2012 COMPREHENSIVE INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY

Prepared for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Higher Education

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LaGuardia Community College

The City University of New York

Comprehensive Institutional Self-Study

For the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools

Commission on Higher Education

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LaGuardia Community College
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Introduction

Institutional Profile

LaGuardia Community College was founded in 1971 as a bold experiment in opening the doors of higher education to all. LaGuardia educates more than 18,000 credit students through over 50 degree and certificate programs, as well as more than 40,000 non-credit students seeking career and educational experiences in more than twenty different categories of Adult and Continuing Education programs. LaGuardia offers associate degree programs in the liberal arts and sciences, business and computer science, as well as career and allied health programs, and offers full-time students career internships as part of their program of study. Upon graduation, LaGuardia students’ lives are transformed as family income increases 17%, and students transfer to four-year colleges at three times the national average. Part of the City University of New York, LaGuardia is a nationally recognized leader among community colleges for boundary-breaking success educating underserved students.

Located in Queens, the most ethnically diverse borough in the City of New York, LaGuardia’s students represent 161 countries and speak 124 languages. Nearly two-thirds of LaGuardia students were born outside the U.S, and half of the college’s incoming students have lived in the U.S. for less than five years. LaGuardia Community College has been accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education since 1974 and is governed by the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY).

Since its founding, LaGuardia has developed an activist and progressive approach to higher education and community service that has made it a leader in post secondary education with an international reputation for teaching excellence. As a Federally designated Hispanic serving institution, it was recognized in 2009 by Excelencia in Education for its exemplary leadership in serving the needs of Latino and nontraditional students. In 2008, the college won CUNY’s inaugural Sustainability Award for environmentally friendly best practices on campus. LaGuardia was named one of two Community Colleges of Excellence in the United States by the MetLife Foundation in 2006, and was named an Institution of Excellence by the Policy Center on the First Year of College for developing one of the best college freshman programs in the nation in 2003. Additionally, the National Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) ranked LaGuardia as one of the top three large community colleges in the U.S. for meeting benchmarks of high academic standards and practices in 2002.

The LaGuardia faculty is accomplished, diverse, and dedicated to the core mission of aiding student success. As of 2010, 54% of the full-time faculty have doctorates, more than twice the national average at community colleges. They have amassed an impressive record of professional achievement and been recognized with numerous grants and awards from such organizations as the National Endowment for the Arts, The National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, NASA, and the Fulbright Foundation. The College has benefited from a substantial growth of the faculty over an eight-year period. Between 2002 and 2010, the number of full-time faculty increased 44% (from 231 to 333), while the number of adjunct faculty increased 52% (from 524 to 795).
LaGuardia nurtures faculty scholarship and creative work through one of the most robust faculty development programs in all of CUNY. In recent years, over 300 full-time and part-time faculty have participated annually in a wide range of programs, including seminars run by the Center for Teaching and Learning, which received the 2004 Hesburgh Certificate of Excellence for Innovative Faculty Training Programs. The Center works with faculty to explore and support pedagogical initiatives, linking technology and pedagogy to advance student learning. Seminars offered by the Center, many of which run for a full year, address an increasingly broad spectrum of topics, such as the capstone experience, quantitative literacy, advising, basic skills education in mathematics, and the effective uses of digital technologies. The College also supports the faculty’s scholarly activities through its Publishing and Tenure Highway (PATH) program, an intensive effort to help faculty complete and place their work in a peer-reviewed journal, and the Carnegie Seminar on Scholarship and Learning, a two-year seminar in which faculty investigate significant issues in teaching and learning in their fields and complete a scholarly paper for submission to a disciplinary journal. Since 2005, the Center for Teaching and Learning has published In Transit: The LaGuardia Journal on Teaching and Learning, a collective product of LaGuardia’s faculty and staff.

