

Executive Summary
LaGuardia Community College
Middle States Self-Study, September 2011

Institutional Overview and the Self Study Process: LaGuardia Community College was founded in 1971 as a bold experiment in opening the doors of higher education to all. LaGuardia educates more than 17,000 credits students through over 40 degree and certificate programs, as well as more than 35,000 non-credit students seeking career and educational experiences. 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 (CUNY), LaGuardia is a nationally recognized leader among community colleges for boundary-breaking success educating underserved students.

For the past 21 months, LaGuardia has engaged in a college-wide process resulting in the creation of this self-study report. More than 120 faculty, staff, and students have participated as members of the Steering Committee or the 14 Working Groups, closely examining whether the College meets the rigorous standards established by the Middle States Commission. Throughout the process, the Work Group participants have collaborated with their colleagues in departments and divisions throughout the College getting their input to inform the self-assessment.

Chapter 1 (Standard 1: Mission and Goals): The self-study process has had an immediate and positive impact on the College: after an inclusive, campus-wide process beginning in Spring 2011, the College adopted a new mission statement that embraces the values and aspirations of the institution. Since the mission was revised after the Working Groups had completed their research, when this report refers to the "mission" or "current mission," we refer to the mission statement in place prior to September 2011.

LaGuardia's mission statement embraces the College's core values and commitments, informing the College's key planning and decision-making processes. The self-study found the mission statement well-embedded in these processes, although typically not explicitly referenced. Additionally, the Working Group encouraged the College to more widely disseminate the mission statement since surveys revealed limited knowledge of the current statement, and it recommended periodic review of the mission statement, every five years, to assure its continued relevance.

Chapter 2 (Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal; Standard 3: Institutional Resources; Standard 7: Institutional Assessment): LaGuardia's rigorous planning process recognizes the College's presence in a larger University system, seeks wide input from throughout the College and drives the resources allocation process. As a college within the City University of New York, LaGuardia is aligned with priorities established in the University's Master Plan and addresses performance goals established by the University. The College's annual planning process begins with an analysis of reports resulting from CUNY Performance Management Process (PMP) reports, providing valuable metrics to the LaGuardia community, including a listing of comparative performance among CUNY colleges on University targets. LaGuardia's strategic plan initiatives are guided by these assessments and are designed to move the College toward reaching University objectives and College targets. The College's strategic

planning process requires extensive consulting with students, faculty, staff, alumni and the community. The planning process, while complex because of the overlay of CUNY's performance goals, has allowed the College to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities and develop plans and institute policy changes and/or programs to achieve shared goals.

Guided by the planning process, the College allocates limited available resources to areas where PMP measures have indicated the need for improvement. The structure of the strategic plan, including university goals and long-term strategies growing out of the College's process to examine longer-term trends through a "visioning process," makes the core priorities clear to the college community and focuses attention, energy, and resources on priority areas. A move to add assessment designs to strategic plan initiatives permits the College to better determine whether investments in priority areas have brought about the desired results.

Budget, capital funding, and strategic planning procedures are repeatedly and effectively communicated to the College community, and recent changes to the strategic plan timeline have expanded participation in the budget process. Long-term planning for the College's operating budget, often complicated by the fluid nature of state and city budget-making processes, has also evolved in recent years, improving the ability to project revenues and expenses and allowing more lead-time to respond to austere years.

The College's physical footprint has expanded significantly and the College utilizes funds from a number of sources for capital projects. A regular assessment process is employed to keep priorities focused on maintaining or expanding the infrastructure necessary to provide high-quality instruction and student support. College assessment of the needs and efficacy of its human and technological resources is similarly embedded in the strategic plan process.

Assessment is central to the College's planning and operations. The College, with its myriad unique programs and processes, often with externally imposed assessment frameworks, follows assessment processes with varied timetables and many types of outcome measures. Because the College's senior leadership recognizes the diverse assessment demands being placed on programs and has sought to avoid a "one size fits all" approach to assessment, no single framework has been imposed on these diverse programs. While this diversity of assessment approaches exists, the strategic planning process ensures that all departments and programs are actively and continuously embracing assessment.

