

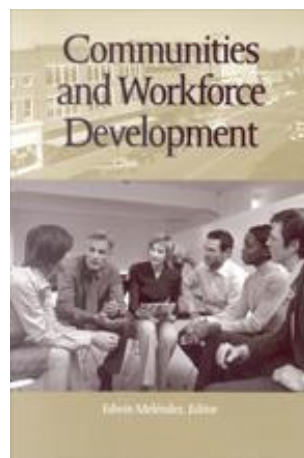
---

Upjohn Institute Press

---

## Innovators Under Duress: Community Colleges in New York's Workfare Setting

Lynn McCormick  
*City University of New York*



Chapter 10 (pp. 331-356) in:  
**Communities and Workforce Development**  
Edwin Meléndez, ed.  
Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2004  
DOI: 10.17848/9781417596317.ch10

# 10

## Innovators Under Duress

### Community Colleges in New York's Workfare Setting

Lynn McCormick  
*Hunter College, City University of New York*

Welfare reform, initiated with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, has been one of several initiatives at the federal level that aims to devolve policymaking to the state and local governmental levels. Other initiatives have come in the areas of federal job service and training, health care, and other social services (Watson and Gold 1997). Proponents argue that devolution makes state and local governments more attuned to the specific needs of their local constituencies than they would be under a single, large, and distant federal bureaucracy. The literature on reinventing government frames a debate on the extent to which state and local governments can act as policy “entrepreneurs” in shaping the behavior of others. This article offers a view of how this specifically has been done by New York City with community colleges that train welfare recipients.

Those who promote greater governmental effectiveness through the reinvention process argue that local governmental systems can become more responsive and efficient if exposed to market pressures and competition (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Watson and Gold 1997; Besharov and Samari 1999; Kazis and Seltzer 2000). The federal government creates such pressures through “fiscal federalism,” a process by which states are given greater responsibilities for program outcomes, accompanied by smaller amounts in block grant funding (Steuerle and Mermin 1997). This places incentives on state and local governments to become more efficient in service delivery. One way to achieve greater

efficiency and citizen responsiveness is to begin contracting out service provision to non- or for-profit enterprises. In this way, governments become entrepreneurial, argue Osborne and Gaebler (1992) and achieve desired policy outcomes through “steering,” or shaping the performance of outside service providers, rather than through “rowing,” or providing direct services. Governments steer by setting policy goals and then designing rewards and sanctions to push service providers to achieve the goals. Contractors receive program funding only upon achieving stipulated benchmark goals, regardless of the level of service provided. In this way, a local government can become “a skillful buyer, leveraging the activities of multiple service providers to meet public policy objectives” (Kazis and Seltzer 2000, p. 10).

In the area of welfare reform, in addition to becoming entrepreneurial, governments also must stimulate a significant cultural change, argue some scholars, among all who participate in local welfare systems—bureaucrats, outside service providers, and welfare recipients. Cultural change is needed to bring about a wholesale reorientation in the purpose of welfare—away from the idea of entitlement and toward a culture of work and a system that is more attentive to the needs of employers (Hercik 1998; Kazis and Seltzer 2000). The PRWORA shifted federal welfare policy to a work first approach. It did so by limiting the training benefits of welfare recipients (now called TANF, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and emphasizing instead quick placement in private sector jobs or government workfare (in the latter, individuals carry out work assignments, often in government positions, for their welfare benefits). The work first school of thought holds that welfare recipients benefit more over the long run through immediate employment than from formal education. Jobs teach individuals how to show up on time, balance work and family responsibilities, and other so-called soft skills, as well as hard skills such as typing and filing, through on-the-job training. The debate in work first circles today is over the extent to which state welfare systems should also offer TANF recipients opportunities for education as a companion to working (Elliott, Spangler, and Yorkievtz 1998; Strawn 1999; Golonka and Matus-Grossman 2001).

Regardless of a state’s position toward education’s role in welfare reform, the literature on reinventing government assumes that the state (or local) government almost exclusively will become the policy entre-

preneur and do all the steering of everyone else—both service providers and TANF recipients. What I have found, however, by investigating the welfare reform environment in New York City is that, although the state and local governments have dominated in shaping the practices of employment and training providers in the city, they are not the only ones doing the steering. In addition, there are strong policy entrepreneurs outside of government who are pushing back. With this resistance, they influence government policies as well. The significance of this finding is that we should not assume that only governments do the steering in devolved states—an assumption of the literature to date. Instead, an interplay of government versus grass-roots entrepreneurs makes reinventing government a nonlinear process. It also complicates our predictions and future evaluations of various localities' welfare reform outcomes.

This chapter sheds light on the reinventing government debate by studying community colleges in New York City's strong workfare environment—one which puts most of its faith in the power of work to alter welfare recipients' future earnings. Through detailed case studies of two such colleges in New York—Hostos and LaGuardia community colleges—I aim to answer two questions: 1) How specifically have the state and city's workfare-oriented policies affected existing education programming for welfare recipients at these institutions? and 2) Have curricular innovations come to a complete halt, or have community colleges found ways to innovate in spite of this policy setting? What follows is, first, a description of New York's workfare policies and, second, the strategic response of two community colleges that have continued innovating in the educational area in spite of the state and city's relative lack of support for training.<sup>1</sup>

## **WELFARE REFORM, WORKFARE, AND TRAINING**

Devolution of programmatic responsibility for welfare reform could result in 50 different state experiments on the best way to move individuals from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency. Both George Pataki, governor of New York, and Rudolph Giuliani, former mayor of New York City, have seen themselves as taking the lead in workfare in the country. The state and the city both enacted workfare programs before Congress passed the PRWORA in 1996. Under its workfare provisions,

New York City has put to work the largest number of welfare recipients of any metropolitan area in the United States.

