November 15, 2011

Dean Michelle J. Anderson, Chair
CUNY Pathways Steering Committee
The City University of New York

Dear Dean Anderson,

As you have requested, I am submitting to you the coordinated response of the faculty and the provost to the Pathways Report issued on October 31st. All of our campus conversations about Pathways have been framed in the context of our deep commitment to provide Brooklyn College students with a general education program that prepares them to excel in their undergraduate studies and succeed in life in a complex, interdependent, and rapidly changing world. Our campus discussions of the proposed Pathways outline also embraced the four principles that guided the Steering Committee’s deliberations—bolster the basics, strengthen critical thinking skills, provide broad curricular exposure, and maximize flexibility for the campuses.

At Brooklyn College, the review and response process included the following chronology and milestones:

- **November 2**: informational session for all faculty, conducted by Professor Mona Hadler, Pathways Steering Committee member;
- **November 2-8**: review by schools, departments, programs, and relevant Faculty Council committees;
- **November 3 & November 8**: discussion at the November meetings of the Council on Administrative Policy (CAP) and the Faculty Council (Faculty Council “Resolution on the Draft Common Core” enclosed);
- **November 10**: Pathways Summit meeting, convened by Provost William A. Tramontano, attended by 35 faculty and academic leaders, including Brooklyn College Pathways Steering and Working Committee delegates.

After many hours of discussion from numerous and varied perspectives, our coordinated campus response consists of the following recommendation and concerns:

**PART I: RECOMMENDATION TO ADOPT THE SECONDARY MOTION ALTERNATIVE TO THE PROPOSED PATHWAYS DRAFT COMMON CORE STRUCTURE**

There is broad consensus at Brooklyn College to support the adoption of a 12-18-12 Common Core Structure that is based on the Secondary Motion to Structure the Common Core discussed
by the Pathways Steering Committee on October 14th, with modifications (as underlined below):

I. Required Common Core

English Composition                                  6 credits
Mathematical, Computational, and Quantitative Reasoning   3 credits
Natural and Physical Sciences                        3 credits

II. Flexible Common Core: six (6) 3-credit courses, with at least one course from each of five areas, and no more than two courses in any department:

1. World History and Cultures—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring world history and cultures, including, but not limited to foreign languages, anthropology, history, political science, economics, and world literature.

2. U.S. Experience in its Diversity—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the U.S. experience in its diversity, including, but not limited to history, political science, economics, sociology, and U.S. literature.

3. Creative Expression—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring creative expression, including, but not limited to fine arts, creative writing, media, music, and theater.

4. Individual and Society—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the relationship between the individual and society, including, but not limited to anthropology, health, philosophy, psychology, religion, and computer science.

5. Scientific World—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts, logic, and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the scientific world, including, but not limited to computer science, the natural and physical sciences, mathematics, statistics, and technology studies.

III. College Option Credits: Each senior college will develop its own 12 College Option general education credits. In addition to the 30-credit Common Core, senior colleges will require all students, except those who transfer with an AA or AS degree, to complete 12 college option credits. Students transferring to a senior college with an AA or AS degree will be required to take a total of 6 college option credits.

RATIONALE FOR THE SECONDARY MOTION FRAMEWORK:

- Brooklyn College Students Want Broader Choice: CUNY’s undergraduate students are arguably the most diverse group of students in the world. Whether first-time full-time freshmen or transfers, students entering Brooklyn College are prepared to embrace
intellectual challenges and eager to expand their world view. They want more choices and broader intellectual exposure. In their comments during our 2010 strategic planning discussions, students voiced strong support for expanding our curriculum in areas that they consider hallmarks of a 21st college experience—science, interdisciplinary studies, and global competencies. By basing the CUNY Core around a 3-credit standard, students would have the broader choice of an additional course, potentially within an additional thematic/disciplinary category.

- **Expand Student Choice Within the Flexible Core:** To provide students with maximum flexibility in terms of choice, where a department can offer courses that satisfy learning outcomes in more than one thematic area, we urge the adoption of the more liberal policy of allowing the student to choose no more than two courses within a specific department. This will be particularly meaningful for students in colleges that offer interdisciplinary courses across many departments.

- **Effect of Mixed Credit Courses on Student Success:** The Required Common Core in the proposed draft allocates one 4-credit course to Life and Physical Sciences, one 4-credit course to Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning, and English Composition has been inflated to 7 credits to accommodate the 30-credit framework. The Flexible Core then allows for an additional five 3-credit courses, creating a mix-and-match scheduling scenario for students of 3-credit and 4-credit courses. In 2006, following a comprehensive review of a long-standing Core curriculum based on mixed credit values, Brooklyn College adopted a standard 3-credit general education curriculum based on two decades of evidence that our students preferred not to mix-and-match courses based on credit values.

