



CUNY SEEK Directors' Black Lives Matter Statement for Systemic Change

Often unrecognized in CUNY's narrative, but historically sustained, real diversification did not co until the establishment of the College Discovery/SEEK Programs.

inal moment in American History was the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Civil Rights was the most sweeping Civil Rights legislation since Reconstruction because it outlawed segregation in businesses including theatres, hotels and restaurants.¹ It also banned discriminatory practices and ended segregation in public places, however de facto segregation continued, in places such as: swimming pools, libraries and public schools. The Higher Education Act of 1965, signed on November 8, 1965, strengthened the educational resources available for colleges and universities, also providing financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education (Pub. L.

1999).^{2,3} The passage of HEA of 1965 offered administrators new tools to foster diversity and the impetus for post-secondary institutions to recruit minorities.

Percy E. Sutton Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) Program stands on the shoulders of political and progressive giants, such as Percy E Sutton, Shirley Chisholm, Basil Patterson, Luis G. Ferrer and Charles Rangel who seized the historical provision and confronted, Anthony Travia one night in a hotel room. Without mincing words they reminded Travia that he needed “Black votes” to remain in office.⁴ They advocated for college opportunities to be created for the historically disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

The SEEK Program was specifically geared towards Black and Puerto Rican youth, who graduated from New York City high schools that had not adequately prepared them for the rigors of a post-secondary education.

For the first time in its history, CUNY began actively recruiting Black and Latino, mostly Puerto Rican students in the mid-1960s, 1963-1966, via their two pilot programs, CD and SEEK. The HEA of 1965 provided federal dollars to post-secondary education led to the largest increases in minority student enrollment at CUNY taking place between 1967 and 1971, minority enrollment increased threefold in those years. The inception of the CD/SEEK Programs became the conscience of CUNY. However, recent data from CUNY’s Office of Special Programs shows that there has been a shift.

A demographic shift has prompted an enlargement of the gap between Black and Puerto Rican (Latino) students who are admitted in the SEEK Program. Besides, failing to meet the target population for the program was intended, the numbers of Black students, in particular Black males, are today abysmal.

July 19, 1965, the Johnson Administration’s proposals to increase and improve resources at higher education institutions and provide financial aid to students in postsecondary education were introduced in the House as bills, H.R. 3220 and H.R. 3221 and in the Senate as S.600. Later, proposing training programs were introduced in the Senate as bill S.2302 on July 19, 1965.

www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/trio_clearinghouse-The_Early_History_of_the_HEA_of_1965.pdf

4. Allen B. *The Education of Black Folk: The Afro-American Struggle for Knowledge in White America*. Harper & Row: 2004, 65–67, 68.

SEEK Programs. Unless we are intentional in redressing the structural inequities that keep the opportunity closed to them, in a few years this gap will become out of reach.

SEEK Directors, we count it a privilege to be charged with the protection of CUNY's most precious investment. Our aim is to thus, protect, preserve and elevate the 1966 NYS legislative man

and with CUNY, its faculty, staff, students and the global community in our condemnation of various acts of racial injustice against Black and Brown people in our country. Most notably, in the global COVID-19 pandemic, the disparities in healthcare, food insecurity, homelessness in Black communities, have been highlighted. However, COVID-19 only further exposed what SEEK alliances through its students.

Responses to the recent horrific deaths, most notably of Mr. Ahmaud Arbery, Ms. Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and the ongoing senseless death and brutalizing of Black bodies that only further highlight systematic oppression Black and Brown communities have endured for centuries. SEEK students have gone through similar abuses not only in society but also in academia.

