

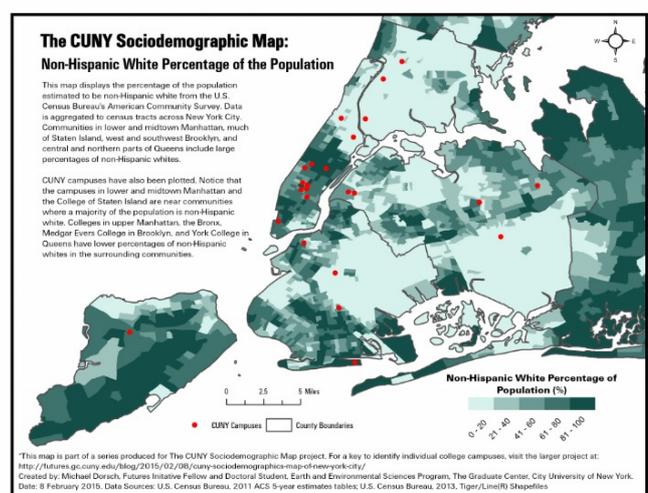
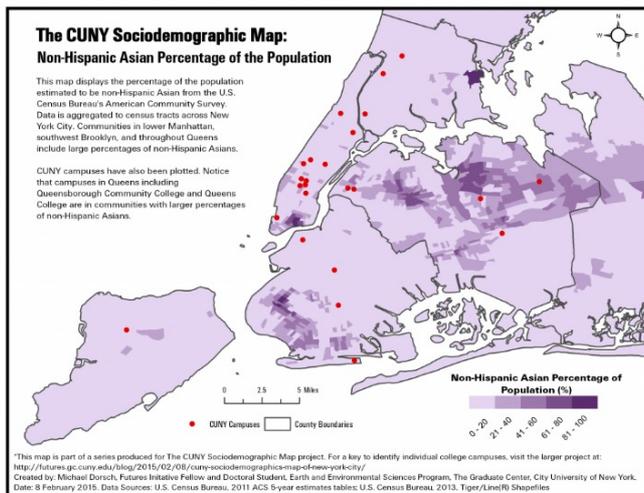
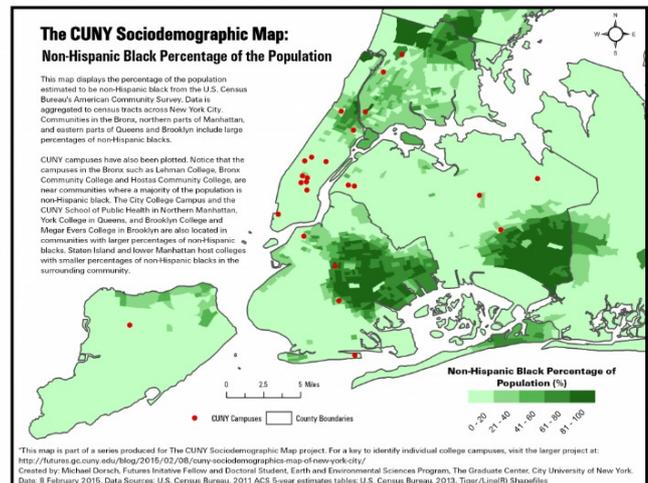
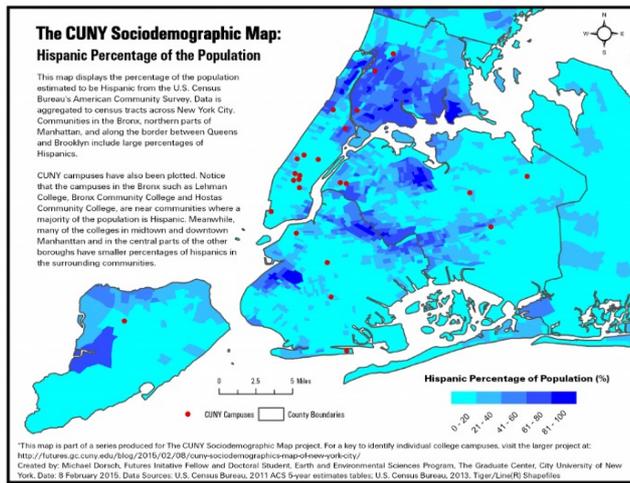
Why Do Research? Mapping the futures of Higher Education through the CUNY map of New York City.

*City University of New York (CUNY) is a public university system throughout New York City and was established to improve access to quality education for a rapidly growing and diverse population. With campuses spread across a vast metropolitan area, tracking and recording the impact of its research and teaching activities is a big task. The Futures Initiative project is aimed at understanding this complexity and advancing innovation in higher education. Director of the Futures Initiative, **Cathy Davidson**, explores the research behind the mapping activities. The project articulates that public higher education—really, all higher education—is a tremendous public good. A society invests in its students because it believes in its own future—and strives for the best one possible.*



Much has been written lately about the rise in quality of CUNY over the last two decades. Some have assumed that its rising quality means CUNY must have lost track of its honored populist commitments to New York City's diverse population. That turns out not to be true, according to the careful demographic research published last week by **Futures Initiative** Fellow and Graduate Center doctoral student, Michael Dorsch.

