

CITY COLLEGE RESPONSE TO DRAFT CORE STRUCTURE

The City College of New York strongly endorses the objectives of facilitating transfers from one CUNY institution to another, improving graduation rates, helping more students earn their degrees on time, raising academic standards, and lowering student and University costs. The proposed framework, however, presents a number of significant challenges to City College, a few of which may be unique to the institution because of the many degree categories offered, while others undoubtedly impact other CUNY institutions. A key enabler to effective implementation will be adopting language that provides the flexibility allowing individual institutions to accommodate their needs, while retaining the core of the mission's objectives.

City College currently has eight General Education curricula: one for each of the degree categories, B.A., B.F.A. and B.S., offered by our College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS); one for our Center for Worker Education (CWE – formally a division of CLAS); and one for each of its professional schools (Architecture, Biomedical Education, Education and Engineering). In developing this response, a number of consultative meetings were held with faculty and deans from all schools/divisions in a variety of settings at which the proposed framework and its impact on the existing curricula were discussed and analyzed. The CLAS Faculty Council convened a final college-wide meeting on November 3, 2011 and invited all the deans and faculty representatives to participate in the discussion and share their views and comments.

The feedback from the meetings is in support of the following recommendations: (1) using a 6-3-3 formula for the fixed portion of the Common Core; (2) treating the College's 6-credit Inquiry Writing Seminar as satisfying the English Composition requirement; (3) treating Foreign Language and Speech as proficiency requirements; and (4) balancing Pathways' requirements with broad definitions and the availability of resources. Given the specific mission of CWE, City College requests an exemption from the 30-credit core framework. For the four Professional schools, the critical issue will be to balance the Pathways' recommendations with state licensure and/or degree accreditation requirements.

For ease of organization, the College's response to the Common Core Draft Structure is broken down into the following outline:

- I. CLAS
- II. CWE
- III. The Four Professional Schools

I. COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCE (CLAS)

The proposed structure will present a number of challenges to the College of Liberal Arts and Science:

A. 1. The 7-4-4-formula for the fixed portion of the Common Core:

CLAS strongly urges a 6-3-3 rather than a 7-4-4 formula for the fixed portion of the Common Core.

The College understands that the 7-4-4 formula was devised in an effort to accommodate the desire of some colleges to provide their students with a 4-credit science course that includes a wet lab. Wet laboratory courses, which are costly and resource intensive, are a critical part of the curriculum for science majors. The faculty believes, however, that it can offer outstanding and more cost effective alternatives for non-science majors to meet the laudatory goals implicit in the statement: "A student will be able to...use the tools of a scientific discipline to carry out collaborative investigations in appropriate laboratory settings." Current science pedagogy offers many interactive alternatives to the wet lab that are as effective or more so in achieving the key learning outcomes. For example, there are several computer-

based interactive curricula that mimic experimentation and teach the key precepts of science. These would involve fewer resources and require a smaller credit allocation. CCNY currently lacks the space, equipment, and staff to mount across-the-board wet lab-based science courses to all students. A rough estimate by a former biology chair suggests that the College could incur incremental expenses of up to ~\$750,000 in annual salaries, in addition to other supply and equipment costs, to provide this wet-lab requirement (analysis available upon request). Therefore, the College recommends that the definition of what constitutes a “laboratory” be broadened to include web-based, experiential, and other innovative approaches to teaching the scientific method. The College further suggests that the third outcome be modified to read, “A student will be able to...use the methods of a scientific discipline to carry out collaborative investigations.”

Secondly, although there may be creative ways to use the 7th credit allocation in English Composition, the 7 credit requirement risks wasting a credit, without contributing to a substantially different educational outcome, or, alternatively, will require a costly and disruptive redesign of existing 3 or 6 credit course structures or the development and assessment of 1-credit stand-alone arrangements.

A 6-3-3 formula would permit the addition of one course to the flexible core and would better meet the needs of the students and of learning outcomes. The additional course in the flexible core could potentially provide the opportunity for further science study (whether as a requirement or among a menu of options). In this connection, the stipulation that there be “no more than one course in any particular discipline” seems unnecessarily stringent. The College endorses the goal of distributed study, but recommends that the stipulation be changed to “no more than two courses in any particular discipline.”

B. The English Composition Requirement:

CLAS urges that the College’s 6-credit Freshman Inquiry Writing Seminar (FIQWS) be treated as satisfying the English Composition requirement.

City has an innovative approach to teaching freshman writing - a double-barreled 6- credit course, half of which is taught by a "topic" instructor and half of which is taught by a "writing" instructor. The writing portion is organized around the material being taught in the topic portion. There is a single grade as well as a single allotment of credit (6), and all major assignments, culminating in a research paper, are read and graded by both instructors, who work collaboratively throughout the course. An on-line description of the course can be found at: http://www1.cuny.cuny.edu/current/gened/faculty_fiqws.cfm; the main purpose of FIQWS is to develop student writing - that is, the course is specifically and carefully designed so as to make effective writing its *outcome*. Embedding writing practice and development within the context of quasi-disciplinary study at a freshman level is the *means* by which this outcome is attained, and there is ample scholarship to support the proposition that this is good writing pedagogy.

