

John Jay
College of
Criminal Justice

Final Report
of Findings and
Recommendations

April 28, 2009



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Introduction

The purpose of this project was to assist the John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York (John Jay; the College) in developing strategies to support greater student retention, especially for undergraduates. Keeling & Associates, LLC (K&A) provided consulting services, technical assistance, and the customized application of proprietary intellectual assets, resources, and materials appropriate to the content and purposes of the project. Additional information about K&A is available on our Web site (www.keelingassociates.com).

The primary product of K&A's work will be an institution-wide strategic retention plan that will provide guidance and direction through short- and long-term goals and objectives and will include implementation and change management plans. This document is the final report of K&A's findings and recommendations; it will inform the development of the strategic retention plan,¹ which K&A will prepare following review and approval of this report.

Context

Factors usually associated with student retention are complex, multiple, and interrelated. Categories of those factors include, at minimum:

- Personal/student characteristics and challenges (including personal health and well-being and social, relational, and family concerns)
- Ability to pay the costs of education; hardships caused by bearing or financing those costs on students and/or their families and supporters
- Levels of student engagement with the institution and its educational programs (in intellectual, recreational, and social, or community domains)

¹ This revised final version of the report supersedes two previous drafts, which were presented to and reviewed by the President, Provost, and Vice Presidents for Enrollment Management and Student Development on March 5 and 31, 2009. It incorporates changes and clarifications discussed during those meetings and others requested by the President and Provost in subsequent email correspondence.

Before developing the first draft of the report, K&A presented both a summary of findings (organized as primary themes) and our first set of preliminary recommendations to the Provost and Vice Presidents for Enrollment Management and Student Development in a meeting at John Jay on January 30, 2009.

- Institutional engagement with, or investment in, students (including faculty attitudes toward students and their potential; standards for services provided to students; levels of expectations and accountability of students in academic and non-academic learning experiences; accountability for academic conduct; and expectations for personal conduct)
- Elements of the institutional learning environment (campus culture, perceived encouragement to learn, distractors, and the sense of connectedness or community on- and off-campus)
- Learning support provided to students (including academic advising, personal and career counseling, monitoring of academic achievement, tutoring, mentoring, and teaching of cognitive skills)
- The quality of academic programs (curriculum, general education, range and diversity of majors, degree of coupling of classroom and experiential learning)
- Quality and effectiveness of teaching; students' access to and ability to develop meaningful, ongoing relationships with full-time faculty members
- Institutional policy and regulations
- Features of the surrounding community, and the interactions of the community with the campus
- Access to the campus; difficulty students face in getting from home or work to campus

An effective approach to retention at John Jay must take into account at least the major pertinent factors included in the list above. Determining which of those factors are most important and pressing for John Jay's students, and which may be suspected or recognized as critical retention concerns within the institution, is an essential initial step. Once probable key factors in retention at John Jay are identified and prioritized, it becomes possible to develop an institution-wide approach to retention that responds specifically to those factors using evidence-based analysis and known best practices. Recommended strategies will likely call for action from all parts of the College.

Since retention is a broad institutional responsibility, the goals and objectives developed must be infused in the work of faculty, student affairs staff, and administrators. Accordingly, implementation of the strategic retention plan will require effective dissemination, communication, professional development, and change management activities.

Finally, a sound strategic retention plan requires evaluation; using effective evaluation methods, the College can determine what aspects of the retention plan are successfully implemented (formative evaluation) and what the outcomes of those activities are (impact evaluation).

Even the richest research universities and most comprehensive state colleges and universities in this country do not do full justice to undergraduate education -- and, therefore, to support for student success and retention -- because the incentive and reward system for the faculty is so skewed towards scholarship and research. K&A understands that John Jay wishes to identify specific, short-term actions that the College can take to support greater student retention, including, as possible examples, better academic advising and further development of student affairs programs and services. We will consider those short-term needs in developing the strategic retention plan. At the same time, and as emphasized in this report, it is likely that actions necessary to improve retention will require more than minor or isolated and categorical changes, as would also be true in other institutions.

Method

K&A consultants and consulting associates spent about six days on-site² at John Jay and conducted 33 individual and group meetings with more than 115 students, faculty, staff, and administrators. At least one senior consultant and one consulting associate attended and recorded notes at each meeting. After the meetings, consultants and associates transcribed their notes; all notes were collated, aggregated, edited for clarity, and read by at least two senior consultants.

The consultants also reviewed reports and data provided by John Jay and available on the institution's Web site. Key findings from those reports and data were integrated with notes from the meetings and interviews. Readers (both senior consultants and consulting associates) identified and highlighted important themes in the collated notes. One senior consultant then developed an initial list of repeated and consistent themes; the other senior consultants and associates reviewed and affirmed or challenged the list. Senior consultants discussed and resolved differences. The final consensus list of themes

² Dates: October 31; November 7, 24, and 25; December 11 and 22.

provided the basis for the analysis provided in the original thematic summary from which the consultants developed this report.

As noted earlier, K&A reviewed our findings in a summary of themes and a list of preliminary recommendations with the Provost and Vice Presidents for Enrollment Management and Student Development, who affirmed that the findings were generally consistent with their knowledge and experience.

Project Timeline

Activity	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March - April	May - June
Orient project team; begin project management; review of documents and data; preliminary interviews							
Final data collection and project plans							
Data collection, including survey(s)							
Short-term recommendations							
Analysis and formulation of drafts							
Final strategic retention plan							
Implementation assistance							

Findings and Analysis: Major Themes

The Priority of Retention

President Travis has established enrollment and retention goals (to be met by 2014): to raise the six-year baccalaureate graduation rate above 50% (currently 42.1%; CUNY senior college rate is 45%) and four-year completion rate for graduate students above 66% (currently 55%). The Chancellor of the City University of New York (CUNY) System expects increases in retention in all schools.