The Percy E. Sutton SEEK program is the premier Opportunity Program in the nation, from its inception to the rise of racist and biased notions it has been incorrectly characterized. SEEK Students are stereotyped, misunderstood, and their place in academia and their intellect perennially questioned. In the early 2000's on the first day of class faculty asked students to raise their hands to indicate if they were SEEK students and their College ID cards had SEEK as an identifier. Clearly separating the lines of deservability and achievement. As recent as last year, a SEEK student was asked to stand in class to justify her grade, and classmates were asked if they believed a SEEK student deserved that grade. These experiences are deeply seared in the minds of our students and alumni. Implicit and explicit bias continues to tailor the teaching and servicing of SEEK students on college campuses across CUNY.

time, we have also seen how the essence and philosophy of SEEK has been co-opted by aims. While we welcome the enlargement of access to college for more youth in the City of New York, over the years we have observed how the SEEK Program has been left behind in an apparent attempt to, many feel, “phase out” or diminish the program. We understand this distancing not as a funding issue that will clearly impact the lives of the most historically diverse population of students in CUNY, but as equally as an issue of social justice, equity and racism. SEEK remains the program within CUNY that continues to recruit, and hire Black and Brown staff in service of Black and Brown students.

We are also mindful that there has been probing about salaries for full-time SEEK Professionals, calling into question the value or worth of the work of Black and Brown professionals. Around 85% of full-time SEEK Professionals are people of color, who merit their salaries based on credentials and experience. We also care about creating work opportunities for our students. We provide our part-timers who are, in some cases, about 90% SEEK Students, with the opportunity to gain valuable workplace experience. We understand that the level of commitment and work that is required to serve our student populations, is different from the work of peers with the same rank, working in comparable areas and departments across CUNY. For example: A SEEK Counselor, not only provides dedicated college advisement to students but also provides academic advising, social work services, and instruction. This entails connecting to other agencies, on an as-needed basis, providing guidance, referrals, emotional and social support to assist students in navigating the complexities of higher education and their personal lives. There are few agencies within CUNY that have the level of professional commitment and multiskilled talent that is required to service students in SEEK. It is not a few talented individuals. Thus, the burden of invisible labor in SEEK is real; yet, often overlooked and unquantified, and to question it is part of a racist mindset.

SEEK Programs at many campuses have endured decades of fighting against isolation, dislocation, administrative underfunding, and professional undermining with large silence from CUNY. This is worrisome for the collective of professionals we have experienced anti-blackness directly, and indirectly through our students. We find ourselves at a crossroads and in a position of needing commitment, respect,

dition from CUNY. Our history, our ancestors who procured this opportunity for Black and Latinx students in the state of New York, and the current climate, require it.

In this era of renewed awakening, we are compelled to acknowledge that Black Lives Matter; because Black lives have always mattered and they have always been here. The vision for the SEEK Program needs to be secured and the commitment to its intended purpose and ideals need to be secured. This generation demands it. History supports it. Our students deserve it.

Chancellor Matos' words resonate with us, *As the leader of a University driven by the ideals of inclusion, I believe that institutions of higher education can be engines of change. Through our teaching, research, and our advocacy, we can drive reforms and change as we continue to foster social justice in the culture at large. In the end, it comes down to human dignity and respect.*⁵

CUNY Diversity Mission Statement further aligns with the Chancellor, *The University respects individual differences, acknowledging the differences among them. These differences include, but are not limited to, racial origin, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and economic status. However, to create a vibrant academic, intellectual, and cultural environment for the University must move beyond representation to genuine participation. Thus, the University seeks to develop a community that is inclusive of all individuals and groups*⁶ (Appendix III, 1, CUNY Diversity Mission Statement).

The University is not only accountable to the state of New York, but also to this nation, for the commitment to social justice that will address social inequities towards underrepresented groups.

⁵ <https://www.blackengineer.com/news/cuny-chancellor-institutions-of-higher-education-can-be-engines-of-change/>
⁶ *Building on A Strong Foundation: A Strategy for Enhancing CUNY's Leadership in the Areas of Faculty Diversity and Inclusion*
<https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/hr/recruitment-diversity/includes/page-diversity-action-plan.pdf>

...exempt, taxpayer-supported institutions, U.S. public colleges and universities should advance the goal by ensuring all Americans — regardless of race — have a legitimate opportunity to get a postsecondary education....Part of achieving this goal requires that our nation's public colleges and universities reflect a representative image of the public they were designed to educate. The undergraduates served and graduated by our public institutions should mirror the racial and ethnic mix of the state ⁷ (Broken Mirrors: Black Representation at Public Colleges and Universities, 6).

