Should the Common Core only include three-credit courses, or a mix of three- and four-credit courses?

The following brief describes options for developing the 30-credit Common Core, the current distribution of three- and four-credit courses within general education, and advantages and disadvantages of including four-credit courses in the Common Core.

Options for the Common Core

The Steering Committee could decide to compose the 30-credit Common Core with ten 3-credit courses. Alternatively, it could decide to mix 3- and 4-credit courses in the Core. The most practical way to mix three- and four-credit courses would be to create a model with three four-credit courses (12 credits) and six three-credit courses (18 credits), as other combinations would not yield 30 credits.

Current distribution of three and four-credit courses

CUNY colleges offer a mix of three- and four-credit courses. Three-credit courses predominate at all colleges except CSI. Four-credit courses in the other colleges are most commonly found in the lab sciences. The majority of the senior colleges require at least one 4-credit science course (Brooklyn, City-BA, Medgar Evers, and York do not require a 4-credit science course). Based on an analysis of selected academic programs at the community colleges, LaGuardia is the only community college that does not require a 4-credit science course. Foreign language courses offered at both community colleges and senior colleges and many math courses offered at the community colleges are also often four credits.

Advantages and disadvantages to having the Common Core contain a mix of 3- and 4-credit courses

Advantages
- Allows variety in course intensity.
- Consistent with current credit allocations in many cases.

Disadvantages
- Allows for only 9 courses instead of 10, reducing the number of areas students would be exposed to within the Core.
- Adds a certain level of complexity.
- It could entail adding one credit to courses that would otherwise be 3 credits in order to make the math work in reaching 30 credits.
- It could be hard to include 4-credit courses in models that offered students choices between areas. Student choices might need to be constrained to insure that all students ended up with a 30-credit Common Core.