

COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY AND AFFORDABILITY

Meeting: November 7, 2024

Start Time: 4:00 pm

via Zoom

MINUTES

A meeting of the Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability (CHEQA or Commission) was held Thursday, November 7, 2024, remotely via teleconference (Zoom).

I. CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME

Commission Co-Chair Chris Gabrieli called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m.

Co-Chair Gabrieli welcomed all and noted the CHEQA group operates pursuant to Massachusetts' Open Meeting Law, which allows the group to meet virtually via zoom and record the proceeding. The Chair asked if there was any objection to recording the meeting. No objection was registered. Recording proceeded.

The Co-Chair took roll call attendance.

The following Commission Members were present:

- Co-Chair Chris Gabrieli, BHE Chair
- Co-Chair Veronica Conforme, BHE Member
- Commissioner Noe Ortega
- Secretary Patrick Tutwiler's designee- Assistant Secretary Robert LePage
- Senator Jo Comerford
- Representative Mike Pease
- President Martin Meehan's designee, Lee Ann Pasquini-University of Massachusetts
- President Nancy Niemi, Framingham State University
- President David Podell, MassBay Community College
- Viviana Abreu-Hernandez
- JD Chesloff
- Nate Mackinnon
- Edward Lambert
- Max Page
- Mary Jo Marion

- Niki Nguyen
- Claudine Barnes
- Femi Stoltz

CHEQA Members Representative Dave Rogers, Douglas Howgate, and Joseph Bonilla joined the meeting after the official roll call was recorded.

Co-Chair Gabrieli reminded Commission Members that Section 215 of the Fiscal Year 2025 budget directs the Board of Higher Education to convene a Commission on Higher Education Quality and Affordability. The membership and charge of the Commission is set forth in the budget language, which further states that the Commission is to be co-chaired by two members of the Board of Higher Education (the Board). On behalf of the Board as its Chair and in keeping with the legislative directive, he noted that he convened this Commission and asked Board Member Veronica Conforme to co-Chair the group, which she agreed to do. Co-Chair Gabrieli requested all CHEQA Members submit to Department of Higher Education (DHE) staff, if they have not already done so, a signed, official Open Meeting Law certification form within the week.

Co-Chair Gabrieli directed all CHEQA Members to review the Section 215 express mandate as depicted in a public PowerPoint document shared with the group and available on DHE's website. He noted that the Co-Chairs have interpreted the 215 mandate to focus on viable options for the Commonwealth to consider around three main areas: (i) student success, (ii) financial aid, and (iii) faculty and staff recruitment and retention.

In terms of schedule, Co-Chair Gabrieli noted the first two meetings of the CHEQA group would focus on student success and financial aid and take place prior to the December holidays. A third meeting on faculty and staff recruitment and retention is envisioned to take place in the new year. Co-Chair Gabrieli stated the deliberative part of the CHEQA process would begin in January when the group would try to come together on consensus recommendations to present to the Commonwealth as part of the group's final report due to the state legislature by the end of March 31, 2025.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

CHEQA Members individually introduced themselves noting their affiliations.

- Co-Chair Conforme introduced herself as the CEO of Greenhouse, which is an executive leadership development program.
- Member Femi Stoltz introduced herself as the Massachusetts Policy Director of uAspire, which advises students on financial aid, trains guidance counselors, and advocates for an accessible, affordable, equitable, quality higher education system. She highlighted her goal for the CHEQA group is that it furthers higher education as a means of upward economic mobility for disadvantaged students.

- Member Claudine Barnes introduced herself as a faculty member at Cape Cod Community College and as President of the Massachusetts community college faculty and staff labor union.
- Member Joseph Bonilla introduced himself as the President of the student government association at Westfield State University.
- Member Niki Nyguen introduced herself as a student at UMass Boston, member of the Board of Higher Education, and Chair of the Massachusetts Student Advisory Council.
- Member Mary Jo Mario introduced herself as the AVP at Worcester State University where she oversees the Latino Education Institute.
- Member Max Page introduced himself as a professor at UMass Amherst and President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association. He stated that the Commonwealth needs to ensure a debt-free education for all students.
- Member Ed Lambert introduced himself as the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education. He emphasized MBAE's focus on quality educational opportunities.
- Member Nate MacKinnon introduced himself as the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Community Colleges.
- Member JD Chesloff introduced himself as President of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable. He stated that the Business Roundtable is very interested in reducing cost as a barrier to higher education participation.
- Member Viviana Abreu-Hernandez introduced herself as the President of the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. Prior to joining Massachusetts Budget, she worked at Quinsigamond Community College. Prior to that she was Commissioner of Higher Education for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.
- Member David Podell introduced himself as the President of Massachusetts Bay Community College and stated that along with Member MacKinnon he represents the Massachusetts community college segment.
- Member Nancy Niemi introduced herself as the President of Framingham State University.
- Designee Lee Ann Pasquini introduced herself as the Associate Vice President for Administration and Finance in the Office of the President of the University of Massachusetts. She noted challenges Massachusetts colleges face in enrollment, the demographic cliff, and affordability.
- Member Kelly Pease introduced himself as the Ranking Minority Member of the Joint Higher Education Committee. He noted his particular interest in how free community college in Massachusetts might be impacting four-year colleges.
- Member Jo Comerford introduced herself as Chair of the Joint Committee on Higher Education.
- Member Noe Ortega, Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education, expressed his gratitude to Members for agreeing to participate in the CHEQA group.