The Division of Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) offers a broad range of educational and training programs for workforce, economic and community development. ACE is one of the largest non-credit education efforts in the country and the largest continuing education program in CUNY, with programs for adults, youth, and special populations. Grants for 2010 surpassed $9 million and programs have grown to serve an increasing variety of constituencies. Through a partnership with ACE and Student Affairs, ACE has helped thousands of students enter credit studies at the College. In the past few years 20% of the incoming freshman class has consisted of students who started their LaGuardia education in Continuing Education. The Division is an acknowledged leader in adult literacy and English as a Second Language instruction. The Center for Immigrant Education was rated an exemplary program by the New York State Department of Education for its pioneering work in providing services to immigrants. The Small Business Development Center has helped entrepreneurs obtain over $25 million in loans, investments and grants since opening its doors in 2001. In recent years, ACE has also launched a Workforce One Healthcare Career Center to expand training opportunities for students in high-demand careers, and provide pathways for foreign-trained health professionals; NY Designs, an incubator for small design businesses; Pre-College Academic Programs; and contextualized GED and ESL programs.

LaGuardia has received national and international recognition for its innovative programs, while President Mellow has emerged as a prominent advocate for community colleges. The College garners extensive media attention, both locally and nationally in the New York Times, Chronicle for Higher Education, and the Wall Street Journal.

In 2007, the College received the National Bellwether Award for Instructional Programs and Services based on our First-Year Academies, which place all freshmen into one of three Academies based on choice of major, thereby contextualizing basic skills instruction. In the same year, faculty member Ellen Quish was named English as a Second Language Teacher of the Year by the New York Times, and LaGuardia was one of 26 colleges from around the country to
receive the Ford Foundation’s Difficult Dialogues grant, which focused the campus on the issue of religious tolerance.

In 2008, President Mellow was invited to give the Atwell Lecture at the American Council of Education, becoming only the second community college president to do so. LaGuardia was one of 150 four-year and two-year U.S. colleges to be invited by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to join 150 colleges from the developing world as participants in the Higher Education Summit for Global Development. LaGuardia was also asked by the U.S. Business Roundtable to be one of three community colleges to appear before members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and present a forum on the untapped potential of two-year colleges in advancing American competitiveness. This national attention contributed to significant increases in external funding, including a $2.7 million Title V grant for strengthening the second-year college experience, a $1.25 million grant for a Veterans Upward Bound Program, a $620,000 grant from FIPSE for disseminating LaGuardia’s model ePortfolio program, and a $2.7 million grant from New York City’s EDC for retraining workers displaced by the Willets Point redevelopment project.

In 2009, the College hosted Bill Gates, Sr. and the Gates Foundation to help deepen their understanding of the “real life” work of community colleges. LaGuardia was invited by the Lumina Foundation to be the first college in New York State for the Achieving the Dream initiative, and President Mellow was invited to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing community colleges at the Brookings Institute and the Springboard Project of the U.S. Business Roundtable. President Mellow gave keynote presentations and guidance to the League for Innovation in the Community College, and to higher education systems in Minnesota, Montana and Oregon. On an international level, President Mellow was an invited participant at the Council of Europe’s Biennial Higher Education Summit, and the College has partnered with higher education leaders in Chile to provide hands-on support to launch that country’s first community college.

In 2010, LaGuardia hosted several Gates Foundation activities, including an on-campus orientation to community colleges for the new Gates Foundation CEO, Jeff Raikes, and we played a leading role in the Gates post-secondary education meeting in Seattle. The College also hosted a national online conversation about President Barack Obama’s American Graduation Initiative. LaGuardia was featured in a PBS Frontline program entitled College, Inc., and President Mellow participated in a debate at the National Press Club, broadcast by PBS, with the presidents of Yale University, DeVry University, and the Chancellor of the Maryland State system.

In 2011, the College received two grants to bring our cutting-edge work on ePortfolios to a national audience. One of the grants, a $3.7 million award from the U.S. Department of Education, will allow LaGuardia and four CUNY campuses to use their existing ePortfolio initiatives to help minority and low-income students follow an academic path to a bachelor’s degree. With the second grant—a $700,000 FIPSE grant—LaGuardia will build collaborations with 20 campuses nationwide that are interested in introducing ePortfolio into their curricula. The College also hosted visits by the U.S. Poet Laureate Kay Ryan, and acclaimed author and
activist, Dr. Temple Grandin, allowing students to discuss in both small and large settings the work of these leading thinkers.