Although the federal law stipulates that vocational training may substitute for only 12 months of a TANF recipient's work activities, each of the states has flexibility in determining the balance between school and work by identifying what constitutes "school" or "work" and through various supports provided for these activities. Hence, each state can steer the actors in its welfare system either toward workfare exclusively or toward a system in which opportunities for more schooling are integrated. Observers classify the state systems as follows: 1) those that do not encourage schooling but only promote workfare among TANF recipients (13 states), 2) those that moderately encourage schooling (allowing postsecondary education to meet 12 months of work activity—12 states), and 3) those that strongly do so (allowing postsecondary education to meet more than 12 months of work activity—22 states) (Greenberg, Strawn, and Plimpton 2000). Four states, including New York, allow their counties to determine such welfare rules within a broad state law. In New York State's case, New York City has amplified the state's leaning toward workfare over education.

Many see the Family Support Act, which President Reagan endorsed and Congress passed in 1988, as the inspiration for states to begin experimenting heavily with workfare programs (Albelda and Tilly 1997; Casey 1998; Leon 1995).<sup>2</sup> New York State ran workfare programs in the early 1990s under this act, primarily for its Home Relief (HR), or general assistance, population. With Pataki's entrance as governor in 1995, he and the legislature worked together to broaden the workfare program to include all public assistance recipients while limiting education and training benefits. Because New York is one of the few states in which local governments maintain responsibility for designing, implementing, and partially funding public assistance programs, local governments decide the extent to which they want to make a tradeoff of training for workfare.

Giuliani was equally enthusiastic about emphasizing work. New York City policy formally allows TANF recipients to count 12 months of postsecondary education as a work activity. Moreover, through various initiatives, including luring Wisconsin's Jason Turner (the workfare guru who drew headlines for his state policy of not counting education as a work activity) to run its Welfare-to-Work program, New York

City has also fashioned a strong workfare environment for its welfare recipients. The city started the NYC Way program in 1995, which combined workfare with a more rigorous eligibility and address verification program. This helped cut city welfare rolls and related financial obligations. New York City, housing about 70 percent of the state's welfare population (but only 40 percent of the state's overall population), must, under state regulations, shoulder approximately 70 percent of the total local governmental share in welfare payments (Leon 1995; Weir 1997; Casey 1998).<sup>3</sup> In the first program year, the city cut the number of public assistance cases by 60 percent (Leon 1995).

In 1997, the state legislature formalized its workfare initiative with the Welfare Reform Act (Mannix et al. 1998). New York City's revised workfare program under the state legislation is called the Work Experience Program (WEP). The WEP, administered by the city's Human Resources Administration (HRA), places the highest priority on workfare, which averaged about 35,000 participants monthly in 1998, rather than on facilitating education and training (Casey 1998).<sup>4</sup> Casey states that "while the City does not publish the number of welfare recipients in education and training activities, education and training providers say that the City's policies have caused sharp declines in activities such as English as a Second Language (ESL), basic literacy, GED, and vocational training. City University (CUNY) reports that the number of welfare parents in the CUNY system has declined from about 26,000 to about 13,000" (1998, p. 14).

The drop in CUNY enrollments, due to the HRA's practice of channeling TANF recipients into workfare versus education and training, is confirmed by other sources including many of the respondents interviewed for this research. HRA intake staff discouraged schooling in two ways: 1) by placing welfare recipients into workfare without mentioning their right to some college and vocational training, and 2) by showing an unwillingness to designate WEP sites near college campuses, which would aid those wanting to combine workfare and college (Mannix et al. 1998; Casey 1998).

## POLICY IMPACTS ON NEW YORK CITY'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES

How has this workfare policy environment influenced training offerings within the city's community colleges and other two-year institutions? Citywide, New York's community colleges and other two-year postsecondary institutions offer less programming and support services for TANF recipients than their counterparts nationwide. One could conclude that the overly rigid workfare policy environment that New York City and State present have caused this outcome. However, we also find that a subset of New York colleges have developed TANF programming in spite of this environment. In a survey of all postsecondary institutions in New York City, which we report on elsewhere (see Meléndez et al. 2002), we found that, as a group, these institutions are less likely to undertake special programming for TANF recipients, compared to similar schools nationally.<sup>5</sup> New York City institutions also are much less likely to offer TANF and other non-traditional students alternatives to full-time study, like non-degree or certificate programs (Table 10.1).

The survey findings lend support to an argument that this lag in institutional innovation for TANF students is due to the relative lack of city and state support for TANF training in the strict workfare policy environment of New York City. Hence, local governments in the city are effectively steering the behavior of service providers in this policy environment. A subset of the New York colleges, however, shows a different pattern. These two-year colleges—all belonging to the City University of New York (CUNY) system—show a high rate of involvement

**Table 10.1 Community Colleges Offering Programs or Services for Students with Special Needs (%)**

Type of program or service	US <sup>a</sup>	NYC	CUNY
Low reading or math skills	80.9	70.6	100.0
Lack of high school diploma or GED	70.4	52.9	83.3
Poor work history	50.0	35.3	66.7
Students with young children	60.5	52.9	83.3
Substance abuse problems	29.4	17.6	16.7

<sup>a</sup>From general sample in Meléndez et al. 2002.

SOURCE: Meléndez et al. 2002; author's calculations.

**Table 10.2 Program Offerings for TANF Students by Institutions with TANF-Specific Programs (%)**

Type of program colleges offer	US <sup>a</sup>	NYC <sup>b</sup>
Degree programs	71.2	100.0
Nondegree programs	82.7	60.0
Coursework to develop soft skills	96.2	100.0
Preparatory courses	90.4	60.0
Short-term training programs	84.9	60.0
Tutorial programs	81.1	80.0
Internships with employers	77.4	80.0

<sup>a</sup>From general sample in Meléndez et al. 1999.

<sup>b</sup>TANF programs are only in CUNY schools and one other institution.

SOURCE: Meléndez et al. 1999; author's calculations.

in programming for TANF students, other non-traditional students, and students with special learning needs (Tables 10.1 and 10.2). How have the CUNY colleges developed programming for TANF recipients? What tactics and features characterize those that have been the most innovative? Answers to these questions come from studies of the two CUNY community colleges, Hostos and LaGuardia. CUNY is a network of 11 senior (or four-year) and six community colleges. LaGuardia, with 11,000 students, and Hostos, with 4,200, represent the third largest and the smallest of the community colleges in this system (CUNY 1997). These cases show that TANF programming can result in workfare-oriented policy environments when institutions pursue innovative means, pedagogies, or institutional structures to work around a workfare system.

