



Report - August 2018

Excelsior Scholarship Serving Very Few New York Students

The Excelsior Scholarship program promises free tuition at CUNY and SUNY colleges. But only 3 percent of public college students are able to take advantage of Excelsior, and students in New York City are especially neglected.

by Tom Hilliard

Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature established New York's Excelsior Scholarship program with the admirable goal of providing free tuition to a large number of low- and middle-income New Yorkers, but our analysis of data from the state's Higher Education Services Corporation shows that the program is serving very few of the students who could benefit the most from free tuition. According to our analysis, barely 4,000 of the 242,000 students attending public colleges and community colleges in New York City have benefited from New York's Excelsior Scholarship program.

Only 20,086 students statewide received an award from the Excelsior program—or just 3.2 percent of the 633,543 undergraduates statewide. But our analysis shows that significantly fewer students in New York City have benefited. Of all students statewide who received an Excelsior Scholarship, only 20.7 percent attend CUNY institutions—even though CUNY students make up 38 percent of all undergraduate enrollment in the state.

Overall, 3,335 students attending CUNY's senior colleges received awards from the Excelsior program—or just 2.3 percent of all those enrolled at CUNY's senior colleges. Meanwhile, 820 students attending CUNY's community colleges benefited from the program—just 0.9 percent of the 95,951 community college students enrolled at CUNY.

At four of New York City's community colleges, 100 or fewer students have received an Excelsior award: Hostos Community College (34 students receiving an award) Guttman Community College (36 students), Bronx Community College (61 students), and Kingsborough Community College (100 students). At all seven community colleges in New York City combined, just 820 students received an Excelsior Scholarship. In fact, four senior colleges in upstate New York each obtained more Excelsior Scholarships than the entire community college system in New York City.

Meanwhile, only two of CUNY's senior colleges—Hunter College and John Jay—saw more than 3 percent of enrolled students obtain an Excelsior award. At ten CUNY schools, fewer than 2 percent of enrolled students received funds.

A disproportionate share of the state's low-income college students attend schools in the five boroughs. Indeed, 60 percent of CUNY students report household income below \$30,000, including 71 percent of community college students.

Data on rejected applications reveals that the Excelsior program's heavy credit requirements were the main obstacle for most students. Almost twice as many applicants were rejected for "not sufficient credits" as received Excelsior awards this year. The requirement that all students earn at least 30 credits in every year of enrollment is screening out the majority of applicants for the Excelsior Scholarship.

Governor Cuomo and legislative leaders should make critical reforms to the Excelsior Scholarship Program to ensure that more students who need financial assistance to attend college and earn a credential are able to qualify for this well-intended but flawed program. They should also take other steps to support student success at colleges and community colleges across the state—including helping low-income students overcome non-tuition related financial barriers. Currently, far too few of the students who enroll at SUNY and CUNY end up getting a credential. They should also take other steps to support student success at colleges and community colleges across the state—including helping low-income students overcome non-tuition related financial barriers. Currently, far too few of the students who enroll at SUNY and CUNY end up getting a credential.

The Center for an Urban Future has written extensively about the increasing importance of a college credential in New York State and the barriers that prevent students from achieving college success. Our recent work has documented both the tuition and non-tuition costs of college, and examined strategies that can ensure more students enrolled in college can graduate with a degree.

Excelsior Across New York

- The Excelsior Scholarship program awarded 20,086 scholarships in 2017-18, 3.2 percent of the 633,543 undergraduate students in New York.¹
- Just 20.7 percent of all scholarship recipients statewide are enrolled at CUNY, even though CUNY students make up 38 percent of all undergraduate enrollment in the state.
- Students at senior colleges were far more likely to obtain Excelsior Scholarships than community college students. Community colleges account for 48 percent of all undergraduate students in New York, but only 27 percent of Excelsior Scholarships.
- Only two of CUNY's senior colleges—Hunter College and John Jay—saw more than 3 percent of enrolled students obtain an Excelsior award.
- At ten CUNY schools, fewer than 2 percent of enrolled students received funds.
- At three CUNY community colleges, fewer than 61 students obtained an award.
- Overall, of the seven community colleges in New York City, just 820 students received an Excelsior Scholarship this year.

