DATE: November 15, 2011

TO: Members of the Pathways Steering Committee

FROM: President Carole M. Berotte Joseph

RE: Bronx Community College’s Coordinated College Response to the Pathways Draft Common Core Structure Proposed on November 1, 2011

Bronx Community College is pleased to submit the following response to the Pathways Draft Common Core Structure. We recognize the critical importance of the Pathways initiative. As we move toward the implementation and planning stages which will begin on December 1, we are fully prepared to consider, over the next months, the implications of Pathways for our curricula and for many other dimensions of academic programming and policy. As a first step, we now offer our coordinated response for the consideration of the Pathways Steering Committee’s deliberations between now and December 1.

Our response reflects three (3) types of activity: intensive deliberations within College faculty governance structures; an open invitation by the President for faculty, students and staff to participate in a Campus Wide Forum and the submission of individual/group responses to the Pathways document. What follows is a synthesis and summary of these activities. In addition, members of the campus community were encouraged to submit comments directly to the Pathways Steering Committee via the established website.

A. Governance Discussions and Resolutions

Following release of the Draft Common Core Structure and campus-wide circulation of the materials, discussions about Pathways were held at the College Senate (November 3), and College Curriculum Committee (November 8) and the College Faculty Council (November 10). Substantial time was reserved on the agenda, and the format consisted of a “Q&A“ session in which Dr. Howard Wach, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs, responded to questions and comments about the Draft Common Core at the first two meetings.

Governance discussions culminated in a meeting of the College Faculty Council, entirely devoted to Pathways, held on November 10. Council members had been urged to bring formal resolutions to the meeting. Minutes of this meeting reflect the passing of two (2) successful resolutions:

1. That “History” be included as a discipline under Flexible Core D “Individual and Society” within the Flexible Core structure. Justification of this resolution was submitted by the BCC Department of History. A supporting statement follows:

   We strongly urge the inclusion of history as a discipline under the Flexible Core, D., “Individual and Society.” A close look at what the discipline of history seeks to convey, and the methods by
which it does so, alongside the learning outcomes enumerated by the Steering Committee in this area, makes the congruence of the two apparent.

For confirmation that the learning outcomes listed are at the heart of the historical endeavor, one needs go no further than Peter Stearn's 2008 essay, “Why Study History,” posted on the American Historical Association's website. His declaration, “History should be studied because it is essential to individuals and society...” is highlighted in 18-point red type. Stearn argues further that history "provides the only extensive materials available to study the human condition” and in so doing offers “a terrain for moral contemplation.” [http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm] These reflections are entirely consonant with the desired student outcomes of Flexible Common Core D.

The discipline of history examines questions of individual experience, identity, status, rights, ethical, moral and civic responsibilities, and relationships with collectives beyond the self. These issues are examined in cultural, political and socio-economic contexts. History strongly emphasizes the transformative effects of philosophical and scientific knowledge, social scientific inquiry, and technological innovation on human lives, ideas and institutions. It examines agrarian and industrial, rural and urban life, comparative cultural change, elite-popular relations, and questions of identity, membership in, or exclusion from polities in the United States and other countries.

The methods of analysis engaged by historians lead students to consider the moral and ethical dimensions of past circumstances as they affected individuals and the societies in which they lived, and to consider the implications that both past and present circumstances and actions bear on their day-to-day lives. Local, national, and global trends and their long-term movements are interwoven in comparative context, into the discourse of historical method and perspective.

An empathetic appreciation of individual circumstance linking past and present is also a key learning method in history courses. Students, in their research, discussion and writing outcomes, are often required to compare, evaluate and consider the manner in which decisions taken on the societal level impact their lives. These considerations are fundamental not only to the study of the individual and society, but to conscious individual participation in society itself, a core general education value essential to student learning at Bronx Community College and CUNY. In short, the discipline of history is essential to a full appreciation of the complex, highly nuanced and often vexed relationship—past and present—of the individual and society.

2. That “Health/Physical Education” also be added to the “Individual and Society” area, and that the word “lifestyle” be added to “experiences, values, and choices” in bullet 2.

B. Additional Discussions / Suggestions for Revising the Common Core

1. Aside from the approved resolutions listed above, additional resolutions and responses were submitted directly to the Office of Academic Affairs and the President's Office from the Department of Modern Languages and the Department of Education and Reading in collaboration with the Communications Department. Changes were suggested to the wording of the learning outcomes to expand English Composition to include Reading and Communications.
2. The Modern Languages response had two components: a request for amended language to the
    general Flexible Core learning outcomes (substitution of the word “effectively” for “critically” in bullet
    2), and the addition of three (3) language credits to the Required Common Core thus bringing the total
    number of credits in the Flexible Core to eighteen (18) credits.

C. Campus Wide Forum - On Monday, 11/14/11, a campus wide forum was also held.

D. Summary and Next Steps

We endorse the formally approved resolutions listed above. In the case of History, a close correlation
    between the “Individual and Society” learning outcomes and the fundamental premises of historical
    study make a compelling case for inclusion. In the case of Health and Physical Education, we recognize
    the critical importance of health education as a necessary element of our mission, and its close
    connection to the larger goals embedded in our longstanding working concept of General Education.

Though they were not approved in our faculty governance deliberations, we include the concerns of the
    Modern Languages and Reading and Communications Departments in order to reflect the full range of
discussion that the Pathways Project has generated at BCC. Similarly, we’ve documented the
    unsuccessful proposals (as reflected in our Faculty Council Minutes) for inclusion of Communications
    within the Pathways credit structures. Some of these proposals (notably Communications and Modern
    Languages) have also been submitted directly to Dean Anderson and the Pathways Steering Committee.

Finally, we can also report initial discussions about how the Required Core credits in Math and
    Composition may be allocated, and whether new courses (along with new credit allocations) will be
    appropriate to our institutional plan.

We are in support of the proposed learning outcomes and have appointed a BCC Pathways Steering
    Committee, consisting of senior faculty and designees from the Offices of Academic Affairs and
    Institutional Research, who will be charged to deliver our Pathways Implementation Plan on April 1,
    2012. They have drawn up a calendar and preliminary work plan.

Once the final Pathways Common Core plan is released on December 1, our Steering Committee will
    begin its work in earnest. We look forward to their deliberations, and to the campus wide discussions
    that will follow. The effort will provide our faculty and staff with many opportunities to examine what
    we do, and to determine how Pathways can complement and strengthen our campus-based academic
    initiatives.