

The Power of Fully Supporting Community College Students

The Effects of the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs After Six Years

The [Accelerated Study in Associate Programs \(ASAP\)](#), developed by the City University of New York (CUNY), is an uncommonly comprehensive and long-term program designed to address low graduation rates among students enrolled in two-year institutions, a challenge facing community colleges nationwide. MDRC has been [studying ASAP's effects](#) on low-income students with developmental (remedial) education needs at CUNY using a randomized controlled trial. In the spring and fall of 2010, roughly half of the students eligible for the study and interested in participating in ASAP at three CUNY colleges were selected to enroll in ASAP using a lottery.

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At the time of MDRC's evaluation, ASAP included the following forms of support and requirements:

STUDENT SUPPORT PROVIDED BY ASAP	STUDENT REQUIREMENTS
<p><i>Available for up to three years</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuition waiver Free use of textbooks MetroCard for admissible use of New York City public transit Access to advisers with reduced caseloads Individual career and employment services Tutoring 	<p><i>To maintain status in the program</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enroll full time Take developmental courses early Meet regularly with an adviser Attend tutoring if taking developmental courses or struggling academically

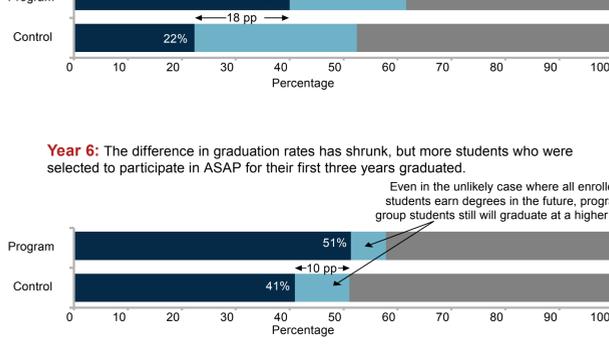
The last report MDRC published found that within three years (the amount of time program services were available to students) ASAP nearly doubled graduation rates.

Programs offering students this level of support for an extended period are uncommon in postsecondary education, and few have been rigorously evaluated. Interest in this highly effective program has grown around the country since the initial results were released, and the question has arisen whether the effects of ASAP are sustained even after the end of the program.

Following up on students six years after the start of the study, MDRC finds that ASAP both continues to increase graduation rates and enables some students to earn their degrees faster than they would have otherwise.

The figure below shows educational status over time among students who were given the option to participate in ASAP (the program group) and among those who were not (the control group).

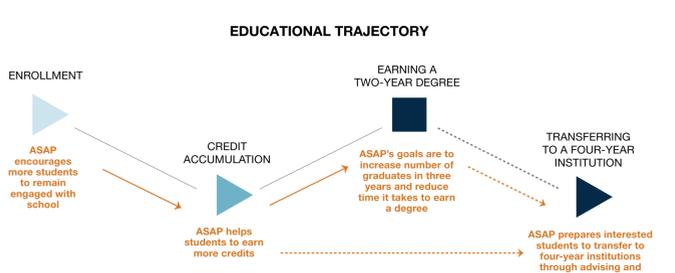
Figure 1 STUDENT STATUS AT THREE AND SIX YEARS



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the CUNY Institutional Research Database (IRDB) and the National Student Clearinghouse.

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by random assignment blocks and selected baseline characteristics. Enrollment is based on courses in which students are still enrolled as of the end of the add/drop period.

A community college student's educational trajectory can involve many steps:



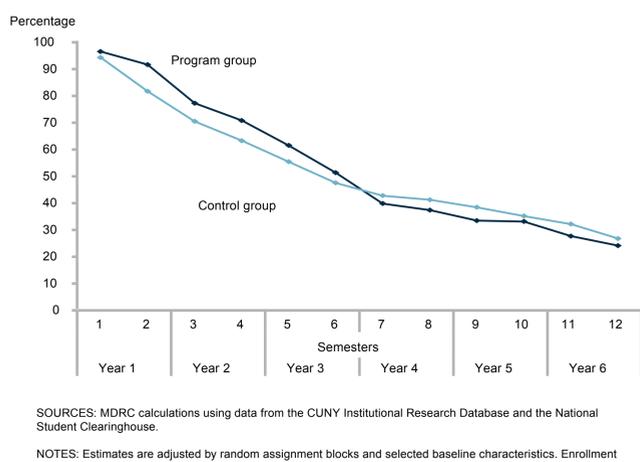
The sections below walk through these progress measures to show ASAP's effect on each. The final section considers the implications of these findings.