**Excelsior Scholarships and Undergraduate Enrollment at SUNY and CUNY Institutions,
2017–2018 School Year**

| Sector | Excelsior Awards | Undergraduate Enrollment | % of Total Enrollment |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| SUNY | | | |
| Community Colleges | 4,603 | 209,233 | 2.2% |
| Senior (State Op.) Colleges | 11,328 | 181,956 | 6.2% |
| SUNY Total | 15,931 | 391,189 | 4.1% |
| CUNY | | | |
| Community Colleges | 820 | 95,951 | 0.9% |
| Senior Colleges | 3,335 | 146,403 | 2.3% |
| CUNY Total | 4,155 | 242,354 | 1.7% |
| Community Colleges | 5,423 | 305,184 | 1.8% |
| Senior Colleges | 14,663 | 328,359 | 4.5% |
| New York Total | 20,086 | 633,543 | 3.2% |

Sources: NYS Higher Education Services Corporation; City University of New York Office of Institutional Research; State University of New York.²

Excelsior at Individual Colleges

- The college with the highest rate of Excelsior Scholarship awards was SUNY-Fredonia (12 percent), followed by SUNY’s Geneseo, Cobleskill, Oswego, and Cortland campuses, all with 9 percent.
- The college with the lowest rate of Excelsior Scholarship awards was Hostos Community College (0.5 percent), followed by SUNY-Empire State College and Bronx Community College, both with 0.6 percent.
- The college with the highest number of Excelsior Scholarship awards was SUNY-Buffalo (1,400).

Rejected Applications

- The state received 63,599 applications for Excelsior Scholarships, of which 43,513 were denied, a denial rate of 68 percent.
- By far the most commonly cited reason for denial was “not sufficient credits,” which accounted for 36,095 denials, 83 percent of all rejected applications.
- Other cited reasons for denial include exceeding the income limit (6 percent), TAP application missing (5 percent), and non-NY resident (3 percent).

SUNY Excelsior Scholarships

| Sector | College | Excelsior Awards | Enrollment | % of Total Enrollment |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Community Colleges | Adirondack | 136 | 3,892 | 3.5% |
| Community Colleges | Broome | 215 | 5,624 | 3.8% |
| Community Colleges | Cayuga County | 70 | 3,784 | 1.8% |
| Community Colleges | Clinton | 34 | 1,583 | 2.1% |
| Community Colleges | Columbia-Greene | 29 | 1,623 | 1.8% |
| Community Colleges | Corning | 95 | 3,834 | 2.5% |
| Community Colleges | Dutchess | 132 | 9,061 | 1.5% |
| Community Colleges | Erie | 289 | 11,135 | 2.6% |
| Community Colleges | Fashion Institute | 290 | 8,661 | 3.3% |
| Community Colleges | Finger Lakes | 224 | 6,353 | 3.5% |
| Community Colleges | Fulton-Montgomery | 60 | 2,403 | 2.5% |
| Community Colleges | Genesee | 127 | 5,906 | 2.2% |
| Community Colleges | Herkimer County | 89 | 2,632 | 3.4% |
| Community Colleges | Hudson Valley | 320 | 11,020 | 2.9% |
| Community Colleges | Jamestown | 95 | 4,463 | 2.1% |
| Community Colleges | Jefferson | 93 | 3,460 | 2.7% |
| Community Colleges | Mohawk Valley | 144 | 6,506 | 2.2% |
| Community Colleges | Monroe | 361 | 12,907 | 2.8% |
| Community Colleges | Nassau | 240 | 19,059 | 1.3% |
| Community Colleges | Niagara County | 165 | 5,439 | 3.0% |
| Community Colleges | North Country | 21 | 2,006 | 1.0% |
| Community Colleges | Onondaga | 278 | 10,659 | 2.6% |
| Community Colleges | Orange County | 153 | 6,601 | 2.3% |
| Community Colleges | Rockland | 125 | 6,950 | 1.8% |
| Community Colleges | Schenectady County | 68 | 6,588 | 1.0% |
| Community Colleges | Suffolk County | 456 | 26,756 | 1.7% |
| Community Colleges | Sullivan County | 26 | 1,565 | 1.7% |
| Community Colleges | Tompkins Cortland | 77 | 2,632 | 2.9% |
| Community Colleges | Ulster County | 60 | 3,560 | 1.7% |
| Community Colleges | Westchester | 131 | 12,571 | 1.0% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Albany | 995 | 13,508 | 7.4% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Alfred State | 357 | 4,188 | 8.5% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Binghamton | 935 | 13,724 | 6.8% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Brockport | 594 | 7,180 | 8.3% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Buffalo State | 525 | 8,527 | 6.2% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Buffalo Univ | 1,400 | 21,020 | 6.7% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Canton | 167 | 3,183 | 5.2% |

| Sector | College | Excelsior Awards | Enrollment | % of Total Enrollment |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| State-Operated Colleges | Cobleskill | 212 | 2,297 | 9.2% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Cornell Stat | 27 | 5,852 | 0.5% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Cortland | 552 | 6,346 | 8.7% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Delhi | 243 | 3,467 | 7.0% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Empire State | 63 | 9,810 | 0.6% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Envir Sci & Forestry | 89 | 1,791 | 5.0% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Farmingdale | 319 | 9,552 | 3.3% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Fredonia | 521 | 4,393 | 11.9% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Geneseo | 516 | 5,524 | 9.3% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Maritime | 53 | 1,641 | 3.2% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Morrisville | 216 | 3,063 | 7.1% |
| State-Operated Colleges | New Paltz | 453 | 6,733 | 6.7% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Old Westbury | 205 | 4,635 | 4.4% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Oneonta | 486 | 5,940 | 8.2% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Oswego | 632 | 7,125 | 8.9% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Plattsburgh | 338 | 5,351 | 6.3% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Potsdam | 210 | 3,321 | 6.3% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Purchase | 264 | 4,063 | 6.5% |
| State-Operated Colleges | Stony Brook | 830 | 17,293 | 4.8% |
| State-Operated Colleges | SUNY Poly | 126 | 2,179 | 5.8% |

CUNY Excelsior Scholarships

| Sector | College | Excelsior Awards | CUNY Enroll | % of Total Enrollment |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Community Colleges | BMCC | 231 | 26,932 | 0.9% |

| Sector | College | Excelsior Awards | CUNY Enroll | % of Total Enrollment |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Community Colleges | Bronx | 61 | 10,935 | 0.6% |
| Community Colleges | Guttman | 36 | 1,066 | 3.4% |
| Community Colleges | Hostos | 34 | 7,211 | 0.5% |
| Community Colleges | Kingsborough | 100 | 15,034 | 0.7% |
| Community Colleges | LaGuardia | 173 | 19,373 | 0.9% |
| Community Colleges | Queensborough | 185 | 15,400 | 1.2% |
| Senior Colleges | Baruch | 362 | 15,253 | 2.4% |
| Senior Colleges | Brooklyn | 348 | 14,689 | 2.4% |
| Senior Colleges | City | 343 | 13,210 | 2.6% |
| Senior Colleges | Hunter | 567 | 16,844 | 3.4% |
| Senior Colleges | John Jay | 404 | 12,916 | 3.1% |
| Senior Colleges | Lehman | 168 | 11,978 | 1.4% |
| Senior Colleges | Medgar Evans | 81 | 6,652 | 1.2% |
| Senior Colleges | NYCCT | 244 | 17,279 | 1.4% |
| Senior Colleges | Queens | 374 | 16,680 | 2.2% |
| Senior Colleges | Staten Island | 290 | 12,509 | 2.3% |
| Senior Colleges | York | 154 | 8,393 | 1.8% |

Sources: NYS Higher Education Services Corporation; City University of New York Office of Institutional Research.

¹ Note that this total excludes two colleges at which fewer than ten students received grants. The precise number of awards was therefore suppressed for reasons of student privacy.

2. For SUNY enrollment data, click [here](#). For 2017-18 CUNY enrollment data click [here](#).

For more on this topic, check out:

- *Degrees of Difficulty: Boosting College Success in New York City*, December 2017
- *Want to Expand Economic Opportunity, Governor Cuomo? Help NYC Tackle Student Success*, December 2017
- *Struggling to the Finish Line: Community College Completion in New York State*, December 2017

- [Completion Day](#), June 2013

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Center for an Urban Future (CUF) is an independent, nonprofit think tank that generates innovative policies to create jobs, reduce inequality and help lower income New Yorkers climb into the middle class. For 20 years, CUF has published accessible, data-driven reports on ways to grow and diversify the economy and expand opportunity that are anchored in rigorous research, not preconceived notions about outcome. Our work has been a powerful catalyst for policy change in New York City and serves as an invaluable resource for government officials, community groups, nonprofit practitioners and business leaders as they advocate for and implement policies to address some of New York's biggest challenges and opportunities.

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