C. Foreign Language and Speech Requirements:

CLAS urges the treatment of Foreign Language and Speech as proficiency requirements rather than as General Education requirements.

Currently City College requires students to demonstrate a certain level of proficiency in a language other than English and in oral communication, rather than completing a certain number of college-level credits. A student may, for example, demonstrate intermediate level proficiency in a language other than English through performance on a placement exam or completion of four-years of a foreign language at the high school level. Last year, of approximately 1000 students who took the placement exam, 50% demonstrated an intermediate level of proficiency (the requirement for BA candidates) or higher and thus were not required to undertake LOTE coursework. There is thus a strong argument to be made, both on theoretical

and empirical grounds, that the Foreign Language requirement should be treated as a proficiency requirement rather than as a General Education requirement. A similar argument can be made with regard to the College's Speech requirement, which can be satisfied by successful performance on a Speech Proficiency examination.

D. The Availability of Resources:

CLAS wants to ensure that all coursework offered to students within the General Education framework is of a sufficient quality to ensure the necessary outcomes of student learning and that there are sufficient resources supporting this endeavor.

This concern has already been referred to in point 1, with regard to Science wet-labs, and the possible costs of adding on a 7th credit of instruction in English Composition. CLAS has not undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the budgetary implications of implementing the Pathways framework, but an analysis prepared by a former Science chair estimating the additional lab costs City would incur were the Common Core to be implemented in its present form, shows the costs to be significant for the additional personnel alone not to mention the costs of lab renovations and equipment. Because one of the objectives of Pathways is to save money for both the students and the University in total, it is recommended that the guidelines be broadly defined so that the needs of the students can be balanced with the needs of the individual institution without compromising on the critical objectives.

II. THE CENTER FOR WORKER EDUCATION (CWE)

Because of CWE's historic mission to assist working adults – non-traditional students – in moving efficiently towards a Bachelor's degree by offering 4-credit classes, City College strongly urges an exemption of CWE from the 30-credit core framework.

CWE was established as a degree-granting program of CLAS thirty years ago, in 1981, in response to requests from government employees through the Federal Executive Board and Labor Union Education Programs to create an off-campus Bachelor's degree program for working adults, primarily structured for evening and weekend classes. Since its inception, CWE courses typically have been four credits. The extended class time that four-credit courses afford is crucial for returning working-adult students, who benefit from intensive class time that engages them in collaborative learning activities. As many of the courses are interdisciplinary, a student taking these courses is exposed to multiple disciplines and perspectives, thus ensuring rigorous and comprehensive coverage of the learning outcomes in the various subject areas. Additionally, four-credit classes allow working students to enroll full time so that they can qualify for financial aid. The four-credit course structure, consequently, helps students work more efficiently toward a Bachelor's degree.

Given the specific and unique mission of CWE, City College requests an exemption from the 30-credit core framework. In its place, CWE would offer a 32-credit core, comprised of eight four-credit courses in the subject areas outlined in the proposed 30-credit Common Core Structure.

We add in passing that few of the non-traditional students served by CWE articulate either into or from the programs of other CUNY schools. Hence this exception would not disadvantage students either at other CUNY schools or in this program.

III. PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

To a greater or lesser extent, all of the professional schools face the same dilemma: a potential conflict between the requirements of the Pathways framework and the requirements of their respective accrediting agencies. These issues appear to be most easily addressed in the case of Architecture and with the

greatest degree of difficulty in the School of Education. One of the FAQs accompanying Dean Anderson's cover memorandum of 11/1/11 notes:

“In situations where licensing or other requirements preclude program changes, OAA will ensure that students are not required to enroll for additional semesters to complete general education requirements.”

Such flexibility may indeed be in order for all of the College's professional schools. Furthermore, as for CLAS, the use of a 6-3-3 rather than a 7-4-4 formula for the fixed part of the core will be essential in order to implement the Pathways framework.

The following individual statements from the professional schools go into slightly more detail.

A. SPITZER SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

While the proposals appear to be compatible with the undergraduate curriculum leading to the Bachelor of Architecture professional degree, the mandatory conditions for accreditation would necessitate a waiver from the total credit requirements for general education.

The Bachelor of Architecture curriculum is highly structured and students are required, starting in the first semester, to progress through the program in a sequential and uniform manner. In the first two years, in which students are required to complete between 66 and 69 credits, 29 credits are required (available) for General Education. Of the total 2-year credits, 32 credits are in required professional courses, and 8 are in two required courses (physics and earth science). Of the remainder, 18-21 credits are 'distributed' amongst a Gen. Ed. selection and 8 are free electives.

