

Scaling ASAP

How Expanding a Successful Program Supported Broader Institutional Change at Bronx Community College

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Community colleges across the country are engaging in large-scale, systemic change efforts that address multiple barriers to student success (see, e.g., Bailey et al., 2015, on the guided pathways model of community college reform). This brief describes one such effort undertaken by Bronx Community College (BCC), part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, in which college leaders built on an existing initiative to scale the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) to catalyze a whole-college redesign.

ASAP was first implemented in 2007 at six CUNY community colleges with funding from the Office of the Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity. Designed to address institutional, academic, and nonacademic factors contributing to persistently low degree completion rates, ASAP provides wraparound services to students who qualify for need-based financial aid, have no more than two developmental education course needs, and agree to attend college full-time (taking at least 12 credits per semester) (Boykin & Prince, 2015).¹ In turn, students receive financial, academic, and personal support from an ASAP advisor with a relatively small caseload, along with career and tutoring services.² ASAP students take block-scheduled or linked courses in their first year and can register early to secure the courses they need for their majors. Financial supports include a tuition waiver that covers gaps between financial aid and college tuition, free MetroCards for the New York City public transportation system, and textbook assistance.

Since 2012, CUNY has increased ASAP enrollment to 25,000 across its seven community colleges. It has also adapted the program's advising model so that advisors could serve larger caseloads while maintaining the quality of advising, adjusted recruitment timing and processes, and added new staff roles at individual colleges (Cormier et al., 2019). BCC, in close collaboration with CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs, expanded the program to serve approximately 5,000 students—roughly 50% of its associate degree-seeking population—in the largest ASAP expansion in the CUNY system. While BCC had one of the highest performing ASAP programs based on student completion, it was the lowest performing CUNY college in terms



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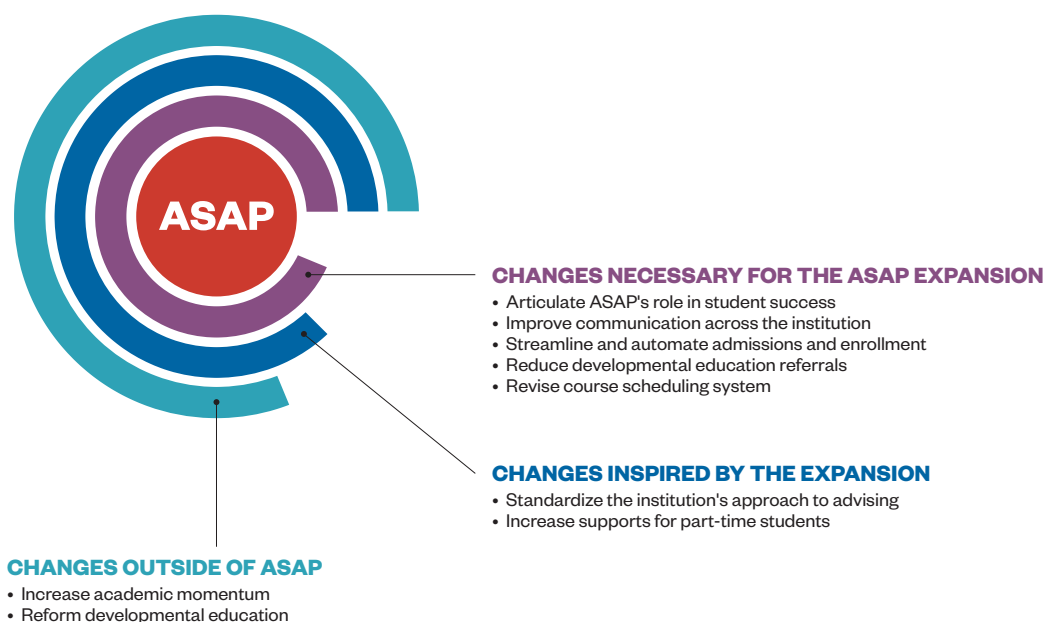
of persistence and graduation. BCC’s leaders viewed the expansion as an opportunity to improve student success across the college, so they leveraged the expansion to promote broader institutional change.

CUNY’s Office of Academic Affairs dedicated additional human and financial resources to helping BCC meet its ambitious ASAP enrollment targets, address institutional challenges related to the expansion, and restructure its policies and practices to better serve all students. The office also regularly generated and reviewed reports with BCC to examine progress on key outcomes, such as retention and credit accumulation.

