

CASE STUDY

Student Success by Design CUNY's Guttman Community College

February 4, 2016

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Introduction

A growing number of American community colleges are redesigning their curricula, advising services, faculty development programs, and relationships with four year institutions in order to help more students succeed. In most cases, reforms take place within existing operating structures, as gradual processes of cultural and institutional change.

At Stella and Charles Guttman Community College (Guttman), the newest of the City University of New York's (CUNY) seven community colleges, designing operations for student success has transpired differently. Planning for the institution began in 2008, and its first class of students enrolled in August 2012. A response to dismal persistence and completion rates at community colleges (both within the CUNY system and nationwide), Guttman was designed, from its inception, to incorporate research-based practices for helping first-generation and low-income students at community colleges succeed.¹ Guttman currently serves 824 students, with a goal of enrolling 5,000 students by 2025.²

A response to dismal persistence and completion rates at community colleges, Guttman was designed, from its inception, to incorporate research-based practices for helping first-generation and low-income students at community colleges succeed.

Though it is too early to declare Guttman's experiment a success, early evidence suggests that its retention and completion rates are significantly higher than similar urban community colleges. For example, just under 30 percent of the students in Guttman's first two cohorts graduated in two years. By comparison, the average two-year completion rate at all CUNY community colleges for first-time, full-time students who entered in the fall of 2012 was 6.2 percent.³ Students, faculty, and administrators

¹ See Alexandra Weinbaum, Camille Rodriguez, and Nan Bauer-Maglin "Case Study on the College: Rethinking College for the Twenty First Century," Guttman Planning Documents (February 2013), <http://guttman.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/NCCCaseStudyLowres.pdf>.

² "Fast Facts," Guttman Community College, <http://guttman.cuny.edu/about/fast-facts/>.

³ For the fall 2012 cohort, 28% earned associate's degrees in two years; for the fall 2013 cohort, 30% earned associates in three years. Information provided by Guttman. For other CUNY community college graduation rates, see "Institution

consistently report that Guttman has fostered a commitment to supporting students and to continuous institutional improvement. This combination of student-centeredness and self-awareness makes Guttman worthy of study.

Two key aspects of Guttman's model are crucial to explaining the institution's early successes. First, Guttman's design intentionally blurs traditional binaries in higher education that separate teaching from advising, remedial coursework from credit-bearing instruction, career preparation from the liberal arts, and certain academic disciplines from others.⁴ Second, Guttman has embraced a continuous cycle of data collection, learning assessment, and collaborative inquiry to evaluate and refine its model.

Guttman has also faced the growing pains that are inevitable in a start-up environment. Some of these challenges may have been exacerbated by the institution's highly flexible model. Guttman's unique organizational structure – which lacks departments and includes every faculty member in a governing council – makes defining faculty roles, workload, and representation particularly challenging. In addition, Guttman has had to balance its efforts to provide adequate support to its students while also exposing them to demanding and rigorous academic work. And while it has benefited from the support of CUNY, Guttman has also been burdened by being part of a large, complex system. Finally, Guttman's rapid expansion plans will test its ability to adapt its high-touch model to meet the needs of more students and to remain flexible and innovative while systematizing operations.

In our view, Guttman's collaborative structures and culture of assessment make it well-positioned to navigate these challenges. At the same time, its research-supported model and mission-focused faculty firmly orient the institution toward student success. While Guttman is distinguished by its newness, both its origins and these features bear lessons for other institutions.

Retention and Graduation Rates of Full-time First-time Freshmen in Associate Programs by Year of Entry:* Community Colleges," The City University of New York Office of Institutional Research (April 17, 2015), http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/RTGI_0015_FT_FTFR_ASSOC_CC_TOT_UNIV.rpt.pdf. Other CUNY community colleges are Borough of Manhattan Community College, Queensborough Community College, Kingsborough Community College, LaGuardia Community College, Bronx Community College, and Hostos Community College.

⁴ This concept is initially laid out in Guttman's planning documents, and we found persistent evidence of it in our own research and interviews. See Alexandra Weinbaum, Camille Rodriguez, and Nan Bauer-Maglin, "Putting Students at the Center at Guttman Community College: Accomplishments and Challenges in the Inaugural Years," Guttman Planning Documents (August 2014), <http://guttman.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/PuttingStudentsattheCenterReport8-21.pdf>.

Origins and Operations of Guttman Community College

In 2007, CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein first articulated the idea for a new community college designed around research-based practices that were known to improve outcomes. The chancellor anticipated increased growth in student enrollment at CUNY's existing six community colleges, and he and his team believed that a differently structured institution might be better suited to address some of the challenges that existing institutions faced in improving graduation rates, transfer rates, and career readiness.⁵

In 2008, system-level leaders assembled a planning team that would guide and design what was then called CUNY's New Community College.⁶ Comprised of CUNY faculty, staff, and administrators—many of whom had experience working with high school students, at-risk students, and adult learners—the planning team's initial task was to answer one question: what would CUNY do differently if it had the opportunity to create a new institution designed to maximize student success? After spending a year studying initiatives at community colleges across the country, reviewing research on community college success, speaking with CUNY faculty, staff, and administrators, and consulting with an advisory board, the planning team published a "Concept Paper" that proposed a model to guide the planning of a new institution.⁷

The Concept Paper outlined and explained the design and rationale of a set of features that the planning team believed would increase students' likelihood of success. As described in Table 1, these features included: mandatory full-time enrollment; limited programs of study; restructured semesters; learning communities; and an interdisciplinary first-year curriculum that incorporates workplace preparation and remedial education into credit-bearing, academic work.