Question is: How committed is CUNY to respecting diversity, fostering inclusion, uplifting and developing those communities that are not widely visible in CUNY but who put in the work to get "a seat at the table" for students who might otherwise be left behind? CUNY will then need to begin to create structures to address real systemic change and set the tone for respect and equity at all levels.

Our aim is to renew our partnership with CUNY in the achievement of this necessary ideal, while recognizing that some of our programs across campuses have utilized many of these best practices, thus we propose the following as a uniformed approach that would align with this commitment towards systemic change.

Commitment & Admissions:

- As demographics have changed and the social landscape has shifted, the pool of Black and Puerto Rican students has dwindled on several campuses. In addition, the local economic crisis in this nation stands to drastically change the demographics of opportunity programs. To be true to the intent of our founders, of uplifting the population of Black and Brown students, who remain disenfranchised and disadvantaged in the State of New York, at least 15% of SEEK seats need to be secured for admittance, of Black and Puerto Rican (LatinX) students to the program through each entering FTF SEEK Cohort. This minimum admittance of either group needs to be determined by the group less represented.

College campus. Thus, if LatinX is highly represented then Blacks need to be the minimum, and vice versa. If both groups are underrepresented then College admission should contemplate a minimum 15% for each group. Colleges should be provided leeway to utilize the following to comply with this minimum: (1) Applying the Guidelines 15% rule (See Addendum)

(2) Looking from within the pool of entering FTF who apply for college and qualify for and TAP, are First Generation (college and/or American) and have grades that are comparable or higher than college requirements. Expected Delivery: Fall 2021

- Intentional incorporation of SEEK informational materials in college recruitment packaging. This should include training of CUNY and campus admission recruiters on how to explain and “sell” SEEK with language that is devoid of biased undertones.

Expected _____ Delivery: _____ Fall

- Intentional development of CUNY Pipelines for SEEK, starting with junior year of NYC High school. Allowing for low income students to be given the promise of admission to CUNY through the SEEK Program. Potential SEEK students should have the opportunity to then utilize early decision on the admission process and select to participate in the Program at that time. Expected Delivery: Fall 2021

ramming:

- The promise of SEEK is not only to educate students but to elevate them. Thus, CUNY support of the Office of Special Programs' advocacy for thrusts that replicate and provide opportunities for expansion of initiatives that strengthen areas of student elevation is critical to this promise. Initiatives that support financial literacy, internships, mentoring, faculty & alumni mentorship, career preparation, graduate school preparation/application, targeted mental health and wellness, leadership development

etc., need to be recognized and supported by CUNY as integral components of Strategic Plans for SEEK Programs. We can no longer view the support services delivered to first generation Black and Brown students as two-pronged: tutoring & counseling. There is renewed awareness that we need to develop and expand more holistic support approaches in every SEEK Program that will guarantee retention and on-time graduation with an end goal of lifetime professional and personal success. Expected Delivery: Ongoing, starting immediately.

Institutional Commitment:

Recognizing that the SEEK Program Leadership may consist of one of the most diverse staff in senior positions at the University with 54% Blacks, 28% Latinos, 18% White, and 18% Male and 82% Female. In addition, the SEEK Directors have a collective total of 110 years of managerial experience. There is a critical need to value the human capital as important contributions to the University discourse.

