November 15, 2011

Michelle J. Anderson
Dean and Professor of Law
CUNY Law School
Chair, Pathways Task Force on the Common Core

Dear Dean Anderson:

I am hereby conveying the consolidated response of the John Jay College academic community to the draft recommendations of the Pathways Task Force for a 30-credit Common Core at all campuses across the University.

To generate this response, Provost Jane Bowers charged the chairs of the primary faculty governance bodies at the College with discussing the draft recommendations and sending their consolidated responses to her. She received responses from the Faculty Senate, transmitted by Professor Karen Kaplowitz; the Council of Chairs, transmitted by Professor Harold Sullivan; and the Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee (UCASC), transmitted by Dean Anne Lopes. In addition, the curriculum committees of the academic departments were encouraged to send their responses directly to the Provost and/or the UCASC. Seven departments did so: Africana Studies, Art & Music, Communication & Theatre Arts, English, Foreign Languages, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Science. Finally, several individual faculty members communicated directly to the Provost and/or the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

The responses of these various bodies and individuals have been synthesized and transmitted to me by Provost Bowers. As Chief Academic Officer of the College, Provost Bowers has forcefully conveyed to me the faculty’s view regarding its authority over the curriculum of the College and the ways the Pathways proposal impinges on that authority. The concerns of the faculty are here organized into several broad categories: 1) the impact of the Pathways proposal on the College’s general education curriculum and on the joint degree programs of the CUNY Justice Academy; 2) violation of general academic principles in the process of creating the Common Core and in the proposal itself; 3) specific objections to elements of the proposal; and 4) the exclusion or de-emphasis of certain disciplines. Following the summary of concerns, we suggest changes to the Pathways proposal that would address at least some of the faculty concerns.
1. The Impact of the Common Core on the College’s General Education Curriculum and on the Joint Degree Programs of the CUNY Justice Academy.

The Pathways proposal undermines John Jay’s five-year, consultative, faculty-led process of revising our General Education curriculum, culminating in a vote by our College Council at the end of spring 2011 to endorse an outcomes-based, scaffolded, curricular structure, which unifies the broad disciplines of the liberal arts under the theme of educating for justice and gives a unique identity to a John Jay education. This curriculum was designed to be assessable and is based on best practices as described by the AAC&U and required by Middle States. If the Pathways proposal is approved, it will mandate changes to the innovative General Education curricular structure developed by our faculty. The faculty feels that the University is asking them to take all of their hard work on General Education reform and set it aside. The imposition of the Pathways proposal will likely engender faculty resistance rather than the support and buy-in our own approved program enjoys.

John Jay has already made a tremendous contribution to seamless transfer at the University through the creation of the CUNY Justice Academy: joint degree programs in Criminal Justice, Forensic Science, and Forensic Financial Analysis, created in partnership with CUNY’s six community colleges and developed and approved by the faculty of the participating colleges. The carefully articulated curricula of these programs include common courses in the majors for indigenous and transfer students and specific agreements about general education requirements at the community college and senior college level that not only ensure seamless transfer, but also ensure that community college students are adequately prepared for success at John Jay. All of these degree programs will need to be revisited and revised in light of the Pathways proposal even though they are perfect transfer pathways envisioned and implemented before there was a Pathways initiative at CUNY. We will be seeking an exemption from the Pathways requirements for at least one of these programs.

2. Violation of General Academic Principles in the Process of Creating the Common Core and in the Content of the Proposal

Without exception the responses from our faculty included a statement to the effect that the Pathways process has violated the traditional rights of faculty governance over curriculum. More specifically, the Pathways process ignored the role of the local campus faculty in setting the college’s curriculum, and the new curriculum will be imposed by the Board of Trustees without a vote of the faculty governance bodies of the college, which normally vote on new curriculum.

Some faculty members oppose the Pathways proposal because it departs from sound principles and best practices in general education. In particular, if this proposal is adopted, the general education curriculum at CUNY will not be scaffolded across a student’s entire undergraduate career, a best practice that enables students to develop necessary skills and knowledge over time. While we applaud the University for seeking to develop an outcomes-based general education, we believe that the proposal’s outcomes are too wide-ranging and ambitious for a 30-credit core curriculum. Because the proposal does not build in a progression of learning across time and
because the outcomes are too-wide ranging, assessment of the curriculum will be difficult. Moreover, the University has not put forward an assessment plan with the proposal; therefore, the faculty cannot tell how or if the curriculum will be assessed and improved.

3. Specific Objections to Elements of the Proposal

Number of Credits: Although the email transmitting the Pathways Proposal stated that “general education at CUNY would consist of a 30-credit Common Core for all campuses across the University and a 12-credit College Option for senior colleges,” the BOT resolution actually specifies a variable-credit College Option depending on the number of credits the transferring student has accumulated at the sending institution. The Provost and the faculty of John Jay College strongly oppose the variable-credit College Option. The goal of the College Option is to allow the colleges to put their unique signature or stamp on their graduates. It is impossible to achieve this goal in six credits and difficult in nine. The full twelve credits would ensure that all John Jay graduates would have taken a set of courses exemplifying and fulfilling our mission of educating for justice.