⁵ See Weinbaum, Rodriguez, Bauer-Maglin, "A Case Study on the College: Rethinking Community College for the 21st Century," and "A New Community College Concept Paper," <http://guttman.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NCCConceptPaperExecSummarywithoutdraft.pdf>.

⁶ The New Community College's name was changed to Guttman Community College after the Charles and Stella Guttman Community Foundation donated \$25 million to CUNY (\$15 million of which went to an endowment for the New Community College in 2013). See "CUNY Receives \$25 Million from the Stella and Charles Community Foundation," The University (April 29, 2013), <http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/forum/2013/04/29/cuny-receives-25-million-from-the-stella-and-charles-guttman-foundation/>.

⁷ "A New Community College Concept Paper," <http://guttman.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NCCConceptPaperExecSummarywithoutdraft.pdf>.

Table 1. Key Components of Guttman’s Educational Model

Component	Description
Admissions	A three-stage process designed to help students understand the level of commitment required at Guttman.
Mandatory Summer Bridge program	A mandatory, two-week, pre-college transition period in which students meet other students, faculty, and staff in their first-year houses (learning communities) and prepare for college-level work.
Full-Time Freshman Year	All first-year students are required to attend full-time in their first year, in either morning or afternoon blocks.
Learning Communities	Students are assigned to learning communities, or houses, of 75 students, within which they become part of one of three cohorts of 25, from Summer Bridge through their first year. They take classes with the same cohort of students for both semesters and are supported by faculty and support staff from the same instructional team, who work together collaboratively to support students.
Required First-Year Core Curriculum	In their first year, all students take City Seminar, Ethnographies of Work, its associated lab/workshop “Learning About Being a Successful Student”, Statistics, and Composition. Courses have an interdisciplinary focus and offer numerous opportunities for experiential learning.
Developmental and Disciplinary Courses Merged	Quantitative reasoning and reading and writing skills are integrated into City Seminar. All students receive support in Studio, and those who need extra time have built-in opportunities to achieve basic skills proficiency.
Partnerships	The Office of Partnerships supports connections between college and workplaces by engaging partners from businesses, community-based organizations, non-profits, and government agencies who support experiential learning, internships, and career exploration.
Combined Academic and Student Support Services	In the first year, instructional teams include faculty and student success advocates (advising staff), peer mentors, and graduate student coordinators. In the second year, faculty members and program coordinators work closely with career strategists to plan curricula and support students. Support is integrated, innovative, proactive, and guided by inquiry.
Calendar Aligned with Learning Needs	A calendar with two 18-week semesters, each divided into a 12-week and a 6-week session, allows for further work in areas where students have not reached college-level proficiency and for students to accelerate their progress in their course work.
Limited Number of Degree Programs	Only five “majors” are offered to students in order to provide a structured pathway to career or transfer.
Institutional Learning	E-Portfolios of student work, Guttman Learning Outcomes, instructional team meetings, assessment days, an associate deanship for assessment in the Office of Academic Affairs, an Assessment and Professional Development Standing Committee, and the Center for College Effectiveness all enable Guttman to deliver on its commitment to continuously assess and improve on its model.

Source: Alexandra Weinbaum, Camille Rodriguez, and Nan Bauer-Maglin “Case Study on the College: Rethinking College for the Twenty First Century,” Guttman Planning Documents (February 2013).

From 2009 to 2010, CUNY assembled 11 working committees to develop and operationalize the ideas proposed in the Concept Paper. These committees were composed of 119 members from CUNY, other higher education institutions, postsecondary schools, and community based organizations. In 2010, CUNY hired eight faculty members to plan Guttman’s curriculum and participate in other aspects of the planning process. From 2010 to 2012, Guttman continued to hire new faculty and involve them heavily in the planning process, though it also experienced some faculty turnover during the period as well.⁸ The extended planning team finalized the development of all aspects of the model, hired peer mentors and first-year advisors (called student success advocates), and established the technical and operating infrastructure necessary to support a new school within the CUNY system. In 2012, Guttman welcomed its first cohort into its inaugural Summer Bridge Program.⁹

Governance and Faculty Structure

Perhaps the most distinctive features of Guttman’s organizational structure are its lack of academic departments, the inclusiveness of its shared governance, and its flat administrative structure. In lieu of departments, Guttman faculty members and student support staff are organized into programs in which they work as partners across disciplines to collaboratively execute an interdisciplinary curriculum and a holistic approach to student support. This organizational structure has been part of the vision for the school since inception, and is rooted in the notion that the primary allegiance of faculty and staff should be to students and their success rather than to a department. “Every adult who comes into contact with a student,” reads one of Guttman’s planning documents, “is a potential mentor, teacher, and advisor.”¹⁰

Currently, Guttman has five programs of study, as well as a first-year program (the First Year Experience, or “FYE”) in which all students and most faculty participate. In the second year, students enter into their programs of study and further develop the academic and professional interests that they began to explore in their first year. Each program of study leads to an associate’s of arts degree and has a rigorous field or experiential component.¹¹ The college planners intentionally kept the number of programs limited and their curricula structured so as to prevent some of the indecision

⁸ Four of the six faculty initially hired to Guttman left during the school’s planning stage.

⁹ For a more detailed narrative and timeline of the planning process, see Weinbaum, Rodriguez, Bauer-Maglin, “A Case Study on the College: Rethinking Community College for the 21st Century.”

¹⁰ Weinbaum, Rodriguez, Bauer-Maglin, “Putting Students at the Center at Guttman Community College: Accomplishments and Challenges in the Inaugural Years.”

