Center for an Urban Future
Innovative Ideas. Independent Policy.



Testimony - June 2003

Testimony Supporting the Creation of a CUNY School of Professional Studies

Center director Neil Kleiman speaks to the CUNY Board of Trustees about the proposal to create a school of professional studies at CUNY

by Neil Kleiman

Good Afternoon. My name is Neil Kleiman and I am the Director of the Center for an Urban Future, a nonprofit public policy institute focused on economic and workforce development issues in New York City.

I am currently the principal researcher on a project commissioned by the Ford Foundation to update a 1999 study by the Center that I authored entitled “Putting CUNY to Work.” At the time of its publication, it was the first campus-by-campus survey of workforce development programs at the City University. A primary conclusion of the original study, based on extensive interviews with business leaders and working New Yorkers, is that CUNY plays a critical role in meeting local workforce needs.

Both working students and local employers believed CUNY has the largest academic breadth and reach of any post-secondary institution in the region. Hundreds of thousands of students have successfully advanced their careers through CUNY. And companies such as Bear Stearns, Verizon and the New York Stock Exchange have worked directly with individual campuses to develop internal training programs.

As successful as CUNY is at meeting the needs of its students and local employers, there were a number of areas in need of improvement in 1999. Based on our research for the current study, several of them still exist today. These include:

- Credit Offerings: Many students and businesses relying on CUNY courses want access to credit-bearing courses, which are rarely available through campus-based continuing education departments.
- Coordination: There is no single point of entry to access the breadth of the campus offerings and expertise.
- Flexibility: Many of the core courses that working students and employers are interested in are offered during working

hours or far from the place of employment, making them inaccessible.

The Center for an Urban Future sees the creation of a CUNY school of Professional Studies as possibly the most important step the City University can take to address the above-mentioned shortcomings.

Specifically, there are a number of reasons to develop a central school of Professional Studies at CUNY.

The Need for Affordable Credit Offerings: Higher education is growing in general, but it is professional studies and extension departments that have experienced truly remarkable growth over the past ten years. And institutions like local institutions like New York University have vastly increased in recent years, now offering 5,000 courses with most of these in credit-bearing and degree-based programs. But credit offerings at CUNY are far more affordable. And the market for high quality, affordable professional studies options is practically limitless.

Overcome Administration and Faculty Misconceptions about Professional Studies: As a policy researcher who has looked at programs at all seventeen CUNY undergraduate campuses, I can testify that it is exceedingly difficult to develop professionally-oriented credit courses to respond quickly to outside organizations and employers.

The difficulty stems in part from the misperception that professional courses lack academic substance. This is not true. At NYU and other New York institutions, faculty are consulted and then teach the courses. And at CUNY, the few credit-bearing courses that have been offered have all been designed in strict consultation with the relevant academic department and faculty members. I'm confident the same process will be employed at the new school. And a separate school at CUNY can highlight the benefits of professional studies, set an example and thereby address many misconceptions.

Generate More Students and Revenue for the Campuses: A successful professional studies school is guaranteed to increase two core academic outcomes: student enrollment and revenue for academic study. In terms of students, these courses frequently attract non-traditional students into the traditional college degree programs. And the vast majority of funds brought in through professional studies schools are plowed right back into academic programs—often for programs that cannot effectively generate significant revenue on their own. For example, NYU uses its significant professional studies revenues to greatly subsidize the Wagner School of Public Administration and other programs. It is my understanding that CUNY in a similar fashion would put revenues right back into core academic study and research.

One Door into the Entire System: A central office offers a single point of entry for students and employers to all nineteen campuses, cutting down on the confusion many potential enrollees currently face in finding appropriate courses to meet their needs.

In sum, a school of professional studies can directly meet the needs of thousands of New York workers and employers, provide a quality, affordable alternative to working adults currently enrolling at private campuses for these courses, offer academic content and quality, and bring in millions of dollars in new revenues for the City University. It is for these reasons that the Center for an Urban Future urges the Board of Trustees to endorse the creation of the CUNY School of Professional Studies and allow the administration the flexibility it needs to work with faculty to develop credit bearing courses, degree programs and customized certificate programs.



CENTER FOR AN URBAN FUTURE
120 Wall Street, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10005

cuf@nycfuture.org © All Rights Reserved.