



## THE PERCY E. SUTTON SEEK PROGRAM AT QUEENS COLLEGE

2020 OVERVIEW

# **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

"Great occasions do not make heroes or cowards;  
they simply unveil them to our eyes.

Silently and imperceptibly, as we wake or sleep, we grow strong or weak;  
and at last some crisis shows what we have become."

*Brooke Foss Westcott*

## **DEDICATION**

*To the thousands of students who after been admitted to the SEEK Program at Queens College, challenged all the social, personal and economic expectations and deterrents to complete a college education. You inspire our work; you are the reason we exist.*

*To the staff of Queens College SEEK counselors, faculty, administrative staff, tutors, supplemental instructors, consultants, and college assistants who have served in the program over the years. Your dedication and unwavering commitment to our students' success is the essence of the heart of real (s)heroes.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

A comprehensive overview of this nature is impossible without the contributions of others. Many thanks the following individuals:

*William Modeste*, one of the original counselors of the Queens College SEEK Program, and our resident historian and archivist.

*Gary Aguayo*, QC SEEK's Academic Program Manager and resident data geek; who pulled, analyzed and culled relevant data of our students' successes.

*Dr. Cheryl Littman*, Queens College Dean of Institutional Research who provided access to the data to support this document.

*Dr. Cicely Rodway*, whose sharp editorial eye assisted with the readability of the document.

*Richard Alvarez*, Queens College Vice-president of Enrollment and Student Retention, for his support and encouragement of this document.

*Rajvir Kaur, Dr. Maryanne Chester, Gaslin Osias, Jessica Perez, Margarita Eguizabal, Shonelle George, Dr. Allyson Regis, Donelle Bailey and Michael Robinson* who assisted in adding elements to this project.

Respectfully,

Norka Blackman – Richards

Queens College SEEK Program Director

## **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

The Percy E. Sutton Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) Program was born out of the Civil Rights Movement and signed into law in 1966 by the New York State legislature as the higher education opportunity program for senior colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY). This legislation, Education Law 6452, was a result of the efforts of some of New York's established activists and progressive politicians; Percy Ellis Sutton, Shirley Chisholm, Charles B. Rangel, Basil A. Paterson, David Dinkins and Allen B. Ballard. Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman from Brooklyn elected to the New York State Assembly often said that her greatest political contribution was getting the SEEK Program into law. Their collective vision was to provide access to CUNY for economically disadvantaged students who graduated from high schools that had not prepared them for the rigors of college.

The program became vital to making CUNY more representative of New York City, bringing in African American, Latino, working-class and immigrant students and supporting them in college studies – a role it continues today. Former New York Mayor David Dinkins, who worked in Albany.... on the SEEK legislation, credits Chisholm and Sutton with pushing it through.<sup>1</sup>

Queens College, Brooklyn and City College were part of the original cohort. Today, there are eleven SEEK Programs across CUNY with College Discovery (CD) as their sister program in two-year colleges. With the success of SEEK other opportunity programs were established in partnership with New York State, The Arthur Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) in 1969 at independent colleges, and the Education Opportunity Program (EOP) in 1970 for state colleges. Most recently in CUNY, Accelerate, Complete, Engage (ACE) in 2015 began as a spin-off the success of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psc-cuny.org/clarion/june-2012/shirley-chisholm-cuny-and-us-history>

## **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

the Accelerate Study in Associate Program (ASAP) started in 2007 as a support program that utilizes elements of the SEEK model, but does not have an income requirement for admission.

### **Institutional Commitment:**

The initial years of the SEEK Program on the Queens College Campus were turbulent. The College's Administration perceived SEEK as one of CUNY's political impositions. Added to already existing racial and social tensions in the country, the relationship between program and college was tense.

In 1969, the Queens College SEEK population was almost exclusively Black and Puerto Rican, but its teaching and administrative staff were almost entirely white. Informed by political ideologies of leaders like Malcolm X and organizations such as the Black Panthers and Young Lords, these students banded together to fight for autonomy over the curriculum and personnel of the SEEK program.<sup>2</sup>

Historical records show that SEEK Students, Faculty and Staff fought for what they called, "self-determination", demanding the right to have a say in how the program was managed and how students were educated.

The SEEK activists won several of their demands, starting with the appointment of the first African American director. With increased autonomy, SEEK's personnel and curriculum diversified, and Queens College SEEK became a truly innovative and representative educational program.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://academicarchivist.wordpress.com/2019/06/17/campus-unrest-at-50-commemorating-the-legacy-of-dissent-at-queens-college/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://academicarchivist.wordpress.com/2019/06/17/campus-unrest-at-50-commemorating-the-legacy-of-dissent-at-queens-college/>

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Hired to teach and work in the program were recent graduates from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's), African and Puerto Rican nationalists, progressive Jews, and Caribbean pedagogues. They were young assertive creatives, who infused their devotion to social activism, ethnic pride, and global awareness in the program. Under their influence SEEK's activism increased as the program demanded more institutional commitment.

The most outstanding requests included:

- **Adequate space.** In the 70's over 2,000 students were housed in two temporary structures on campus. During warmer months some faculty held classes on sidewalks. They remained in these structures for 25 years.
- **Daycare service.** As a great number of students, at the time, were parents. SEEK Counselors started the Day Care Service that become the first service of its kind in CUNY and the second in the nation.
- **A diversified curriculum.** One that included the histories and stories of people of color, in particular for social sciences and English course work.
- **The development of holistic structures.** Supportive guidance that would allow students to receive dedicated college advisement which included personal counseling. Academic support with imbedded, untimed and dedicated teams of tutors who were peers and staff, who could relate to and understood students' backgrounds and needs.

