

**Testimony of Provost Allison Pease, John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
The City University of New York (CUNY)**

**The New York City Council's Committee on Higher Education Hearing on
Examining Graduation Rates at CUNY Campuses
November 24, 2025**

Good afternoon chairperson Dinowitz and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. I am Allison Pease, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the alma mater and current college of many of your constituents.

I want to provide a brief description of John Jay College, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary, share how we have significantly increased graduation rates over the last ten years, and highlight a few of the interventions that have helped more students graduate.

ABOUT JOHN JAY

Located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, John Jay is a national leader in criminal justice, forensic science and forensic psychology, and our mission is centered around justice. We enroll 14,000 undergraduate, master's and doctoral students in 36 bachelor's programs, 13 master's programs, and three doctoral programs. John Jay graduates are first responders, public safety professionals, elected officials, and agency leaders in the public sector, and in the private sector they excel in law, finance, healthcare, media, and tech.

Our undergraduate population is 15% Asian, 25% Black, 42% Hispanic, and 18% White. Sixty-five percent of our students are Pell Grant recipients, 72% receive Pell and TAP, and 50% are the first in their families to attend college. According to the Law School Admissions Council, John Jay ranks 5th in the U.S. for sending black applicants to law school, 13th for sending Hispanic applicants to law school and is in the top 10 among American universities in student social mobility according to the pioneering research led by Professor of Economics Raj Chetty of Harvard

University. This year John Jay was ranked #3 in Top Performers on Social Mobility in the North, according to *U.S. News and World Report*.

RISING GRADUATION RATES

In 2017 when President Karol V. Mason arrived at John Jay College, the 4-year graduation rate was 26% and the 6-year graduation rate was 44%. She galvanized the college leadership to develop a Vision for Student Success as the College's top priority. I am proud to say that in the eight years that have followed our graduation rates have climbed significantly. We increased our four-year graduation rate fourteen percentage points to 40%. Our six-year graduation rate increased twelve percentage points to reach 56%, though it fell to 53% last year, reflecting the loss of momentum students experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our four-year transfer graduation rate is 67%, the second highest in New York State. The National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS) comparison group report of 2024 shows that at John Jay Black students graduate at 11% percentage points and Hispanic students at 7% percentage points above national peer institutions.* We have been dogged and intentional about ensuring that we support increasing numbers of students to graduate, and to graduate more quickly so they earn more money over their lifetimes.

SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS

To fund these efforts, we have worked with philanthropy to pilot programs and test what works. Annually we raise between \$6-8 million dollars. We are incredibly grateful to the City Council and New York City, which funds our two cohort programs with the highest graduation rates, APPLE Corps and ACE.

Five key practices and programs that have demonstrably contributed to student success include:

- 1. Completion of Upper-Division Students Program (CUSP):** Counterintuitively, we discovered that students with 90+ credits were failing to graduate. We worked with DataKind who used machine learning to identify students at risk of dropping out. Now we can focus on those students who most need support and help them

cross the finish line. CUSP – supported by the Gray Foundation and the Price Foundation – increased senior student graduation rates from 54% to 86% in its first year. Between 2019-2024, John Jay graduated 3,038 more students than predicted. That’s about 500 additional college graduates per year. (CUSP was featured in a *New York Times* article).

2. Accelerate Complete Engage (ACE): ACE has been well described already. I would simply add that a 2023 study found four-year graduation rates among ACE students at John Jay College were 16 percentage points higher than among the comparison group.

3. APPLE Corps: APPLE Corps is a partnership with the NYPD that serves a cohort of 100 students per year who receive annual stipends, travel support, academic and career advising while they to explore public service, leadership, justice and equity issues in policing and community relations in NYC. The four-year graduation rate of APPLE Corps students in 2023 was 70%, 30 percentage points higher than the college average.

4. Winter and Summer Acceleration: Our Acceleration program helps first and second year students who are not on track to graduate in four years earn credits during summer or winter to increase their academic momentum and get back on track. We started this for STEM students about six years ago and then broadened the program during the pandemic to freshmen and sophomores. This program reversed a downward trend in first-year retention from 75.8% in 2021 to 80.9% in 2022. The program reaches out proactively to invite at-risk students for tuition-free courses and provides time management workshops and tutoring. In the three years we have run this intervention for freshmen and sophomores, we have seen that if a first-year student receives Acceleration support, their four-year graduation rate rises to 51%. If a second-year student receives Acceleration support, their four-year graduation rate rises to 61%. This is a promising practice, particularly in that it only costs about \$1000 per student. We are actively fundraising to support this work.

5. **CUNY Justice Academy:** The CUNY Justice Academy is a dual admission program with CUNY’s seven community colleges. The program has proven to increase the numbers of students completing their associate’s degrees at their colleges of origin, and providing a shortened time to graduation once at John Jay. This program was the subject of an [NYU Research Alliance study](#) in which they found that “John Jay College of Criminal Justice holds the distinction of being the CUNY college that graduates the highest percentage of transfer students of color—43 percent compared to just 29 percent in the rest of the City—as well as the school that serves the highest *proportion* of students of color. Both facts underscore the value of *how* John Jay supports its transfer students, through policies, teaching practices, and program culture.”

That concludes my testimony. I am sincerely grateful not just for your interest in our work but for your support of ACE and APPLE Corps, each of which has changed not just individual lives, but those of our students’ families and communities, and therefore contributed to New York City.

*Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/dfr/2024/ReportHTML.aspx?unitId=190600>