In "[The CUNY Sociodemographics Map of New York City: Part I – Race and Ethnicity](#)," Michael Dorsch compares the ethnicity of each of the communities that surround each of CUNY's campuses to the ethnicity of the students attending that campus. He has also published detailed racial and ethnic demographics for each campus, so you can gain quite an intriguing and complex picture of both the individual colleges and CUNY as a whole from this excellent research. The "punchline" of Dorsch's demographic work: "CUNY schools serve a student population as diverse as NYC itself—and sometimes more so."



Source: Michael Dorsch, CUNY Sociodemographics Map of New York City: Part I – Race and Ethnicity

Quality and diversity, it turns out, can operate hand in hand—and they do at CUNY. Why does this matter? At a time when state after state is cutting its support for higher education, it is crucially important to have examples of higher education that still serve the public. It is important to think of the role our urban universities play in the life of a city, how they nurture and feed the communities around them as well as the city as a whole. It is crucially important to think about what it means to embrace both quality and diversity, excellence and access. And it is important to make the future of higher education part of the pedagogy of graduate training. Over 80% of students today attend public universities. The fate of all of those institutions matters to our society. And it should matter in the way future professors learn how to master the art, craft, and science of research, teaching, and institution building.

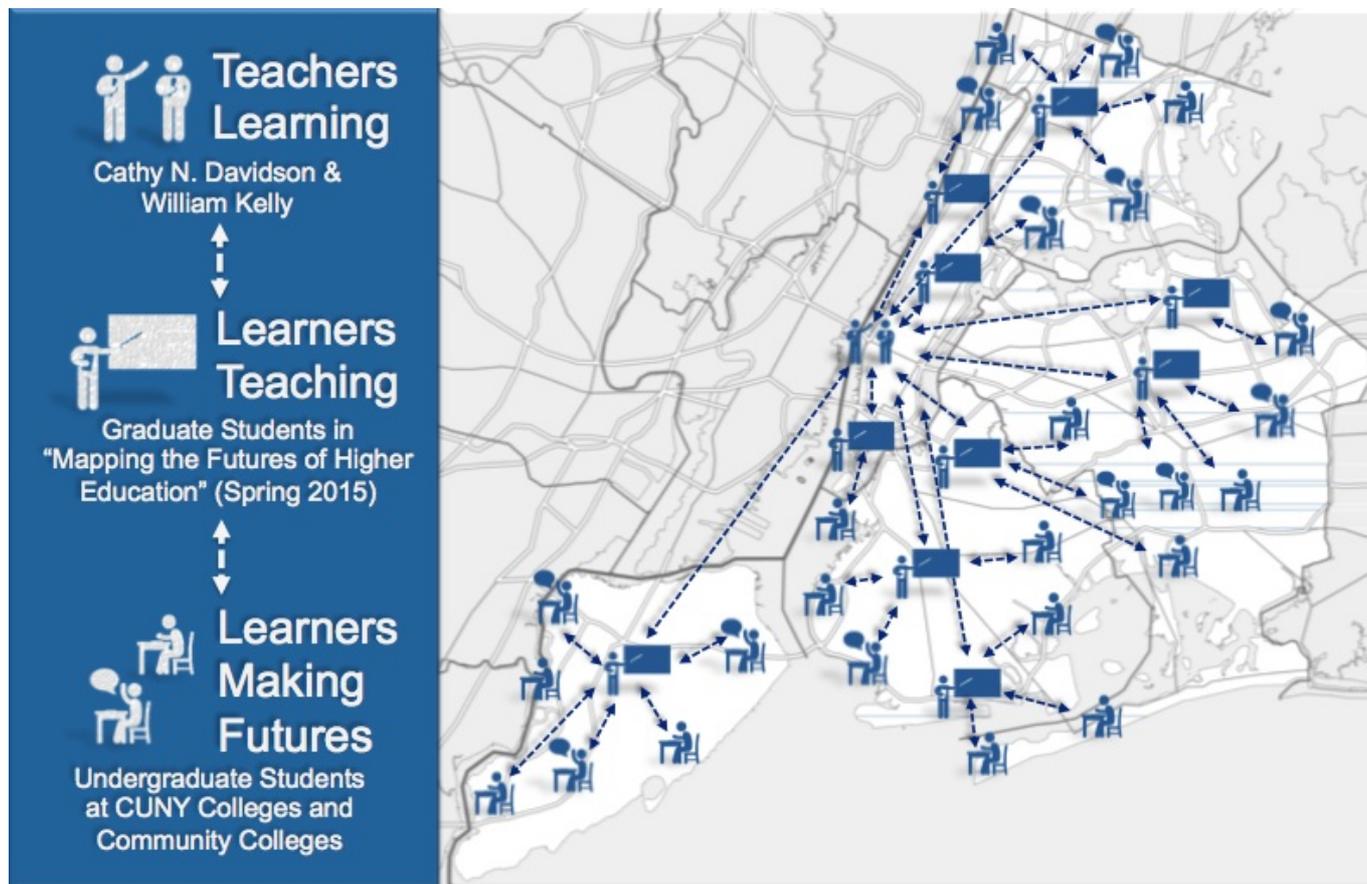
The CUNY Map of NYC matters as we think, together, about the long-standing tradition in the U.S., at least as old as the GI Bill, that makes affordable higher education a conduit to the middle class. Through accessible public higher education a “nation of immigrants” builds upon the strengths of its diverse ethnic cultures. It builds a future. We have to work, together, to champion a future where access to higher education allows for a diversity as great as that of our cities, and of our society as a whole.

