December 1, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for the coordinated campus responses to the draft structure of the Common Core submitted on November 15. They contained constructive and specific recommendations that we compiled and posted on the Pathways website two weeks ago.

The Steering Committee of the Pathways Task Force considered each of these campus responses carefully and seriously. We also reviewed each of the faculty senate, faculty council, disciplinary council, and departmental resolutions and statements submitted to the Pathways email address or posted on the University Faculty Senate website. On Friday, November 18, the Committee met and used the feedback to revise the structure of the Common Core. The responses and recommendations from the campuses and others were spirited, complex, and at times contradictory. Many of the concerns and conflicts noted in these responses echoed those in our own discussions over the past several months, and the Steering Committee appreciated the opportunity to reconsider them.

On Monday, November 21, the Committee posted a summary of the November 18 meeting and a copy of our revisions-in-progress on the Pathways website. The ensuing email discussions on the Steering Committee's work widened to include perspectives from the Pathways Working Committee and across the Task Force. The Steering Committee met again on Monday, November 28, to finish its review of campus feedback and to develop final recommendations for the Chancellor.

Attached is a copy of the final recommendations. As a result of campus feedback, it differs in several ways from the October 31 Common Core draft structure. This letter will highlight the major issues raised in the coordinated campuses responses and other feedback we reviewed, and describe how the Steering Committee responded to that feedback.

Credit Allocations in the Required Core

The October 31 draft structure of the Common Core included seven credits for English Composition, four credits for Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, and four credits for Life and Physical Sciences. In their coordinated campus responses, many colleges suggested that the Required Core include six instead of seven English Composition credits. Some of those colleges also argued for a reduction from four to three credits in Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning and Life and Physical Sciences. Some colleges asked that the mixture of three- and four-credit courses, with nine courses overall, be changed to ten, three-credit courses so as to maximize breadth of exposure to different areas of learning.

Many colleges, however, were silent on the question of credit allocations in the Required Core, and one college articulated a strong argument in favor of the 7-4-4 allocation for English, math, and science. Currently at CUNY, four-credit courses in math and science predominate at some senior and community colleges, while three-credit courses predominate at others.

The Pathways Task Force had considered both a 7-4-4 model for the Required Core and a 6-3-3 model in its deliberations over the previous few months. At meetings of both the Steering Committee and the full Task Force, the vote between the 7-4-4 model and the 6-3-3 model was very close. Based on the varied feedback received from the campuses on the issue, members of the Pathways Task Force concluded that those close and divided votes were likely representative of similar divisions across the wider CUNY community.

Despite the lack of consensus on the issue, the Steering Committee had to designate credits allocated to the Required Core. After a range of extended dialogues, the Committee decided that the 6-3-3 model gave the campuses and students more flexibility. As a result, the Steering Committee decided to revise the Required Core from 15 credits (seven credits of English Composition, four credits of Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, and four credits of Life and Physical Sciences) to 12 credits (six credits of English Composition, three credits of Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, and three credits of Life and Physical Sciences). This revision allowed an increase in the Flexible Core credits from 15 to 18.

Variant for Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning and Life and Physical Sciences

When the Pathways Task Force considered a 6-3-3 model for the Required Core in its earlier discussions, some colleges requested flexibility regarding the possibility of offering four-credit Life and Physical Sciences courses. The Committee received a similar request regarding a one-credit variant for Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning courses from the CUNY Math Discipline Council early in the process. Because the Board of Trustees' resolution granted the Pathways Task Force the option to make specific recommendations for STEM students, the Steering Committee decided to recommend a variant in the Required Core for both of these areas. Under this variant, colleges would be required to offer sufficient three-credit courses for students to satisfy both the Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning and the Life and Physical Sciences areas in the Required Core. Thereafter, colleges would also be allowed to offer four-credit courses to satisfy these areas, particularly for students planning to major in these fields.

Proscription Against Multiple Courses in One Discipline

A number of colleges objected to the proscription in the Flexible Core against taking more than one course in any particular discipline. Some also requested that, whatever provision emerged, it explicitly include interdisciplinary areas. Colleges argued that removing the one-course restriction would allow more flexibility for course sequencing in the Flexible Core, particularly in the study of foreign languages. In light of these requests, the Steering Committee modified the restriction so that a student may now take "no more than two courses in any discipline or interdisciplinary area" of the Flexible Core.

Science and Technology

Some campuses requested additional opportunities for students to study science and technology. When the Pathways Task Force considered a 6-3-3 model for the Required Core in its earlier deliberations, it approved, both at the Steering Committee level and at the Task Force level, the addition of a fifth area of the Flexible Core entitled, "Scientific World," which would allow

students the option of taking two science courses as part of their general education studies, and would allow the Flexible Core to comfortably offer a range of courses related to technology and an understanding of technology in a social context. Having restructured the Required Core to a 6-3-3 model, the Steering Committee decided to add a fifth category to the 18-credit Flexible Core entitled, "Scientific World." Because there were now five areas and 18 credits in the Flexible Core, the Steering Committee decided that students would complete six three-credit courses in five areas.