¹¹ Guttman’s programs of study are Business Administration, Human Services, Information Technology, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Urban Studies. These fields were selected because of their predicted impact on graduation and retention rates, anticipated student interest, and their relevance to future issues in New York City.

and stagnation that can result from lack of structure or an overabundance of options at community colleges.¹²

Each program of study is led by a program coordinator, and the FYE is led by two program coordinators. Program coordinators are appointed for two years and take leadership on matters such as curriculum development, hiring adjuncts, liaising with deans and the provost, and working closely with other college support staff. Faculty are affiliated with one or more programs of study, and many faculty teach courses in both the FYE and second-year programs of study. First- and second-year students also benefit from advisors – student success advocates in FYE and career strategists in second-year programs of study. Some programs of study also employ a field placement coordinator.

The faculty and staff who work in the FYE are divided into instructional teams, each of which is responsible for a “house” or learning community of first-year students (students in each house are then divided into cohorts of 25 students with whom they take all of their first-year courses). Instructional teams consist of teaching faculty members (one of whom is appointed instructional team leader), a student success advocate (SSA), library faculty, and graduate coordinators.

Instructional teams meet once a week for 90 minutes, led by the instructional team leader. In these meetings, instructional team members discuss curriculum, align assignments, on-board new Guttman faculty, and address issues with particular students. This collaborative structure provides several benefits: it allows faculty members and SSAs to strategize about student support, it gives library staff an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the resources faculty and students need, and it fosters a culture of shared responsibility for FYE’s integrated curriculum and students’ ability to navigate it. Many faculty members we interviewed said that these structured opportunities for collaboration enriched both their teaching and research.

The curriculum in Guttman’s second-year programs varies from program to program, though in each case program coordinators, faculty, and career strategists have delineated a highly-structured sequence of courses that aligns with learning outcomes, transfer policies, and projected career expectations. Consistent with Guttman’s commitment to collaboration and interdisciplinarity, many courses are linked and all are reviewed by a curriculum team that includes faculty from other disciplines, a career strategist, and other stakeholders.

Since Guttman’s launch, its governing college council has consisted of all full-time faculty appointed to the college as well as certain administrators and student

¹² See “Majors,” Guttman Community College, <http://guttman.cuny.edu/academics/majors/>.

representatives.¹³ Members participate in a variety of standing committees, including the Curriculum and Student Academic Support Committee, the Agenda Committee, the Assessment and Professional Development Committee, the College Personnel Committee, and the Special Personnel Committee. Because Guttman has had so few faculty in its early years, most faculty members have participated in multiple committees, creating a substantial burden on faculty members' time. The original interim governance plan was intended to be transitional, and a committee is currently considering revisions to the structure.

In its early years, Guttman's administrative structure was relatively flat. However, as Guttman grew and the need for leadership in various areas became apparent, the institution's administrative structure has grown more layered. Guttman appointed deans for strategic planning and academic affairs in 2013, an associate dean for assessment and technology in 2014, and an associate dean for academic affairs and a dean for student engagement in 2015. Deans provide mentoring and support to faculty and program coordinators and assist with administrative matters such as managing the academic calendar and overseeing articulation agreements. As Guttman's governance structure continues to evolve, administrators are considering a greater role for the dean of academic affairs in annual evaluation, reappointment, mid-tenure review, tenure, and promotion.

Curriculum and the Student Experience

Just as Guttman's professional structure eschews typical higher education organizational boundaries, its academic curriculum blurs the categorizations that often separate remedial from college-level coursework and career preparation from the liberal arts. In spite of this (or perhaps because of it), a student's first-year experience at Guttman is highly structured.¹⁴ First-year students must enroll full-time, are assigned a cohort during their introductory Summer Bridge program, and, with the exception of a recuperation term at the end of each semester (discussed more below), remain with the same group of students, instructors, librarians, and advisors throughout their first year.

¹³ In addition to the faculty, the president, provost, three persons appointed to the council by the president from among the professional and administrative staff, four full-time, nonteaching staff, and two student representatives sit on the College Council. See "New Community College-Approval of Governance Plan," Guttman Community College (August 2014), <http://guttman.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/GovernancePlan.pdf>.

¹⁴ The decision to implement year-long learning communities was outlined in Guttman's concept paper, and was based on research that indicated first-year learning communities were associated with increased completion rates at community colleges, including at other CUNY institutions. For a detailed documentation of instructional teams and the house model, see Alexandra Weinbaum, Camille Rodriguez, and Nan Bauer-Maglin, "Instructional Teams at Guttman Community College: Building a Learning Community of Students, Faculty, and Staff," Guttman Planning Documents (September 2013), <http://guttman.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ITReportFinal.pdf>. For an example of a study on learning communities from which Guttman drew for the design of its educational model, see Dan Bloom and Colleen Sommo, "Building Learning Communities: Early Results from Opening the Doors Demonstration at Kingsborough Community College," MDRC (June 2005), <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/building-learning-communities>.

First-year students must enroll full time, are assigned a cohort during their introductory Summer Bridge program, and . . . remain with the same group of students, instructors, librarians, and advisors throughout their first year.

There are no remedial courses at Guttman. Instead, basic skills development in quantitative reasoning and reading and writing are built into Guttman’s mandatory, two-semester, credit-bearing City Seminar course. Hence, CUNY placement exams are not used for their typical purpose of placing students into remedial courses, but rather to inform faculty and students about the need and context for differentiated instruction in the City Seminar. These exams are also used for placement of students into Guttman’s credit-bearing Statistics Pathway. Proficient students are placed into a one-semester, 3-credit “un-stretched” Statistics course whereas non-proficient students are placed into a 3-credit, two semester “stretched” Statistics course, with 1.5 credits for Stats A in the fall and 1.5 credits for Stats B in the spring.

