



Borough of Manhattan Community College  
The City University of New York  
Academic Senate

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November 15, 2011

RE: PATHWAYS Initiative

We endorse the concept that a CUNY General Education core may enable students to transfer more easily to other colleges within the university. We also recognize the difficulty of identifying courses for a core that will satisfy the multiple goals of offering flexibility and breadth of experience to our students, while ensuring that we maintain the quality of our degree programs. Given the complexity of the task, the colleges must have more time to review the core, and to better understand the implications of its implementation and to make recommendations. We suggest that a final decision on the core be postponed until May 2012, which would provide faculty senates, disciplinary councils, departments and the Pathways Largest Transfer Majors Committees, to review in greater detail the proposed structure and to offer more concrete solutions to issues we see as problematic.

Many of our A.A. and A.S. programs are transfer programs and it is impossible for our programs to provide feedback without first knowing what changes will be made at the senior colleges, once they adopt the core. Again, this issue goes to timing, and the need for each step to be well considered prior to implementation.

Additionally, some of our most proscribed programs, those that currently offer a student few, if any electives, for example, Childhood and Bilingual Childhood Education, need assurance that these programs will continue to meet licensure requirements after the implementation of the core. Other programs have raised concerns that if the core supersedes existing articulation agreements, there will be much to discuss and negotiate with our senior college partners after the core is finalized. This is necessary to assure our students entire program, not just the core portion, will seamlessly transfer.

We have identified a number of concerns with the proposed core and list some of those concerns below, but we want to emphasize that given the short time frame permitted to evaluate the core we are responding with reservations. **The concerns we list below are a compilation of suggestions from our faculty; given the imposed time constraints, we could not convene all the necessary faculty groups to achieve consensus. For that reason also, some of the suggestions may be inconsistent with others.**

Across CUNY campuses there has been much discussion that the core is not large enough to meet the needs of a broad liberal arts education. At this college some departments have argued that the core should be reduced to afford the individual programs or degrees greater flexibility in utilizing the credits outside the core. It stands to reason that at the community colleges, a requirement of a 30 credit core in a 60 credit degree program is disproportionately burdensome, as opposed to a 30 credit core in a 120 degree program.

The requirement that all courses in the flexible core be three credits needs to be reconsidered. We offer two-, three- and four-credit classes currently and departments would have to reevaluate the courses, and majors would have to evaluate the distribution of credits before we could agree that three credits for all courses is the best solution. We recommend that rather than mandate three credit courses in the flexible core, a three credit minimum be accepted to satisfy a theme area (e.g. World Cultures). This will accommodate any combination of courses including a 4 cr. Language courses or two, 2-credit Art and Music courses to be acceptable.

In that vein, we recommend that the seven credits in English be reduced to six credits, thus reducing the fixed core to 14 credits. This would allow the full core to remain at 30 credits.

In regard to the learning outcomes in the flexible core there was a concern that the outcomes are heavily oriented towards the social sciences. Two alternatives were offered: a) increase and broaden the number of outcomes, while retaining the requirement that a course meet three outcomes or b) reduce the number of outcomes to be met by any given course to two outcomes. Our goal is that the thematic areas be as inclusive of a wide range of disciplines as possible. We recommend specifically that a learning outcome for the Individual and Society area be added that would address individual and global health.

We feel strongly that Speech or Communications classes are essential for our students. Placing Speech in the Creative Expressions theme is counterproductive. Towards that end we have two possible solutions: a) requiring speech as a three-credit course in the fixed core and reducing the flexible core to 13 credits and renaming the Creative Expression area to Fine Arts or b) creation a fifth theme area, Communications or Language Arts, with outcomes that would permit inclusion of both communications and language courses.

In support of CUNY's Decade of Science as well as belief that knowledge of technology is crucial to students, we offer a suggestion to create a sixth theme area in the flexible core: the Scientific World, which could incorporate natural science and computer science offerings; students would then have the option of taking 5 courses from six theme areas. The sixth area would alleviate some of the concerns that our A.S. programs in Science and Computer Science have expressed based on the need for sequential course taking in these areas. Barring the creation of the sixth theme we suggest that the learning outcomes in the other flexible core areas be revised to better reflect the need to incorporate awareness of, and command of, technology in more of our classes.

Lastly there was a concern that in order to meet the learning outcomes it would be necessary to reexamine class sizes, and course load, which in turn would result in demands on the physical plant. We agree that our students need to “Retrieve, evaluate, and interpret information from a variety of sources and points of view; evaluate evidence and arguments critically and produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions” but we question the ability of a faculty member teaching five sections of 35 students each, to effectively assess whether or not this is occurring, while also participating in college service and contributing to scholarship.

We also request clarification on the following:

1. which body will be tasked with approving future changes to the CUNY Gen Ed core; and
2. which body will approve Gen Ed core courses after they have been approved by our own college curriculum committee and senate?

