

Social Programs That Work Review

Evidence Summary for Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) and Accelerate, Complete, Engage (ACE)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **PROGRAM:** ASAP is a comprehensive program, implemented at two-year community colleges, that provides academic, personal, and financial supports to low-income students with the goal of increasing graduation rates. ACE is an adapted version of ASAP that uses the same student support model, but is delivered at four-year (as opposed to two-year) colleges.
- **EVALUATION METHODS:** ASAP has been evaluated in two well-conducted randomized controlled trials (RCTs) – one with a sample of 896 students at City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges, the other with a sample of 1,501 students at three Ohio community colleges. ACE has been evaluated in a well-conducted RCT with a sample of 570 students at John Jay College (a four-year institution).
- **KEY FINDINGS:** All three RCTs found large, statistically-significant increases in college graduation rates in long-term follow-ups: 11 to 15 percentage point gains in two-year or four-year degree completion for ASAP, and a 12 percentage point gain in four-year degree completion for ACE. The Ohio study of ASAP also found a statistically-significant increase of 11% (\$1,948) in annual earnings six years after study entry.

[Disclosure: Arnold Ventures helped fund the Ohio and John Jay studies. We are also funding the delivery and/or evaluation of ASAP at other U.S. locations.]

I. Evidence rating: TOP TIER

The standard for Top Tier is:

Programs shown in well-conducted RCTs, carried out in typical community settings, to produce sizable, sustained effects on important outcomes. Top Tier evidence includes a requirement for replication – specifically, the demonstration of such effects in two or more RCTs conducted in different implementation sites, or, alternatively, in one large multi-site RCT. Such evidence provides confidence that the program would produce important effects if implemented faithfully in settings and populations similar to those in the original studies.

II. Description of the Program:

Originally developed by the City University of New York (CUNY), ASAP provides academic, personal, and financial supports to low-income community college students to help them earn an associate's degree within three years. Participation is offered to new students and continuing students who have earned 12 or fewer credits, and is voluntary. Core program components include: (i) required full-time enrollment; (ii) a range of resources that ASAP students are required to use including an ASAP-dedicated advisor who helps students with academic, social, and interpersonal issues, a career counselor, and (if needed) tutoring services; (iii) special class scheduling options to ensure that ASAP students secure the classes that they need and that they take remedial classes (if needed) early in college; and (iv) financial supports such as tuition waivers equal to the difference between students' tuition/fees and their existing financial aid, free textbooks, and gift cards for transit or food.

ACE is an adapted version of ASAP that uses the same comprehensive student support model, but is delivered at four-year (as opposed to two-year) colleges.

The estimated per-student cost of ASAP (beyond that spent on non-ASAP students) was approximately \$13,838 in the CUNY study and \$8,030 in the Ohio study.¹ ACE's cost has not yet been reported, but is likely to be modestly higher than that of ASAP given ACE's longer duration as a four-year college program.

[Click here for the CUNY ASAP/ACE Program website.](#)

III. Evidence of Effectiveness:

This summary of the evidence is based on a systematic search of the literature, and correspondence with leading researchers, to identify all well-conducted RCTs of ASAP and ACE. Our search identified three such studies that have measured effects on college graduation rates (other, more recent RCTs are underway and will report effects on graduation rates in the future). The following summarizes ASAP's and ACE's effects on the main outcomes measured in each study, including any such outcomes for which no or adverse effects were found.

STUDY 1 – City University of New York (CUNY)

This was an RCT of ASAP with a sample of 896 low-income students with remedial education needs, recruited for the study from CUNY's three largest community colleges (Borough of Manhattan Community College, Kingsborough Community College, and LaGuardia Community College). The

¹ These per-student cost estimates reflect both the direct cost of ASAP program services and the different costs of regular courses and services for the ASAP group versus the control group (e.g., resulting from the fact that ASAP students take more classes than control students). The CUNY cost estimate is in 2019 dollars; the Ohio cost estimate is in 2018 dollars.

students were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that was eligible to receive ASAP services (n=451) or a control group that received the community colleges' usual services (n=445).²

Sample members averaged 21.5 years of age, 44% were Hispanic, 34% were black, and all were either eligible for a Pell Grant or had family income below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Effects of ASAP eight years after random assignment (versus the control group):

- The study found a statistically significant 11 percentage point increase in college graduation rates (55% of the treatment group completed either a two-year or four-year degree, versus 44% of the control group, $p < 0.01$).
- This effect was driven by an increase in two-year associate's degree completion. The study found no effect on four-year bachelor's degree completion (25% of both treatment and control group students earned a bachelor's degree).

Discussion of Study Quality:

- At the start of the study, members of the treatment and control groups were highly similar in their observable characteristics (e.g., demographics, educational background).
- The study appropriately measured outcomes for all members of the treatment group, regardless of whether or how long they participated in the program (consistent with an "intention-to-treat" analysis).
- Outcomes were measured for all sample members, without attrition, using administrative data from CUNY and from the National Student Clearinghouse (which includes enrollment data on 98% of U.S. college students).
- We believe that a longer-term follow-up of this study would be desirable to determine whether the program's impact on graduation rates leads to gains in participants' workforce earnings post-graduation.

STUDY 2 – Ohio

This was an RCT of ASAP with a sample of 1,501 low-income students recruited for the study from three Ohio community colleges (Loraine Community College, Cuyahoga Community College, and Cincinnati State Technical and Community College). The students were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that was eligible to receive the program (n=806) or a control group that received the community colleges' usual services (n=695).