In the City Seminar course, students analyze and address critical issues like sustainability, immigration, and gentrification using an interdisciplinary approach. They are given ample, dedicated opportunities to develop their quantitative, reading, and writing skills in a contextualized manner.¹⁵ To support their work in City Seminar and allow extra time on task for developmental work, students spend 90 minutes each week in Studio, a mandatory meeting with peer mentors and graduate student coordinators.

In addition to City Seminar and Statistics, students take courses in Composition and Ethnographies of Work. The goal of the unique Ethnographies of Work course is to bridge the “age-old gap between the academic and the vocational.” The course is designed to “introduce students to the world of work through basic concepts and approaches of sociology and anthropology, critical observation and analysis of workplaces through ethnographic methods, provision of professional skill training, and helping students think in depth about their future academic and professional pursuits.”¹⁶ In practice, students read about social science and ethnographic methods, conduct field studies of workplaces, and interview practitioners in wide-ranging professions and

¹⁵ “Instructional Teams at Guttman Community College: Building a Learning Community of Students, Faculty, and Staff,” Guttman Planning Documents, <http://guttman.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/ITReportFinal.pdf>.

¹⁶ Weinbaum, Rodriguez, Bauer-Maglin “Putting Students at the Center at Guttman Community College: Accomplishments and Challenges in the Inaugural Years.”

industries. The class also introduces students to research and occupational data, brings in guest speakers, and allows students to explore dimensions of work life through a variety of cultural artifacts. To complement *Ethnographies of Work*, SSAs lead a course called Learning about Being a Successful Student (LABBS), a 90-minute, weekly session dedicated to developing students' study and job readiness skills.

Both fall and spring semesters are divided into two sessions of 12 weeks (called Fall I and Spring I) and six weeks (Fall II and Spring II). In most cases, students who are unsuccessful in Fall I or Spring I have the opportunity to retake the course in Fall II or Spring II to stay on track. This approach is especially useful for students who need more basic skills development at entry and has helped students prepare for advanced coursework without needing to take separate developmental courses.

Guttman's commitment to interdisciplinarity carries over to its second-year curriculum. As discussed, second-year students enroll in one of five interdisciplinary programs of study; students can apply this "meta major" to a variety of related bachelor's degrees. Much like the FYE, second-year programs of study seek to contextualize academic topics in relevant local issues and incorporate experiential components.

Students' second-year experiences continue to bridge the divide between academic and professional preparation. The career strategist eases students' transition into the second year and helps students plan for transfer to a four-year school, create a professional and co-curricular portfolio, and develop career skills. Students, career strategists, and program coordinators work alongside the Office of Partnerships to secure internships, bring in guest speakers, and design professional development opportunities.¹⁷

Collaborative Assessment

In Guttman's concept paper, college planners viewed rigorous assessment as a crucial part of the institution's model. They imagined data being used "right from the start in ongoing formative assessment to help build a community of teachers and learners."¹⁸

Guttman collects and analyzes data at multiple levels. At the institutional level, Guttman's Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness has set clear goals for persistence and completion rates and carefully tracks students' CUNY proficiency exam pass rates. The Center for College Effectiveness, which sits within the Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, uses surveys, focus groups, interviews, and shared data systems to report on the admissions process, enrollment,

¹⁷ See "Office of Partnerships," Guttman Community College, <http://guttman.cuny.edu/partners/>.

¹⁸ "A New Community College Concept Paper," p. 43.

student engagement, the effectiveness of college services, and postgraduate outcomes.¹⁹ The Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness also partnered with the Community College Research Center at Teacher's College to conduct a fidelity-of-implementation study of Guttman's early years. Guttman uses these data to design strategies for its growth, to improve graduate preparation, and to ensure that its model achieves its desired outcomes. (See below for more discussion of Guttman's utilization of data).

In addition to tracking high-level student outcomes and experiences, Guttman frequently assesses its program-specific learning outcomes. One key enabler of this assessment is Guttman's innovative approach to constructing and managing the student record. Each Guttman student stores select projects and reflections—from Summer Bridge to graduation—in an e-portfolio.²⁰ Guttman faculty and administrators participate in nine "assessment days" annually—three days during Fall I, two days during Fall II, and four days during Spring I. Assessment days are coordinated by the associate dean for assessment and technology in consultation with the Center for College Effectiveness. Participants use assessment days to review students' e-portfolio artifacts using a standard rubric, adapt program curricula based on assessment findings, and plan for the upcoming term.

In 2011, Guttman's Committee for Assessment and Professional Development developed more general Guttman Learning Outcomes (GLOs) to assess students' holistic academic development across all courses and programs. In 2013, Guttman engaged two teams of faculty and staff in a three-year assessment process based on the GLOs— one year of inquiry, one year of reflection, and one year of integration. The GLO teams use student e-portfolios to assess how Guttman's curriculum can better equip students to achieve institutional outcomes.²¹

Finally, Guttman's assessment is framed by the Systematic Approach for Guttman Effectiveness Plan (or the SAGE Plan) which aligns the institution's assessment and data collection initiatives with those of CUNY and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Guttman's accrediting agency.²²

¹⁹ See "Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness," Guttman Community College, <http://guttman.cuny.edu/about/strategic-planning-and-institutional-effectiveness/> and The Center for College Effectiveness Portal at <https://guttman-cuny.digication.com/idea/about/>.

