

# **Executive Summary Bronx Community College (BCC) Self-Study**

**for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)  
February 2019**

## **BCC Profile**

Bronx Community College (BCC) was established in 1957 to meet the growing need for increased higher education opportunities in the Bronx, NY. BCC is part of the City University of New York (CUNY), the largest urban public university in the country, comprised of 25 institutions, including seven community colleges.

Bronx County, one of the five boroughs of NYC, has a population of 1.47 M, which is a largely minority population (56% Hispanic and 29.5% Black); with a substantial immigrant population (35% foreign born); in need of further education (only 19% with a bachelor degree or higher); and a poverty rate of 28%, one of the highest in the country. (See [Economic Snapshot of the Bronx.](#))

BCC has 41 academic programs (34 associate and 7 certificates) registered with the New York State Department of Education that are active. The majority of our matriculated students are enrolled in transfer-oriented AA/AS degrees (71%), with a smaller percentage in the career-oriented AAS degrees (28%). Our certificate programs, also career-related, are a very small percentage of our total enrollment (1%). In Fall 2018 approximately two-thirds (64%) of students enrolled full-time, more than one-half (56%) female, and approximately one-half (53%) age 22 or younger. See [BCC Fact Sheet](#).

BCC's student headcount enrollment is approximately 10,000 and FTE enrollment approximately 7500. Following 15 years of steady enrollment increases, BCC's headcount enrollment declined by 3.8% and FTE enrollment declined 1.5% between 2013 and 2017 (see [BCC Enrollment Trends](#)), with similar declines predicted through 2020 (see [Enrollment Projections](#)).

The vast majority of BCC students (98%) are ethnic minorities, representing more than 100 countries of origin. Approximately one-half (51%) of BCC students are employed, and almost one-quarter (25%) are supporting children. Approximately one-half (55%) are first-generation college students, and 53% have an annual household income less than \$20,000. Two-thirds (64%) of entering BCC freshmen require developmental instruction in one or more basic skill area (reading, writing, mathematics).

## **Self-Study Process and Purpose**

BCC initiated a comprehensive, college-wide self-study process in January, 2017 according to the requirements of the college's regional accrediting body, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). In Spring 2017, a Steering Committee and nine working groups were formed (involving more than 100 campus members) who conducted research and drafted reports that informed the current Self-Study Report. Throughout the process, efforts have been made to engage the campus community in the analysis and recommendations in the document, including focus groups, town hall meetings, and use of social media. The Self-Study and review process will culminate in March, 2019 with a three-day visit from a team of peer evaluators, who will meet with members of the campus community and provide their feedback regarding the extent to which the campus meets/exceeds the MSCHE standards. The evaluation team will forward their recommendations to MSCHE and a final determination

of the College’s accreditation status will be voted on by the Commission in June, 2019.

The purpose of BCC’s Self-Study (which is organized according to the seven standards) has been to: (1) demonstrate compliance with the MSCHE standards and requirements for accreditation- relative to the BCC mission and goals; (2) engage the BCC community in an open and inclusive evaluation process; and (3) use the Self-Study findings and analysis to inform the next strategic plan for 2020-2025.

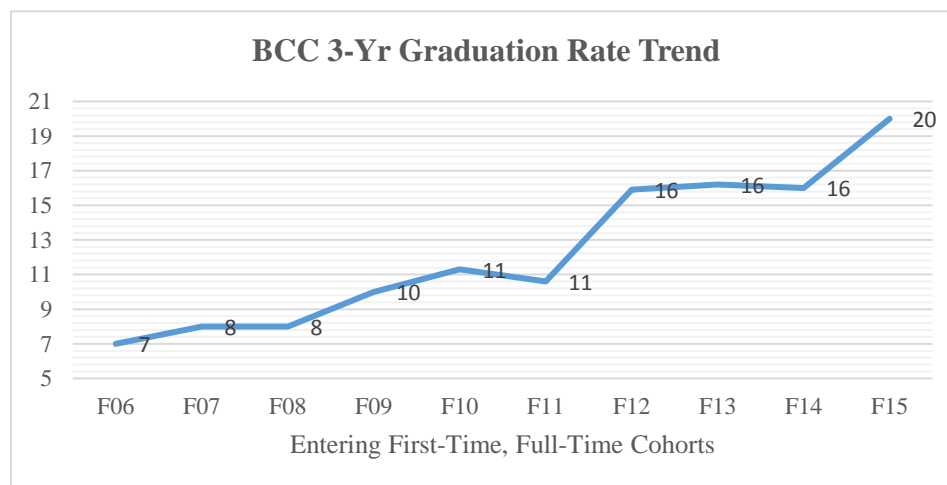
The current BCC [Strategic Plan](#): 2015-20 (*Building a Community of Excellence*) has provided an ambitious blueprint for the College. The overarching goal of the plan is to build a “community of excellence” characterized by a culture that (1) fosters evidence-based decision-making; (2) promotes mentoring of faculty and students; and (3) facilitates collaboration, alignment and integration in all college activities and processes. The following BCC goals (with corresponding objectives and action plans) were identified to support the College’s mission and move the College towards realization of our Vision: (1) Build a Community of Excellence (2) Empower Students to Succeed (3) Deepen Student Learning (4) Develop World Citizens (5) Cultivate a 21st-Century Curriculum (6) Enhance the Campus Environment (7) Promote a Reputation for Excellence.