Sample members averaged 23 years of age, 64% were female, 10% were Hispanic, 35% were black, 34% were the first member of their family to attend college, and all had family income low enough to

² Students majoring in Allied Health Sciences, Nursing, Forensic Science and Engineering Sciences were excluded from ASAP eligibility because these majors have course requirements which make it difficult to graduate within three years.

qualify for a Pell grant. Unlike the CUNY RCT, the Ohio RCT sample included students both with and without remedial education needs.

Effects of ASAP in Ohio six years after random assignment (versus the control group):

- The study found a statistically significant 15 percentage point increase in college graduation rates (44% of the treatment group completed either a two-year or four-year degree, versus 29% of the control group, $p < .01$).
- This effect was driven by statistically significant increases in both two-year associate’s degree completion (42% of the treatment group versus 26% of the control group) and four-year bachelor’s degree completion (14% versus 9%). Both of these effects were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).
- The study found a statistically significant 11% (\$1,948) increase in average annual earnings in the sixth year after random assignment (\$19,573 in the treatment group versus \$17,626 in the control group).³

Discussion of Study Quality:

- At the start of the study, members of the treatment and control groups were highly similar in their observable characteristics (e.g., demographics, educational background).
- The study appropriately measured outcomes for all members of the ASAP group, regardless of whether or how long they participated in the program (consistent with an “intention-to-treat” analysis).
- College graduation outcomes were measured for all sample members, without attrition, using National Student Clearinghouse data (which includes enrollment data on 98% of U.S. college students).
- Earnings outcomes were measured for all but 19 sample members (those who did not provide a Social Security number), using Ohio Unemployment Insurance wage records. These records capture wages earned in Ohio but may miss earnings of sample members who moved to other states.
- The program was implemented in close adherence to the ASAP program model, with technical assistance provided by CUNY.
- Longer-term study follow-up is ongoing, to measure program effects through 10 years after random assignment.

³ The p-value for the earnings effect was 0.047, which meets the conventional 0.05 benchmark for statistical significance. After being adjusted for multiple comparisons (across the two primary outcomes) using the Westfall-Young method, the p-value was 0.059 – just shy of the benchmark.

STUDY 3 – John Jay College

This was an RCT of ACE with a sample of 570 students at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a four-year institution within the CUNY system. The students were randomly assigned to either a treatment group that was eligible to receive the program (n=285) or a control group that received John Jay College’s usual services (n=285).

Sample members averaged 18 years of age, 70% were female, 48% were Hispanic, 10% were black, and 72% had family income low enough to qualify for a Pell grant. For 61% of the sample, neither parent had gone to college. All sample members were proficient in math, reading, and writing, based on their scores on the SAT or other standardized tests.

Effects of ACE five years after random assignment (versus the control group):

- The study found a 12 percentage point increase in bachelor’s degree completion (at John Jay or any other U.S. college). Specifically, 69% of the treatment group earned a bachelor’s degree versus 57% of the control group. This effect was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Discussion of Study Quality:

- At the start of the study, members of the treatment and control groups were highly similar in their observable characteristics (e.g., demographics, educational background).
- The study appropriately measured outcomes for all members of the treatment group, regardless of whether or how long they participated in the program (consistent with an “intention-to-treat” analysis).
- College graduation outcomes were measured for all sample members, without attrition, using National Student Clearinghouse data (which includes enrollment data on 98% of U.S. college students).
- The study [pre-registered](#) its analyses, including the primary outcome (bachelor’s degree completion at the five-year mark), and adhered to these analyses in estimating the program’s impacts.
- The program was implemented in close adherence to the ACE program model, with technical assistance provided by CUNY.

IV. References:

Study 1 (CUNY)

Azurdia, G. & Galkin, K. (2020). *An Eight-Year Cost Analysis from a Randomized Controlled Trial of CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs*. New York, NY: MDRC.

Weiss, M.J., Ratledge, A., Sommo, C., & Gupta, H. (2019). Supporting community college students from start to degree completion: Long-term evidence from a randomized trial of CUNY's ASAP. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 11(3), 253-297.

Gupta, H. (2017). *The power of fully supporting community college students: The effects of the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs after six years*. New York, NY: MDRC.

Scrivener, S., Weiss, M. J., Ratledge, A., Rudd, T., Sommo, C., & Fresques, H. (2015). *Doubling graduation rates: Three-year effects of CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for developmental education students*. New York, NY: MDRC.

Scrivener, S., Weiss, M. J., & Sommo, C. (2012). *What can a multifaceted program do for community college students?: Early result from an evaluation of Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) for developmental education student*. New York, NY: MDRC.

Study 2 (Ohio)

Hill, C., Sommo, C., Warner, K. (2023). *From Degrees to Dollars: Six-Year Findings from the ASAP Ohio Demonstration*. New York, NY: MDRC.

Miller, C., Headlam, C., Manno, M., Cullinan, D. (2020). *Increasing community college graduation rates with a proven model: Three-year results from the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Ohio Demonstration*. New York, NY: MDRC.

Study 3 (John Jay College)

Scuello, M., Strumbos, D. (2024). *Evaluation of Accelerate, Completed, Engage (ACE) at CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice: Final Report*. New York, NY: Metis Associates and CUNY.