The Community College Research Center (CCRC) collaborated with BCC and the ASAP team at CUNY’s Office of Academic Affairs to document BCC’s ASAP expansion and consider how the program’s principles can drive broad institutional improvement. Over two years, beginning in fall 2016, CCRC researchers interviewed key ASAP personnel, BCC administrators, enrollment management staff, and advisors; conducted focus groups with faculty; and reviewed planning documents for the ASAP expansion.

This brief examines the relationship between BCC’s ASAP expansion and institutional change to illuminate how scaling a discrete reform can impact other areas of a college and change the way an institution serves all students.³ The three types of change we observed are summarized in Figure 1. We also share preliminary results from an internal evaluation of CUNY’s system-wide ASAP expansion, highlighting data from BCC. Findings from this evaluation show that BCC’s overall graduation rate increased during the expansion, reinforcing the importance of considering how scaling a discrete reform can impact the way an institution serves all students.

Figure 1.
Three Types of Institutional Change at BCC



Institutional Change at BCC

Changes Necessary for the ASAP Expansion

In three years, BCC expanded its ASAP enrollment from 750 to 4,500, or 50% of its associate degree-seeking population, a significant accomplishment in and of itself (Cormier et al., 2019). BCC's leaders supported this significant achievement by articulating ASAP's role in the college's broader student success efforts and improving certain college functions. These actions helped assure members of the college that comprehensive institutional change was possible at BCC.

Articulating ASAP's Role in Student Success

Amid low completion rates and high leadership turnover, in 2015, BCC administrators established a vision for student success that would make the institution more responsive to students' needs. Like many community colleges, BCC experienced challenges related to assessment and placement, advising, and high enrollment in developmental education. BCC also had a fragmented organizational structure, with most administrative departments and programs operating in relative isolation. These challenges led BCC to pursue an institution-wide transformation that prioritized student success and modified policies and practices that hindered students' progress.

BCC's leaders used the ASAP expansion to anchor the college's strategic plan and accreditation process. For instance, mirroring ASAP's use of data, BCC's strategic plan emphasized the use of data and evidence to inform all academic, student support, and administrative decisions. The strategic plan also foregrounded the need for stronger curricular alignment, student supports, and administrative processes to support the ASAP expansion.

BCC's leaders recognized that cultivating an understanding of the expansion's role in broader student success efforts, particularly among those not directly involved with the program, would be critical to its success and the overall effectiveness of the strategic plan. To do this, BCC and ASAP leaders held a series of town hall meetings where they conveyed to the college community that the ASAP expansion was part of a college-wide student retention and completion effort. They described ASAP as a proven student success model at BCC and explained how it addresses barriers to student progression and completion. They also provided logistical information about the expansion and elicited input from across the college.

Improving Communication Across the Institution

Integrating the ASAP expansion into BCC's strategic plan required college leaders to establish stronger cross-college communication mechanisms. According to both ASAP and non-ASAP administrators, BCC lacked normative practices for documenting and disseminating information across divisions and departments, making it difficult to engage stakeholders in institution-wide conversations about the expansion and related initiatives.

In response, BCC leaders established communication channels and structures to engage a range of stakeholders in the expansion. They created an ASAP expansion steering committee, which included stakeholders from across college departments and functions, to establish strategic goals that would guide the expansion. BCC also created cross-functional planning and implementation teams that included faculty, further broadening the range of stakeholders involved in the expansion.

CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs and BCC enlisted a liaison from CUNY's Central Office to help the steering committee document and communicate decisions across the college, in addition to communicating with the Office of Academic Affairs. According to many stakeholders, the liaison played a critical role in establishing the information-sharing practices necessary for broad engagement in reform. To formalize communication structures, BCC used funding from CUNY Central to hire a project manager for the ASAP expansion.

Adjusting College Functions

The expansion impacted many college functions previously not involved with ASAP, such as admissions, enrollment, and finance, and necessitated that representatives from these departments take part in the expansion process. BCC administrators leveraged change efforts in these areas to address issues affecting the broader BCC community.

Admissions and enrollment. Meeting ASAP enrollment targets required integrating the program's admission and enrollment processes with BCC's. Before the expansion, ASAP and other special advising programs operated somewhat independently from BCC's admissions department. BCC admissions enrolled and provided orientation services for all new students; ASAP personnel identified eligible admitted students and invited them to attend separate, ASAP-specific information sessions. ASAP staff and others at CUNY recognized that this approach would not support the expansion efforts. The separate admissions and enrollment processes inhibited ASAP staff's ability to target and recruit large numbers of students, and it contributed to duplicative messaging about special programs, adding unnecessary complexity to the enrollment process.