²⁰ See Laura Gambino, "Putting e-Portfolios at the Center of our Learning," *Peer Review* 16.1 (Winter 2014), <https://www.aacu.org/peerreview/2014/winter/gambino>.

²¹ See Laura Gambino, Tracy Daraviras, Nate Mickelson, "Outcomes Assessment: Making Student Learning Visible," Guttman Community College (April 2013), <http://gcc.mcncr.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2013/04/Guttman-Outcomes-Assessment-1.16.14.pdf>.

²² "Systematic Approach for Guttman Effectiveness," Center for College Effectiveness, <https://guttman-cuny.digication.com/idea/sage>.

Guttman appointed its first associate dean of assessment and technology in August 2014, in the Office of Academic Affairs, to coordinate these efforts. As a faculty member, the dean was heavily involved in the design and launch of Guttman’s assessment program and is currently working with Guttman’s assessment committee to align SAGE, program review, and the assessment of GLOs.

These structured assessment processes have led to several programmatic changes. For example, the first-year Studio requirement (previously called Group Workspace) was redesigned to provide more structure for skill-based work; the City Seminar signature assignment was standardized across houses; and the use of e-portfolio was better integrated into the Summer Bridge Program and research assignments. Many of the programs of study have used assessment to improve curricular alignment with CUNY bachelor’s degree programs. This has led to changes in course numbering, descriptions, and outcomes, eliminated redundancies across courses, and broadened the set of electives from which students can choose.

Evidence of Impact

Early evidence of Guttman’s impact is quite promising. Twenty-eight percent of the 289 students in the initial 2012 cohort graduated within two years, and 49 percent graduated within three years.²³ To put these results in context, for the 2011 entering cohorts at all CUNY community colleges (the latest for which all data are available), 4.1 percent of full-time students graduated in two years and 16.8 percent graduated in three years.²⁴ For Guttman’s first two cohorts (fall 2012 and fall 2013), fall-to-spring retention rates were about 90 percent, and fall-to-fall retention rates were just above 70 percent. Among all CUNY community colleges, average first-year, fall-to-fall retention rates for full-time students entering in the fall of 2012 was 65.7 percent.²⁵

Guttman students appear to be making strong academic progress. Evidence suggests that the integration of remedial coursework with credit bearing coursework effectively builds students’ reading and writing skills. Of all retained students in the fall 2012 cohort, 92 percent demonstrated proficiency in reading by the end of their first year (up from 74

²³ Elisa Hertz, “Guttman’s First Graduates: A Profile of the August 2014 Degree Completers,” Center for College Effectiveness, Guttman Community College (November 2014); Weinbaum, Rodriguez, Bauer-Maglin. “Instructional Teams at Guttman Community College: Building a Learning Community of Students, Faculty, and Staff.”

²⁴ “Institution Retention and Graduation Rates of Full-time First-time Freshmen in Associate Programs by Year of Entry: Community Colleges,” The City University of New York Office of Institutional Research (April 17, 2015), http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/RTGI_0015_FT_FTFR_ASSOC_CC_TOT_UNIV.rpt.pdf.

²⁵ Ibid. Nationally, about 47 percent of students who started at a two-year institution in fall 2012 returned to that same institution in fall 2013; for full-time students, retention rates were about 60 percent. See “Snapshot Report: First Year Persistence and Retention Rates by Starting Enrollment Intensity, 2009-2012,” National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (July 9, 2014), <https://nscresearchcenter.org/snapshotreport-persistenceandretention14>.

percent at entry), and 91 percent demonstrated proficiency in writing (up from 71 percent at entry). A much smaller share of students (around 15 percent for retained students in each of the 2012, 2013, and 2014 cohorts) enter the institution with math proficiency. By the end of their first year, 54 percent of the fall 2012 cohort, 59 percent of the fall 2013 cohort, and 71 percent of the 2014 cohort demonstrated proficiency in math.²⁶

Students from all backgrounds are also succeeding in their courses at Guttman. Seventy-four percent of students in the fall 2012 cohort earned a C average or higher in the first year program, as did 71 percent of the fall 2013 cohort. Results were relatively consistent across race and language spoken at home, though, not surprisingly, students who entered lacking proficiency in multiple subjects tended to have poorer outcomes.²⁷

Data on how Guttman graduates fare upon transfer is early and minimal, and only available for those students who stayed within the CUNY system. Eighty students from the fall 2012 entering cohort graduated in two years, and 76 percent (61 students) enrolled in a CUNY college. Of those graduates who enrolled in a CUNY senior college, 95 percent (58 students) completed at least one semester during the 2014-2015 academic year, and 72 percent (44 students) completed both fall 2014 and spring 2015. The average cumulative GPA for Guttman graduates who completed fall 2015 and spring 2015 at CUNY senior colleges was 2.63 (compared to an average 3.28 GPA upon graduating from Guttman).²⁸ Regardless of the results, it is worth noting how unusual it is for a two-year institution to track its graduates so closely. Guttman faculty and administrators are already using these data to identify opportunities for programmatic improvement.

The Guttman students we interviewed report high levels of satisfaction with their experience at the school and describe it as significantly formative. Students feel as if they are part of a family at Guttman and highlight the proactive and comprehensive nature of

²⁶ Elisa Hertz and Yvonne Rubie, "Progress to Proficiency: Student Proficiency Status during the First-Year," Center for College Effectiveness, Guttman Community College, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.digication.com/M5f567b2815e12ff51b86ee90f1ff0ef1?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJBQAXZE3MAI6INA&Expires=1449418851&Signature=I9sZVZANTeGobFdxKIZaBbbWSy8%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22DataSnapshotTestingProficiency20150918.pdf%22>. Results for the fall 2013 and fall 2014 cohorts are similar. For the fall 2013 cohort, 91% demonstrated proficiency in reading and 89% in writing. For the fall 2014 cohort, 92% demonstrated proficiency in reading and 92% in writing. Some of the increases in demonstrated math proficiency between the 2013 and 2014 cohorts may be the result of changes in CUNY standards for demonstrating math proficiency.

