Attachment 2. Five Recommendations from CSI on the Pathways to Degree Completion Project Proposal

1. In general, the restriction on “no more than one course in any discipline” in the Flexible Core may be too rigid. Among the strengths of the 30-credit Common Core is that courses from a single discipline may be inserted into more than one area of the Flexible Core, provided that they meet the learning outcomes. For example, history courses might be proposed in fulfillment of the world cultures requirement, but history courses might also fulfill individual and society and/or other requirements. The broad thematic nature of the four areas in the Flexible Core allows for greater creativity than before in terms of course choices for each area, but the restriction on choice undercuts the possibilities of the thematic categories.

Further, students often use introductory courses in general education as building blocks for more in-depth study of a particular topic or issue or discipline, either in the general education curriculum itself or later in the majors. While the project to determine the three to six courses that are pathways into the major may address the interests of students who choose to pursue that major, the one-course-per-discipline requirement in the Flexible Core would make it impossible for a student to pursue a subject of interest that may not be related to their choice of a major or minor.

In general, it may be advisable to provide students with the option to pursue in-depth knowledge from a disciplinary perspective, even in the general education curriculum, or to choose to pursue breadth of perspective through course options in different disciplines.

Flexibility of choice as to the number of courses from a particular discipline that can be used to fulfill requirements allows for a more creative approach to the general education curriculum. Further, the common learning outcomes emphasize basic skills to be developed. If the emphasis of the curriculum is on critical skills addressed by all courses within the thematic constructs, then flexibility will achieve those goals as easily as the currently proposed restrictions.

2. There are minor issues related to the terminology in the description of the Flexible Core. The current description reads: “five 3-credit liberal arts courses, with at least one course from each of the four areas and no more than one course in any discipline.” On the state level, the phrase “liberal arts core” is used by the NYSED to refer to the total number of credits per type of degree that must be composed of “liberal arts and sciences” courses. Since the Flexible Core does not equal the number of credits referred to on the statewide level as the “liberal arts core” and the verbiage in the description is actually in reference to the courses in the flexible core, we suggest that the descriptive text for the Flexible Core be revised to read “liberal arts and sciences courses” to match statewide terminology. While we all agree that the phrase “liberal arts” encompasses the sciences, we believe that this will also help to allay some of the reactions of science faculty who may think the sciences cannot be made to apply to any of the proposed thematic areas.
3. There is some concern about the number of outcomes a course might have to meet, especially in the Flexible Core. We very much like the addition of the three outcomes that all courses in each area must meet, but the imposition of the requirement that courses must meet at least three additional outcomes in each thematic area may be too stringent. For example, a foreign language course proposed for the World Cultures thematic area may not be able to meet as many as three of the learning outcomes suggested. We suggest that the committee consider reducing the requirement to two outcomes.

4. Under the U.S. Experience in its Diversity thematic area, we propose revising the third bullet as follows: “Evaluate how indigenous populations, immigration, and slavery have shaped the development of the United States.”

5. The restriction that all courses for the Flexible Core be liberal arts and sciences courses undercuts some of our current offerings and seems to pose issues, in particular, for the Creative Expression category. While we understand the rationale behind this restriction and are aware that this restriction is consistent with national trends, the general education curriculum at the College of Staten Island currently includes a three to eight credit requirement (AA, BA, and BS) in textual, aesthetic, and linguistic analysis (our TALA requirement). This area of our general education curriculum currently includes courses in drawing, acting, painting, sculpture, photography and other applied arts, which speak to the very nature of creative “expression.” Our Performing and Creative Arts Department has historically included artists with national reputations, who provide unique opportunities for students to experience the arts. Upon reflection, the distinction between some courses designated now as liberal arts and sciences courses, such as foreign language and composition courses that focus on basic skills, and courses in drawing, painting, or other similar areas seems arbitrary.

Given that the proposed thematic area focuses on creative expression, it seems counter intuitive to undercut courses that clearly are at the heart of creative expression. Further, these types of courses currently appear not only in our general education curriculum, but also in the curricula of Queens College (acting, set design), York College (Visual Design, Drawing, Painting, Photography), John Jay College of Criminal Justice (any three-credit course in art, music or drama), and other CUNY colleges. We ask that the committee consider relaxing this restriction to allow for one course to be taken in the Creative Expression area of the Flexible Core that does not currently qualify for inclusion on the NYSED list of liberal arts and sciences courses. Because the statewide requirement currently ensures that an appropriate percentage of associate and baccalaureate degree program credits be composed of liberal arts and sciences courses, this modification would not affect the overall integrity of a degree program and would allow for the proposed Creative Expression thematic area to include courses that truly speak to the theme.