

June 1, 2011

Dear Trustee,

With regard to the letter issued by Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Berry and Chancellor Goldstein:

1. College readiness

National and local statistics (National Center for Educational Statistics, the College Board, the numbers of students requiring remediation) agree that high school graduates – who may be very smart – are far less prepared for college work than cohorts of a generation or more past.

Thus, the CUNY faculty have developed curricula to repair deficits as well as to advance students towards an education capped by a valid degree.

Over 45 faculty groups have indicated that the proposed Pathways project skirts this reality by talking about “outcomes” rather than the discipline content that faculty believe students need.

2. The purpose of a college education

If we are to accept the student point of view expressed, for instance, at the April 29 2011 conference of the University Faculty Senate, the purpose is to prepare a student for a job, probably in some business area or career, with as little “impediment” as possible.

One student stated flatly that he did not care about the meaning of “natural selection” or any similar issues as long as he could be assured of a degree that brought a job.

The faculty, including faculty with primary appointments in career programs, tend to believe that the purpose of a college education is not pure job training but the development of skills AND knowledge that enables a raw freshman to emerge as a sophisticated senior. In an economy that no longer promises a lifetime position at one company, there is no way to prepare people for “jobs” alone.

We do not believe that “outcomes” does more than create vague categories which only disciplines can infuse with meaning. “Outcomes” may be fine for Middle States rhetoric but they do not help if a student has no idea that the American Revolution preceded the Civil War.

### 3. The Wrigley report

The University Faculty Senate as well as faculty with critical skills in both two and four year colleges found the report flawed in fact and evidence.

Focus groups where students complained that they needed extra credits or more time to graduate because:

- a) they challenged the existence of prerequisites for some courses;
- b) they changed majors, sometimes more than once;
- c) to maintain full time status, they took courses they did not really want because they could not get a convenient class for their own schedules;
- d) they charged faculty were indulged by not teaching at times convenient to students – and this is noted without challenge or evidence – it is gossip;
- e) they had problems with math requirements; and
- f) they did not understand the difference between an AA and AAS degree

The report correctly notes that students have problems getting proper advisement and the UFS and many faculty groups have agreed heartily with this and wonder WHY administrative investment has faltered in this area.

If a student complained that he/she could not graduate in a timely fashion because of the problem of accessing needed courses, THIS is a legitimate issue and is often the result of shortfalls of funding. If this problem has been bad in the past, next year it will be worse as many colleges are telling departments to CUT adjuncts (rather than cutting bloated administrations). Cutting adjuncts will reduce availability of sections.

### 4) Pathways – its past and future

While the Vice Chancellor indeed visited many groups to discuss the proposal, and ran a web site inviting comments, there is a major difference between receiving over 250 largely anonymous supporting remarks and the stream of faculty resolutions that pours in daily (the latest being from the Discipline Council in Puerto Rican and Latino Studies -- see [www.cunyufs.org/A](http://www.cunyufs.org/A) and a thoughtful letter from the chair of the Queens College Anthropology Department).

These resolutions insist that the serious problems of transfer need not be addressed by reducing general education and they insist, equally, on the traditionally respected right of faculty to determine curricula.

Moreover the proposal seems unaware of the Charter of the University Faculty Senate which states that the UFS is responsible for “the establishment of University-wide academic

programs, initiatives and priorities” in coordination with the Trustees and the Council of Presidents. See <http://cunyufs.org/wizzd.html>.

The UFS has been authorized by the Board for decades to participate fully in issues concerning allocation of monies that deal with educational objectives, in the opening of new University units, the appointment of principal administrative officers and the cross campus creation of new academic initiatives. Pathways is a cross campus new academic initiative.

While the Education Law authorizes the Board to make CUNY policy, the Board has normally not micromanaged curriculum and has respected the capabilities of the professionals whom it has appointed to preserve academic standards. The Trustees usually vote on curricula matters presented up through the ranks of faculty committees, through the Office of Academic Affairs. This policy gives the Chancellor total authority to determine what is general education.

The Senate has created a new Committee on General Education representing every undergraduate college in CUNY as well as the general range of courses taught in general education and composed of seasoned faculty who have served on general education committees on their individual campuses. This group has made useful proposals for dealing with transfer and it represents the faculty across the system. We await the call to serve and cooperate ... so far, all we hear is silence broken only by an assertion of the Board’s authority to do nearly anything it wants.

Yours sincerely,



Sandi Cooper