The CUNY Map of NYC

Michael Dorsch’s work is part of a major collaborative project undertaken by the Futures Initiative called The CUNY Map of NYC. His work is actually the first of what will be several maps, all of which will be the work of graduate and undergraduate students across the CUNY campuses. On May 22, we will host a reception at the Graduate Center exhibiting all the maps done by all the students and faculty teaching in our program, from all the

different campuses. Because each CUNY campus has a different graduation date, this will be a relatively rare occasion for CUNY, where students from different campuses have an opportunity to meet each other. All who are participating in this project will receive a Certificate of Recognition as a Futures Initiative Scholar.

Mapping the Futures Of Higher Education: A New Model for Training Future Professors



Source: [Mapping the Futures of Higher Education](#)

The CUNY Map of NYC is a big, collaborative project, undertaken by the undergraduate students and their professors (all graduate students) in a dozen courses being taught all across the CUNY system. The professors of these introductory courses are themselves all students—graduate students enrolled in the first graduate Futures Initiative course, "[Mapping the Futures of Higher Education](#)."

The course is taught by myself and Graduate Center President Emeritus [William Kelly](#). For those who haven't followed this blog, I direct the Futures Initiative along with a fantastic team of colleagues and four Futures Initiative Fellows, including Michael Dorsch. Our course, "Mapping the Futures of Higher Education," is about the content, methods, pedagogies, technologies, theories and practices of teaching and administering universities in the digital age. It is an entirely new way of training graduate students for the challenges they will encounter as researchers and as professors.

To our knowledge, nothing like this has been done before at CUNY—or anywhere. We'd love to hear from anyone who knows of a comparable program. We are doing everything publicly, on [our website](#), so we can model this new way of translating the specialized research one learns as a doctoral student into inspiring introductory, undergraduate teaching—in any field.

The focus of the course is on the "why?" of research, teaching, and institution building. Why are you dedicating several years of your lives to this subject matter? Why is it worth passing it on to your undergraduate students as part of their "general education"? How often in higher education do we really engage, translate, and exemplify these deep kinds of "why?" questions about the knowledge we have and that we transmit?

We are working to create—together—the best, most inspiring and motivating kind of classroom—engaged, experiential, collaborative, project-based, student-led teaching. We have lots of research on these methods and know that they help substantially in retention in two ways: you retain content better if you engage with it (rather than just memorize with a test) when you use it, and best of all when you teach it to someone else. Also, you are more likely to complete a course or a degree when you work with others, in study groups, as partners, as collaborators who count on you and on whom you count. Personal relationships are hugely important to staying in college and earning a degree. The CUNY Map of NYC is one of the projects that requires collaboration and commitment and partnerships. It's also fun. Enjoying what you do happens to also be a great motivator, for staying in college and for anything voluntary that we undertake in life.

Quality + Equality = Diversity (On Every Level)

Our graduate students come from the following fields—and I'm not sure anyone has taught graduate education to such an array of fields and disciplines before: English; Theater; Urban Education; Chemistry; Speech, Language, and Hearing Science; Criminal Justice; Computer Science; Classics; Music; Art History.

Our graduate students are already professionals. Graduate Center students teach some 200,000 (yes, you read that correctly) undergraduates annually. Our dozen students are all either teaching one or two undergraduate classes right now, or they are organizing programs for undergraduates. Together, they represent the following CUNY campuses: Queens College, Lehman College, Brooklyn College, Hunter College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Kingsborough Community College, Laguardia Community College, John Jay College, and City College of New York.

In the graduate class Bill Kelly and I are teaching, we are reading extensively and deeply in pedagogies of interaction, collaboration, experiential learning, and engaged teaching. Our goal is the success of our students as researchers and as teachers. Their goal is the success of their students. We define success both in terms of learning the material and in successfully completing the courses they are taking, of course. But we are also defining success as learning something in these courses that helps them have the confidence as human beings to apply that knowledge in the world. In a larger sense, we want them to know, confidently, that they have learned the ability to master a new subject and apply it—through all the shifts and changes of the world in which we live. Precious. We put a lot of emphasis on “why”: Why this field? Why these methods? Why college? Why now?