ASAP'S EFFECTS ON STUDENT ENROLLMENT

While many students enroll in postsecondary education at some point, far too many do not stay enrolled long enough to earn degrees. The graph below shows enrollment in each semester among program group students and control group students. ASAP had a negligible effect on enrollment in the first semester, but as will be discussed below, program group students made more academic progress in this term than control group students.

Figure 2 ENROLLMENT AT ANY COLLEGE

In semesters two through five, ASAP had large and meaningful effects on enrollment, indicating that ASAP encouraged more students to remain engaged with school; these are among the largest enrollment effects seen in a higher education experiment. From Semester 6 onward the effects are negligible, in part because compared with the control group, more students in the program group had already graduated.



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the CUNY Institutional Research Database and the National Student Clearinghouse.

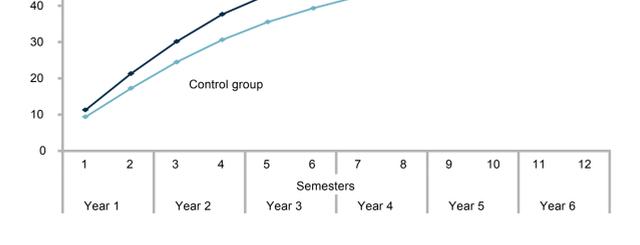
NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by random assignment blocks and selected baseline characteristics. Enrollment is based on courses in which students are still enrolled as of the end of the add/drop period.

ASAP'S EFFECTS ON CREDIT ACCUMULATION

In addition to encouraging students to stay enrolled, ASAP helped them earn more credits. In the graph below, average total credits (college general plus developmental credits) earned by each group are plotted over time; the credit amounts are calculated cumulatively from one semester to the next.

Figure 3 CREDIT ACCUMULATION

Starting in the first semester, students offered ASAP earned more credits on average than students in the control group, and this lead is maintained throughout the three years that program services were available to students and beyond. At the end of six years, students offered ASAP earned 7 credits more on average than control group students. To put this number in context, most associate's degree programs at CUNY require 60 credits.



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from the CUNY Institutional Research Database.

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by random assignment blocks and selected baseline characteristics. Credits earned is based on courses in which students are still enrolled as of the end of the add/drop period. Measures of cumulative credits earned exclude courses that are passed more than once.

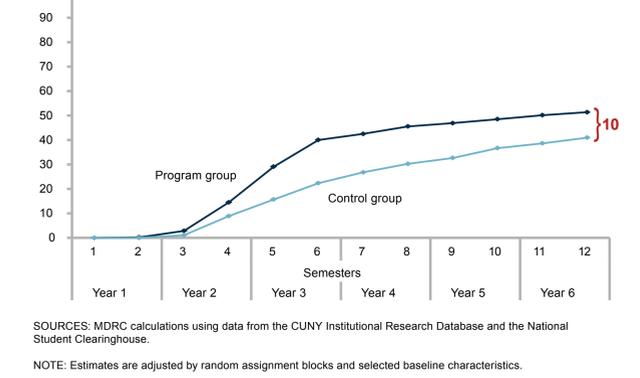
ASAP'S EFFECTS ON GRADUATION

Students with postsecondary degrees have access to a variety of opportunities that might not be available to them otherwise. ASAP's stated goals are both to increase the number of students who graduate within three years and to reduce the amount of time it takes students to earn degrees. This evaluation shows that the program clearly succeeds in achieving these goals.

The graph below shows the percentages of students in the program group and the control group who earned degrees over six years. Students earning multiple credentials are counted when they earned their first degrees; the graduation rate for a given term includes all students who earned a degree in that term or an earlier term. By the end of two years, ASAP had already made a meaningful difference in increasing the number of students who graduated. The gap widened through Year 3, at which point ASAP had nearly doubled graduation rates: 40 percent of the program group had earned degrees, compared with 22 percent of the control group. After the program's services ended, students in both the program and control groups continued to earn degrees, and the difference between the groups began to lessen.

Figure 4a EARNED ANY DEGREE

At the end of six years, however, there was still a 10 percentage point difference between them (51 percent of program group students and 41 percent of control group students had earned degrees).

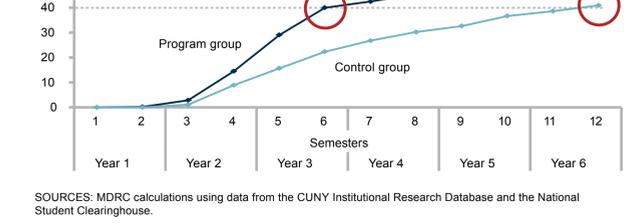


SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the CUNY Institutional Research Database and the National Student Clearinghouse.

NOTE: Estimates are adjusted by random assignment blocks and selected baseline characteristics.

