

Dear Colleagues:

**Foreign languages.** “Modern students must have more than a passing understanding of other cultures, *speak other languages fluently* and appreciate other histories.” This statement admirably articulates what a New York City college student needs to thrive in today’s globalized world. The statement, though, refers to what high school students should learn and is part of the mission statement of the proposed Avenues World School, whose board chairman is Benno Schmidt, also the chairman of CUNY’s Board of Trustees. The students in this private high school will be expected to achieve “fluency in at least one other language,” and will have studied at least Spanish or Mandarin all through elementary school and junior high.

Clearly an unintended consequence of the current Pathways proposal is to marginalize and likely permanently damage the teaching of foreign languages in the City University of New York. There are three problems: (1) a single semester of foreign language, which is the most that can be required, in the current proposal will not give students more than a passing acquaintance with a language; (2) foreign language courses do not belong in the proposed core curriculum because a semester of language study is not a study of World Cultures; (3) since it is envisioned that the one semester of foreign language will be a choice among several other kinds of courses, the majority of students are likely not to have the experience of studying a language in college.

The solution is to distinguish, quite properly, foreign language study from the core curriculum per se and allow the colleges to set foreign language requirements according to the degree the student is seeking. At Baruch, for example, we currently have different language requirements for the BA and the BBA. We do not want to see our students in a public university be deprived of an essential learning experience that is rightly valued by an innovative private high school.

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