Assessment of student learning is of paramount importance and is detailed under Standard 14. The College has become a national leader in the assessment of learning, adding greatly to the formation of innovative assessment practices by employing faculty-developed rubrics to assess basic competencies and applying these rubrics to assess student work archived in electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) which contain a rich repository of student learning artifacts. The College has built a robust assessment team both within the Academic Affairs Division and a highly-regarded Institutional Research & Assessment Office (IR&A) to promote assessment across the College.

Chapter 3 (Standard 4: Leadership and Governance; Standard 5: Administration; Standard 6: Integrity): As a part of CUNY, LaGuardia operates within the broader CUNY governing

structure. On the campus, the College Senate plays a central role in governance. The tripartite governance structure of the Senate (encompassing faculty, staff, and students) provides an essential venue for formulating academic and operating policies. Yet, this structure has also engendered debate about how to achieve a balance between giving adequate voice for all constituencies and ensuring appropriate faculty authority over curriculum. The revised governance plan, approved in 2009, promoted greater transparency of the Senate's proceedings and brought the College into compliance with the New York State Open Meetings Law. Ongoing concerns about the role of non-faculty representatives in curriculum approval and about student government orientation, mentoring, and committee membership remain outstanding issues and the Working Group recommended they should be addressed under periodic, planned assessments of college governance.

Oversight of the College is the responsibility of the President under the authority of the CUNY Chancellor and Board of Trustees. The President administers the College through the Executive Council, comprised of Division leaders and key staff of the President. Six Vice Presidents directly manage operations within their Divisions. The self-study found reporting relationships and lines of organization and authority are clear. Final decision-making responsibility rests with the President; the Executive Council reviews major budgetary and policy matters and recommends actions to the President after careful review and assessment. The Executive Council is informed by the deliberations of the President's Cabinet, the Student Government Association, the College Senate and other venues.

The Executive Council itself uses several methods of assessment to examine its effectiveness to ensure that the College achieves its strategic plan targets and improves upon its PMP results. These assessments ensure the integrity and efficiency of overall College structures and services and are utilized to inform its decision-making.

Chapter 4 (Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention; Standard 9: Student Support Services): LaGuardia, an open access institution, has experienced dramatic growth in student enrollment, which is carefully managed by College staff, in coordination with the University's enrollment team. Prospective students receive early and regular communications and each year thousands of incoming students come to campus to attend new student orientation sessions to better prepare them for college life.

From the first encounter with students, the College emphasizes retention and graduation. This starts with the provision of accurate and comprehensive information about academic programs and policies, basic skills requirements and testing, financial aid, and transfer. The College disseminates information to students at all points in their academic careers via the regularly updated web site, college catalog, and student handbooks, as well as through electronic media.

The College offers a comprehensive program of student support services from point of entry to graduation that respond to the wide-ranging needs of LaGuardia's diverse student population. From before students enter the College until they depart, LaGuardia has both college-wide and more focused initiatives to support students as they endeavor to persist and ultimately graduate. Each program assesses itself to assure that it is meeting its goals and is aligned with the College mission.

Since 2007, the College has made many structural changes to academic advisement in response to ongoing assessments. Of particular note is a new process that permits each of the College's advising departments to concentrate on one of three stages of a student's development, providing more meaningful interactions for students with advisors who have a particular expertise. Further, in 2010 the College launched an "Advising Central" website to ensure that faculty and staff possess accurate advisement information. Despite the intense focus on advising, students, faculty and staff continue to see a need to create a more unified and impactful approach to advising. The College is embarking on a college-wide process to construct a more student-friendly advisement program.

LaGuardia's students typically must overcome financial hardship to afford school. The College has improved the processing of financial aid so that it is more quickly delivered to students, has instituted a scholarship program to help needy students, and has changed its financial services processes to promote retention.

Despite these advancements, the College community has noted the challenges of getting students the information and the services they need to stay on track towards a degree. Findings from the most recent *Achieving the Dream* report show that more work is needed to remedy persistent fragmentation of services that confuse students and potentially undermine their experience at the College.

