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Concerning the Pathways Initiative

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CUNY students come with a complex variety of educational backgrounds that often inhibit their abilities to make adequate progress in their college educations. Among these are inconsistent high school curricula that often lacked even the minimum Regents' requirements and inadequate preparation in the skills and content required for college-level work. Pathways has two significant problems in satisfying the needs of our student population: It lacks rigor and breadth.

Rigor is especially important for students entering college without inadequate preparation, especially liberal arts skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and laboratory science. All of these reflect critical tools that students will use during and after their college educations. The ability to read and understand complex documents is fundamental to most jobs our students will apply for, as is the equally important task of writing well organized, evidence-driven documents. Furthermore, the ability to produce and analyze meaningful evidence is a necessary skill in an increasingly data-driven world. Pathways, as it currently stands, does not ensure that students with deficits in one or more of these areas will acquire these necessary skills. It allows students to satisfy their general education requirements through lower level classes that introduce, but do not reinforce these skills, and that certainly do not insist on their mastery. Current thinking in the field of General Education stresses the importance of a scaffolded model that focuses on a specific set of skills deemed critical for undergraduate success. These skills are introduced in the first year, then reinforced, refined, and tested for the rest of the students' careers. Pathways, by

allowing students to satisfy their General Education requirements all at the 100 and 200 level, ignores this critical piece of pedagogy.

Another significant problem with the rigor of the Pathways model is that the learning objectives are too vague to ensure that students leave with these critical skills. In an attempt to ensure that any class of any level from any department would satisfy students' General Education requirements, the planning committee failed to recognize that their learning objectives are vague in content and lacking in any mention of skills. Perhaps in a perfect world, every proposed course would include elegantly crafted contents and skills-based learning objectives, but the reality is that departments will produce courses that students want to take. As a rule, those courses are easy, require minimal time and effort, and do not introduce or reinforce critical skills. This is, in short, a race to the bottom, where departments from art history to zoology will all offer courses on reality television, drugs, and comic books to attract students.

Pathways also lacks breadth. For a CUNY degree to have substance and reflect the ideals of undergraduate education, students need exposure to different methodological approaches they will encounter in their daily lives. The newspaper provides an outstanding example of the importance of educational breadth. News articles often utilize social science approaches to gathering and analyzing evidence, while political pieces make use of linguistics and textual analysis to clarify speeches. Historical evidence gathering and analysis plays a critical part in news portrayals of current events. The science section obviously uses scientific evidence gathering and analysis techniques to reflect on recent developments in science and medicine, the arts section uses a variety of theories from art history, dance, and music to assess performances

and exhibitions, while the sports pages abound with statistics. CUNY students must be able to critically assess all of these kinds of evidence, so that they can independently assess news outlets and not accept every piece of media at face value.

Students must also be able to do all of these kinds of evidence gathering and assessment, so that they can be competitive in the job market. The ability to generate logically constructed, evidence-driven memos and evaluations is fundamental to success in fields such as the law, education, and advertising, while generating and convincingly using statistics is a foundational skill in business and any of the sciences, as well as in work for NGO's and the government. Students who can only write well but cannot comprehend statistics, or who have the opposite skill set, will not be competitive for many jobs. Pathways threatens CUNY's ability to produce graduates with the skills to compete with students from any university in the country, and it endangers their success on the job market. As Pathways currently stands, students can complete their General Education requirements without ever entering a science lab, where they would learn to generate and analyze their own experimental evidence; without taking a single humanities course, where they would master logical written argument and textual analysis; without attending a social science class, where they would learn to use statistics to make numbers-driven arguments; or ever learning the fundamentals of artistic analysis to critically assess an exhibition or performance.

CUNY degrees must maintain, and even improve, their educational value as the demands of the job market and the world become increasingly complex. Our graduates must command the excellence their diplomas promise because their training contained both rigor and breadth.