To address these issues, BCC designated the admissions department as the point of contact for all entering students. Admissions personnel then strategically directed students to specific interventions, including placement test preparation boot camps, remedial courses, and special programs such as ASAP. BCC's admissions and enrollment departments also implemented an algorithm, developed by CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs, to identify candidates for ASAP using student application information. BCC's IT department developed an additional algorithm for use post-application to evaluate students' eligibility for ASAP based on their placement test scores and other ASAP requirements. This automated process updates the list of eligible students for BCC's admissions office, minimizing the need for manual data entry and updates. Accepted students flagged as ASAP-eligible receive an invitation to an ASAP registration event, where they can learn about and join the program. Since the algorithm's implementation, BCC has modified it to identify other special programs and interventions for which students are eligible, which has helped alleviate

concerns that the streamlined admissions process would overlook other student success initiatives. Subsequently, students identified as ineligible for ASAP were redirected to other special programs.

Developmental education placement. Given the requirement that ASAP students have two or fewer remedial needs, BCC's large population of developmental education students presented challenges for the ASAP expansion. BCC administrators consequently worked to reevaluate the best path for students with significant developmental education needs, particularly in math. These efforts aligned with a larger CUNY-wide effort to improve developmental education outcomes.

To reduce developmental education referrals, the admissions and testing divisions collaborated to develop placement test preparation workshops and organize staffing to facilitate the workshops. They also created a calendar that clarified the number of test preparation sessions and dates for testing and retesting. A year after implementing these changes, stakeholders anecdotally reported a noticeable reduction in remedial placement.

As part of CUNY's effort to improve developmental education outcomes, BCC also increased the number of ASAP-eligible students by expanding enrollment in CUNY Start and Math Start, one-semester pre-matriculation remedial programs that advance students into credit-level courses quicker than traditional, multicourse sequences (Scrivener et al., 2018). In addition, BCC created a pipeline to ASAP for CUNY Start completers, with the goal of having at least 50% enter ASAP. To ensure that students did not miss the ASAP registration period, the college assumed responsibility for transitioning students from CUNY Start or Math Start to ASAP. As the pipeline between the programs was strengthened, on average, 75% to 80% of eligible CUNY Start and Math Start completers each semester joined ASAP at BCC.

Course scheduling. Prior to the expansion, BCC administrators observed that the existing course scheduling system posed barriers for student completion. Often, students could not plan which courses to take more than one semester ahead of time because departments submitted schedules shortly before the beginning of each semester. Furthermore, faculty requests to hold class Monday through Thursday between 10:00 a.m. and noon constrained the number of courses the college could offer and limited when students could take classes.

The ASAP expansion compounded these issues. ASAP students take classes as a cohort, often during peak hours (e.g., 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday). ASAP advisors also provide students with extra support to ensure they take the courses they need to graduate on time. Maintaining these practices would be difficult unless the course scheduling system changed to allow a growing population of ASAP students to have consolidated schedules (in the morning or afternoon). BCC also needed to offer more upper level courses to serve the increasing number of students progressing into their second and third year at the college.

Recognizing that changes to course scheduling could benefit all BCC students, college leaders set out to make the course scheduling system more retention-focused. They incentivized department chairs to complete their schedules over the summer by providing a stipend. The college also began developing a grid system so that classes

would be offered on a standardized schedule (8:00–10:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m.–12:00 noon, 12:00 noon–2:00 p.m., etc.), which would maximize the use of rooms, reduce scheduling bottlenecks, and increase the number of classes offered during peak times. After one year, roughly 10% of off-grid courses were moved onto the scheduling grid.⁴

Changes Inspired by the Expansion

The ASAP expansion cast a light on how BCC served students outside of ASAP and the need to improve student services and advising. BCC and CUNY administrators leveraged the expansion to reconceptualize advising across programs and divisions and increase supports for part-time students. These efforts became all the more important once ASAP comprised close to half of BCC’s student population.

Standardizing the Institution’s Approach to Advising

Early in the expansion, BCC’s leaders prioritized creating a more coherent and strategic approach to student services and reducing advisor caseloads. BCC administrators explained that creating an institution-wide approach to advising would help reposition student success as a collective endeavor rather than the domain of certain areas of the college, such as special program offices, academic departments, and the advising center.

The college’s advising programs, which operated separately from ASAP, varied in how they served students, according to BCC advising staff. Processes for directing students to different sources of advising were inconsistent, and advising practices differed across these sources, with advisors using different advising models and meeting with students at different frequencies. According to some BCC advisors, these differences contributed to differences in students’ course-taking patterns and overall college experiences. An institution-wide survey of advising models conducted midway through the expansion provided further evidence for these experiences and perceptions. The study illuminated inconsistent processes for assigning advisors to students and found differences in advisors’ skill sets and advising practices.



