

**Testimony of K.E. Saavik Ford  
Associate Professor, Borough of Manhattan Community College  
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

**Concerning the Pathways Initiative**

**June 18, 2012**

Good evening. My name is K. E. Saavik Ford, and I am a newly tenured associate professor at Borough of Manhattan Community College. I am also a member of the CUNY Graduate Center doctoral faculty, and a research associate at the American Museum of Natural History. I am a member of an instrument team on the successor to NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST).

These titles are representative of my expertise in teaching and astrophysics. When I was tenured by this body, I assumed you wanted me to use my expertise on behalf of this university. But Pathways has ignored my expertise.

We are required by Pathways to include a lab in our science classes – an essential component of any rigorous science course—but are given only 3 hours (3 credits) per week with our students. Current national best practice is a 4 credit class, meeting for at least 5 hours per week, for non-science majors. You are asking us to invite national ridicule by shortening our courses at the expense of understanding. In our increasingly scientific and technical world, when people must be scientifically literate to participate in many of our political discussions, cutting time on science leaves our students disenfranchised as citizens of the future.

I want to share a story with you from my first semester teaching at BMCC: I wanted to discuss magnetism with my astronomy students, and I began by asking them to recall an experiment they would have done in middle school. They would have made a magnet, using a battery, a bolt and some wire. I got blank stares—I waited—finally, a brave student at the back of the room raised his hand and said, “Ma’am, we went to New York City public schools. We didn’t have fancy equipment like that.”

A battery, a bolt and some wire. And now they get three hours of college science, plus maybe a linguistics class, and they’re educated?

I want to make clear that I do not blame the hardworking and dedicated teachers of the NYC public schools for this situation. Rather, I blame the idea that teachers (or professors) are lazy, unprofessional and untrustworthy decision makers on the education of their students. And the idea that education is about a series of facts, or equally foolish about, a few abstract processes stripped of context—a least common denominator, austerity education.

Many “adjustments” have been made to Pathways to correct the worst absurdities—in my own field, we’re asked to design co-requisite science courses, meeting for 6 hours per week, worth 6 credits. This is pure credit inflation, sure to embarrass us on the national stage. No adjustment can fix the fact that you did not properly consult your experts—the elected faculty bodies entrusted with curriculum decisions. So I am here, now. Given CUNY’s long, proud history as a leader in science, and the fact that this is our Decade of Science, I implore you to take the time needed to fix the transfer situation without diminishing the scientific rigor of a CUNY degree. Our students deserve more than three-fifths of a science class.