

ITALIAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK:

'A SOCIOECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL PROFILE*'

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INTRODUCTION

In the history of the City University of New York (CUNY), the theme of ethnicity looms large. The origins of the University coincided in a rough way with the emergence of New York City as the major funnel of immigration in the United States. Beginning in the 1840s over a million Irish from agricultural origins made their way to New York. Later in the century they were joined by waves of Jewish immigrants from Russia and eastern Europe, and by vast numbers of Italians who came overwhelmingly from peasant origins in the southern region of that country.

Partly as a result of cultural differences, these groups varied markedly in their utilization of City University. From the early 1900s up to the 1960s, Jewish students were by far the dominant presence on the various campuses of the municipal college system. In part, Jewish enrollments were a result of heavy emphasis in their culture upon the importance of education. During this period, the University established its reputation as a major avenue of social and economic mobility. This image of the University resulted largely from the achievements of many Jewish graduates in the professions, business, academe, the arts, and in public life.

Relative to their proportions in the population of the city, the representation at CUNY of the major Catholic groups, the Irish and the Italians, was very low. In part this was due to the presence of several Catholic colleges in the area. Intrinsic to Catholic religious doctrine was a perception that secular education was a threat to religiosity, and so, if Catholics went to college, they were likely to attend church-sponsored institutions. In addition, the ethnic cultures of these groups did not place the heavy emphasis on education that was displayed among Jews. Indeed among those of southern Italian origin, "... educational aspirations were thwarted by cultural values, such as an emphasis on loyalty to the family above all else, that were finely tuned to the needs of a rural folk society but were very dysfunctional in a highly industrialized urban setting." ¹ These factors so reduced the attendance of Italians at CUNY that in 1930 they comprised only three percent of the graduating class at City College.²

But as the forces of assimilation made themselves felt, Catholics, including those of Italian ancestry, began to attend college in sizeable numbers. Indeed, by the mid to late 1960s Catholics comprised between a third and 40 percent of entering classes at some CUNY colleges. ³ This trend accelerated in the early 1970s as a result of CUNY's open-admissions policy. Though the policy was designed to increase the representation in CUNY of newer migrants (blacks and Hispanics) to the City (and it did so dramatically), the major beneficiaries of the policy were white ethnics, in particular Irish and Italian Catholics. While the enrollment of whites in CUNY fell off substantially after the fiscal crisis of 1975-76, the proportions of Italian Americans among whites continued to increase, so that by 1980 they were the largest single white group enrolling in that fall's freshman class, surpassing Jews as the numerically most important white group among entering classes.

In the years after World War II and especially since the 1960s, much research has been conducted and a great deal written about CUNY's efforts to expand educational opportunity for impoverished minority groups, primarily blacks and Hispanics. And the utilization of the University as an instrument for assimilation and social mobility has been well documented for Jewish students. By contrast, relatively little attention has focused on students from other ancestries whose representation in CUNY has increased. An important example is that of Italian Americans who are the largest white group within CUNY, just as they are the largest ethnic bloc within the American Catholic population.⁴

The educational achievements of Italians have been viewed as attenuated because of the constraints of southern Italian folk culture which placed little emphasis on formal schooling, since education was seen as conflicting with urgent practical demands of rural life.⁵ Notwithstanding these initial dissonances of Italian and American culture, there is considerable evidence suggesting the assimilation of Italians in the United States. For example, one important index, intermarriage, indicates considerable assimilation.⁶ Less is known about the more recent achievements and aspirations in the educational arena, particularly in higher education which has become almost a prerequisite for entry into the more rewarding positions in the American occupational system.

What are the achievements of Italian Americans in high school? Do they typically enter college via institutions that lead to bachelor's degrees or are they more likely to begin in two-year community colleges? What are their educational aspirations and what do they want from college? How do their family backgrounds affect their educational life chances? Are traces of earlier cultural constraints still visible among college entrants? These are

some of the questions considered in this study. In addressing them we shall contrast the Italian American group with others, in particular, other white groups and minority students. Drawing such a profile will ultimately provide a baseline for understanding the educational attainments of Italian Americans in CUNY.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY AND NATURE OF THE DATA

The data presented in this report are taken from a longitudinal study that is following the academic careers of freshmen who entered the University in fall 1980.* The point of departure for the broader study is a detailed social background survey mailed in summer 1980 to 52,366 students who had applied to CUNY as first-time freshmen. The survey requested a wide range of information about students' social origins, financial resources, employment situations and educational attitudes and aspirations. The number of respondents to the survey questionnaire was 15,727. Of these, 11,625 subsequently enrolled in CUNY. This report draws on the data collected for these enrollees. The sample represents about 36 percent of the total freshman class of 31,890.