A concern noted in the self study has been the College's communication with and support for those students who have applied to candidacy programs in nursing but are not accepted. The College has developed alternative programs to meet the needs of students who wish to continue in the health professions but whose academic achievements do not meet the cut off for admission to the extremely competitive nursing program. The College also has tutoring, special advisement, and support programs for prospective nursing students.

Chapter 5 (Standard 10: Faculty): LaGuardia faculty are the bedrock of the institution. The faculty is accomplished, diverse, and dedicated to the core mission of aiding student success. Today, 54% of the faculty have doctorates, an exceptionally large proportion for the community college sector. They have amassed an impressive record of professional achievement and been recognized with numerous grants and awards. Diversity among the faculty is fairly high (29% are Black or Hispanic) and increasing, though improvements remain desirable, especially in order to improve the current 47 to 1 Hispanic student/faculty ratio.

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). Almost half (45%) the faculty have been at LaGuardia for less than five years. Even though the College has devoted significant resources to hiring full-time faculty, due to rapid student enrollment growth, the ratio of full-timers to part-timers has increased slightly from 1:2.27 in 2002 to 1:2.39 in 2010.

Evaluation policies for the reappointment of all faculty members and for the promotion and tenure of full-time faculty are clearly defined. The system of annual evaluations, peer teaching

observations, and student surveys form the core of this process. Faculty and Chairs expressed that peer evaluations are effective in assessing the quality of teaching, while views of the effectiveness of SIRs are divided.

Professional development opportunities are widely available to both full-time and part-time faculty and are designed to help faculty refine the “art of teaching” and develop their scholarship.

A substantial portion of the LaGuardia faculty responding to a recent survey state they find it challenging to balance their teaching responsibilities with scholarship and service. Overall, faculty members believe that teaching is the core of LaGuardia’s mission as a community college. Many express the desire for a more manageable workload in order to both better serve students and to give more attention to scholarship and publication.

Chapter 6 (Standard 11: Educational Offerings): Since 2007, 11 new academic programs have been launched, bringing the total offerings to 59. LaGuardia’s process for developing, implementing, and modifying new and current programs ensures that the College’s curriculum is academically rigorous and consistent with its mission. LaGuardia’s academic programs meet the rigorous standards set by the University, and, where appropriate, national accreditors and appropriate governmental entities. All courses and programs are developed through a peer review process among qualified faculty in departmental curriculum committees.

Enrollment in the College’s AA and AS degree programs expanded 58% between Fall 2005 and Fall 2010. This growth has exerted extra pressure on transferability in curriculum deliberations, since most of these students intend to transfer to baccalaureate programs. As required by CUNY policy, all new AA and AS programs are articulated with senior CUNY colleges.

LaGuardia graduates are well prepared academically for transfer to baccalaureate programs. The five-year transfer rate to senior colleges for LaGuardia graduates is 55%, far above the national rate of 23%. In Fall 2009, the average first term GPA of LaGuardia AA/AS graduates who transferred to CUNY senior colleges was 2.72, the highest among community colleges, and exceeding all other CUNY community colleges. The College also prepares students for employment through AAS vocational programs and internship experiences arranged by either the Cooperative Education Department or specific degree programs. The College’s six-month job placement rate for AAS programs is 75.4% (above CUNY 74.9% average), and pass rates on national/state certification exams indicate that the allied health programs are very effective at preparing students for employment.

The Cooperative Education Department has recently entered a period of change, although cooperative education itself, including internship programs, remains a curricular staple at LaGuardia. Consistent with recommendations of a 2002 college Task Force, the Co-op Department is working more closely with other departments to better serve students, and several programs have requested and been granted direct responsibility over internships for their students.

Capital funding has been secured to allow a major expansion of the library. Student satisfaction with library services is high and demand for services grows. Increasing enrollment and budgetary pressures have created challenges for the library faculty to address student needs.