We hope you will give serious consideration to our suggestions, in particular to our request that additional time is necessary to complete a more in-depth review and render recommendations.

Ad Hoc Committee on Pathways  
Borough of Manhattan Community College Academic Senate



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**Office of the President**

Borough of Manhattan Community College  
The City University of New York  
[www.bmcc.cuny.edu](http://www.bmcc.cuny.edu)

199 Chambers Street  
New York, NY 10007-1097  
tel. 212-220-1230  
fax 212-220-1244

November 15, 2011

Michelle Anderson, Dean and Professor of Law  
CUNY School of Law at Queens College  
65-21 Main Street  
Flushing, NY 11367

Dear Dean Anderson:

As per your email sent on October 31, 2011, I am providing Borough of Manhattan Community College's (BMCC) coordinated response to the proposed 30-credit Common Core for all campuses across the City University of New York (CUNY).

Overall, we endorse the concept of a CUNY-wide General Education Core that will enable our

students to transfer seamlessly to our sister institutions. As part of the review process we have engaged and consulted with the chairs of our academic departments, who have discussed the Common Core with their faculty and forwarded to us their observations, issues and concerns. The Common Core was also reviewed through our governance process. Chairs of the standing committees in our Academic Senate met with their committee members to discuss the Core and shared their concerns and observations at their Executive Committee meeting held on November 9, 2011.

Upon review of the various responses from the academic departments and Academic Senate participants, as well as in consultation with my Cabinet members, the following salient concerns about the Common Core were identified:

### **1. Seven Credits Required for English**

Many senior and community college English courses are three (3) credits and no pedagogical rationale or assessment to support the increase in credit was offered in the Common Core document.

### **2. Speech and Language Arts**

A number of academic departments and standing committees voiced concern about the absence of required Modern Language and Speech Communications courses in the Common Core, especially since the current job market has stressed the need for both written and oral communication skills with a global perspective, i.e., proficiency in more than one language. Therefore, faculty have suggested that a fifth theme entitled “Speech Communication and Language Arts” be added to the Common Core, in which courses in speech and modern languages could fulfill the requirement. We fully support this suggestion.

### **3. Revision of the Theme-based Flexible Core**

Many members of the standing committees observed that the areas of the flexible core are oriented towards courses in the social science disciplines. While the social sciences are important to a student’s general education, part of the purpose of a General Education Common Core is to provide students with both depth and breadth of experience; therefore, it should not rely heavily on the social sciences. It was proposed that the theme-based core be revised to include areas other than the social sciences.

### **4. Technological Skills**

One possible area that would enhance the theme-based flexible core is technology. Faculty stated that it is a myth that all CUNY students are adept technologically. Our students’ proficiency in technology falls at all levels on the continuum. Their knowledge of and facility

with technology, including the several varieties of social media, cannot be taken for granted. There must be university/institutional encouragement for all students to focus on this area as part of their General Education. Therefore, another theme that may be added to the flexible core is “Technological Skills.” E-learning courses, technology-enhanced courses, and computer science courses that improve students’ technological skills at the basic and advanced levels may be used to fulfill the requirement.

## **5. Curriculum Revision**

There was some concern expressed by academic chairs and members of the standing committees that the Common Core will force changes in our current curricula that will have a negative effect on the goals and articulation agreements of the programs, especially for those in the sciences. For example, the A.S. degrees in our Science for Forensic Science, Biotechnology and Engineering Science programs provide the basic science courses for the first two years of science programs at CUNY senior colleges, such as John Jay College of Criminal Justice and York College. However, the proposed Common Core would necessitate our replacing some of the foundation science courses with other liberal arts/general education courses to meet the learning outcomes of the Core. This, in turn, would force the senior colleges to require the students to take more foundation science courses in the third and fourth year, and possibly have an unintended consequence of students taking more than eight semesters to complete the baccalaureate because the foundation science courses are pre-requisites for many of the third- and fourth-year science courses. This is especially disconcerting since the University has identified these current ten years as “CUNY’s Decade of Science.”

## **6. Articulation in the Common Core**

Some faculty have raised concerns about how the Common Core will affect current articulation agreements and accreditation in A.A.S. degree programs, such as Nursing, Respiratory Therapy, Health Information Technology, and Media Arts and Technology. There should be an on-going review of such programs with respect to the Common Core.

## **7. Revision of General Education Assessment, Program Outcomes and Assessment Plans**

BMCC has in place a General Education Assessment Plan. It is based on the college’s seven General Education Outcome Goals that were approved through our governance process. It would appear that the proposed General Education Common Core will supersede our General Education Outcome Goals, and that all academic departments will revise their syllabi to incorporate the new general education learning outcomes associated with the Common Core.

I appreciate the opportunity that the University has given BMCC to share our observations, issues and concerns about the proposed General Education Common Core. Equally important, we appreciate being involved in a process that will ultimately benefit all of the students within CUNY.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Antonio Pérez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping tail.

Antonio Pérez  
President

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