A second type of data used in this report are high school background records. This information, collected by the University's centralized admissions office for the 52,366 freshman applicants, contains data on numerous variables

* This study is being conducted in conjunction with the City University Office of Institutional Research and Analysis.

including: (1) college admissions average, a measure of the student's grades in all academic courses deemed by the University to be college preparatory in nature (e.g., English, mathematics, science, etc.); (2) the number of college preparatory courses taken (this variable reflects the breadth of students' exposure to college preparatory work); (3) the number of college preparatory courses taken in two subject matter areas: math and science.

To obtain an overview of students' academic preparedness and for purposes of placement into remedial courses, CUNY administers to entering freshmen university-wide-tests in mathematics, reading and writing. Our files contain the raw scores for each test and indicate whether the student passed or failed each.

A fourth data source is the registration file assembled for the freshman population by the University's Office of Institutional Research and Analysis from information transmitted to it by each of the CUNY colleges. This file indicates the level of enrollment in the University (senior or community college).

The registration data, high school transcript information, skills assessment test scores and social background survey have been combined so that the record of each enrollee who responded to the survey also contains all of the other information. This merged file is used to describe and compare the characteristics of Italian American students, other white students, and minority students in the senior and community colleges.

Though the sample of 11,625 students is a large one, it is being used to generalize to the 1980 cohort population of 31,890 cases, and it is necessary to determine whether the sample is representative by comparing it with the

population, using measures common to both. The details of the comparison have been presented elsewhere.⁷ Overall, the pattern is clear. The sample contains a greater proportion of females, and among students in the senior colleges, the sample contains a greater proportion of more able students than the population. In all cases, however, the sample/population differences are small. In short, the comparisons indicate that the sample provides a good representation of the population.

SOCIAL ORIGINS

Introduction

Social origins are known to have important effects upon students' academic careers. Insofar as ethnic groups differ in aspects of their social backgrounds, it would be expected that their grades, rates of progress toward a degree, and likelihood of graduation would also differ. Thus, the social advantages and disadvantages with which Italian American students enter college will help to predict how they will fare in higher education. For this reason it is important to consider social background profiles. We shall examine several social origins factors including gender, age, marital status, and economic situation.

In each of the following analyses, we compare Italian American entrants with two other categories: "other whites" and minorities. Each of the latter are an aggregation of specific groups. The minority category includes blacks and Hispanics (Asians are not included in this report). The other white classification includes Jewish students, Irish Catholics, white Catholics of

other ancestry, and whites of diverse religious/ethnic backgrounds. Students entering via special admissions programs (i.e., SEEK and College Discovery) are not included in this report.

The distribution of these three groupings across the two levels of CUNY (senior- and community colleges) is shown in Table 1. Among entering classes, minorities have become the numerically predominant category, particularly in CUNY's two year schools. Italian Americans now comprise ten percent of all entrants, and about 25 percent of all whites.

Demographic Profile

Nationally, about half of all college entrants are female.⁸ At CUNY, females predominate for all groups, comprising 60 percent of entering students (Table 2). The proportion of females among minority entrants is higher than for Italian Americans or other whites. The racial disparity is partly a consequence of gender differences in high school dropout rates. Minority females predominate over minority males because the latter are more likely to drop out of high school. Among the white groups, including Italian Americans, we speculate that a different process is involved: limited financial resources are expended in sending males to more prestigious and expensive colleges than CUNY, since their educations are assumed to be the basic determinants of the financial status of their future families.

Although the representation of females among Italian American students is not much different from other whites, they do stand apart in one respect: the proportion of females is constant for the other white students in both senior and community colleges, but the sex distribution of Italian Americans differs by institution type. Sixty-one percent of the Italian Americans at the senior

colleges are female, compared with 53 percent at community colleges. The reason for this difference in sex ratios among Italian Americans is not immediately apparent from our data, but we speculate that compared with other whites, a higher proportion of males see community college as the route to clearly defined vocational goals.