### **Innovative Means**

Educational opportunities for welfare recipients have expanded in some New York institutions because of the activities of different institutional activists. These activists are also policy entrepreneurs but are lodged outside of local government. Although they “row,” by taking direction from government agencies, they also “steer.” The activists believe that for the work first philosophy to succeed, TANF recipients require access to training so they can build a long-term career path that will move them out of poverty. Key activists have included welfare rights organizations, CUNY “Central” as the umbrella administration



for multiple colleges, and staff activists within individual colleges that serve TANF recipients directly.

### **Welfare rights activists**

After continued protests by New York's highly organized welfare rights organizations, the HRA modified its practices that discouraged TANF recipients from seeking training. Litigation, trying to reform workfare, took an early lead in New York. Issues that the Welfare Law Center, the Legal Aid Society, and others in the city's welfare-rights movement have contested include the following: 1) illegal diversion of welfare recipients from benefits, 2) low-quality child care placements for TANF-covered children, 3) lack of workplace safety for workfare participants, 4) unwillingness of nonprofit organizations to become WEP sites, 5) illegal denial of food stamp and Medicaid assistance, and 6) payment of below prevailing wages for workfare placements, contrary to a New York State Supreme Court decision (Abramovitz 1997; Mannix et al. 1998; Laarman 1998; Casey 1998; NASW 1999; WLC 1999).

In regard to educational rights, the Welfare Law Center and the Legal Aid Society brought a class-action suit on behalf of all TANF recipients against the HRA over its policy of assigning recipients to WEP activities regardless of their desire for education or training. The plaintiffs in this case, single parents on welfare who were enrolled in education or training programs, charged that the city's policy violated the state law requiring that individualized assessments and employability plans be made for each TANF recipient and that assignments be made according to recipient preferences when possible (Mannix et al. 1998).<sup>6</sup>

The original plaintiff, Evelyn Davila, for example, was enrolled in an 11-month medical technician program but was told by the city to give this up and take a WEP assignment in order to continue receiving her welfare payments.<sup>7</sup> In July 2003, the TANF recipients won the case on appeal in the Supreme Court of the State of New York. Fisher reports that "under the agreement, the city must assess the needs of welfare recipients and come up with 'employability plans' which may include job training or additional schooling. Recipients can appeal those plans if they disagree with them. The settlement also allows attorneys from the Welfare Law Center to monitor the city's efforts" (2003, p. 1).

Hence, broad-based organizing and protests have been key mechanisms by which New York City's welfare reform laws and agency practices, including those related to postsecondary education, have been modified to encourage education and training alongside work. Activism by CUNY's central administration—as I will describe next—has also been crucial to the educational offerings that do exist today for TANF recipients.

### **CUNY Central**

In the 1980s and early 1990s, CUNY's central offices worked closely with the City's HRA under Mayor Dinkin's administration to develop educational programming and services for the poor. This early institutional support helped set up several programs and services for welfare-receiving students. Although some of the programs have ceased to exist under the current climate of welfare reform, these earlier efforts have stimulated the individual CUNY colleges to begin thinking of programming for welfare recipients.

In the early period, the central CUNY office established the Center for College Options, which played a support and liaison role for public assistance recipients wanting to enter CUNY by helping them with financial aid, testing, remedial work and other hurdles. In addition, in 1993, CUNY created the College Opportunity to Prepare for Employment (COPE) program, its brainchild to encourage AFDC recipients to gain college credits and skills as a means to achieve eventual financial independence. HRA intake staff readily referred appropriate welfare recipients to CUNY colleges for enrollment in this program.

CUNY and the City's HRA initially designed the COPE program to move single, welfare-receiving parents through at least two years of college and an associate degree program. These credentials offer career-focused skills, entry to semi-skilled jobs, and a foothold in a potential lifetime career that could involve further education. With this as their goal, COPE program staff focused on the retention and graduation of students. Prior to welfare reform, the COPE program consisted of three components. First, the program targeted only a subset of welfare-receiving students. For instance, the first year's COPE cohort represented only 11 percent and 14 percent of all eligible students at Hostos and LaGuardia, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Staff selected these first COPE participants according to their potential for future employability and their college readiness.

A second component of this early COPE program was to move each incoming cohort of students through as much of the academic experience together as possible. Staff arranged block scheduling of classes so that all COPE students attended classes only with one another; this facilitated peer studying, joint use of tutors, and peer counseling. The third program component involved support services offered to students, which included everything from personal and academic counseling to specialized workshops and job placement.

Before welfare reform, COPE students could attend college full or part time and receive welfare stipends and other training related expenses (TREs) for up to three years. This meant that an early COPE program participant's day would be composed exclusively of classes, studying, and time spent receiving counseling and other support services until she finished a two-year degree. Child care responsibilities were balanced against this academic work. Controlling for entering characteristics and skill levels, researchers who compared COPE students with other welfare-receiving CUNY students found that COPE students made faster progress toward a degree compared with similar non-COPE students at the same colleges (Gittell et al. 1996).<sup>9</sup> Hence, COPE, which had been put in place because of CUNY Central's support, offered a subset of welfare-receiving students the services they needed to gain skills and credentials.

### **Staff activists**

After the PRWORA of 1996, COPE underwent significant changes. At first, the city reduced TREs to two years and initiated workfare requirements of 20 hours a week for all TANF recipients. Then, in 1998, it reduced TREs to 12 months and increased the work requirement to 35 hours (ten more than the state's mandate). Now, an incoming TANF-receiving COPE student can obtain a year's exemption from WEP to take occupationally oriented classes (TREs can no longer be used for academic classes that lead to transfer to a four-year college), but often also must work. Typically, she will take a full load of 12–15 class credits (up from 5 allowable class credits before the settlement of the Davila lawsuit in 2003). The remaining 20–23 hours to meet the full work requirement must be spent in an internship, work study, WEP assignment, or job. The second and remaining years in school are not

covered by TREs, so the student must work 35 hours weekly along with attending school.

