



Fewer Latino Freshmen at CUNY Senior Colleges

By David R. Jones
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Although Latino students made significant gains in admission to the top senior CUNY colleges from 2001, they lost all of those gains in just two years. From 2001 to 2008, Latino students increased their presence at all levels of CUNY schools. Yet in the two years after 2008, they lost most of their gains at senior colleges, with dramatic declines in top-tier schools.

This is a key finding in a recently released report from the Community Service Society (CSS) that examines the enrollment trends of freshmen at the City University of New York. The report, "[Unintended Impacts: Fewer Black and Latino Freshmen at CUNY Senior Colleges After the Recession](#)," reveals that black and Latino students are now far less likely than they were before 2009 to be enrolled in a CUNY senior college, where retention and graduation rates are far higher than at CUNY community colleges.

The report analyzes only freshmen so as to understand the opportunities available to graduating high school students seeking to enroll in CUNY. CUNY is extremely important as the major institution of higher learning for much of the city's high school students who go on to college - 73 percent of CUNY freshman in 2010 were graduates of the city's public schools.

The recession that began in late 2008 led to more applications to CUNY from students and families hit hard by the economic downturn. As applications increased, CUNY senior colleges raised their minimum admissions requirements, leading to much greater enrollment of students with higher SAT scores. The numbers of Latino students enrolling as freshmen at the top five CUNY colleges dropped sharply, and also fell at other senior colleges.

From 2001 to 2008, the number of Latino freshman at top-tier schools increased by 40 percent. By 2010, that entire increase was erased, and Latino students comprised only 19 percent in the top five CUNY colleges - Baruch, Hunter, Brooklyn, City, and Queens Colleges - and 25 percent of all senior colleges despite the fact that more Latino high school students than ever are taking the SAT exam.

The CSS report is titled "Unintended Impact" because we do not believe that CUNY knew what would happen with a combination of higher standards and the recession. However, we believe that CUNY can increase the number and share of black and Latino students at its senior colleges.

Admissions processes should consider more than just grade point average and SAT score in a student's application in the same way the other public and private colleges do to achieve greater levels of diversity. CUNY should provide support to students with lower scores to help them succeed once on campus. CUNY should also conduct more outreach to students of color and reinstitute the summer program of conditional admissions.

Two weeks ago, I wrote about a report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education that revealed that the city's school system's resources are unequally distributed according to race and neighborhood. It showed how the school system practices of education redlining "systematically lock out most of its student population from an opportunity to learn."

The next mayor of New York must make it a major priority to revise the way resources are meted out in the city's schools. Our students must have adequate preparation to succeed at the college level. Youth of color in New York City are being told to prepare for college and are making great strides in doing so, yet the opportunities for them to enroll in a four-year college at CUNY are diminishing. Our education system must be geared to prepare its students for living wage jobs in a challenging labor market.

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 168 years. For over 10 years he served as a member of the board of directors of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer.