



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** College Presidents and Deans  
**From:** Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Wendy Hensel  
**Re:** Strategies for the Optimal Use of Academic Resources  
**Date:** January 25, 2024

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Together we begin the new year acutely aware of the budget challenges that we face as a system and at nearly all campuses. The Office of Academic Affairs is here to work with you and your teams to surmount these challenges and advance our common mission.

To these ends, we have collaborated with campus provosts to identify both short and long-term strategies and academic practices that have been successful at CUNY and elsewhere in reducing costs without compromising academic quality. A few immediate recommendations for your consideration are below, focusing on optimal scheduling because most campuses are now in the process of creating the Fall 2024 schedule of classes.

We encourage you to consider the approaches that fit best with your campus culture and use these ideas to spark innovation and conversation with faculty in support of your work during these difficult budgetary times. Central staff is available to provide technical support and other expertise to help your campus as needed.

### **1. Primary Recommended Action: Improve Scheduling Optimization**

**Move to average enrolled section size of twenty-five students and raise fill rates to 85% in a manner that will not adversely impact educational outcomes.**

#### **Summary**

The management of course sections is a critical operational issue with substantial financial consequences.

From 2018 to 2023, enrollment at CUNY has fallen faster than section offerings, with enrollment down 18% and sections down 13%. During that same period, the average number of enrolled students per section fell slightly at the senior colleges and by about 3 students per section (11%) at the community colleges. Average section sizes vary substantially among the colleges.

In Fall 2023, nearly 75% of all course enrollments systemwide were in courses with three or more sections. Of this group, more than 3,000 sections had 4-15 students per section. This information strongly suggests that it is possible to eliminate sections without creating overly large classes or affecting educational outcomes while simultaneously realizing significant savings.

## Impact

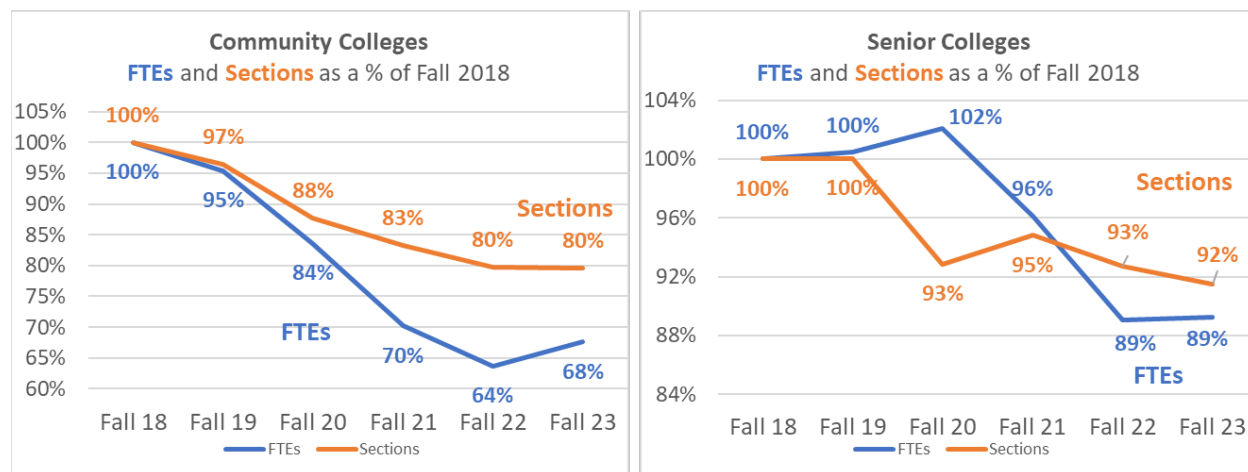
If colleges return to the 2018 average class size, it could save > \$20M systemwide. If senior and community colleges set the average section size at 25 for appropriate courses, it could save \$40M per year (at 27 students per section, savings could reach \$60M).<sup>1</sup>

## Explanation

In AY 2022-2023, CUNY taught nearly 88,000 course sections, more than 50 percent of which were taught by adjunct faculty. The cost of a typical 3-credit course taught by an adjunct faculty member ranges from \$5,558 to \$6,694. In 2022-2023, total adjunct costs totaled \$369 million.

