

CUNY TO TIGHTEN ADMISSIONS POLICY AT 4-YEAR SCHOOLS

A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

Students Must Display Skill in Reading, Writing and Math to Enter Senior Colleges

By **KAREN W. ARENSON**

Trustees of the City University of New York last night voted to exclude any student from the university's four-year colleges who cannot pass proficiency tests in reading, writing and mathematics, making the most fundamental change in standards since instituting open admissions nearly three decades ago.

At a meeting broken by loud protests from students, faculty members and other observers, the board voted 9 to 6 to approve a new system first proposed by Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani more than a year ago and later backed by Gov. George E. Pataki.

After the vote, Mr. Giuliani praised the trustees as "courageous." In a statement, Mr. Giuliani said that the trustees "were under tremendous pressure to defeat the proposal, and they should take great pride in their action. Their vote sends a powerful message that CUNY is starting the important and difficult process of restoring its reputation as one of the great public institutions of higher learning in the country."

Anne A. Paolucci, the board's chairwoman, said, "We have had a period of 30 years of neglect." Talking to reporters after the board meeting at CUNY's administrative headquarters on East 80th Street, Dr. Paolucci added, "We are cleaning out the four-year colleges and putting remediation where it belongs."

Critics, some of whom demonstrated outside the meeting, assailed the vote as destructive. "It's going to be the dismantling of the university and its whole purpose," said the Rev. Michael C. Crimmins, a trustee who voted against the measure.

Although many critics said the vote was tantamount to ending open admissions, in fact, that concept has been broadly misunderstood. The 11 senior colleges in the system have always had some restrictions on admissions, but a few senior colleges have had standards so loose they in effect had open admissions. In addition, the 6 two-year community colleges have accepted any student with a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Unless derailed by legal challenges, the plan will be phased in over three years, beginning in September 1999, and could affect nearly half of the students entering CUNY's bachelor's degree programs — about

CUNY Limits 1970's Policy Of Admission For All Pupils

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dents a year. Approximately that many entering students fail one or more placement tests that all entering students must take.

Those who fail the tests could take remedial classes in summer immersion programs or at CUNY's community colleges, which will continue to admit students who need remediation. Then, if they later pass the tests, students could enter bachelor's degree programs at any of CUNY's 11 four-year colleges.

One unanswered question is who would pay the cost of those remedial courses students might take over the summer; those who enroll at community colleges would still be eligible for state and Federal grants to cover tuition and living expenses. Those not enrolled as full-time degree students in a CUNY college would not be eligible for financial aid.

"These are things we have to negotiate," Dr. Paolucci said.

The plan will bar many students who are now allowed to enter CUNY's senior colleges — the goal of the university's harshest critics, who have long argued that its standards have been eroding since the advent of the open admissions policy in 1970. The newly approved admissions system is different in so many ways from the pre-1970 policy that any direct comparison is difficult.

"We're pleased that the board voted to restore standards at CUNY," said Charles Deister, a spokesman for Mr. Pataki.

Protesters in the meeting last night repeatedly shouted objections to the new plan, calling it "racist," and accusing trustees of "killing our colleges." After repeated disruptions, Dr. Paolucci repeatedly pleaded for order and finally asked the police to clear the room. Twenty-four people were arrested, according to the police, and handcuffed outside.

Trustees who support the plan argued that it would raise the value of the CUNY diploma and help students complete their remediation more quickly.

They also denied the most emotional allegation of their critics, that the new system would hurt minority students the most.

"I have every faith that black, Latino and Asian students will do as well as other students, and that this will benefit them as well as every other student," said Herman Badillo, vice chairman of the board of trustees.

Opponents of the policy disagreed, and have said they might bring suit to stop its implementation.

Among those organizations considering lawsuits, which would likely charge that the plan will disproportionately affect minority students, are the Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund, the N.A.A.C.P. and the American Jewish Congress.

Critics point out that although CUNY is a heavily minority institution, with whites making up only one-



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Police officers arresting protesters outside a meeting of the trustees of the City University of New York. The trustees voted to exclude any student from its four-year colleges who cannot pass proficiency tests.

New Rules May Cost CUNY Millions

By DAVID ROHDE

Eliminating remedial classes at the City University of New York will affect as many as 13,000 freshman and transfer students each year and could cost the university hundreds of millions of dollars in tuition revenue, according to CUNY estimates.

The plan, if not overturned by legal challenges, is to be phased in over three years, beginning in September 1999 at Baruch, Brooklyn, Hunter and Queens Colleges. After those colleges end remedial classes, five others — City College, Lehman, John Jay, Staten Island and New York City Technical — are required to end remedial classes by September 2000. Medgar Evers and York Colleges have until 2001.

Richard F. Rothbard, CUNY's

vice chancellor for budgeting, estimated in March that the university could lose \$80 million in tuition revenue in the first year, and more in succeeding years, as students who need remedial work are barred from enrolling.

Mr. Rothbard has also said that setting up and running the remedial programs outside the college's existing curricular structure could cost \$10 million to \$15 million. CUNY's total budget is \$1.3 billion.

The largest impact on new enrollment would occur at John Jay in Manhattan, according to estimates. Officials say the changes would result in a 64 percent drop in new enrollment there in the 2000-01 school year. The least affected would be Baruch, with an estimated 34 percent decline in new enrollment in fall 1999.

third of the senior college enrollment, a higher proportion of minority students fails the placement tests.

CUNY estimates that 38 percent of white students would have trouble meeting the new standard, compared with 46 percent of black students, 51 percent of Asian students and 55 percent of Hispanic students.

Identifying himself as a member of a minority group and a civil rights leader, Alfred B. Curtis, a trustee from Staten Island, said he disagreed that CUNY was eliminating programs that benefit members of minority groups.

"I believe anyone who wants to earn a college degree will be able to do so," he said.

The board is made up of 17 members, 16 of whom have votes. Any policy change requires 9 votes for passage.

All of Mr. Giuliani's five appointees supported the measure, and three of Mr. Pataki's six appointees did.

The other members are a student representative, who voted no; a faculty representative who does not

have a vote; and four appointees named by previous governors.

Of those, one who opposed the measure was absent, Mr. Badillo voted yes, and two others voted no.

The board has been sharply divided on this issue for months, without a majority behind any proposal. Yesterday, Richard Stone, a law professor at Columbia University named to the board by Mr. Giuliani, declared that he would support the change. With that decision, which he called "one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made in my life," he became the ninth vote.

The impact of the policy approved last night is still unclear, even to those within CUNY. If the senior colleges shrink by several thousand students, what would that do to the schools, and the faculty and their state financing? "If the enrollments are going to be dropping at the senior colleges, it will be very easy for the Governor to cut their budgets," said Matthew Goldstein, president of Baruch College.

And can the community colleges absorb the thousands of students who are likely to enroll, once excluded

TRENDS

Turned Away

The City University of New York approved a proposal yesterday that will bar students* who have not passed proficiency exams. The new program will be phased in over three years at CUNY's 11 four-year colleges.

- 1997-98 base enrollment.
- Estimated enrollment of new students following change in admission policy.



*Freshman and transfer students entering four-year bachelor program.

Source: City University of New York

The New York Times

from the bachelor's degree programs at the four-year colleges? No one at this point can say.

What is clear, however, is that by barring all students who need remedial work, CUNY is taking a highly unusual step, educators say. Many high school students today graduate without finely honed skills in writing and mathematics, and many enter college needing additional help in these areas before they move on to other courses.