October 31, 2011

Dear CUNY colleagues,

On June 27, 2011, the CUNY Board of Trustees passed the Resolution on Creating an Efficient Transfer System, which specified that general education at CUNY would consist of a 30-credit Common Core for all campuses across the University and a 12-credit College Option for senior colleges. The Chancellor charged the Pathways Task Force with making a recommendation on the contours of the 30-credit Common Core structure.

Attached is a draft structure for the Common Core. Although the Resolution did not require the Task Force to do so, the Task Force is now engaging in formal campus consultation so that it can reflect carefully on coordinated campus feedback. The Task Force hopes to incorporate the best ideas from across the University in revising the structure before submitting it to the Chancellor.

The college president’s office should submit the coordinated campus response via email to pathways@mail.cuny.edu by 5 p.m. on November 15, 2011. The Resolution mandates that the Pathways Task Force submit its final recommendation to the Chancellor by December 1, 2011.

There are two parts to the Common Core structure developed by the Pathways Task Force: 1) the Required Core, and 2) the Flexible Core. The Required Core consists of 15 credits, which include seven credits in English Composition, four credits in Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, and four credits in Life and Physical Sciences. The Flexible Core, also with 15 credits, includes four thematic areas: World Cultures, U.S. Experience in its Diversity, Creative Expression, and the Individual and Society.

As required in the Board Resolution, each area of the Common Core includes specific learning outcomes that a course must meet in order to fulfill that area. Each area, including those in the Required Core, is defined by the learning outcomes it requires, not by its title. For example, “World Cultures” is not limited to those courses with the words “World” or “Cultures” in their names. It is restricted to those courses that satisfy the applicable learning outcomes in that area.

This Common Core structure, with specific learning outcomes defining each area, is designed to do several things:

1. **Bolster the basics.** CUNY students must achieve excellence in the fundamental areas of English, math, and science, so the structure places each of these areas in the Required Core and grants them slightly weightier credits. Effective written and oral communication are given special prominence throughout the Common Core. In the Required Core, English composition obviously expects students to learn how to produce coherent texts and support well-reasoned arguments. Math also requires students to effectively communicate solutions to mathematical problems in written or oral form, and science requires students to produce
effective written laboratory reports. In the Flexible Core, every course requires students to produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions.

2. **Strengthen critical thinking skills.** High-level critical thinking skills are required in every Common Core course. In English, students must demonstrate critical reading, listening, and analytical skills. In math, students must identify and apply logically valid arguments. In science, students must apply the scientific method to explore natural phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, and the evaluation of evidence. Every course in the Flexible Core requires the critical evaluation of evidence and arguments from a variety of sources and points of view.

3. **Provide broad curricular exposure.** The Pathways Task Force takes as a given that the first 30 credits of general education at any University should require the study of a wide range of disciplines. Courses in the Flexible Core are limited to three credits to allow students to take five courses. These five courses must be taken in four different thematic areas and five different disciplines. The requirement that students take no more than one course in any particular discipline is designed to mandate the study of different fields and thereby broaden curricular exposure.

4. **Maximize flexibility for the campuses.** The Common Core allows campuses to submit courses across a variety of disciplines in many areas of study. None of the thematic areas in the Flexible Core is defined by discipline, and courses in any discipline or interdisciplinary field may fit in a range of areas. Where disciplines are identified in thematic areas, they are provided only as examples, and are not meant to constitute exhaustive lists. The Flexible Core is designed to grant campuses the maximum opportunity to fit their current general education courses into the Common Core.

At the end of this letter we have included a set of Frequently Asked Questions to help the CUNY community understand the Common Core structure developed here. Although not required by the Board Resolution, the Pathways Task Force has also developed a set of overarching Learning Goals to help guide its own work and the work of the campuses as they implement the Common Core. That document, and much more information on the history and work of the Pathways Project, may be accessed on the Pathways website: [www.cuny.edu/pathways](http://www.cuny.edu/pathways).

