The City University of New York provides high-quality, accessible education for more than 269,000 degree-credit students and 247,000 adult, continuing, and professional education students at twenty-four campuses across New York City.

The University is an integrated system of senior and community colleges, graduate and professional schools, research centers, institutes, and consortia. From certificate courses to Ph.D. programs, CUNY offers postsecondary learning to students of all backgrounds. It provides the city with graduates trained for high-demand positions in the sciences, technology, mathematics, teaching, nursing, and other fields. As CUNY has grown, the University also has strengthened its mission as a premier research institution, building an array of modern facilities and expanding the ranks of its world-class faculty.

Although the University was created in 1961, its history dates back to 1847, when City College was established. Its mission today is as it was then, to "educate the whole people" — to uphold a commitment to academic excellence while providing equal access to and opportunity for education. Over the years, other public colleges joined City College: Hunter College (1870), Brooklyn College (1930), Queens College (1937), New York City College of Technology, founded as New York City College (1947), the College of Staten Island, founded as Staten Island Community College (1955), Bronx Community College (1957), Queensborough Community College (1958), and the Graduate School and University Center (1961), also known as the Graduate Center. In 1961 all these institutions were incorporated into the City University of New York. Other institutions to join the CUNY system since 1961 are Borough of Manhattan Community College (1963), Kingsborough Community College (1963), John Jay College of Criminal Justice (1964), Richmond College, now part of the College of Staten Island (1965), York College (1966), Baruch College (1968), Lehman College (1968), Medgar Evers College (1968), LaGuardia Community College (1968), Hostos Community College (1970), the CUNY Baccalaureate (1971), the Macaulay Honors College (2001), the CUNY School of Professional Studies (2003), the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism (2006), and the New Community College, now the Stella and Charles Guttman Community College (2012).

Throughout its history, the University has been an integral part of the city and state through partnerships with public schools, economic development initiatives, immigration aid and financial advice services, and other community outreach programs. Today, CUNY faculty and staff members continue to benefit New York City — as well as the entire nation — by serving as policy experts to business and government and advisers to nonprofit institutions, civic organizations, and community groups. Students, too, are strongly encouraged to experience the cultural, educational, and community-based opportunities of the five boroughs, through a network of internships and fellowships, and to embrace the city as their campus.

CUNY's 6,700 full-time faculty features internationally recognized experts in nearly every academic field. Many faculty members combine outstanding academic credentials with significant real-world experiences, and are regularly recognized with fellowships, grants, and awards. CUNY students also continue to reflect remarkably diverse backgrounds, with family heritage linked to over 205 countries. More than 40 percent of CUNY's undergraduates were born outside the United States, about 44 percent are first-generation Americans, and about 20 percent are the first in their families to attend college. And the University's long list of distinguished alumni includes twelve Nobel Laureates, among the highest number from any public university.