

**Testimony of George D. Sussman
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Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

Concerning the Pathways Initiative

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My name is George Sussman. I am a professor of history at LaGuardia Community College. In my career, which has also included higher-education policy positions in the New York State Education Department, a CUNY assistant deanship for program review, and a vice presidency of academic affairs, I have always been intrigued with curriculum and the message it sends to students about education.

My principal objection to Pathways is that it sends no message at all. Let me illustrate this by examining one of the five Flexible Core areas in the Pathways Common Core, the area concerned with “World Cultures and Global Issues.” At LaGuardia Community College four different departments propose to offer 116 different courses in this area. The courses include foreign languages and literatures, the novel, the art of Renaissance Italy, photojournalism, Eastern philosophical traditions, an introduction to macroeconomics, Western Civilization, and the politics of Latin America and the Caribbean—a mind-spinning range of courses.

In proposing this potpourri of 116 courses, I do not think that my college has misinterpreted the Pathway guidelines. They state that one learning outcome for “World Cultures and Global Issues” will be that

A student will identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of a discipline or interdisciplinary field exploring world cultures or global issues,

including, but not limited to, anthropology, communications, cultural studies, economics, ethnic studies, foreign languages..., geography, history, political science, sociology, and world literature.¹

What Pathways tells the student is that academic disciplines, subject matter, or knowledge do not matter. What matters is something the proposal calls “learning outcomes,” which appear to be unverifiable skills (‘a student will be able to analyze..., to identify and apply fundamental concepts and skills..., to communicate..., to use..., to formulate...’). The Pathways curriculum does not hold students responsible for any specific knowledge.

But education cannot separate skills from knowledge. Our understanding of the world advances by the accumulation of knowledge through the disciplines and their fruitful interactions. It is folly to attempt to construct a curriculum, as Pathways does, without the bricks provided by the disciplines. This building cannot stand.

¹ “Common Core Structure: Final Recommendation to the Chancellor, City University of New York Pathways Task Force,” December 1, 2011.