The discontinuation of associate degree programs at John Jay -- a policy decision with which the consultants strongly agree -- created pressing needs to a) enroll higher number of baccalaureate freshmen and transfers, b) retain a higher proportion of baccalaureate students, and c) recruit and retain more graduate students, especially at the master's level.

- Between Academic Year (AY) 2007 and AY 2009, the number of incoming baccalaureate freshmen increased from 1,027 to 1,414 (38% improvement); the College intends to enroll 1,900 baccalaureate freshmen by AY 2011. In AY 2009, John Jay enrolled 1,200 transfers, up from 1,000 the previous year (50% from CUNY schools, the rest primarily from community colleges in Long Island and New Jersey). John Jay intends to increase retention 2% per year and transfer numbers by 10% per year over the next 5 years.
- CUNY educational partnerships are designed to allow seamless transition from community colleges to John Jay; because of these arrangements, John Jay believes it is not “abandoning” or disadvantaging the historical population of students who came to the College for associate degrees. Assuming they do well in community college, students may transfer to John Jay and graduate with both associate and bachelor's degrees.
- The discontinuation of associate degree programs did not eliminate the need for remedial courses. Those courses now have different names and formats but are, if anything, more challenging to provide and administer.³

President Travis seeks to strengthen academic standards as one key way to improve academic quality and retention (i.e., by the admission of more qualified students): the minimum required high school score is now 75, and will increase to 80 in AY 2010;

³ See later comments about the adequacy of preparation of incoming freshmen.

minimum SAT is now 800.⁴ This improvement in academic standards is linked to broader efforts to strengthen the College's academic offerings and institutional profile. Subject to certain considerations described later in this report -- primarily the possibility that higher admissions standards may result, in the short term, in lower total enrollment -- the consultants support the President's intention to strengthen admissions standards.

Retention: A Multifactorial Challenge

Many factors at John Jay may discourage undergraduate retention. Therefore, improving retention, given a variety of institutional and demographic realities described below, is a multifactorial challenge.

Perspective: Retention is always some part infrastructure, and some part culture—perhaps more culture than infrastructure in most institutions. Note that here we define retention not simply as keeping students in school until they graduate, but as ensuring their ability to demonstrate competency and skills worthy of the bachelor's degree. The implication of this conjoining of retention with quality is that in the short run, John Jay could raise its expectations and standards for both admission and graduation -- but if that is all that it does, it may suffer a decrease in retention and graduation rates.

But the research shows that if an institution simultaneously raises standards AND improves the learning environment (e.g., better teaching and relationships with faculty members, student personal and academic support, advising, feedback via appropriate and timely assessment, tutoring, learning communities, etc.), then it can raise standards and retention through to graduation, assuming it effectively communicates standards and expectations to students before admission and again at matriculation.

Improving retention is very difficult across all kinds of institutions, and the reason little gain is made is because most institutions assume that changing one or a few things (e.g., establishing or improving first-year seminars, improved advising, better first-year orientation programs) will make big differences, when in fact sustainable improvement in retention to graduation requires significant campus cultural change to achieve a collective and cumulative effect. It is the synergistic and cumulative effect of many improvements simultaneously that finally helps an institution reach a tipping point or critical mass of

⁴ This reflects the required minimum score on the traditional SAT mathematics and verbal test components, without the additional writing section.

change to effect retention -- a multivariate problem with multifactorial solutions. This is the difficulty the consultants face in making useful, practical recommendations for short-term actions that would authentically and predictably improve retention.

Obstacles and Barriers to Retention at John Jay

Given both the characteristics and levels of academic preparedness of the students now arriving at John Jay and the limited institutional resources available with which to support those students as learners, it is remarkable that the College is doing as well as it is. We attribute this to a dedicated, if overburdened, faculty and staff, most of whom we found to be extraordinarily committed to the institution and its students. The spirit with which John Jay's teachers and administrators repeatedly and consistently make the most of limited resources is one of the College's greatest strengths.

Admissions

Undergraduate baccalaureate admissions standards at John Jay have historically been low and admission has not been selective. The continuing supply of students for the associate degree programs obviated the need to make serious investments in associate or baccalaureate level retention. One respondent in our interviews said, "The College's enrollment challenges have largely been an admissions problem -- it was a revolving door." John Jay did not in the past provide sufficient academic and personal support for either the associate or baccalaureate degree students. Therefore, the College does not have a legacy of strong experience or success in supporting students as learners.

Now, however, John Jay needs to increase retention and focus on student success at the baccalaureate level when many students admitted to the College are not up to the intellectual challenge and requirements of college-level work.

- A group of recently recruited faculty members interviewed by the consultants estimated that at least 20-25% of freshmen in their classes are not functionally qualified or prepared to be in college. Other faculty gave even higher estimates -- as many as 30-40% of freshmen in their classes underprepared for college.
- Faculty also emphasized, however, that the high-performing students at John Jay, though small in number and few as a proportion of their classes, are as good as those in any other university.

