

**Testimony of Joachim Oppenheim  
Lecturer, Kingsborough Community College  
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

**Concerning the Pathways Initiative**

**June 18, 2012**

The idea of creating a unified system of credit transferability within the University is an important one, and one that I support. But imposing a stipulation that all courses be taught “3 credits - 3 hours” is wrong. Take for example a student who begins his or her college studies by enrolling at a community college. Why has this student chosen to start his or her studies at a community college rather than at a four-year college? Often, it is because they need to develop learning skills necessary to be successful as college students. My colleagues and I need every minute of the four hours of instruction time we currently have in order to teach elementary and intermediate-level foreign languages. Four hours a week is the amount of time that students around the country typically receive for equivalent courses. Languages with different alphabets such as Arabic, Hebrew and Chinese, are taught in five or six hours a week. The Pathways initiative, as it has evolved into the “CUNY Common Core Submission Form”, stipulates that all courses are to be taught at 3 credits, 3 hours a week, with no exceptions except for a very limited number of math and science courses.

For the many classes at CUNY that are taught at 4 hours a week, how is it now possible to offer these same courses in 25% less time? There is no answer to this question except to say- dilute the content of the course. If we do this, however, then we cannot say that the quality of our courses has not been seriously downgraded. Indeed, if we were to tell students that they are going to now

receive the same quality of education, the same chance to achieve academic success, we would be making a false promise to them.

Students at the community college level need and expect guidance and encouragement in meeting the demands of college-level work. A great many of them need to learn *how* to learn. Two things must happen simultaneously- students must learn the actual curriculum of the course while at the same time learning how to process college-level work. They must, for example, be taught how to prepare their different assignments and how to get meaning as they work with their texts. All of this takes time. Not all courses, everywhere in the university, can be taught in three hours a week. At other universities, languages using different alphabets such as Arabic, Hebrew and Chinese are taught in 5 hours a week. This is the case at NYU and at Harvard, where students are required to take a full two semester sequence of the Elementary course. At UCLA, these languages are taught in 6 hours a week, per semester. Latin alphabet languages such as Spanish and French are taught at these universities in either 4 or 5 hours a week per semester. Now you may be wondering why I am citing such exclusive colleges here in my argument. It is simply because if a Harvard or NYU student needs between 4 and 5 hours a week to learn a foreign language, then how can we demand that our students at CUNY do the same in 3 hours?