

General Education at CUNY: Pathways Possibilities*

All Courses

CUNY's new general education framework (part of the Pathways initiative) has two parts: the Common Core for all colleges (30 credits) and 6-12 additional credits for baccalaureate programs, selected at the senior colleges' choice (the College Option). Common Core details, including the specified rigorous learning outcomes--all of which were designed by a 55-person Task Force including 47 faculty--are available at <http://www1.cuny.edu/mu/academic-news/files/2011/12/CommonCoreStructureFinalRec.pdf>. All courses in the Common Core must be 3 credits and 3 hours except as specified below. College Option courses do not have that restriction. However, senior colleges should be mindful, in designing their College Option, that whatever they require of their students should be easily transferable to other colleges. Another overriding principle is that all colleges should design the structure of their general education requirements so as to be as straightforward and comprehensible as possible.

The Common Core and the College Option were designed to ensure rigorous and transferable study across the colleges while retaining sufficient flexibility for colleges to sustain and develop their distinctive academic identities. With that in mind, following are some of the many possibilities that specific colleges have for framing their general education requirements within the new general education structure:

- Colleges will choose which courses to propose for each of the three required areas, as well as the five flexible areas, of the Common Core; courses will be accepted for all of these areas based on the courses' ability to satisfy the requisite learning outcomes, not based on the disciplines of which they are a member.
- By definition, baccalaureate colleges will make entirely their own choices for the courses for the College Option.
- Colleges can choose which courses to offer in each category of the Common Core, as well as in the College Option, so as to limit, or expand, the range of types of courses to which their students are exposed. For example, a college might decide to offer only foreign language courses in the World Cultures and Global Issues area, thus essentially requiring all of that college's students to take a foreign language course.
- Colleges can link a course in one of the areas of the Common Core with a course in another one of the areas of the Common Core, making them co-requisites. For example, a course in the "Life and Physical Sciences" category could be linked to a course in the "Scientific World" category, with one of them being a 3-credit lab course and the other a 3-credit lecture course (as long as transfer students do not have to take any additional general education courses as a result of this linkage).

- The Common Core requires that students take six 3-credit courses from 5 areas in the flexible core. Colleges can specify from which area the sixth course must be taken.
- Colleges can also require that the sixth course be a more advanced version of one of the other five. In this way a college could, for example, require that a student take two semesters of foreign language as part of the Common Core (note that the College Option credits are another possibility for additional foreign language study).
- As part of their College Option, colleges that offer baccalaureate programs could require all students, including transfer students, to take a specific course such as, for example, a foreign language course or a laboratory science course.
- For both the Common Core and the College Option, colleges can specify that students take certain courses if they have not already done so or have not shown proficiency in a certain area. For example, a college could specify that a student who did not already have a certain level of proficiency in a foreign language would have to take a foreign language course in the World Cultures and Global Issues area of the Common Core; those students who were proficient would take something else. As another example, a college could specify that a student who had not already taken American History must take American History in the U.S. Experience in Its Diversity area of the Common Core, and if the student had taken American History, then the student would take something else. As still another example, a college with baccalaureate programs could specify that any baccalaureate student who had not already taken two lab science courses must take more lab science as part of the College Option.
- For both the Common Core and the College Option, a college can submit only courses that conform to a certain theme, as long as those courses satisfy the requisite learning outcomes. For example, a college could decide that all of its general education courses would have some relationship to justice or to New York City or to technology.
- A college can offer a required 3-credit course as part of the Common Core and can develop an accompanying elective of one or more credits to complement the required course. Baccalaureate colleges can use their College Option credits to require the complementary course, instead of having that course be an elective.
- Colleges can set “overlay” requirements for students as long as those requirements, by themselves, do not result in students having to take any additional courses. For example, a college might set a requirement that each student has to take four writing intensive courses and then designate many courses, across the curriculum, including many courses in the Common Core, as writing intensive courses. Students who took those courses would then be satisfying both the general education and the writing intensive requirements of that college.
- Although the Pathways Task Force decided not to recommend that the Common Core include performing arts because New York State does not count such courses towards the required minimum number of liberal arts and sciences credits for college degrees (see <http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/lrp/liberalarts.htm>), senior colleges can, if they wish, require such courses as part of their College Option.
- Some colleges with associate degree programs may wish to combine noncredit, remedial coursework with credit-bearing coursework. Such combinations will necessarily result in courses with more hours of meeting time than they have credits. The guidelines for such courses within the Common Core are still being determined.

Additional Options for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Courses

- Currently, CUNY colleges follow a wide range of practices regarding math and science general education requirements. Some colleges currently require 4-credit (or more) math and science courses of all students. Other colleges currently require 3-credit, non-laboratory courses in these areas for non-majors. CUNY's new General Education Framework continues to give campuses considerable latitude in these matters, although it does require that each student, at a minimum, take two three-credit courses concerning science, and at least one, additional, three-credit course focused on mathematical or quantitative reasoning.
- The Common Core requires all students to take a 3-credit course in "Life and Physical Sciences" which can consist of lecture (with active learning experiences), lab, or both. (The amount of credit for a course depends on the total amount of work that a student does for a course, inside and outside of class, not the type of class instruction for the course.) Therefore a 3-credit, 3-hour course can be a laboratory course if the faculty design it as such.
- A college can offer a STEM Variant for the "Life and Physical Sciences" category. Assuming sufficient 3-credit/3-hour courses are available to meet students' needs, a college can also offer other science or math courses that are part of a STEM major, that any student can take, and that are more than 3 credits or 3 hours (e.g., under the STEM variant, 3-credit/4-hour, 4-credit/4-hour, 4-credit/5-hour, 4-credit/6-hour, 5-credit/6-hour, courses can all be offered). These alternative courses must, of course, meet the learning outcomes specified for this category of the Common Core.

*For questions concerning these and other possibilities, please contact the Pathways mailbox, (pathways@mail.cuny.edu).