The John Jay College faculty believes that the 42 credits mandated by the BOT are too few; that such a small general education would seriously compromise undergraduate education at the University. They recommend at least 48 credits.

Outcomes: We note that the proposal has no outcomes related to mastery of new technologies and that the learning outcomes are too advanced and therefore inappropriate for 100-200 level courses. Further, we believe that the outcomes are too numerous to be achieved in the 30 credits of the Common Core.

Disciplines: We suggest that the proposal clarify the meaning of “discipline” in the Flexible Core. Does the proposal consider English and philosophy disciplines? Or does it consider “humanities” the discipline. Does “humanities” encompass the fine and performing arts? Does the proposal consider science a discipline? Or is the discipline chemistry, biology, or physics? Further, the proposal does not acknowledge the existence of inter-disciplines (e.g. gender studies) nor provide guidance about how/where these fit into the Flexible Core.

Waivers: We have been told that certain majors/programs will be granted waivers from the Pathways general education requirements. We intend to request a waiver for the Forensic Science major, both locally and in the CUNY Justice Academy. John Jay’s Forensic Science major is a carefully sequenced 73-credit curriculum, which necessitates that general education courses be taken throughout a student’s plan of study. In order for the Science for Forensic Science associate degree students to transfer with ease and succeed academically, the general education credits of these joint degrees cannot be front-loaded at the community colleges. Without a waiver, the College will have to remove Forensic Science from the inventory of the CUNY Justice Academy or formally apply to have Forensic Science declared a five-year major.

4. The Exclusion or De-emphasis of Certain Disciplines
The responses below come primarily but not exclusively from the faculty in these disciplines.

**Science:** If approved, CUNY would be among the smallest STEM core requirements of all major university systems. Further, the de-emphasis of science and mathematics is certain to negatively impact the future career prospects of our students, move us further from our roots as a strong STEM-oriented university, and run contrary to recent efforts such as the CUNY administration’s Decade of Science and Mayor Bloomberg’s work to attract more STEM education to New York City. Finally, the learning outcomes associated with the Physical and Life Sciences component of the Required Core, while reasonable and valuable, cannot be covered or achieved in a single course.

**Foreign Languages:** Foreign language study is crucial. A CUNY without a required foreign language course (ideally two semesters) does an enormous disservice to our students. How, our faculty asks, will our graduates ever compete for career positions in any field involving international business, politics, law, and the like? This exclusion of foreign languages appears especially egregious in a cosmopolitan, multi-national city like New York.

**History:** Our faculty believes that no student should graduate from college without having taken at least one history course. By taking one required history course, students can learn that a) countries and peoples have a past; b) this past shapes their present and future.

**Speech:** Some faculty expressed deep concern that our students will be able to complete the core without having dealt with their very serious speech problems. Unless we have a speech requirement, they predict that there will be a decline in the quality of student presentations and class participation.

**Art & Music:** With the implementation of the Pathways proposal, for the first time in the history of many CUNY colleges, John Jay among them, no specific fine arts class will be required of our students. Rather than a broad liberal arts requirement, CUNY should have a specific fine arts requirement.

Although some members of our community believe that the Pathways project cannot be “redeemed” by tinkering with its individual components and that it should be re-thought and re-designed or rejected entirely, others make the following specific suggestions, which I support.

- Eliminate the variable-credit aspect of the College Option and allow each campus to require 12 credits of every transfer student, at no matter what stage of their education they enter the college.
- Increase the Common Core to at least 36 credits.
- Specify that the six-credit increase proposed be allocated to a foreign language, which would become part of the Required Core. Take foreign languages out of the World Cultures category.
- Add a fifth category to the Flexible Core that specifies historical knowledge and skills. A variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches should be represented.
- Revise the learning outcomes so that they are appropriate for 100 and 200 level courses and limit them so that they are ambitious but achievable in 36 credits.
Substitute “Writing” for “English Composition” in the Required Core.

I found the University report on transfer a powerful and disturbing call to improve transfer for CUNY students so that they can move seamlessly among our many colleges. In view of that compelling report, the John Jay College community supports the goals of the Pathways initiative. Indeed, the leadership role played by John Jay College and our faculty in the design of the CUNY Justice Academy is ample evidence of our support for the creation of smooth pathways from community to senior college. However, I must report that the responses from our faculty have been highly critical of the process and of the first proposal of the Pathways Initiative regarding General Education. I hope that this summary of our community’s responses will be helpful to you as you consider changes to the current proposal.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Travis  
President