said that for him the primary problem was a lack of counseling and that there were “not enough options” in the types of classes and numbers of sections available because there were too many students and classes were often closed. As he explained, “there wasn’t just one person who cares about you. There weren’t enough classes for so many students and I would have to speak to several counselors. There wasn’t just one person who kept my file.” Others shared his concerns and noted that sometimes there was wasn’t enough continuity from one semester to the next in terms of counseling and guidance

Wanted to Transfer or Wanted a Specific Program

While 28.4% of the students we interviewed indicated that they had transferred, only 14.8% indicated that this was their primary reason for leaving. Students left LaGuardia for both positive and negative reasons. As mentioned earlier, some students had planned from the start to transfer and later did so. Others left, often reluctantly, in pursuit of programs which were not available or because other schools offered different or more convenient programs which better suited their needs. In a few cases some students were offered better financial aid packages by other schools and therefore transferred. A few others transferred to other schools because of unsatisfactory experiences at LaGuardia.

One woman, now working full-time as a flight attendant had started at LaGuardia, left to complete a specific program elsewhere and subsequently changed her career plans altogether. As she explained, “I did one year at LaGuardia and then transferred to another school for paralegal studies where I finished after nine months. That is the reason I left. I didn’t have any problems.” Another student who left LaGuardia after completing 52 credits, but without obtaining a degree simply said, “I wanted to go to a private university to get my BA so, I transferred to NYU.” Because the student knew that he wanted to continue and was accepted at a four-year college, completing his Associate’s degree at LaGuardia was neither a priority nor a necessity for him.

A few students left LaGuardia because the program was not meeting their needs in some way. For example, one student told us that LaGuardia “shattered” his confidence because he felt like he wasn’t making enough progress. “I felt like I was constantly having to repeat remedial work and [when you are in remedial classes] you receive report cards that say zero credits,” he explained. The student transferred to another school where he could get “more personal attention and where I could earn credits right away instead of repeating remedial classes.” However, this was by far more the exception than the rule. The majority of students who had transferred told us that they did so for largely positive reasons, such as to pursue new options like different majors or degrees not available at LaGuardia, or because they had been offered better financial aid options elsewhere.

Student Profile: Erica

Erica’s story was typical of many students with whom we spoke. She cited a combination of economic and other reasons for leaving, wants to return as soon as she can, and recognizes that attending college, even without graduating, has already had a positive impact on her life in very specific ways. Most notably, she said that attending college “showed me a lot about responsibility, and helped me find a job.”

Erica said that when she enrolled it was with the intention of earning an Associate’s degree in Human

Services. She first took a work-study job working part-time but soon found that it “didn’t pay enough.” After a year of looking she found a job working full-time at a medical center. From her description, it was evident that her reasons for leaving LaGuardia were both economic and academic:

I was going to school full-time but then my average dropped too low because I was trying to work full-time and go to school full-time and I realized that’s kind of impossible to do. When I started school, I was working part-time but I left that job for a work-study job but it wasn’t enough. So, I found a full-time job at night but my GPA dropped so low I lost my financial aid. It took me one year to find the job that I have now, with benefits and that pays well enough. I work in the day and I want to go back to school at night. Luckily my program has night classes; some programs don’t.

I went in for the AA in Human Services [because] I realized that you’re very limited if you don’t have a degree. I want to go back to school because when you go out there for jobs there is so much competition and you know you need a degree. Going to school did pay off. I did put it on my resume that I went to school and some of the classes helped—they related to what I am doing.

Erica wants to return to LaGuardia because, although she had to leave, she felt that the classes were beneficial and the guidance counselors, in particular, were very supportive. However, although she would like to return, she is uncertain when she will be able to and expects that when she does it may be on a part-time basis, given the fact that she is working full-time and financial issues remain a consideration.

Leavers Benefit from Attending College

While there is considerable evidence to support the argument that college attendance, even without earning a degree, has at least some positive impact on an individual’s future earnings (Rouse 1993, Kane and Rouse 1999, Leigh and Gill 1997), this study adds another dimension to these conclusions providing further, qualitative evidence of the benefits of attending community college. It also supports further consideration of the far reaching potential impact of community colleges, not only on the individuals who choose to attend them but also on their families, surrounding communities, and society as a whole.