LaGuardia’s work has also attracted the attention of both government and private funders, leading to major grants from the Robin Hood Foundation, the MetLife Foundation, and the Goldman Sachs Foundation. One of our most notable programs (now underway in several other cities) is the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program, which provides intensive hands-on business education and one-on-one mentoring and guidance to spur revenue growth and new hiring in local businesses. Already the “graduates” are showing results with 50% reporting double digit year-over-year revenue growth and more than 75% hiring new employees.

Academics

A foundation of LaGuardia’s approach towards raising academic quality is to further the development of academic majors. The majors allow students to pursue more rigorous study in a discipline they are hungry to explore, creating a stronger link and superior advisement opportunities between faculty and students. They also build a richer academic community, leading to the creation of student clubs, journals and conferences. Since 2007, new majors have been launched in a wide range of disciplines, raising the total number of programs, options, and certificates to 59, including new programs in Accounting, Aviation Management, Biology, Communication Studies, Criminal Justice, Digital Media Arts, Environmental Science, Industrial Design Technology, Music Recording Technology, Philosophy, Radiologic Technology, Spanish Translation, Theater, and Writing and Literature. Work is well underway to develop additional programs in Creative Writing, Early Childhood Education, Forensic Science, Journalism, and Psychology. We have also expanded course offerings in modern languages and literature to better address the needs of heritage-language learners, with courses in 17 languages, including Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, Polish, and Russian.

One example of the power of the academic programs can be found in our philosophy program. Students are flocking to study philosophy, with over 4,500 students enrolled in courses, 60 majors, and the launch of an active Philosophy Club and student journal. LaGuardia’s philosophy program, perhaps one of the largest in the nation, was featured in a 2011 story broadcast by National Public Radio.

LaGuardia’s effort to advance the CUNY Decade of Science is flourishing. The College created a new Natural Sciences Department to separate biology, chemistry, and physics from Allied Health, permitting closer interaction and advisement for students seeking careers in the hard sciences. Four research labs for engineering, physics, natural sciences, and nursing have been completed and faculty, along with their students, are engaged in research ranging from examining environmental toxins in the nearby Superfund-designated Newtown Creek to measuring the movement of potassium through cell membranes using state-of-the-art electrophysiology equipment. Three of our professors were awarded a NASA grant to explore the effects of aerosols and solar variability on the earth’s climate, a project that will engage dozens of students in hands-on research into a suspected cause of global warming. In 2008, the College received Title V STEM Grants totaling $2.1 million, and to encourage the next generation of scientists and engineers, we launched the LaGuardia Youth Center for Engineering
Excellence to encourage Hispanic and low-income high school students to pursue an associate degree in engineering at LaGuardia and a bachelor's degree in engineering.

Our U.S. Department of Education-funded Project Quantum Leap (PQL), designed to contextualize math instruction by linking it to complex social issues such as public health and epidemiology, shows promising results. Since 2007, 47 Mathematics Department faculty have participated in year-long PQL seminars run by the Center for Teaching and Learning. Course attrition is down and higher pass rates from developmental math are found in PQL courses as compared to non-PQL classes. LaGuardia is also experimenting with pedagogy in the sciences looking, for example, at whether 18-week courses, rather than our conventional 12-week courses, lead to better outcomes for students in key biology courses.

The curriculum has been substantially enriched by an expansion of the Honors Program and our Phi Theta Kappa chapter. The LaGuardia Performing Arts Center maintains an active performance program with extensive connections to our multi-ethnic communities. LaGuardia’s signature Learning Communities have expanded, including faculty-designed Liberal Arts Clusters that provide students with a wide variety of challenging interdisciplinary academic experiences that foster integrative learning. Developmental skills programs have successfully moved thousands of students beyond basic skills to achieve their academic goals. Increasing numbers of our graduates are transferring to four-year colleges, both within and beyond CUNY, including such highly competitive institutions as Amherst, Bard, Columbia, Cornell, Sarah Lawrence, Swarthmore, and Vassar, often with substantial financial aid packages.

**Student Success**

A central focus of the College has been on measuring student learning. LaGuardia is on the cutting-edge of using student-developed electronic portfolios (ePortfolio) as a mechanism to assess general education core competencies in all majors. Over 40,000 examples of student work have been collected for assessment purposes. In 2011, faculty teams assessed a sample of over 3,000 of these artifacts using faculty-developed rubrics for each competency. These assessment readings documented gains in student achievement.