- **Exposure to Mathematics and Science:** The same 2006 Core curriculum revision, which took over two years of evaluation and planning, requires at least two 3-credit courses in life and physical sciences, and one 3-credit course in quantitative or computational reasoning. At Brooklyn College, we are currently developing a 21st-century interdisciplinary science curriculum that will be housed in a modern science teaching commons now in the design stage. A fundamental element of our planned science curriculum will be an interdisciplinary course in life sciences designed to fulfill one of our existing general education science requirements and for which we are seeking the support of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. We have grave concerns about the erosion of exposure to the sciences and the absence of the option for study of the Scientific World in the Flexible Core; students will have lost the precious opportunity to explore fields that are crucial to 21st-century knowledge and hold the promise of future employment for many students. As we close the first CUNY Decade Of Science, we believe it is a setback to limit our university’s undergraduates to one required 4-credit course in life and physical sciences and one required 4-credit course in mathematical, computational, and quantitative reasoning.

We also seek the inclusion of a mathematical, computational, and quantitative reasoning component in the Required Common Core in order to incorporate potential offerings in
computer science that provide a laboratory for learning mathematical and quantitative reasoning, while contributing to the technological literacy of an informed citizen.

- **College Flexibility and the 12 Credit College Option Core:** The proposed sliding scale of required college option core credits does not provide senior colleges with the opportunity to adequately shape the educational experience of our graduates. Based on the scale, the reality is that most students will not be required to take 12 credits in the College Option Core. Moreover, depending upon how their previous coursework aligns with the courses designated in the college option, students may be deprived of signature educational experiences valued by the senior college from which they plan to graduate. We strongly urge that the Board of Trustees consider amending the Pathways resolution to require the 12-Credit College Option for all students, except those who transfer to a senior college with an AA or an AS degree and who would be required to take only 6 credits of the College Option.

The following are two major illustrations of experiences and competencies that we believe should define a globally prepared Brooklyn College graduate, regardless of a student’s coursework at another institution:

- **The Experience of Commonality:** Since its inception, the signature component of our Core curriculum has been the creation of a common student experience in a set of carefully constructed interdisciplinary courses that are not owned by a single academic department. The introduction of two courses (6 credits) of upper tier interdisciplinary Core requirements in 2006 guaranteed that our transfer students would benefit from this signature Brooklyn College experience.

- **Foreign Language and Global Competencies:** The loss of a universal requirement for foreign language competency within a 42-credit Common Core is of serious concern to Brooklyn College. It is our view that a globally-competent graduate who is truly prepared for success in our globalized society should have exposure to a foreign language. Our feeder high schools have raised the bar on language competencies, and it is our obligation to meet their standards. If the foreign language requirement were to be subsumed in a college option core, and students were only required to take 6 college option credits on the sliding scale, it might not be possible to allocate those credits for foreign language; in this circumstance, the importance of foreign language competency could be at serious risk.

**PART TWO: CONCERNS**

- **Implementation Timetable:** The timeframe for response and the implementation date of the Pathways Initiative are very tight. We are concerned that the push to meet these deadlines may result in condensing our curriculum into the new framework without
adequate time for review and revision. Moving the implementation timetable to fall 2014 could address this concern.

- **Management, Administration, and Tracking:** There is concern about the complex system that is being developed and its ongoing implementation. Questions have emerged, such as: How will modifications, such as new course proposals, be reviewed and certified? How will Flexible Common Core and College Option Core requirements be tracked and made accessible so that students can make informed decisions about their choices?

- **Student Advisement:** What additional resources will be required to implement the Pathways Initiative and ensure that students fully benefit from it? How will increased advisement costs be addressed?

- **Curriculum Reform Issues:** With the reduction in the number of required general education credits to 42, the number of “free credits” will increase. At Brooklyn College, this change would result in a total of three 3-credit courses. We will need to carefully consider how to manage and advise students with respect to these new course options so that our students may benefit fully from broader curricular exposure and the chance to pursue their own life interests, as Chancellor Goldstein vividly described during his recent visit when he recalled his own experience as a mathematics major who wanted to study music for the fun of it.

The comments enclosed herein summarize the many conversations that have transpired at Brooklyn College over the past two weeks. We hope that they prove helpful to you as you finalize the Steering Committee’s report.