The National Architectural Accrediting Board places conditions on all professional programs requiring a specific distribution of credits amongst professional, non-professional and general education. In addition, they require a certain number of elective courses.

B. SOPHIE DAVIS SCHOOL OF BIOMEDICAL EDUCATION

As a specialized Professional program, Sophie Davis faces unique curricular challenges. With a separate admission process, Sophie Davis accepts very few students who transfer from other units of CUNY. Similarly, few students transfer out of Sophie Davis. Further, the curriculum is large (159 credits over 5 years) prescribed, and with limited student choice. The specific course demands of this high-credit major make it difficult to accommodate the requirements of the Common Core.

Because Sophie Davis depends on CLAS for its General Education offerings, it is crucial that the curriculum of Sophie Davis be adjusted to correspond with the 30-credit core eventually adopted by CLAS. With some additional minor modifications, Sophie Davis can reasonably expect to do so, with the exception of the 7-4-4 formula, which would be very difficult to implement given the School's accreditation requirements. Sophie Davis can, however, adapt a 6-3-3 common formula without major consequence.

C. SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

The proposed common core structure presents serious challenges to students in the School of Education due to requirements established by New York State. The current core structure aligns, in part, with the New York State Education Department (NYSED) mandate requiring schools of education to embed in their preparation of teacher candidates "30 hours of liberal arts" coursework in specified areas. NYSED mandates 6 hours of mathematics and 6 hours of science. In the approved Pathways, students get only 4 hours in each subject area. In the design of the Flexible Core foreign language study is part of a range of

choices. If the student completes another area of study within the range of choices, the opportunity to satisfy the language other than English requirement would become a deficiency in the program mandate from NYSED. Although “Communication” is listed among the areas associated with Creative Expression, the outcomes for the latter are too wide-ranging to be successfully addressed by a dedicated Speech course of the kind from which Education majors would benefit.

The School of Education therefore requests the following changes to allow the School to remain in compliance and alignment with accrediting (NCATE) and licensing (NYSED) units on which its programs are registered.

- (i) Expand the range of coursework and credits in the CUNY Common Core Structure to 15 credits for students in teacher education tracks to include an additional course in mathematics and science either at the community college level or senior college level.
- (ii) Unpack the Foreign Language requirement from the Flexible Core in World Cultures. Proficiency can be demonstrated through performance on a placement test or appropriate coursework.
- (iii) Remove communication from the Flexible Core in Creative Expression and treat Speech as proficiency to be demonstrated through performance on a placement test or appropriate coursework.

D. GROVE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

The most obvious challenge posed by the proposed common core for the CCNY Engineering curriculum is the seven credit requirement for English. Engineering majors are currently required to take six credits of English. Accreditation requirements defined by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) leave little room for adding credits to what are already high-credit majors.

More time would be needed to carefully assess the impact of the proposed 15 credit Flexible Common Core component on the Engineering curriculum. Currently, Engineering students are required to take six approved general education courses (18 credits), with at least six credits (two courses) at the 2000 level or higher. The six courses must satisfy at least three of the four general education clusters, defined as follows:

1. Outcome f: Professional and Ethical Responsibilities Cluster
2. Outcome g: Communication Cluster
3. Outcome h: Global and Societal Context Cluster
4. Outcome j: Contemporary Issues Cluster

Whether and how these outcomes as defined by ABET might be mapped onto the outcomes outlined for the flexible core will require careful study.

SUMMARY

The faculty of City College recommends the following with regard to the Core structure as it impacts its Schools and Divisions:

With regard to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS):

- Modify the current proposed 7-4-4 structure to a 6-3-3 formula for the fixed portion of the Common Core;
- Treat the College’s 6-credit Inquiry Writing Seminar as satisfying the English Composition requirement;
- Treat Foreign Language and Speech as proficiency requirements;

- Balance Pathways' requirements with broad definitions and the availability of resources;
- Broaden the definition of "laboratory" to include web-based, experiential, and other innovative approaches to teaching the scientific method.

With regard to the Center for Worker Education (CWE):

- Given the specific mission of CWE, City College requests an exemption from the 30-credit core framework.

With regard to City College's professional schools:

- Given the various constraints placed upon the professional schools, the critical issue will be to balance the Pathways' recommendations with state licensure and/or degree accreditation requirements. City College recommends flexibility to balance these requirements versus objectives and needs.

Finally, the College wants to express its gratitude for being given this opportunity to actively consult with the College's faculty and to provide feedback to this very important initiative.

Postscript:

Subsequent to its transmittal on 11/15, the above was unanimously endorsed by the City College Faculty Senate, as follows:

Resolved, that the Faculty Senate supports the College Response to the Draft Core Structure.