At the same time the COPE program moved to the performance-based payment system instituted by the HRA, CUNY also expanded the COPE program rolls. This has watered down programmatic support for each participant. Under the new HRA guidelines, student retention and graduation are no longer compensable program goals. Currently, COPE staff secure program funding if, and only if, they place TANF recipients in jobs. The city will even pay colleges for placing TANF recipients in jobs who have never enrolled in classes. After welfare reform, CUNY increased the number of campuses offering COPE (from an initial four community college campuses to 10) and opened it to all welfare-receiving students without increasing the overall COPE budget. This has tripled the size of the COPE programs at Hostos and LaGuardia in numbers of participants while cutting individual program budgets. These changes, therefore, have placed significant financial pressures on the ability of staff to assist individual TANF students.

Because of the program's expansion, as well as an explosion in the HRA's workfare-related reporting requirements, COPE counselors now help students negotiate the HRA and WEP assignments rather than deal with personal or financial issues as they had before. They have also successfully intervened to make their TANF students' days logistically possible. Initially, workfare job placements were mostly in Brooklyn—a significant distance to travel from Hostos, LaGuardia, and some other CUNY campuses. This made the logistics of getting back and forth to work, school, and the HRA office for reporting requirements impossible as a daily regimen, prompting various staff responses to find a solution. Initially, CUNY colleges joined with TANF recipients to protest this arrangement. This led the state legislature in 1997 to mandate that college students be placed in workfare jobs at or near their colleges. Even after this mandate, however, the city was slow in complying, taking more than two years to register the CUNY colleges as legitimate workfare settings and excluding two from ever getting this designation (Arenson 1998; New York Times 1998). The two left out were Hostos and the Borough of Manhattan Community College. Since those two are situated in Democratic strongholds, some observers attribute this to politics.

As a result, Hostos' staff had to find a different solution to help its welfare-receiving students stay in school under workfare. Because the city did not designate Hostos as a WEP site, its TANF students must either travel to an external WEP assignment or be involved in an internship or federal work study assignment. Since work study funding can be used for on-campus work assignments, Hostos' financial aid office has aggressively pursued this funding. It led all of CUNY's community colleges in the use of the work study assignments for its students, covering 61 percent of its welfare-receiving students in 1998. In fact, in early 1998, more than half (57 percent) of all CUNY COPE students who utilized work study positions in lieu of WEP assignments were at Hostos (Table 10.3). This share declined later in the year, simply because other CUNY colleges followed Hostos' lead and began utilizing work study more fully.

COPE staff at both colleges have been remarkably resilient. The COPE programs at Hostos and LaGuardia now represent the largest and most successful (in terms of job placements) within the CUNY system. Each has grown threefold since its first year of operation; currently 800–900 students receive services at each campus. The two colleges make the highest job placements among all CUNY COPE programs. For example, during the 1997–1998 school year, each of these two programs placed about 100 students in jobs, representing about half the placements made by COPE staff at CUNY's six community colleges and one-third the number made at its 11 senior colleges.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Hostos and LaGuardia have dealt successfully with budget cutbacks. They have devised different, but equally successful, mechanisms that help students carry out their WEP assignments on-site and negotiate the often burdensome HRA bureaucracy. In addition, the staff at each college try to link students with work experiences that employ degree-related skills, both at their WEP placements and, later, on their first jobs.

What we see here, then, is that the overly restrictive workfare policies that New York City's HRA has put in place have become less so through the innovative tactics of a variety of actors. The actors have successfully litigated or pressured policymakers to ensure that TANF recipients can claim their educational rights. Unique pedagogical philosophies, as discussed below, also facilitate recipients' learning.

**Table 10.3 Use of WEP Exemptions and Nontraditional Programming in CUNY (%)**

Type of program or service	All CUNY colleges	Community colleges	Hostos C.C.	LaGuardia C.C.
<b>WEP exemptions within COPE</b>				
Work study (Spring 1998)	100	81	57	18
Work study (Fall 1998)	100	87	36	9
Internships (Spring 1998)	100	96	20	75
Internships (Fall 1998)	100	87	38	24
Welfare recipient enrollment (1998)	100	53	9	8
<b>Nontraditional programming</b>				
Continuing ed. enrollment (Fall 1997)	100	45	1	19
Certificate prog. enrollment (Fall 1997)	100	43	2	6
Total enrollment (1997)	100	37	2	6

SOURCE: CUNY COPE statistics, 1999; CUNY Student Data Book, Fall 1997.

## **Innovative Pedagogies**

Within CUNY, Hostos and LaGuardia take innovative pedagogical approaches to their students. Hostos' mission is to provide "educational opportunities leading to socio-economic mobility for first and second generation Hispanics, African Americans, and other residents of New York City who have encountered significant barriers to higher education."<sup>11</sup> LaGuardia has a similar mission to that of Hostos but carries it out differently.

### **Bilingual college**

Since its founding, Hostos has followed a bilingual educational model, one that focuses on Hispanic adult learners with limited English proficiency. Since more than two-thirds of Hostos students claim a Caribbean ancestry and list Spanish as their native language, the college offers a Spanish-English learning environment. Furthermore, Hostos students are more likely than other community college students at CUNY to have an out-of-state or foreign high school degree (31 percent versus 15 percent for the system as a whole), a GED (31 percent versus 24 percent), and difficulties passing the CUNY skills assessment tests (55 percent did not pass any tests at Hostos versus 35 percent CUNY-wide). Hostos students, in general, also require much more support than those in the rest of CUNY. This is because they are more likely than students in any of CUNY's other community colleges to be poor (two-thirds came from households making less than \$15,000 in 1997 versus 42 percent from the system as a whole) and supporting children (61 percent versus 36 percent, respectively) or functioning as a single parent (43 percent versus 17 percent) (CUNY 1997).

The bilingual component includes these special services: bilingual administrative functions, college orientation, counseling and advising, tutoring and instruction, cultural activities, and library materials. Although Hostos has been lauded in the past for its bilingual approach, more recently it has come under increasing criticism for failure to move its graduates into an English environment. When a significant number of its graduating class failed a writing exam that CUNY's trustees imposed university-wide as a belated requirement for graduation, the college's president was asked to resign (Arenson 1998). Today, the college

is working on improving test scores among its student body, according to its special needs (Varro 2004).

### **Co-op model**

LaGuardia is the only cooperative education college within CUNY. The co-op model allows the college to create a stronger link between the classroom and the workplace. The college views this approach “as a particularly effective learning strategy for a New York City open enrollment institution; [the students of which are] essentially minority, low income and recent or first generation immigrants.”<sup>12</sup> This approach helps students explore different career options and apply classroom concepts to work situations. Hence, it makes the transition from education to employment more successful for them. The co-op program accomplishes this through the use of internships: full-time students must complete a related introductory course and two internships as part of their degree programs. LaGuardia had wanted to go further with the co-op experience and boost the number of required internships but has been restrained by CUNY so that it does not stray too far from a traditional academic model. Even so, because of its philosophy LaGuardia outpaces all other CUNY institutions in the use of internships; in early 1998, 75 percent of all CUNY COPE students gaining a WEP exemption to fulfill an internship were enrolled at LaGuardia (Table 10.3). This amount declined as other COPE programs began to learn from LaGuardia and use internships more to avoid unrelated WEP assignments for their students.

### **Cluster learning**

Another key educational innovation at LaGuardia is the widespread use of “learning communities” or “clusters” throughout the College. Clusters involve combining two or more courses for a group of students to take together. LaGuardia staff started pairing ESL students together in their non-language courses in the 1980s. Since then, the idea has spread to the whole college. Staff have found that students in clusters get better grades than if they were to take the course alone, because students who take the same classes can study together as well as offer peer support and advice on personal issues. Faculty members in cluster courses also plan their courses together and integrate what they are teaching so



that information offered in one class supports that in another. The staff (faculty and counselors) form clusters by combining students with similar educational interests into a human resources cluster, an accounting cluster, and so forth.

Hence, both of these “best practice” organizations have developed innovative pedagogies that are intended to facilitate learning among non-traditional adult learners. Even so, limits have been placed on these pedagogical innovations by the wider CUNY administration, which is resisting pushing these innovative models to the extreme. A final set of innovations in the colleges’ structure has also taken place, in part to circumvent other CUNY restrictions which limit the ability of college staff to fit into the new workfare regulations.

### **Innovative Structures**

One hurdle that CUNY presents to college staff wanting to develop new programming for their TANF students is the lengthy time it takes for the bureaucracy to approve new credit-bearing degrees or programs. For example, staff at Hostos estimate it took four years to get the final approval needed from CUNY to begin operating a new LPN certificate program. This delay becomes particularly problematic given that the HRA will only allow for a year of training to take place, yet the associate degrees offered by CUNY’s community colleges take at least two years to finish. LaGuardia has been especially innovative here. By building up a substantial adult education division, it has provided an alternative academic structure—albeit one that does not confer credit—for developing short-term training programs for TANF recipients and others. LaGuardia is clearly the leader here; of the almost 28,000 people enrolled in adult continuing education classes among all 17 colleges within the CUNY system, almost 20 percent attend LaGuardia (Table 10.3). In addition, LaGuardia utilizes this division to house a development corporation that can make more direct ties with business, facilitating placement of its students in internships and jobs beyond what a traditional college can offer. These specific initiatives include LaGuardia’s Project Enable and its HRA-funded Vocational Work Study (VOWS) program, its Adult Career Counseling and Resource Center’s job search and training components, and its Urban Center for Economic Develop-

ment—all located within the college’s Adult and Continuing Education Division (ACE).

### **Project Enable and VOWS**

Project Enable runs several training programs for homeless heads-of-household, other public assistance recipients, and the low-income unemployed. It operates programs on-site in shelters, in transitional housing, and on campus. Recently, it began an HRA-funded pilot project for TANF recipients, the Vocational Work Study (VOWS) project. VOWS offers training in computerized office skills to participants who concurrently carry out workfare assignments within the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Participants work at NYCHA three days a week and come to LaGuardia for all-day training on the fourth and fifth days in skills related to their work assignment. The training program follows an “open entry–open exit” model; welfare recipients enter training whenever they are ready. Staff run the training in short modules that offer novel instructional techniques such as peer and small group instruction to better meet participants’ needs. The project’s staff is trying to convince the HRA and the city that short-term training can be effective and also be integrated into workfare settings. The NYCHA has hired several trainees as full-time staff, indicating the project’s success as a training program.

### **Adult Career Counseling and Resource Center**

Another way that LaGuardia works with welfare recipients is through the Adult Career Counseling and Resource Center (ACCRC), housed in Adult and Continuing Education. The center serves “all adult students enrolled in noncredit continuing education classes and community residents who want to explore career changes and enter or re-enter the job market.”<sup>13</sup> ACCRC assists welfare recipients through several programs, including its Job Search Skills Program, its Work First Center, and the InVEST Pilot Program.

The Job Search Skills Program helps single individuals find jobs—people who have applied for public assistance and have waited several months for benefits. ACCRC staff teach participants job seeking skills (e.g., interviewing techniques, how to identify likely employers) and offer access to computers, phones, and a job placement specialist.

Also housed under ACCRC is one of the HRA's Work First centers—an unusual partnership since most Work First centers are located in community-based organizations. As a Work First Center, ACCRC receives referrals from the HRA; it teaches these TANF recipients job seeking skills and provides help in finding jobs.