Sincerely,

Karen L. Gould
President
Brooklyn College
Of
The City University of New York

Faculty Council

Committee on Academic Foundations
Committee on Core Curriculum

November 8, 2011

Resolution on the “Draft Common Core Structure”

Whereas, the campuses of the City University of New York have been asked to respond to the “Draft Common Core Structure” promulgated by the Pathways Task Force on November 1, 2011; and

Whereas, Brooklyn College remains committed to providing its students with a general education that will prepare them to excel in their undergraduate careers and in their chosen vocations; and

Whereas, the general education framework for the City University of New York should be focused on student learning and success, and not privilege particular departments or disciplines,

Be it Resolved (1) That the Faculty Council of Brooklyn College urges the Pathways Task Force to adopt the “Secondary Motion to Structure the Common Core” found on pages 3-4 of the report on the CUNY Pathways to Degree Completion All-Day Task Force Retreat, Friday, October 14, 2011.

(2) That the Faculty Council of Brooklyn College urges the Pathways Task Force to revise the language of the “Flexible Common Core Credits” in the “Draft Common Core Structure”* to provide more flexibility and inclusion within each category, as follows:

1. World Cultures—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring world cultures, including, but not limited to foreign languages, anthropology, history, political science, economics, and world literature.

2. U.S. Experience in its Diversity—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the U.S. experience in its diversity, including, but not limited to history, political science, economics, sociology, and U.S. literature.
3. Creative Expression—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring creative expression, including, but not limited to fine arts, creative writing, communications, music, and theater.

4. Individual and Society—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the relationship between the individual and society, including, but not limited to anthropology, philosophy, psychology, religion, and computer science.

5. Scientific World—Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and research methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring the scientific world, including, but not limited to computer science, the natural and physical sciences, mathematics, statistics, logic, and technology studies.

(3) That the Faculty Council of Brooklyn College recommends that before the College submits its final response to the Pathways Task Force, it further research national trends in general education requirements, including but not limited to the sciences and foreign languages.

(4) That the Faculty Council of Brooklyn College urges the Pathways Task Force to change the name of category B in the “Required Common Core” to “Mathematical, Computational, and Quantitative Reasoning.”

(5) That the Faculty Council of Brooklyn College recommends that the College’s response to the Steering Committee deplore the absence of a foreign language requirement in the “Draft Common Core” and seek to propose a modification to the framework that will ensure that our students receive adequate preparation in foreign languages.

*The reference here should be “Secondary Motion” not “Draft Common Core Structure.”*

Discussion

(1) Brooklyn College students receive a well-rounded introduction to the sciences in two 3-credit courses in the life and physical sciences and one 3-credit course in quantitative reasoning. English composition is currently taught in two 3-credit courses. The “Secondary Motion” more adequately retains this foundation of a general education. The “Draft Common Core Structure” allocates one 4-credit course to the Life and Physical Sciences, and one 4-credit course to Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning. These allocations deny our students the grounding in the sciences they currently receive, and distort the Common Core by assigning unnecessary additional credits to English Composition as well as to Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning solely in order to comply with a stipulated total of 42 credits for general education. If the University does not adopt the “Secondary Motion” and holds to the current “Draft Common Core Structure,” it should be noted that the addition of one credit (for a total
of 43) to the latter would greatly ameliorate the difficulties just enumerated. It would then be possible to reduce English Composition to 6 credits and Mathematical, Computational and Quantitative Reasoning to 3 credits, thereby gaining an additional 3-credit course to be placed either in the “Required Common Core” or the “Flexible Common Core.”

(2) The listing of departments in the “Flexible Common Core” is presumably not intended to limit the contributing departments in each category to those named. The proposed revision makes it more explicit that other departments may contribute as needed and appropriate.

(3) Relative to our current Core, the “Draft Common Core Structure” reduces the number of credits students take in the sciences, in foreign languages and other areas included in the College’s current general education curriculum. To help ensure that this will not put our students at a disadvantage relative to their peers at other institutions, we recommend a study of trends in general education at universities comparable to CUNY. The results of such an investigation will help determine the appropriate allocation of credits to put CUNY on a par with similar institutions.

(4) At Brooklyn College we have given students the option of taking either mathematics or computer science in the Core. The proposed change to the name of Category B allows for greater flexibility and diversity within the category. Computer science not only provides a hands-on laboratory-based vehicle for the implementation of quantitative and qualitative reasoning, but is an essential component of the education of the citizens of our technologically based society.

(5) Brooklyn College’s current general education curriculum reflects our conviction that knowledge of a foreign language is a necessity for a truly educated person, and it is more vital than ever for professional success in our globalized world. The loss of a universal foreign language requirement is one of the most serious consequences of the reduction in general education credits that is built into all of the Task Force’s proposals. This is an issue that must be addressed in the College’s response to the “Draft Common Core Structure.”