

To: CUNY Pathways Steering Committee and Working Committee
October 13, 2011

History Discipline Council Resolution

The History Discipline Council urges that the Pathways Steering Committee take seriously the assertion in the draft preamble that the learning goals of the new Common Core include "interest in relating the past to the complex world." This statement highlights how history is a foundational discipline and crucial to liberal arts learning goals. A number of the models of 10-course common core programs distributed at the September 23 Steering Committee meeting included a separate category for Historical Studies and the History Discipline Council would like the Steering Committee to revisit the current structure of the core to consider options retaining a historical category.

The Discipline Council is adamant that the knowledge, skills, and methodology gained and practiced through the study of history are crucial to general education, the liberal arts, and fully functioning citizenship. Without an understanding of how the historical forces operate upon the individual, society, the economy, culture, and the environment, our students will look at the present simply as an unmanageable collection of disconnected entities, systems, information, and experiences. History also teaches skills that have useful interdisciplinary utility and real world applicability, including critical analysis of texts and comparative or evidence based argumentation. One of the essential elements of every history course is to show the students how historians discover, evaluate and interpret archaeological, genetic, linguistic, and written evidence to reconstruct the past. Thus, history courses teach the student how to make rational judgments about information. This is a skill that has applications in every discipline and, therefore, illustrates the foundational nature of history as an academic discipline. Just as English composition provides the students with the grammatical and semantic tools to express their thoughts, and mathematics enables them to decode the physical sciences, history offers the grounded platform from which they can explore the humanities and the social sciences.

Historical judgment is an essential academic goal, and historical perspective is a necessary academic outcome.

In response to the latest draft of the Structure of the Common Core, the History Discipline Council has several recommendations.

1. "Learning from the Past" or "Historical Perspectives" should be allotted its own 3-credit category. The discipline of History would be the most appropriate to fill this category, since it does the most complete job of bridging politics, culture, and society to provide an overarching framework that makes the past intelligible and meaningful as a whole. However, this category would not necessarily be limited to the discipline of History, but could also include art history, historical sociology, history of music, history of literature, philosophy, and other courses related to past cultures, events, and people. This kind of categorization is not uncommon in general education requirements nationwide. For example, SUNY includes both U.S. History and Western

Civilization within its core.

The History Discipline Council urges the Steering Committee to adopt this historical category due to the firm belief that appreciating and learning from the vast resources of the past, honing the ability to trace the origins of current ideas and ideologies, comparing present societies with those of the past, and understanding how change occurs over time is critical to the formation of students' abilities to make political decisions and evaluate current events.

While the current categories within the flexible core would encourage students to compare U.S. society with other areas around the globe, it would be possible for them to complete their education without comparing the current-day world with societies and cultures of the past.

Providing a base of knowledge about how now only the U.S. but also societies around the world evolved to their present state, tracing the development of current ideas and ideologies, and comparing the present with the past is fundamental to educating students who will be informed citizens.

2. Formulate the Common Core to make sure students take courses in both social studies and the humanities. Despite the Steering Committee's best effort to make social studies and humanities central to the Flexible Core, the History Discipline Council is concerned that with the current structure, it would be possible for students to bypass either humanities courses or social studies courses or both. Therefore, we urge that the categories be given more specificity to make sure that students draw from these fundamental liberal arts disciplines. Putting a "Historical Perspectives" category into the Core would help to fulfill this goal, since most courses that examine the past would be squarely within social science or humanities disciplines.

3. If the current Common Core proposal is adopted and "Learning from the Past" or "Historical Perspectives" is not given its own category, then students might but would not be required to opt to take a history class to fulfill either the "World Cultures" or the "U.S. Experience in its Diversity" requirement. Since the History Discipline Council contends that historical knowledge is so foundational to general education, it would at least hope that the CUNY student body is encouraged to take a history class by adding that discipline explicitly to the category "Individual and Society." History is among the main disciplines that analyze the relationship between individual agency, historic structures, and the formation of societies. The current categories might also be reworded to reflect the importance of examining these themes historically. For example, the categories might be renamed "Development of World Cultures" and "Diverse U.S. Experiences in Past, Present, and Future."

Signed, CUNY History Chairs/Coordinators and other History Discipline Council

Representatives:

Allison Kavey, Associate Professor and Chairperson, History Department, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, akavey@jjay.cuny.edu

Blanche Wiesen Cook, Distinguished Professor, History Department, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, bcCook@jjay.cuny.edu

Colleen Slater, Assistant Professor of History, Chair, History Faculty, Department of Social Sciences, Borough of Manhattan Community College, CSlater@bmcc.cuny.edu

David G. Troyansky, Professor and Chair, History Department, Brooklyn College, Troyansky@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Frances Kraljic, Chair, Department of History, Philosophy and Political Science, Kingsborough Community College, Frances.Kraljic@kbcc.cuny.edu

Frank Warren, Professor and Chair, History Department, Queens College, Frank.Warren@qc.cuny.edu

George D. Sussman, Professor of History, History Coordinator, Social Science Department, LaGuardia Community College, gsussman@lagcc.cuny.edu

Gerald Markowitz, Distinguished Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, gmarkowitz@jjay.cuny.edu

Gilmar E. Visoni, Chair of the History Department, Queensborough Community College, GVisoni@qcc.cuny.edu

Gregory Downs, Associate Professor and Interim Chair, History, Department, City College of New York, gregorypdwns@gmail.com

Helena Rosenblatt, Professor and Executive Officer, Ph.D. Program in History, The Graduate Center, CUNY, [YPERLINK"mailto:HRosenblatt@gc.cuny.edu"HRosenblatt@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:HRosenblatt@gc.cuny.edu)

Jacob Kramer, Faculty, History Department, Borough of Manhattan Community College, JKramer@bmcc.cuny.edu

Jonathan D. Sassi, Associate Professor and Chairman, Department of History, College of Staten Island, Jonathan.Sassi@csi.cuny.edu

Katherine Pence, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of History, Baruch College, Katherine.Pence@baruch.cuny.edu

Laura Fishman, Chair, Department of History and Philosophy, York College, lfishman@york.cuny.edu

Richard Belsky, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of History, Hunter College, Richard.belsky@hunter.cuny.edu

Robert Parmet, Professor, Department of History and Philosophy, York College, rparmet@york.cuny.edu

Susan Besse, Associate Professor of History, City College of New York, skbesse@gmail.com

Jacqueline Gutwirth, Professor and Chairperson, Department of History, Bronx Community College, jacqueline.gutwirth@bcc.cuny.edu