- Recognizing that SEEK Programs, with over 50 years of existence have established relationships and partnerships with their campuses, and college administration, a one-size-fits all approach cannot be tailored for SEEK Programs. Instead, college administrations must invite SEEK Directors to their tables, to form part of councils and committees, and involve them as part of the collective of important voices in critical decision-making processes. The recognition and acknowledgement that SEEK Directors represent the most vulnerable population on campus and thus can speak to how the formulation or lack of, environments and policies of care and equity impact these students and others. This needs to be encouraged by CUNY and explicitly recommended to College Presidents. Expected Delivery: Ongoing, starting immediately.

- SEEK needs to be incorporated in both CUNY and Campus Strategic Plans as a long-recognized stakeholder with ongoing and critical contributions to the University, College governance, academic and budgetary projections, curriculum, diversity and inclusion goals, staffing and professional development, recruitment and enrollment and plans for physical spacing. Expected Delivery: Starting immediately.
- Amplifying and supporting lobbying efforts of SEEK by presenting the strengths of SEEK before the NYS Legislature - both Houses - Assembly and Senate. This should also be a required item in the agenda of every College President with a SEEK Program. The State Budget impacts the College budget, thus continued advocacy for SEEK is critical to the budgetary balancing of CUNY. Expected Delivery: Fall 2020
- Institution of the SEEK Directors Council as a recognized body of CUNY. The Council will also serve as one of the advisory boards to the Dean of Special Programs. Member of additional advisory boards will report to their campus SEEK Director to ensure organizational flow and program cohesiveness. Expected Delivery: Fall 2020
- Support the hiring of dedicated Data Analytics staff, who report to the Dean of the College of Special Programs. This team should ideally have an academic and research background that understands opportunity programs in higher education and therefore will work towards bringing to light data and trends that will set the path for continued progress of students and programs and much needed re-evaluations of processes. Expected Delivery: Spring 2021

- CUNY can help provide professional development opportunities for SEEK Directors. In addition, creating a pipeline towards completing executive leadership certifications and doctoral programs that include release time, financial assistance, or scholarships. There is a need for creating opportunities and encouraging research and publications and tuition waivers for SEEK Directors. The University benefits from having leadership and research based experience and knowledge in every rank and at all levels.
Expected Delivery: Spring 2022
- Appoint or recruit an annual committee of SEEK stakeholders, including students, that will convene to focus on discussing, preparing and presenting trends both on campus and CUNY-wide, with opportunities for regional and national presentations. Thereby providing increased exposure to the development of race, diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and assessment throughout CUNY for key stakeholders from all campuses. Action items should be a direct outcome of this initiative. Expected Delivery: Spring 2021
- Ensure that colleges and campuses provide and support a hazardous-free safe physical space, including virtual spaces and technology, for SEEK students, faculty and staff to work, study, and convene. Spaces that will facilitate healing, support, community building and become respite from the injurious effects of racial trauma experienced by communities, on campus and in the classroom. This physical space should include dedicated space within close proximity for students' access to program resources.
Expected Delivery: Fall 2022
- Extend each College's academic commitment to its SEEK Program by establishing dedicated SEEK sections of freshman courses in English & Math, with inclusions of sections of social sciences courses, within General Education Pathway compliance, where students

will broaden their world view and see their history and the contributions of their ancestors incorporated in the curriculum. Students need to be exposed to the experiences and histories of diversity, free of ethnic supremacy. Utilizing textbooks, and selected faculty that support this curriculum. Faculty hires should be carefully selected by department chairs with the inclusion of the SEEK Director in the appointment discussion and approved and paid for by College Administration funds. SEEK students have already been shaped by curriculums, and live in a society that erases them, the college classroom should be the first decolonizing arena to help to break that cycle. Each of these courses should be paired with a dedicated Supplemental Instructor, who is a graduate student, preferably a former SEEK Student, or one who understands the struggles of first generation students and can assist students outside of class with the mechanics of what it takes to succeed in college. SEEK Students in Colleges throughout CUNY who have been part of this program go on to match and surpass their non-SEEK counterparts. These SEEK sections are not to be viewed as self-segregation but as a leveling ground for students to develop skills as they transition into general population classrooms. These are not remedial courses, all students will be expected to do the same work, and meet all course requirements. This model is widely utilized, with CUNY's support, by Macaulay Honors, TIME 2000 and other select programs. With this model SEEK Students will be able to receive additional targeted support in smaller groups and from dedicated faculty. These courses serve as building blocks towards retention, timely graduation and students' success. When seats are available in these SEEK Sections, colleges should procure space for students who may not have qualified for SEEK but who are identified during admissions as needing extra support.