### **BCC Progress since the last Self-Study in 2008-2009**

In the past decade, BCC has experienced a significant rejuvenation, including:

- Transformation of our landmark campus, with the construction of a new classroom/ library building, on-campus Early Childhood Center and renovation of our campus quad
- Reformulation of our general education program (to conform with CUNY Pathways)
- Institutionalization of a college-wide assessment and improvement program
- Designation as CUNY’s First [ASAP](#) (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) College
- Implementation of focused and evidence-based student success initiatives (First Year Seminar, Learning Communities, Learning Commons)
- Advancement of professional development to support active learning, effective pedagogy and faculty scholarship

These developments have corresponded with significant improvements in student success rates and significant improvement in faculty, student and staff satisfaction during the same period. The BCC 3-year graduation rate has almost tripled during this time.



Analyses conducted as part of the Self-Study process resulted in identification of major challenges that BCC currently faces and will address as part of the next strategic planning period for the College. The five major challenges include:

1. Improving Student Success (academic progress, retention and completion)
2. Improving Student Learning (especially basic and higher-order skills)
3. Addressing Enrollment Decline and Impact on College Budget
4. Improving College Financial/Administrative Management, Transparency and Communication
5. Managing Campus Infrastructure

Now that the Self-Study report is completed, the campus is enthusiastic to utilize the analyses conducted as part of this process to inform the development of the new strategic plan for BCC 2020-25. A brief summary of the report's findings follows:

### **Standard I: Mission and Goals**

Bronx Community College's clearly defined mission remains at the heart of its identity, forming the foundation for strategic planning, assessment, resource allocation, and goal setting. BCC's mission, vision and values drive our purpose and support the overall CUNY Mission to provide a high-quality education with broad access and function as an engine of social mobility.

#### **Strengths**

- BCC's mission and goals are: clearly understood and deeply embraced across the campus; widely publicized; and used to drive budgeting, planning and decision-making. They are aligned with each other, with CUNY's mission and goals, and with MSCHE expectations.
- BCC's *Academic Master Plan (AMP)* provides comprehensive analysis and evidence to inform future directions for academic programming at the College.

#### **Challenges**

- While the BCC's mission, vision and goals are deeply embraced across campus, their statements could be more succinctly expressed.

#### **Recommendations**

- Utilize recommendations from *MSCHE Self-Study*, along with recommendations from *Academic Master Plan*, to inform the new *BCC Strategic Plan: 2020-25*.
- Ensure that upcoming operational planning efforts (to address enrollment, retention, and remedial reforms as highlighted in subsequent chapters of this report) are true to the core elements of our mission: serving students of *diverse backgrounds, preparations, and aspirations* by providing a *broad and rigorous education* and *providing the foundation and tools for success*.

### **Standard II: Ethics and Integrity**

Bronx Community College is committed to upholding the highest standards of ethics and integrity. Consistent with our mission and vision, BCC provides the best possible service to the learning and working environment on our campus by remaining current on local, state and federal regulations and communicating policies and procedures widely and transparently. The BCC Values of Respect, Integrity,

Engagement, Empowerment, and Excellence foster a climate with which the campus community engages in all activities, interactions, and commitments. The College implements and complies with all CUNY system-wide policies and develops its own for local campus use.

### **Strengths**

- BCC capitalizes on the rich diversity among its students, faculty and staff in developing a robust program of activities to foster a climate of tolerance and respect on campus.
- BCC has invested significant time and resources to develop and implement programs and strategies to: provide financial support for students, (ASAP, APEX, Single Stop, NSF Grant); accelerate degree completion (with academic supports such as skills workshops and tutoring); provide on-campus jobs for students; provide support for obtaining work off-campus; and provide information and advisement regarding options for financing a college education.
- BCC complies with all CUNY reporting policies as well as city, state and federal regulations and requirements. Periodic audits by both CUNY and BCC ensure continued compliance and facilitate reporting to appropriate campus constituencies.

