



**STATEMENT  
Of  
LUIS GUTIERREZ  
UNIVERSITY STUDENT SENATE VICE CHAIR OF GRADUATE AFFAIRS  
BEFORE THE  
STATE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, STATE ASSEMBLY  
COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS,  
STATE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, & STATE SENATE COMMITTEE  
ON FINANCE  
February 6, 2014  
ALBANY, NEW YORK**

Good afternoon. My name is Luis Gutierrez and I am a graduate student at Hunter College. Moreover, I serve as vice chair of graduate student affairs for the University Student Senate (USS), the official governance organization for students at the City University of New York (CUNY), and as chair of the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD), a CUNY-wide organization representing the University's more than 9,000 students with disabilities.

Speaking on behalf of CUNY's more than 30,000 graduate students, I am here today to urge you to consider providing a financial aid safety net for New York State students seeking advanced degrees.

I would like to take a moment to display—with assistance from my colleague: USS Vice Chair Cynthia Roldan-- a list of all student financial aid programs, other than the Veterans Tuition Award, that New York State currently offers for graduate study. As you can see the chart is blank. It would certainly appear that the State of New York doesn't believe that having a well-trained workforce with advanced degrees is a good investment.

However, according to the Council of Graduate Schools, it is estimated that by 2018, 2.5 million new jobs will require advanced degrees ([http://www.fgereport.org/rsc/pdf/ExecSum\\_PathForward.pdf](http://www.fgereport.org/rsc/pdf/ExecSum_PathForward.pdf)). Moreover, The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that jobs requiring master's degrees and professional degrees will grow by 22% and 20%, respectively, from 2010 to 2020 – faster than any other level of education (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/about/projections-overview.htm>).

At CUNY, tuition & fees for a number of graduate programs has skyrocketed. At a number of our institutions, graduate enrollment is down. USS is working with Chancellor Kelly and Vice Chancellors Sapienza & Sanchez in exploring ways to provide a wider financial aid safety net for our graduate students. However, no matter what resources that our University is able to provide our graduate students, it will not be an adequate substitute for a comprehensive State program.

USS, working in coalition with NYPIRG and others, recommends that the state legislature expand the State's tuition tax credit/deduction program to include matriculated graduate students. The tax credit or deduction, which is currently only offered to undergraduates at New York colleges & universities, is equal to the amount of qualified tuition expenses paid, up to a maximum deduction of \$10,000 for each eligible student ([http://www.hesc.ny.gov/content.nsf/SFC/NYS\\_College\\_Tuition\\_Tax\\_Credit/Deduction](http://www.hesc.ny.gov/content.nsf/SFC/NYS_College_Tuition_Tax_Credit/Deduction)).



Expanding the State tuition tax credit/deduction to include graduate students would be a great first step in addressing the needs of our State's graduate student population.

Finally, I would like to shift gears slightly & take a moment to thank the members of the state legislature for including a line for CUNY LEADS in the CUNY operating budget. However, I urge you to support the University's request for an increase of \$1.5 million in FY 2014-15.

CUNY LEADS, an academic development, job training & placement program, is perhaps the nation's preeminent program of its kind for college and university students with disabilities. As you are probably aware, participants in the program who are job-ready have a 70 percent employment rate, compared to the 56 percent national employment rate for people with disabilities. Moreover, it is estimated that a modest investment of \$10,000 to develop and place a CUNY LEADS student in competitive employment saves New York State more than \$14,000 per year in disability benefits alone.

The increase of \$1.5 million would allow the program to be fully funded & serve the maximum number of eligible students.

Thank you.





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# UNIVERSITY STUDENT SENATE TESTIMONY

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Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2014-2015 Executive Budget Proposal:  
Topic "Higher Education"  
February 6, 2014

**Prepared by:**  
Cynthia Roldan  
Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs  
University Student Senate

## ORAL TESTIMONY

Good morning, Chairperson LaValle, Chairperson Glick and members of the committee. I am Cynthia Roldan, Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs at The University Student Senate of The City University of New York. Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the 2014-2015 Executive Budget Proposal as it pertains to Higher Education.

**The University Student Senate of the City University of New York** is the leading student government organization of the City University and is tasked with preserving the accessibility, affordability, and excellence of higher education within the City of New York.