Expected Delivery: Fall 2021

- Through the Office of Institutional Research on each campus, facilitate access to data and periodic research reports for SEEK Programs on every campus. It is critical for SEEK Directors to see trends and patterns that are related to SEEK Students, including trends in retention in relationship to Non-SEEK Students. Semesterly reports on retention, graduation

Gateway courses, GPA's attainment, honors, would provide information to invest in academic performance in prime and high failure courses, and thus address student academic needs. Expected Delivery: Starting immediately

- Considering that the SEEK program services the most vulnerable students in CUNY, SEEK was not exempt from budget cuts as a result of COVID-19. Even though our population was recognized as directly impacted by the health pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis. Our students have suffered great physical and economic losses. While some students applied and received much needed help from the Chancellor's initiatives, there are still many in need of assistance. Priority screening for access to CUNY programs that provide food, rent assistance, Petrie Fund Grant, etc. should be granted to SEEK Students. Expected Delivery: Starting immediately
- SEEK Students often come from homes that are transient, temporary, and even unstable. Housing insecurity is part of the many challenges that SEEK students face. SEEK also has a population of Foster Care and homeless Students in dire need of safe and stable housing. There is currently a Foster Youth College Success Initiative that provides housing support to foster care youth, however there are many other SEEK students who are ineligible and are in need of housing support. There are currently SEEK Students who are experiencing housing insecurity in the midst of this health pandemic and with the winter season coming up. Through the Division of Student Affairs at every campus, discounted rates or dispensation for SEEK students to access campus housing/dormitories should be contemplated at all CUNY Colleges. During the summer, SEEK Students in need of safe and stable housing should not be "evicted" from campus housing. Instead, a year-long work-study program as part of the staff of these housing facilities can be contemplated for these students, until graduation.
Expected Delivery: Fall 2020

aging & Branding:

ary to popular belief by some campus stakeholders, SEEK is not: remedial, an ESL Program, or d towards students with special needs; we must quell this notion now and in the future. Recogn he negative messaging that SEEK students are: less intelligent, dependents of charity, not likely ed - still prevalent on many campuses- must be addressed. Added to the negative assumptions even from CUNY, that SEEK Programs are solely consumers of resources and not producers of ates, that SEEK Staff is overpaid - are all part of a racist narrative that hurts our students, and ams. The undertone of this narrative is that being poor, Black or brown means inferiority of skill gence and thus anyone connected to this is less than, lazy, or part of a perennially underperform class.

- Cultural competence needs to be established as a mandate for CUNY employees of ranks and at all levels in CUNY. Cultural competence that not only addresses differences in gender and culture but also in socioeconomic status.
Expected Delivery: Fall 2021
- Provision of opportunities and space for SEEK Programs to take ownership and accurately share their program history, mission, goals, and achievements through p online or other means. Colleges need to publicly acknowledge SEEK, when SEEK Students excel on campus. SEEK Students are members of two campus communities: they are students of the College and they are part of the SEEK Program, both entities are equally responsible for students' success. This public acknowledgement would elevate the work of the program, instil pride, build community, provide representation for our students and help to dismantle racist, and biased notions about our students: the program. Expected Delivery: Immediate

g Practices:

