THE TEAM • 2

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS • 3

JASNEET HORA
ON DACA, UNIVERSITIES MUST LEAD THE WAY • 4

PHILIP HSU
CYBER DEFENSE IN THE DISINFORMATION AGE • 7

JEENHO HAHM
JASON HEALEY HEADLINE • 10

MICHAEL DRAKE
HOMELESSNESS IN NEW YORK CITY • 14

KARLI MCMENAMIN
NEW YORK STATE EXCELSIOR SCHOLARSHIP:
LAST DOLLAR PROGRAM IGNORES THE REAL BURDENS • 18

KUBA WISNIEWSKI
DESIGN-BUILD PROJECT DELIVERY METHOD AND
ITS FEASIBILITY IN NEW YORK CITY • 19
DEAR READER,

Welcome to the second issue of the Columbia Public Policy Review, a student-run publication dedicated to domestic policy in the United States. The mission of CPPR is to inform our communities at Columbia and beyond, while inspiring democratic participation. This year has been turbulent, flush with issues worth unpacking: the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States; a slew of new policies from his administration to review; an energetic exchange on balancing privacy and security; and the parsing apart of what it really means to be an American and achieve success, in whatever form, in this country.

In this issue of the magazine, our contributors explore topics on the minds of many people living in the United States in 2017, from cybersecurity and disinformation, to immigration, education, infrastructure investment, and how to make our cities—specifically this global capital we call home—more liveable for those most in need.

As one writer explains, now, more than ever, policymakers should hear the voices of students. We believe that members of Columbia and SIPA can have meaningful impacts on policy conversations at the neighborhood, city, state, and even federal level. CPPR is our way to amplify these voices, and it can be yours, too, as our team always welcomes submissions.

Sincerely,

THE 2017 CPPR BOARD

Kelsey Ann Kearns, President
Alexandrea Marie Logan, Vice President
Marc K. Dominianni, Executive Editor
Hadiya Housepian, Co-Communications Chair
Carlos Alberto Rubio Pimienta, Co-Communications Chair
Karli A. McMenamin, Events and Skills Chair

EMAIL: cppr@columbia.edu
@cppr @columbiappr @columbiapublicpolicy
On DACA, Universities Must Lead the Way

Student movements can bring immigration issues into the national conversation — by Jasneet Hora

In moments of national turmoil, university campuses throughout recent American history have provided clarity and encouraged a return to the ideals that formed this nation. They have served as moral compasses, and have stirred the national consciousness in such a way that makes change inevitable. In Ohio’s Kent State University, it was the 1970 shooting of four students peacefully protesting the Vietnam War that shook a nation’s conscience firmly against the war.1 In the 1980s, women in college campuses in Pennsylvania organized the first “Take Back the Night” marches and vigils to lead a movement against sexual violence, after the murder of a young female microbiologist drew the nation’s horror.2 And in Columbia University itself, it was the firm insistence of seven students who launched a three-week demonstration and drew national attention to the injustices of the South Africa’s apartheid regime that facilitated a slow but steady divestiture of funds from the country’s most profitable industries.3

Such a moment of reckoning is once again upon us. As the nation undergoes a particularly virulent strain of anti-immigrant sentiment, the lives of 800,000 young immigrants hang in legal limbo with U.S. President Donald J. Trump’s September 5 rescinding of DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. DACA is a program that grants protection from deportation to people who came to this country as children, most of whom only know America as their home. To receive DACA protections, an applicant must have come to the United States before 2007, demonstrate that they are enrolled in secondary or higher education or working, and show that they have a clean criminal background, among other requirements. By all accounts, these individuals who pledge allegiance to the only country they know.

DACA recipients are hardworking Americans who are actively contributing every single day to the only country they know. The President recognizes this as well. As recently as September 14, he tweeted that DACA recipients are “good, educated and accomplished young people who have jobs and are serving in the military... and who have been in the country for many years.” Yet despite these benefits and positive sentiments, Congress has been unable to develop a responsible legislative solution. What emerged was a seemingly positive development—the President’s bipartisan deal with Democratic party leaders of a DACA fix for additional border security—looks to have descended into partisan squabbling as some White House aides, such as Stephen Miller, have tried to “trade” the future of 800,000 individuals for their personal wish list of anti-immigration measures.4 A recurring poison pill that Miller keeps trying to insert into the discussions is the RAISE Act, a law designed to cap the number of legal immigrants accepted into the United States by half each year—something the President himself never discussed on the campaign trail, and something clearly designed to stall progress on a solution for DACA. Such an outcome would go against the will of the American people. According to a recent Fox News poll, 80% of all Americans—including 71% of Republicans—favor a legalization path for DACA recipients.5 More than 400 business leaders signed a letter titled an “Open Letter from Leaders of American Industry” to the President affirming the importance of DACA youth to the national economy.6 Over 1,300 religious leaders are pleading for protections for these individuals.7 Yet in this overwhelming support for a solution, a simple point is often missed: such an outcome would go against the spirit of the American experience.

