November 15, 2011

Dean Michelle J. Anderson  
Dean and Professor of Law, CUNY Law School  
Chair, Pathways Task Force  
CUNY School of Law  
65-21 Main Street  
Flushing, NY 11367

Dear Dean Anderson:

Let me first thank you for your leadership of the CUNY Pathways Task Force and express my thanks to the Committee as well for its thoughtful recommendations. The recommendations from York that I convey to you are a result of a series of consultations across the college that occurred within individual departments, at a college-wide Town Hall meeting, and at a College Personnel and Budget Committee meeting. Student government leaders, faculty governance representatives, and PSC union representatives were present. York College faculty, serving on the Pathways Committee, led the discussions.

York College recommendations fall into two categories: specific Required Core and Flexible Core elements, and contextual and facilitating aspects that impact implementation. In relation to the first category, we offer the following:

1. The category Math and Quantitative Reasoning should be changed to Math only. The term “Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning” is vague and both “Mathematical” and “Quantitative” are adjectives. Thus, the term “Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning” opens the door to a wide range of courses without significant mathematical content. Mathematical concepts are treated differently when introduced in courses offered by Mathematics departments than when offered by other departments. Moreover, the subject of mathematics has traditionally been one of the fundamental cornerstones of a liberal arts education.

2. An American History course should be required in the additional 6 to 12 credits. Further, the History discipline should be listed as one of the appropriate disciplines included in Category Four of the proposed Common Core, "Individual and Society."
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3. An inclusive list of disciplines for courses in the various categories should be included for example, see item 2 above.

4. The Natural Science core requirements should be increased from 4 to 6 credits, requiring two courses from different natural science disciplines. These credits can be made up by reducing the English Core requirements from 7 to 4 credits. (If necessary, additional writing intensive courses could be required to expand opportunities to improve writing skills). This would involve changes at the college level in the 6, 9, or 12 additional credits.

5. Two semesters of foreign language courses should be required. This can be accomplished by adding 3 credits of foreign language study to the required Common Core. This would increase the total number of credits in the required Common Core from 15 to 18 credits, thereby reducing the total number in the Flexible Core to 12 credits and allowing students to choose 3 credits in each category. This change will not affect the overall number of required general education credits, which will remain at 30 credits.

6. There should be a requirement of one course in US History plus one course in Foreign Language if the student has less than one year of high school language or cannot pass a foreign language proficiency test. In all cases, in both the Flexible Core and in the additional credits, a discipline can only be used once (This would insure the widest possible distribution of courses in the core).

With regard to matters of context that impact implementation, we recommend the following to the Task Force:

1. The final text should state explicitly, preferably in a Preamble, that the final document is a living document, intended to undergo organic growth and evolution; that it will be subject to modification and revision over time. Without such explicit language, by and from the original creators, there is the likelihood that the document can appear to have such “permanence” as to complicate the pursuit of modification in the future. The Task Force may also indicate when and under what circumstances it expects the final document to be modified.

2. The final document should include an Appendix or a Supplement that outlines the Task Force’s interpretations and rationale for the terms used in each of the learning outcome bundles (areas). The Appendix can also include the appropriate citation of evidence. During the implementation phase, there will be concerns and controversies about the exact meaning and intent of the Task Force concerning specific terms and phrases. Provision of the Appendix will serve to mitigate such debates.

3. This is an opportune time for the university to standardize best practices regarding class size in order to enable faculty and students to meet the learning objectives proposed in the Required Common Core. One of the three learning objectives that pertain to all five classes
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in the Flexible Core is that students "produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions." Students need to learn how to "produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments" through instruction, repetition, reinforcement, and feedback. It is recommended that CUNY standardize reasonable class size for classes in the Common Core across the university to embrace the learning objectives meaningfully. This issue is especially important for the 7 credits in "English Composition." At present, composition class size varies across the university from 20 (Queens and Hunter) to 27 (community colleges). As we standardize the learning objectives, we should move to standardize the conditions under which these objectives are to be met.

4. The critical importance of advisement for student success in the Core and in the educational journey generally suggests the need for explicit language on this matter. (There is also the matter of allocation of resources to consider).

The York College community appreciates the opportunity to have further input on this crucial initiative and looks forward to a final document that benefits from our recommendations as well as those of colleagues across the University.

Sincerely,

Marcia V. Keizs  
President

c: Provost Ivelaw L. Griffith