In the conventional view, college going is a life cycle event which occurs immediately after high school graduation. Thus, the typical college student is thought to be 18 years old, unmarried and childless. National data confirm that these are, overwhelmingly, the typical characteristics of college freshmen. This national picture does not fit the realities at CUNY, as is shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5. For example, nationally, 8 of 10 entering senior college freshmen are 18 or younger, and less than 1 percent are married. At CUNY, only 7 of 10 entrants are 18 or less (16 percent are 20 or older), 4 percent are married, and 5 percent have children. The corresponding percentages are substantially higher in the community colleges. These differences between freshmen nationally and those at CUNY are accounted for largely by the variance of minority students from the national norm and to a lesser extent by other whites. Italian Americans, on the other hand, stand out as the group approximating most closely the traditional picture of college going in America. They are younger, the least likely to be married and the least likely to be supporting children.

These characteristics of Italian Americans may place them at an advantage relative to other groups, at least in terms of ultimate educational attainment. Students who complete college at age 21 or 22 are more likely to consider going on for further education than those who do not finish until 25 or older.

Economic Background

The single most direct indicator of economic class is family income. It is an indication of ability to enter and continue in higher education, as well as to meet the routine exigencies of daily life.

As Table 6 shows, minority students are markedly more disadvantaged by low income than are white students. Overall, ninety-one percent of all minority students have family incomes of less than \$20,000. Among Italian Americans and other white students, only about 60 percent have incomes of less than \$20,000.

The proportion of lower income students is significantly greater at community colleges than at the senior colleges. If we consider the lowest income group, (less than \$10,000), we find that while over two-thirds of the minority students at community colleges fall in this income bracket, one-third of the white students and only one-quarter of the Italian Americans report such low income. However, the apparent income advantage of Italian American students over other whites is offset to some extent by the fact that the former are slightly more likely than other white students to have five or more people supported by the reported family income (see Table 7).

As one might expect, given group differences in income, there are substantial disparities in the proportions receiving public assistance. Table 8 shows that at the four-year colleges only 2 percent of Italian Americans and other whites receive welfare and, at the two-year colleges 5 percent of the former and 7 percent of the latter are welfare recipients. The proportions of black and Hispanic students who receive public assistance are significantly higher: 15 percent at the four-year schools and 24 percent at the two-year colleges.

These differences in economic status are reflected in the likelihood of receiving financial aid (in the form of New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) awards, Pell grants, and other aid). Minority students, at both senior and community colleges, are far more likely to receive aid, and they receive it from more numerous sources than do white students (see Table 9).

Slightly more than half of Italian American students receive financial aid at senior colleges. In this respect, they are very similar to other white students. In the community colleges, 60 percent of Italian Americans receive aid, somewhat less than the proportion of other white recipients. This difference between the two white groups may be a reflection of the fact that Italian American students in the two-year schools are less likely than other whites to come from very low income families.

As expected in a University where so many students come from families of modest- and low income, a high proportion of students reported that they were working (full- or part-time) or looking for work at entry to college (Table 10). Overall, three-fourths of students were working or looking for work. Minority students were more likely than whites to be working full-time. In senior colleges, the work situations of Italian American students were little different from their other white counterparts. In the two-year schools, however, the Italian Americans were more likely to be working part-time than either minorities or other whites. Employment has negative effects on success in college and, in this respect, CUNY students carry a heavier burden than is true for college students in general.⁹

Despite the fact that CUNY students are likely to be labor force participants, they appear, in general, to be living in traditional family settings. The

majority of these students live with parents or other relatives. Not unexpectedly, given their age and marital status, Italian Americans, even more than the other two groups, live with their families: ninety-seven percent at senior colleges and over eighty percent of those at community colleges do so (see Table 11).

In summary, this is the picture of Italian American students that emerges from our data: They are younger, less likely to be married, less likely to be in the lowest income category, or have multiple sources of financial aid, and in the community colleges they are less likely to have any financial assistance than are minorities and the composite group of other white students. They are more likely to be living at home and to be working part-time than are the other student groups. They present themselves as solidly from working class or lower-middle class backgrounds. By most criteria, they are advantaged by comparison with minority students and they tend to be similar to the other white students.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Family Educational History

Demographic status and economic context are only part of the life histories which affect students' educational chances in college. There are also family cultural resources (such as parental educational background) that can enhance children's school achievements. Then, there are actual school environments which can affect students' academic self-concepts, aspirations, and basic

skills. We now consider several aspects of family and school background which may differ between groups, thus affecting chances for success in college.

The educational background of parents can have important effects on school achievement, aspirations, expectations and knowledge about college. Better educated parents presumably bring to their children a wider range of information, interests and cognitive competencies that add to skills children carry with them when they start school. They also may be better able to provide their offspring with important daily advantages; for example, helping with homework.