The college students at LaGuardia were almost uniformly positive in their assessments of whether or not attending had benefitted them in some way. Only 5.9% of the students told us that they did not feel they had benefitted in any substantial way. Preparing for further study or to transfer was cited as both the largest primary benefit (36.3%) and secondary benefit (20.6%). Improving English, learning new skills, and discovering new interests were also important primary benefits, while making new friends and contacts and improving skills, were cited as important secondary benefits. Many students also mentioned that LaGuardia’s supportive, multi-cultural environment was both a benefit and an important factor contributing

to other benefits. While they were unanimous in the view that they had benefitted, and those who had not transferred elsewhere were interested in returning to LaGuardia, many students suggested that there were ways in which LaGuardia could be improved to better meet their needs. For the majority however, these concerns did not preclude benefitting from attendance.

In our study of BMCC, there was a distinct dichotomy between students who were very positive about their experience and those who were negative about it. The students at BMCC who said they had not benefitted were critical and often felt that no one cared or had taken the time to help them. They described feeling like they had been “lost in the system” and found neither support networks of fellow students nor the appropriate counseling or guidance from faculty or staff which they said they needed. At BMCC those who were positive seemed to have managed to be connected to various support networks, to find peer support groups, counseling, and the tutoring they needed. These students left not because of negative experiences at BMCC, but due to family, financial, and other pressures. At LaGuardia this was not the pattern. Instead, almost all students were very positive about LaGuardia and interested in returning. At the same time, they noted areas for improvement such as overcrowded class rooms and occasional problems with counseling or guidance as relatively minor issues which, although a concern, did not have a strong negative impact on their consideration of the ways in which they had benefitted. Most of the students who told us that they had not benefitted simply felt that they had not attended LaGuardia long enough to benefit from it. Only a few students told us, similar to their counterparts at BMCC, that they had not gotten the help they needed or that they felt isolated and alone.

Table 10
Leaver’s Primary Benefits of Attending
LaGuardia Community College (percent)

Helped Find a New or Better Job	4.9
Earn More Money	1.0
Learn New or Improve Skills	11.8
Discover New Interests/Areas of Study and Abilities	14.7
Make New Contacts	1.0

Prepare for Further Study	19.6
Prepare to Transfer	16.7
Improved Confidence and Self-Esteem	5.9
Make New Friends	2.9
Improved Written and/or Spoken English	10.8
Other	4.9
Did Not Benefit	5.9

N=102

Table 11
Leaver's Secondary Benefits of Attending
LaGuardia Community College (percent)

Earn More Money	2.0
Learn New /Improve Skills	16.7
Discover New Interests/Areas of Study and Abilities	3.9
Make New Contacts	2.9
Prepare for Further Study	11.8
Help Prepare to Transfer	8.8
Improved Confidence and Self-Esteem	2.9
Helped Relationships with Family/Kids	2.0
Made New Friends	12.7
Improved Written and/or Spoken English	8.8
Other	3.9
No Second Choice	23.5

N=102

Preparing to Transfer or for Further Study

In light of the fact that 31.3% of the students had either transferred to other institutions or had already returned to LaGuardia, it is not surprising that 36.3% of the students interviewed told us that their primary benefit of attendance had been to prepare them to transfer or for further study. Combined with the students who indicated these factors as a secondary benefit of attendance, a total of 56.9% of the students

mentioned preparing to transfer or for further study as a benefit. While most students transferred to public or private four-year institutions, some transferred either to private two-year colleges or to proprietary schools. Most felt that attending LaGuardia had prepared them well--sometimes better than their fellow students--for their continued education. Those who chose, "prepare for future study," included both those who indicated an interest in transferring to another school as well as those interested in returning to LaGuardia.

Improving Skills and Discovering New Interests and Abilities

Another important group of benefits were those associated with acquiring new skills and discovering new interests and abilities. Some students specifically entered LaGuardia to find out what they liked to do, and what they might be good at doing, while others made these discoveries en route to other goals. Some credited attending LaGuardia with helping them make important decisions about future careers or courses of study. Other students noted particular improvements in areas such as math or in their speech and composition skills. One woman, a native English speaker told us attending LaGuardia "really improved my writing and speaking skills, and taught me how to do research. We had to write a paper a week--I really liked that."

Another student who wants to transfer to Queens College to pursue her new interests told us, "I did learn a lot at LaGuardia. I went for a mental health program and did an internship and I realized that I liked working with kids more than adults, so I switched to developmental [psychology]." Another student echoed her sentiments telling us, "I will go to Lehman next year to do my BA in Social Work and then I want to go on for my MSW. I am interested in that career. The program at LaGuardia got me interested in social work." Some students who thought they knew what they wanted to study were able to clarify their goals and switch to different majors as a result of attending LaGuardia. For other students who were not certain about what they wanted to study, trying different classes and majors helped them to choose a major or specific program. In both cases, sometimes the decision to chose a specific major or program led students to transfer to other schools, within and outside CUNY, in order to pursue their goals.