The College has placed sustained emphasis on helping students develop their capacities to envision and plan their own academic futures. Since 2003, LaGuardia students in some programs have been developing longitudinal ePortfolios, working in multiple courses across semesters and disciplines. They collect their work and reflect on their learning, creating narratives that connect academic context to lived experience. Reviewing their growth and planning for the future, students link their work to General Education and programmatic competencies. Faculty development and student peer mentoring programs encourage an ePortfolio pedagogy that supports integrative learning and helps students craft potent new identities as learners. Thousands of students share their ePortfolios with their families, potential employers and transfer institutions, involving outside stakeholders and support systems in the process of reflective conversation and goal setting. In 2009-10, more than 12,000 LaGuardia students were active in their portfolios, and as noted in the Self-Study Report, data consistently documents a significant impact on engagement in learning, retention, and progress towards the degree.
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LaGuardia is also providing national leadership on ePortfolios. From 2008-2010, the Center for Teaching and Learning mounted the FIPSE-funded Making Connections ePortfolio Seminar Program, working with 30 New York City higher education institutions (community colleges through research universities) as they moved forward with their campus ePortfolio implementations. An April 2008 conference hosted by LaGuardia, Making Connections: ePortfolio, Integrative Learning, and Assessment, drew 600 faculty from 70 universities in 30 states and 5 countries. LaGuardia’s leadership in these areas has provided regional and national development of assessment practices particularly associated with ePortfolio, helping to document and guide emerging national practices.

LaGuardia embraces technology as a powerful tool to improve student outcomes. LaGuardia is taking the lead on a Gates Foundation-supported project which is using Web 2.0 technology to identify and disseminate effective pedagogical techniques for developmental education faculty at colleges across the nation. This high-profile initiative is showing results with increase in course completion and pass rates. All of our classrooms are now “smart” classrooms, equipped with networked computers, video projector and screen, along with all AV control devices. Our library’s decision to offer e-books was well-received, with over 100,000 e-book files downloaded by our campus community. Although we’ve tripled the number of online/hybrid courses offered, we continue to lag behind the rest of CUNY. The College intends to increase the number of online courses by 50% in 2011-2012.

Academic excellence can be found throughout the college. At a time when approximately 70% of the nation’s veterinary technology students pass the national exam for licensure, 100% of our 2010 graduates passed this rigorous exam. Our paramedics also had a perfect pass rate and our licensed practical nursing and physical therapist assistant pass rates exceed the national average. One area of disappointment was a drop in the percentage of students passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses to 79% in 2010. The College is revamping and intensifying the support we provide to students taking the exam and we are committed to achieving a substantial rise in the pass rate next year.

One of the most important measures of our success is academic completion. In the last few years, LaGuardia’s retention and graduation rates have shown small increases. The College has done much to “move the needle” and it is encouraging to see these outcomes and to know that our graduation rate continues to outpace the national average. However, much still needs to be done. Research conducted in connection with the Achieving the Dream project found that students, as well as faculty and staff, often were confused about where to obtain timely assistance to address in-school and external problems which could interfere with course completion. To address these issues, the College is developing on-line tools to enable students to better understand what they need to do and when, as well as where to get the help they may need. Our research on LaGuardia’s graduation rate has led to a new focus on the many students with 45 or more credits who do not complete their degree. We’ll be intensifying our work to ensure these seemingly on-track students get the academic and student support services they need to graduate.

The College continues to wrestle with how we can most effectively deliver advising services. Based on feedback from students, the College has launched a college-wide initiative on creating
an advising and counseling structure that is understandable to our students, uses limited resources effectively, and provides timely help.

Our Division of Student Affairs is being enhanced to improve service to our students. Staff is being redeployed and professional development is being strengthened. We are using technology to engage students from the first moment they decide to come to LaGuardia and we’ve seen student use of online resources grow. This is particularly important at a time when our enrollment is growing, yet staffing levels are being reduced. In recent years, we created the Information/Call Center and the Enrollment Services Center, a one-stop for registration and financial aid. Our partnership with Single Stop, a non-profit agency who maintains an office on our campus, has led our students to secure over $1 million in tax benefits and has increased applications to available benefits, such as Food Stamps and Public Assistance. The College also provides thousands of students with a reliable and convenient learning environment for their children at the accredited Early Childhood Learning Center.

