

The New York Association of Scholars

General Education at the City University of New York

Since December, 2010 the City University of New York has been troubled by successive versions of a [draft resolution](#) on “Creating an Efficient Transfer System” issued by its Office of Academic Affairs. Better known as the "Pathways Proposal,” the resolution seeks to identify and remedy problems faced by undergraduate students in transferring from community to senior colleges. In particular, it [focuses](#) on the costs of students accumulating excess credits, resulting in delays in the completion of degree programs in a timely manner. At the center of these issues are CUNY’s chronic dual dilemmas of enrolling poorly prepared students from New York City’s public schools, and of failing to graduate a [majority](#) of them after six or more years in college.

Rather than proposing solutions to the serious issues involved in student transfer, retention and graduation, the university has chosen to solve them through the reform of general education policies on the respective campuses. Instead of the expensive, but highly effective path of hiring more counselors, improving frequently woefully inadequate academic support services, and providing necessary IT resources, CUNY is going to change the curriculum. This is very much a change for the worse. Among the recommendations of the “Pathways Proposal” are ones that will limit the number of general education credits to a maximum of 42, require that students at the community colleges complete 30 of these credits as part of their 60 credit degree programs, and dismantle current standards at the senior colleges. This includes Brooklyn College’s celebrated Common Core, as well as the demanding programs at Baruch, Hunter and Lehman.

The New York Association of Scholars is extremely concerned that reductions in required general education classes will severely undermine academic standards and rigor at the senior colleges. This is in part due to a conflicted view of the community college mission. As a senior professor at one of the community colleges recently said, “it’s clear that for a large proportion of our students, an authentic, meaningful college education ... is nowhere in sight.” This was not a lament. While this attitude is very far from general, it is nonetheless troubling. We are in addition concerned that shifting the general education burden on to the community colleges will overwhelm their already strained resources. We agree with some forty six [student and faculty bodies](#) at CUNY, and with the national executive of the [Phi Beta Kappa Society](#) that implementation of these potentially very destructive changes to general education be deferred. One June 20th, the university’s Board of Trustees will hear public testimony on the “Pathways Proposal.” On June 27th they will vote on it. We call upon the Board of Trustees to ensure that CUNY’s commitment to a quality liberal arts education for all undergraduates is not compromised. The hard won standards of academic rigor must not be sacrificed for administrative expediency. In 1999, the Schmidt Report waned of “An Institution Adrift.” In 2011, we face the prospect of “An Institution Considerably Diminished.” The tuition paying students and parents, and the tax payers of the City and State of New York, deserve much better. In their name, we respectfully demand it.