As you well know, **affordability** remains the key concern for our students. With the aid of the state, and this committee in particular, CUNY represents a tremendous value in higher education for many of our students. CUNY reported that nearly 60% of full-time undergraduates attend tuition free, thanks in part to federal Pell grants, the state's Tuition Assistance Program, and CUNY's own financial aid programs. They also reported, that almost 80% of full-time students are debt free when they graduate from CUNY. This however is does not paint an accurate picture because it fails to take into account the students that drop out having taken out loans or due to the fact that they did not qualify for any loans. The cost of higher education is much more than just tuition, it includes textbooks, transportation, supplies and expensive online codes to name a few of the additional costs. It is hard to make ends meet, pay rent, and internet and phone bills, sometimes be a parent and be a student at the same time. Yet, education is the only key to success, many of you went to CUNY or even SUNY and are now in the position to help students attain their professional goals through obtaining their degree just as you did in the past.

With the help of the state legislature CUNY administration has been able to retain and aid those students in need through opportunity programs such as SEEK/College Discovery, ASAP, College Readiness: CUNY Start and College Now, Black Male Initiative, Single Stop, CUNY LEADS and programs such as Child care. All of these programs have three things in common they directly help our students financially, the directly help our students grow, develop and graduate at a higher rate and they all did not receive the adequate funding to operate or appear on the executive budget.

### **Black Male Initiative**

The Black Male Initiative was instituted to address education, retention, graduation, and underrepresentation challenges in 2006. According to CUNY in the fall of 2004, 10.3% of all degree seekers at The City University of New York were black males (8.6% at the bachelor's level and 12.3% at the associate's level). Additionally CUNY has reported that at the end of one year of enrollment, black males are significantly less likely to return for a second year of study than others—only 74.3% do so at the bachelor's level and only 57.1% at the associate's level. Moreover, the long-term graduation rates for black males are very low—only 27.1% of the black men who began as freshmen in baccalaureate degree programs in the Fall of 1998 had graduated six years later and only 14.6% of those that had begun in associate degree programs had done. This program is successfully working to reverse this national trend by providing dedicated mentoring, tutoring, leadership, work experience and development services and programs. CUNY wants to expand this successful program and believes it will have a great impact if implemented at the State level if the state were to match the City's allocation.

### **Single Stop**

In 2009 CUNY partnered with Single Stop USA to support a Single Stop office at each community college to increase retention by connecting low income students with government benefits and services. From 2009 to 2012 Single Stop helped CUNY Students access benefits that helped them save \$66 million. In order to expand Single Stop to senior colleges at CUNY funding is needed. This program has helped make the cost of attaining a degree at community college at CUNY more affordable for students and it will do the same for students like me at CUNY senior colleges. Helping the over 40% of low income students at CUNY to find cheaper textbooks, get free legal help, get free metro cards, apply for food stamps and even get discounted materials for class. This will also improve student performance and retention rates in

the state as students are able to continue their studies and relieve some financial stress to focus on studying and not how they are going to make ends meet.

### **CUNY Start & College Now**

CUNY Start provides students admitted with significant remedial needs with an intensive pre-matriculation academic semester program to complete remedial classes before beginning college-level work the following semester and preserving their financial aid. Which in turn makes earning a college degree more affordable. However, this magnificent program has a limited capacity, with adequate funding it can expand to help more students and this is very important considering the average rate of graduation is 6 years and many students transfer within the system and then drop out due to lack of funding. That is the story of my older sister Monica, who attended community college part time and graduated with her associates in three years and then not being able to obtain her bachelors at Baruch and having to drop out after her first year since she could no longer receive aid and had to help my single mother.

Today I am a senior at Baruch College and that is thanks to another college readiness program that needs funding. College Now, this program allowed me to take classes while I was in high school and is enabling me to graduate on time this May. This program currently serves 20,000 students annually in over 400 public high school programs in NYC. Studies have shown that College Now students have higher retention and graduation rates than other students. Funding is needed to expand both of these successful programs. Without College Now I would've never the discovered the gem that is CUNY, nor would I be in front of you today- I would probably have taken a year or more off from school and worked so that I could afford tuition at a private school- but I learned that SUNY and CUNY were the only school systems that would offer me in state tuition as an undocumented youth and my decision was made clear. College Now also gave me the opportunity to become politically engaged and learn about our city and state legislature through their Model New York City Council Program. All of these opportunity programs and the ones my colleagues have mentioned are essential to our students achieving their dreams.