The arc of institutional support bent slowly towards commitment. In 1991 Queens College assigned the SEEK Program its own physical space in the then "D Building". A commemoration ceremony and renaming of the three-story structure, to The Lloyd

## **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

Delany Hall, named after the first SEEK Director of color, took place in 1992. Currently the program only has 80% of the building space dedicated to SEEK Faculty, counseling and staff offices, three classrooms, a computer laboratory and student centers for tutoring, STEM and writing support. Thanks to the networks of those original faculty members, today, Delany Hall also boasts on the walls of its hallways, carefully curated artwork reflecting the cultural heritage of its students and donated by ethnically diverse artists.

Currently, for much of their first three-semesters at Queens College SEEK Students are taught in dedicated SEEK Sections by faculty attached to Queens College Departments. In these sections students benefit from smaller classes and the additional academic support of a Supplemental Instructor. More than 85% of SEEK Tutors are high academic achievers who are also SEEK Students and serve as role models for their peers.

The program currently has eight (8) dedicated full-time counselors who serve in dual roles. They provide academic advising to all SEEK Students from admission to graduation along with personal counseling and support. QC SEEK Counselors all have mental health counseling backgrounds. A critical course in SEEK Students' first semester is Student Life Workshop (SLW) - a 1 credit course taught by SEEK Counselors. The goals of the course are to assist students to navigate college life successfully, recognize new academic expectations and understand college policies. As part of the counseling unit, SEEK Students also have the support of two Mental Health Wellness Interns thanks to a partnership with the Queens College Mental Health Graduate Program.

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This holistic approach ensures that students not only transition successfully from high school to college but also maintain a supportive structure while students pursue their degrees. Thanks to the visionary examples of the SEEK Program, today several Queens College initiatives have been modeled after the successes of the SEEK Program; one extra contact hour for English 110, calculus and pre-calculus courses, learning communities, block scheduling, FYI (Freshman Year Initiative, now FYE), Queens101 - a college transition course for transfers, priority registration for special groups, the Daycare Center, experiential and service learning. All of these continue to greatly benefit the entire Queens College student population.

### **Program Relevance:**

The Queens College SEEK Program is as necessary today as it was fifty-four (54) years ago; it continues to provide both access and opportunity to students who would otherwise could not afford, or be admitted to college.

In 2016 a report by Jill Barshay published in *The Hechinger Report*, shed light on a study carried out by four economists, who compared 10,000 SEEK Students graduates of CUNY from three generations, 1980's, 1990's and 2000's, with two other groups of students of similar generations.

(A) Low-income students who with better grades and stronger applications were accepted into the general population and received some form of financial aid,

(B) Students who were denied admission to four-year colleges because of weak academic grades but their families income exceeded financial thresholds and thus did not qualify them for the program.

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Of the three groups, “Years later, the low-income SEEK Students earned \$4,000 more a year on average than the students from affluent families. The economists believe that this earning differential will probably persist for their entire working lives, adding up to \$120,000 over 30 years.”<sup>4</sup>

This study supports the belief that the SEEK Program continues to serve as a social elevator by turning low-income, first generation college students, and first generation Americans, into middle-class earners. After fifty-plus years of existence SEEK continues to make good on its promise of access and opportunity. As stated by Barshay in her 2018 article, “Today, CUNY invests more resources in newer sometimes more expensive programs to help struggling low-income students. However, this research shows that old ideas still work”<sup>5</sup>

SEEK also continues to significantly enhance the level of ethnic and cultural diversity at Queens College. The SEEK student population today reflects this diversity; African Americans (9.4%), Asians (44.6%) and Hispanics (36.1%). SEEK English and Social Sciences faculty are intentional about adopting texts that reflect students’ identities and realities.

Queens College recognizes that while its student body is quite diverse, with nearly 70% of undergraduate students of color, the QC faculty is among the least diverse within CUNY. However, the SEEK Program continues to hire an ethnically diverse representation of counselors, adjunct faculty, supplemental instructors, consultants, and tutors who are representative of its diverse student population. In

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<sup>4</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/one-college-system-pushes-many-graduates-middle-class-beyond/>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