As shown in Table 12, the educational attainments of parents of Italian American students are noticeably lower than those of parents of other white students. Indeed, with regard to college attendance, mothers and fathers of Italian American students are more similar to minority parents than to other whites. At the senior colleges almost half of the fathers of the other white students have had some college, compared to about a quarter of Italian American and minority student fathers. A similar pattern is evident in the community colleges, although group differences are smaller. In all groups, mothers are less likely to have attended college than fathers, but those of Italian American students are considerably less likely to have attended than the mothers of other whites.

Italian American students are more likely than minorities and other whites to represent the first generation of their families to be attending college (Table 13). More than ninety percent of Italian American students are first generation college-goers.

Whether students have siblings who are- or were in college partly conditions expectations that college is a natural stage in the life cycle. To possess such an expectation may well enhance the student's chances of adapting to the collegiate setting. In CUNY's senior colleges there are no important differences among groups in the likelihood of having college-attending siblings (Table 14). Overall, about half of the students had brothers or sisters with college experience. In community colleges, about 40 percent of Italian American students had college-going siblings. In this respect, they more closely resembled minority students than other whites.

High School Background

It is well documented that students from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds are differentially prepared for college careers. Because they typically come from poverty backgrounds and because of educational disadvantage stemming from attendance in ghetto high schools, minority students generally graduate high school less well prepared than others. In contrast, white students, and especially Italian Americans, are markedly more likely to have graduated from private high schools (most commonly Catholic, parochial ones). Almost half of the Italian Americans at senior colleges and a third of those at the two-year colleges are graduates of private high schools (see Table 15). The effect of having attended private schools is unclear. Whether Italian American students enter CUNY prepared by a strong high school background relative to that of other white and minority students is a question we now address.

An overview of CUNY students' high school backgrounds is given by Table 16 which shows the average number of college preparatory courses taken. Large

disparities exist in the extent of college preparation. At both senior and community colleges, minority students take fewer college preparatory courses than Italian Americans or other whites. Both white groups closely resemble each other. On average, they finish high school having taken a semester more of college preparatory work than their minority counterparts. Community-senior college differences are also evident. Generally, community college entrants have had almost a year less academic coursework than their senior college peers. For example, other whites in two-year schools average less than 11 college preparatory credits, while in the senior colleges they earned about 14 credits.

How these summary differences in preparation translate into substantive course exposure is revealed clearly in Tables 17 and 18 which show differences among groups in math and science preparation. In the senior colleges, the differential between minority students and the other white and Italian American groups is marked: over two-thirds in these groups have completed algebra and/or trigonometry (11th year high school mathematics) and well over half have completed chemistry and/or physics. Only about a third of minority students had this much math and science preparation.

Among community college entrants, all groups have had less exposure to math and science than their counterparts in senior colleges. Nonetheless, the pattern of differences observed in the former is again observed. Relative to Italian Americans and other whites (who, for the most part are similar in preparation), minority students are considerably less likely to have taken math or science courses beyond the 9th grade level. For example, 63 percent of minority students did not go beyond 9th grade math, compared with 49 percent of Italian Americans and other whites.

Overall, then, our analyses of high school academic preparation suggest two major themes. First, Italian American students appear very similar to other whites, and both groups seem considerably better prepared than minority students. Second, senior college entrants exhibit stronger preparation than their community college peers.

These differences in high school background may have important effects on students' chances of clearing their first major hurdle after acceptance at CUNY: the Freshman Skills Assessment Tests. These tests in math, reading, and writing are administered to all CUNY entrants and must be passed in order to move directly into the mainstream of college work. Failing two or three of the basic skills tests leads to placement in remediation courses. A program saturated with such courses (typically for no credit) for the first year or two of college, may, in a student population already burdened by financial difficulties and social pressures, act as a deterrent to remaining in college.

As one might expect from the preceding discussion there are marked group differences in performances on the skills tests. Table 20 shows that in the senior colleges about two-thirds of Italian American students and other whites passed all three tests. In sharp contrast, only a quarter of minority students did this well. In community colleges, there were also no differences between the white groups: about a fourth passed all of the tests. This was true for only 5 percent of minority students.

The data in Table 20 can also be viewed in terms of this question: what proportions of each group failed all of their skills tests? In the senior colleges, very few Italian American students or other whites fared this poorly (only 2-3 percent). On the other hand, 20 percent of minorities passed none

of the tests. In community colleges, almost half of the minority students failed all three tests. This was true for less than 20 percent of the white groups.

