



# BELIEVING IN THE POTENTIAL OF EVERY STUDENT:

## A CASE STUDY ON LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Institutional policies and practices shape which students have access to college, who persists and completes, who borrows, and who experiences economic and social mobility. To create clear pathways to academic and workforce success, and ultimately increase the value students receive from their postsecondary education, institutions can learn from Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and community colleges. These institutions often excel at equitably serving students from historically marginalized backgrounds in the classroom and beyond.

LaGuardia Community College, a two-year public institution in Long Island City, New York is home to one of the most diverse student populations in the country. Using the [Equitable Value Explorer](#), an interactive data dashboard that allows users to analyze and compare post-college earnings outcomes, IHEP found that ten years after entering LaGuardia, the typical student earns nearly \$46,500. This is nearly \$5,000 more than the median income among New Yorkers with associate's degrees.

The case study, informed by interviews with administrators, faculty, and students at LaGuardia, offers lessons institutions can apply in their own contexts to strengthen student-centered and data-driven approaches to promote student success. From bridging the gap between nondegree programs and academic tracks to adapting curricula to promote degree completion and smoothing the transfer process to four-year institutions, LaGuardia proactively removes obstacles and enables students to achieve their varied goals.



**LaGuardia is a Minority-Serving Institution twice over:** qualifying as a Hispanic-Serving Institution and an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. Its diverse student body includes 44% Latinx and 20% Asian American undergraduate students, representing over 130 countries and reflecting the rich cultural tapestry of New York City.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING EQUITABLE POSTSECONDARY VALUE ON YOUR CAMPUS

## 1. Prioritize a student-centered culture.

Building and maintaining a student-centered culture requires leaders who explicitly commit to and embody this approach in every facet of their work. Doing so empowers faculty and staff at all levels to design policies and practices that prioritize the needs of students. Typically, students enrolled in continuing education divisions are not eligible to access the same kinds of institutional resources and financial aid that degree-seeking students can. However, LaGuardia has intentionally opened up access to specific support services for [Adult and Continuing Education \(ACE\)](#) students and, through the support of the LaGuardia Foundation, they are eligible for substantial scholarships. Where an institution invests time, money, and energy determines how and how much their students benefit from higher education, regardless of their specific goals.

## 2. Leverage data to drive change and innovation.

Institutional data is a powerful tool to inform policymaking and can drive changes that support students' social and economic mobility. LaGuardia, for example, uses matriculation data to identify students in nondegree programs who are potential candidates for degree programs. This helps to create smoother pathways for students who want to further their education. Other institutions should similarly analyze their data to identify opportunities to support students along their journey, including at key transition points. Whenever possible, institutions should disaggregate data by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status to pinpoint inequities and inform targeted interventions.

## 3. Proactively identify barriers and take opportunities to smooth student pathways.

Rather than leaving students to navigate complicated pathways or transitions on their own, LaGuardia provides targeted support before, during, and after key transitions points along their students' postsecondary journeys. LaGuardia has taken on the responsibility of navigating the "bureaucracy of education", for example, by offering students in language immersion and ACE programs coaching to navigate the matriculation process as they transition to degree programs, developing memoranda of understanding between ACE and degree programs to award academic credits to ACE students, and negotiating articulation agreements with four-year institutions. Institutions must analyze their own data and audit current policies to identify opportunities to smooth pathways for students.

Institutional leaders, faculty, and staff at all levels have an obligation to provide students from all backgrounds and circumstances the support they need to achieve strong outcomes. A student-centered culture and data-driven approach are essential to meeting that obligation. By following the example of MSIs and community colleges like LaGuardia, institutions can improve college access, enrollment, completion, and students' post-college outcomes.



“ If we really believe in the potential of each individual student, no matter where they come from and where they want to go, what they want to get out of their LaGuardia experience—[their] whole diverse range of needs and of aspirations—we have to be committed to helping them realize their full potential.”

— President Kenneth Adams

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*This case study is part of a series on Minority-Serving Institutions. Read [Creating a Culture of Data Use: A Case Study on the University of North Texas](#) and [Student Success is the DNA of NAU: A Case Study on Northern Arizona University](#) for more recommendations to advance postsecondary value.*

*Photos courtesy of LaGuardia Community College*