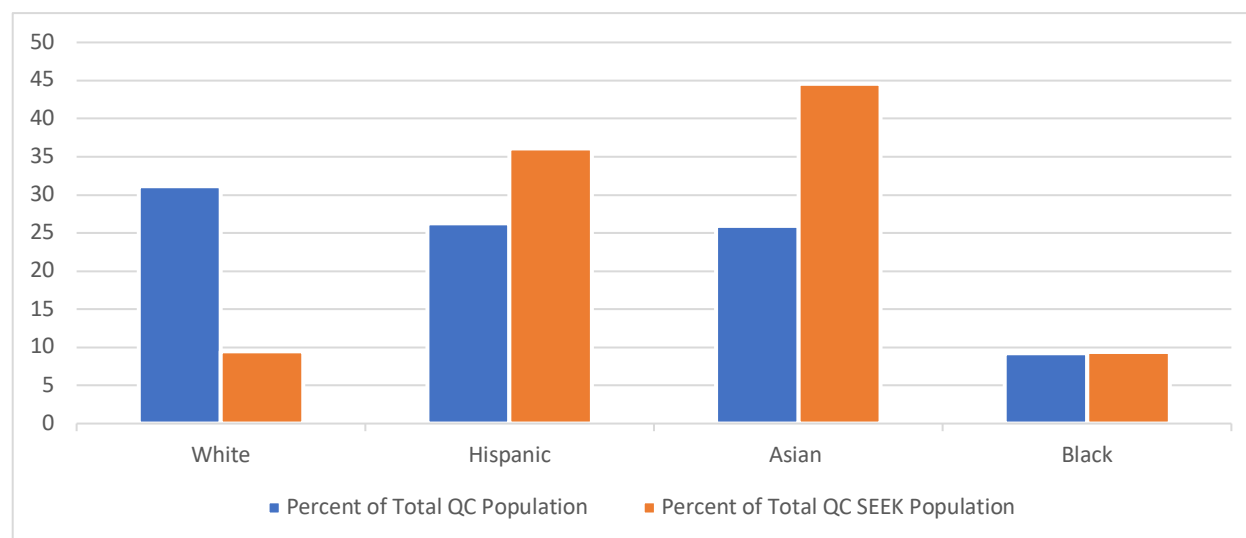


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addition, SEEK understands that intentional fostering of representation can leverage the power of possibilities for students who need to visualize themselves as future professionals and leaders. Our diverse staff serve as role models to students admitted to the program. We believe that opportunity and access are the stepping stones of equity, but they must be partnered with representation in order for long-term social change to take place.

### I. Ethnicity of QC Student and QC SEEK Student Population (Fall 2018<sup>6</sup>)

Ethnicity	Percent of Total Queens College Student Population	Percent of Total QC SEEK Population
White	31.1	9.5
Hispanic	26.3	36.1
Asian	25.9	44.6
Black	9.2	9.4

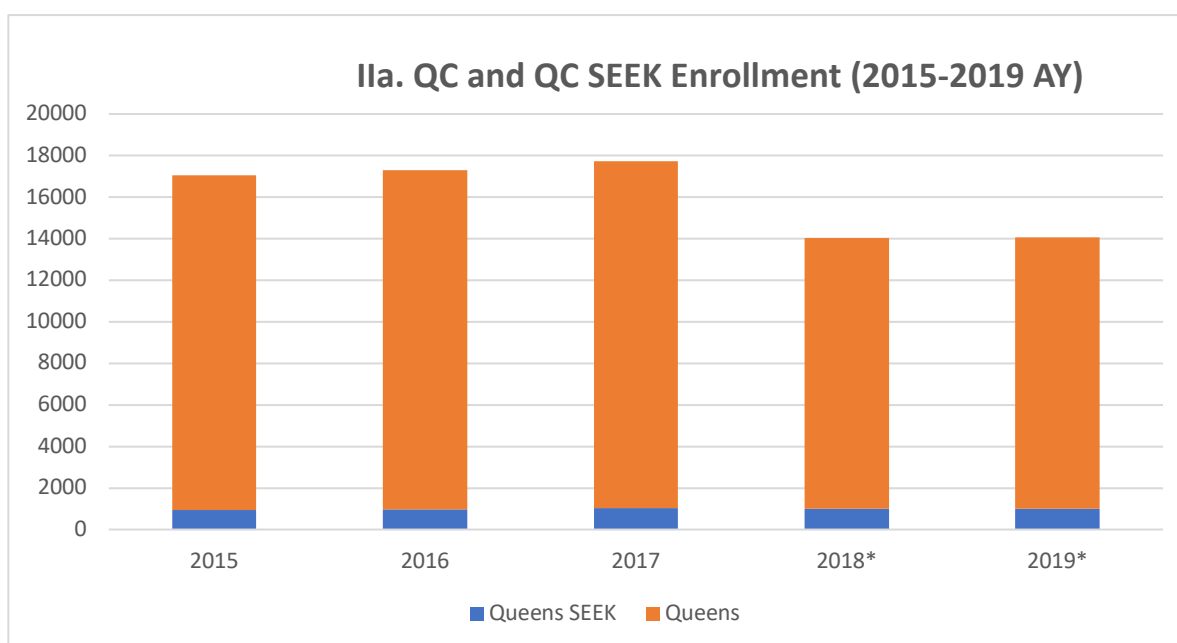


<sup>6</sup> [http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2\\_AY\\_current/ENRL\\_0040\\_SPRG\\_RACE\\_GEN\\_TOT\\_PCT.rpt.pdf](http://www.cuny.edu/irdatabook/rpts2_AY_current/ENRL_0040_SPRG_RACE_GEN_TOT_PCT.rpt.pdf)

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### II. QC and QC SEEK Enrollment (2015-2019 AY)<sup>7,8</sup>

	2015	2016	2017	2018 <sup>9</sup>	2019 <sup>10</sup>
<b>Queens SEEK Students</b>	942 (17%) <sup>11</sup>	956 (17.1%)	1,045 (16%)	1,016 (12.8%)	1,007 (13%)
<b>Queens College General Education</b>	16,100	16,325	16,680	13,019	13,051



<sup>7</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/institutionprofile.aspx?unitId=acb4abb1b1af>

<sup>8</sup>

<https://www.qc.cuny.edu/about/administration/president/Documents/2018%20State%20of%20the%20College%20Data.pdf>