A fuller picture of students' academic skills upon entry to CUNY is given in Table 22 which shows the performance of each group for each skill area. Generally, there is little difference between Italian American students and other whites in the proportions passing each type of test. Both groups have higher pass rates on every type of test than do minority students. Overall, students were most likely to pass the writing test and least likely to pass the math assessment, though it is true that in the senior colleges white groups did about equally well on math and reading.

Self-Assessment

These test score results are reflected in students' self-assessments as shown in Table 23. Students were asked if they felt that they needed any special tutoring or extra help in the three areas of the basic skills tests. In the senior colleges, students reported needing extra help in mathematics in proportions approximating those in each group that failed the test. However, this pattern did not hold throughout. Students reported needing help in writing in proportions that generally matched or exceeded those whose test scores showed a need for help. The opposite was true for reading: students were less likely to think they should have help when their scores indicated a need for it. Generally, other whites and Italian Americans, who did better on the tests than minorities, were less likely to report needing help.

In the community colleges, where pass rates on the skills tests were substantially lower, all groups were more likely to think they needed extra help. As in senior colleges, other whites and Italian Americans were less likely to report needing help than were minorities. (This, of course, is a function of the different pass rates between the two groups.) The pattern of relationship between scores and reported need differed somewhat from the senior college students. Students were somewhat less likely to think they needed help in math even if they needed it. The slippage was even greater in the reading area. In writing, the reported need for help dovetailed quite well with the percentages in each group that failed the test.

As a way of summarizing students' academic self-concept, they were asked to rate their ability relative to other students who had entered college with them. The results are shown in Table 24. There were no large differences observed between Italian Americans and the other whites at the four-year schools. Sixty percent of these white students felt that they were above average, while less than half of the minority students rated themselves above average. At the two-year colleges, there were essentially no differences among groups. A little more than one-third of the students rated themselves above average. Practically no students felt that they were below average in comparison to other students at their school. In short, student academic self-concepts seem to reflect, at least in senior colleges, the realities of their actual preparation. Italian Americans and other whites entered four-year schools better prepared than minorities and their self-estimates reflect this reality.

Upon entry all groups showed considerable optimism that they would persist in their collegiate studies. Ninety percent or more felt that there was little

chance they would drop out, either permanently or temporarily (see Table 25). Much higher proportions expected that they would transfer to another college before graduating from the one in which they started. In both senior and community colleges, other white students were more likely than Italian

Americans to think they would transfer. The latter were more similar to minorities in their transfer expectations. We speculate that because Italian Americans are more vocationally focussed in their orientation to college, they are less apt to see transfer as an appropriate option.

THE MEANING OF COLLEGE FOR STUDENTS

Higher Education in the United States has traditionally been perceived as an avenue of upward social mobility. The extent to which going to college continues to provide opportunities for working class and lower class people is the subject of much on-going investigation. Whatever the actual advantages of a college education, students come to college with certain expectations and goals. How such orientations are altered or supported during the course of their student careers is a result of a variety of circumstances: the real or imagined success students feel in their studies, the requirements placed on them by family and friends, the subtle or overt support of school personnel (or lack of such support), and so forth. At this point we are not addressing what transpires during the college years to reinforce or re-shape the original meaning going to college has for students. We can, however, locate CUNY students in their initial definition of what college holds for them.

Most striking in the data are the high aspirations held by all students. At the senior colleges, sixty percent or more of the students aspire to master's

degrees or higher. Minority students and other whites are most likely to aspire to these higher degrees (66%) and Italian Americans are least likely to aim for such additional credentials (60%). The most notable difference between Italian Americans and the other two groups involves aspirations for the doctorate or professional degree: Almost 30 percent of minorities and other whites hold such aspirations compared with only 18 percent of Italian American students (see Table 26).

High aspirations are also the rule in community colleges, but, again, Italian Americans hold more modest goals than others. Sixty-seven percent of the Italian American students indicated wanting to continue toward a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 79 percent of other white students and 80 percent of the minority students. Italian Americans were also more likely than others to hold aspirations no higher than an Associate's degree (33 percent, compared with about 20 percent for other whites and minorities). One can only speculate about the reasons for Italian American students' more modest aspirations. But we believe that their closer ties to family (Table 11), the lower educational attainments of their parents (Table 12), and a clearer vocational orientation to college may, in part, be an explanation. Perhaps it is stretching the point, but it is possible that these findings indicate the traces of earlier cultural orientations.

In conducting our survey of entrants, we assessed the reasons why students wanted to go to college. Did they see it as having mainly vocational utility? Was it a stepping stone to graduate school? Did they simply want to know more? We asked students to pick from such a list the two most important reasons for going to college. Table 27 gives their most important reason for attending.