- The complexity of students' lives leads to additional challenges: even if they are academically prepared and are able to do well in class, many students do not have enough time, life flexibility, family support, or resources to allow time for study or reading outside class. Their ability to devote sufficient time on task to support effective learning is very limited, given their economic, transportation, and personal challenges.⁵ In the 2008 CUNY Student Experience Survey, only about half (49%) of John Jay students reported preparing for class for 6 hours or more per week -- a smaller percentage than reported by students at CUNY senior colleges (60%) or in the total CUNY cohort (54%).⁶
- The average entering SAT score for John Jay students is 937⁷; this figure has gone down slightly over the past four years. This average reflects performance in the 20th to 30th percentiles for all students taking the SAT.⁸ These metrics reinforce the level of academic preparedness of, and, therefore, the degree of educational challenge faced by, students admitted to John Jay.
- Students have the option under existing College academic policy to take as many as six courses per semester, though faculty (and the great majority of students with whom the consultants spoke) report that they can barely handle four, in most cases. Many faculty members regard this option as unfortunate, and some described it as "destructive."
- Faculty members who earned their Ph.D.'s at the best research universities may not be professionally well-prepared to support and teach the kind of students who come to John Jay. John Jay's students often require levels of academic support and caring that exceed both the faculty members' personal experience as students themselves and their professional capacity and preparation.

⁵ See also later discussion.

⁶ The percentage of John Jay students who spend at least 6 hours per week preparing for class has declined in successive administrations of the Student Experience Survey. Those percentages were 63% in 2002, 55% in 2004, 54% in 2006, and 49% in 2008.

⁷ Average score for traditional mathematics and verbal tests only.

⁸ SAT Percentile Ranks for Males, Females, and Total Group: 2007 College-Bound Seniors—Critical Reading + Mathematics + Writing. (PDF) College Board.

Characteristics and Challenges of Students

Most John Jay students have extraordinary personal, family, and financial challenges. Seventy-five percent come from New York City high schools; more than half are first generation college students. High proportions work full or part time,⁹ spend many hours commuting to campus, and have to provide care for formal or informal dependents -- these rates are in each case worse than those for students in John Jay's peer institutions, according to the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2008.¹⁰ John Jay students are often distracted by these complex "life factors" and have little margin for error caused by stress, etc. A family event or change in the student's personal or family financial picture may interfere with focus, funding, motivation, and time for school and study -- and therefore lead to departure.

However: despite their out-of-class time commitments, John Jay students surveyed in the 2008 administration of NSSE also reported levels of engagement with academic work that are generally similar to those of students in three groups of peer institutions.

- Seventy-six percent of students at John Jay receive financial aid (grants, loans, or work study). The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) shows that, overall, 66% of all undergraduates nationally received some type of financial aid in 2007/2008; in public 4-year doctorate granting institutions, 72% of undergraduates received financial aid.¹¹ In the CUNY system, 70% of degree-seeking students receive financial aid.¹²

⁹ In responding to the spring 2008 CUNY Student Experience Survey, 63% of John Jay students said they work full or part-time. In comparison to the total CUNY student cohort and the CUNY senior college student cohort, John Jay students were slightly more likely to work for pay and more likely to work 21 hours or more per week.

¹⁰ The 2008 NSSE results showed that John Jay first-year students and seniors both reported devoting large amounts of their time working for pay off campus, commuting to class, and providing care to dependents. Moreover, John Jay students spent significantly more time on these activities than do students at the peer institutions. Two examples: 1) 70% of John Jay first year students and 63% of John Jay seniors reported spending at least 6 hours a week commuting to class -- far higher than the 28-30% of first year students and 30-34% of seniors in the three groups of peer comparison schools; and 2) more than twice as many John Jay first year students -- 38% versus 17% in all three groups of peer institutions -- spent at least 6 hours a week caring for dependents.

¹¹ Source: 2007-2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, April 2009; <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009166.pdf>, accessed 4/10/09.

¹² Source: CUNY Web site: <http://web.cuny.edu/about/index.html>, accessed 3/20/09.

- Given these challenges and the reality of “stop in/stop out” enrollment patterns, John Jay may have to recognize graduation rates in intervals longer than six years; in other words, measuring 6 year graduation rates may understate actual completion rates at John Jay.

Limited Student Support Services

The College offers limited personal and academic support services for students in any category. The Registrar reports that students who leave the College most often cite personal, relationship, family, health, and financial concerns as reasons for their departure. One respondent summarized the situation as follows: “Once they get here, they get lost; they have no connection with counselors or advisors, they’re taught by adjuncts who know little about the institution, they get little information...you wonder how people actually get here and once they’ve been here how they get to graduation.”

In their responses to the 2008 administration of NSSE, high percentages of first-year students and seniors reported that the College provides only very little or some support to promote their success. For example: 26% of first year students and 27% of seniors endorsed “some” or “very little” regarding the extent to which the College emphasized spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work; 29% of first year students and 39% of seniors endorsed “some” or “very little” regarding the extent to which the College provided them with the support they needed to help them succeed academically. And 61% of first year students and 69% of seniors checked “some” or “very little” regarding the extent to which the College helped them cope with their non-academic responsibilities.

- Many respondents in our interviews felt that no level of support services would be sufficient to retain some minority of current undergraduates who are so underprepared or unready for college that they will almost certainly not succeed regardless of attempts to assist and support them. Speaking directly about an issue implied by many others, one respondent said, “If we aren’t going to serve and support them, we shouldn’t admit them.”
- A much more diverse and sophisticated portfolio of support services would be necessary to support the potential for achievement and success of another large proportion of students.