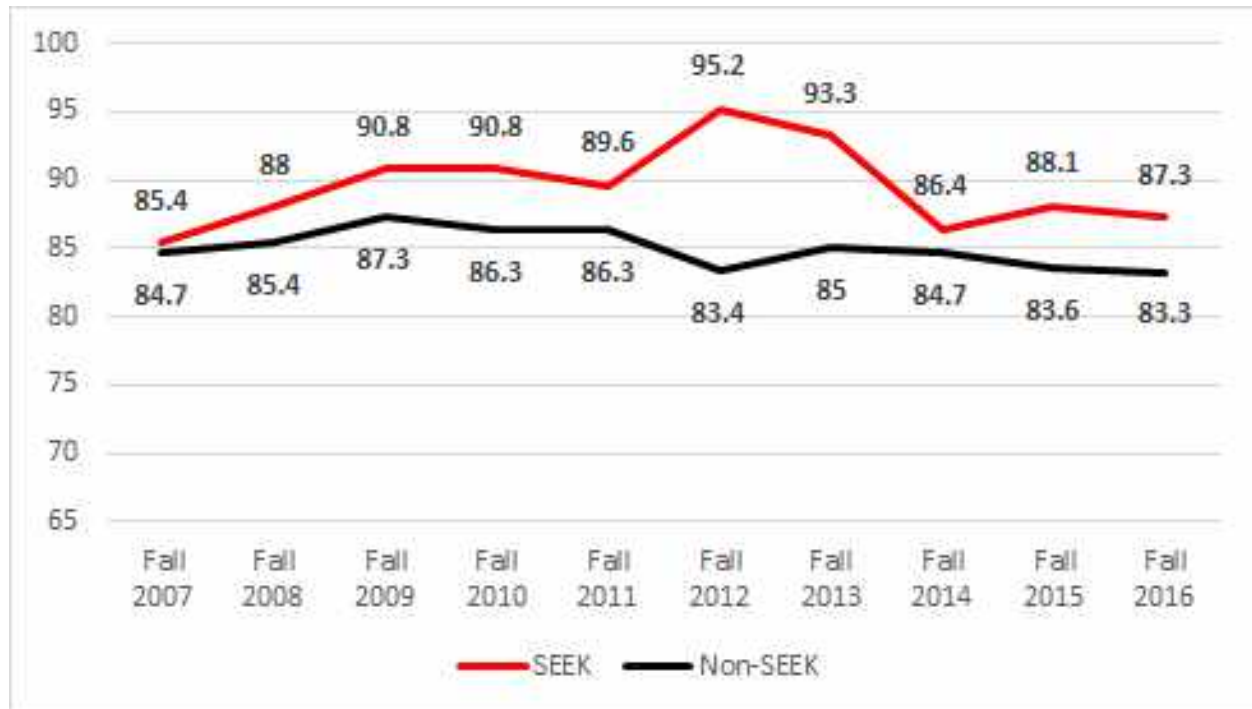
<sup>9</sup> According to email received from VP for Enrollment and Retention Richard Alvarez dated, Monday August 5, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Accounts for seventeen percent (17%) of total Queens College population.

## The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program

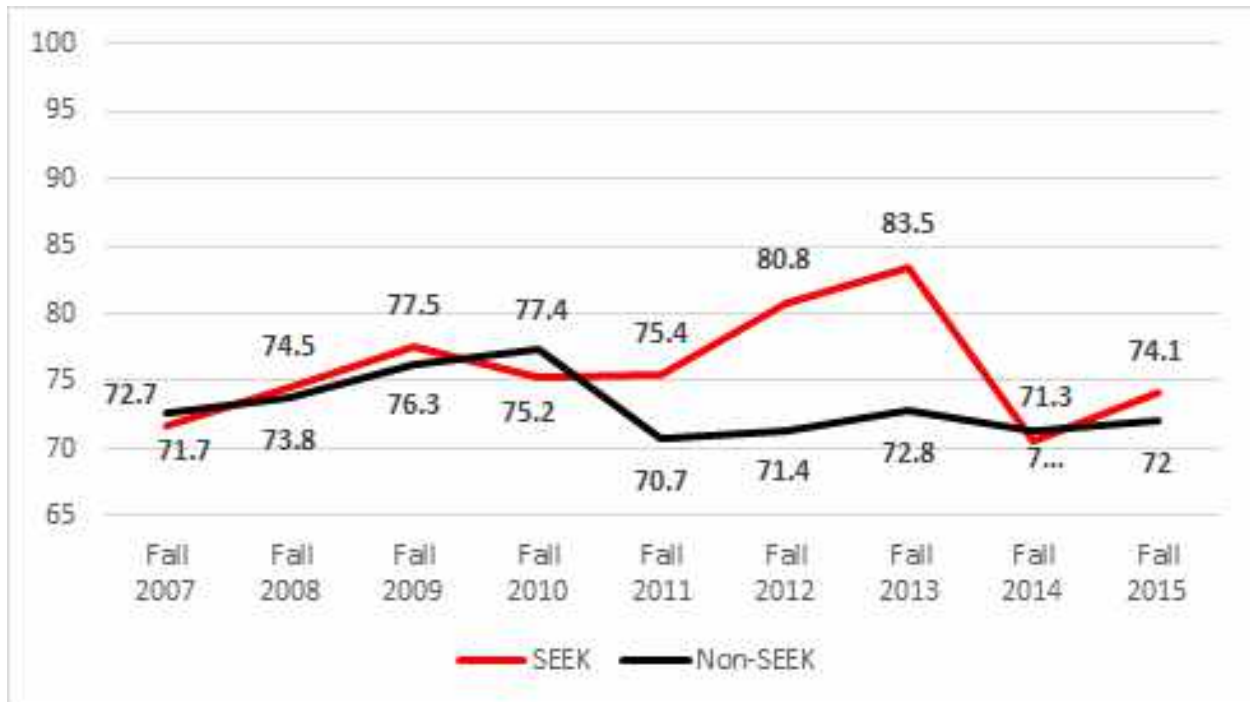
### III. SEEK vs Non-SEEK First-Time Full-Time Freshmen First Year Still Enrolled Retention Rates



Note: SEEK Retention Rates are 4% higher than QC Retention Rates – 87.3% to 84.3% using Fall 2016 data.