### **Challenges**

- Students' financial needs and challenges are extensive, despite a wide variety of BCC efforts to support economically disadvantaged students as they pursue a degree. Many BCC students who are financially eligible to receive financial aid do not for a variety of reasons (international student status, lack of satisfactory academic progress, part-time enrollment, registration and withdrawal actions, and filing challenges).
- Making the vast array of documents, policies and procedures regarding freedoms, rights, rules and responsibilities available and transparent for communicating the content to the campus constituencies can be improved.

### **Recommendations**

- Expand and improve efforts to provide financial supports, accelerate degree completion, and educate students about financial literacy along with options available to them to finance their college education.
- Identify and implement effective strategies to communicate policies, regulations, protocols, and procedures in transparent and user-friendly formats.

## **Standard III. Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience**

The BCC campus community maintains a strong belief that all of the “students of diverse backgrounds, preparations and aspirations” who enroll at BCC have the capacity to successfully master our rigorous academic programs and succeed in subsequent academic and/or professional experiences. It is the College’s responsibility to enhance the learning experiences for all students by supporting the faculty and staff that create and deliver those learning environments. We seek to accomplish this with a focus on the goals articulated in our Strategic Plan.

### **Strengths**

- The strong academic qualifications of BCC faculty are reinforced by a rigorous process of reappointment, tenure, and promotion that requires a sturdy integration of teaching, scholarship, and service.

- BCC provides an extensive range of programs and initiatives to support its academic programs and students' academic progress (including pre-college preparation programs; advisement and counseling; academic supports and enrichment; supports for specific student needs; and academic department resources).
- BCC has a solid general education program and effective mechanisms for assessing it.
- There is a mature program to annually/periodically assess all academic/non-academic programs and learning outcomes across the campus and to use results to make improvements.
- Strong professional development programs for faculty are based on the integration of pedagogical innovation with rigorous assessment practices.
- The new Academic Master Plan (AMP) provides substantive direction for the development, assessment and revision of academic programs.

### **Challenges**

- Too few BCC students are making satisfactory progress at the College. While the 3-year graduation rate has almost tripled in the past decade, retention rates and completion rates at BCC could improve. Academic progress at BCC is positively associated with: participation in special programs; low/no balances owed to the College; and completion of credit math/writing courses.
- Effective pedagogy and high-impact classroom practices are successfully utilized by many, but not all faculty—which is evidenced by considerable variance in course pass/withdrawal rates by instructors teaching the same courses.
- CUNY's placement and remediation reforms will eliminate CUNY skills placement testing and recommend the creation of co-requisite courses and elimination of stand-alone developmental courses.
- Programming for working adults (evening, weekend and distance classes), academically talented students (honors students), and probationary students is available, but not formalized in comprehensive academic and support programs.

### **Recommendations**

- Build upon successful professional development programs (like those used in the New Faculty Seminar and the First Year Seminar) to develop roadmaps of professional development built around student-learning-centered pedagogies and assessment for all full-time and adjunct faculty members.
- Further develop expanded and better integrated programming for specific student populations (honors students, working adults, and probationary students).

### **Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience**

Maintaining a strong belief in the capacity of all students, BCC invests in empowering students by providing them with an environment that enhances the student experience and facilitates their learning and success. BCC students bring a rich diversity of talents along with a variety of challenges to their higher education success, which makes support of the student experience especially important. Efforts to develop an empowering educational environment are guided by our strategic goals and objectives to: Build a Community of Excellence with: evidence-based practice, mentoring, and alignment of services; Empower Students to Succeed, by: promoting student engagement and cultural competency, assuring a cohesive experience and providing efficient, accessible, user-friendly and integrated support services; and Deepen Student Learning by: promoting active teaching and learning.

## **Strengths**

- The ASAP program and the corresponding College Redesign have profoundly impacted the student experience, improving student support across all areas. The scaling up of ASAP has provided many lessons from which the College community can draw and apply to the more extensive ongoing College Redesign.
- Evidence-based initiatives to build basic academic skills and provide student support have successfully improved student success.
- The College has built a strong assessment culture in student support departments, with a great deal of knowledge created about what and how student support efforts contribute to student success.

## **Challenges**

- Student lack of academic progress and persistence remain a major problem at the College.
- Many students are financially eligible for financial aid, but do not receive the aid due to lack of academic progress, international student status, lack of proper filing and registration/withdrawal actions.

## **Recommendations**

- Develop a comprehensive student success plan incorporating high-impact practices that have been successfully implemented at BCC and elsewhere and including lessons learned from the ASAP expansion/BCC Redesign to support student progress and academic success. This plan should also respond to CUNY policy reforms regarding placement testing and remediation.
- Design an integrated college-wide advisement plan to implement an equitable admissions-to-graduation caseload advisement model for the entire BCC student population, including: expanding the First Year Program to serve all incoming students; more clearly defining faculty mentoring roles; and maximizing the potential of Starfish software.