ESL Courses and Improving English

The ESL students we spoke with were all pleased with the results of attending programs at LaGuardia. They noted improvement in all areas of their language skills including reading, speaking, and writing. Students whose primary purpose was to improve their English skill were largely satisfied with their accomplishments. Some students who considered ESL classes the first step in a longer course of study expressed some frustration. As noted earlier, only 3.9% of the students felt that their problems with English were sufficient to be their primary reason for leaving. However, it is clear that ESL classes and the pressures of acquiring a new language are important concerns for students.

Students were quick to point out that the demands of ESL classes, especially when combined with other course work, were overly burdensome. Some felt that they had been required to move into “regular” classes too quickly. As one woman described, “ESL students had to take more class hours than other students. They’ve been attacking us more than anybody else. With ESL and reading it was more than 20 hours [of class] per week. It was so hard for me.” Another ESL student explained:

Because of my poor English, I tried to combine taking ESL classes and credit classes but I could not move forward in my major. I dropped out because I was extremely frustrated about the pressure school put on me even though I was trying really hard to learn English. ESL students need to take credit subjects. In your second semester you have to take six credits [in addition to ESL work]. I ended up taking credit classes I was not interested in so that I was allowed to register for ESL.

This student did want to move on to other course work at LaGuardia when she was more proficient in writing and speaking English.

While the needs of ESL students and the requirements of academic programs must be balanced, these and other student’s comments raise concerns about the amount of total course work students can effectively manage in a semester. All students, not just ESL students, note the difficulty of balancing course work with the responsibilities of their everyday lives. Not surprisingly, ESL students also note these problems and suggest that in some ways their burden is even greater than for those who are already proficient in English. Community colleges not only help non-native speakers improve their English skills, they also help acculturate them to American academic institutions and society as a whole. As such, it would seem important to examine ways in which ESL and other community college class work can be designed to better address this student population’s needs. Overall, students were quite satisfied with their progress and the work they were doing in their ESL classes and were often eager to resume their studies, but were concerned that they would not be able to manage the required course loads.

Multi-cultural Atmosphere and the Effects of Socialization

Much attention has been paid to the direct economic benefits of college attendance, both for the individuals who attend school and for the businesses which need well-trained workers. What has often been overlooked is the degree to which community colleges can and do, according to the students, help to create environments in which people of different cultures can learn to live and work together as well as learn what it means to do so in the United States. It is readily evident that LaGuardia has succeeded in creating an atmosphere in which students from many cultures and backgrounds feel not only comfortable, but welcomed. Foreign students, recent immigrants, and longtime residents, praised LaGuardia as an institution which not only reflects the diversity of Queens, but also helps to create an environment which fosters connections and new networks between individuals and groups of varying cultures.

A number of students noted that attending LaGuardia had brought them into contact with many people from outside their own cultural backgrounds which had important, positive effects on their lives. As one student told us, "I learned by meeting people from other cultures. It helped me deal with life in New York City." Another student described LaGuardia in this way, "it is a great atmosphere. It is a really cultural school, which is important because it is in Queens. The students help each other a lot and that's good." Other students noted the importance of the support of fellow students and teachers and the "culturally open" environment for learning. Whether making new contacts and friends, or simply working as a team with fellow students from other cultures, interviewees said that LaGuardia provided important opportunities and growth experiences.

Some recent immigrants spoke of feeling comfortable at LaGuardia which made it easier to adjust to a new institution and environment. One recent immigrant from Asia said that attending LaGuardia had helped her "assimilate with the culture," which she felt was critical to her future success. Another student from the Dominican Republic felt that attending LaGuardia had helped her when she transferred to the New York Institute of Technology, a four-year school, after a couple of semesters of course work. One student from Cuba who is in his late fifties told us, "my experience at LaGuardia was very good overall. I got a better job and I am now the head of a department. I studied ESL and I have continued to study English. But, I am most thankful to LaGuardia because as an immigrant, I was welcome."

Other students noted that the atmosphere and the opportunity to meet people from other cultures not only taught them a lot, but also added to their sense of self-confidence and self-worth which was for them, perhaps the most important benefit of their work at LaGuardia. As one young woman noted, "***I learned*** because of them [the teachers and fellow students]. They helped me improve as a person." As another

student put it, “. . . thinking about it I don’t think I developed any one particular interest. The best thing I got from LaGuardia was from my peers. I learned a lot from my peers about team work and having that attitude.”