## The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program

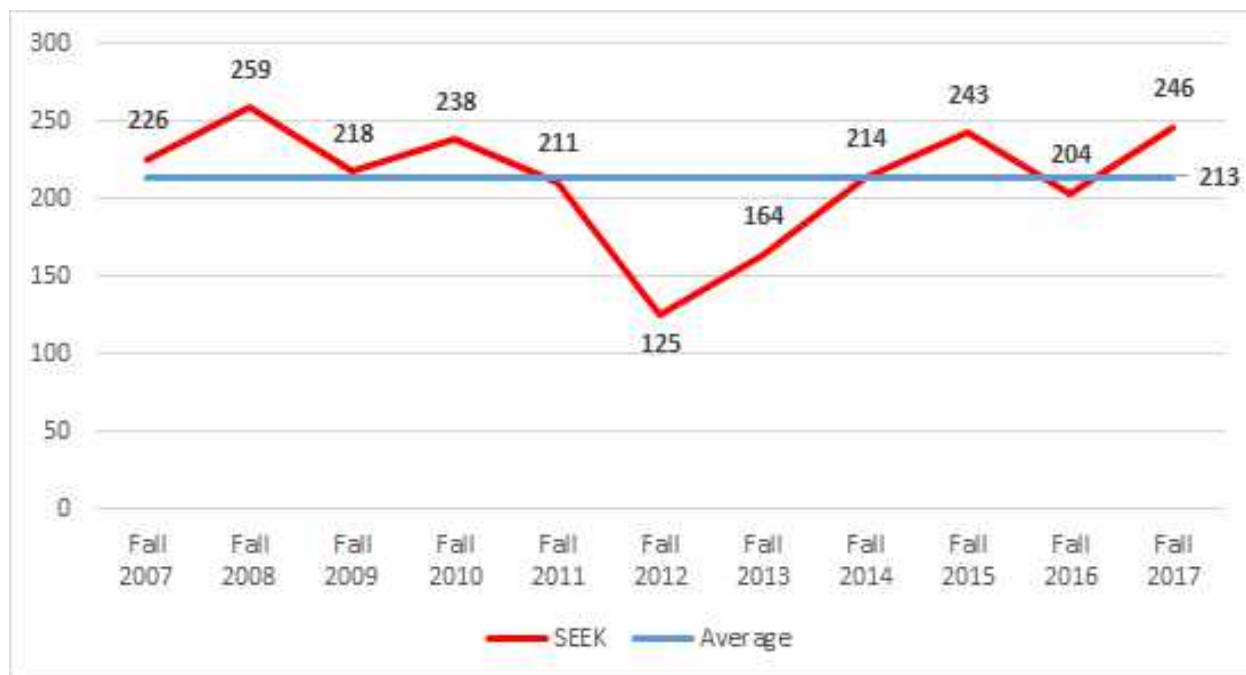
### IV. SEEK vs Non-SEEK First-Time Full-Time Freshmen Second Year Still Enrolled or Graduated Retention Rates



Note: As of Fall 2015, SEEK students still enrolled after the second year is 2.1% higher than the Non-SEEK student population.

## The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program

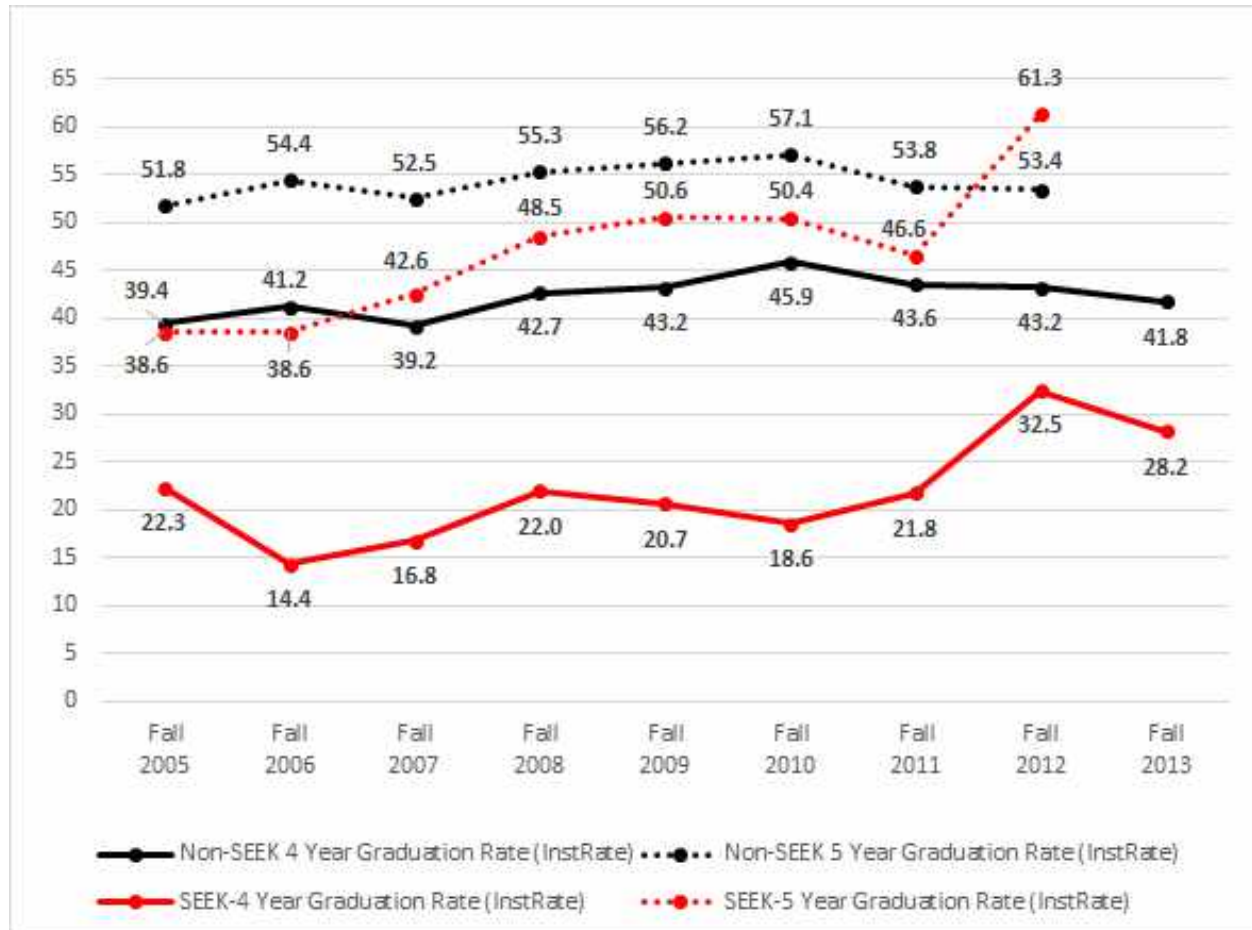
### V. SEEK Full-Time First-Time Freshmen Enrollment Fall Semester Trends