Peer-Learning, Student-Directed Learning

After an Introductory lecture and several introductory assignments when our twelve students came to know a little about one another, Bill and I left the room on the first day and invited the graduate students to design a course. We had built a foundation, had mapped out the course, and left a space for four groups to take charge. You can find out what they did [here](#), since we are documenting the class. The four units they have chosen are: Assessment; Student-Led Learning; Life Barriers and Ethics (the socioeconomic barriers students face on their way to success in a diverse system); and Space, Movement, and Dynamics (non-text based ways of learning and knowing). The graduate students come up with readings for us and lead us in some kind of research-based pedagogical exercise. That week, these graduate students who are also teachers then find a way to apply what they have learned in our graduate class to their undergraduate teaching or program/administrative work. The following week is a “debriefing” and we discuss what happened, how it worked, how it could have been different.



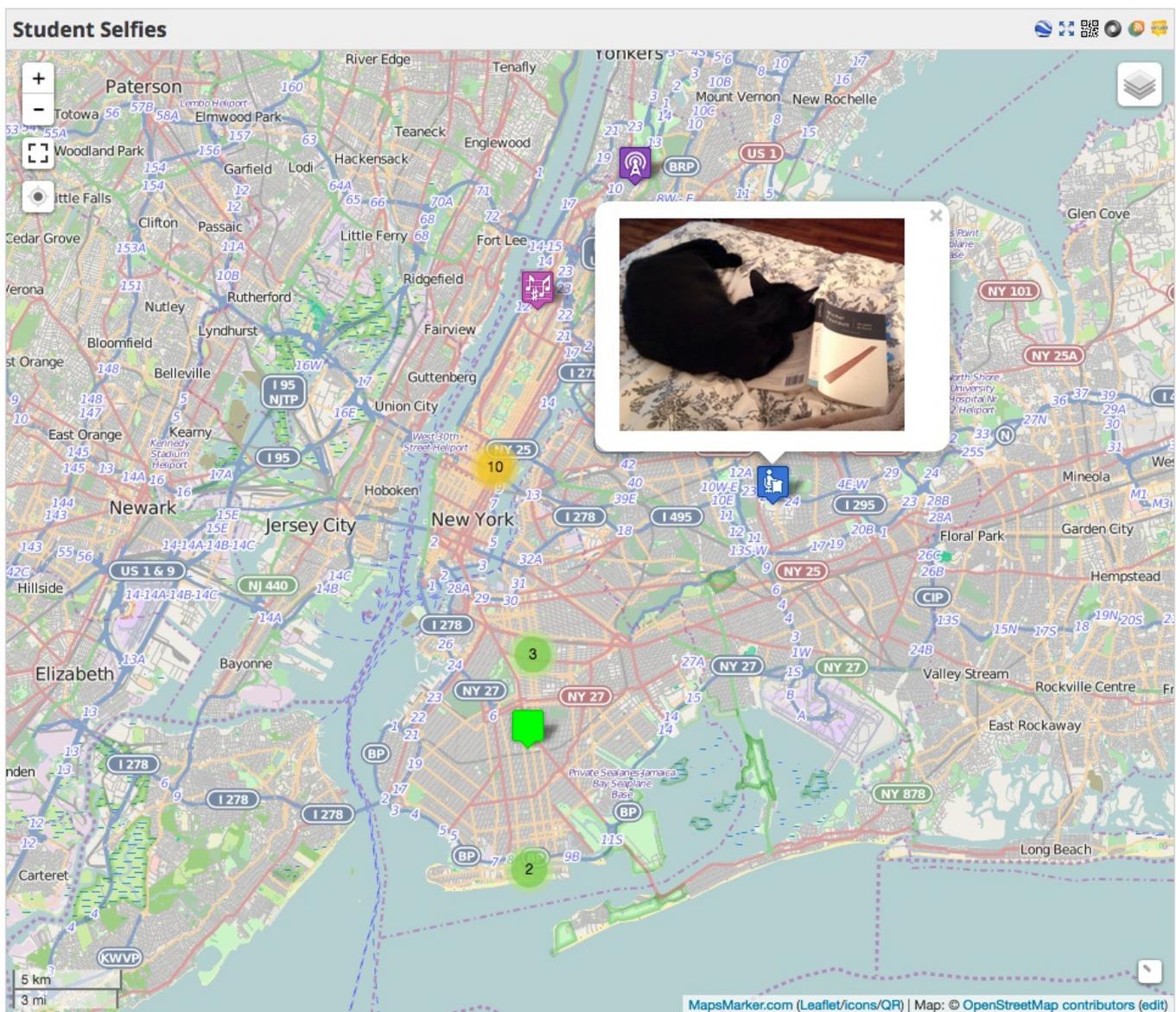
Photo of first Mapping the Futures class by FI Fellow Kalle Westerling

And here is the great part: their students—those undergraduates at the CUNY colleges—will be able to use our [CBOX site](#) to comment on what they are learning and how, to offer feedback on what we can all do better, to be engaged in these methods of learning. In the jargon of the field, this is called “meta-cognition”—learning about how you learn best. The research shows that understanding and thinking about how you learn best and finding the best ways to use your best abilities to master a subject—often in tandem with others who have different ways of learning—is the single best way to master challenging material, in school or in life.