Other students, both those who had already gone on to pursue further education and those who had not, noted the positive effect attending college had on their lives. One man who has already transferred said “the best thing for me about my experience at LaGuardia is that it improved my confidence. It has also opened up doors to other universities and I want to continue studying. I have continued going to school and that has already been a positive experience.” Another woman who was currently out of school because she had a baby, describes her experience in this way: “Even if I don’t go back to LaGuardia, I have developed an interest in education. LaGuardia has mostly impacted my personal life. I made a lot of friends and enjoyed the college atmosphere. I have no complaints—the professors worked really hard.” She told us that she is interested in pursuing a degree in bilingual education, but that she would need childcare in order to come back to school.

Student Profile: Grace

Grace did not graduate from LaGuardia but she has gone on to make the most of her experience at LaGuardia and perhaps typifies the ideal community college success story. At age 43, Grace has just completed her BA and is moving on to begin a Master’s degree in Education at Adelphi University. Entering LaGuardia with a GED, Grace completed 30 credits at LaGuardia maintaining a 3.6 GPA before deciding to transfer to a four-year college. “I went to LaGuardia to get the AA and while I was there I found that I really wanted to continue and now I am getting my MA at Adelphi. LaGuardia was the whole reason why I succeeded. Had it been a bad experience at LaGuardia, I would have been, like, forget it. I really owe it all to LaGuardia,” she explains.

Grace is enthusiastic about her experience at LaGuardia and notes that she only left to pursue a degree that wasn’t available there. In fact, she insists, she wishes that she could have stayed at LaGuardia to earn her BA and even her MA, but she is certain that it was LaGuardia that prepared her for continuing her education. “I don’t know if I would have graduated college had I not been at LaGuardia. I had such good teachers there. When you are a freshman, you’re in a cluster of students—it was the greatest experience I’ve ever had. Every single experience was great. I never had a question [about] what they wanted or what was required—and this stuff was all new to me. I got the foundation I needed, and when I transferred I saw that others didn’t have it.”

As an older student with a GED, Grace felt that LaGuardia gave her a chance to prove herself, and the confidence which allowed her to go on to further her education. She left LaGuardia before graduating because it made sense for her life as she revised her educational goals as a result of the work she'd done at LaGuardia. Technically, Grace is listed as a "drop-out" but she is certainly an example of a LaGuardia success story.

Students' Concerns

To say that the majority of students were positive, many very positive, about their experience at LaGuardia does not imply that they did not raise issues, express concerns, or suggest areas for improvement. The issues some students raised help to explain why some students transferred or others experienced some difficulties at LaGuardia. Over-crowded classes, problems with counseling, poor coordination of classes and schedules, and a lack of financial aid were most often cited as concerns. While these issues did not preclude benefitting from attendance, students discussed them primarily in order to suggest ways in LaGuardia could be improved.

One of the main concerns of students was that classes were over-crowded making it difficult for them to get the contact with the professors they felt they needed. Others said that sometimes they were closed out of classes altogether. Some students were concerned that their counselors were often overloaded and they regretted not being assigned to one specific counselor who followed their progress. They told us that sometimes they would have to speak to several different counselors in order to register for a semester, or that they had to change counselors from one semester to the next.

Another problem which troubled students was getting the classes they needed at the times they were available to take them. This was especially difficult for students in majors or concentrations in which classes followed a specific sequence. Students noted that the sequences "weren't logical" and that sometimes they would have a class starting at 8:00am and 8:00pm on the same day. Several students told us that they felt LaGuardia should make a better effort to make the classes they needed available at different times and that they had transferred to schools with programs which better fit their schedules. As this student described, "I left school because I had difficulty coordinating working full-time, maintaining my family responsibilities and going to school. The classes need to be offered when I am free to take them. I had problems before putting together a schedule." Others told us that they had transferred to schools which offered classes and programs at night and on weekends which better suited their schedules.

Some students noted that there were particular scheduling concerns for those trying to get into the more

popular programs and that sometimes even getting a place in them was difficult because the demand was so great. One student told us that he reluctantly left LaGuardia because he was told there was no space for him in the program he wanted. While he would have preferred to stay at LaGuardia, he transferred after completing two classes, earning As in both of them. Like many CUNY colleges, even though there is a demand for programs and specific classes, budget constraints limit LaGuardia's ability to provide spaces in programs, sometimes even for highly qualified applicants.

What is clear from the interviews, was that when financial, academic and guidance counseling was available, tutoring programs worked, classes were available, and schedules were coordinated, the students did well. Students who did poorly often felt isolated and alienated. They struggled with school and eventually dropped out. A recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* addressed the issue of retention of college freshman at four-year institutions, but some of the issues they raise and the solutions they propose also apply to community colleges. The article notes that there is an average 26.4% dropout rate at four-year colleges. Not surprisingly, "selective" colleges have the lowest rate, 8.8%, while "open" institutions have the highest, 46.2%. Students at community colleges are the very type of students that four-year institutions have identified as being at "high-risk" for dropping out: students who plan to work more than 20 hours a week, who took few college preparatory classes, and/or performed poorly in high-school (Reisberg 1999).