Note: Between 2007 and 2018, QC SEEK admitted an average of 213 students every year; a total of 2,561 students were provided access to higher education.

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### VI. Four-Year and Five-Year Graduation Rate Trends of SEEK and Non-SEEK Freshmen Entrants

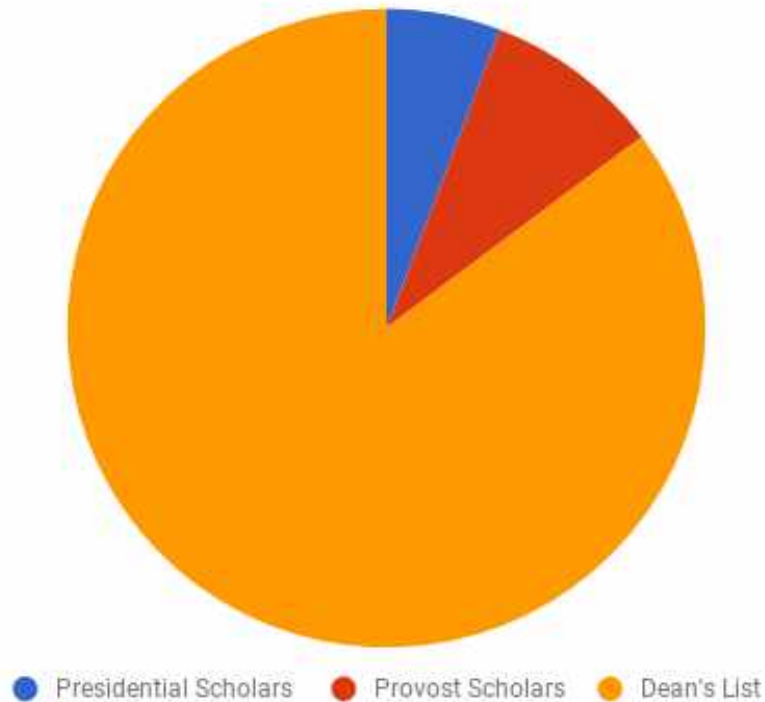


Note: As of Fall 2012, SEEK's five-year graduation rate (61.3%) was 7.9% higher than that of QC 5-year graduation rate (53.4%).

The SEEK Program's graduation rates have risen steadily as displayed in a 15% increase from the Fall 2011 to the Fall 2012 cohort alone. SEEK's five-year graduation rates have risen for the last 8 cohorts. This increase is projected to continue as a result of SEEK Counseling and the QC-in-4 initiative for academic momentum.

## The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program

### VII. Grade Point Averages of High Academic Performers<sup>12</sup>



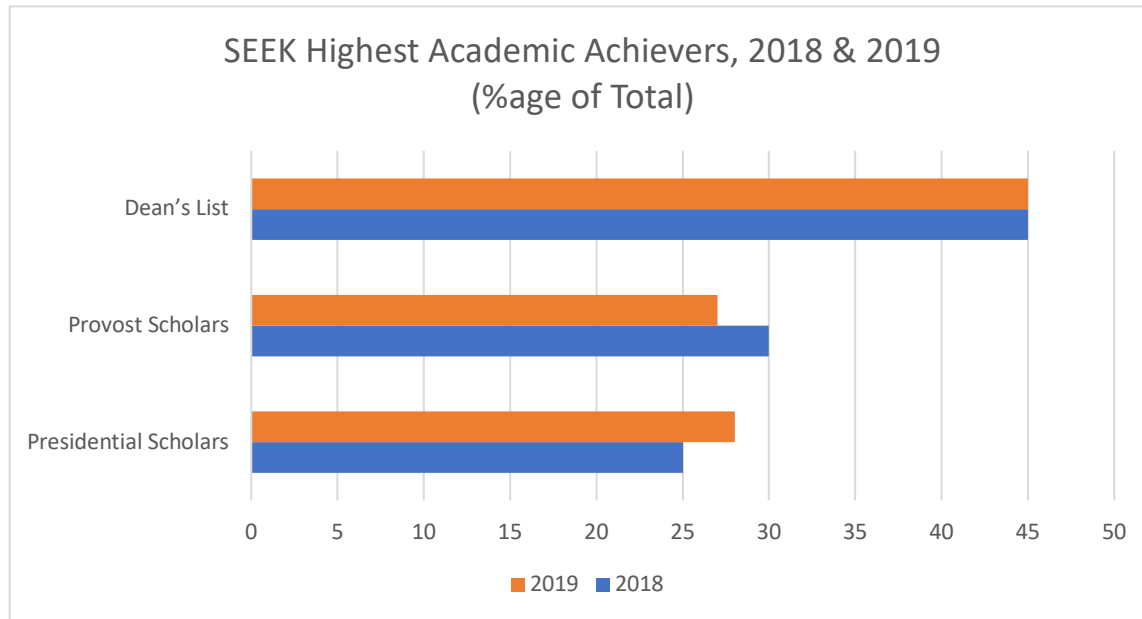
**Note:** This is an important trend to watch for retention and progression.