²⁷ Elisa Hertz, "Guttman Highlights: An Overview of Students' Academic Progress," Center for College Effectiveness, Guttman Community College (September 2014), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.digication.com/Mad69c33db224037315aca7c9bb19d16a?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJBQAXZEE3MAI6INA&Expires=1449418509&Signature=3XVIlz5dq8EYSl8zzYS8yRFM8DQ%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22Fall201213AcademicPerformanceUpdateSnapshotrevSept.pdf%22>.

²⁸ Elisa Hertz, "Beyond the Cap and Gown: Experiences of the First Graduating Class," Guttman Community College (November 2015).

support they receive from faculty members, advisors, peer mentors, and other members of the community. Student survey results also highlight advisor support as one of the most valuable and satisfying components of Guttman’s model.²⁹ While some students dislike particular aspects of the model—such as the requirement to take classes with only one group of students for an entire year or specific topics explored in City Seminar—there was no single aspect of the model that multiple students highlight as particularly problematic. Surprisingly, none of our student interviewees—even those who worked full-time—reported that the first-year full-time requirement was too great a burden. Students cited Guttman’s block scheduling, in which students attend class in consistent morning or afternoon blocks, as crucial to making it easier to juggle work and coursework.

Managing the Growing Pains of a Start-Up Institution

While early data and anecdotal evidence indicate its great promise for improving student success, Guttman has also experienced some growing pains as it has translated concept into practice. Some of the most pressing challenges we observed were defining roles and an organizational structure for faculty members, balancing support with rigor for students, innovating within a well-established system, and maintaining a high-touch approach as the institution grows.

Defining Faculty Roles and Governance

Guttman’s distinctive organizational features have allowed it to offer students a uniquely comprehensive set of supports and academic experiences to promote their success. However, those same features have left some of the faculty members we interviewed feeling overburdened and under-supported.

In addition to sitting on Guttman’s College Council, nearly all of Guttman’s faculty members have participated in or chaired multiple committees, developed curricula, and served as leaders in shaping both the FYE and the second-year programs of study. On the one hand, this has been valuable for both faculty and students and has ensured that Guttman has attracted, retained, and developed faculty members who are deeply invested in the college mission. On the other hand, the experience has stretched faculty members thin between teaching, service, and research.

²⁹ See Elisa Hertz and Elizabeth Rivera Rodas, “The Student Experience: Results of the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory,” Center for College Effectiveness, Guttman Community College (July 2013), <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.digication.com/Meba4c21853643ee868e724332aafadec?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJBQAXZEE3MAI6INA&Expires=1449427665&Signature=dt5lZGsLAPXWrlnOwTYS%2B3UqqY%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22DataDigest1July2013Noel-Levitz.pdf%22>.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that most of Guttman's faculty members are not yet tenured. Tenure and promotion expectations have shifted over time, and faculty members have struggled to balance their commitments to teaching and service with the research requirements necessary for tenure. While Guttman's Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) document is broad and supports research in the scholarship of teaching and learning, some faculty feel pressure to produce more traditional, disciplinary scholarship to improve their standing in their fields.

Guttman's pattern of hiring junior, untenured faculty has meant that there are few senior colleagues in the discipline to mentor newer faculty members or advocate on their behalf. Guttman's lack of departmental structure and departmental chairs also contributes to faculty perceptions of leadership and mentorship deficits. In addition, tenure and promotion decisions are made without the intercession of a department chair as is typical in other institutions. Some faculty complain that the committee in charge of tenure and promotion sometimes lacks the specialized disciplinary expertise one would find in larger institutions. Some program coordinators feel empowered to take on the role of advisor and advocate, but others remain reticent to do so.

The provost, in the absence of department chairs, acts as the official supervisor to every faculty member. As noted above, Guttman added deans in the Office of Academic Affairs from 2013 to 2015 to provide the college with more structure and distributed leadership. While the deans' roles are still being refined, they have already relieved some service burdens for faculty members and program coordinators and have taken on mentorship roles for faculty.

To further address these concerns and replace the interim governance plan, the College Council convened an ad-hoc committee in early 2015 to assess Guttman's current governance structure and research potential changes. The committee, which consisted of faculty members, staff, and two student representatives, released a report in late 2015 that reviewed Guttman's current governance structure, looked at the governance structures of other postsecondary institutions, and identified ten areas of inquiry for the institution to consider further. If approved by the College Council, a second committee will use the report as one resource in drafting a new governance plan.

In addition, Guttman is currently hiring more senior faculty members to relieve perceived leadership and mentorship shortages and recently began offering workshops in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Despite these challenges, our impression is that faculty and administrators remain committed to Guttman's model and continue to prioritize student success. The aim of everyone with whom we spoke seemed to be to adjust the existing structure to correct perceived problems, rather than to abandon it.

Balancing Support with Rigor

Guttman’s model is based on the notion that traditional models of higher education do not work for many low-income, minority, and non-traditional students. To remedy this, Guttman “meets students where they are” and invests deeply in a variety of proactive student support structures. However, both students and faculty worry that, in some cases, Guttman’s level of support may come at the expense of the rigor necessary to prepare students for success at four-year schools and beyond.