- Designee Robert LePage introduced himself as Secretary Tutwiler's representative and as an Assistant Secretary in the Executive Office of Education.

III. DISCUSSION TOPIC: STUDENT SUCCESS

Co-Chair Gabrieli introduced two presenters. First, he noted the group would hear from Donna Linderman, Senior Vice Chancellor for Student Success with the State University of New York and formerly the lead implementer of the CUNY ASAP program, which is recognized as a national model student success initiative. Second, co-Chair Gabrieli noted the group would hear from Lane Glenn, the President of Northern Essex Community College, who helped lead the implementation of the Commonwealth's SUCCESS program within the community college segment. Each made use of a PowerPoint presentation available on the Massachusetts Department of Education's website on the CHEQA homepage.

Dr. Linderman presented on New York State's Advancing Success in Associate Pathways (ASAP) and Advancing Completion through Engagement (ACE) programs. She discussed that the model provides a comprehensive set of supports for students in furtherance of a three-part theory of action – first, help students gain academic momentum in terms of course load intensity, second help students feel a sense of integration and belonging at their relevant institution of higher education, and third provide students with timely, relevant academic tutoring and advising services – that together drives student completion.

Dr. Linderman stated that at the beginning of ASAP, only 13% of CUNY students graduated within three years of initial enrollment. Today, ASAP students graduate at a rate of 53.4%. Over 20,000 students are served. The program has helped increase completion rates overall and has narrowed the degree completion racial equity gap between white students and their Black and Latino peers. Dr. Linderman noted that a rigorous, random control trial study of the ACE program at John Jay University demonstrated a significant impact on five-year graduation rates (68.8% vs 57.1% for the control group) and on the success rates of two-year transfer students (68.4% v. 39% graduation rate for a comparable control group). Dr. Linderman also noted that ASAP has been replicated in Ohio. A randomized control study led by MRDC found the model nearly doubled three-year graduation rates. The program now serves over 100,000 students nationwide and has been replicated in seven states.

Dr. Linderman continued, noting that New York State has invested \$75 million in ASAP/ACE expansion; 80% of those funds go directly to campuses to adopt evidence-based approaches consistent with ASAP/ACE precepts. Campuses, for example, retain discretion over whether to invest in degree or non-degree programs linked to economic mobility and high demand jobs *or* to make an investment in increasing retention and degree completion rates overall. Additional options include using funds to support transfer pathways, increasing operational efficiency and eliminating back office redundancies, and providing essential supports to targeted populations. In short, participating colleges receive a planning template and menu of program options. The majority of participating colleges have focused on investments directed at economic mobility and support services for targeted populations.

Dr. Linderman stated that at SUNY, a matrix of support items are offered to participating

students including a cost of attendance award for non-tuition and fee costs, a transportation stipend, a dedicated advisor, and consolidated course schedules (e.g. block scheduling) for first-year students, among other support services. Similar to CUNY ASAP, SUNY ACE students are demonstrating a 20% higher completion rate compared to non-participating peers.

President Glenn followed with a presentation on the Massachusetts community college SUCCESS program noting that it was developed relying heavily on the ASAP model. The SUCCESS program's goals are to improve persistence, retention, and completion by using "evidence-based, high impact practices." It operates from the premise that community colleges are under resourced on a per-student basis, that those institutions know how to improve student success, and that with dedicated resources they will do so.

President Glenn provided data on relative funding of community colleges, past gains associated with supplemental success programs, and improvements to date generated with Massachusetts SUCCESS funding. He highlighted an average 10 percentage point increase in retention among participants as compared to non-participants. Historically underrepresented minority groups demonstrate the greatest gains.

President Glenn stated that operationally, SUCCESS is governed by a written charter. The charter establishes a leadership team and underlying coordinating committee to ensure alignment among institution programs, analyze data, share best practices, and provide professional development. President Glenn emphasized that the two groups encourage colleges not to experiment with new practices, but rather to scale up proven practices they already saw were generating success on their campus or to replicated evidence-based practices proven elsewhere. He noted key features of high impact practices include active and collaborative learning, high levels of student-faculty interaction, and supplemental support for learners (e.g. peer mentoring, intensive first-year student advising, regular student check-ins with advisors). Again, President Glenn highlighted quantitative success in persistence levels for participants.

President Glenn described the Massachusetts SUCCESS program distribution formula among institutions. He noted that colleges are guided to spend at least 80% of funds on staffing. Overwhelmingly, staff hired have direct contact with students as opposed to administrative overhead. Over 8,500 students were served last year. Nearly two-thirds are Black or Hispanic. In contrast to ASAP, SUCCESS serves part-time as well as full-time students. Spending per student is less than that associated with ASAP, because SUCCESS does not provide direct grant aid to students. President Glenn, however, noted that Massachusetts community colleges would welcome the opportunity to provide additional grant aid to needy students.