In Fall 2017, 45% of SEEK Students earned GPA's of 3.5 and above. Of these 345 students, 6%, achieved GPA's of 3.9 - 4.0 (Presidential Scholars), 9 % achieved GPA's of 3.75 - 3.89 (Provost Scholars), and 85.2% achieved GPA's of 3.5 -3.70 (Dean's List). This is noteworthy because reflects that more than 45% of SEEK sophomores, juniors and seniors are high academic performers.

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<sup>12</sup> This is the data of GPA distributions of SEEK Students who meet the Queens College requirements for academic honors. This trend allows the program to review the academic gains of students who are excelling academically.

## The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program



According to EAB data, as of Fall 2018 there were 202 SEEK Students with GPAs higher than 3.0; out of 431 - excluding 261 freshmen. Of these 202 students with GPAs higher than 3.0, almost 9% achieved GPA's of 3.9 - 4.0 (Presidential Scholars), 11% achieved GPA's of 3.75 - 3.89 (Provost Scholars), and slightly more than 16% achieved GPA's of 3.5 - 3.70 (Dean's List). This also reflects that almost 47% of SEEK sophomores, juniors and seniors have GPAs higher than 3.0.

As of Fall 2019, according to EAB, there were 329 students with GPAs higher than 3.0, out of 656 - excluding 312 freshmen. Of these 329 with GPAs higher than 3.0, 13% achieved GPA's of 3.9 - 4.0 (Presidential Scholars), 13 % achieved GPA's of 3.75 - 3.89 (Provost Scholars), and 21% achieved GPA's of 3.5 - 3.70 (Dean's List). This is significant because it also reflects that slightly more than half, or 50.1% of SEEK sophomores, juniors and seniors have GPAs higher than 3.0.



## The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program

### VIII. Most Recent Data: QC General Population with QC SEEK Population

	<b>QC General Population<sup>13</sup></b>	<b>QC SEEK Population<sup>14</sup></b>
<b>Persistence/Retention</b>	82% (Fall 2018 Cohort)	84% (Fall 2018 Cohort)
<b>GPA 3.0 or better</b>	55%	55%
<b>GPA 2.01 to 2.99</b>	33%	31%
<b>GPA below 2.00</b>	12%	14%
<b>Graduate and Professional School Enrollment (Within 1 year of Graduation)<sup>15</sup></b>	26% (2017 Graduates)	16% (2017 Graduates)

*The most recent data from the Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, Dr. Littman, points to the following: persistence / retention rates of the SEEK, Fall 2018 cohort, when compared to QC General Population is two (2) percent higher.*

### **Expansion and Funding of Support Services**

Within the last four years, the program's leadership recognized that many students often graduated without having completed internships or developed personal networks and significant connections on the campus. As a result, they often lacked the confidence to compete optimally in the workplace. SEEK has developed initiatives that provide students with resources and information to enhance career prep, develop personal networks and leadership skills, such as:

- Student Enrichment Workshops (SEW)

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<sup>13</sup> According to data obtained from Tableau.com received from Dr. Cheryl Littman, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness at Queens College, City University of New York, on January 14, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> According to email received, Subsequent Enrollment within 1 Year of Graduation from Dr. Cheryl Littman, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness at Queens College, City University of New York, on January 14, 2020.

## **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

- Student Leadership Groups (Gen Student Leaders, Peer Mentors, Social Justice Collaborative, SEEK Young Men's Alliance, SEEK Young Women's Alliance, and Service Learning Team Leaders)
- SEEK Champions Days (cohort days) lead entirely by SEEK Student leaders
- Career advice & Internships Consultation
- SEEK Alumni Mentoring
- Financial Literacy workshops
- Partnerships for training, resources and internship opportunities with CUNY Service Corps, NY Men Teach, Teachers Corps, CERRU, BMI Project Excel, and others.

The program's goal is that every SEEK student should complete an internship and form part of a student leadership experience at CUNY, on campus, or within the program before their senior year.

In order to continue to further develop these initiatives, and fully aware of the impending financial constraints, we have submitted proposals for funding to The US Department of Education (Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions (DHSI) & Student Support Services (SSS) – awaiting reply August 2020), as well as Santander, Petrie and Steelworks Foundations.

### **SEEK's Involvement on Campus**

The expansion of our support services to include student leadership development resulted in a historical feat; SEEK Students have been elected as presidents of the Queens College Student Government Association for three consecutive years.

Carmine Couloute (2018-2019)  
Joseph Cobourne (2019 -2020)

## **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

Zaire Couloute (2020 - )

In addition, today, SEEK Students are active participants in both the program and on the campus. They see themselves, with pride, as dual citizens of both.