## **Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment**

In order to make good on our promise to provide students with a rigorous and broad education that prepares them for educational/professional success and informed and engaged citizenship, BCC maintains a robust program of assessment of student learning outcomes. BCC faculty and staff are increasingly building knowledge about student learning and academic success through their assessment and scholarship efforts.

## **Strengths**

- BCC has built a mature culture of assessment of student learning outcomes, with strong participation among all academic departments as well as participation in administrative and student service departments.
- BCC faculty-driven research and publications in the scholarship of teaching and learning have influenced the development and integration of high-impact pedagogical practices that improve student learning across the curriculum.
- BCC provides extensive professional development, support and tools for evaluating educational effectiveness.

## Challenges

- Although critical thinking pedagogies anchor the Gen Ed program, their integration and assessment across the curriculum could be expanded, better aligned, and communicated more transparently.

## Recommendations

- Given the wealth of knowledge about student learning and student success that is and has been created at BCC, the College should develop a mechanism to further support, collect, organize, and disseminate research and assessment results.
- Building upon the positive effects of the New Faculty Seminar, clearly communicate the role of scholarship of teaching and learning and student-learning-centered assessment in fulfilling requirements for reappointment, promotion, and tenure.
- Develop an integration plan for basic and higher-order thinking (critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, information literacy) skills and pedagogies across the curriculum.

## Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

In keeping with the BCC mission and vision, the College has been successful in managing and aligning its planning, resource allocation and assessment processes to ensure that these priorities are accomplished. Despite the challenges and limitations of being a publicly-funded institution, the College has successfully supported major improvements and institutional priorities over the past several years, which include: developing/expanding student success initiatives; integrating/coordinating student support services; fostering development of effective pedagogies; updating the General Education Program; transforming landmark campus with construction of new classroom and library, a new on-site childhood center and renovation of campus quad; and advancing effective assessment practices.

## Strengths

- BCC is financially stable and has financial resources adequate to support its operations, educational purpose and programs.
- BCC provides strong support for evidence-based practice with readily available information and analysis, as well as analytical support provided by the Offices of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment and Academic Assessment.

## Challenges

- BCC's budget allocation from CUNY is enrollment driven and enrollment has declined in recent semesters.
- While campus surveys generally demonstrate improving satisfaction with campus culture and services, there have been recent expressions of concern regarding transparency, timeliness and effectiveness of administrative processes as well as campus communications.
- Administrative and budget information is not always presented in a timely manner or in the most user-friendly format.
- BCC's aging infrastructure and landmark status require substantial support.

## Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive enrollment management plan aligned with both the *Academic Master Plan* as well as the recommended *Student Success Plan*.

- Develop and disseminate budget and administrative reports that more clearly and transparently communicate the state of the College to the various campus constituencies.
- Annual evaluations of departments and executives should include assessments of the following: communication, consultation, timeliness, transparency, collaboration, and effectiveness.
- Convert detailed assessments of infrastructure systems (central heating plant, building envelopes, and energy savings) and annual reviews of the life cycle duration of facilities infrastructure systems into actionable items.

## **Standard VII: Governance, Leadership and Administration**

Since the last Self-Study in 2009, BCC has experienced significant changes in executive leadership positions at the college. During this decade, there have been four presidents, five provosts, three vice presidents of Student Affairs, three vice presidents of Administration and Finance and two vice presidents of Advancement. Despite these substantial transitions, the College has remained grounded by a campus-wide commitment to its mission and goals. To their credit, all of the new executive leaders have embraced the Mission and Goals of the College as they were written before their tenure, which has enabled the College to make substantial progress, as evidenced by the significant increases in student completion rates among other significant outcomes.

The college has maintained a commitment to the value of facilitative leadership and shared decision-making among key stakeholders about issues that affect the learning and working environment. BCC's shared governance model emphasizes inclusivity, partnership between faculty, staff, students and senior administration, and shared accountability

### **Strengths**

- Shared governance is exercised effectively by the College Senate and its standing committees.
- The BCC Strategic Plan has provided strong direction for the College, despite several executive and leadership transitions.

### **Challenges**

- Orientation for college leadership (senators and members of the governance bodies, department chairs, new executives) is not formalized and does not include clearly articulated learning outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

- Develop orientation programs (including the articulation of learning outcomes) for new department chairs and executives as well as for student, faculty, and staff senators.
- Utilize new website to make governance and administrative matters more accessible to the campus community.