Creating an institution-wide approach to advising would help reposition student success as a collective endeavor.

In addition, many advisors received minimal training and ongoing professional development. According to a BCC advisor who did not receive training before assuming her role, much of what she learned about being an advisor at BCC was self-taught. Some faculty members commented that the lack of advisor training may have led to students receiving the wrong information in some cases.

To address these inconsistencies, BCC created a college-wide advising policy that informed changes to advising practices and services over the course of the expansion. Staff from advising, student services, and ASAP drafted an advising mission statement that outlined college-wide advising learning outcomes and expectations for managing student caseloads. In addition to integrating student services practices, these efforts fostered collegiality across departments. When developing the statement, BCC administrators recommended that ASAP advising practices, such as high-touch interaction, career readiness development, and early engagement, guide all advising practices at the college. An administrator explained that college leaders

and advisors wanted to “make sure the students experience services seamlessly and that there is one strategic direction we are moving in for students.” Common expectations for advising included establishing a consistent schedule of outreach activities for each advising service and helping students make individualized educational plans based on program maps.

Other efforts to coordinate advising services and academic support included implementing Starfish, an early-alert system and student tracking software that identifies students who need attention from faculty and advisors. The program also manages online advising appointments, advisor caseloads, and referrals of students to support services. College leaders used ASAP-designated resources to purchase and implement Starfish midway through the expansion. BCC ASAP administrators customized Starfish with ASAP and other end users in mind and implemented it college-wide, giving all students, faculty, and advisors access. Advisors across BCC found Starfish useful for identifying and providing interventions to struggling students and suggested it had the potential to shift how they communicate and engage with students over the long term.

Finally, as shown in Table 1, BCC decreased advising caseloads across the college. BCC advisors, known as success coaches, acknowledged that decreased caseloads would improve the quality of advising for all students and broadly viewed this as a benefit of the ASAP expansion. Toward the end of the expansion, a student services administrator noted that since the reduction in caseloads, advisors have experienced fewer challenges during registration periods, which perhaps is indicative of both lower caseloads and a stronger advising model.

Table 1.
Reduction in Caseloads of BCC Success Coaches

Expansion Year	Pre-expansion	Expansion		
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
BCC ASAP advisors	4	10	20	24
Average BCC ASAP advisor caseload	124	166	147	155
BCC success coaches	21	22	23	24
Average BCC success coach caseload	455	399	312	244
BCC success coach caseload reduction		12%	32%	46%

Increasing Supports for Part-Time Students

Recognizing that part-time students are generally excluded from special programs and therefore receive less support than their full-time peers, BCC, in collaboration with the ASAP expansion CUNY liaison, developed a program for part-time students that, like ASAP, provides financial and academic resources and advising services. The college piloted the program, Advancing Part-Time Excellence (APEX), in fall 2018. Funding from the Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity allows the college to serve 100 students through the program each year. APEX participants can take courses during intersessions and receive MetroCards as well as tuition waivers. As in ASAP, each student in APEX receives intensive advising support.

Changes Outside of ASAP

While undertaking the ASAP expansion and related reforms, BCC was also involved in other student success initiatives: one aimed at increasing students' academic momentum and another focused on restructuring developmental education. Both aligned with BCC leadership's vision of student success and enhanced the college's reform efforts by providing additional structures and resources.

Increasing Academic Momentum

During the ASAP expansion, BCC participated in a CUNY-wide initiative to increase students' academic momentum and make it the norm for full-time students to earn 15 credits per semester (or 30 credits per academic year) instead of 12. CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs launched the campaign in 2017 and requested that each college submit a plan for reaching momentum targets (CUNY Matters, 2018). BCC's plan outlined activities that would build on the ASAP expansion to facilitate long-term change.

CUNY's academic momentum initiative aligns with many ASAP components, such as the promotion of sufficient and timely credit accumulation, improved academic advising, and expanded course availability. Given that degree-seeking students typically enroll in 12 credits per semester, which is the minimum required to meet financial aid eligibility, the push for 30 credits per year represents a considerable shift.

Reforming Developmental Education

To meet enrollment targets for the expansion, BCC needed to address many institutional barriers to student success, including the large number of students placing into and not completing remedial course sequences. BCC and ASAP leaders recognized that strategies beyond those integral to ASAP and the expansion were needed to improve the outcomes of students referred to developmental education. Faculty and administrators acknowledged that because ASAP targets student services, the expansion was likely to have a limited impact on faculty and therefore unlikely to change teaching and learning in developmental education.

