MEMORANDUM

To: Dean Michelle J. Anderson
   Chair, Pathways Task Force

From: President Scott Evenbeck
      The New Community College at CUNY

Date: November 15, 2011

Re: Coordinated College Response

After conferring with the NCC community, I’m writing in response to the Task Force’s draft recommendation on the contours of the 30-credit Common Core structure. We held a college-wide meeting on November 8, at which we discussed the proposed Required and Flexible Common Cores and, after a careful analysis, their impact on the NCC curriculum. All faculty and staff were also invited to a subsequent meeting for a further discussion.

At the outset, let me affirm the work you and the members of the Steering and Working Committees have done to develop the draft plan to implement the Board Resolution on Creating an Efficient Transfer System. We agree with our General Counsel’s characterization of the system that now exists as “arbitrary, inconsistent and incomprehensible.” It cannot be emphasized enough how important this Board initiative is to assure smooth, system-wide recognition of transfer credit for our students and their ultimate success in achieving timely degrees based on the recognition of established learning outcomes.

The New Community College at CUNY was founded to develop a new educational model. That model, which is based on careful research and promising practices in CUNY and throughout the country, provides for an extensive, highly interdisciplinary learning community common core, and emphasizes experiential learning through applied engagement with critical issues. Institutional student learning outcomes informed by the Lumina Foundation Degree Qualifications Profile/LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes have been carefully developed. Many national experts believe our model represents an exciting new direction in higher education, and this view is part of a growing national trend in recognition of the value of interdisciplinary models. There is a need to assure that the University Common Core as it is finalized at CUNY can accommodate these models.

The proposed Pathways Common Core articulates learning outcomes and non-traditional groupings of courses centered on key themes important for our society and our students. It
assumes, however, a comprehensive menu of course choices available through a multitude of departments, and many of the suggested learning outcomes appear to propose discipline-specific outcomes. Adapting our interdisciplinary model, with a limited number of clear pathways to graduation in highly structured curricula to the requirements of the Common Core as they now stand, could involve significant re-design of our liberal arts core courses and our programs of study. We would like to suggest the following changes, therefore, to the Pathways recommendations—changes we believe are important not only to The New Community College at CUNY but to other campuses in the system, as well:

- Set the English Composition requirement at 6 credits and allow an additional credit earned through a writing intensive course. This will reinforce a widely recognized and effective approach to Writing Across the Curriculum.

- Make credits tied to learning outcomes (not courses) the ultimate unit of analysis and eligibility. This recommendation, aligned with the Board Resolution’s emphasis on learning outcomes, affords each campus the opportunity within the Required and Flexible Common Core structure to decide the optimal disciplinary and interdisciplinary emphases for its general education program.

- Revisit topical learning outcomes that seem tied to traditional survey course content. E.g. change “Analyze the major themes of U.S. history from different social, economic, demographic, cultural, or political perspectives” to “Analyze one or more major themes. . .”

- Consider more flexibility in the model with regards to the number of areas required. E.g. reduce four areas in the Flexible Core to three by combining U.S. Experience in its Diversity with the Individual and Society; or include learning outcomes for creative expression under the other three areas.

- Consider more flexibility in the model with regards to the total number of courses and credits that satisfy the required Flexible Core. E.g. allow four courses of 3 or 4 credits totaling 15 to satisfy the five 3-credit course requirement as it now stands.