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There is no clear evidence that Guttman’s level of rigor is lower than that of other community colleges, or of CUNY’s senior colleges, for that matter. As mentioned above, Guttman tracks its students who transfer to CUNY senior colleges and found that 86 percent of such students in its first cohort earned a C average or better. In a survey administered to students who graduated in August 2014, only a slight majority of graduates (58 percent) said that they spent more time at their senior college completing homework than they did at Guttman (of course, time on task is only a partial proxy for rigor).³⁰ Anecdotally, the small number of alumni we interviewed report that the number and difficulty of writing assignments was greater in City Seminar and EOW than in their courses at the senior colleges they now attend.

Still, graduates earn lower GPAs at CUNY senior colleges than they did at Guttman, which suggests that there is some misalignment of standards. Guttman has already used these data to identify some programmatic grading policy changes. For example, it changed a policy that allowed a student to receive NC (“no credit granted” grade) in first-

³⁰ Elisa Hertz, “Beyond the Cap and Gown: Experiences of the First Graduating Class,” Guttman Community College (November 2015).

year courses an unlimited number of times.³¹ Now, first-year students can only receive one NC in any first-year course and receive a grade of F if they fail it the second time. In addition, Guttman has changed some of its transfer advising policies in the Business Administration and Information Technology majors to better prepare transfer students for success.

The tension between support and rigor plays out in another sense: coming from the high-touch environment at Guttman, students may struggle without such proactive support structures at the schools to which they transfer. Post-graduate survey responses also indicate that some graduates do not know from whom to seek help at their senior colleges. Focus group responses echo these sentiments and also highlight students' difficulty navigating bureaucratic structures and building relationships with their professors at their senior colleges.³² We heard from both faculty and alumni that it was common for graduates to continue meeting with their former SSAs or career strategists for advising. To address this problem, Guttman has begun implementing a developmental approach to advising that gradually takes students from a high-level of support upon entry to a degree of relative autonomy upon graduation.³³

Innovating within a well-established system

Guttman could not exist independent of the CUNY system. Not only does CUNY's central office subsidize the institution, but Guttman's origins lie in system leaders' commitment to designing an institution that, in their eyes, solved problems not adequately addressed by any existing institutions within the system. But working within the CUNY system has presented some challenges. For example, because Guttman is a new school with a unique professional structure, its faculty members face challenges when it comes to unionization and representation within CUNY. Due to Guttman's small size, its faculty are not currently represented in CUNY's University Faculty Senate. Furthermore, Guttman's lack of departments makes it difficult to reconcile Guttman faculty roles with the contract between CUNY and the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the union representing CUNY faculty (including Guttman faculty). Guttman, CUNY, and the PSC are currently working on updating Guttman governance documents and contracts to address these areas of misalignment, but progress is slow.

³¹ Within the CUNY system, NC grades "represent a non-punitive failure indicating unsatisfactory completion of the course." They are not counted in the GPA calculation. However, they are counted as "attempted credits" in the college's academic probation guidelines. See CUNY Uniform Grading Glossary, https://www.ccnycuny.edu/sites/default/files/registrar/upload/CUNY_Uniform_Grade_070108.pdf.

³² Elisa Hertz, "Beyond the Cap and Gown: Experiences of the First Graduating Class," Guttman Community College (November 2015).

³³ This approach is based on Valencia College's LifeMap developmental advising model. See "LifeMap," Valencia College, <http://valenciacollege.edu/lifemap/>. See also, Jessie Brown and Martin Kurzweil, "Collaborating for Student Success at Valencia College," Ithaca S+R (October 29, 2015), <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/publications/collaborating-for-student-success-at-valencia-college/>.

As another example, in 2011, CUNY's board of trustees approved Pathways, which created a standard framework for general education requirements, credit, and transfer policies across the system. When CUNY issued the Pathways general education framework shortly before Guttman's first classes, Guttman faculty and administrators had to quickly reformulate some of their planned curriculum and credit values to comply with the new policy. Despite these implementation challenges, many Guttman administrators and faculty feel that Pathways provided great benefit to students at Guttman and other CUNY community colleges by easing transfer to the senior colleges.

Scaling the Model

Guttman's leaders aim to enroll 5,000 full-time students by 2025 or soon thereafter. While this is still small by community college standards, it represents a significant increase in scale for Guttman, which currently serves 824 students. This rapid growth presents two related risks: first, an increase in student-to-staff ratio and increasing costs will put pressure on Guttman's high-touch model; second, the need for more structured operations may temper Guttman's ability to adapt and innovate.

To manage these risks, Guttman has relied on its significant capacity for assessment. Though they do not foresee a dramatic change in the model, Guttman's leaders have begun to assess the efficacy of changes to the model that would make it less costly. These might include shortening the length of Summer Bridge or cutting back on redundant opportunities for time-on-task for students. Guttman also expects its culture of assessment to maintain its flexibility and avoid bureaucratic ossification.

Success Factors

Though Guttman is unique in many ways, the factors that have facilitated the successful implementation of its model and management of early challenges are applicable to a variety of institutional contexts.

Thoughtful synthesis and implementation of research-driven practices

Several interviewees emphasized that no single component of Guttman's model had been built from scratch. Rather, Guttman has borrowed proven programs and practices from the research literature and from institutions across the country. Importantly, however, the college planners and, later, administrators and faculty, wove these components together into a workable whole. Dividing the planning into conceptual and practical phases was key. The planners were able to take a green-field approach to the model, with sufficient time and flexibility to surface, study, and synthesize the research on student success. The founding administrators and faculty were then able to test the conceptual model against practical realities in a process akin to the engineering that follows basic

science. Since the college's launch, this interplay between concept and implementation has continued in a productive fashion. Practices have evolved, but always with an eye toward the original concept and its research base.