The importance of DACA youth to the nation’s economic vitality.8 Over 1,300 religious leaders are pleading for protections for these individuals.9 Beginning March 5, 2018, the government will be able to begin rounding up these DACA recipients, these individuals who pledge allegiance to the
American flag, and deporting them to lands alien to them. Such an action would stain the nation and its foundations irreparably.

America is in dire need once again for its consciousness—its youth—to step up and bend the arc towards justice. Because many DACA recipients are our classmates, our coworkers, and our friends, we have a uniquely personal and urgent need to act, or risk being complicit in abandoning one of the most pressing issues of our time. To date, so far more than 560 presidents from higher education institutions have banded together to call on the President to allow these DACA recipients to continue working and studying.10 Some universities, such as Columbia University, have gone so far as to deny entry to federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, officers who may try to enter the campus to arrest these individuals.

These actions are not enough for the times we are in.

In the fall of 1960, four young students sat down in their local campus diner in North Carolina A&T University, after a long day of classes. After waiting what seemed like too long for a cup of coffee, they realized that they had been denied service, and were being asked to leave because they were African Americans sitting in a “whites only” space. Instead of allowing this injustice to fester on, these students returned the very next day to request equal service.11 In the coming days and weeks, they would return joined by groups of 25 of their classmates, then 60, 300, 1,000, and eventually 1,600 of their peers supporting their cause, launching the Greensboro Four into the national conversation and eliciting hundreds of similar sit-ins nationwide. With their actions that day, little did they know that within five years, the landmark Civil Rights Act would become the law of the land in their country. It would make the type of discrimination they faced that day outlawed for all future students, thanks to their and the actions of their peers.

To earn a similar outcome for DACA youth, in one of the defining civil rights issues of our time, we must assemble the same broad-based coalition of students as past movements to bring this problem to the forefront of our national debate. Only by doing this can students once again draw the nation’s eye, and, soon, its lawmakers’ support, to lead the change that the country needs.

One such connection is between the Russian propaganda machine and the U.S. “Alt-Right,” a new movement of ultra-conservatives. Around the time of Charlottesville protests in August, 2017, fake news and influence campaigns feed into Twitter and Facebook’s ad revenue, as a victory for Russia in undermining the US constitution. Furthermore, fake news and influence campaigns feed into Twitter and Facebook’s ad revenue, as a victory for Russia in undermining the US constitution. Additionally, fake news and influence campaigns feed into Twitter and Facebook’s ad revenue, as a victory for Russia in undermining the US constitution. Furthermore, fake news and influence campaigns feed into Twitter and Facebook’s ad revenue, as a victory for Russia in undermining the US constitution.

RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA AND FAKE NEWS ARE REGULARLY SHARED BY ALT-RIGHT WEBSITES, JUST AS RUSSIAN SITES PROPAGATE U.S. RIGHT-WING NEWS, REFLECTING A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO.

Just a day before the CNN story broke, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman James Lankford and Republican Senator from Oklahoma and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, claimed that Russian “trolls farms” were “linked to Russian influence operations” begun churning out tweets and promoting content critical of left-wing “Antifa” demonstrators, then praising President Trump’s response to the protests. The bots also promoted what amounts to Russian propaganda from Spanish and RT.

The result of this dovetailing serves both the Kremlin and the Alt-Right’s interests well. Russian propaganda and fake news are regularly shared by Alt-Right websites, just as Russian sites propagate U.S. right-wing news, reflecting a symbiotic relationship between the two. As Facebook and Twitter crack down on fake accounts or others that disseminate Russian fake news, they may begin treading on the turf of the “Alt-Right” or White Nationalists by removing their accounts as well. Such “persecution” by “liberal media” plays well into the self-victimization, anti-establishment, and siege mentality of “Alt-Right” and White Nationalist groups, who are likely to be drawn closer to Russian influencers who amplify their message. In return, the Kremlin gains a more loyal vanguard for perpetrating its own political agenda vis-à-vis the United States and elsewhere.

Russia has proven to be utilitarian in achieving its goal to amplify, divide, and undermine, as the Kremlin targets divisive issues in American society beyond just the “Alt-Right.” On September 28, 2017, CNN reported that Russian operatives apparently fabricated the “Blackvickt” Facebook page to dovetail with the Black Lives Matter movement. Boasting more followers—some of which were undoubtedly fake accounts—than the actual Black Lives Matter site, Blackvickt featured videos of police brutality and encouraged protests in what CNN’s unnamed sources described as a Russian attempt to sow racial discord in the United States leading up to the 2016 Elections.

Nora was WikiLeaks’ release of the DNC emails illegal? Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman James Lankford and Republican Senator from Oklahoma and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, claimed that Russian “troll farms” were “linked to Russian influence operations” begun churning out tweets and promoting content critical of left-wing “Antifa” demonstrators, then praising President Trump’s response to the protests. The bots also promoted what amounts to Russian propaganda from Spanish and RT.