In this shifting landscape, intentional efforts to adhere to the historical identity and the intent of the designers of SEEK need to be preserved both in the staff and student composition. The hiring of staff from populations that have been historically underrepresented and are connected to a history of overcoming racial and economic bias globally is central to this identity. We will need to establish intentionality in the hiring of Black & Brown Professionals to represent the population we were founded to support. Including individuals who have had personal experiences with inequity. Our institutions and programs, must mirror the communities we serve to fully represent all perspectives, experiences, scholarship, and professional expertise that is needed to further critique, analyse, and dismantle institutionalized racism and oppression that our students face. These efforts should be included in the strategic plan of the University as a whole, communicated to CUNY HR and all HR Departments at CUNY. Furthermore, there should be an annual assessment of how the University is meeting its goals in SEEK programs. Expected Delivery: Spring 2021

Recruit and hire an assistant director that would report to the program director and assist in the management of large programs and representation of SEEK on CUNY and campus council committees. Expected Delivery: Fall 2022

Equal pay for unequal (more) work. SEEK professionals are deserving of salaries comparable to non-SEEK counterparts. Protections with special dispensations that create an understanding of the work generated in SEEK needs to be put in place throughout CUNY. Compensation must be commensurate and take into account level of work, credentials, multiple job responsibilities, degrees, and licensing, as well as years of experience. Expected Delivery: Fiscal Year 20-21

EK Directors, we represent a plethora of communities, professional subgroups, and global groups. We support the Black Lives Matter Movement, and all other movements for justice.

Although we celebrate the recent changes in leadership in CUNY, the appointment of diverse Deans and Presidents, has definitively broken down patterns of racial preference and deference. In leadership, we still believe that CUNY as the Urban University of New York also needs to further expand and address the issues of injustice that exist at campus levels and that particularly impact SEEK, a first standing critical agency that equips students of color to become degree-holding, fully engaged and successful citizens of this nation. The Time is Now.

Addendum

Guidelines: *Fifteen Percent (15%) Variation

A maximum of 15 percent of the SEEK/College Discovery students enrolled at any given time may be from households with income exceeding those listed in the income eligibility table. Inclusion in this category may be warranted by unusual and extenuating circumstances (as identified below), documented by a disinterested third party and judged appropriate by the Program Director in cooperation with campus officials. Supporting documentation should be obtained prior to enrollment and maintained in written form thereafter. Documentation of these circumstances must be kept on file by the school at which the students are enrolled. In all cases, this documentation must include a statement(s) from a disinterested, reliable third party, such as a member of the clergy, a legal representative or a social worker with direct knowledge of the student's situation. Students accepted into Special Programs under this rule must be so designated at the determination of initial eligibility.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM GUIDELINES 10-8

Categories into which these variations may fall are limited to the following:

1. Serious mismanagement of the household income with little of the funds accruing to the interest of the student. Serious mismanagement might be defined as use of a controlled substance by head of household, bankruptcy, or a history of legal problems. For this category, the statement from the disinterested third party disinterested, reliable party such as a parent, relative, lawyer, clergyman, counselor or judge, who is knowledgeable about the student's financial status and financial history, along with financial records would be acceptable documentation.

2. One-time income fluctuation in a household with a history of low income, due to one-time causes such as illness, unemployment, severance pay, etc. Satisfactory evidence that a household's income in the calendar year prior to the cause of the fluctuation and the calendar year used for determining the student's economic eligibility fall within the limits applicable of the household income guidelines is sufficient to establish the existence of a one-time fluctuation in household income, provided that there is satisfactory evidence of a history of low income. Documentation of both the base year and the years (at least 2 years) prior to the fluctuation in income must be collected.

3. Households with substantial long term, non-reimbursed medical obligations (such as maintenance of children with physical or mental disabilities). This may be documented by the appropriate medical bills or a statement from the family member who is institutionalized.

4. Families which must maintain two households, one for the wage earner and one for dependents, in order to maintain employment. Documentation required would be leases, utility bills for both residences and a statement from the employer regarding the job location.

5. Families where the EFC as computed from base year financial data by a United States Education Department approved analysis system indicates no parental contribution (from a dependent's household or zero EFC from an independent student's household).