In senior colleges, three-quarters of Italian Americans reported that their first reason was to "get a better job", compared with less than two-thirds of other white and minority students. At the community colleges, Italian Americans were also more likely than other students to consider getting a better job the primary reason for going to college, but differences were narrower than in four-year schools.

Few students in any group stated that preparing for graduate school was an important reason for going to college (less than ten percent of the senior college students, and less than five percent of the junior college students). Given the fact that such large proportions of students reported earlier that they aspired to graduate degrees, it is surprising that so few found it a primary motivation.

Generally, then, CUNY students are motivated to go to college to get a better job. Our data (Table 28) also show that they have considerable faith that college will further this aim. In all groups, close to 90 percent believed that their education would advance their job prospects.

INITIAL COLLEGE PLACEMENT

Considerable controversy exists among social scientists about the relative merits of attendance at senior or community colleges. Some have argued that two-year schools are a good place to start college, especially in the case of students with weak high school preparation and poor economic circumstances. Others argue that in the long run, community colleges have negative impacts: they tend to depress aspirations and lead to lower educational attainment, and

they tend to sort people into dead-end jobs. While the controversy is far from resolved, most social scientists side with the latter view. Evidence at CUNY is sparse at this point, but one systematic study indicates that those who begin in two-year schools do not go as far in higher education as comparable students who begin in senior colleges.¹⁰

In the context of this debate, where groups are placed is of some importance. It is clear from an examination of Table 1 that different groups have different probabilities of attending senior and community colleges. Most unequally distributed are minority students: three-fourths of them are found in the two-year tier. Other whites are the group most likely to attend senior colleges: 44 percent are found there. Italian Americans are less likely than the other whites to go to a four-year institution: slightly less than 4 out of every 10 enroll in one, while 6 in 10 go to a community college.

One should not assume that placement in the two-year college is something necessarily done against the wishes of unwilling students. To some degree, where students begin their college careers is also a reflection of their preferences. For example, our data show that of all groups in community colleges, Italian Americans are the ones most likely to have picked that college level as their first choice (Table 30). Indeed, regardless of level, Italian Americans are more likely to prefer being where they are placed. On the other hand, even though their educational aspirations are not as high as other groups, the majority of those in community colleges aspire to credentials beyond the Associate's degree. If the critics of community colleges are right, these students' chances of realizing their ambitions are, in part, constrained by community college placement.

CONCLUSION

Over the past twenty years the composition of the CUNY student body has changed dramatically. The University's student mix has become much more diverse in terms of economic status, educational background, race and ethnicity. The conventional wisdom holds that a very large increase in the enrollment of minority students has been the main racial/ethnic change. While this has occurred, other changes have also taken place. White groups such as Italian Americans have come to the University in large numbers, but very little is known about them. This report has aimed to fill this vacuum by presenting a profile of their socioeconomic backgrounds, their educational histories, and their attitudes and aspirations.

The sharpest differences revealed in this report are those distinguishing minority students from both Italian Americans and other white groups. In terms of economic status and educational preparation, whites are far more advantaged than minorities.

Although in most respects Italian American students are very much like other whites, there are some important ways in which they differ. One is that they more closely approximate the traditional demographic profile of the beginning college student: they are younger, single, and more likely to be living with their parents. They are also more likely to have graduated from a private (presumably parochial) high school. The educational attainments of their parents are somewhat below the parents of other white students, especially in terms of college attendance. Possibly as a consequence, Italian American students hold more modest educational aspirations for themselves. They also

have a somewhat more vocational orientation to college and perhaps this orientation has led them more often to prefer a community- rather than a senior college.

Whether the differences we have noted have consequences for success in college is not a question addressed in this report. It remains a topic requiring additional analysis.

NOTES

1. David E. Lavin, Richard D. Alba, and Richard A. Silberstein, Right Versus Privilege: The Open Admissions Experiment At The City University of New York (New York: The Free Press, 1981), p.4.
2. Lavin, Alba, and Silberstein, pp.22-23; see note 23.
3. Jack E. Rossman, Helen S. Astin, Alexander W. Astin, and Elaine H. El-Khawas, Open Admissions at City University of New York: An Analysis of the First Year (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975), see Tables 3.4-3.6, pp.35-37.
4. As reported in Stephen Steinberg, The Academic Melting Pot (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p.63.
5. See, for example, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot 2nd ed. (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1970). See also Leonard Covello, The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child (Leiden: Brill, 1967); Richard Gambino, Blood of My Blood: The Dilemma of the Italian Americans (New York: Doubleday, 1974).
6. Richard D. Alba, Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1985)
7. See David E. Lavin and others, Socioeconomic Origins and Educational Background of an Entering Class at CUNY: A Comparison of Regular and Special Program Enrollees (New York: City University of New York, 1983), pp.46-49.
8. See Alexander W. Astin, Margo R. King, and Gerald T. Richardson, The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1980 (Los Angeles: Cooperative Institutional Research Program, U.C.L.A. and American Council on Education).
9. Lavin, Alba, and Silberstein, Chapter 7.
10. Richard D. Alba and David E. Lavin, "Community College and Tracking in Higher Education," Sociology of Education, 54 (1981: 223-237).