### **DREAM Act**

On that same note, our team and I are advocating for the passage of the NYS Dream Act and the allocation of twenty million dollars in the state budget to make it a reality. As I briefly noted, New York is the fourth state to offer undocumented students in-state tuition rates at public universities. However, the other three states- California, New Mexico, and Texas- offer undocumented youth access to state financial aid programs today. The Office of the State Comptroller estimates that the initial cost of providing TAP awards to these students would likely be offset by the additional taxes paid over the course of their working lifetimes as a result of their ability to obtain higher-paying jobs and likelihood of residing in New York after graduation. CUNY has the highest number of undocumented students in the state with nearly 40% of students born outside of the U.S. mainland. Linking them to at least one child in their family who this law will help. I did not receive any financial aid for the first two years of my undergraduate degree. Luckily for me I had help but others students are not as lucky and they decide to not pursue a degree because of the high cost of tuition, books, transportation, supplies and much more. The reality is that many of these brilliant youths end up working minimum wage jobs to help their families and never return to school, and never got to accomplish their dreams to become engineers, teachers, and doctors.

My thanks again to you, Chairperson LaValle and Chairperson Glick, and your colleagues for the opportunity to speak to you today. The University Student Senate deeply appreciates your effective advocacy on behalf of our students, and we look forward to working in partnership with you to sustain their advancement and break down the barriers to higher education, which is the gateway to success.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Roldan  
Vice Chair for Legislative Affairs, University Student Senate

# CUNY STUDENT AGENDA 2014-2015 STATE OPERATING BUDGET PRIORITIES

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## Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)

**\$1.7 million**

CUNY launched ASAP in 2007 to help community college students earn their degrees as quickly as possible. ASAP graduation rate is more than three times the national three-year graduation rate for urban community colleges. CUNY wants to expand enrollment to 4,000 students for Fall 2014. Unfortunately, funding to enhance this program was not included in the Executive Budget.

## Single Stop

**\$1.0 million**

In 2009 CUNY partnered with Single Stop USA to support a Single Stop office at each community college to increase retention by connecting low income students with government benefits and services. From 2009 to 2012 Single Stop helped CUNY Students access benefits that helped them save \$66 million. In order to expand Single Stop to senior colleges at CUNY funding is needed.

## Black Male Initiative

**\$2.5 million**

The Black Male Initiative was instituted to address education, retention, graduation, and underrepresentation challenges in 2006. Over the years, BMI has amassed an impressive record of mentoring, outreach, placement, and related activities aimed at maximizing student success. Historically, only the City of New York, through the City Council, has provided funding. The State should match the City's allocation.

## Graduate State Tuition Tax/Credit Deduction

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that jobs requiring master's degrees and professional degrees will grow by 22% and 20%, respectively, from 2010 to 2020. Unfortunately, New York State completely eliminated Graduate TAP in 2009. If implemented this program will allow eligible graduate students to receive the State Tuition tax/credit deduction currently offered to Undergraduates and alleviate the costs of a student population in need.

## DREAM Act Reform

**\$20.0 million**

In 2002, New York became the fourth state to offer undocumented students in-state tuition rates at public universities. Today, California, New Mexico, and Texas offer undocumented youth access to state financial aid programs. The Office of the State Comptroller estimates that the initial cost of providing TAP awards to these students would likely be offset by the additional taxes paid over the course of their working lifetimes as a result of their ability to obtain higher-paying jobs and likelihood of residing in New York after graduation.

## **CUNY LEADS**

**\$1.5 million**

The Linking Employment, Academics, and Disability Services (CUNY LEADS) program is a unique partnership with the State Education Department, and was established to facilitate successful academic and career outcomes for students with disabilities.

## **Legislative Restorations**

**\$1.0 million**

The Executive budget does not include funding for SEEK/College Discovery of \$0.5 million, a program previously provided by the state legislature and reduced Childcare funding at the Community Colleges by \$544,000. Fifteen percent of all CUNY Undergraduates support children and quality care is essential to the retention and success of these students.

## **College Readiness: CUNY Start and College Now**

**\$5.0 million**

CUNY Start provides students admitted with significant remedial needs with an intensive pre-matriculation academic semester program to complete remedial classes before beginning college-level work the following semester and preserving their financial aid. College Now serves 20,000 students annually in over 400 public high school programs in NYC. Studies have shown that College Now students have higher retention and graduation rates than other students. Funding is needed to expand both of these successful programs.