Figure 4b EARNED ANY DEGREE

Looking at the trend more closely, it becomes apparent that ASAP also helped some students earn their degrees faster. Consider that 40 percent of students offered ASAP earned degrees in three years, while the control group did not achieve the same graduation rate until Year 6. In other words, if 40 percent of students would have graduated in six years either way, ASAP enabled at least some students to earn their degrees in less time.



SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the CUNY Institutional Research Database and the National Student Clearinghouse.

NOTE: Estimates are adjusted by random assignment blocks and selected baseline characteristics.

Additional analyses were conducted to see whether ASAP's effects on graduation varied for different types of students. At three years, students offered ASAP graduated at higher rates, regardless of observable characteristics such as gender, race, and the amount of developmental course work the student needed to complete. By six years, some differences in the effect on graduation begin to appear among students of different races, though additional research is needed to assess what could be leading to this difference or if the finding is spurious. Notably, ASAP appears to be effective not only for "traditional" college students but also for those who are likely to be the most at risk: students who are older, who work full time, who have children, or who did not receive high school diplomas. At this point, there is not clear evidence that ASAP works better for some students than others, but the consistency of ASAP's effects, in general, may help in closing known educational achievement gaps.

ASAP'S EFFECTS ON TRANSFERRING TO FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS AND EARNING BACHELOR'S DEGREES

Some community college students consider the associate's degree a stepping stone to a bachelor's degree. Through advising and other student services, ASAP helps prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions if they express interest in obtaining bachelor's degrees, but during the study students could only participate in the program while they were pursuing associate's degrees. The figure below shows enrollment rates at four-year institutions on the left and rates of bachelor's degree receipt on the right.

Figure 5 TRANSFER TO FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND RECEIPT OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES

ASAP helped students enroll in four-year institutions sooner, but over six years comparable percentages of program and control group students enrolled in four-year institutions. Similarly, students offered ASAP were able to earn bachelor's degrees more quickly than control group students, but by the end of six years similar proportions of students in both groups had earned that credential.

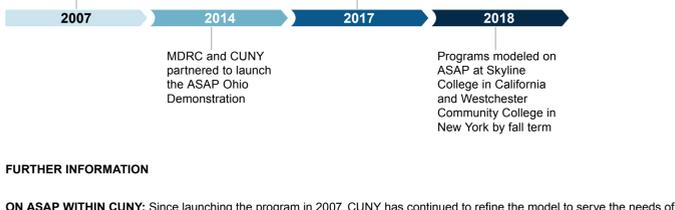


SOURCES: MDRC calculations using data from the CUNY Institutional Research Database and the National Student Clearinghouse.

NOTE: Estimates are adjusted by random assignment blocks and selected baseline characteristics.

CONCLUSION

Ten years ago, CUNY ASAP began as a pilot program serving just over a thousand students at six CUNY colleges. Because of its remarkable effects on community college graduation rates, the program has since expanded substantially and has benefited tens of thousands of students. This evaluation, along with research conducted by CUNY, has shown that ASAP works incredibly well. Policymakers and community colleges around the country can draw on the lessons of CUNY ASAP to help more students graduate and to help them graduate more quickly.



FURTHER INFORMATION

ON ASAP WITHIN CUNY: Since launching the program in 2007, CUNY has continued to refine the model to serve the needs of students better. ASAP is now offered at nine CUNY colleges and plans to serve 25,000 students per year by the 2018-2019 academic year. CUNY has also developed the Accelerate, Complete, Engage (ACE) program, modeled on ASAP, for students pursuing bachelor's degrees. MDRC will continue to follow the academic progress of students in the experimental study.

ON THE ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF CUNY ASAP: For the research evaluation conducted by MDRC, the program cost was estimated at about \$14,000 per student over the course of three years, in addition to the roughly \$26,000 per student that CUNY spends on all students. Researchers at Teacher's College hope the program will prove beneficial to students and taxpayers. MDRC will continue to assess the cost of ASAP and plans to continue following the students in the experimental study to determine ASAP's effect on their employment rates and earnings.

ON ASAP'S EXPANSION BEYOND CUNY: In 2014, MDRC and CUNY partnered to launch the [ASAP Ohio Demonstration](#), an effort to determine whether CUNY ASAP can be successfully implemented at community colleges in Ohio and to confirm the positive academic impacts found in the evaluation of CUNY ASAP. Early findings from a randomized controlled trial in Ohio are promising and in line with the CUNY results. Skyline College in California and Westchester Community College in New York are currently receiving technical assistance from CUNY ASAP and plan to have programs modeled on ASAP in place by the fall 2018 term. MDRC will conduct a randomized experiment to assess the effects of Westchester's program.