The ACCRC also offers New York State's pilot program InVEST, as do three other organizations throughout the state. The Individual Vocational Education and Skills Training Program (InVEST) involves a collaboration of four agencies: the state Department of Employment, the Higher Education Service Corporation, CUNY, and the HRA. This program offers training vouchers to public assistance recipients who are working but earn so little that they still depend on welfare. The goal is to enhance their skills so they can obtain a job that will take them off welfare. HRA offers the client six months of TREs to take a course that can lead to better employment. The Family Institute, a component within LaGuardia's ACE that operates programs to promote schooling among the poor and educationally disadvantaged, designed six-month programs in computer information systems and computer repair for the pilot.<sup>14</sup> Since ACE houses both Work First and the InVEST training program, it can identify those applicants who are eligible for six months of training when they come in for job seeking assistance. HRA pays for this noncredit bearing short-term training.

Regardless of these innovations, however, no source finances continuing education that may lead to certificates or degrees for those who are working. As the ACCRC director explains, "What is missing from this system is a middle ground, where people can obtain financial aid for more vocational training,...funds that can support training for low income individuals who want to continue their education and training but do not have sufficient resources to pay for these programs. An example would be those individuals who leave public assistance but are still in low level jobs."

Although LaGuardia has excelled at providing short-term, non-credit training through its continuing education division and two-year associate degrees through its other programs, it has done relatively little in the way of offering certificate programs. For instance, whereas 9,576 of its students enrolled in continuing education courses in 1997, only 44 were enrolled in one-year certificate programs (CUNY 1997). Even so, the college's 6 percent share of CUNY enrollment in certificate pro-

grams mirrors its share of overall enrollment (Table 10.3). One-year certificate programs earn credit that the student can later apply toward an associate or a bachelor's degree. The creation of certificate programs has been underutilized in much of CUNY because of the overly lengthy approval process, which discourages the establishment of shorter but credit-bearing programs.

As with other COPE Programs at CUNY, LaGuardia has on staff its own job placement specialist who nurtures contacts with local employers. However, since she also works out of LaGuardia's ACCRC, she is well integrated with the range of job development activities for all of the College's TANF recipients, not just those who are full-time students. Therefore she has the ability to make linkages among LaGuardia's programs for TANF recipients in order to set up longer-term career ladders. At the same time, employers are regularly involved in the college's economic development activities, which further strengthens job linkages. Even though the activities have not been formally coordinated, the pieces are all there at LaGuardia, which should, over time, facilitate formal career ladder planning for welfare recipients. These economic development activities are substantial and involve the efforts of the LaGuardia Urban Center for Economic Development (LUCED) and its participation in CUNY's Quality Consortium, its Taxi and Limousine Institute, and its partnership, along with other educational institutions, in the Communications Managers Association. Each is briefly profiled below.

LaGuardia's economic development corporation, LUCED, was created within the college's Adult and Continuing Education Division in the mid-1980s to offer education and training programs to private, public, and nonprofit sector organizations. The center designs and holds customized training sessions, offers workshops for businesses (one is "Government Contracting for Minority and Women Entrepreneurs"), links these firms to the college's co-op program and its student interns, and provides technical assistance and training to entrepreneurs and small businesses. LUCED's Preparing for Profit (PREP) Program and Entrepreneurial Assistance Center specifically target minorities, women, and small businesses. Each year LaGuardia places more than 2,000 interns in 600 local companies, in part through LUCED contacts.<sup>15</sup>

LUCED's total quality management component conducts programs for businesses wanting to improve the quality of their products and

services through worker training programs and technical assistance. In the early 1990s, LUCED held its first conference on quality management for small business, after which it developed a program to offer affordable consulting on this issue to local small businesses. In 1998, funds from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation allowed LUCED to expand these services. The college's Industrial Management Resource Program (IMRP) now conducts the program and offers services jointly with the Long Island City Business Development Corporation.<sup>16</sup>

LaGuardia's Taxi and Limousine Institute was cofounded and is funded by the city's Taxi and Limousine Commission. The Institute offers continuing education courses to all drivers in accordance with the commission's training requirements and to date has prepared over 45,000 people to qualify for a taxi license.<sup>17</sup> Another way for LaGuardia to connect with New York companies and help serve both company and student interests is through membership in industry associations and partnerships, like the regional Communications Managers Association, for which it offers educational advice. These connections also help the college run a successful co-op program, making important employment links for its students.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this work indicate that workfare settings, and the incentives or disincentives that states and cities provide, can hamper employment and training innovations developed for TANF recipients. However, in such settings, as in New York City, other actors in the policy environment also play a significant steering function. As Brettschneider (2001) notes, actors can counter top-down planning that does not meet their needs through a variety of mechanisms such as litigation, adversarial tactics, or interorganizational collaboration. Some of New York's community colleges, in league with other nonprofits and TANF recipients, have used these tactics and others to try to increase employment and training opportunities in a strong workfare regime. Hence, colleges like Hostos and LaGuardia that are the "rowers" are also steering the work first debate from their position of influence. They are resisting a "race to the bottom" that some scholars (Lynch 1994) argue may occur in devolved governmental systems that are more interested in cutting

the costs of service provision than in solving intractable social problems like persistent poverty and welfare dependency.

Both colleges needed an alternative vision to carry out a successful “welfare-to-school-to-work” policy. They developed this vision, in part, through the efforts of CUNY Central and the HRA in previous educationally oriented city administrations. This alternative policy also received substantial support and definition from New York’s “workfare reform” legal and activist community. Both colleges have also been able to innovate TANF-specific programming through various staff efforts to make training accessible in spite of the limitations inherent in the broader policy environment. Both colleges encourage staff innovation through an active mission for serving the poor and through pedagogical philosophies that aim to motivate nontraditional students. In addition, LaGuardia’s Adult Education Division offers an organizational structure that is more flexible for creating new and unusual programming. Because of these features, both colleges have been able to reshape New York’s rigid workfare regime to incorporate skill training for TANF recipients. Their efforts are particularly important as states now work to move the remaining TANF recipients off welfare—those that are least educated and skilled (Besharov 2004). Through such efforts, they, along with local government, are reinventing welfare.

## Notes

Portions of this chapter appeared previously in the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, Vol. 27, No. 6, July 2003, and are republished by permission.

