Pathways Initiative Frequently Asked Questions
April 16, 2012

What is the Pathways Initiative?

- Approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees in June 2011, the Pathways Initiative will clarify requirements and ease transfer across the system. It will help students transfer all three parts of an undergraduate curriculum: general education, major, and elective courses.

Why does CUNY need a Common Core for General Education?

- Currently, CUNY colleges differ in their general education requirements. As a result transfer students may be required to fulfill new general education requirements after they transfer. This makes it hard for transfer students to graduate on time.
- The new Common Core structure will assure students that courses they take for general education will count toward general education requirements at any CUNY college.

Which students will be affected?

- Pathways will go into effect starting in September 2013.
- Pathways will apply to all students who are new freshmen and transfer students in September 2013. Most continuing students will have a choice about whether to stay with the requirements in place when they entered CUNY or to switch to the new Pathways curriculum.
- All CUNY undergraduates will be required to complete the 30-credit Common Core except students in AAS programs.

What is included in the new Common Core?

- The new Common Core requires 10 courses and consists of two parts: a “Required Core” portion and a “Flexible Core” Portion.
- In the Required Core all students must take 6 credits in English Composition, 3 credits in Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, and 3 credits in Life and Physical Sciences.
- In the Flexible Core students must take six three-credit courses across five thematic areas (six three-credit courses from five categories of courses). They must take at least one course in each area. The five areas are: World Cultures and Global Issues, U.S. Experience in Its Diversity, Creative Expression, Individual and Society, and Scientific World. No more than two courses may be taken in any discipline within the Flexible Core.

What is the “College Option”?

- Students who transfer into baccalaureate programs at a different college will also take from 6-12 additional general education credits, called the College Option credits. Students who start in baccalaureate programs and do not transfer colleges will take 12 College Option credits. The colleges with the baccalaureate programs will decide on which College Option courses their students will take.
How will general education requirements change?

- The biggest change will be in the number of credits required to meet general education requirements. Currently some CUNY senior colleges require more than 60 credits of general education courses. The Pathways Initiative will reduce the number of general education credits to 30 credits for associate degree programs and to a maximum of 42 for baccalaureate programs. This brings CUNY in line with most universities across the country.
- Each College will choose the particular courses that will be required as part of general education at that college. Colleges are likely to submit many existing general education course for inclusion in the Common Core.

What about foreign language requirements?

- It is expected that all colleges will allow students the option of taking foreign language courses as part of the Common Core and that many colleges will require such courses. Colleges may require foreign language courses, or have them available as an option for students, within the “World Cultures” area of the Flexible Core and/or as part of the College Option (for baccalaureate programs).
- Students will also, of course, be free to major in foreign languages or to minor in them. In addition, they may take foreign languages as requirements for majors in other fields, such as education or anthropology.

I’ve heard that most science courses need 4 credits if they’re going to include a lab component. Will students be learning less science in the new Common Core?

- CUNY’s new Common Core requires that each student, at minimum, take two three-hour courses concerning science. The three-credit courses that make up the Common Core may consist of lecture, lab, or a mixture of both. Campuses have considerable flexibility in deciding how science courses are structured. Colleges can require additional credits in science if they wish.
- Many faculty are currently working to create innovative new courses for the Common Core and College Option. These include linking courses in the “Life and Physical Sciences” category with ones in the “Scientific World” area of the Common Core. They also include three-credit courses that consist entirely of laboratory work.
- Any student who wishes can take a four-credit lab science course or a four-credit math course. Colleges can offer these courses as part of the Required Core as long as these courses also meet major requirements. These courses would be especially suited for students planning on majoring in fields such as math, science, or engineering, but any student would be free to take such a course. However, students who are not majoring in science, engineering, or math cannot be required to take a 4-credit science course or a 4-credit math course.

How will students benefit?

- The purpose of the Pathways Initiative is to benefit students. Students will have a clear pathway to graduation because they will know how to satisfy requirements at any CUNY college. In addition, the many students who transfer from one CUNY college to another will be assured that their credits will transfer.
• General education courses will be held to rigorous learning outcomes that will provide students with an excellent education. The learning outcomes will also serve as a guidepost that will allow students to chart their progress and achieve at high levels.
• It is likely that students will have more elective credits, giving them more freedom to take courses of academic interest, as well as an increased ability to do a minor or a double major.

**Will quality be reduced as a result of Pathways?**

• No. Areas of the new Common Core are defined by learning outcomes, insuring that each course is rigorous. For example, every Common Core course requires students to produce well-reasoned written and/or oral arguments. High-level critical thinking skills are also required in every course.
• Students will be exposed to many different fields in the Common Core which will enable them to choose majors with greater confidence.
• All general education courses are being designed by CUNY faculty, and are being reviewed through the usual campus committees and campus governance approval mechanisms. In addition, Common Core courses must also be approved by a university-wide committee of over 120 tenured faculty who will determine if the course will meet the designated learning outcomes.
• Some of the most highly respected people in higher education in the United States have strongly praised Pathways (see [http://www.cuny.edu/academics/initiatives/degreepathways/Pathways_brochure.pdf](http://www.cuny.edu/academics/initiatives/degreepathways/Pathways_brochure.pdf)). These individuals previously had no comment on CUNY’s curriculum. However, they now have many wonderful things to say about the Pathways plans. The commentators include former leaders of Brown, Yale, Columbia, Cornell, Princeton, and Berkeley Universities, as well as the current president of Arizona State University and the president of the American Council on Education. Two of these individuals are also the current and past presidents of the AAU (a national organization of the top 61 research universities in the United States). The value of a CUNY undergraduate degree just went up considerably.

**How can students be involved?**

• Students have been part of the Pathways Initiative from the start. Students were included among the voting members of the Steering Committee and Working Committee that designed the 30-credit Common Core framework. Students also have had, and continue to have, opportunities to express their views concerning Pathways at meetings and public hearings.
• Students are also encouraged to express their views on draft curriculum and policies via the pathways website ([www.cuny.edu/pathways](http://www.cuny.edu/pathways)).
• Students are encouraged to remain apprised of developments with Pathways by regularly consulting [www.cuny.edu/pathways](http://www.cuny.edu/pathways), and to share what they have learned with other students.
• Students are also encouraged to submit questions, concerns, or suggestions to: pathways@mail.cuny.edu.
• As the University progresses toward full implementation of the Pathways Initiative, additional opportunities for student involvement will become available. For example, CUNY will be seeking student input on how to set up an appeals procedure for students who feel that, after Pathways is implemented in September 2013, they have not received appropriate transfer credit.