
cent, yet the region's ghettos grew by nine tracts.

Still, Jargowsky takes encouragement from declining concentrations in such areas as New York City, Newark, N.J., and Tampa-St. Petersburg. The drops are the product of improved local economies, Jargowsky believes, and show that the vision of the black poor as totally alienated and indifferent to opportunity is wrong. If the economy is strong, many poor people will work their way out of the ghettos.

A University's Decline and Fall

"Downward Mobility: The Failure of Open Admissions at City University" by Heather Mac Donald, in *City Journal* (Summer 1994), Manhattan Inst., 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

To generations of talented New York City high school graduates, including many from poor and immigrant families, City College once was known as the "Harvard of the poor." It offered an excellent education, free of tuition. Hunter College, Brooklyn College, and Queens College did the same. But that excellence is gone, laments Mac Donald, a *City Journal* contributing editor. Ever since the City University of New York (CUNY) embraced "open admissions" 25 years ago, its four-year senior colleges have been on a steep downhill slide. Today, only about 25 percent of its students graduate within eight years, and many who do lack even basic skills.

CUNY dropped entrance requirements at its 10 senior colleges after a violent student strike in 1969 protesting "racism" and "elitism"—even though it had seven community colleges effectively open to all city students with a high school diploma.

The open admissions policy cost \$35.5 million in its first year. "Within months, City College alone created 105 sections of remedial English and hired 21 full-time faculty members to teach them," Mac Donald writes. Nearly nine in 10 of its students required remedial writing instruction. "Professors found themselves facing students who had never

read a book, some of whom had no experience with written language or standard English." Although the initial graduation rates of students in SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge), the central remedial program, were only around 15 percent within eight years, the university did not reconsider the program but instead expanded it. "Today, its resources dwarf those of traditional academic departments," reports Mac Donald, but the graduation rate for SEEK students is no better.

There are still good students and good programs at the CUNY colleges, Mac Donald notes, "but it is harder and harder for those students to get the education they deserve, because CUNY's remedial functions are swallowing up all others." Open admissions has hurt some colleges, notably Queens, less than others, she points out. And many CUNY graduate programs retain good reputations.

Proponents of open admissions originally promised that the remedial students would be brought up to the colleges' high academic standards, Mac Donald writes. Instead, standards have been lowered. The original idea of keeping remedial students out of regular courses until they acquired college-level skills was soon decried as "stigmatizing" and abandoned. Now, the distinction between the two types of courses has been blurred.

Bad as things are, Mac Donald fears that they may get worse. "A new generation of writing teachers, forcefully represented in CUNY's English and SEEK departments, is arguing that [academic] 'deficiency' and 'remediation' are mere 'social constructs' designed to marginalize unwanted groups of people." If these teachers have their way, academic standards will be completely abandoned and replaced by the notion of "competence in one's own culture."

Mac Donald thinks it is time to scrap the whole experiment and go back to the colleges' original purpose: giving an excellent education to poor and working-class students who are prepared to benefit from it. The money saved could be used to help their less qualified peers in other ways. As things stand now, both groups are being cheated.