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## Accelerated Study in Associate Programs Fact Sheet

### What is ASAP?

The City University of New York's (CUNY's) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), launched in 2007 with funding from the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, is an uncommonly comprehensive and long-term program designed to help more low-income students graduate and help them graduate more quickly.

ASAP presents an opportunity and an obligation for students. It was designed to address multiple potential barriers to student success for up to three years. ASAP requires students to attend college full time and encourages them to take developmental courses early and to graduate within three years. The program provides twice-monthly, comprehensive advisement from an adviser with a small caseload, plus enhanced career services and tutoring. ASAP offers blocked or linked courses for the first year and a seminar course covering topics such as goal-setting and study skills. The program provides a tuition waiver that fills any gap between students' financial aid and college tuition and fees. It also provides free MetroCards for use on public transportation, contingent on participation in program services, and free use of textbooks.

ASAP was noted as an effective and evidence-based program by President Barack Obama in his press release on America's College Promise in January 2015.

### What is ASAP's Effect on Students?

MDRC evaluated ASAP at three of CUNY's six community colleges that operate the program. Nearly 900 low-income students who needed one or two developmental courses were randomly assigned either to a program group, who could participate in ASAP, or to a control group, who could receive the usual college services. Comparing the two groups' outcomes over time provides an estimate of ASAP's effects, or value-added. After three years, MDRC found the following:

- **ASAP was well implemented.** The program offered – and students utilized – a wide array of services over a three-year period. ASAP staff effectively communicated requirements and other messages.

- **ASAP substantially improved students' academic outcomes over three years, including almost doubling graduation rates.** ASAP decreased drop-out rates and had large effects on enrollment during the winter and summer sessions. On average, program group students earned 48 credits in three years, 9 credits more than control group students. By the end of the study period, 40 percent of the program group had received a degree, compared with 22 percent of the control group. At that point, 25 percent of the program group was enrolled in a four-year school, compared with 17 percent of the control group.

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- **At the three-year point, the cost per degree was lower in ASAP than in the control condition.** Because the program generated so many more graduates than the usual college services, the cost per degree was lower despite the substantial investment required to operate the program.

ASAP's effects are the largest MDRC is aware of in the field of postsecondary education. The model offers a highly promising strategy to markedly accelerate credit accumulation and increase graduation rates among educationally and economically disadvantaged populations.

## Other Questions and Answers

**Does ASAP's full-time requirement mean it only serves a narrow population?** No. Nationally, about forty percent of community college students enroll in school full time – that's roughly 2.8 million students. This doesn't include students who would enroll full time if offered ASAP. MDRC's evaluation found that ASAP caused plenty of would-be part-time students to enroll full time. ASAP increased full-time enrollment rates by 11 and 22 percentage points in the first two semesters of the evaluation.

**Can ASAP help nontraditional students?** Yes – and it has! While the majority of CUNY's student population is traditionally aged, in MDRC's study, the sample included a substantial number of "nontraditional" college students: at the start of the study 23 percent of the evaluation sample was 23 or older, 26 percent did not live with their parents, 31 percent were employed, 15 percent had at least one child, and at least 6 percent were married. MDRC's student survey, administered one year after random assignment, found that roughly 50 percent of survey respondents (program and control group) said they were employed during the first semester of the follow-up period. Among those who were employed, about half said they worked 30 or more hours per week. Among the 50 percent of ASAP students who were employed during the first program semester, 42 percent graduated within three years.

**Is the cost of ASAP too high for other colleges to implement it?** CUNY ASAP is a comprehensive program and it requires a substantial increase in the cost per student. During MDRC's evaluation, running ASAP required an approximately 50 percent cost increase compared to usual college services. However, the program provided a significantly lower *cost per graduate* – that is, while operating ASAP cost more per student, it produced many more graduates, making it more cost-effective than business as usual at the college. Based on two cost studies, one conducted by MDRC and one conducted by Teachers College, Columbia University, ASAP is cost effective, reducing the costs of graduating by 11 percent. In addition, the costs of operating ASAP have dropped dramatically since the program was first developed, falling from roughly $6,200 per student per year (when ASAP began) to approximately $3,100 per student per year (current program). In MDRC's ASAP Replication Demonstration in Ohio, the initial average annual cost per student is estimated to be about $3,100. It is possible that the incremental cost of ASAP at CUNY and the Ohio colleges will continue to decline as the program continues to expand through economies of scale.

**What contributes to ASAP's costs?** ASAP is so effective because it provides students with comprehensive, integrated, monitored, wraparound services. Providing those services costs money! The most expensive component of the program at CUNY, accounting for almost one-quarter of the

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program's operating costs, is administration and staffing. This includes salaries for ASAP college directors and staff in CUNY's central office, including research and evaluation staff who provide oversight and monitoring. Salaries for ASAP staff who interact directly with students also contribute to the program's cost. Interestingly, the tuition waiver accounts for only a small portion of the program's cost at CUNY, as the vast majority of ASAP students are eligible for full Pell grants which covered their tuition and fees. (Offering ASAP to non-Pell eligible students would raise tuition waiver costs substantially. Alternatively, leveraging state aid for summer terms not covered by Pell could reduce costs.) Other components with notable costs include the monthly MetroCard incentive for students, textbooks, and dedicated tutoring services. Colleges seeking to replicate ASAP might be able to reduce costs in these areas by leveraging existing programs, such as textbook buyback programs or existing tutoring centers. However, as noted above, the cost per graduate in ASAP is lower than the cost per graduate for typical college services.

**How is ASAP expanding across the country?** At CUNY, ASAP plans to serve more than 13,000 students by fall 2016 – a population larger than many colleges' total enrollment. In addition, MDRC and CUNY are working with three community colleges in Ohio to replicate CUNY ASAP as faithfully as possible, keeping most program components the same but adapting components such as the MetroCards for the Ohio context. This demonstration will test whether the ASAP model can be replicated and if its effects are similar in a new context serving a different student population. In the future, MDRC may work with other colleges interested in implementing their own ASAP programs to evaluate the effectiveness of adaptations of CUNY ASAP in new contexts.