Adjunct faculty typically fill the gap between the demand for instruction (determined by student enrollment in programs and courses) and the supply of instruction (determined by the number of full-time faculty). Holding the number of full-time faculty constant, the number of sections taught by adjunct faculty typically should grow or shrink with enrollment.

If section offerings are managed optimally, there will be a tight relationship between enrollment (student FTEs) and sections offered. However, that largely has not been the case, especially in the last few years. Since 2018, community college enrollment is down 32 percent while sections are down only 20 percent. Collectively, at the senior colleges, enrollment is down 11 percent while sections are down only 8 percent. Because a few senior colleges have strong scheduling optimization, this discrepancy is significantly larger at some senior colleges.



<sup>1</sup> Please note that the section size statistics and section savings analyses cited in this memo are based on data that *exclude* any course section with fewer than four students. This is to ensure that we do not inappropriately assume that additional students could be added to independent study and clinical coursework sections, which cannot be easily identified in the data. However, by excluding the lowest enrollment course sections from the analysis, we are likely understating some of the efficiency opportunities.

The chart below shows average section sizes at each college from Fall 2018 to Fall 2023, and the fiscal impact of the change during that period. Spring section size trends and costs are similar.

College	Average Section Size						% Change F18-F23	Millions of \$ (Savings)/Cost
	Fall 18	Fall 19	Fall 20	Fall 21	Fall 22	Fall 23		
Baruch	33	35	36	36	35	36	7%	\$ (1.09)
Brooklyn	27	26	30	25	23	23	-13%	\$ 1.87
City	25	24	26	24	23	25	1%	\$ (0.17)
Hunter	29	29	33	31	30	30	6%	\$ (1.22)
John Jay	25	26	28	24	24	24	-3%	\$ 0.47
Lehman	22	23	26	25	23	25	12%	\$ (1.43)
Medgar Evers	26	24	30	24	20	22	-16%	\$ 0.70
NYCCT	23	23	23	22	21	22	-8%	\$ 1.30
Professional Studies	18	18	19	18	18	19	8%	\$ (0.25)
Queens	26	27	31	29	26	27	3%	\$ (0.45)
Staten Island	28	27	30	28	26	27	-3%	\$ 0.28
York	25	24	25	23	20	20	-22%	\$ 1.63
Graduate School	12	12	12	11	12	11	-4%	\$ 0.13
Journalism School	13	13	12	12	12	12	-9%	\$ 0.04
Labor & Urban Studies	11	12	12	11	13	13	11%	\$ (0.04)
Law School	28	28	28	29	28	29	3%	\$ (0.02)
Macaulay Honors College	12	11	15	14	11	11	-14%	\$ 0.01
Medical School	26	23	28	25	26	23	-12%	\$ 0.04
Public Health	22	25	30	24	25	27	26%	\$ (0.14)
<b>Senior College Average</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>\$ 1.66</b>
BMCC	25	25	25	23	21	23	-10%	\$ 1.89
Bronx	22	23	23	20	17	20	-8%	\$ 0.68
Guttman	23	24	26	23	22	24	3%	\$ (0.04)
Hostos	24	23	24	20	21	22	-9%	\$ 0.52
Kingsborough	24	23	23	20	20	21	-14%	\$ 2.05
LaGuardia	24	25	23	22	20	20	-17%	\$ 2.76
Queensborough	24	25	26	23	22	23	-6%	\$ 0.73
<b>Community College Average</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>-11%</b>	<b>\$ 8.59</b>
<b>CUNY Average</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>-4%</b>	<b>\$ 10.25</b>

### Recommended Actions:

- **Determine which courses can strategically increase seat capacity without negatively affecting educational outcomes.**

CUNY OAREDA provides a dashboard ([here](#)) that will enable colleges to make useful comparisons across CUNY. For example, the average English course clusters around 22.2 students per course section. At some schools, this average is significantly lower. Adding a nominal number of seats and reducing the number of sections could save considerable expense without harming student learning.

In some cases, there may be good reasons for section size variability. Colleges should carefully consider the costs and benefits of these changes.

- **Allocate budgets to encourage careful monitoring of class size and scheduling.**

Presidents and deans are empowered by the CUNY bylaws as the [executive agents](#) of the Chancellor and authorized to oversee the use of all campus resources, including the scheduling of classes. They may delegate responsibility for management of scheduling to key administrators on their campuses.