The result of this dovetailing serves both the Kremlin and the Alt-Right’s interests well. Russian propaganda and fake news are regularly shared by Alt-Right websites, just as Russian sites propagate U.S. right-wing news, reflecting a symbiotic relationship between the two. As Facebook and Twitter crack down on fake accounts or others that disseminate Russian fake news, they may begin treading on the turf of the “Alt-Right” or White Nationalists by removing their accounts as well. Such “persecution” by “liberal media” plays well into the self-victimization, anti-establishment, and siege mentality of “Alt-Right” and White Nationalist groups, who are likely to be drawn closer to Russian influencers who amplify their message. In return, the Kremlin gains a more loyal vanguard for perpetrating its own political agenda vis-à-vis the United States and elsewhere.

Russia has proven to be utilitarian in achieving its goal to amplify, divide, and undermine, as the Kremlin targets divisive issues in American society beyond just the “Alt-Right.” On September 28, 2017, CNN reported that Russian operatives apparently fabricated the “Blackvickt” Facebook page to dovetail with the Black Lives Matter movement. Boasting more followers—some of which were undoubtedly fake accounts—than the actual Black Lives Matter site, Blackvickt featured videos of police brutality and encouraged protests in what CNN’s unnamed sources described as a Russian attempt to sow racial discord in the United States leading up to the 2016 Elections.

Just a day before the CNN story broke, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman James Lankford and Republican Senator from Oklahoma and a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, claimed that Russian “troll farms” were “linked to Russian influence operations” begun churning out tweets and promoting #BoycottNFL hashtags on social media so as to exacerbate social division over the decisions of some National Football League players not to celebrate the U.S. national anthem before football games. Beyond just seeking to undermine the National Football League itself as a foundational American pastime, Russian hijacking of social media also attempts to undermine the trust Americans have in the companies providing such platforms and services.

How should the US respond to Russia’s new information warfare on the American home front? Three types of responses need to be pursued: operational, legislative, and systemic.

Operational responses need to be supported with legislation to eliminate the gray areas of information warfare. But it will not be easy. American legislators criticize social media companies for being neglectful and taking inadequate measures to stop fake news and influence campaigns, yet remain constrained from providing legal cover or encouragement for what these companies are already doing by the First Amendment. Rolling back First Amendment protections could be seen as a victory for Russia in undermining the US constitution. Furthermore, fake news and influence campaigns feed into Twitter and Facebook’s ad revenue, placing these companies at odds with regulators and possibly contributing to their reluctance to confront the issue in the first place.

Congress can, however, create tighter regulation over how user accounts are created and used, to just legal. Further, legislators should suspend or enacting laws that promote fake news or are created by Russian operatives, especially if these laws are found to be manipulatively suspending suspect accounts unless additional personal information (such as text message verification via cell phone, or email verification) is provided. Congress can also pass a law that requires the private sector to coordinate and verify foreign disinformation and influence campaigns with law enforcement and intelligence agencies, if a cooperative outcome can’t be achieved otherwise.

Finally, there are a number of systemic issues that contribute to the virulence of Russian information warfare on the American home front. These could address some of them: digital literacy initiatives in the U.S. should be expanded in K-12 education and public awareness campaigns, and include training on how to identify and verify fake news. The U.S. can take inspiration from other countries, such as Taiwan, where a new educational curriculum teaches students to recognize fake news, in response to disinformation campaigns by the People’s Republic of China and the proliferation of fake news in general.

But the real systemic factor behind these campaigns has been the rise of social media and Internet news at the expense of established journalistic practices and media outlets. According to a 2017 Pew Survey, 67 percent of Americans get their news from social media outlets, up from 62 percent in 2016. In a world where people self-select their news sources and receive near-constant updates on platforms profitting from the viral distribution of eye-catching content regardless of verification, the allure of fake and divisive news will grow. Policymakers should prioritize causing widespread public awareness about the threats disinformation campaigns pose to U.S. institutions and the First Amendment, and ensuring that these campaigns do not continue to hijack and undermine the new digital institutions of our democracy.

How did you first get into the cyber field? While I was at the Air Force Academy, I turned down the pilot slot and instead applied for the intelligence one. At that time (shortly after the First Gulf War), a lot of things were happening within the Air Force intelligence. We had to protect our systems and eavesdrop on others in new ways. All the traditional tools of intelligence were becoming computerized. That’s how I got started.

How do you keep yourself protected from cyber threats? Do you have some advice for us? First, always have your computer up-to-date and keep it patched. Always use the two-factor authentication; so don’t use only passwords but at least have codes sent to your phone. Columbia’s secure Wi-Fi is way better than the regular one. All the traditional tools of intelligence were becoming computerized. That’s how I got started.

I recently started using this YubiKey [a small USB drive known as a “hardware token” to prove identity]. For the stuff I truly care about, sending me a text isn’t enough; it tells me to insert my YubiKey to prove my identity. The YubiKey is really cryptographically secure. I spend $10 a year on my password manager called LastPass. To log into my LastPass, I have to type in a very long passphrase, and insert this YubiKey. Two-factor authentication with hardware token and VPN [virtual private network] are inexpensive, and they make sure that my passwords are very secure. Columbia’s VPNs are free. Nobody can see what you’re doing.

What do you know about the recent cyber attacks against Equifax? Many of my colleagues seem to be hinting that the attackers were possibly Chinese.
has been mentioned in the open source policy review.

