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NYS Assembly Higher Education Committee Hearing on the Changing Demographics of Students in Higher Education and Educational Opportunity Programs

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Chairperson Glick, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding New York University’s Educational Opportunity Programs and the benefit these programs are providing to our students.

NYU is committed to fostering a dynamic and rigorous teaching and learning environment that represents a diversity of viewpoints, and supports a community of scholars from divergent backgrounds, including historically underrepresented groups. Our commitment to a rich learning environment is underscored by the robust Opportunity Programs we operate. NYU is home to the largest Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) in the state, and one of the largest CSTEP/STEP programs. In total, we have 875 students engaged in our college-level Opportunity Programs and 260 in the pre-college area. We greatly appreciate the State’s continued support of these programs, as they not only assist students financially, but also allow universities to introduce students to experiences that prepare them for the global world. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some specific services our programs offer, each of which are proven, successful models.

As you know, students enrolled in the Opportunity Programs come from traditionally underserved and/or low-income backgrounds. In our freshman class, more than 80% reside within New York City, the majority (78%) are first-generation college students, and more than 70% are pursuing STEM related professions. It is the academic support services offered within the Opportunity Programs that are the critical component, ensuring the retention and academic success of these students.

At NYU, support services include a six-week summer program prior to the start of their freshman year to ensure a smooth entry into university life, a science-focused summer program for upperclassman, professional, expert tutors who are bought in to provide 3,000 hours of tutoring each semester, in addition to peer tutoring services and various university tutoring centers. We also employ four full time instructors in core areas, and eight counseling supporting our students in all 10 undergraduate programs the University offers. This underscores how the Opportunity Programs are fully integrated into academic life at NYU, and is one of the keys to our success.

Most importantly, I believe, is that our students are served by expert staff where the majority have received their master’s degree or terminal degree and half of which are
graduates of Opportunity Programs themselves, including eight who are graduates of NYU’s programs. As we like to say, “we are who we serve.”

At NYU we often talk about the “whole student” – that our mission is to support these students through graduation and to become contributing citizens. This is also accomplished through the Opportunity Programs which allows us to offer professional development services, host cultural events, run alternative spring break trips, and send students to professional conferences, all enabling our students to thrive not just academically but in the global world as well. In addition, over 100 students from the Opportunity Programs have been accepted into NYU study abroad programs for the upcoming semester – 3 times the previous amount – showing NYU’s commitment to provide a full educational experience to our students. We believe all of this enables students to thrive both academically and personally at work, in their communities and in an increasingly global society.

The graduation rate of NYU’s Opportunity Program students is at its highest rate least 10 years. They regularly graduate cum laude, win awards for academic excellence, are named to the Dean’s list, and many enter graduate school within two years of graduation. We recently had a HEOP student who was named a 2015 Truman Scholar. Additionally our students are actively engage in the community through internships and volunteer opportunities.

Historically, these programs have enrolled a majority of African American/Black students, but as demographics in New York State and the United States shift, we continue to serve African American/Black students as well an increasing number of students who identify with a variety racial/ethnic categories, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, and abilities. At NYU we are most notably seeing a majority of Hispanic/Latino students, and an increase in Muslims, LGBTQ, and those who are differently abled.

While my capacity at NYU focuses on the Opportunity Programs, I do want to briefly mention a few university-wide initiatives that are focused on non-traditional students that may be of interest to the committee.

- NYU offers the Community College Transfer Opportunity Program (CCTOP), which is a scholarship and assistance program for students transferring from partnership community colleges into NYU’s School of Education. This program partners with many community colleges within the 5 boroughs, as well as Long Island and Westchester schools to assist students transferring into NYU.

- We have also begun a new program called POISE – Pipeline Opportunities for Inter-Collegiate Stem Education – through our College of Arts and Sciences. This program is administered in collaboration with the Borough of Manhattan Community College in order to create a pipeline for promising sophomore-standing BMCC students who are pursing STEM related majors. POISE focuses
on bringing African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino male students who are pursing science programs to NYU and provides scholarship funding for these students.

- We have begun a pilot program to provide institutional scholarship aid to undocumented students from New York. This program began this fall with our freshman class and undocumented students who have resided in New York for three years or more are eligible.

- NYU is also working University-wide to increase assistance and programs offered for Veterans returning to their studies. Our School of Social Work recently partnered with the Schultz Family Foundation to provide 300 fellowships for veterans earning a masters degree in social work. While receiving their degrees, these fellows will be provided with professional development and mentoring services as well as complete field placements in veteran-oriented organizations. Our School of Engineering has also begun a Veterans Entrepreneur Training program, with support from the NYS Assembly, which targets individuals seeking to transition into the technology industry.

- NYU’s School of Professional Studies also offers many advanced degrees and continuing education programs. An example of these professional pathways is the CleanStart program that our School of Engineering offers to train mid-career professionals for a career in cleantech industries.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We look forward to continuing to work with the State to provide essential educational services to our students.