Student success is supported by an extensive array of tutoring services, most of which are linked to academic departments, dedicated to particular areas, and available to all matriculated students. In addition, special programs offer tutoring along with other services to designated populations, and student peer tutors are employed by the College to assist fellow students.

Chapter 7 (Standard 13: Related Educational Activities): LaGuardia participates in CUNY's systematic entrance testing systems, identifies incoming students who need pre-college level coursework, and offers a broad range of support services and basic skills courses in English, Reading, ESL, and Mathematics. In later credit-bearing courses, students who have passed basic skills courses tend to perform comparably to those who entered college-level courses directly, suggesting that these pre-college programs are very effective. The College provides multi-faceted support, and regularly scheduled assessments show quantifiable gains in basic skills instruction.

The Division of Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) carries out the College's mission with non-credit educational offerings. ACE programs have a positive impact on the College's local community and on the more than 35,000 individuals who access ACE-related courses and programs. ACE programs meet a broad public need for GED instruction, English language programs, services to help small businesses grow, development of workforce skills and much more. LaGuardia's non-credit programs have garnered much attention, as well as significant public and private financial support. New York City provided substantial funding to launch the city's first health care career center to meet growing demand for healthcare industry workers. LaGuardia was the first community college to pilot the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses, a national imitative to grow small businesses.

ACE is also an important pipeline for students enrolling on the credit-side of the College. In spring 2010 nearly 20% of LaGuardia's incoming new students entered credit studies through ACE.

Many assessment methods are used to evaluate ACE's offerings, and in 2011 ACE began reviewing instruction, curriculum, and customer service standards as part of the University-wide examination of continuing education programs. Grant-funded programs are reviewed and evaluated on a continuing basis and must meet rigorous standards established by funding entities.

Chapter 8 (Standard 12: General Education; Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning): LaGuardia employs an across-the-curriculum approach to general education, based on a core set of competencies that are woven into course work in all the majors. General education goals are assessed by seven core competencies: Critical Literacy (a comprehensive category for three competencies: reading, writing, and critical thinking), Quantitative Literacy, Oral Communication, Technological Literacy, and Research and Information Literacy. Survey results indicate that students are well-informed about general education competencies and believe they are making significant progress in improving their performance in these competencies.

Faculty within each academic program have also established programmatic competencies with discipline-specific learning goals, outcomes, and assessment plans.

LaGuardia implements a systematic, sustained, and thorough process that uses multiple qualitative and quantitative measures to document and improve student learning. The Assessment Leadership Team, established in 2005 to guide the College's assessment processes, has made major improvements in the Periodic Program Review (PPR) process, including the implementation of a three-year staged process that guides faculty in conducting regular and cyclical assessment of academic programs. Since 2007, 13 programs have completed PPRs. The PPR process, coupled with other faculty-led assessment processes, provide the College with valuable data that supplements course pass rates, retention data, information from standardized examinations, and course grades.

For general education core competencies, LaGuardia has instituted twice-yearly Benchmark Assessment Readings using faculty-designed rubrics to augment the findings from PPRs and create additional direct evidence of student learning on a yearly basis. In Spring 2011, interdisciplinary faculty teams read student artifacts across six core competencies. The 2011 Benchmark Assessment readings documented gains in student achievement, while also indicating that several rubrics should be revised to improve their utility in assessing student work.

Student learning outcomes are defined through clearly articulated, written statements and the College has designed courses, programs, and educational experiences to achieve those outcomes. The emphasis on clearly defining learning outcomes starts when official course proposals are reviewed by college governance. All proposals are required to list specific student learning outcomes as part of the syllabus; there are no exceptions to this policy.

The College is continuously seeking to improve the assessment of student achievement of key learning outcomes and in utilizing these assessment results to improve teaching and learning. Within this effort, the Center for Teaching and Learning has been essential to expanding ePortfolio for assessment purposes, to educating faculty and staff about assessment, and to supporting programs in implementing changes in curriculum and programmatic development based on their PPR findings. There has been a steady growth in the use of authentic student assessment, in the routine inclusion of student work in PPRs, in establishing clear and sustainable collection methods for student work, and in using the data to inform program changes.