Knowing your work has consequences in the world is another way to be successful. Bill and I hope and believe that, in “Mapping the Futures of Higher Education,” our graduate students are learning—from one another and from us—new ways to have consequence in the world as educators. We hope they are instilling that sense of consequence—meaning, importance, relevance—to their own students across the CUNY system. The CUNY Map of NYC is one way of quite literally mapping the consequences of higher education—of our students’ education right now—onto the map of their city.

CBOX: A Platform for CUNY Students to Communicate Across Campuses

The purpose of this collaborative project is to use, to its best advantage, the distributed, networked structure of CUNY. As a first research project, Michael Dorsch has released his socio-demographic maps. As a first pedagogical project, each of the graduate students in “Mapping the Futures of Higher Education” has put a non-referential selfie on an online [map of New York](#). The selfie images are non-referential because we are also teaching digital literacy in this course, how to use educational tools wisely and well to maximize what higher education can offer. And data privacy is one issue we take seriously. Someone put up a photograph of their cat, someone else put up a photograph of their dog. No names, no addresses—but they have put themselves, in a way that’s important to them, on the map of New York City.



Still from our Student Selfies Map, available as an interactive map [here](#)

In the next weeks, students in all the undergraduate classes will do the same. That is the first teaching application of The CUNY Map of NYC, for students to see themselves on the map, linked to their campuses. We have also, in the Futures Initiative, developed a tool to make this linking across campuses for teaching purposes possible. Katina Rogers, Deputy Director of the Futures Initiative, was the lead designer of a unique platform on which all of our graduate students have uploaded their syllabi for the courses they are teaching. For the first time, we have customized the [CUNY Academic Commons](#) tool, developed by CUNY faculty as an academic network for faculty, so that students can use it to communicate ideas and give one another feedback across the system.

Our “[Mapping the Futures of Higher Education](#)” site has a public face that anyone can visit. We are keeping accounts of what happens each day in the graduate class so anyone can follow along on this historic class via the site’s [blog](#). There is also a private log-in for all the students in all of our collaborative CUNY classes and for others who join the site officially (we give permission if you sign in). Logged in, students and faculty can share ideas—and maps! If they so choose they can work together, across classes on maps of disciplines, or intellectual hobbies of relevance to the course, or just about anything that maps their relationship to the city.

There Are Many Kinds of Maps

For the CUNY Map of NYC, some classes may have a specific project, others may just decide to map their class projects onto their non-referential selfies. Our Classics graduate student/professor, for example, does a project

where she has students create the etymologies of their own names and trace back all the places from which any contemporary name may have come across the linguistic and geographical map. She is planning to have her students chart the journeys in all their names, with markers of all the places those names may have traveled over centuries and centuries of time. From Hunter College to the world, from 2015 back throughout history. Quite a map to be on!

Other classes will link students' final projects to this public map, making work, even by undergraduates, a public contribution to knowledge. Some maps might be utilitarian, some scholarly, some playful. Perhaps there will be some artists arising in the classes who may want to create a mind-map of the content of their classes—or of all of the Futures Initiative classes! I once gave a talk where someone in the audience recorded and transmitted the talk to the remarkable mind mapper [Giulia Forsythe](#) who mapped my talk in real time and released it from her home in Canada while the audience was asking questions of me in Davis, CA. It was tweeted around the world and, coincidentally, it showed up again on my Twitter feed. (I have included it at the end of this blog post, as an inspiring model and because it happens to illustrate the themes of our course and the way public knowledge travels. Thanks again, Giulia, and Twitter friends. Make sure to follow us: [@FuturesEd](#) & [#FuturesEd](#)).

We hope this project will allow all of us to understand more about how universities support, enrich, augment, draw from, and complement the resources of the communities that surround them, in ways actual—and sometimes virtual. We're all in this together.

The CUNY Sociodemographic Map of New York: A Buffer Analysis

Futures Initiative Fellow [Michael Dorsch](#) has kicked off our elaborate research—and pedagogy-based mapping project with his exemplary, meticulous sociodemographic research and skillful academic mapping. Michael is a doctoral student in Environmental and Earth Sciences. He is writing his dissertation on the relationships between income inequality and pollution. He is also interested in income inequality and access to natural resources—parks, green areas, the environmental resources that make a city livable.

In our Futures Initiative Fellows' meetings, we posed the question of whether the twenty-four CUNY campuses might, in some way, be resources to their communities, whether they reflect the diversity of those communities, or whether they are anomalous, with little in common with the communities around them. That is a very complex question because CUNY is complex. It is comprised of 24 physical campuses (plus some inter-campus colleges such as Macaulay Honors College). These campuses are spread across the five boroughs of New York. To simply do an average or a median statistic of NYC or of CUNY misses the point of the complexity, individuality, and distinctiveness of the different areas, boroughs, or campuses of our city.