APPENDIX

TABLES

TABLE 1

COLLEGE TYPE BY ETHNIC GROUP

	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
%	46%	43%	12%	67%	25%	9%
% of group at each CUNY level	24	44	38	76	56	62
(n)*	(1237)	(1154)	(323)	(3941)	(1459)	(521)

* These numbers are the maximum possible bases for all subsequent tables. The actual basis for specific tables may be slightly reduced by missing values of the variable in question.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE STUDENTS BY COLLEGE TYPE AND ETHNIC GROUP

	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
	65	57	61	63	57	53

TABLE 3
AGE AT ENROLLMENT BY COLLEGE TYPE AND ETHNIC GROUP

<u>Age</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
18 or younger	69%	84%	93%	33%	55%	62%
19	11	6	3	13	11	10
20 - 29	14	9	4	36	23	20
30 or older	6	2	*	18	12	9

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGE OF MARRIED STUDENTS

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
7	3	1	19	12	8

TABLE 5
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SUPPORTING CHILDREN

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
11	2	1	31	12	11

TABLE 6
FAMILY INCOME

<u>Income</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
less than \$10,000	44%	19%	16%	65%	32%	24%
\$10,000 - 19,000	41	30	39	28	38	44
\$20,000 or more	15	51	45	7	31	33

TABLE 7
NUMBER OF PERSONS INCOME SUPPORTS

<u># Persons</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
1	6%	5%	3%	15%	11%	8%
2 - 4	52	60	57	58	60	56
5 - 6	30	28	37	21	23	31
7 or more	12	6	4	6	5	4

TABLE 8
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHOSE FAMILY RECEIVES PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
15	2	2	24	7	5

TABLE 9
NUMBER OF SOURCES OF FINANCIAL AID

<u># Sources</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
none	16%	47%	45%	13%	36%	41%
one	12	19	25	13	17	19
two	50	25	23	45	29	27
three or more	21	9	7	30	18	13

TABLE 10
STUDENTS' WORK SITUATION

<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
working/looking full-time	11%	6%	3%	25%	17%	16%
working/looking part-time	64	72	75	52	61	70
not working	26	23	22	23	22	14

TABLE 11
WHERE STUDENTS EXPECT TO LIVE UPON COLLEGE ENTRANCE

<u>Live With</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
parents or other relative	84%	88%	97%	58%	73%	81%
spouse	5	2	*	12	11	7
friends	2	4	1	3	3	2
alone	9	5	2	27	12	10

TABLE 12
FATHER'S AND MOTHER'S EDUCATION

<u>Father's Education</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>
less than high school	51%	24%	39%	59%	36%	50%
high school graduate	25	29	38	25	38	32
some college or more	24	48	23	16	26	18
<u>Mother's Education</u>						
less than high school	53	19	32	58	29	41
high school graduate	29	45	51	27	50	49
some college or more	18	36	18	15	21	10

TABLE 13
PERCENTAGE OF 1ST GENERATION COLLEGE ENTRANTS

<u>% First Generation College-goer</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>
	85	70	89	85	85	93

TABLE 14

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH SIBLINGS WHO ATTENDED OR ARE ATTENDING COLLEGE

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
47%..	52%..	52%..	40%..	49%..	47%..

TABLE 15

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
14%	37%	45%	17%	25%	31%

TABLE 16

'AVERAGE NUMBER OF COLLEGE PREPARATORY COURSES*

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
11.6	13.8	13.5	8.8	10.8	10.9

* The number of courses shown is based upon those completed at the time of application to CUNY and, thus, do not necessarily reflect all work done in the senior year of high school.