1. These colleges were chosen from a larger national survey because each offered programming targeted specifically at welfare recipients. See Meléndez et al. (2002) for results of the national survey.
2. Leon (1995) and Casey (1998) also describe earlier federal efforts to stimulate workfare programming (e.g., President Johnson’s WIN program for AFDC recipients in 1967) and state workfare provisions (e.g., the New York State Work Relief Program in 1959, which required that employable Home Relief clients work on Work Relief projects to secure their benefits).
3. For instance, in December 1997, New York City housed 817,000 welfare recipients out of a total of 1.16 million in the state (Casey 1998).
4. White (1997) states that although the City reported 38,000 WEP participants in early 1997, it placed 166,683 people into WEP from July 1995 through October

- 1996, or about 126,000 annually.
5. *Peterson's Guide to Two-Year Colleges* (1999) lists 20 community colleges in New York City. Each of these was contacted for a telephone interview; 17 agreed to be interviewed. The full results of the survey are reported in Meléndez et al. (2002).
  6. In a case originally filed in 1996 as *Davila v. Hammons*, the plaintiffs won a preliminary injunction against the city in March 1997 in the Supreme Court of New York County. The city appealed this decision—in what was now the case of *Davila v. Eggelston*—and agreed to a settlement favoring the plaintiffs in 2003 (Fisher 2003; Poverty Law Center n.d.).
  7. Initial critiques of New York City's WEP program contend that it seldom led to skills enhancement or permanent jobs for the TANF recipients (Finder 1998; White 1997).
  8. These figures come from 1995 administrative records of the COPE programs at Hostos Community College and LaGuardia Community College.
  9. Characteristics included a student's age, gender, welfare status, ethnicity, college of attendance, and high school group (i.e., whether high school degree was from a school in the New York City public, New York City private, New York State, or foreign/out-of-state system, or from a GED program).
  10. Taken from 1999 administrative records of the COPE programs at Hostos Community College and LaGuardia Community College.
  11. See "Hostos Community College," <http://www.hostos.cuny.edu/about/hostos01.htm> (accessed August 10, 2004).
  12. Taken from information on LaGuardia Community College's Cooperative Education Program at the college's Web site, <http://lagcc.cuny.edu> (accessed May 28, 1999).
  13. See "Adult and Continuing Education," Programs, Adult Career Counseling and Resource Center, <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ace/new.htm> (accessed August 10, 2004).
  14. For more details on the programs of the Family Institute, see the United Way Web page, [http://caresdb.uwnyc.org/cares/AgyRslt\\_45.cfm?AgyRec=2940](http://caresdb.uwnyc.org/cares/AgyRslt_45.cfm?AgyRec=2940) (accessed August 11, 2004).
  15. Taken from information on LaGuardia Community College's Cooperative Education Program and LUCED at the college's Web site, <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu> (accessed May 28, 1999).
  16. See "Industrial Management Resource Program," <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ace/imrp/index.html> (accessed August 11, 2004).
  17. See "Adult and Continuing Education," Programs, The New York City Taxi Driver Institute, <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/ace/new.htm> (accessed August 11, 2004).



## References

- Abramovitz, Mimi. 1997. *Workfare and the Non-Profits? Myths and Realities*. Report for the Task Force on Welfare Reform, New York City Chapter, National Association of Social Workers. <http://www.naswnyc.org/w2.html> (accessed April 1, 1999).
- Albelda, Randy, and Chris Tilly. 1997. *Glass Ceilings and Bottomless Pits: Women's Work, Women's Poverty*. Boston: South End Press.
- Arenson, Karen W. 1998. "CUNY Wins Ruling in a Dispute Over Graduation Requirements." *New York Times*, December 10, B:25. <http://www.nytimes.com/archive> (accessed April 1, 1999).
- Besharov, Douglas. 2004. "There's More Welfare to Reform." *New York Times*, March 6, A:15. <http://www.welfareacademy.org/pubs/welfare/theresmorewelfarestoreform.pdf> (accessed August 11, 2004).
- Besharov, Douglas, and Nazanin Samari. 1999. "The *Other* Wisconsin Miracle: How Wisconsin Foundations are Helping Create a Responsive Market for Child Care." *Philanthropy* 13(3): 30–33. <http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/magazines/1999/may/besharov.html> (accessed August 10, 2001).
- Brettschneider, Eric B. 2001. "Bottom-Up Planning in a Top-Down World." In *Social Work in the Era of Devolution: Toward a Just Practice*, Rosa Perez-Koenig and Barry Rock, eds. New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 211–222.
- Casey, Timothy J. 1998. *Welfare Reform and its Impact in the Nation and in New York*. Report of the Policy, Advocacy and Research Department, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. New York: Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. <http://www.welfarelaw.org/CaseyPaper.htm> (accessed May 5, 1999).
- City University of New York (CUNY). 1997. *CUNY Student Data Book, Fall 1997*. Vol. 1. New York: CUNY. <http://www.cuny.edu/abt/cuny/facts/databook97/tocvol1.html> (accessed May 13, 1999).
- . 1999. CUNY COPE (College Opportunity to Prepare for Employment) statistics. [http://www1.cuny.edu/portal\\_ur/content/studentjobs/cope.html](http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/studentjobs/cope.html) (accessed October 27, 2004).
- Elliott, Mark, Don Spangler, and Kathy Yorkievitiz. 1998. *What's Next After Work First: Workforce Development Report to the Field*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
- Finder, Alan. 1998. "Evidence Is Scant That Workfare Leads to Full-Time Jobs." First article in series, Does Welfare Work? *New York Times*, April 12, A:1.
- Fisher, Luchina. 2003. "New York City Agrees to Education for Welfare Recipients." *Women's Enews*, August 22, from the National Organization for