Campuses should administratively develop budgets for the scheduling of programs on the front end and maintain oversight on the number of sections offered.

There are many methods that are possible in this regard. Each campus is aware of what has worked and not worked in the past. A few operational suggestions follow:

- Campus VPs for Finance may work with OAA's Budget and Finance team to create financial plans that reinforce campus scheduling goals.
- Campus VPs for Finance should collaborate with the Provost and local IR to develop specific budgets that allocate funding to each academic program in consultation with the Dean in the case of senior colleges, or directly with department chairs on campuses where deans do not oversee schools. The Provost or Dean should allocate the funds to the chairs of the departments in which the specific programs reside.
- The program that is scheduling the faculty for a cross-listed course should be assigned the funds for the course. Stated differently, the department in which the faculty member resides or the department that is hiring the adjunct faculty to teach the specific course should receive the funds specifically allocated to that distinct program's budget.
- The program that is scheduling the faculty for a general education course should receive those funds. Stated differently, the department in which the faculty member resides or the department that is hiring the adjunct faculty to teach the specific course should receive the funds specifically allocated to that distinct program's budget.
- To manage the schedule, shadow sections and a rigorous cancellation schedule need to be put in place as well as daily monitoring and adjustments. Further progress can be gained by the following:
  - Establishing optimal course caps and section floors.
  - Instituting regular chair training that includes the effective use of available data and student-centered scheduling approaches. Central OAA can serve as a resource with this. It is critical that chairs understand the adjunct budget and the importance of distribution of courses across bell codes, the

alignment of contact hours and semester hours, and other scheduling strategies to be effective.

- **Communicate the importance of optimized scheduling to all stakeholders repeatedly if the campus has not been socialized to these concepts.**

The President and Provost must publicly champion the importance and significance of optimal academic scheduling. Faculty and staff should be engaged early and provided with data that supports this approach. To the extent that challenges arise regarding control over scheduling, it should be emphasized that accountability is a partner to control, and that failure to make changes in section management will directly diminish the resources available for other critical work in faculty development, faculty hiring, and necessary activities of the college.

## **2. Other recommended actions that are in development**

### **a. Institute annual campus-based "program review" to determine vitality**

The Council on Academic Policy (CAP) is developing parameters to guide this effort based on national practices.

CAP is likely to recommend that campuses be guided by a limited number of criteria, such as the program's mission, its purpose in the campus' portfolio of offerings, trends in enrollment numbers, graduation and retention rates, trends in degree production levels, and related considerations. CAP will recommend a threshold for what constitutes a low-enrolled or a low-degree producing program. For programs that do not meet this threshold, or the criteria established, CAP will propose remedies for the campuses, such as identifying a specified time period to achieve enrollment and graduation increases, consideration of consolidation or consortial approaches, or closure of programs.

The University will provide professional development to campuses after the guidance from CAP is established. The University also plans to send reports on the low-enrolled, low-degree producing and low graduation and retention rate programs to the campuses after CAP makes its recommendations.

### **b. Conduct a faculty workload audit**

#### **Inventory and assess the use of faculty reassigned time annually.**

Central administration is working to provide guidance that specifies the average teaching workload by sector so that colleges with an excess of reassigned time outside of these averages and budgetary challenges may consider appropriate action. Colleges also can regularize chair and other academic administrative reassigned time, such as time allocated for major program director and graduate program director responsibilities.

The University is working on considerations about percent effort for determining faculty workload assignments. This will be helpful for differentiating between service that is already compensated as part of workload and "extra" service for which reassigned time is appropriate.

**c. Fully implement *Navigate* to assist with decreasing credits that do not count toward degree completion (“unproductive credits”)**

Advisors can use *Navigate* in multiple ways, including ensuring that students are following their degree plan, which helps ensure that all credits attempted count toward degree completion. Campuses may elect to begin identifying all sources of unproductive credits, such as those lost in transfer, those related to academic policies, and those forfeited in high DFWI rate courses, and develop strategies to address these losses.

The University plans to work with campus IR departments to help them leverage reports on unproductive credits. Based on the data and analysis, a campus may develop an action plan to address the problems. The University plans to monitor changes to the level of unproductive credits and assist with suggestions to the campuses for a further decrease.