SEEK Faculty and Staff are also actively serving on campus in numerous departmental advisories, committees and hiring searches. These include, but are not limited to:

- Division of Enrollment & Student Retention
- QC Navigate (EAB) Leadership, Communication and Data Committees (The SEEK Program was an original pilot for EAB at QC)
- SALT (Students Affairs Leadership Team)
- Queens College Athletics
- Title IX
- The Undergraduate Scholastic Standards Committee (USSC)
- Diversity Affairs Committee with School of Social Sciences, School of Education & CERRU
- Rosenthal Library Academic Advisory
- English Department Advisory
- Urban Studies Department Advisory
- Political Science Department Advisory
- History Department Advisory
- Math Department Advisory
- Sociology Department Advisory

### **COVID-19 and SEEK's Response:**

On March 11<sup>th</sup> Governor Andrew Cuomo, announced distance learning as of March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, for all state Higher Education institutions, including CUNY. On that same day, SEEK Faculty & Staff met to discuss plans and strategies. Staff members who were absent were contacted via email with plans and resource links. On March 16<sup>th</sup> all administrative and counseling areas of the SEEK program began working remotely. Uncertain of what was ahead, we wanted to ensure that our students did not miss access to the program's services. Since then, the COVID-19 Pandemic has presented significant challenges. Some specific challenges include:

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- **Adapting to distance learning** has been particularly difficult for our student population who often express feeling overwhelmed with virtual coursework and requirements
- **Access to technology** was an issue for some but thanks to loan of devices from the College, this has been quickly addressed.
- **Connectivity** is a continuous problem as many students report having little bandwidth and some even report having no access to the Internet.
- **Living in home environments that are not conducive to successful distance learning**; overcrowded, siblings needing assistance with schoolwork, caretaking and family duties are frequent disruptors of online learning
- **Financial and Environmental challenges** are experienced by most. This includes unemployment and loss of income of parents or providers, contracting of the virus, caretaking of family members who have contracted the virus, death and illness of family members living under the same roof.

In the Proof of Continuity of Service document requested by the CUNY Office of Special Programs (OSP) and submitted on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, Queens College SEEK reported the following:

*Students are currently being advised via virtual and distance mediums. Between March 13<sup>th</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup>, our Counseling Unit of 8 Full-time Counselors, registered 1,484 contacts with students. This is an average of 185.50 contacts per counselor or 23 students per day per counselor, in 12 days. Tutoring, Writing Center, STEM Consultations and Supplemental Instruction are provided via Google Classrooms, Zoom and Blackboard. A total of 673 students were serviced between March 13<sup>th</sup>, to March 30<sup>th</sup> by tutors and supplemental instructors for an average of 16 QC SEEK Students serviced daily.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Proof of Continuity of Service Report to CUNY OSP, submitted by Norka Blackman-Richards on 4/2/2020

## **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

Since March 16<sup>th</sup> the program has expanded its support of students to include:

- Advocacy against the displacement of SEEK Students, in particular those who are foster care youth, living in The Summit (QC's Residence Hall) to unsafe or unstable home environments.
- Emotional support and advocacy, where possible, for Asian American students who reported incidents of harassment, attacks or cyberbullying.
- Hosting two (2) Town Hall Meetings (March and April) Combined attendance of one hundred and thirty-eight (138) students. A third Town Hall, requested by students themselves, will take place after finals week.
- Hosting two (2) weekly support groups run by faculty and counselors One for grief and loss and the other to assist students with managing distance learning. Groups will run until the end of May.
- Sending weekly mass emails (via Hobsons) with lists of local and state resources (housing, meals, employment, funeral assistance, testing centers etc.) to all SEEK Students.
- Through the volunteering of one of our English instructors (Professor Perlie Singh) and a partnership with The Center for Ethnic Religious and Racial Understanding (CERRU) hot meals are delivered twice a week to homes of twenty-three (23) students who are home bound due to COVID-19 related issues
- Developing a watchlist on QC Navigate with the growing number of students reporting COVID-19 related issues (deaths, virus contraction, and unemployment by main provider, often times a combination of all three). Students instructors are also contacted with student's consent. Reports of COVID-19 issues continue to increase.

Concerned with this existential threat, students in significant numbers continue to call, email and text, daily. While many express gratitude for the program's support, they are justifiably troubled and burdened by the challenges of this health crisis. To meet these new demands, SEEK has had to effectively transform its support services to provide crisis management. However, all areas of the program have risen to respond to students' outreach and needs, with compassion and empathy.

### **Conclusion**

## **The Queens College Percy E Sutton SEEK Program**

The Queens College SEEK Program continues its commitment to provide access and opportunity to students who otherwise would not have been able to afford a quality higher education. Our faculty, counselors and staff remain dedicated to providing knowledge and resources that will ensure that SEEK Students persist, remain in good academic standing, graduate on time, are prepared to enter professional studies or the labor market and become leaders in their communities and the nation. We do this by providing students with a holistic college experience. The wraparound care and services offered by Queens College SEEK are indeed noteworthy. The 2017 Middle States Commission of Higher Education's, statement on the Queens College SEEK Program sums it best:

The campus should expand the very successful model used by the SEEK Program to help students succeed and insure that every student at Queens College receives the necessary support to succeed that is afforded to those [students]....<sup>17</sup>

The Queens College Percy E. Sutton SEEK Program remains committed to the 54-year legacy with which we have been entrusted.

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<sup>17</sup> Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Team Report, Queens College - CUNY, Dates of Evaluation April 2-5, 2017, page 16)