- The Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies has responsibility for undergraduate student success and retention initiatives but has extremely limited resources of staff, space, and funds.
- A common view among both faculty and staff whom we interviewed is that students do not take full advantage of existing support services. As one respondent said, “We don’t have enough support services, yet the students don’t even take advantage of what currently is out there. The students don’t spend enough time on campus to know about, find, or use these services.” But there has been mostly a “walk-in” mentality regarding the delivery of student support services; there is no active surveillance, case-finding, etc. Services therefore may be utilized primarily by students who self-identify and self-refer, but many other students may “fall through the cracks.” Students who most need help may not have sufficient self-efficacy and self-advocacy attitudes and skills to ask for it. This, obviously, may explain some part of the perception that students do not use existing services.
- Infrastructure and technology for most student support services is exceedingly limited and generally out-of-date; there are insufficient telephone lines and staff to meet students’ needs.
- The College has established a new Advising Center (space pending) with a Director and 3 advisors who have been hired. While the development of the Advising Center and the deployment of new resources to provide academic guidance are important steps, all respondents in our interviews and meetings recognized the limitations this level of resources imposes; many reported that other CUNY colleges have far more staff doing this type of work.¹³ Only about half of John Jay students responding to the 2008 CUNY Student Experience Survey were satisfied with academic advising.¹⁴

¹³ As an example: the Center for Academic Advisement at Baruch College has, in addition to the Director, a staff of 12 advisors who provide both appointment and walk-in advising with extended hours on two days a week. Baruch has about 13,000 undergraduates -- within about 10% of the number enrolled at John Jay.

¹⁴ In that survey, 51% of John Jay students felt satisfied to very satisfied with academic advising while 20% felt dissatisfied to very dissatisfied with academic advising. The remainder, 28% were neutral towards academic advising. In comparison, the CUNY Total cohort had a slightly higher percentage of satisfaction towards academic advising (53%), a similar level of dissatisfaction (21%), and a smaller level of neutral responses (25%).

- ▶ At the same time, some faculty and department chairs with whom we met objected to “civilianizing” advising -- believing that advising by staff members will be just about compliance with regulations.
- ▶ The faculty collective bargaining agreement defines faculty workload in such a way that advisement is not considered part of workload unless faculty are given reassigned time to do it.
- There is a very limited staff and availability of appointments in Writing Center.
- The Office of First Year Experience has only one staff member.
- There is no required first year seminar/transition to college course; establishing one is under consideration, but is still in the planning stages.
- ▶ A new common-reading program developed by faculty members and the Office of the Dean for Undergraduate Studies is a bold and promising experiment: the “Subway Series.” The idea was to allow students to transition to college within the context of the symbols, systems, and realities of their own worlds. The students, most of whom are commuters, could ‘navigate’ this idea as if it were a subway map. Common readings address the general theme, but different disciplines contributed their ideas (art, math, poetry on placards in subway cars) to engage students on a level they can understand and engage.¹⁵
- The new student orientation program is very limited, has a tiny budget, and is supervised by one employee who manages the program outside her regular work responsibilities.
- No summer experience program is available to freshmen before they start school aside from the summer basic skills immersion programs mandated by the University for students who are not skills-certified.
- Peer tutoring programs have been developed in science but have not been implemented at scale in other areas.

¹⁵ In an unplanned, informal, non-scientific “study” of 11 freshmen in an elevator, one of the consultants found that 100% of the students were familiar with the Subway Series; several described their experiences with it in some detail.

Weak Sense of Community and Student Engagement

Student campus culture is (as reported by students themselves) easily and quickly described: “Come to school -- do what you need to do (classes) -- leave.” Most students work, many have family responsibilities, and most travel long distances to get to John Jay, as noted earlier. Both students and Student Development staff agreed: “There is no sense of community at John Jay.”

- There are few gathering spaces; even groups of students in majors have little or no collective study or meeting space.
- Students object to John Jay policy and practice on student events and activities; they feel College administration is highly and excessively risk averse and overestimates risks of events. Student government seeks more up-to-date student activities, greater support from that office, easier guest access, less demand for extensive security forces at events. The work of Student Activities has historically been primarily compliance and paperwork-based. It is a tiny office with three staff for 12,000 undergraduate students. The cost of this level of institutional risk aversion (security) is reduced student engagement and a the loss of a sense of community.

Organizational Structure

- There is really no central, senior position with accountability for retention -- no “retention czar.”
- Currently, the Director of Graduate Admissions reports to the Vice President for Enrollment Management. In our interviews, some academic administrators suggested that a different organizational placement for Graduate Admissions, in which the Director reported instead to the Dean of Graduate Studies, might better align graduate admissions with the goals of Graduate Studies.

Academic Policy and Practice

- In the first two years, many undergraduates see no full-time faculty members. General education courses are taught primarily by adjunct instructors. John Jay has encouraged full-time faculty to teach in general education courses but with little success; there is no specific reward or positive incentive for faculty members to do so.

- New full-time faculty have 24 credit hours of release time in the first five years of their appointment to the faculty. Although 35% of the full-time faculty have been hired within the last four years, there is a serious problem with faculty coverage in undergraduate classes because of a) the contractual release time, b) contrary institutional expectations for scholarship and research, and c) need for full-time faculty to cover advanced level courses.
- 42% of all undergraduate instructional FTE is delivered by full-time faculty -- which means more than half is delivered by part-time/adjunct faculty.
- The quality of teaching and student relationships developed by adjunct faculty members is reported by full-time faculty, students, and administrators to be highly variable; the scope of their contracts and levels of compensation do not encourage their strong engagement with student learning and retention.
 - ▶ There is no consistently applied process or procedure for evaluating and improving the teaching done by adjuncts.
- The general education curriculum, courses, and policy have been recently reviewed. The main thrust of a recent report from the responsible Committee is that general education has to focus on the principles of what makes a good general education program in a national context, and on determining and establishing general education learning outcomes -- looking toward the future, not the past. That report is now under review.
- John Jay does not have formally designated gateway courses that must be passed successfully before students move ahead academically (that is, there is no competency-based process of incrementally advancing students in the lower division); instead, the College has informally (and likely unintentionally) “controlled” academic quality by failing students in early required courses. Example: Government 101, which is not intended as a barrier course, has as much as 40-50% failure rate in some sections; introductory mathematics course is another example. There are many problems in these introductory courses -- adjunct faculty, policy problems trying to engage full-time faculty (doing so would have put adjuncts in classrooms as teachers for senior major courses), and the relatively poor levels of preparedness of many students.