Chair Gabrieli opened the floor to questions. The following discussion among CHEQA Members and Ms. Linderman and President Glenn ensued:

- **Nate Mackinnon:**

- Asked about the ideal advisor/student ratio in the ASAP model. Dr. Linderman replied at CUNY/SUNY students are sorted based on need and a 150:1 student to mentor ratio has been effective for successful high touch advising, with additional individual mentoring available based on need. Program has been successful, but

Dr. Linderman noted the importance of mentors being adequately trained.

- **Ed Lambert**

- Inquired about the allocation thought process and the appetite for campuses to invest in high-demand fields and operational efficiency. Dr. Linderman replied that high demand fields were of high interest to campuses and programming has been designed to be responsive to campus interests by supporting big investments in fewer areas. A minimum of 50% of funds is to be directed toward retention, completion, and high demand workforce areas.

- **Viviana Abreu-Hernandez**

- Raised concerns about recruitment and retention, emphasizing the need for resources to support part-time students. Dr. Linderman replied that at CUNY, staff found that some 85% of students began as full-time students and the vast majority dropped down to part-time status over time because of insufficient support services like assistance with transportation and childcare. ASAP provides wraparound support services that allow students to transition from part-time to full-time. New York's experience is that many, many more students can go full-time with adequate support. In fact, they found that a vast number of students who initially were part-time switched to full-time status with barriers removed and additional support.

Dr. Linderman noted that ASAP has experimented with serving part-time students at two pilot sites and found there are positive gains, especially when focused on ensuring students continue taking at least one course per semester rather than stopping-out with an intention to return later.

- **Robert LePage**

- Asked about the value of program design, intentional academic pathways, and the value of a cohort model. Dr. Linderman discussed the value of cohorting and building student affinity. She noted that the cohort model is crucial for student connection with orientations and blocked courses enhancing engagement. Faculty involvement and collaborative learning are key, alongside structured programs and intentional scheduling to support students effectively.
- Secretary of Education Designee LePage followed up with a question about whether ASAP applies to recent high school graduates, young adults, or adults. Dr. Linderman replied that the program serves all, but while it is mixed the student group skews toward traditional aged students.

- **Mary Jo Marion**

- Discussed the importance of including transfer rates as a measure of success and inquired about the value of that measure in a free community college climate.

President Glenn agreed that transfer is important, and that Massachusetts needs to improve it. He made clear that transfer rates are one measure of success but noted that it should not be the only measure. Success programming can include transfer mentoring. President Podell replied that recent data shows that with free community college, there is a delay, but more students are transferring. Dr. Linderman concluded noting that ASAP long ago established completion of an associate degree as a goal. And she noted that according to national data doing so (completing an associate's degree program) among those who transfer is a big indicator of subsequent bachelor's degree completion.

- **Niki Nguyen:**

- Member Nguyen inquired about financial barriers, particularly housing, and how programs address these issues. Dr. Linderman noted that wrap-around support depends on location and needs of students. In New York, the high cost of housing was in part countered by assuring free transportation citywide so students could make use of the most affordable housing possible. In the Ohio replication, they provide a gas card for transportation costs. SUNY ASAP also provides an additional “cost of attendance” stipend that can be used to offset housing costs.

- **Max Page:**

- Affirmed his longstanding support for ASAP program and highlighted the importance of advising and financing in achieving high graduation rates. Member Page called ASAP's near 50% completion rate remarkable and noted that in Massachusetts the rate has long been in the teens and low twenties. He stated Massachusetts should set a goal of a 50% graduation rate for community college students, and it should assure funding for a student success program to achieve that goal. He highlighted that the Commonwealth has a dedicated fund – Fair Share – that can finance that proposal.
- Member Page asked about the impact of student debt of the ASAP/ACE programs and the need to support both full-time and part-time students. Dr. Linderman replied that community college students in New York generally don't have loans, but that ASAP can mitigate extra expenses that typically are covered by education loans. Both Dr. Linderman and President Glenn noted that full time attendance is a strong indicator of graduation, but President Glenn cautioned against funding only full-time students since many in SUCCESS institutions benefit from part-time support.

President Glenn noted that his institution and Bunker Hill Community College are involved in a financial aid experiment whereby students are receiving in effect a “doubling of the Pell Grant” and that those participants are enrolling in much higher course credit levels.

Chair Gabrieli sought to adjourn the meeting and announced that the next scheduled meeting would take place on November 26, 2024 and would be focused on financial aid.

The meeting adjourned at 5:41 pm.

List of Documents Used (available at www.mass.edu/strategic/cheqa.asp)

- PowerPoint Presentation, CUNY ASAP / SUNY ACE, November 7, 2024
- PowerPoint Presentation, Supporting Urgent Community College Equity through Student Services (SUCCESS), November 7, 2024
- Strategic Review of Public Higher Education Financing: Discussion of Policy Options, November 3, 2022
- BHE Motion 23-23: Strategic Review of Public Higher Education Financing: Endorsement of a Policy Framework and Charge to the Commissioner, December 13, 2022

###