

A Home Away from Home:

Transforming CCNY with a New Student Center



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Introduction:

The City College of New York, renowned for its engineering programs, carries a stellar reputation as one of the top affordable public colleges in the nation (U.S. News and World Report, 2025). Despite its ranking as a prestigious school, City College is missing an important aspect of the student experience: a desirable student center. As a commuter school, most students travel to and from the campus throughout the day, making it difficult to foster social connections with other students. According to the “City College of New York Fact Sheet,” released by The Office of Institutional Research (2024), the one-year student retention rate is approximately 79%, and the six-year graduation rate rests at an approximate 61%. Students require a space that promotes socialization, provides a comfortable studying environment, and allows them to relax between classes. To satisfy the demand for a more social-friendly student environment, The Absent Fathers have designed a modernized student center. Our proposed student center will be stocked with amenities to improve the student experience and increase student retention. We have chosen to convert the Howard E. Wille Administration Building into a new student center, offering a centralized location on campus and expanding on its existing modern exterior design. The current administrative offices can be moved to Wingate Hall, essentially swapping the functions of the two buildings. The completion of our proposed student center will bring the desired social atmosphere to City College, boost the school’s prestige, and motivate students to continue their academic careers at the school, leading to an increase in student retention and graduation rates. City College will also benefit through increased tuition contributions as more students complete their degree programs at the school.

We conducted an initial survey with City College students to collect their opinions about the existing student center. While the existing student center exists inside Wingate Hall, it

isn't popular among students, and many students are unaware that a student center exists on campus. Based on our findings, many students believe that a student center is necessary for City College to provide a designated space for academics, relaxation, and social interaction. Most students responded with a demand for quiet studying areas, group study rooms, lounging areas, and recreational spaces inside the student center.

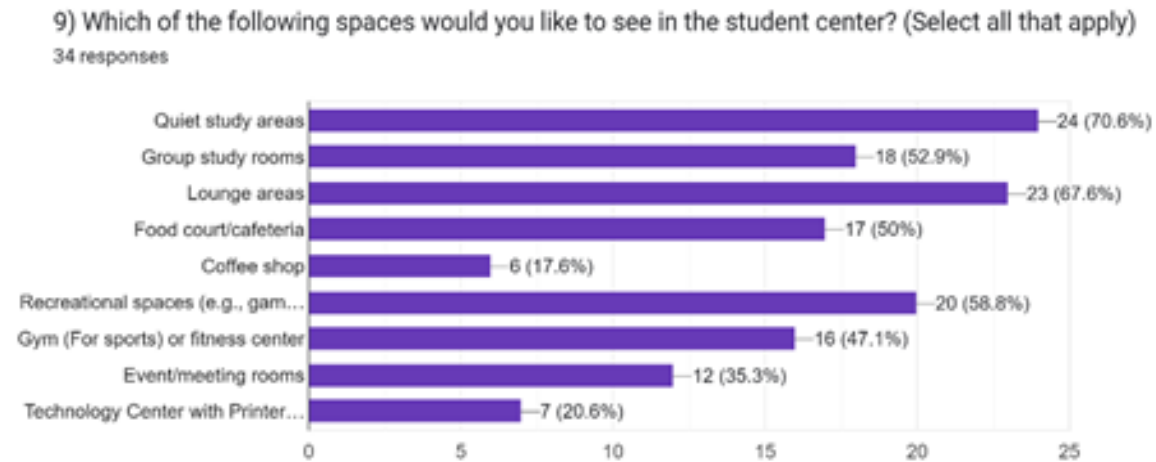


Figure 1: A Survey of students shows a demand for spaces to socialize and study.

Students also show a strong demand for student services within the proposed student center, requesting a variety of different resources to support them in their academic careers.

11) What student services should be housed in the student center? (Select all that apply)

34 responses

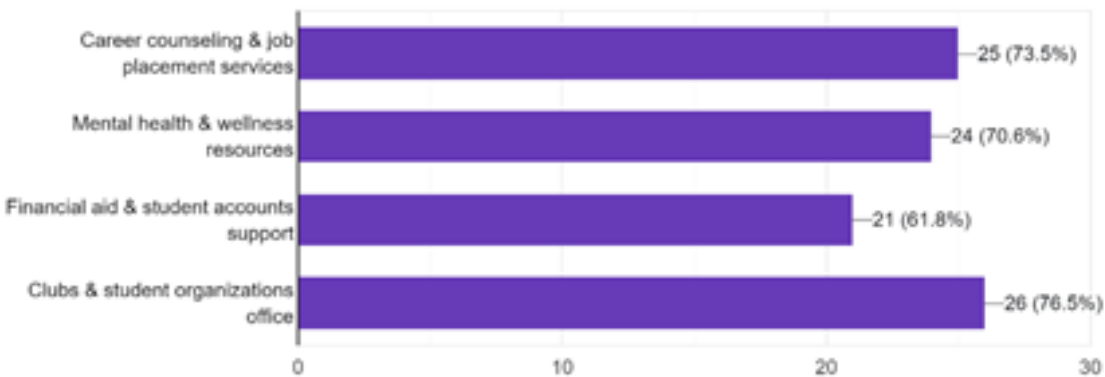


Figure 2: Survey results show a demand for student organization spaces, career counseling, and mental health resources.

Our student center design contains spaces to satisfy these demands, offering ample spaces for socialization, effective studying, and student resources to accommodate their needs.

In combination with the results of our student survey, peer-reviewed studies show a direct connection between effective student centers and student retention. According to the article “The Importance of Title V Center for ‘People Like Me,’” educational researchers Krista L. Lucas, Sarah A. Roberts, and Michael Lloydhauser (2024), focus on a student resource center at a large university in California. Lucas, Roberts, and Lloydhauser (2024) citing authors explicitly state:

A sense of belonging at the university is particularly important for minoritized and/or first-year college students, because how students perceive their college environment is one of three factors that affect their sense of belonging, the others being involvement in the institution itself and relationships with others (p. 1665).

Students reportedly felt that they were the only students of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, often feeling isolated and judged by fellow students. The results of the study showed that minoritized students developed a stronger sense of identity and community using The Center, citing that existing major departments failed to satisfy the needs of students in comparison to services provided by The Center (Lucas, et al., 2024).

In another article, “The African American Student Center and Black Student Retention at a Pacific Northwest PWI”, Dr. Johnny D. Jones, Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer of Arkansas Baptist College; and Michelle Williams (2006), Higher Education Ph. D student at Washington State University, both highlight the importance of a student center geared towards Black students to increase student retention. In their evaluation of the African American Student Center located at a PWI, their findings showed an increase in motivation and persistence among Black students to continue their education at the school, citing factors such as assistance in navigating a range of systems and departments on campus, and providing a safe space on campus. Additionally, their findings showed that the student center is a driving force in student retention, stating, “Based on this study, the office seems to be most effective in creating a nurturing environment for students that promotes both their academic and social development (p. 31).” Based on these studies, there is a strong connection between effective student centers and student retention, showing that providing a space for students to develop a sense of community and belonging will encourage them to stay enrolled at a school (Jones & Williams, 2006). With this combination of data and research, we are confident that our proposed student center will provide City College students with an increased sense of community, increase student retention, and provide the school with a well-rounded image.

Floor By Floor Plans:

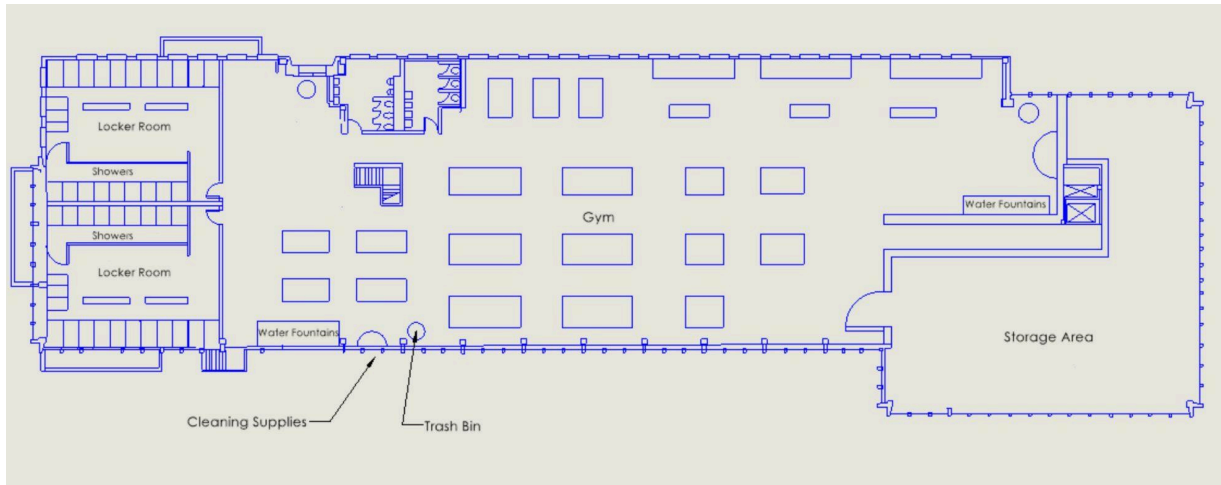


Figure 3: Basement Floor Plan

Let's start from the ground up. In the Basement, this area will double as both a storage space and a Gym for students to exercise in. The storage area will be for the whole building and any supplies that may be needed for both maintenance and special events. For the gym area, it will be accessible to both students and staff by both elevator and stairs. There will be a narrow corridor that leads from the elevator that is nested within the Storage Area, which will allow for both convenience and for gym goers with accessibility needs to be able to more easily access the gym. There are also gender separated lockers with showers within them for the convenience of students.

This area within the student center will be great for student retention. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information (2015), there is indeed a positive correlation between exercise and the academic performance of students. Having this gym area will not only incentivise students to stay on campus longer, but also have a side effect of positively impacting their academic performance. This higher retention would mean more revenue through tuition,

which will be beneficial for both students in higher budgets for CCNY and also positively benefit donors/partners of CCNY by demonstrating both financial growth and institutional success.

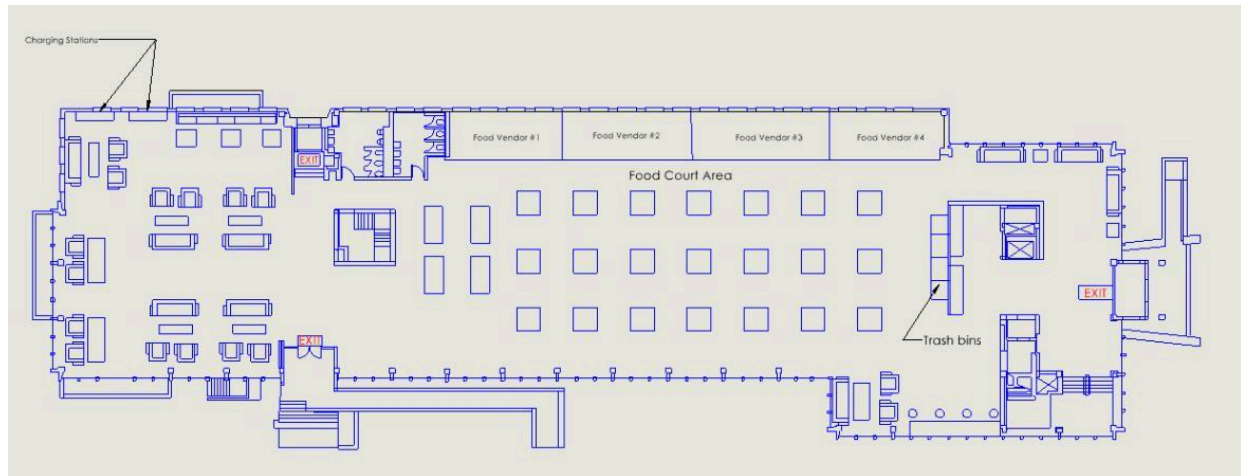


Figure 4: First Floor Plan

The first floor is what you see when you immediately enter. On the right side of the floor plan is the entrance where security guards will check for IDs as students enter. There will also be an elevator in the immediate vicinity so that there can be easy access by students to go to all 5 floors of the building. Past the entrance area, there will be a food court area with a lot of seating for students. Students have the freedom to bring in both their own food, but also have the option to purchase from vendors who partner up with CCNY. A highlight of the vendors here is the hours of operation. They will open up for lunchtime and close by the end of dinner time. Past that, there is a lounge area that is reminiscent of the couches and tables in the NAC Library. Here, students have the option to do whatever they want, such as study, lounge around, watch shows, socialize, etc. The whole floor serves as a way for students to recharge their batteries and unwind as they go through their stressful days.

One of the biggest benefits of this floor is that it serves as a place for students to get food outside of the hours of Benny's lodge in the NAC. This structuring of hours allows students to have the confidence and reassurance that they won't have to worry about on-campus food options, as this will give them a higher variety of options closer to campus. We can contact small businesses around the area and ask them if they want to be a vendor, which will not only boost the local economy but will also appeal to CCNY's students and incentivise them to dine here rather than off campus, thus increasing revenue. The extra space to socialize is a nice bonus for students on top of that, which will encourage them to stay on campus longer.

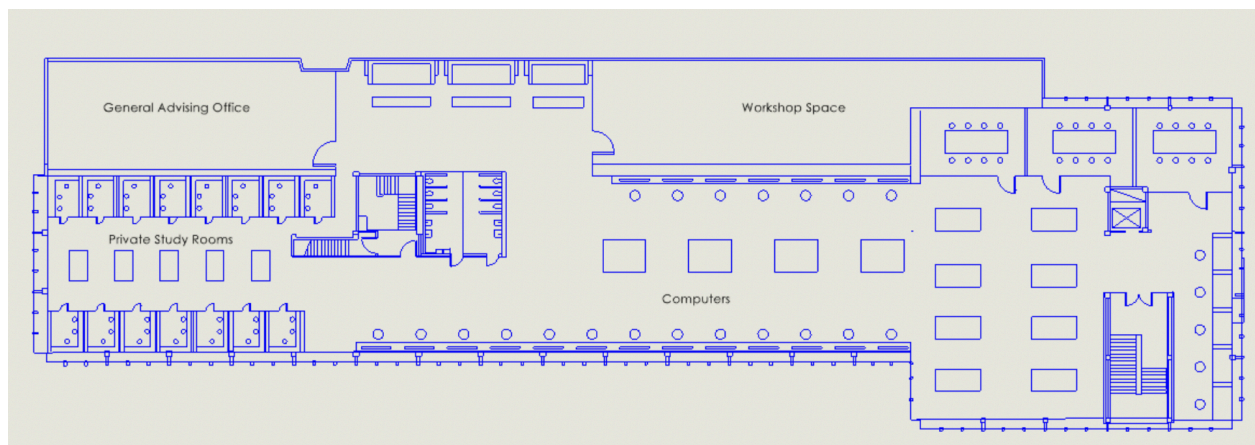


Figure 5: Second Floor

Going up the elevator, you are met with the second floor, which is dedicated to students who want to study. The floor is split between 2 areas, one quiet study area where students can silently focus on the work that they need to do. The Quiet area features private study rooms with soundproofing, frosted glass walls, and a 2-4 person capacity with conference-style seating so that students can have the option to work in a private room alone or with a group without bothering others. There are also open tables in the quiet area, as well, if students desire to sit outside of those private study rooms but still want to be in a quiet environment. These tables are

reminiscent of those already on the 2nd floor of the NAC library. For the non-quiet area, there are many tables with chairs where students can work collaboratively with others without worrying about bothering others, as it is a space reserved for such activities. On the right side wall of Figure 5, there is a small row of single tables with dividers for student use. There is also a long row of computers for student use in case they need to work on assignments or want to use them for other purposes. But it doesn't end there. There is a General Advising office that will have staff there who can give general advice on various student matters. There will be a digital queue akin to the one already used in the current administration building, so that there won't be a need to use extra space for a dedicated waiting room. They can also redirect students to other departments if they need specialized help. Next to that is the workshop space that can be utilized to hold constructive student events such as workshops or tutoring during finals week.

All the features and amenities of the 2nd floor serve to function as an easy-to-access to access place to support a higher level of academics. The quiet area allows for enhanced focus for those who prefer quiet, and the non-quiet area supports collaborative work. The advising office will give students an additional sense of security and trust in CCNY, knowing that this resource is there to help students feel more supported and remain more focused on academics. The workshop area and its events will be a great way for students to get to know each other in a more constructive setting, which will foster a sense of belonging in CCNY. All these features of the 2nd floor come together to form a great area that will further incentivise students to stay longer on campus and increase retention of students in CCNY.

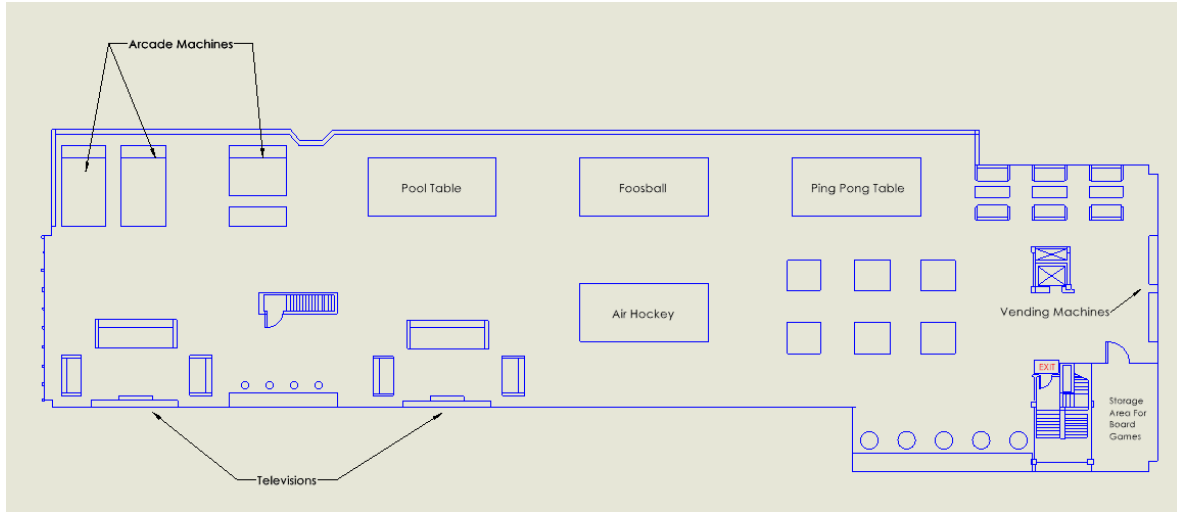


Figure 6: Third Floor

The third floor was designed to be a place optimized for both relaxation and recreation. It features large TVs for student use where they can connect their own devices to either watch movies together or play games together. There are also Pool, foosball, Air Hockey, and Ping Pong tables that students can use. There is a shared sitting space with tables where students can enjoy playing board games with other students. The board games themselves have their own storage in a small room nearby that students have access to. Near the top left of the room, there are arcade machines as well for those really craving some retro gaming action if they desire so. The seating spaces both around the TVs and the top right of Figure 5 are all spaces made for making socializing easier for students.

This whole floor was designed in a way so that there are dedicated zones for those who like certain activities. This allows for a certain level of separation without having actual walls there, which keeps things structured. This way, students can more easily socialize with like-minded individuals without feeling like they are out of their depth doing something they

don't really want to do. All things that further positively impact the retention rate of students, which will be beneficial for CCNY both financially and institutionally.

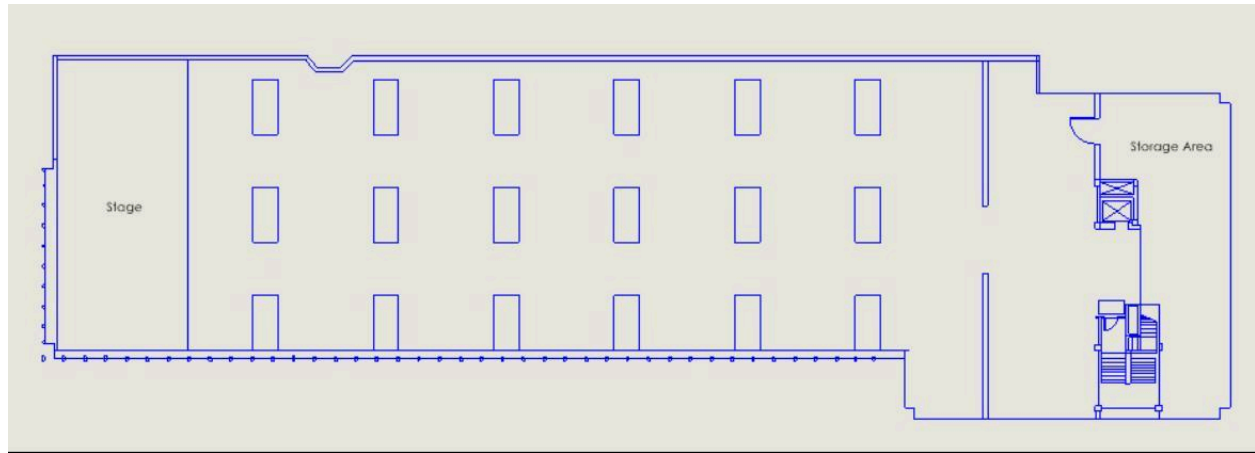


Figure 7: Fourth Floor

Here is the 4th and final floor of our plan. Here, it is going to mainly be an open floor that is a dedicated event space. Anything from student-led and made plays to job fairs can be held here. But it doesn't stop there. This space can be monetized by its eligibility for rent for those outside of CCNY who want to hold events. This could be tournaments, speeches, or anything you could think of being held here, all for a fee. To the right of all this is a storage area that is separate from the one in this basement. This storage will primarily hold all things that will be needed for events. General things like tables, chairs, posters, etc, and also a space to store specialized things for events ahead of time. This way, it will be very easy and convenient to both hold and organize events.

This fourth floor is not only a great venue, but it's also just an environment that can serve to foster great student connections through the events that can be organized for this. It is a space where students can express their creativity freely without spatial constraints. Donors can also

appreciate this space as a source of additional revenue and as a way to appeal to new students who are thinking about coming to CCNY. It is a space that benefits all people involved!

Costs/Finances:

The total estimated cost of construction is roughly \$84 million. Calculating an additional contractor fee, the total cost of this project is an estimated \$97 million. This total cost accounts for the materials, labor, permits, and interior design of the student center. Since the total area of the first floor of the existing building is the largest, with 20,663 square feet, it serves as the base of our design. With an approximate construction cost of \$840 per square foot, the cost of each floor is an estimated \$16.8 million. Notably, the rising costs of material, labor, and strict building codes and regulations contribute to the substantial cost of construction in New York City, ranking among the most expensive in the world (Chatzigeorgakis, 2024). However, City College must consider the benefits that come with the cost of construction.

Impact:

The proposed student center will have a direct impact on the school's student experience and revamp the school's image as a commuter school. As students utilize the space to foster connections, they will develop a stronger sense of community and belonging. Providing these social spaces will incentivize students to continue their academic career at CCNY, increasing the school's student retention and six-year graduation rates. Upon completion of the student center, the expected increase in student retention over the six years will lead to increased revenue for the school through tuition contributions. For example, an increased six-year graduation rate of 65% would yield up to an estimated \$94 million, and a rate of 75% would yield up to \$108 million. This increase in revenue over these six years will pay off the estimated

cost of the student center, earn a profit for the school that can be used to maintain the center, and fund possible future improvements. A total breakdown of the costs and benefits can be found in the appendix in Figure 8 and Figure 9.

Experience:

Ayeman Farhan is a freshman at the City College of New York who is aspiring to be a Computer Science Major. He was born in Chittagong, Bangladesh, and grew up in Brooklyn, NY. He has a very strong passion for technology, which can be seen through his dedication to keep up with both the consumer and novel tech world. He also has a strong interest in human psychology, photography, working out, and video games. He is a very collaborative individual who is very willing to help and assist others with this technical knowledge. He also possesses high-level interpersonal skills along with stress management, which make him a great professional. However, he always expresses that he isn't done growing as both a person and a professional. He aims to use technology and creative solutions to drive positive change in the world.

Jamaal Lee is a freshman computer engineering student at the City College of New York and was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. He has a passion towards technology and education, demonstrated through his teaching of his passions to the younger generations as an instructor. Teaching as an afterschool instructor taught him skills in patience and adaptability, along with more practical skills in welding and engineering. He is skilled in hardware repair and has knowledge in the JavaScript coding language: and enjoys sports and videogames. In the future, Jamaal hopes to be developing computer hardware and teaching in his local community.

Jameilynn Sibri is a first-year mechanical engineering student at The City College of New York. She graduated from Aviation High School in 2023 and the Fifth Year Program in 2024. In Aviation High School, she was captain of her basketball team which helped develop her leadership and collaborative skills. The coursework in Aviation High School provided her the opportunity to develop skills in reading technical diagrams, repairing electrical systems, and servicing aircraft engines. These skills have led to her obtaining her powerplant license. In the future, she hopes to work in the design and development of engine systems.

Marcel Sarfati is a first-year electrical engineering student at the City College of New York. He graduated from the High School for Math, Science, and Engineering in 2024 where he gained relevant leadership and communications skills as the leader of the school's Environmental Activism Club. He has experience with soldering, integrated circuits, and the Java & Verilog programming languages. He hopes to specialize in telecommunications, including signal processing and fiber optics, after graduation.

Quamel Lewis is a first-year civil engineering student, and economics minor, at the City College of New York. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, he attended Transit Tech Vocational High School where he gained a background in electrical wiring that allowed him to work for New York City Transit, where he is currently employed. Having gone directly into the workforce, he acquired necessary communication and interpersonal skills as he progressed in his career. In his current role as a supervisor, he has developed leadership skills and his ability to work well under pressure. He has also developed qualities such as keen attention to detail, as well as being a reliable asset to the team. Outside of work, his interests include traveling and gaming, typically open-world games in which he can develop his own projects. He hopes to

apply his interests, work experience, and future civil engineering degree to construction projects in New York City Transit, and other public transportation systems nationwide.

Conclusion:

City College is an affordable institution that gives many of those who cannot pay for private universities an opportunity to get a high-quality education on par with many well-known institutions. However, as a commuter campus, many students find it challenging to make meaningful connections with others on campus. Both secondary research and our student survey confirm that a dedicated student center will not only help students make connections on campus but also increase the retention of students, leading to increased revenue for City College.

To reiterate, we will be swapping the functions of Wingate Hall and the Howard E. Wille Administration Building to expand on its modern architecture and utilize a larger space for the proposed student center. Our center will include academic support services such as general advising, a workshop area to host student development programs, and comfortable studying areas. Recreational amenities include an event center, a gaming floor, and a food court with various options for students.

Upon acceptance of our proposal, we plan to obtain formal approvals, establish a project management team, finalize the architecture plans, and begin the building process in phases as this proposal has outlined. After completed construction, we will negotiate vendor contracts for the food court and any partnerships that could happen within the new student center. We plan to further prepare the launch through heavy marketing both to prospective high school students and students currently enrolled in City College. Prior to opening day, we will put QR codes around the campus that will allow for us to collect feedback for further improvement.

Our purpose is to create an inclusive, revenue-generating, and community-building student center to effectively support our students and improve the school environment. We envision our student center to bring a well-needed social atmosphere to our students, marking a new era of City College where students will have access to more academic resources and increased opportunity to foster connections within the school. Our student center is the next step to cement a profitable and sustainable future for City College.

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Appendix:

Category	Year -2 (Pre-Construction)	Year -1 (Construction)	Year 0 (Completion)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Planning & Design	500000								
Permits & Legal Fees	200000								
Site Preparation		750000							
Materials		34713840							
Labor		30374610							
Equipment		8678460							
Utilities Installation			4339230						
Contingency			8678460						
Contractor Fee		8748460							
Total Construction Cost		83265370	13017690						
Annual Maintenance				200000	200000	200000	200000	200000	200000
Operational Costs				500000	500000	500000	500000	500000	500000
Revenue / Benefits				17968075.2	17968075.2	17968075.2	17968075.2	17968075.2	17968075.2
Net Benefit				17268075.2	17268075.2	17268075.2	17268075.2	17268075.2	17268075.2
Profit	-700000	-83965370	-96983060	-79714984.8	-62446909.6	-45178834.4	-27910759.2	-10642684	6625391.2

Figure 8: Chart of Costs Over Time



Figure 9: Chart of Profit Over Time