- The College has not consistently or regularly provided “second best” options (alternative programs) for students who are unable to succeed in their originally chosen program of study. This is especially true in forensic sciences; students who do not do well in forensic sciences should be able to shift their academic program to an alternative program without losing the value and time invested in courses already taken and passed.
- Several faculty respondents claimed that some of their faculty colleagues tend to “pass-through” students (give passing grades despite poor performance) to get them out of school regardless of their capacities.

Academic Scheduling

Scheduling of classes for undergraduates and graduate students has historically been faculty-centered, rather than student-centered (schedules have been determined primarily on the basis of the convenience or preferences of the faculty member).¹⁶ In the 2008 CUNY Student Experience Survey, about 2/3 of John Jay students reported that courses were offered at times when they could take them *and* that they could register for every course they wanted to take -- which means that about 1/3 of students indicated otherwise. These percentages are similar, however, to those recorded for the overall CUNY and CUNY senior college cohorts.

- It has been difficult to correct this problem because faculty resist having staff tell them when to schedule classes -- an example, respondents in our interviews often cited of the need for faculty culture change.
- As a result, the Registrar has not been able to guarantee students that they will be able to graduate in a given time because she cannot be sure all the required courses will be offered, or that the student will be able to get in those classes, or that the class schedule will work for them.
- When students cannot take a needed course, they are allowed to “substitute” another course; the substitute courses may have little to do with the course for which they are substituted, or with the major, and students who take substitute courses -- which are

¹⁶ On March 5, during the presentation of the first draft of this report, the consultants learned that a committee has made strong recommendations that would address this problem; those recommendations had not yet at that point been implemented.

apparently far less commonly approved in other CUNY schools -- may graduate less well prepared.

- John Jay similarly has historically made few adjustments to accommodate the reality of schedules for graduate students. Most graduate students have classes in the evening, but the counselors aren't on campus at that time. There also is only one graduate student career advisor.

Institutional Vision, Direction, and Strategy

President Travis has described a three-pronged strategy for John Jay: 1) becoming a senior college and aggressively raising admissions standards ; 2) criminal justice focus—in the transition from comprehensive to senior college status and in the introduction of new liberal arts majors, retaining the criminal justice emphasis [majors in forensic psychology, criminal justice, forensic science] and brand; and 3) scholarly activity -- becoming an institution noted for scholarship as well as teaching and for broad intellectual and practical contributions to the field of criminal justice.

John Jay's academic and administrative leaders hold differing views about institutional direction and vision; especially, there is concern among some leaders about whether the College can realistically and simultaneously both 1) improve undergraduate education and retention and 2) strengthen scholarship, publishing, and national impact.

- Many participants in our interviews -- both faculty and staff -- described two major internal institutional tensions at John Jay:
 1. Admissions standards: raising admissions standards (and therefore requiring higher levels of preparedness for college) versus continuing to admit students representative of John Jay's historical, traditional population.
 - ▶ In our meetings, many members of the faculty and staff emphasized that John Jay attracts students who believe in the idea of education for justice. Many are public-service oriented, and they persist, regardless of conditions and levels of support. Many of the students come from what they, and faculty members, describe as rough backgrounds; John Jay is a public institution and, in the view of many faculty and academic leaders, educating students who are not privileged is what the College stands for. One expression of that perspective

serves to illustrate many similar comments: “We have to work with our students as they are...and stay loyal to our mission.” Professors and leaders who agree are concerned that raising admissions standards and focusing on academic quality will disenfranchise the population of students who have traditionally chosen John Jay.

- ▶ To the extent that higher standards and a stronger focus on quality alter the profile of admitted students, however, other faculty at John Jay emphasize that the CUNY community colleges remain available to provide educational access.
2. Priority and emphasis in academic programs: supporting undergraduate education and student success versus expanding graduate/research programs, emphasizing scholarship, and hiring research faculty.
- ▶ In the view of many faculty and some academic leaders, trying to become a research university that makes significant practical and scholarly contributions to the public good while also improving undergraduate education and retention is not possible; these are seen as fundamentally opposed, conflicting goals. Many do not see how the College, with limited resources, can support both priorities; they fear, especially, that undergraduate education will not receive sufficient resources.
 - ▶ Many faculty members believe that they are “overused” in terms of teaching time. Young faculty have 24 credits of release time and must inevitably focus on promotion and tenure. At the same time, both John Jay and CUNY seek to increase retention and student success. Faculty believe that these goals do not mutually reinforce each other.
 - ▶ Many academic leaders believe John Jay cannot maintain a focus on research, Centers, and Institutes without hollowing out the needed strong core of undergraduate learning.
 - ▶ Now the institution and CUNY are asking for increased research and scholarly production and hiring new faculty on criteria different than in years past -- faculty who expect to be rewarded for their scholarship, not their teaching, at a time when John Jay also needs to increase contact between students and full-time faculty exponentially. Given limited resources, especially in this austere economy, John Jay may not have the elasticity to take on those two priorities. Many

faculty and academic leaders think the administration is going to have to “back off from recruiting stars,” and focus on teaching. Many current elite faculty have their own institutes or branches within programs. They do not see working with undergraduate students -- especially lower division students -- as part of their duties/responsibilities.

