

Social Programs That Work Review

Evidence Summary for Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP)

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **PROGRAM:** A comprehensive community college program that provides academic, personal, and financial supports to low-income students, with the goal of increasing college graduate rates.
- **EVALUATION METHODS:** 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.
- **KEY FINDINGS:** A sizable, statistically-significant increase in college graduation rates. For example, eight years after random assignment in the CUNY study, 55% of ASAP students had graduated with a two-year or four-year college degree versus 44% of control group students.

[Disclosure: Arnold Ventures funded the three-year follow-up of the Ohio RCT. We are also funding the delivery and/or evaluation of ASAP programs at other locations, including Westchester Community College in New York, Skyline College in California, and West Virginia Community and Technical College System.]

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.

The estimated per-student cost of ASAP (beyond that spent on non-ASAP students) was approximately \$13,838 in the CUNY study \$8,030 in the Ohio study.¹

[Click here for the CUNY ASAP 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. Our search identified two such studies. The following summarizes ASAP's effects on the main outcomes measured in each study, including any such outcomes for which no or adverse effects were found. All effects shown are statistically significant at the 0.05 level unless stated otherwise.

STUDY 1 – City University of New York (CUNY)

This was an RCT 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 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.

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).

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.

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

- The study found an 11 percentage point increase in college graduation rates (55% of the treatment group had graduated versus 44% 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 (25% of both treatment and control group students earned a bachelor's degree).
- The program's effect on graduation rates had diminished somewhat since the study's three-year follow-up point, when it was 18 percentage points. The eight-year effect of 11 percentage points is likely to be stable, since few treatment or control group members were still enrolled in college in year eight.

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. 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's degree on subsequent earnings is not yet well established in the research literature.

STUDY 2 – Ohio

This was an RCT 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, 10% were Hispanic, 35% were black, and all had family income low enough to 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 three years after random assignment, immediately after program completion (versus the control group):

- The study found a 16 percentage point increase in college graduation rates (35% of the treatment group had graduated versus 19% of the control group). This effect was statistically significant ($p < .01$). The effect was driven almost entirely by an increase in graduation with a two-year associate's degree, as opposed to an occupational or technical certificate or a four-year bachelor's degree.
- The study found large, statistically significant effects on graduation for the subgroup of students with remedial education needs (16 percentage point increase) and the subgroup without such needs (17 percentage point increase).
- The study found a 6 percentage point increase in transfers to a four-year college (18% of the treatment group had transferred versus 12% of the control group; statistically significant, $p < .01$).

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).
- Outcomes were measured for all sample members, without attrition, using administrative data from the participating community colleges and from the National Student Clearinghouse (which includes enrollment data on 98% of U.S. college students).
- The program was implemented in close adherence to the ASAP program model, with technical assistance provided by CUNY.
- We believe that longer-term follow-up would be desirable to determine whether the sizable eight-year graduation impacts found in the CUNY RCT are replicated in Ohio, and whether graduation impacts lead to gains in participants' workforce earnings post-graduation.

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)

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.