- Women Web page, <http://www.now.org/eNews/aug2003/082203welfare.html> (accessed August 10, 2004).
- Gittell, Marilyn, Kirk Vandersall, Jennifer Holdaway, and Kathe Newman. 1996. *Creating Social Capital at CUNY: A Comparison of Higher Education Programs for AFDC Recipients*. New York: Howard Samuels State Management and Policy Center, City University of New York.
- Golonka, Susan, and Lisa Matus-Grossman. 2001. *Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers*. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.
- Greenberg, Mark, Julie Strawn, and Lisa Plimpton. 2000. *State Opportunities to Provide Access to Postsecondary Education Under TANF*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. <http://www.clasp.org/pubs/> (accessed September 21, 2001).
- Hercik, Jeanette M. 1998. "Organizational Culture Change in Welfare Reform." *Welfare Information Network Issue Notes* 2(4). <http://www.welfareinfo.org/Isseorganiza.htm> (accessed August 11, 2004).
- Hostos Community College. 1999. Various Web site materials. New York: Hostos Community College. <http://www.hostos.cuny.edu> (accessed April 1–May 28, 1999).
- Kazis, Richard, and Marlene Seltzer. 2000. "Toward a Demand-Led Workforce Development System." Paper presented at the Welfare to Work: New Solutions for the New Economy UK/US Symposium. Boston: Jobs for the Future. [http://www.jff.org/jff/kc/library/0114/index\\_html](http://www.jff.org/jff/kc/library/0114/index_html) (accessed August 11, 2004).
- Laarman, Peter. 1998. "An Insult to the Poor: Why New York Churches Are Resisting Workfare." *Sojourners* (September–October). <http://sojourners.com/soj9809/980915.html> (accessed April 1, 1999).
- Leon, Rachel. 1995. *Workfare in NYS: Does It Work? A Study of the Impact of New Workfare Regulations and the Correlation Between Emphasis on Workfare and Job Entry*. Albany, New York: Hunger Action Network of NYS. <http://www.crisny.org/not-for-profit/unions/hannys-1.htm> (accessed April 1, 1999).
- Lynch, Roberta. 1994. "Can Markets Govern?" *American Prospect* 5(16): 125–134. <http://www.prospect.org/print/V5/16/lynch-r.html> (accessed August 11, 2004).
- Mannix, Mary R., Marc Cohan, Henry A. Freedman, Christopher Lamb, and Jim Williams. 1998. "Welfare Litigation Developments Since the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996." *Clearinghouse Review* 31(1): 435–453. <http://www.welfarelaw.org/artcommw.html> (accessed April 1, 1999).

- Meléndez, Edwin, Luis M. Falcón, Carlos Suárez, Lynn McCormick, and Alexandra de Montrichard. 2002. *The Welfare-to-Work Policy Shock: How Community Colleges Are Addressing the Challenge*. New York: New School University, Community Development Research Center.
- National Association of Social Work (NASW) 1999. "Job Centers: NYC's Diversion from Aid = Loss of Human Rights." *Currents* (January). First in a series of articles by New York City chapter, NASW Task Force on Welfare Reform. <http://www.naswnyc.org/w7.html> (accessed April 1, 1999).
- New York Times. 1998. "Obstructing Local Welfare Reform." Editorial. *New York Times*, July 4, A:10. <http://www.nytimes.com/archive> (accessed April 1, 1999).
- Osborne, David, and Ted Gaebler. 1992. *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Peterson's Guides. *Peterson's Guide to Two-Year Colleges*. 1999. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides Inc.
- Poverty Law Center. n.d. "Settlement Requires New York City to Evaluate TANF Recipients for Education and Training Programs Before Assigning Them to Work Activities." [http://www.povertylaw.org/legalresearch/cases/act\\_abstract\\_for\\_print.cfm?id=51713](http://www.povertylaw.org/legalresearch/cases/act_abstract_for_print.cfm?id=51713) (accessed August 10, 2004).
- Steuerle, C. Eugene, and Gordon Mermin. 1997. *Devolution as Seen from the Budget*. No. A-2 in the series *Assessing the New Federalism: Issues and Options for States*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. [http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/anf\\_a2.htm](http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/anf_a2.htm) (accessed August 15, 2001).
- Strawn, Julie. 1999. *Welfare-to-Work Programs: The Critical Role of Skills*. Kellogg Devolution Initiative Paper. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy. <http://www.clasp.org/pubs/jobseducation/skillspapere.htm> (accessed May 18, 1999).
- Varro, Barbara. 2004. "1 College, 2 Languages." *Chicago Tribune*, March 7. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/custom/educationtoday/chi-0403060310mar07,0,3301021.story> (accessed August 11, 2004).
- Watson, Keith, and Steven D. Gold. 1997. *The Other Side of Devolution: Shifting Relationships Between State and Local Governments*. *Assessing the New Federalism* report. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. <http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/other.htm> (accessed August 15, 2001).
- Weir, Margaret. 1997. "Is Anybody Listening? The Uncertain Future of Welfare Reform in the Cities." *Brookings Review* 15(1): 30–33. <http://www.crisny.org/not-for-profit/unions/weirwi97.htm> (accessed May 11, 1999).
- Welfare Law Center (WLC). 1999. "Federal Court Finds New York City Illegally Deters and Denies Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Cash Assistance Applications and Bars Expansion of 'Job Centers.'" From *Welfare News*

(March). New York: Welfare Law Center. <http://www.welfarelaw.org/wnreynolds.htm> (accessed May 5, 1999).

White, Andrew. 1997. "WEP (Workers Expect Paychecks)." *City Limits* (69). <http://www.citylimits.org/lores/archives/9703wep.htm> (accessed April 1, 1999).

# **Communities and Workforce Development**

Edwin Meléndez

*Editor*

2004

W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Communities and workforce development / Edwin Meléndez, editor  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-88099-316-2 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-88099-317-0  
(hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Occupational training—United States. 2. Employees—Training of—United States.  
3. Welfare recipients—Employment—United States. 4. Public welfare—Government  
policy—United States. I. Meléndez, Edwin

HD5715.2.C613 2004

331.25'92'0973—dc22

2004025118

© 2004

W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research  
300 S. Westnedge Avenue  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007-4686

The facts presented in this study and the observations and viewpoints expressed are the sole responsibility of the authors. They do not necessarily represent positions of the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Cover design by Alcorn Publication Design.  
Index prepared by Diane Worden.  
Printed in the United States of America.  
Printed on recycled paper.