Many four-year institutions are implementing a variety of programs such as increasing students' personal connection with counselors and professors, clustering students together in specific sequences of classes, offering tuition credits, and encouraging students to get more involved with campus activities (Reisberg 1999). Clearly solutions such as trying to get students more involved with campus life and with fellow students is difficult, at best, at a commuter college where so many students also have heavy work and family responsibilities. However, more contact with counselors and professors, as well as better coordination of classes through sequencing and clustering, is in line with what LaGuardia students themselves have identified as areas for improvement.

What these issues and proposed solutions suggest, is the need for greater funding in order to provide more counselors, more class sections with fewer students combined with higher levels of tuition assistance (or a lower tuition rate) to help meet the needs of the students who attend community colleges. Tuition rates in New York's public colleges have increased to the point where they are among the highest in the nation--only students at Vermont's public colleges pay higher tuition. For the 1997-98 academic year, the national average for tuition and fees was almost \$1500 for students at public two-year institutions, while at CUNY

community colleges tuition was \$2500 (McCall 1999). While tuition has increased at CUNY, demand for many programs and courses has also increased, although course offerings have declined causing class size to swell. Given these conditions it is not surprising that students continue to drop in and out of community colleges or transfer to other schools before completing their degrees, and that consequently graduation rates at CUNY's community colleges are low.

Conclusion

The future of American community colleges is the subject of ongoing research and debate. As Griffith and Connor (1994) note, discussions of higher education continue to mistakenly define the high-school graduate who enrolls in a four-year college and who progress in a linear trajectory toward a degree, as the norm. This is problematic as they point out because:

...statistically and in the lives of a majority of Americans who attend institutions of higher learning, that assumption is false. Nearly half of the students enrolled in public higher education are not in conventional four-year colleges. . . . Nearly six million American adults are enrolled in community college credit courses. . . two-thirds attend part-time. Most of the students work. Their average age is twenty-nine. Many of them do not follow a straight path toward a clearly defined academic goal. Instead their educational lives zig and zag. They leave school to take a job or have a baby or reorganize their lives; they come back, perhaps with a different goal, a different attitude, once, twice, three times(1-2).

Furthermore, the misconception of *who* is attending community colleges coupled with a misunderstanding of the reasons *why* students attend community colleges, contribute to the misuse of graduation rates as an indicator of the “success” of community colleges. By focusing attention on graduation rates, and sometimes graduation rates alone, critics fail to understand not only the multiple and evolving missions of community colleges and the functions they serve in their communities, but also the varied ways in which students benefit from attending college, even though they have not yet, or may never, earn a degree.

From its inception, the American community college has had multiple missions, including preparing students for transfer by providing the first two years of a liberal arts degree, providing vocational education, and offering other training programs. In addition, work-force retraining has become an increasingly important part of community college curriculums, evidenced by the increasing number of “reverse transfers,” students who’ve already earned BA’s returning to community college to acquire additional skills (Quinley and Quinley 1998). While some have argued that such close ties to the fluctuating labor market put community colleges and students in a precarious position (Dougherty 1994), others note that it is precisely the community college’s flexibility as an institution which puts it in a unique and invaluable position to meet the changing needs of employers *and* students.

The important social functions, and other benefits such as practical skill building or preparation for transfer which translate into measurable economic benefits, are most often assessed in terms of the individual’s benefits from them. However there are important benefits which accrue to society as a whole when new

immigrants learn or improve their English skills or study the American system of government to prepare them for informed citizenship, or when women and minority students have increased access to higher education. Furthermore, as the students can attest, education does not only take place in the classroom. Individuals share and pass on knowledge to their children, parents, friends, and co-workers.

Throughout its hundred-year history, the American community college has also been an important source of low-cost higher education. Its openness and accessibility have provided a point of entry for women, minorities, and new and recent immigrants to higher education. Many community colleges serve important community building functions both by bringing individuals of differing backgrounds together, and by providing the necessary educational foundation for democratic, civil participation. While younger new immigrants gain important exposure to the processes and institutions of American democracy through grade-schools and high-schools, for older immigrants community colleges serve a similar function. In a multiracial, multi-ethnic, multilingual community such as New York City, there are few places which so effectively bring together individuals of differing backgrounds.