TABLE 17

HIGH SCHOOL MATHEMATICS PREPARATION

	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
9th yr math not completed	13%	2%	5%	26%	17%	14%
completed						
9th yr math	26	8	12	37	32	35
completed						
10th yr math	24	21	15	18	20	30
completed						
11th yr math	37	69	68	19	31	21

TABLE 18

HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE PREPARATION

	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
intro science not completed	4%	*	*	3%	2%	3%
intro science completed	31	10	10	65	44	37
biology completed	31	32	34	22	37	38
chemistry and/or physics completed	34	57	55	10	17	22

TABLE 19
COLLEGE ADMISSIONS AVERAGE (CAA)*

<u>CAA</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
less than 70	6%	3%	4%	28%	28%	25%
70 - 74.9	12	4	5	46	34	33
75 - 79.9	20	16	10	17	22	24
80 and over	62	77	82	9	17	18
<hr/>						
<u>X CAA</u>	80	82	82	65	69	70

* Students with GEDs are excluded from this analysis.

TABLE 20
NUMBER OF BASIC SKILLS TESTS PASSED

# Tests Passed	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>
none	20%	2%	3%	49%	12%	18%
one	23	8	7	30	27	24
two	31	24	27	17	39	33
three	26	66	63	5	22	24

TABLE 21
AVERAGE SCORES ON FIRST BASIC SKILLS TESTS

Average Scores	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>
math test*	24.4	31.1	30.4	16.5	21.8	21.7
reading test**	29.7	36.3	36.0	24.3	32.1	31.6
writing test***	6.4	8.1	8.3	5.4	7.1	7.0

* highest possible score = 40.

** highest possible score = 45.

*** highest possible score = 12.

TABLE 22
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO PASSED BASIC SKILLS TESTS

<u>% Passed</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
% passed math	51%	85%	78%	14%	35%	37%
% passed reading	41	75	77	25	57	54
% passed writing	68	92	95	40	81	77

TABLE 23
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO FELT THEY NEEDED TUTORING OR EXTRA HELP

<u>Skill Area</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
math	48%	22%	20%	66%	41%	39%
reading	25	7	4	39	12	12
writing	40	16	11	53	21	17

TABLE 24
SELF RATING OF ACADEMIC ABILITY

<u>Self-rating</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
above average	46%	61%	60%	35%	39%	34%
average	53	38	40	62	60	64
below average	2	1	0	4	2	2

TABLE 25
PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO ESTIMATE A STRONG CHANCE OR SOME CHANCE
THAT THEY WILL:

	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
drop out temporarily	8%	10%	7%	8%	11%	10%
drop out permanently	5	8	7	5	8	7
transfer to another college	42	54	38	38	42	37

TABLE 26
DEGREE ASPIRATIONS*

<u>Degree Wanted</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>
associate	1	*	2	20	21	33
bachelor's	33	34	38	36	47	39
master's	37	39	42	32	23	19
doctorate or equivalent**	29	27	18	12	9	9

* Data have been recalculated with responses of "don't know" and "other" removed.

** e.g. law, medical degree.

TABLE 27
MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR GOING TO COLLEGE

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian- Americans</u>
get better job	60%	63%	72%	65%	70%	73%
prepare for grad school	8	8	7	4	3	3
general education	16	16	10	15	12	11
contribute to community	7	3	3	6	3	3
other	9	10	8	10	12	10

TABLE 28

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO FEEL THAT GRADUATING FROM THIS COLLEGE
WILL HELP THEM GET A BETTER JOB

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
93%	89%	94%	91%	86%	88%

TABLE 29

MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR CHOOSING THIS COLLEGE

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
academic or program reputation	64%	48%	53%	46%	31%	35%
financial reasons	12	27	28	10	21	23
near home	16	18	14	26	33	30
other	8	7	5	18	15	12

TABLE 30
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN FIRST CHOICE COLLEGE TYPE

<u>1st Choice</u>	<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
4-year CUNY college	64%	64%	71%	-	-	-
2-year CUNY college	-	-	-	43%	46%	52%

TABLE 31
PERCENTAGE WITH FRIENDS AT COLLEGE OF ATTENDANCE

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
66%	77%	83%	45%	62%	67%

TABLE 32

PERCENTAGE WITH FRIENDS AT OTHER COLLEGE

<u>Senior Colleges</u>			<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
92%	96%	97%	80%	84%	88%

TABLE 33

PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

<u>Senior Colleges</u>				<u>Community Colleges</u>		
<u>Participated</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>	<u>Minorities</u>	<u>Other Whites</u>	<u>Italian-Americans</u>
a lot	23%	23%	21%	18%	14%	15%
to some extent or a little	57	60	61	55	53	56
rarely	20	17	18	27	34	29