- ▶ Teaching loads for full-time faculty are too high to support premier-level scholarship and research, in most instances -- especially for senior faculty, for whom the contractual 24 credit hour release no longer applies. That contractual provision takes more recently hired faculty out of the classroom, and, by doing so, creates a barrier to retention. This is a serious “structural” problem in that teaching loads are matters of University-wide faculty contracts that are not under John Jay’s control. Given that teaching loads may not be able to be changed, the alternative solution would be to expand the number of faculty lines (enough to compensate for the release time given to each new faculty member).
 - ▶ Scholarship is a necessary condition for faculty to maintain currency in their field, but great teaching, of the variety required by John Jay students, takes much time and demands a skill level that most faculty did not acquire in their doctoral preparation programs.
 - ▶ Some academic leaders have suggested that John Jay develop a dual faculty structure so that the College can address both needs (teaching and scholarship/research). At the same time, they are aware of the potential pitfalls of such a system and hesitate to advocate the creation of different tiers, or categories, of faculty.
- There seems to be no consistent messaging/communications plan for the President's vision; various participants in our interviews knew of, or emphasized, different elements, or segments, of that vision, but none expressed it in its entirety.¹⁷
 - Some observers see the conflict over vision and direction as a question of inadequate strategic planning and priority-setting. They note that, in their opinion, John Jay is doing too much and reaching out too far. “We want a top-scholar program while we

¹⁷ A specific example is the use of the term “institution of consequence,” which is widely attributed to the President and said to have been used in his major addresses; the President recalls only one instance of his using the term, and it is not found in any of the texts of his speeches available on the Web site.

simultaneously are reaching out to the community,” one faculty member said, adding, “One of our biggest problems is we aren’t prioritizing anything.”

- ▶ The Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) has annual strategic plans in place, and each Dean reporting to the Provost has annual goals that map to the strategic plan and for which they are accountable; OAA has developed a five-year vision but has deferred finalization of that document pending the renewal of the College’s larger strategic planning process.¹⁸
- ▶ The College’s current strategic plan expires at the end of 2010; John Jay will begin a new planning process to produce a five-year strategy for the period 2010-2015.
- ▶ Despite the existence of both institutional and academic strategic plans, as noted above, many respondents told the consultants that there is no current and functional strategic plan in Academic Affairs. They objected that the absence of such a plan left Academic Affairs with no way to prioritize or judge the best allocation of resources.
- ▶ Similarly, many participants in our meetings told the consultants that there was no functional institutional strategic plan, and that, in the absence of a guiding strategy, excessive authority over the allocation of resources rested with the Senior Vice President for Finance and Administration.
- ▶ More significantly, many respondents in our meetings and interviews said that the College has not historically been willing to shift resources, terminate programs and staff, etc. to make change -- but all of that may be necessary to improve undergraduate retention. Change involving *additions* has been far easier at John Jay than change requiring *subtractions* or *terminations*. But several respondents gave specific examples of programs that, in their view, do not “work” and should be terminated.
- ▶ One consequence of the unresolved uncertainty about institutional direction is tension in the allocation of the College investments -- e.g., in the library, where deepening of the College’s world-class collection in criminal justice research is limited by the need to have basic resources for liberal arts programs.

¹⁸ Summarized in email correspondence from the Provost, dated March 23, 2009.

Faculty Culture, Roles, and Responsibilities

Faculty must bear the greatest responsibility for supporting student learning, retention, and success. To make this possible, both changes in institutional policy and significant culture change within the faculty will be required.

The responses of students in 2008 to NSSE questions about student/faculty relationships and interactions suggest that greater engagement between faculty and students is needed. For example: 52% of first-year students and 45% of seniors report only “sometimes” or “never” discussing grades or assignments with an instructor; moreover, students’ responses showed minimal interactions with faculty outside of class, and 23% of first year students and 40% of seniors reported that they do not plan to work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements.

- At John Jay, the key to organizational change to support retention must come through engagement and commitment by the faculty. Younger faculty “get” this idea; legacy faculty, however, are less often engaged.
- There will probably not be sufficient resources to develop strong and robust student personal and academic support structures in the short term, though the President believes some additional funding may be provided by CUNY.
- The overarching issue is how faculty perceive their relationship with students and their obligations to institutional purposes.
 - ▶ To create a culture of learning, assessment, and retention, John Jay will have to figure out how to initiate and then generalize culture change through the faculty.
- *Concern:* this is largely a new discussion among the faculty, including the faculty leaders. Faculty have not been engaged with questions of undergraduate retention before. Institutional research data are collected and posted but may not be viewed. The discussion at John Jay historically has emphasized access, not success; the assumption, whether or not justified, has always been “there will always be more students,” and, during the time of associate degree programs, there usually were. Many faculty report that they do not see a role for themselves in mentoring individual students and supporting retention.

- ▶ An attitude commonly perceived about faculty at John Jay is that problems in retention are students' fault -- "we should get better prepared students."
- Last year the Provost and President held a retreat (about 50 members of the faculty and staff attended) on student success; it is reported that there was some good discussion, but then that conversation turned from a focus on students to an emphasis on the interests of faculty. Little evidence of change was produced.
- Administrators and some academic leaders say that no one is pushing the tenured professors to be better teachers, or to improve their pedagogy.
- Summarizing a very common view, one respondent said, "We need teachers. It is that simple and that hard."
- There is concern that increasing teaching loads will make newly recruited junior faculty leave -- especially because they were recruited with expectations of scholarship and research, and anticipate having to make tenure based on those criteria, not on grounds of teaching and service. Most faculty were not present at President's address when he emphasized getting more full-time faculty into the classroom.
- Fifty percent of FTE instruction at the graduate level is provided by full-time faculty, but this is declining, down from 60%. Only 42% of undergraduate FTE instruction is provided by full-time faculty. John Jay has hired many new faculty members in recent years,¹⁹ but the new hires are more likely to be research scholars, and are not in the classroom. And newly hired faculty in general are entitled to contractual course release time, as noted earlier. A major indicator for CUNY is the number of full-time faculty in the classroom, but hiring research faculty may make those numbers go down. *None of this takes away from the important success John Jay has had in recruiting new and well-qualified faculty members under President Travis' administration. The question is only how those faculty members can be and will be utilized to support student success and retention.*

¹⁹ Source: President's State of the College Address, November 5, 2008: "419 full time faculty, 25% more than four years ago. Fully 35% of our faculty have been hired in the last four years. With 32 searches underway as we speak, we could well reach a new milestone of 422 full time faculty in fall 2009."