Critics often assert that the community college is in “crisis.” Dougherty (1994) concludes that “strong empirical evidence backs up the claim that its many baccalaureate aspirants are significantly hindered in their pursuit of a bachelor’s degree by the fact of entering a community college rather than a four-year college. But if the crisis of the community college is clear, the solutions are less obvious”(269). While there is evidence to suggest that some community college students revise their educational goals downward, there is also evidence which indicates that for minority students, attending community college is indeed the stepping stone to further higher education its supporters claim it to be (Hilmer 1997). However, as important as these considerations are, a singular focus on the transfer function of community colleges continues to obscure the multiple and important missions of community colleges and the many ways in which students benefit from them.

Some critics of community colleges point to the multi-purpose community college as a sign of dysfunction and argue that one function, the liberal-arts education and transfer function, should be encouraged over others. To support only the transfer function would exclude students who may not have the immediate ability, either academic or economic, or the desire to complete a four-year degree. To limit community colleges to the vocational and job-market training function would similarly close the door to future education for those who would seek to use it as a stepping stone, to build the necessary skills they lack in order to gain entry into a four-year institution. Valdez and Rhodes (1997) argue that community colleges should embrace their multi-purposeness if they are to remain viable institutions.

Our interviews with students at LaGuardia and BMCC clearly demonstrate that community colleges continue to serve the transfer function, but that often students will not necessarily complete their degrees before moving to other schools. They also demonstrate that students attend community colleges for many other reasons, and that they continuously revise their educational plans as new pressures and/or opportunities arise. Most importantly, students have told us that they have benefitted in important ways from attendance and that they consider their status as “drop-outs” only temporary. Ultimately the findings contribute to a more complete understanding of the various functions community colleges and demonstrate that while there are economic benefits to attendance, there are others which, although less readily quantifiable, are equally important.

It is clear that new measures of success must be created in order to adequately reflect the missions and functions of community colleges, but also the very reasons why students say they attend them and the benefits they say they receive. It is also important to understand that students are likely to continue to drop in and out of school as the full-time class loads they often must register for in order to receive financial aid, become temporarily unmanageable due to increasing economic and time pressures of their everyday lives. Importantly, even though these students have left school, they view this status as only temporary and are eager to return as soon as possible. Perhaps most significant, students also feel that even their sometimes necessarily intermittent attendance, has benefitted them and they continue to recognize and value community colleges for their flexibility and for the access to higher education they provide.

Methodology

Selection of the Sample

The sample of “leavers” was prepared by the CUNY Office of Institutional Analysis and Research. The overall sample of 1130 students who left LaGuardia was drawn from the 1995 cohort of students based on their first year and semester of enrollment. “Leavers” are those students who were not enrolled at LaGuardia beginning in the Spring of 1996. Students at all levels of academic standing and number of credits completed were included. While the BMCC study was produced using a sample from both the 1994 and 1995 cohorts, it was determined that limiting the sample to the 1995 cohort was desirable to eliminate any possible issues arising out the inclusion of two cohorts.

Attention was paid to ensure that our sample of leavers represented a similar spread of important demographic variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, and native language among others. Ideally more men than women would have been included in our sample since, although more women than men attend community college, proportionally a higher percentage of men leave school than women. However, due to factors limiting our ability to reach students, this was not possible.

Telephone Survey

The most recent phone number was provided for most students in the sample. The few students whose phone numbers were not available were set aside. A Samuels Center research staff person telephoned each of the students in the sample. Each number was called at least three times. For some students, considerably more attempts were made to contact them as in cases where we left messages with friends or relatives, or in cases where we spoke to the students but were asked to call back at another time which was more convenient. The results of the phone calls were either an interview or a designation into one of three categories: “disconnected/wrong number”; “moved/no longer at number”; or “call back.” In a few cases where the student had moved but a new number was available, an attempt was made to contact the student at the new number. Once contacted, the students were most often willing to participate. Less than 1% of the students contacted declined to participate.

Each person was asked to participate in a phone interview concerning their experience at LaGuardia, the duration of which varied according to the respondent. Reaching students by phone proved to be a difficult task, requiring multiple call-backs on various days and at different times of day. Roughly, 60% of the calls were “wrong number/disconnected,” 30% were “no answer/never home,” and 9% of the calls resulted in

interviews.⁹

Students were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their experience at LaGuardia (see Appendix A). The information was then coded (see Appendix B), entered into a database, and analyzed to produce the statistics in this report. The students were asked both standardized and open-ended questions about their experience at LaGuardia. Questions about the “benefits” were phrased in such a way as to be open-ended such as, “how would you characterize your experience at LaGuardia” or “how do you feel your time at LaGuardia has affected you.” Interviewees who answered in general terms were then prompted to elaborate and to be more specific. Students were provided the opportunity to elaborate further at any point. Specifically open-ended questions were included to provide additional information about whether or not students intended to return to school, what they felt they would need in order to be able to return and if there were any programs, classes, or other factors had been beneficial.