No, but I also haven’t looked. My colleagues have said, “Man, if I were a data scientist right now, I’d want to be a Chinese data scientist.” Since they [the Chinese] have already stolen information from OPM [Office of Personnel Management] and UnitedHealth, they have this huge database of our medical information, personal records, and that’s all true, credit history. Imagine what they’d be able to do with all that.

The implication for us [the Americans] is that we have social security numbers [SSN], and we use them as the basis of all bureaucratic information. SSN wasn’t meant for this. By law, we weren’t supposed to use our SSN as our authenticators.

But, here we are.

What do you think about the Russian hacking of the 2016 U.S. presidential election? At first, I was one of the least histórical national security cyber experts on this issue compared to most of my colleagues. Many wanted to hit back hard at Russia, but I thought it’d be too excruciating because we didn’t know the full extent of the damage yet. But once I found out more about what the Russians have been doing, I became more muscular on this than my colleagues. This needed to be about policy, not politics; this needed to be about defending democracy, not the Democrats. And we just failed at that.

Since nuclear weapons first became available to the superpowers, they recognized the unprecedented amount of damage the weapons could do, and thus gradually created a deterrence framework. As cyber attacks become more destructive, and nuclear powers (U.S., China, Russia) recognize the potential damages, do major powers (U.S., China, Iran) have already stolen information from OPM [the Chinese] have already stolen information. The basics of how to fight and win haven’t fundamentally changed. The first cyber conflict was in 1986, and there are many parallels between what happened back then and what is happening today. [Note to reader: a West German hacker named Markus Hess was recruited by the KGB to hack a U.S. National Lab to steal military information. Clifford Stoll, an American astronomer at the Lab, was able to capture Hess.]

The basics of how to fight and win haven’t changed significantly. For example, if you put fighter pilots from 1917 and 2017 together, they’re going to completely understand each other in terms of formations and tactics, even though the technology has changed so dramatically. Back in the Civil War, the Union army would capture telegraph stations to send false messages to the enemy. Both the Chinese and Russians have been killing us with deception even before cyber technology had an advantage in cyberspace previously, but it is now possible for defenders to have leverage.

Can you explain how you came up with it? Many have called for some sort of “Cyber Manhattan Project.” But in cyber security, we have made tremendous progress in technological, operational, and policy areas by consistent application of the right kind of innovations. The report’s message is that we don’t need a Manhattan Project but need to continuously implement small and quiet innovations across all enterprises. That is how we gain leverage.

What is the biggest difference between the public and private sector in terms of cyber security?

Strengths. Governments have great staying power. They have tremendous amount of resources and access to other levels of power. Private sectors don’t have that, but they have the following: agility, subject matter expertise, and hands deep in cyberspace. My friend who was in the Army and went to work for Verizon told me, “Jay, we can create and recreate cyber-space everyday. We can bend the cyberspace!” Think about it—the Air Force cannot bend the air in a way it wants. But these companies can do that with cyberspace. Governments are now trying to do that too, but aren’t as effective as companies who have deeper reach. So the best solution is for each side to get out of stepping on others’ strengths, and actually try to bring the strengths together.

Do you agree with the notion that data is the “new oil”? [Note to reader: just like oil in the last century, many experts believe that data will become the next key resource encompassing all aspects of lives.]

Yes, that sounds about right. But we got to think about where our national security interests lie. If data is the new oil, we’re rapidly weaponizing our cyberspace and attacking others’ oil well all the time. So we have to insist less on attacking others’ data and think of fundamental trade-offs.

If the Air Force decides to order 500 new fighters or 100 new bombers, that doesn’t affect Boeing, United Airlines, or Newark Airport. But if the Cyber Command decides to keep 1000 zero-days, we’re fundamentally undermining Microsoft, AT&T, and security of what you and I use. This is unlike any other space. That is why trade-offs are different in terms of cyber security. [Note to reader: Zero-day is a computer software vulnerability that is unknown to the vendor, which can be detected and exploited by the hackers first.]

How do you deal with rogue states that have enormous cyber capabilities but won’t follow international norms?

Cyber capabilities are relatively easy to acquire, although not as easy as many make it out to be. These capabilities are easy to buy, and the U.S. doesn’t want to shut down those markets either because we have to buy them too for our own interests. That’s where the national security trade-off comes in.

We need innovations from developing the capabilities. There is something called the Wassenaar Arrangement, which puts restrictions on export of nuclear technology devices. I was talking to some major cyber security companies, and they said right now, they need 10 export licenses. This one company was involved in Stuxnet. Its team in Europe would analyze the code, then pass it onto the team in the U.S., who would further analyze what’s going on, and pass it onto the team in Singapore. Under Wassenaar, they need licenses to do all that because they’re exporting.

This is one of those things that don’t have leverage; in fact, it is the opposite of leverage. It puts enormous amount of costs on defense but very minor amount to the attackers. That would only help rogue actors. It’s one of the stupidest things that have ever come across in public policy.

What would be the major cyber attack look like?

Well, it would be very interesting and I’d hate to know. It’s going to be very different from a nuclear case because both countries understand dirty tricks. But is it going to be against finance or master lease of publicly available information? We know the direction it is coming from but not when or how it will hit us.

So let’s take Pearl Harbor. We already knew the Japanese would try to attack American assets, but we didn’t know where. That doesn’t mean to strike against Boeing, United Airlines, or Newark Airport. But if the Cyber Command decides to keep 1000 zero-days, we’re fundamentally undermining Microsoft, AT&T, and security of what you and I use. This is unlike any other space. That is why trade-offs are different in terms of cyber security.
Homelessness in New York City

BACKGROUND

He 1979 landmark ruling in the New York State Supreme Court case Callahan v. Carey paved the way for a “right to shelter” for all homeless men in New York City. Subsequent lawsuits extended that right to women and children, and included provisions requiring basic health and safety standards for shelters. Intake centers around the city are required to accept everyone and assign them to a shelter bed regardless of where they are from or what resources they have available. As the number of people in shelter continues to rise, the city must build new shelters to meet growing demand.

But building new shelters is incredibly costly in both money and political capital. A new shelter costs the city millions of dollars in purchasing or leasing land, construction, and funding a nonprofit to take over day-to-day operations. The process of choosing a location for a new shelter is filled with obstacles as well. Once a location has been identified, the city must go through a lengthy process of convincing the local Community Board (a body made up of 50-200 residents who vote on measures affecting their district) and the Borough President (who has veto power over any private or public development project). And despite the fact that building new homeless shelters is a popular idea among voters, no Community Board wants new shelters in their jurisdiction. And if enough voters express displeasure at a proposed project, a Borough President will veto it.

BUILDING NEW SHELTERS IS INCREDIBLY COSTLY IN BOTH MONEY AND POLITICAL CAPITAL.

A New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio begins his campaign for reelection this year, he is hounded by one issue in particular: homelessness. It is no secret that there are more homeless New Yorkers now than ever before, with 60,350 individuals and families currently in shelter (in October of 2008 there were 38,000 active shelter cases). During the first Mayoral debate of the 2017 election, Mayor de Blasio said his ambitious plan for developing 400,000 affordable housing units would solve the crisis. Unfortunately, solving the problem is far more complicated than adding more affordable housing.

BUREAUCRACY AND FUNDING CHALLENGES PUT CITY AGENCIES HELPING THE HOMELESS IN A BIND

BY MICHAEL DRAKE

The de Blasio administration has drastically expanded other government functions focusing on three vital functions: homelessness prevention, rapidly rehousing citizens once homeless, and ensuring that those who are rehoused develop financial stability. At the direction of the Mayor’s Office and under the leadership of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), the city has fielded new teams dedicated to reaching out to those at risk of eviction to offer free legal services from the city, securing new apartments through a broker and landlord call-center, and following up with those who are newly housed to ensure that they won’t become homeless again.

Knowing that there will always be New Yorkers who become homeless, the administration worked to develop new strategies for directly reducing the homeless census by implementing pilot programs and new initiatives.
with the Veterans Administration (VA), the city establishes a system known as “Functional Zero” for veteran homelessness. Eventually, this framework would be applied to other vulnerable populations in the city as well as homeless families with children and runaway homeless youth.

As a definition, Functional Zero means that the number of homeless citizens entering the shelter system is equal to the number who are leaving the system. Using the homeless veterans initiative as an example for determining the benchmark, the city compiled data from intake centers and concluded that on average 100 veterans entered the system every month and remained in shelter for about 90 days. This meant that in order to achieve Functional Zero, the city should be no more than 100 homeless veterans in shelter at any given time. The benchmark would be altered for other homeless groups depending on how long they stay in shelters and how many enter the system every month.

In conjunction with using Functional Zero as a metric, de Blasio directed the Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) to hire full-time staff to work directly with homeless veterans in shelter as a pilot program that could be expanded to other groups. The goal of the Veteran Peer Coordinator Program was to reach out to landlords to secure housing opportunities, assist veterans in navigating the housing process, and ensure long-term stability by following up with veterans after they exit the shelter system.

In addition to making strides in reducing veteran homelessness, the Peer Coordinator program also provided valuable information on systemic and economic obstacles to housing for both short-term homelessness and long-term homelessness.

**Short-Term Homelessness**

Many New Yorkers become homeless for a short period of time, usually due to the loss of a job, divorce, or finding themselves having to vacate their current residence. Those who have a fixed income, the elderly, and those with disabilities are left at the mercy of an unforgiving housing market that may not even come close to what they can afford. This is particularly difficult for residents who are forced to leave behind rent-controlled apartments.

When New Yorkers who have hit a stumbling block enter the intake center and are assigned to a shelter bed, they meet with an assigned case worker on site who helps them develop a plan to achieve housing stability. The case worker will interview the client and determine what their needs are for stability. This can include anything from financial resources to help with debt, legal assistance for criminal justice or child support cases, and substance abuse or mental health support. It is the dual responsibility of both the case worker and the client to determine what is needed to achieve the primary goal of long-term housing.

One of the most effective tools at a caseworker’s disposal is the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 Housing Voucher. For homeless clients who qualify by earning no more than $30,363 annually for a single person in New York City, the Section 8 voucher subsidizes rent by calculating the “rental contribution” of the individual or family ensuring that they pay no more than 30% of their income in rent. A combination of funding from the city, state and Federal government covers the rest. Based on household size, the voucher will denote the size of the apartment and what the maximum rental amount allowed is. For instance, a single person would likely receive a Section 8 voucher for a studio apartment with a maximum rent of $1,213 per month in New York City.

**Long-Term Homelessness**

There are some New Yorkers who have significant mental health and substance abuse issues that create an almost insurmountable roadblock to stability. In the 1980’s, the Federal government under President Ronald Reagan pursued a path of “deinstitutionalization” for mental health patients. This meant that those with significant mental health complications were left at the mercy of state, city, and Federal government for their care. This proved disastrous as the amount of visits to the emergency room, incidents of incarceration, and homelessness cases spiked.

Those with significant mental health and substance abuse backgrounds become homeless again after being permanently housed because they either fail to pay their rent on time or the landlord decides not to renew their lease. A new type of housing solution was created to provide the services needed for these cases called Supportive Housing. Supportive Housing is a permanent housing solution that provides on-site social workers and mental health services for tenants.

### Using the Homeless Veterans Initiative as an Example for Determining the Benchmark

The city compiled data from intake centers and concluded that on average 100 homeless veterans entered the system every month and remained in shelter for about 90 days.

### Policies, Limitations, and The Way Forward

The system is a transitional process, then more homeless people need to be exiting shelter than entering it to reduce the census. Over the past several years, and more and more people have been unable to locate housing in the city even with a Section 8 voucher because average median rent has exceeded the limits set by the program. Currently, the average rent for a one bedroom apartment in the five boroughs is $2,500 per month and Section 8 will only cover a maximum of $1,553 per month for a one bedroom apartment. To make matters worse, only 3.8% of New York City’s apartments are vacant (as opposed to a national average of 4.4%), which drives up demand for a shrinking supply of affordable apartments. Many landlords choose to increase the market rent just above the Section 8 limit to avoid renting to those enrolled in the program. There is currently no count of how many people are enrolled in Section 8 and unable to find an apartment, but 80% of enrollees in a city-funded alternative called Living in Communities (LINC) still remain homeless after 3 months of having the voucher.

The way in which Section 8 funding is distributed makes matters worse, since municipalities have little recourse in obtaining more funds to meet demand. The Federal government issues block grants to states, and states issue block grants to cities and counties to provide vouchers. It is at the discretion of municipal and county housing authorities to determine how many vouchers should be issued and at what value. 

### In New York City, There are 146,808 Applicants on the Waiting List for Section 8 Through the New York City Public Housing Authority

However, the intricate eligibility requirements for tenants and the lack of availability for Section 8 tenants means there is not nearly enough to meet the growing demand.

### Policy Limitations and the Way Forward

The system is a transitional process, then more homeless people need to be exiting shelter than entering it to reduce the census. Over the past several years, and more and more people have been unable to locate housing in the city even with a Section 8 voucher because average median rent has exceeded the limits set by the program. Currently, the average rent for a one bedroom apartment in the five boroughs is $2,500 per month and Section 8 will only cover a maximum of $1,553 per month for a one bedroom apartment. To make matters worse, only 3.8% of New York City’s apartments are vacant (as opposed to a national average of 4.4%), which drives up demand for a shrinking supply of affordable apartments. Many landlords choose to increase the market rent just above the Section 8 limit to avoid renting to those enrolled in the program. There is currently no count of how many people are enrolled in Section 8 and unable to find an apartment, but 80% of enrollees in a city-funded alternative called Living in Communities (LINC) still remain homeless after 3 months of having the voucher.

The way in which Section 8 funding is distributed makes matters worse, since municipalities have little recourse in obtaining more funds to meet demand. The Federal government issues block grants to states, and states issue block grants to cities and counties to provide vouchers. It is at the discretion of municipal and county housing authorities to determine how many vouchers should be issued and at what value. Agencies are caught in a catch-22: if they issue too many vouchers, the dwelling rules to remain in budget, which makes housing unattainable for homeless families. If they issue too few vouchers, homeless applicants must wait even longer before receiving a voucher. In New York City, there are 146,808 applicants on the waiting list for Section 8 through the New York City Public Housing Authority.

This is the heart of New York City’s homelessness dilemma. There simply is not enough funding through Section 8 to keep up with demand. Worse still, President Donald J. Trump’s projected budget includes $136,656,658 in cuts annually to the Section 8 program in New York City.

Finally, there are significant bureaucratic barriers to moving, or “porting,” a Section 8 voucher out of a particular jurisdiction if a person or family cannot locate suitable housing. In order to move to another jurisdiction, the enrollee must apply for a transfer and wait for approval before they can begin their housing search. This adds days and weeks to the process, which in turn adds days and weeks to the length of stay in shelter.

Reforming the way in which Section 8 is funded and how individuals are enrolled could provide significant cost savings and shorten the length of time homeless New Yorkers reside in shelter. Funding Section 8 through block grants creates obstacles to finding affordable housing in neighborhoods, communities and increases the cost of the program nationwide. For example, if a New Yorker found a cheaper apartment in Yonkers or New Jersey, and they were able to avoid the process of porting the voucher, then the Federal government would spend less annually on the total cost of rent, and the City of New York would spend less on temporarily housing that person.

---

NEW YORK STATE EXCELSIOR SCHOLARSHIP: Last Dollar Program Ignores the Real Burdens

SCHOLARSHIPS OVERLOOK SOME COMPLICATED COSTS OF COLLEGE, LEAVING MANY NEW YORKERS OUT

BY KARLI MCMENAMIN

As a former History student at Brooklyn College, and longtime free-tuition advocate, Bernie Sanders was the ideal political champion for Andrew Cuomo’s Excelsior Scholarship. At one rally, Sanders expressed, “What Governor Cuomo is proposing is a revolutionary idea for higher education. It’s an idea that is going to reverberate not only throughout the State of New York, but throughout this country.” Unfortunately for Bernie, and most New Yorkers, the Excelsior Scholarship isn’t the revolution New York State public universities really need.

Launched in Spring 2017, the New York State Excelsior Scholarship is the first in the country to provide free tuition to college students. However, when looking critically at the guidelines and state resident demographics, this policy will deliver far short of its political promises and fanfare.

In a press release, New York State Department of Education outlined that more than 940,000 middle-class families and individuals making up to $125,000 per year will qualify to attend college tuition-free at all CUNY and SUNY two- and four-year colleges in New York State. The new program begins this Fall 2017 and will be phased in over three years.
To qualify, students must meet strict residential, financial, and academic eligibility requirements and commit to reside in New York State for the length of time they received the award. Unfortunately, the criteria outlined by Governor Cuomo and the 2017 New York State Legislature is woefully out of touch with the current state of SUNY and CUNY persistence and graduation. Excelsior scholars must complete 30 credits a year towards their degree program. In comparison, both New York State’s Tuition Assistance Program and Federal Aid require students to take 12 credits each semester, or 24 credits for the year. It’s a traditional credit requirement across most universities, including our own Columbia University. In Excelsior’s case, students must either load up on courses each semester, or take classes in the summer or winter terms. Excelsior will not fund these extra classes it requires, nor will state and federal grants cover more than two semesters per year. Meanwhile, the cost of a 3- or 4-credit course at a SUNY runs between $800 to $1000.7

The awards strict duration period primarily drives the credit requirement. Students must graduate with their Associate’s degree in two years, and their Bachelor’s degree in four years. While on the surface, that might seem reasonable, New York State graduation rates confirm that the majority of students may risk ineligibility, or worse, retroactive repayment of the award as state in the program’s criteria.8 On average across the state, 36% of students pursuing bachelor’s degrees in SUNY and CUNY graduate within 4 years. For associate’s degrees, 16% of students graduate within 2 years. In fact, many students pursuing associate’s degrees continue beyond 4 years. These two cases demonstrate the oversight inherent to Excelsior’s basic regulations, and we haven’t even discussed money.

The Scholarship is a “last dollar” program. SUNY resident tuition (currently $6,470 annually) and CUNY resident tuition (currently $6,330 annually) will first be reduced by other student financial aid—NYS Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) award and/or federal Pell grant—before the Excelsior Scholarship may be applied. The Scholarship will cover any remaining tuition liability up to $5,500, and a tuition credit will cover any remaining tuition expenses not covered by the Excelsior Scholarship.

Excelsior’s funding addresses the high price tag of college, but in ways more limited than Cuomo and Sanders have led the public to believe. Students with the highest financial need are the most likely to attend SUNY and CUNY universities because of their low cost of attendance in comparison to other private and out-of-state public universities. This same population often receives large Pell and TAP grants, and will consequently be ineligible for Excelsior funding. The population of students who come from household incomes between $50,000 and $100,000 would most benefit from Excelsior, if only because their income makes them ineligible for federal and state grants, and their only public financial aid comes through loans. But, loans will likely still remain in most students’ financial aid packages.

Tuition only makes up a small fraction of a college’s price tag. The New York State Department of Education estimates SUNY’s total cost of attendance rounds out $25,000 a year of a bachelor’s degree and $13,000 for a commuting associate’s student. New York City’s DOE calculates CUNY’s 4 year cost of attendance at $16,000, and commuting associate’s at $14,000. Looking at these numbers, Excelsior is sure to alleviate the financial burden for students not covered by grant aid, and not attending a four-year university. But we need to consider the other direct and indirect costs that make up most of the price tag. Even after tuition is covered, undergraduates still need to close the annual gap of $19,000 at SUNY four-years and $9,000 at CUNY four-years.9

Looking beyond requirements and money, the Excelsior Scholarship encourages New York residents to study in New York. It is sure to increase the appeal of the public university for middle income New Yorkers that aren’t eligible for federal and state grants. Already this year, CUNY reported that freshman applications increased 9 percent this year to a record total of 76,000.10 Administrators attributed the surge to Excelsior. In the five months since the program was rolled out, that seems to be the only statistic in its favor.

In reality, the Excelsior Scholarship benefits middle class families who do not face any obstacles to qualify and keep the funding during their child’s undergraduate career. This policy provides an incentive to keep traditional students in New York State. The governor should be celebrated for motivating students to be educated and employed in their state of residence. It is not, as Governor Cuomo describes, granting “every child the opportunity that education provides.” Nor is it promoting equity and access within New York’s higher education system. Senator Bernie Sanders should recognize the difference.

THE CRITERIA OUTLINED BY GOVERNOR CUOMO AND THE 2017 NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE IS WOefully OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE CURRENT STATE OF SUNY AND CUNY PERSISTENCE AND GRADUATION.

3 University at Albany. “Cost of Attendance (Tuition and Fees - The Credits)” University at Albany, State University of New York.
4 New York State Education Department. “Graduation Rates.” 2017. OBERD Board of Information System.
Design-Build Project Delivery Method and its Feasibility in New York City

Efficient, effective public spending is needed to fix New York’s infrastructure

BY KUBA WISNIEWSKI

Maintaining and developing new public infrastructure are vital components of municipal responsibilities. However, the condition of infrastructure in New York does not meet its current demands. According to a report by The American Society of Civil Engineers, in New York City 43% of roads are indicated as being in a poor condition and 30% in a mediocre state. Only 27% of roads are considered to be in fair or good condition.

The current methodology used to procure construction works is Design-Bid-Build, which requires the contracting authority to initiate two subsequent procurement procedures for each stage of the project. Considering the complexity and time that this approach elicits, the City of New York could benefit from a more innovative investment approach. One of such approaches, the Design-Build service delivery method, permits the contracting authority to enter into a single contract with a consortium that is then tasked with both providing the project design and construction works.

Unfortunately, New York City does not currently have the legal authorization to use the Design-Build method, and the chances of acquiring such authorization from the New York State legislature are slim in the foreseeable future.

New York is currently one of only seventeen states without active public-private partnership (PPP) legislation. Although the State passed the New York State Infrastructure Investment Act in 2011, this statute does not apply to municipalities and their agencies. To rectify this situation, the State legislative branch is currently working on the New York City Public Works Investment Act, which will authorize the City to use design-build projects. Unfortunately, this legislative initiative lacks momentum in the current political atmosphere as intergovernmental dynamics provide further hindrance.

Federalism, as defined by political scientist Paul Peterson, is a system of government in which powers are divided between higher and lower levels of government. To fully comprehend the position of New York City in the federal structure, this definition needs to be complemented by the Dillon’s Rule. As described by political scientist Nancy Burns, Judge John Dillon ruled that cities were creatures of the state, and therefore nothing more than administrative divisions, with municipal authority defined solely as a grant from the state. As a consequence of Dillon’s rule, local governments’ autonomy, or simply home rule, is significantly diminished and municipal powers are directly derived from the State legislation. In states like New York where Dillon’s rule is still active, judicial rulings based on this principle solidify the significant control the state retains over local authorities.

New York City can only exercise its powers within the boundaries determined by the State. As a consequence, State law constrains municipal flexibility to match project delivery methods to the special needs of public construction projects. For example, in the early 20th century, multiple scandals involving infrastructure investment in New York City resulted in the passing of “Wicks Law.” According to this regulation, construction projects need to be divided into four separate contracts, each with its own prime contractor, in order to prevent each contractor from having too much power over the investment.
The only way for the City to be authorized to use Design-Build method is the enactment of State legislation. The current political atmosphere could be interpreted as promising for passing this method, as the need for increased public infrastructure investment has been expressed by U.S. President Donald J. Trump.3 Unfortunately, the chance of passing of this bill in the current situation is doubtful.

The main reason the State Government is unwilling to grant the City more powers in the investment process is the State lawmakers’ concern over potential abuses of power and increased corruption at the city level. This stance has been further reinforced by the recent events that took place in the State’s and City’s public universities, which saw both presidents being forced to step down amid accusations of misappropriation of public funds.4 Most common in this political struggle is the well-known fact that the Mayor and the Governor of the State of New York, Andrew M. Cuomo, have a deep personal conflict, which diminishes the political clout the City has in the State Government.5

Beyond politics, the implementation of the Design-Build law is supported by many construction companies and their associations, including the Associated General Contractors of New York State and New York Building Congress.6 Private sector representatives are aware that a higher number of PPP projects could lead to an increase in infrastructure investment and their profits. Despite the obstruction from the State, the federal government could expedite the process of providing New York City with a broader array of project delivery tools. The administration of President George H.W. Bush required the Federal Highway Grant recipients to use Design-Build to receive certain federal transportation grants. Since New York at the time did not have the proper legislation, it passed up a significant amount of federal matching grants for certain types of projects. If the current federal government included in its new grant programs a condition for state and local governments to use the most efficient service delivery model—including but not limited to Design-Build—as a precondition to receiving the grant, this might act as a strong incentive for the State Government to grant the City legal authorization to use alternative methods of project delivery.

PPP projects have the potential to provide the City with a chance for more efficient public spending on new and existing infrastructure. Lobbying for new legal frameworks, implementation of such regulation on the city level, and putting an emphasis on cooperation with the private sector should be goals for all municipal departments and offices responsible for infrastructure. City, state, and federal governments need to combine their efforts to popularize and use innovative models of infrastructure procurement. (PPP)

3 Assembly Bill A7590.