- Both students and staff describe the need for greater ethnic and cultural diversity among faculty, despite recent gains in hiring faculty of color; John Jay's very diverse student body may not "see" themselves in the faculty and may not, therefore, feel comfortable seeking advising from them.
- More recently recruited faculty describe a strong connection with students: "I do care whether you pass my course or not." They described making significant investments in relationships with students and making themselves available in person or by email for students' questions.
- The Center for the Advancement of Teaching is a first step in bringing faculty together. But there has been an Interim Director, and there are no other staff. Many respondents likened this, on the faculty side, to the single-person-office programs in Student Development.
- Faculty reward systems and structures are not aligned with support for undergraduate education. It is not clear to faculty that they will be supported or rewarded for investing in quality of undergraduate education or support for students.

Assessment and Evaluation

Primary in the mission and goals of every post-secondary institution is education itself – the process that students experience as learning. Knowing how to assess the kind of learning that occurs in higher education is central to the ability of educators – both inside and outside the classroom, in the traditional academic faculty or in student development and support – to do their best work. The assessment of learning explores how effectively engagement with the institution increased students' ability, skill, or competency in various domains as a result of various learning experiences – a curriculum, academic major, certificate program, course, specific classroom activity, student development experience (such as leadership development), or experiential learning activity. These assessment processes are central to ensuring that the College advances student learning and success. As noted in comments at the beginning of this report, *retention* should embrace *achievement of desired learning outcomes* -- not just persistence in enrollment to graduation.

John Jay is required to update the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) on “continued implementation of comprehensive, integrated, and sustained processes to assess institutional effectiveness and the achievement of student learning outcomes (Standards 7 and 14)” by December 1, 2009. The institution is beginning preparations for a self study review by Middle States in 2013, which will also need to demonstrate progress in assessment and institutional effectiveness processes.

Assessment of student learning is an essential contributor to improvements in retention and student success. Such assessment has not yet been widely developed and implemented at John Jay.

Recommendations

1. First and foremost, John Jay -- as an institution, an administration, a leadership team, a faculty, and a community -- should recognize that retention is a complex matter deeply embedded in institutional culture; that the factors influencing retention are multiple and diverse; and that approaches to improving retention are inevitably multifactorial and interlinked. *It is not possible to improve retention simply by “tweaking” policies or practices, making small or incremental changes, or purchasing a vendor’s program or product. Improving retention at John Jay will require fundamental change in the culture of the institution, and especially among the faculty. This change in turn will require a diligent and rigorous strategic planning process based on a strong consensus among College leaders that clearly defines the vision and priorities of the institution.*
2. The College does not have the resources to support *both* significant new and additional investments in signature graduate programs and centers *and* major enhancements in undergraduate student learning, retention, and success. To improve retention, the College must assign short-term priority to supporting, assessing, and strengthening undergraduate learning. *This does not require that the College reverse direction, or abdicate its commitment to improving academic quality, scholarship, and research. But, in the coming two to three years, the primary priority for assignment and reallocation of resources should be for student learning and success.*

The rest of our recommendations (3-15) depend upon the College's affirmation of the need for culture change and its assignment of priority to undergraduate learning and retention. Both greater engagement by faculty with student learning and success and greater allocation of resources to student and academic support services are needed.

3. The College should, as soon as possible, begin its process of institutional strategic planning for 2010-2015. That process can (and should) in and of itself build community and foster institutional change; a healthy, broad-based strategic planning effort should produce key changes in College policy and priorities that will support changes in institutional and faculty culture.
4. In parallel, the Office of Academic Affairs should complete a new academic strategic plan with specific goals, objectives, and timelines to guide further decision-making. As is true at the institutional level, this is an opportunity for community-based discussions leading to institutional change for learning.
5. Both the institutional and academic strategic plans, and the derivative plans for implementation of their goals, should emphasize *redistribution of resources*. Even if John Jay is fortunate enough to receive a significant distribution of new resources from CUNY or external funding from foundations/corporations, reallocations will be needed to support student success. While the addition of \$1M or more, for example, to the institutional budget for support of student success would certainly have an impact, it would not alone relieve the conditions that impair retention at John Jay. The redistribution, or reallocation, of resources should locate an increasing proportion of institutional funds, positions, and infrastructure in academic and support programs that support student learning and retention. *This required redistribution is itself a goal for institutional culture change at John Jay that should be supported in the new strategic plan.*

