

Social Programs That Work Review

**Evidence Summary for City University of New York’s
Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP)**

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **PROGRAM:** A comprehensive community college program that provides academic, personal, and financial supports to low-income students who need remedial education, with the goal of increasing college graduate rates.
- **EVALUATION METHODS:** A well-conducted randomized controlled trial (RCT) with a sample of 896 students at City University of New York’s (CUNY’s) three largest community colleges.
- **KEY FINDINGS:** A sizable, statistically-significant increase in college graduation rates six years after random assignment (51% of ASAP students graduated with a two-year or four-year college degree vs. 41% of the control group).
- **OTHER:** A study limitation is that it was conducted in a single site (the CUNY system). Additional RCTs of ASAP in other U.S. locations are currently underway to determine whether the sizable effects at CUNY can be reproduced and whether they generalize to other settings.

[Disclosure: Based on the CUNY ASAP evaluation findings summarized here, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation subsequently funded the delivery and/or evaluation of ASAP programs at other locations, including Westchester Community College in New York and Skyline College in California, and provided co-funding for an ongoing RCT of ASAP in Ohio.]

I. Evidence rating: **NEAR TOP TIER**

The standard for Near Top Tier is:

Programs shown to meet almost all elements of the Top Tier standard, and which only need one additional step to qualify. This category primarily includes programs that meet all elements of the Top Tier standard in a single study site, but need a replication RCT to confirm the initial findings and establish that they generalize to other sites. This is best viewed as tentative evidence that the program would produce important effects if implemented faithfully in settings and populations similar to those in the original study.

II. Description of the Program:

ASAP is designed to help low-income community college students with remedial education needs to complete their studies and earn an associate's degree – if possible, within 3 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 at CUNY; (ii) a range of resources that ASAP students are required to utilize including an ASAP-dedicated advisor who helps students with academic, social, and interpersonal issues, a career counselor, and tutoring services; (iii) special class scheduling options to ensure that ASAP students secure the classes that they need and that they take remedial classes early in college alongside other ASAP students; and (iv) financial supports such as tuition waivers equal to the difference between students' tuition/fees and their existing financial aid, as well as MetroCards and free use of textbooks.

In the study described below, the estimated per-student cost of ASAP incurred by CUNY was approximately \$16,000 higher than the nearly \$26,000 spent by CUNY on non-ASAP students.¹

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

III. Evidence of Effectiveness:

Study Design:

The researchers recruited low-income students with remedial education needs from CUNY's three largest community colleges (Borough of Manhattan Community College, Kingsborough Community College, and LaGuardia Community College). A total of 896 eligible students consented to participate in the study and were randomly assigned to either a 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.

Key Findings:

At the follow-up three years after random assignment, immediately after program services ended, the study found that ASAP nearly doubled students' college graduation rates – 40% of ASAP students had graduated from any college (two-year or four-year) versus 22% of the control group. The difference was statistically significant ($p < .01$). The program also substantially increased four-year college enrollment (25% of ASAP students had enrolled in a four-year college versus 17% of the control group; $p < .01$).

¹ Approximately \$14,000 of these extra costs are the expense of providing ASAP program services and \$2,000 are a result of the program's success in keeping students in school and enabling them to complete more courses.

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.

At the follow-up six years after random assignment, the difference in outcomes between ASAP students and control group students had narrowed somewhat but the effect on college graduation remained substantial. Specifically, the study found that 51% of ASAP students had graduated versus 41% of the control group (statistically significant, $p < 0.01$). This effect resulted from an increase in graduation with a two-year associate's degree; there was no effect on the proportion of students graduating with a bachelor's degree from a four-year college (17% of both ASAP and control group students earned a bachelor's degree).

Summary of Study Quality:

This was a well-conducted RCT. Members of the ASAP and usual services groups were highly similar in their demographic characteristics, as well as their pre-program educational backgrounds. 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). 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).

A study limitation is that it was conducted in a single site (the CUNY system). Additional RCTs of ASAP in other U.S. locations (the state of Ohio and Westchester County, New York) are currently underway to determine whether the sizable effects at CUNY can be reproduced and whether they generalize to other settings. The RCT in Ohio has reported preliminary [findings](#) that are encouraging but not yet definitive, and the Westchester RCT only recently launched and has not yet reported results.

In addition, we believe that a longer-term follow-up of the CUNY ASAP study would be desirable to determine whether the program's impact on graduation rates leads to gains in participants' workforce earnings post-graduation. We encourage such follow-up, in part, because ASAP was found to increase receipt of associate's but not bachelor's degrees, and the effect of an associate degree on subsequent earnings is not yet well established in the research literature.

IV. References:

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.

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*. MDRC.