We continue to achieve important results with severely disadvantaged populations. Our GED Bridge program which provides contextualized instruction and strong academic support to students is showing great promise. Initial results in this Robin Hood-funded random control study reveal higher GED pass rates and less need for remediation. Our CUNY Catch program, which delivers education to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, will connect inmates now located at an upstate prison to LaGuardia upon their release. Recognizing our students’ need for income supports, we’ve expanded employment of students, specifically as peer mentors and health educators.

Fundraising

Despite a very tough environment, our external funding has grown. We have been increasingly successful in philanthropic fundraising from corporate sources and alumni, with new foundation grants from the Luce Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Wal-Mart Foundation, the Robin Hood Foundation, the Goldman Sachs Foundation and the MetLife Foundation. In 2009-2010 alone, we garnered over $12 million in workforce development grants and contracts, including new funding for our cutting-edge GED work.

The Division of Institutional Advancement has helped the College develop its assets, stay in touch with alumni, strengthen relationships with the community, and maintain clear and powerful communication with the public, helping to raise the national profile of the College. In response to dwindling financial support for public higher education, it has become imperative to engage in fundraising efforts to help sustain our programs and provide support for our students. In 2003, under the leadership of President Mellow, the LaGuardia Foundation was launched and is committed to attracting donations, with the main objective of providing scholarships to our students in need. To date the foundation has raised $4.5 million and distributed 2,600 scholarships to students, growing from $40,000 in 2006-2007 to $300,000 in 2009-2010.

Organizational Structure of the Self-Study Process

The LaGuardia Community College Middle States Self-Study Steering Committee was appointed by the President in November 2009. The Steering Committee consists of the Chairs of
the fourteen Working Groups created to address each Middle States standard, plus the Steering Committee Chair. The members of the Steering Committee and Working Groups were drawn from a broad cross-section of the college and include over 140 faculty, administrators, staff, and students. A co-chair was designated for each Working Group. The composition of the Working Groups was accomplished through a collaborative process involving input from many stakeholders, including the Academic Chairs and the Executive Council. In addition, a self-study website was created to complement the campus forums, surveys and other events to ensure that the self-study was an inclusive, transparent process engaging the entire college community. Appendix A provides a complete listing of the Steering Committee and Working Group members.

To guide the work of the Steering Committee, a smaller Core Team was created, consisting of the Steering Committee Chair; the Working Group Chairs for Standards 7, 13, and 14; and two senior administrators: the Vice President for Student Affairs and the Executive Director for Organizational Development and Planning. The Core Team served as the policy-making body to establish the direction, goals, and activities of the self-study. It established agendas for Steering Committee meetings; assisted the Steering Committee in establishing the format and scope of working group reports; and provided feedback on the Working Group reports. In consultation with the Core Team, each Working Group developed research questions for the self-study. During 2010-2011, the Working Groups conducted research and submitted seven interim reports, including draft findings and recommendations, to the Core Team (see instructions for logging in to the SharePoint site where these interim reports and other research documents are posted).

In May 2011, the final reports of the Working Groups were submitted to the Core Team and preliminary findings were discussed with the Student Government Association and the President’s Cabinet, and at a college-wide Open Forum. Over the summer the Steering Committee Chair, assisted by the Core Team, edited these reports into a draft self-study, which was published on the college website in September for review. All members of the college community were invited to submit comments through the website and to attend a college-wide Middle States Open Forum. An additional Student Open Forum was held. In addition, each Working Group submitted written comments about the draft report to the Core Team. The feedback received from these venues was reviewed by the Core Team and Steering Committee, and, as appropriate, incorporated into the final draft of the Self-Study.

Documentation and Demonstrating Compliance

Throughout this report there are sentences and phrases that have been bolded. The language in these areas has been taken directly from the standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education as enumerated in the Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education. We have incorporated and bolded these words in order to state explicitly how LaGuardia is in compliance with the Middle States Commission’s standards. Parenthetical references to the Fundamental Elements follow the order listed in Characteristics of Excellence. For example, FE 1.1 refers to the first Fundamental Element under Standard 1.

All documents cited in the report are accessible online by clicking on the highlighted links. The report also includes references to appendices for supplementary information. These appendices are provided in a separate document accompanying the report.