6. John Jay should inform decision making about the redistribution of resources with clear, sound assessment data that demonstrate the outcomes, value, and worth of various programs and activities. The College can use a decision matrix approach -- ranking programs (both academic and student development or support services) on the intersecting axes of *mission-centeredness* and *greatest good for the greatest number*; in both cases, rankings should be made on the basis of outcomes data, not impressions or history. Developing and using this decision matrix will require -- and reflect -- the creation of a culture of evidence in the institution.
7. The consultants enthusiastically support the Provost's decision to recruit an Associate Provost for Assessment and Planning. This position is essential to support the processes of institutional and academic strategic planning, outcomes-based decision-making, and creation of a culture of assessment and evidence. John Jay should recruit and hire an experienced educator and administrator and *rest responsibility and accountability for assessment and strategy in that position*. Note, however, that identifying and hiring the right person for this complex and demanding role will be challenging -- and that having an excellent individual in the position is not a "silver bullet"; filling the position will not absolve other faculty and administrators of shared responsibility for assessment and planning.
8. The College should develop and implement a rigorous system for assessment of student learning applied to all classroom and out-of-classroom learning experiences. Success in this endeavor will require increasing the capacity of faculty members, primarily, to conduct clear, transparent, and meaningful assessments of student learning. These assessments, when linked to strong institutional commitments to renewal and change in academic programs, will enable John Jay to ensure that it is providing educational offerings, pedagogy, and content that address its desired core learning outcomes for students.
9. Given the College's significant resource limitations in student academic and personal support services, John Jay should a) continue to increase resources in those areas as much as possible in each budget cycle, and b) change the service and practice models of the services to emphasize early recognition of and intervention with students who have academic or personal/social/family/financial problems that are interfering with their achievement and progress. With only three cross-College academic advisors, for

example, John Jay should provide priority access to those advisors for students who are self- or faculty-identified as having academic distress.

10. The College should create and implement reliable, sturdy systems of academic monitoring and support designed to facilitate the early recognition of students with emerging academic limitations or problems. These systems will require greater faculty engagement with students and the willingness of faculty members to intervene when students exhibit evidence of personal problems or constraints in academic performance. John Jay will need to institute College-wide policies supporting a) ongoing formative evaluation of student learning in classes, b) criteria for notification by faculty members to advisors or counselors that students are “in trouble,” and c) systems that make it easy for faculty members to make easy referrals of troubled students to advisors or sources of personal counseling and assistance.
11. While the consultants warmly endorse the College's attempts to increase academic standards for admission, we caution John Jay that the short-term consequences of significant changes in academic standards can run counter to the goal of maintaining enrollment. In the longer term, higher standards may result in a College that is somewhat smaller but has much higher retention rates and stable or higher enrollment revenues. *At minimum we support raising standards sufficiently to avoid admission of students whose academic portfolios are so weak that they will almost certainly fail in college.*
 - John Jay should work diligently to convey the facts, and the significance, of higher academic standards to prospective students, parents, high school guidance staff, and high school teachers.
12. The complexity and difficulty of students' lives are major challenges to retention at John Jay. We recommend that the College take several steps to provide assistance to students who are facing those challenges:
 - We endorse recent work done by the College to make class schedules more convenient for students. The *student-centeredness* underscored by this action will be a core feature of movement toward an institutional culture that emphasizes student learning and success.

- Similarly, the College should ensure that student personal and academic support services observe office hours that more closely match the days and times that both undergraduate and graduate students are on campus.
- There should be no decrease in funding or human resources for personal support services such as counseling and health; over time, the College should redistribute resource to augment the scope and scale of these programs.
- The College should continue to support and implement innovative programs that allow students to integrate life and learning more completely -- such as the recent "Subway Series."
- John Jay should do everything possible to facilitate students' access to financial aid for which they are eligible.

13. Academic support services also need additional resources. We recommend that the College:

- Implement policies and practices designed to promote the early recognition and referral of students with emerging academic difficulty, as suggested above.
- Provide faculty and professional development training to prepare teaching faculty, administrators, and student life professionals to recognize and refer students with academic or personal problems that limit achievement.
- Strengthen the resources (including funding, space, and human resources) and programs of the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.
- Though new monies and/or redistribution of resources, increase staffing in the cross-College advising service (Advising Center) to at least 15 positions over the coming 5 years.
- Develop and implement learning communities of students focused on academic disciplines or topics of common interest.

- Engage students in peer mentoring and peer tutoring programs in all academic departments and in general education.
- Establish a credit-bearing and required first semester/first year transition to college course designed to enhance students' academic, study, and cognitive skills and strengthen their engagement with the College and its programs.
- Develop a summer orientation experience through which to facilitate students' adjustment to college, prepare them for college-level academic expectations, and link them to academic and personal support services.
- Continue to administer and disseminate results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).
- Create better internal transfer options for students who encounter academic difficulty in their first choice academic programs. "Students often are discouraged and drop out when they find that they are not performing well in their "first choice" program. Others encounter what they perceive as a "no forgiveness" policy -- if they leave on academic probation, move to an alternative option and show appropriate improvement, they are then admitted "on probation." While some of these issues may be rectified by better academic advising, changes in academic policy will also be required.

14. Faculty will bear the greatest responsibility for supporting student learning, retention, and success. To make this possible, both changes in institutional policy and practices and significant culture change within the faculty will be required. John Jay must strengthen the engagement of faculty with student learning, retention, and success. The overarching issue is how faculty perceive their relationship with students and how they understand and discharge their obligations to the achievement of high-priority institutional purposes.

- Strengthen, enlarge, and expand resources for the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and engage larger numbers of faculty with its programs.

- Provide faculty development programs on student learning and development, current research on learning, and research and scholarship on teaching and learning.
- Infuse a culture of assessment in all academic programs; begin providing students with extensive, detailed feedback about their performance not only at the end of classes (summative evaluation) but throughout the class cycle (formative evaluation). Help students learn to self-assess and to understand the assessments provided by faculty. Provide faculty development activities regarding assessment of student learning.
- Use the conclusions of the recently completed review of general education to reinforce the reorientation of faculty priorities toward teaching, assessment, and student success.
- Revise faculty promotion and tenure criteria to emphasize engagement with students, effective teaching, the accomplishment of student learning outcomes, and student success. It must be clear to faculty that they will be supported or rewarded for investing in the quality of undergraduate education or providing support for students.

15. Adjust policies, programs, and practices to support the creation of a greater sense of community at John Jay.

- Review and revise the policies and programs of the Office of Student Activities as needed to improve students' engagement with programs and the campus.