Mission-focused faculty

Guttman's model tends to attract faculty who are focused on instruction and student success. But Guttman has also been intentional about hiring faculty with specific knowledge and experience with at-risk students, pedagogy, technology, and assessment. Some of Guttman's faculty have backgrounds outside of academia, including in K-12 education and practice in their discipline. This strategy has helped ensure that Guttman's faculty culture aligns with the institutional mission. The most successful faculty members have taken advantage of Guttman's structure and small size to experiment with curriculum and program structure, redefining their own roles while creating new opportunities for students.

Institutionalized collaboration

While Guttman's structure has presented some challenges to faculty and administrators, it has also created some unique conditions for collaboration that have immensely benefitted student success. A significant majority of faculty members at Guttman participate in the first-year experience and the interdisciplinary instructional teams' regular, weekly meetings. Broader groups of faculty scrutinize and discuss artifacts of student work nine times per year on assessment days. And faculty members' substantial participation in governance has allowed them to build networks beyond those forged in their program areas. Guttman's approach to revising its governance structure—in which it has solicited participation from faculty, staff, and students to create a document of research-based inquiry—demonstrates how its collaborative approach extends from its program-level meetings to large-scale institutional decisions and processes.

An institutional culture of assessment and improvement

Though Guttman's commitment to assessment and institutional learning is highlighted throughout this study, it is worth making explicit how important this orientation has been to the institution's early success. Everyone we spoke with at Guttman was deeply engaged with the question of how Guttman's model is working and how it can improve. This mindset is reinforced through Guttman's operations—from instructional teams that meet regularly to discuss the progress of students and constantly review their pedagogy and curricula, to the frequent assessment days—and is evident at all levels of the institution.

An innovative site within a well-established system

While we have emphasized the sui generis nature of Guttman’s program, the institution’s existence within the CUNY system is an important feature that has benefited as well as challenged its efforts. Not only is the institution subsidized by the central office, but Guttman also shares an information technology system, registrar’s data system, and other infrastructure with other CUNY institutions. These arrangements have given Guttman some of the leeway it has needed to test out an innovative and high-touch model. In addition, Guttman has adapted or integrated programs from other CUNY institutions, such as Kingsborough Community College’s learning communities and the system-wide “CUNY Start and Summer Start” programs.³⁴

CUNY’s strategy of implementing research-supported practices through a new institution, relatively unhindered by previous practice or existing culture, is a factor in Guttman’s success.

Taking a step back, CUNY’s strategy of implementing research-supported practices through a new institution, relatively unhindered by previous practice or existing culture, is a factor in Guttman’s success. The CUNY central office has developed a number of other innovative programs, such as the Accelerated Study in Associate’s Programs (ASAP) initiative, that have shown success at CUNY colleges and are being rapidly expanded in the system.³⁵ Still, it was only through the creation of Guttman as a new, separate institution that CUNY was able to stand up a broader set of research-supported practices all at once.

Conclusion

In contrast to institutions that reorganize existing operations around student success, Guttman started with a relatively blank slate. As such, it functions as a sort of laboratory for examining the challenges and opportunities of developing a comprehensive student

³⁴ CUNY Start and Summer Start provide intensive academic preparation to students who have not demonstrated proficiency in reading/writing or math. See “About CUNY Start,” The City University of New York, <http://www.cuny.edu/academics/programs/notable/CATA/cti-cunystart/about.html> and “Summer Start,” The City University of New York, <http://www.cuny.edu/academics/programs/notable/CATA/cti-cunystart/summerstart.html>.

³⁵ CUNY’s ASAP program features include a consolidated block schedule, cohorts by major, small class sizes, required full-time study, and comprehensive advising and career development services. See the ASAP website, <http://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/asap/>.

success strategy. Because of this green-field approach, Guttman has been able to take organizational and programmatic structures from concept to implementation with a directness and speed that path dependence would compromise at most other institutions. It has also faced some “start-up” challenges related to model implementation, faculty roles, and scaling.

Despite these distinctions, Guttman’s specific programmatic experiences can serve as examples to inform similar programmatic changes at other institutions. More importantly, Guttman’s general approach holds lessons for the field. Guttman’s commitment to research-driven practices, innovative and dedicated faculty, institutional learning, and collaboration all resemble factors we have observed at other institutions that have successfully organized themselves to improve outcomes. Guttman’s unique and unencumbered situation—and the way it has managed challenges inherent under these conditions—distills the importance of these factors as crucial components that are most effective when intentionally incorporated into institutional strategies for student success.

Appendix

We conducted the following interviews with Guttman staff, faculty and students between November 4 and November 18, 2015.

- Amy Beth, Chief Librarian and Associate Professor
- Nicola Blake, Program Coordinator, Liberal Arts and Science Program
- Sebastien Buttet, Associate Professor of Economics, Chair of Ad Hoc Committee on Governance
- Stuart Cochran, Dean of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness
- Scott Evenbeck, President
- Laura Gambino, Associate Dean of Assessment and Technology
- Danielle Insalaco-Egan, Director of Student Support and Academic Achievement
- Joan Lucariello, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Nicole Saint-Louis, Program Coordinator, Human Services
- Alia Tyner-Mullings, Program Coordinator, First Year Experience, member of Ad Hoc Committee on Governance
- Lori Ungemah, Program Coordinator, First Year Experience
- Three current Guttman students and two Guttman alumni (graduated 2015)