

ALAN G. HEVESI
COMPTROLLER



110 STATE STREET
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12236

STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER

May 13, 2004

Dr. Matthew Goldstein
Chancellor
City University of New York
555 East 80th Street
New York, NY 10021

Re: Report 2003-F-36

Dear Chancellor Goldstein:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law, we have reviewed the actions taken by City University of New York (CUNY) officials to implement the recommendations contained in our audit report, *City University of New York - Availability of Student Computer Resources (Report 2001-S-45)*.

Background, Scope and Objectives

CUNY is the largest urban university, and the third-largest public university system, in the United States. In the spring term of 2003, CUNY had over 200,000 students in 1,476 degree programs on its 19 campuses, and over 240,000 students in adult and continuing education programs. CUNY's 11 Senior Colleges (Colleges), Baruch, City, Hunter, Brooklyn, College of Staten Island, John Jay, Medgar Evers, Lehman, NYC Technical, York, and Queens, offer four-year degrees and are located throughout the five boroughs. CUNY's Chancellor is the chief educational and administrative officer of the university and is responsible for unifying and coordinating college business and financial procedures and management. In addition, each College is governed by its own president, who has general superintendence over the College. CUNY has established the Information Technology Steering Committee (Committee) that is comprised of senior representatives from each senior and community college and from Central Office. The Committee will address technology data security, training, disaster recovery, communication, funding, procurement standards and infrastructure. These Colleges possess a level of autonomy in educational, administrative, and disciplinary affairs; however, each must adhere to CUNY-wide policies and procedures.

Our initial audit, which was issued on November 25, 2002, examined the extent to which CUNY's Senior Colleges provided students with access to up-to-date computer resources. We also

sought to determine if CUNY had set minimum standards for measuring the adequacy of student computer resources at the Senior Colleges. In our prior audit, we found that access to computers varied widely from campus to campus as did the percentage of outdated computers. Colleges did not have an adequate number of hardwired nodes or wireless connections to the College networks to enable students to use their own notebook computers on campus. We also found that Colleges were making computer purchasing decisions without knowing the number of computers that were already available for student use (versus faculty and administration). Of the 11 Colleges, 9 acknowledged they did not provide enough computer lab hours to meet the needs of their students, a problem they attributed mainly to information technology staffing shortages. The objective of our follow-up, which was conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards, was to assess the extent of implementation as of March 4, 2004 of the seven recommendations included in our initial report.

Summary of Status of Prior Audit Recommendation

Of seven prior audit recommendations, one recommendation has been implemented by all Colleges. The other six recommendations have been partially implemented.

Follow-up Observations

Recommendation 1

Establish a set of performance standards to define what type, capability and number of available computer hardware is minimally required to deliver adequate basic service to students. Have these standards reviewed by the CUNY Information Technology Steering Committee.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - None of the 11 Colleges have set standards that address all of the elements recommended in our prior report. All of the Colleges have defined what capabilities are needed in the computers that they will purchase for student use. This was verified through visits to 3 of the 11 Colleges. None of the Colleges' work to date has been reviewed by the CUNY Information Technology Steering Committee.

Recommendation 2

Prepare computer inventory listings that identify each unit and the primary student or administrative user.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - Baruch, City, Hunter, Lehman, Medgar Evers and the College of Staten Island have compiled adequate records and implemented this recommendation. These six Colleges reported that they maintain inventory records that identify computers available for student use versus those available for administrative use. Three Colleges, Brooklyn, NYC Technical, and Queens, have not implemented this recommendation. Two Colleges, John Jay and York, responded that they can distinguish on their inventory records between computers available

for administrative use versus student use by the location of the equipment. However, they will implement a coding system to better distinguish those computers available for students from those computers available for administrative use.

Recommendation 3

State criteria for defining outdated computers and annually monitor to identify this hardware.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - Our review indicated that 8 of the 11 Colleges implemented this recommendation. Eight Colleges have set standards as to when computers were considered outdated. The standard ranges from three to five years. Brooklyn and NYC Technical did not state the criteria for defining outdated computers and are considered as not implementing this recommendation. City College has partially implemented this recommendation because it presented a general description of outdated computers including sufficiency of memory and processing power, new releases of operating systems, wireless computing, and network bandwidth.

Recommendation 4

Develop a three to five year computer replacement cycle.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - Of the 11 Colleges, 10 reported they are replacing computers on a three to five year cycle because they have instituted technology fees for all students and are able to raise enough revenue to upgrade their computers. City College reported that it was challenging to maintain a coherent three to five year replacement cycle and only partially implemented the recommendation.

Recommendation 5

Implement the best practices identified in this report to help provide adequate computer lab access to CUNY students, including those students who need late night and weekend access.

Status - Implemented

Agency Action - All 11 Colleges have implemented this recommendation. All Colleges responded that they have increased their Information Technology staff and expanded computer lab hours. This resulted because of an increase in student fees.

Recommendation 6

Identify the access needs for students who have personal notebook computers and strive to meet these needs, taking into consideration security and privacy issues.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - Of the 11 Colleges, 9 have implemented this recommendation. The 9 Colleges have implemented wireless network installations and centralized a large numbers of public access personal computers in school libraries and department classrooms. The two other Colleges, John Jay and Medgar Evers, are in the process of building a wireless network in their libraries, lounges, and lobbies to accommodate students with notebook computers. These two Colleges have partially implemented this recommendation.

Recommendation 7

Establish standards for student IT support and have these standards reviewed by the CUNY Information Technology Steering Committee.

Status - Partially Implemented

Agency Action - Queens and NYC Technical did not implement this recommendation. Of the 11 Colleges, 9 have partially implemented the recommendation by hiring additional Information Technology staff to improve its staff-to-student ratios. York College also participated in the nationwide Campus Computing Project which addressed computer standards nationwide. The CUNY Central Office has not developed any standards for student Information Technology support, and the ratios of support staff to students have not been reviewed by the Committee.

Major contributors to this report were Joe Giaimo, Ken Haque, and Tom Trypuc.

In response to our observations, CUNY officials stated that the status of the recommendations for the 11 colleges is acceptable, as presented. We would appreciate your response to this report within 30 days, indicating any actions planned to address the unresolved issues discussed in this report. We thank the management and staff of CUNY for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this review.

Very truly yours,

Steven E. Sossei
Audit Director

cc: Louis Chiacchere