

**Testimony of Arthurine DeSola
Secretary, Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

Concerning the Pathways Initiative

June 18, 2012

Good evening. My name is Arthurine DeSola. I am secretary of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY. I'm a principal officer of the union and a representative of the Professional Staff at CUNY. I've been a part of the CUNY community for more than 35 years, working predominantly at community colleges. After many years working in the Queensborough Community College student counseling center, I am well acquainted with the barriers to transfer and completion that CUNY students often face.

I must tell you that a new General Education Framework is not the most important thing we need to facilitate student transfer throughout CUNY. What we need is resources—money to hire more academic advisors and more counselors, money to improve our technology and information sharing systems, and money to keep our class sizes and advisement caseloads down to a level that allows for real mentorship and guidance for students.

Pathways has been called “austerity education” because it accommodates to, rather than seeks to overcome, public disinvestment in CUNY.

QCC's website lists nine full-time and two part-time academic advisors—at a school with around 17,000 students. Nursing students have their own advisors, as do students in College Discovery and other special programs, but even discounting these students, it's clear that the advisors'

caseloads are too high. One bit of evidence that they could use more advisors at QCC: Students with 25 credits completed and a minimum 2.50 GPA are exempt from advisement, and are encouraged to “self-advise” via an online advisement system.

Strong advising structures and good counseling promote student achievement—and smoother transfer. This is particularly true when you’re talking about CUNY students who often have to overcome significant educational deficits, financial barriers, and family and work obligations. There are professional staff throughout CUNY who have long experience helping students work through the challenges they face and advising students on articulation between colleges. They need more resources and more colleagues.

The Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP) has successfully demonstrated that substantial gains can be realized in the retention, graduation, *and transfer rates* with targeted reforms and significant additional resources. ASAP advisors have a caseload limited to 80 students who they see at least twice per month. The program provides for “intrusive” counseling—that is advisors and faculty have the responsibility and resource of time to reach out to students when they fall behind or miss classes. Students in this program know what classes they need to take and they have the full attention of an advisor who can guide them through the transfer process.

Instead of accepting our lot and reengineering an assembly-line General Education Framework to make do with the inadequate funding we receive from the city and state, CUNY must demand

the resources necessary to give our students the support they need and the education they deserve. Then we can make targeted, thought-through, faculty-driven changes to the curriculum, where they are necessary, to facilitate transfer, and keep our class sizes and advisement caseloads down to a level that allows for real mentorship of and guidance for students.

Thank you.