



Dr. Sandi E. Cooper  
905 W End Ave  
New York, NY 10025

New York, 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011

Dear Professor Cooper, *dear Colleague,*

As faculty and professors responsible for PhD programs in fields integral to a multilingual, multicultural college education, we are writing to express our profound dismay about the impact that the proposed Pathways initiative would have on Foreign Language studies in particular and the quality of CUNY education in general.

Although the initiative has been modestly modified in response to strong criticism, the fact remains that by reducing the number of General Education credits required for graduation, the curricular reorganization this initiative imposes will lead to a damaging disincentive for thousands of future students to study subjects beyond minimal and narrow requirements. The regulations erode the rich Liberal Arts core in the senior colleges and eviscerate departments of Foreign Languages in a world desperately in need of better cultural understanding.

Our mission is to provide public education of the highest caliber in a uniquely cosmopolitan and multicultural city. We have long assumed that we belong to an institution committed to learning and teaching in a broad and layered world of languages, histories, and cultures. We could not conceive of preparing our graduates for professional careers in teaching, human rights, art history, journalism, or administration, international relations or business, in the absence of a deep inside knowledge of languages other than English.

There is tremendous value - intellectual, human, economic as well as ethical - to knowing languages. Such knowledge permits, in a distinctive fashion, comparisons and acts of cultural translation that broaden horizons and increase potential for meaningful exchange. Pathways marginalizes Foreign Languages and impoverishes humanistic studies -- in that invaluable place where ideas circulate, worlds are broadened, and critical skills are honed.

But the issue is not merely intellectual. There are other urgent concerns. To cut down General Education requirements and thus to turn the acquisition of a foreign language into a luxury, is to ensure that the divide that separates privileged private institutions from a public university such as ours will only widen. Indeed, recent studies show that there is a very substantial pay-off to sustained linguistic apprenticeship in the form of increased cognitive flexibility and enhanced literacy. In view of this fact, it would seem all the more important to encourage CUNY undergraduates to begin early

on the study of foreign language, and not to shorten or to postpone it -- as will inevitably happen if our core requirements are curtailed. It is a disservice to CUNY students, the City and State of New York, to widen a cognitive divide under the guise of streamlining.

For those among us directly involved with the training of future teachers and scholars in a particular language, the proposed changes make CUNY into a distinctly less attractive academic environment: the number of PhD or MA students will shrink dramatically because of a lack of teaching fellowships, which provide irreplaceable professional experience. With diminishing numbers of Foreign Language course offerings across the University, adjunct teaching will be so drastically reduced as to deprive most of our doctoral students of a livelihood and practical teaching experience.

In this fashion, the CUNY Pathways reform could wipe out from the Graduate Center a number of currently flourishing PhD programs and eliminate thereby a generation of teachers. The shrinking of Foreign languages programs will have an effect both upstream and downstream: in stopping the preparation of foreign language teachers for High Schools, it will withhold from those younger generations in the city or state the intellectual, artistic, cultural opportunities that could make them better citizens of the world.

It is a sad irony that at a time when European as well as Asian countries are urgently devising pathways to introduce languages as early as possible to their school children, we, in an internationally regarded Center for Graduate Studies, are going to reduce language studies to a luxury too expensive or time costly for our students to afford. Graduates of CUNY will be blissfully monolingual, but singularly unprepared for the challenges of a global world.

We understand that now too many constraints impair the undergraduate students' progress and their ability to choose and focus on distinct courses of studies. But while we endorse wholeheartedly the value of choice, we also believe that students need to be exposed to challenging areas or ones they have never yet experienced, such as foreign language courses in their first years of study leading to potentially advanced courses. In sparking their intellectual curiosity, we enable them to choose the best possible «path» for their own studies towards a world class education. It is our firm conviction that the Pathways initiative will lead, if for no other than structural reasons, to the gradual demise of foreign language study, and thus to a decisive impoverishment of our University. In light of these serious concerns we urge the Board to table the current Pathways resolution for further consideration.

Sincerely,

Meena Alexander	Elizabeth Beaujour	Clare Carroll	Mary Ann Caws
Raquel Chang-Rodriguez	Peter Consenstein	Vincent Crapanzano	
Joseph W. Dauben	José del Valle	Morris Dickstein	Evelyne Ender
David Greetham	Hermann Haller	Steven Kruger	Wayne Koestenbaum
Isaias Lerner	Nancy K. Miller	Jeanine Plottel	Magdalena Perkowska
Burton Pike	Julia Pryzbos	Helena Rosenblatt	Francesca Sautman
Lia Schwartz	Domna Stanton	Richard Wolin	

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