So Michael applied what, in his field, is called a "buffer analysis" to our question. Before he crunched any data at all, Michael drew a circle around each campus. He used one mile as his measure, a "walkable distance." To maintain consistency and as much objectivity as possible, he used that same measurement in analyzing the data for each campus and then began collecting data within that circle. He used census data. You can go to his [blog post](#) to find out all the details of his methodology, the data he used, how he analyzed it, and what tools and techniques he employed. By releasing his research and his maps first, we have set the highest possible bar for all of our undergraduates. This is what you can learn from a map. This is what you learn from research. You are in college to learn about the world. You are in college to learn about yourself. You are in college to, literally, put yourself on the map of your class, your campus, your city, your society.

Why Do Research?

To be frank, we had no idea what the answer would be when Michael began working with census data (for the communities) and CUNY data for each campus supplied by the Office of Institutional Research. Neither did Michael. The whole point of careful research is you don't know the conclusion in advance.

Unlike some recent journalism, Michael didn't start from assumptions about quality and diversity being antithetical. On the contrary, he made methodological decisions and then pursued the best research he could to find out what he might find out. Imagine that! Rather than simply assert something without evidence or on only the slimmest (and inaccurate) anecdotal or even stereotypical evidence, he crunched numbers—not sure at all of what he would

find out. And we have no idea what we will find in the future either. Again, that's the point of good research.

The purpose of a Graduate Center or any university is to train students to explore, to be diligent, to sleuth, to ask hard questions, and to think of the best ways to address those questions and come up with answers. One set of answers may well lay the groundwork for further questions. Inquiry, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving are the heart of a university. Research is almost the opposite of polemic, punditry, bigotry, stereotype, hype, PR, or "click bait."

Public Education as a Public Good

So why are we creating the CUNY Map of NYC together? Our point is that public higher education—really, all higher education—is a tremendous public good. A society invests in its students because it believes in its own future—and strives for the best one possible. Around the world, many countries with far less affluence than the U.S. offer free or very low-cost higher education to their population. In some countries, such as Sweden, students are actually paid a stipend to go to university. The United States has seen decades of defunding and underfunding public higher education. If your public university "costs too much," it is because for decades we have been transferring the burden of higher education costs from society at large to the individual students going to school.

New York supports its public educational system more than many cities in the U.S. do—but we could do lots better. As a brand new New Yorker (I moved here to teach at the Graduate Center this summer after over twenty years teaching at Duke University), I am baffled that the city doesn't make more out of the fact that nearly 500,000 full and part-time students are in our public city colleges and universities right now. That is extraordinary. [Over eighty percent of them graduate without tuition debt.](#) That is a remarkable statistic.

I keep saying that there should be billboards all over the city and maybe even flashing signs on the bridges and in the tunnels leading into the city, proclaiming, "Yes, it's the most expensive city in America; yes, we have the worst income inequality in the U.S.—but your child (or you!) can still afford to go to college here."

To Be a Student Is To Make a Singular Commitment

New York needs to take far more pride in the remarkable gift of nearly half a million inhabitants attending our public university system. It's not easy being a student, especially a commuter student, especially one who (like the majority of CUNY students) also has a job—or two jobs. To make a voluntary commitment to your own improvement, to your own learning, is extraordinary. It's not a commitment to be taken lightly.

Volunteer activities performed for no immediate gratification but towards some long term goal have a notoriously high drop-out rate. Gyms, for example, base their business plans on the assumption that less than twenty percent of new members will still be using the gym within five months of paying their annual membership fee. Going to school is a lot harder than showing up at the gym a few times a week. And yet students make that commitment, to themselves and to their society. The CUNY Map of NYC is partly to pay tribute to the commitment our students make every day to the life of the city.

CUNY Campuses as Economic 'Hot Spots'

That's another reason for the CUNY Map of NYC. Economically, intellectually, socially, and culturally, campuses offer many resources to their surrounding communities, even as those communities support the campuses through tax dollars. This happens to be true all across America. More and more members of the Baby Boomer generation, for example, are retiring to college towns. They often are exciting spaces for art, think tanks for technology innovation, sites for the performing arts and music, sites of conversation and dialogue—whether book clubs or public lectures or political dialogues. The CUNY Map of NYC will partly illustrate all that our twenty-four campuses offer to the communities surrounding them.

CUNY as a Network

The City University of New York is essentially a network of universities, colleges, and community colleges, and, structurally, works as many networks do. There are the "nodes," which is to say the various campuses. Each is in many ways independent and unique, and has its own vital relationship to its own surrounding community. Terms

such as “consortium” and “system” are used about CUNY, but neither is technically accurate for how this ad hoc collection of sometimes small, sometimes huge campuses is working together while also maintaining independence as separate campus entities. That is yet another reason why we worked with the campus as the focal point—it’s network nodal theory applied to the CUNY structure. Network analysis actually works quite well for the unequal distributions even of distributions.