BCC turned to initiatives beyond ASAP to support institutional changes to developmental education. Notably, CUNY issued system-wide guidelines for community colleges to reform developmental education placement and exit policies and introduced models to develop alternative pathways through developmental education. BCC also participated in CUNY's Strong Start to Finish Initiative, funded through a network of education and philanthropic organizations to address college attainment gaps (Strong Start to Finish, n.d.). The initiative focused on implementing corequisite developmental education courses and workshops, popular alternatives to traditional, stand-alone remedial courses.

As part of this project, BCC faculty participated in cross-campus learning with other CUNY community colleges, giving them the opportunity to learn about other approaches to developmental education. The collaboration resulted in the development of a corequisite pilot course. In addition, BCC administrators worked

with developmental math faculty to create a three-credit statistics course with one hour of additional support and an embedded tutor, six sections of which were piloted in fall 2018.

CUNY's ASAP Evaluation

As ASAP has expanded to serve a larger proportion of incoming CUNY students, CUNY has estimated the contribution of ASAP to graduation rate increases. A recent descriptive analysis examined increases over time and the percentage of entering students who participated in ASAP. In fall 2011, the year before the ASAP expansion began, just over 3% of first-time students at BCC enrolled in ASAP (55 of 1,743 students). While the three-year graduation rate for these students was the highest of any ASAP cohort (70.9%), because they made up such a small percentage of the college population, BCC's three-year graduation rate remained close to that of prior years at 10.9%. The program grew to serve 9.7% of first-time students in the fall 2014 cohort, and BCC's overall three-year graduation rate increased to 16.0%. The next fall, ASAP enrolled 19.0% of first-time students. The fall 2015 cohort is the most recent one for which three-year graduation data are available, and they show that ASAP maintained a graduation rate of 52.1% for program participants and contributed to an increase in the BCC three-year graduation rate to 20.3%, nearly double the fall 2011 rate. ASAP grew to serve close to 60% of first-time students in the fall 2018 cohort. While these students have not yet been tracked for three years, graduation rates are expected to continue to improve due to both the expansion of ASAP and the broader reform efforts at BCC described in this brief.



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Summary and Implications

Beginning in 2015, BCC set out not only to scale ASAP to an unprecedented level but also to leverage the expansion for broader institutional change. CUNY's internal evaluation suggests that ASAP's positive effects remained strong during the expansion and that the expansion is contributing to increases in the institutional graduation rate.

Students at BCC faced substantial challenges to success, so to fully address them, BCC's leaders needed to pursue an institution-wide transformation that would fundamentally alter how the college served students. During the expansion, three types of institutional change occurred. To meet ASAP enrollment targets, BCC worked to change the culture and structure of the institution. BCC also enacted changes inspired by ASAP to better serve all students at BCC, including creating institution-wide advising policies and practices and implementing an advising program for part-time students. Finally, BCC engaged in student success initiatives outside of ASAP, including reforms to developmental education.

Many of the institutional changes taking hold at BCC were in service of ASAP's programmatic goals and enrollment targets. For instance, the expansion impacted

many college functions and required changes in areas such as admissions, enrollment, and finance. Changes in those areas subsequently motivated college leaders to examine ways in which BCC was or was not poised to support success for all of its students. To address changes in areas less connected to the ASAP expansion, such as teaching and learning in developmental education, BCC embraced CUNY-wide and national initiatives that aligned with the expansion's goals and leaders' vision of student success.

BCC's experience with reform illustrates how scaling established programs can promote widespread institutional change, particularly when programmatic elements that have proven beneficial are extended to other parts of the institution. Overall, our findings suggest that grounding institutional reform efforts in local programming functions provides an effective starting point for widespread change. In addition, BCC's ASAP expansion demonstrates that other, more systematic changes may be needed to support broader institutional transformation at the same time. Institutional leaders should consider what these other changes might be toward the beginning of a programmatic expansion so that they might be coordinated with program scaling.

Endnotes

1. ASAP students with developmental education needs must enroll immediately and continuously in any required developmental courses. Students are referred to developmental (or "remedial") courses if they are not deemed college ready upon enrollment based on skills assessments in math, reading, and writing.
2. Research on barriers to degree completion for community college students suggests a variety of interconnected issues are at play, including issues related to students' academic momentum, financial obligations and aid, integration and sense of belonging, and need for relevant and timely student services (Kolenovic et al., 2013).
3. The first brief from this project examines the expansion of ASAP and how adaptations were made to bring the program to scale across CUNY, using BCC as an illustrative case study (Cormier et al., 2019).
4. To facilitate this work, CUNY ASAP dedicated funds for the college to purchase a course-scheduling software program. At the time of this brief's publication, CUNY and a selected vendor were finalizing contractual conditions.

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Funding for this research was provided by The Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation.