

# INSIDE HIGHER ED

## IUDs to Complete

---

Pairing birth control with college completion may seem unconventional at first glance, but like other outside-the-classroom factors an unplanned pregnancy can deter many students from ever graduating.

That's why the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene along with the City University of New York system last week announced a campaign to promote the awareness of intrauterine devices -- one of the most effective forms of birth control.

The Maybe the IUD campaign is looking to provide information for college students -- particularly those who are minorities or from low-income homes -- about their reproductive options.

"Having access to good reproductive health is essential, and we want to make sure that students are able to make choices about if they want to have children and when they want to have children," said Gail Mellow, president of LaGuardia Community College. "I know personal stories of students who because of a pregnancy or the cost of pregnancy or the challenges of caring for infants and struggling with multiple jobs just made college impossible."

According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, unplanned births account for nearly one in 10 dropouts among women at community colleges and 7 percent of dropouts among all students at community colleges. Sixty-one percent of community college students who have children after enrolling do not finish their education.

Mary Ellen Duncan, a retired president of Howard Community College, who also works with the campaign to prevent teen pregnancy, said she doesn't think many colleges understand how much of an obstacle unintended pregnancies can pose to completing a college education. She's worked to make sure there was a day care option for students at the college.

"It's surprising to people who work in colleges. Having faculty and staff at the college realize that by the time students come to them, while they may think a student knows everything about preventing pregnancy, they don't. It depends on where you live. You may not have gotten terrific sex education or you might have gotten it a while ago or what you learned then might not be the same as what you need now while going to community college," said Andrea Kane, senior director of public policy at the National Campaign.

On campuses like LaGuardia, students will be able to see posters promoting the Maybe the IUD campaign, and the college's wellness center will pass out information about birth control. The campaign also provides information on the cost of an IUD, whether Medicaid will cover it and how students can find a provider to insert the device.

The reaction to colleges promoting birth control awareness has been positive, Kane said.

"Colleges are so focused intensely on doing whatever it takes to help students succeed and stay in school. They're helping them with financial literacy and management, managing their time and plotting out academic trajectory and career trajectory," she said. "There's a lot of focus on sexual assault prevention and drinking -- all of these things that happen outside of the classroom that affect your ability to succeed in the classroom. Most colleges see this as relevant and appropriate part of their work to address life skills and success skills."

LaGuardia's Mellow said addressing reproductive health is important if people ever expect to get serious about women completing college.

For many colleges, one way to slow the effects of failing to complete because of unintended pregnancies or the demands of parenthood is providing a child care center.

LaGuardia has a low-cost Early Childhood Learning Center program that cares for about 250 children. Of the college's nearly 50,000 enrollment, 25 percent are parents, and 98 percent of those students have reported that the program fits into their college schedule, according to LaGuardia's statistics.

"We find they may have a child in child care longer than the time they're in classes because that freedom to study is so essential. It's a freedom that students going to a high-end Ivy League [institution] wouldn't question, because of course they have time to study, but when you're juggling a job and school, day care is essential," Mellow said.

Tackling birth control awareness isn't new for some colleges. The American Association of Community Colleges launched a campaign a few years ago with the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy to encourage faculty members to incorporate pregnancy planning into their academic courses.

"This is not about people telling other people not to have children. This is about helping students align their own aspirations with their actions," Kane said.