While we welcome all your feedback, in order for a campus response to be most useful, and to increase its likelihood of influencing the final recommendation to the Chancellor, we ask colleges to make concrete and specific suggestions for revision if they seek changes in the Common Core structure. For example, if a college believes that a particular discipline should be placed in the Required Core, we hope that it would not simply describe the importance of learning in that discipline. We request that the college suggest specifically how to alter the structure to include it. Alternatively, if a college
believes there are too many learning outcomes listed in a certain area, we hope that it would not simply describe the burden of numerous outcomes. We request that the college suggest which specific learning outcomes to delete.

The Pathways Task Force looks forward to receiving the coordinated campus feedback by 5 p.m. on November 15, 2011. Please submit campus responses as Microsoft Word documents to facilitate their prompt transmission to the members of the Pathways Task Force for expeditious review and consideration.

Other individuals or groups are also encouraged to submit feedback via email to pathways@mail.cuny.edu.

Sincerely,

Michelle J. Anderson
Dean and Professor of Law, CUNY School of Law

CUNY Pathways Common Core FAQs

Do remedial courses count for the Common Core?
No. Common Core courses must be credit bearing. Remedial courses are not credit bearing. All courses in the Common Core must also be at the college level. The New York State Education Department regulations require: “Credit toward an undergraduate degree shall be earned only for college level work.” The CUNY-wide committee tasked with evaluating courses submitted for the Common Core will ensure that all courses approved for the Common Core are college-level courses.

Do all courses in the Common Core have to be at the lowest level?
No. Within each area of the Common Core, colleges must offer at least one course that has no prerequisites. Colleges will also offer higher-level courses. Colleges should submit courses of different levels and students should be encouraged to take courses at levels compatible with their knowledge and skills.

What are College Option credits?
Each senior college will develop its own 12 College Option, general education credits. In addition to the 30 credits of general education in the Common Core, senior colleges will require all students who begin at their colleges to complete 12 College Option credits. Students who transfer in to the senior college with 30 or fewer credits must similarly complete 12 College Option credits. Students who transfer in with more than 30 credits but without an Associate Degree must complete 9 College Option credits. Students who transfer with a completed Associate Degree must complete 6 College Option credits.

Do AAS degree programs have to implement the full Common Core?
No. AAS programs are not required to implement the full Common Core. The Board Resolution states: “liberal arts requirements for AAS degrees will be drawn from the
courses approved for the Common Core such that AAS students will receive partial certification for completion of the Core.” Moreover, CUNY will ensure that all licensing and accreditation standards for AAS and other degree programs are met.

What about programs that cannot fit the Core?
It is possible that some high-credit majors with very specific course demands will not be able to accommodate the requirements of the Common Core. At a later stage in the Pathways process, the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) will review such cases. In situations where licensing or other requirements preclude program changes, OAA will ensure that students are not required to enroll for additional semesters to complete general education requirements.

What is the relationship between the Common Core and requirements for the major?
The Pathways Majors Committees in nine areas (accounting, biology, business, criminal justice, English, finance, nursing, psychology, and teacher education) are working to recommend the first three to six lower-division courses that will serve as entries into the majors. These committees may also recommend courses for beginning the major that could be taken as part of the Common Core. For example, a student majoring in sociology might be required to complete Sociology 101 as part of the major and also have the option of completing an area of the Common Core by taking Sociology 101. A student could count that course for both the Common Core and the major.

How will the Common Core affect articulation agreements between community colleges and senior colleges?
With respect to the transfer of general education credits, the Common Core will supersede existing articulation agreements. Courses taken as part of the Common Core will transfer as general education credits. Articulation agreements that cover courses in the major might continue to apply, although the work of the Pathways Majors Committees will supersede many articulation agreements in the major.

Will the Common Core also benefit students transferring from a senior college to a community college?
Yes. Common Core courses will transfer for general education credit whether students are transferring from a community college to a senior college, from one senior college to another, from a senior college to a community college, or from one community college to another. If students transferring from a senior college to a community college have taken some or all of the senior college’s 12 College Option credits, those credits will transfer for elective credit or for the major, as appropriate.