Due to the potentially high numbers of ESL students and non-native speakers, where appropriate and necessary, interviews were conducted in Spanish. For the most part those who indicated they were not comfortable being interviewed in English were Spanish-speakers. However in a few cases, students were contacted who would have preferred being interviewed in another language. At the time, additional foreign language speaking interviewers were not available and their interviews unfortunately, could not be included.

Data Issues

Based on the experience of the study of leavers from BMCC we did not attempt to create a random sample from the list of leavers. Instead, an attempt was made to contact everyone on the list resulting in a response rate of 9%, yielding 102 usable interviews. The interviews were conducted with students who had left BMCC. However in a couple of cases, students were interviewed who had already returned to school during the time which had elapsed between when the list was generated and when the student was interviewed. These students were interviewed along with those who had not returned to school or

⁹ In some cases messages were left on answering machines or with roommates or relatives. Students who did not respond were ultimately categorized as “no answer/never home.”

transferred, and were asked to respond to the same sets of questions. Additionally, they were asked to consider what factors had enabled them to return.

Based on the information initially provided we were not able to pre-determine which students may have left LaGuardia before the completion of a semester. However students who had failed to complete even one semester did not constitute a major category and they were not especially negative in their assessment of LaGuardia. Their reasons for leaving, similar to many other students, were largely financial.

Profile of Respondents

The profile of respondents to our survey is, for the most part, similar to the profile of all leavers from LaGuardia who began in 1995 in terms of gender, place of birth, and type of high-school. Our sample was 60.8% female and 39.2% male. The overall sample of leavers was 58% female and 42% male. Both samples were split approximately evenly in terms of foreign-born and U.S.-born individuals, although the overall sample of leavers had 15.3% missing cases.

In terms of ethnicity, Latinos and African-Americans were the two largest groups in each sample followed by whites and Asians. However, our sample differed from the overall sample of leavers in that it had slightly higher percentages of all ethnicities though the proportions remained roughly the same. This is most readily explained that while the overall sample had 5.0% “other” and 9.4% missing, our sample had only 2.0% “other” and no “missing” cases. The language with which students were most comfortable was difficult to compare due to the high percentage of missing data (42.5%), from the overall sample of leavers.

It would have been desirable to include a larger number of men in the sample because while in terms of absolute numbers more women register and leave school than men, a higher percentage of men leave. Unfortunately however, this was not possible due to the overall difficulty in obtaining interviews. In terms of ethnicity, our sample is slightly different, largely due to the fact that there was a higher percentage of individuals choosing “other” or “no answer” in the overall sample of leavers.

Appendix A: Phone Interview

Name _____

Caller _____ Date _____

Race/Ethnicity _____ Country of Birth _____

Gender _____ Age _____ Married _____ # of dependants _____

GPA _____ ESL _____ CUNY tests pass/fail R _____ W _____ M _____

First in family to go to college _____ Employed when began college _____

Phone Call Results:

___ number disconnected/wrong number ___ persistent no answer/no machine/never home

___ poor English ___ information found out from family ___ spoke to student

___ declined to participate ___ registrar didn't provide number

CUNY Status:

___ dropped out permanently total time in school before dropping out _____

___ transferred to _____

___ leave of absence for (how long?) _____

___ graduated ___ back in/still in school

Employment/ Family Status

First in family to go to college? _____ Married _____ # of dependants _____

Employed when began college? _____ If not, because student? _____

Currently Employed (ft,pt) _____ What type of work? _____ if unemployed, how long/looking? _____

Public Assistance while at LaG? _____ Did WEP affect your decision to stay in school? _____

Reason for enrolling at LaGuardia (rank order):

___ to earn an AA degree ___ for a few courses ___ to study English ___ fulfill requirement

at another school ___ to get a course not offered at another school ___ to improve skills for current job/to help

get a job ___ try college

___ other (describe):

Reasons for leaving (rank order):

Education related:

___ failed reading test ___ failed writing test ___ failed math test ___ changed major ___ Not accepted in a program

because of low GPA ___ problems with a professor or particular class ___ Found work too difficult

___ Difficulties with English

If so, were those difficulties primarily with: speaking ___ reading ___ writing ___ all ___

Did you have access to needed English tutoring ___ What is your first/native language? _____

Money/Job:

___ lack of money ___ new job or additional work responsibilities ___ increase in tuition

___ financial aid problems

Personal Problems:

___ pregnancy ___ moved ___ death in the family ___ got married ___ illness ___ childcare ___ needed to

devote more time to children ___ caring for a parent ___ unstated personal problem

