

CUNY Assessment Tests/Julia Ramirez

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FILE

It was the fourth time in a row that Julia Ramirez was late to pick up her two year old boy, Michael, from the babysitter's house. Janet Lopez, the babysitter, was giving her that look again. But, unfortunately, Julia could not do anything about her lateness this time either. "I am sorry, but I was working on a paper for my English class in school, and I didn't realize how late it was," explained Julia to the babysitter, who kept looking at her with an expression of disapproval and replied "Yes, yes, and yesterday was your math tutor; what is it going to be tomorrow?"

19-year old Julia Ramirez's routine has been the same since last September, after being accepted to LaGuardia Community College in Queens. Now, Ramirez has to wake up at 5:30 in the morning, get herself ready to leave her apartment on Perry Avenue in the Norwood section of the Bronx, and make the almost two hour-15 mile trip by train to Long Island City, Queens. Julia's husband, 20-year old Michael Ramirez, constantly makes jokes and picks on her. He reminds her that if she had passed all the CUNY Assessment Tests or at least two, she would have been able to enter Lehman College in the Bronx, or Hunter College in Manhattan, and she wouldn't have to travel so far.

But Ms. Ramirez failed two of the CUNY Proficiency Exams that must be now successfully passed before entering any of the 11 senior Colleges of the City University of New York (CUNY). She is one of the 2,331

students who were denied admission to any of the four-year CUNY colleges in the past Fall, because they failed two or all of the Assessment Tests. Some of these students failed the exams even after participating in summer remediation. Therefore, they needed to continue in remediation programs as of the beginning of the term. This is according to the October 1999 Report of the Commission on the Future of CUNY provided by the Association of the Bar of the City of New York.

The new CUNY remediation policy, which was passed on May 26, 1998 by the CUNY Board of Trustees, states that no senior college of the City University of New York shall offer any remedial courses for their students. The policy took effect on January 2000 in Baruch College, Brooklyn College, Hunter College, and Queens College. In September 2000, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York City Technical College, and the College of Staten Island began implementing this policy. And as of September 2001, City College, Lehman College, Medgar Evers, and York College will begin to enforce the new CUNY policy as well. Such a policy will affect approximately 63% of all new freshmen already admitted to the 11 senior CUNY colleges, about 18,000 students who in their attempt to enter a B.A. or B.S. program will end up attending the Summer Immersion Program, and an estimated 283 students who will require the "Year-round Immersion Programs. In addition to those

students, an indefinite number of high school students will have to think about enrolling in the College Now Program to improve their chances of passing the three Assessment Tests if they want to be admitted to a CUNY Senior College.

This new CUNY policy on remediation brought controversy to New York, since most colleges and universities in the United States (about 78%) offer remediation programs for their students, including the largest state university systems in California and New York. But Herman Badillo, the current Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Governor George E. Pataki, and Anne A. Paolucci, the former Chairwoman of the CUNY Board of Trustees, argue that the new system will raise the value of the CUNY degree, and will also lead students to complete their remediation courses sooner than before.

Many other people disagree on the new CUNY standards, however. Gloria Ramirez, Julia Ramirez' mother in law, believes that the new CUNY policy came just in time to make her son and her daughter-in-law's lives more complicated. "CUNY has had practically open admissions for over 25 years; why change them now?" she says. Many students will prefer to go away for college, and those students like her daughter-in-law, who cannot leave their family behind, will be discouraged from pursuing Bachelor degree programs and will settle for Associate Degrees.

"Look at her, she first wanted a Bachelors in Science, now she is thinking about getting only a certificate, not even an Associate's degree. On top of that, my grandson is suffering; he needs his mother, and she spends most of her time traveling!" Gloria Ramirez said shaking her head.

But Julia Ramirez feels rather grateful she was admitted to college at all. "I knew I wasn't prepared for those tests. That is why I wasn't surprised, and I didn't complain when I found out my scores," says Ms. Ramirez, who decided to get her GED after dropping out of high school in her tenth grade, and giving birth at the age of 18. And while Julia Ramirez was undecided about whether to pursue an Associates or a Bachelors degree in Computer Science at Hunter, Lehman, or La Guardia Community College, and she has failed both the writing and mathematics exams with quite low marks, she has been assigned to a program called the Basic Skills Program in LaGuardia Community College, where she will have the chance to improve her skills in writing and mathematics before trying to transfer to a Senior College.

Julia is currently taking only three courses, ENA099 or Basic Writing for zero credits but for six hours a week, MAT 095 or Essentials of Mathematics also for zero credits but for seven hours per week, and CIS 231 or networking, for three credits and

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