Advancing Equity and Innovation in Higher Education

The Futures Initiative motto is “Advancing Equity and Innovation in Higher Education.” Keeping those in balance is the key to technology innovation that is not exploitative but has potential to offer real goods to society. We are learning how to use best technologies wisely and well. We don’t expect technology to be a “magic bullet” that solves all problems.

We are as interested in the social and intellectual connections as in the tools. But we also want our graduate students and their undergraduate students to graduate from college understanding more about the tools, what they can and cannot do, and to understand more about the age and place in which we live.

What does it mean to live in the Information Age? What does it mean to live in a world where the “Internet of Everything” offers us choices (usually advertisements) based on our past online behavior and our own sociodemographic profile? We want our students to understand and know more about the tools that the world is using to track their data and design their world. We are giving them tools to understand and use and sometimes fight back against the tools that are shaping their lives.

We also hope that by participating in the CUNY Map of NYC project that they are gaining enormous pride in this vast and rich system of public, urban education—the nation’s largest and most distinguished. Why can’t you buy CUNY sweatshirts in the airports that sell Columbia and NYU sweatshirts? We need more CUNY pride. Pride is another one of those factors, the research shows, that motivates learning and formal educational success. Being a CUNY graduate at this time in history is important: It is crucially important for the future of American democracy to have quality and equality as shared educational values.

Are there problems with CUNY? Of course! I am sure future research undertaken by the Futures Initiative will highlight areas where we need to be making major improvements. We are planning a major research project, ahead, about career paths, for example, for graduate students in this era where too much of America’s college teaching force is now part-time, with no benefits, no security of any kind, hourly wages that have been calculated as below the minimum wage. CUNY is no exception and we will be doing the research into these and other areas too.

Research To Inform Policy and Decision-Making

Again, this is what research is. You ask hard questions. You use the most meticulous methods you can to answer them. And then you see how you can use those answers to inform policy and decision-making going forward. The amazing beauty of our first course is we also have as a co-teacher someone who has spent a very distinguished career making and understanding the contingencies, possibilities, opportunities, and challenges of institutional decision-making. It is a priceless gift having a former President of the Graduate Center and the 2013-2014 Interim Acting Chancellor of the entire CUNY system, William Kelly, team-teaching this first ever Futures Initiative course.

What’s Up Next for the Futures Initiative?

In 2015-2016, we have funding to be able to support four or five courses, where a professor from the Graduate Center faculty teaches with a professor from one of the CUNY campuses. We will focus on diversity and equity, on underrepresented groups, scholars of color, and research on diversity. If there are, say, five courses, with 15 graduate students in each, and those graduate students are each teaching 15-30 students, we have a very strong multiplier effect.

If we are able to raise funding, we will be hosting workshops for this year’s 400 students (undergraduate and graduate) to become peer mentors to next year’s 1500+ students. That’s exciting. That’s impact.

We will, as we are doing this year, also hold public forums and use our virtual sites to make our learning and pedagogy as public as possible. And we encourage anyone, anywhere, who is doing work to rethink graduate training, student-led learning, and the mapping of higher education as a public good to post here, to link your work to ours, and to make this a truly collaborative venture. We hope to model. We hope to learn. Together.

Mapping the Futures of Higher Education

From undergraduate research at Laguardia Community College or Queens College or Lehman College, or any of the CUNY campuses represented, to a President Emeritus. It is all CUNY. It's all on our Futures Initiative map. That's what we hope to accomplish with The CUNY Map of NYC. As an aggregate, CUNY represents the network of educated city residents, publicly educated at less cost than in most other cities. We are working, together, to map that invaluable, precious New York resource.

Public Events, Spring 2015: (Join this HASTAC Group or stay tuned to this site for further information):

- Feb 6, 4:00 pm: "Teaching CUNY at CUNY" English Department Friday Forum
- Feb 26, 3:30-6:30 pm: Elizabeth Losh, "[The MOOC Moment](#)" (room 9206, the Graduate Center, CUNY)
- April 14, 4:15-6:15pm: Open Session, "Mapping the Futures of Higher Education," Conversation with Professor John Mogalescu, President Emeritus Kelly and Futures Initiative Director Davidson (William Kelly Skylight Conference Room, the Graduate Center, CUNY)
- April 17: Feminist Pedagogy Conference
- April 20, 1:00-3:00 pm: Brewster Kahle, "Internet Archives" (William Kelly Skylight Conference Room, the Graduate Center, CUNY)
- May 1: Purposeful Pedagogy Conference
- May 5, 4:15-6:15 pm: Open Session and Reception for "Mapping the Futures of Higher Education": Recap and Work in Progress and an Interactive Session—Bring Your Markers! (William Kelly Skylight Conference Room, the Graduate Center, CUNY)
- March 10, 4:15-6:15. Open Session, "Student-Directed Learning," Presented by graduate students in "Mapping the Futures of Higher Education" (Room 9206, Graduate Center)
- May 22: Exhibit of the CUNY Map of NYC, Reception, and Recognition Ceremony for all Futures Initiative Scholars (Segal Theater, Library, Entry Hall, the Graduate Center, CUNY)