Administrative Problems:

___ registration ___ lack of/poor counseling ___ closed out of a class ___ class not offered/scheduling conflicts ___
 problems with financial aid office

Transferred to another school:

___ Wanted to live in dorms/campus atmosphere ___ wanted to go to a specific program
 ___ other school had better administrative support

Other (describe):**The Benefits of the LaGuardia Experience**

Instructions: Rank order, mark down the first response as number 1, then prompt them about the other areas marking them 2nd, 3rd etc. Write detailed quotes below about kinds of jobs they got, how it helped them with the kids etc. **Take notes /quotes on separate sheet.**

Money/ Job:

___ get a job ___ find a better job ___ earn more money at the job you had ___ learn new skills ___ improve skills ___ discover new interests/abilities ___ make new contacts

Education:

___ prepare you for further study ___ help or prepare you to transfer to another school
 ___ get you interested in new areas of study

Personal life:

___ improved confidence/self-esteem ___ helped you with your family or kids ___ make new friends ___
 improved written and spoken English

___ Did not benefit/was not at all positive

Description:

Other Descriptive Information:

What Assistance, guidance, financial or otherwise do you feel you need to get back into school?

Do you have any plans to go to college in the future?

What do you feel you would have needed in order to stay in school?

Appendix B: Coding Sheet

CUNY Status: (CUNYSTAT)

- 1 dropped out intends to return
- 2 dropped out permanently
- 3 transferred CUNY
- 4 transferred non-cuny
- 5 leave of absence
- 6 graduated
- 7 back in/still in school

Attending full-time? (fulltime)

- 1 yes 2 no

Registered full-time for financial aid (ftfinaid)

- 1 yes 2 no

If aid would have been available would you have registered part-time? (part time)

- 1 yes 2 no

Employment

Were you employed when you began college? (empbeg)

- 1 yes 2 no

Were you employed . . . (emppt)

- 1 part-time because student
- 2 not employed because student
- 3 no employed
- 4 work not affected by student statuses

Are you currently employed? (empnow)

- 1 full-time 2 part-time 3 looking for work

If unemployed, are you currently looking? (looking)

- 1 yes 2 no

Reasons for Enrolling: (enroll a, enroll b, enroll c)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 to earn an AA degree | 6 to improve skills for current job/ to help get a job |
| 2 for a few courses | 7 try college |
| 3 to study English | 8 prepare to transfer |
| 4 fulfill requirement at another school | 9 other |
| 5 to get a course not offered at another school | 10 no second or third choice |

Reason for Leaving (leave a, leave b, leave c)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 failed reading test | 3 failed math test |
| 2 failed writing test | 4 changed major |

- | | |
|---|---|
| 5 low gpa | 19 illness |
| 6 not accepted in major because of low gpa | 20 need to devote more time to children |
| 7 problems with professor or class | 21 caring for parent |
| 8 found work too difficult | 22 unstated personal problem |
| 9 difficulties with English | 23 registration |
| 10 lack of money | 24 lack of poor counseling |
| 11 new job/additional responsibilities | 25 closed out of a class |
| 12 increase in tuition | 26 class not offered /scheduling conflicts |
| 13 financial aid problems | 27 problems with financial aid office |
| 14 could not find appropriate, affordable childcare | 28 wanted to live in dorms/college atmosphere |
| 15 pregnancy | 29 wanted a specific program |
| 16 moved | 30 other school had better administrative support |
| 17 death in the family | 31 better faculty |
| 18 got married | 32 better course offerings |
| | 33 smaller class size |
| | 34 other |
| | 35 no second or third choice |

Benefits of the LaGuardia Experience (benefit a, benefit b, benefit c)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 get a job | 10 get interested in new areas of study |
| 2 find a better job | 11 improved confidence/self esteem |
| 3 earn more money at current job | 12 helped with family or kids |
| 4 learn new skills | 13 make new friends |
| 5 improve skills | 14 improved written and spoken English |
| 6 discover new interests and abilities | 15 NO BENEFIT |
| 7 make new contacts | 16 no second or third choice |
| 8 prepare for further study | 17 other |
| 9 prepare to transfer to another school | |

Difficulties with English (engprob)

- 1 speaking
- 2 reading
- 3 writing
- 4 all

Did you have access to adequate English tutoring? (Tutoring)

- 1 yes 2 no

What is your native language:_____

Public Assistance

Were you receiving public assistance?(public)

1 yes 2 no

Was WEP cause of leaving? (wep)

1 yes 2 no

Family

First in family to attend college? (first)

1 yes 2 no

Married

1 yes 2 no

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