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Commentary/Op-Ed - March 2022

# Boost equity with TAP access for part-time students

In this op-ed for Times Union, CUF's Jonathan Bowles urges the State Legislature to support Gov. Hochul's proposal to expand the state's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to the nearly 200,000 SUNY and CUNY students who are enrolled on a part-time basis.

by Jonathan Bowles

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In this op-ed for Times Union, CUF Executive Director Jonathan Bowles makes the case for why the State Legislature should support Gov. Hochul's proposal to expand the state's tuition assistance program (TAP) to SUNY and CUNY's part-time students. You can read the full op-ed below or here.

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In an age when low-wage jobs have proliferated, SUNY and CUNY have become the new launchpads to the middle class. Their importance as engines of mobility has only grown during a pandemic that has inflicted disproportionate economic pain on those without college credentials. But too many New Yorkers struggle to reap the full benefits of these institutions due to a misguided state policy that disadvantages students who are only able to attend on a part-time basis.

Gov. Kathy Hochul is proposing to change this. The Legislature should follow suit.

Today, virtually all part-time SUNY and CUNY students are cut off from the state's invaluable Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), which provides qualifying full-time students with up to $22,000 in grants.

While enrolling full time is beneficial for maintaining academic momentum, it's simply not feasible for many New Yorkers who cannot set aside work and family responsibilities.

Last fall, more than 103,000 SUNY undergraduate students attended part time, including 53 percent of community college students and 32 percent of SUNY undergrads. Another 79,000 undergrads attend CUNY part time.

Part-timers account for a majority of students at many campuses, including Schenectady County Community College (70

percent), Columbia-Greene Community College (71 percent), Empire State College (58 percent), and Kingsborough Community College (50.3 percent).

Most of these students — nearly 200,000 statewide — can't access the state's main tuition assistance program. Historically, fewer than 1 percent of CUNY's part-time community college students have received TAP awards.

This isn't just unfair to part-time students, who disproportionately hail from low- and moderate-income households. It affects their ability to succeed in school. Indeed, a far higher share of part-time students drop out without a credential.

It also perpetuates deep inequalities in college attainment. In New York City, just 20 percent of Hispanic New Yorkers and 27 percent of Black New Yorkers hold a bachelor's degree, compared with 64 percent of white New Yorkers.

Fortunately, Hochul has proposed extending TAP to part-time students, altering current rules requiring students to be enrolled full time for two consecutive semesters before being eligible.

The Legislature should get behind her plan, and work with her to implement it in 2022.

Enabling part-time students to access TAP would help them stay in school, earn a credential, and move up the economic ladder. It would also help create a more equitable economy in New York.

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This op-ed builds on the Center's ongoing research on boosting college attainment for all New Yorkers, including the reports *Supporting CUNY's 79,000 Part-Time Students*, *Reengaging Adult Learners to Complete College Degrees: Learning From Tennessee*, and *Tapped Out*.

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