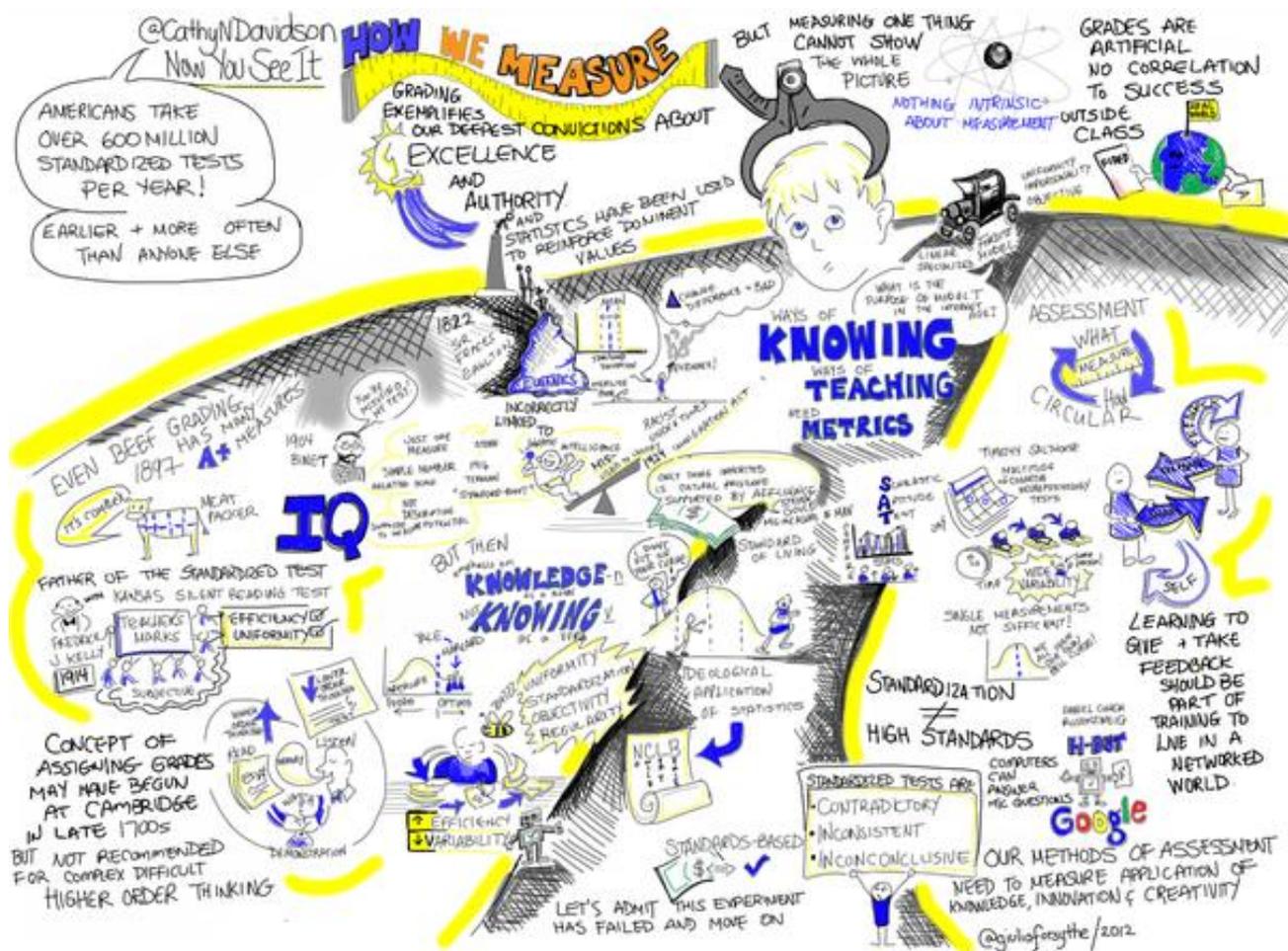


Image credit: Mind map by Giulia Forsythe

This piece originally appeared on the HASTAC blog as [Why Do Research? Or, Why “The CUNY Map of NYC” Matters #FuturesEd](#) and is reposted with the author’s permission. For more on the Futures Initiative, you can [visit the website heret](#) or follow the Twitter hashtag [#FuturesEd](#).

This article originally appeared at the [LSE’s Impact of Social Science blog](#).

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USApp– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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About the authors

Cathy N. Davidson - CUNY

Cathy N. Davidson is director of the Futures Initiative and a distinguished professor in the Ph.D. Program in English at the Graduate Center, CUNY. She is a renowned scholar of cultural history and technology, including the history of the book, the history of industrialism and postindustrialism, digital humanities, and the impact of new technologies on culture, cognition, learning, and the workplace. Her current work focuses on trust, data, new collaborative methods of living and learning, and the ways we can change higher education for a better future. In 2011, President Obama appointed her to the National Council on the Humanities.



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