Foreign Languages

Some colleges requested that the structure mandate the study of foreign languages in the Required Core. Others suggested adding a new area to the Flexible Core devoted to foreign languages or to foreign languages and some other field. Others argued that campuses should be able to continue to require foreign languages through proficiency requirements.

Colleges at CUNY do not uniformly require foreign languages in their general education curricula. As a result of this current diversity, and because adding foreign languages to the Required Core would decrease flexibility for the campuses, the Steering Committee declined to require foreign language study.

The Committee also noted that, because of the revision of the disciplinary restriction from one course to two, the Common Core structure would not prevent a college from requiring up to two courses in foreign language study as part of a student's first 30 credits of general education. A college could choose to mandate that all students who begin at that college take a language proficiency test and, if a student does not demonstrate the requisite language proficiency, the college could require the student to take two foreign language courses under the World Cultures and Global Issues area. Students who demonstrate the requisite foreign language proficiency, however, could take any course in that area of the Flexible Core. Similarly, if a senior college wanted to do so, it could use its College Option credits to mandate two foreign language courses for all transfer students who did not demonstrate the requisite level of proficiency.

Speech/Oral Communications

Some colleges requested that the structure mandate the study of speech and oral communications in the Required Core. Others suggested adding a new area in the Flexible Core devoted to communications or to communications and some other field. Others argued that campuses should be able to continue to require communications through proficiency requirements.

As with foreign languages, colleges at CUNY do not uniformly require speech or oral communications in their general education curricula. As a result of this current diversity, and because adding communications to the Required Core would decrease flexibility for the campuses, the Steering Committee declined to do so. However, the Committee added communications to several categories in the Flexible Core to increase its overall presence.

Under the Common Core, communications is now listed in four of the five areas of the Flexible Core. In addition, the Common Core structure does not prevent a college from requiring a

course in speech communications. A college could choose to mandate that all students who begin there take a speech proficiency test and, if a student does not demonstrate the requisite proficiency, the college could require the student to take a speech course somewhere in the Flexible Core. Similarly, if a senior college wanted to do so, it could use its College Option credits to mandate a speech course for all transfer students who did not demonstrate the requisite level of proficiency.

History

Some colleges requested that the Common Core mandate the study of history. Colleges at CUNY do not uniformly require history in their general education curricula. As a result of this current diversity, and because requiring history would decrease flexibility for the campuses, the Steering Committee declined to require history.

In the Common Core structure, history is featured in numerous areas of the Flexible Core: World Cultures and Global Issues, U.S. Experience in its Diversity, Individual and Society, and Scientific World. The Common Core structure does not prevent a college from requiring a course in history. A college could choose to mandate that all students who begin there take a history course within the Flexible Core. Similarly, if a college wanted to do so, it could use its College Option credits to mandate a history course for all transfer students who had not already completed one.

Editorial Suggestions

The Steering Committee reviewed dozens of editorial suggestions regarding language of the Common Core structure, including the text of specific learning outcomes. The Steering Committee accepted all suggestions that enhanced clarity, meaning, or rigor.

Suggestions Beyond the Task Force's Jurisdiction

A number of colleges included in their coordinated campus responses specific requests to change the June 27, 2011, CUNY Board of Trustees *Resolution on Creating an Efficient Transfer System.* For example, some requested that, contrary to the resolution, the Common Core consist of 32 to 36 (or more) credits. Others requested that a senior college be allowed to impose its 12 College Option credits on all transfer students, regardless of how many credits they had accumulated at other campuses. Others objected to the timeframe established by the resolution, and requested greater time for consideration and implementation. The Steering Committee determined that these requests were beyond the jurisdiction of the Pathways Task Force as defined by the Board of Trustees *Resolution*.

A number of colleges also requested that the Pathways Task Force certify that specific courses or sequences of courses meet the learning outcomes of certain areas, or that specific programs be exempted from the requirements of the Common Core. Again, these requests were beyond our jurisdiction. A cross-CUNY committee will be charged with evaluating the courses that colleges submit to fulfill the learning outcomes of the areas of the Common Core, and the Office of

Academic Affairs has indicated that it will entertain requests for waivers of the Core requirements at a later date.

Closing

As Chair of the Pathways Task Force, I would like to thank the Task Force members, both the Steering Committee and Working Committee members, for their diligence and hard work. It was a privilege to work with such a talented and dedicated group of faculty and students across the disciplines and the campuses of the City University of New York. I also want to express my appreciation to the faculty, staff, and students on the campuses for their contributions to the dialogue that helped the Task Force in its work.

Using a consultative process, the Pathways Task Force has developed a rigorous and detailed structure for the first 30 credits of general education at CUNY. Each of us who helped develop the Common Core structure shares a powerful commitment to excellence in undergraduate education and a deep hope that CUNY students will thrive at our colleges, inspired by the engaged learning that they will receive in our general education courses.

Sincerely,

Michelle J. Anderson Dean and Professor of Law CUNY School of Law CUNY Pathways Task Force Chair