Pathways to Degree Completion
The City University of New York

Retreat of the Task Force
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National General Education Reform

• Association of American Colleges & Universities has worked on general education reform for over a decade.
• In the 1990s in the US, accrediting agencies also began focusing on measurable learning outcomes and assessment to bring greater clarity and accountability to higher education.
• An AAC&U 2009 survey of member institutions reported that nearly 80% had developed learning outcomes for their general education programs.
• CUNY senior colleges range in required general education credits from 33 to 63. On average, CUNY senior colleges require 52 credits of general education.

• CUNY community colleges don’t have universal general education requirements. Instead, general education is organized by academic program.
Transfer is Common at CUNY

- In Fall 2010, approximately 10,000 undergraduates transferred from associate to baccalaureate programs at CUNY.

- In 2009-10, 62 percent of all baccalaureate graduates had transferred to the degree-granting college.
Current CUNY Transfer System

- Course-matching model: students who take a course at one college and then transfer to another:
  - Receive credit if the receiving college has a course similar to the one they took.
  - Don’t receive credit if the receiving college doesn’t have a close match.

- The process involves subjectivity in how similar the courses are and must be for credit.
Transfer Problems at CUNY

Transfer often does not work smoothly.
  • Some courses do not transfer at all.
  • More often students receive only elective credit which may not help advance them toward their degrees.
  • Transfer problems can slow students’ progress and contribute to excess credits. These problems increase costs and can discourage students from continuing.
  • Increased credits can also lead to financial aid running out before students finish.
CUNY Pathways to Degree Completion

• Resolution establishing Pathways To Degree Completion Initiative and our Task Force approved June 27, 2011, by CUNY Board of Trustees.

• The initiative is designed to create a curricular structure that will streamline transfers and enhance the quality of general education across the University.
Charge of the Pathways Task Force

• The Task Force will create the 30-credit Common Core by establishing learning outcomes in multidisciplinary areas. The Task Force’s Steering Committee will initiate and direct the process and will be assisted by a larger Working Committee with representation from all CUNY colleges and major disciplinary areas most common among transfers.

• (Senior colleges will also have an additional 12 credits of general education, called the College Option.)

• We will submit Our recommendation on the Common Core to the Chancellor by December 1, 2011.
Why Use Learning Outcomes?

- Learning outcomes shift from a focus on inputs to a focus on the measurable outcomes of learning, with attention to specific competencies and knowledge.

- By building the Common Core and, hence, a new transfer system, around learning outcomes, colleges can focus on student learning rather than course-matching. Colleges will offer core courses with confidence that, if those courses meet agreed-upon learning outcomes, students who take them and transfer elsewhere will receive full credit for them.
Learning Outcomes in the Pathways Project

• Learning outcomes at CUNY will be robust.
  – They will define the boundaries of the multidisciplinary areas of the Common Core.
  – They will determine which college courses will fit within different areas.
  – They will enable assessment of student learning in general education courses.

• By formulating learning outcomes for general education, CUNY will establish a common high standard.
What courses will count in the Common Core?

CUNY colleges will decide on the courses for the Common Core. The courses will be submitted for review by a CUNY committee predominantly made up of faculty to insure that they meet the learning outcomes for their specified areas.
Work of the Pathways Task Force

- Steering Committee has met twice:
  - First meeting was welcomes, timeline, and background information.
  - Second meeting was a discussion of the approach for completing our task. The Steering Committee voted to adopt a cross-curricular learning outcomes approach.
Major Steps to Our Work

• At every step, we want to report our work back to the colleges through the Pathways website and through the college representatives on the Task Force. We want to consult with the colleges through this process and revise our work in light of the feedback we receive at every step.

• To complete the Board of Trustees’ charge on the Pathways Project, we have four major steps ahead of us.
Steps 1 and 2

- First, we will define cross-curricular learning outcomes for CUNY. This approach expands on the AACU’s articulation of “best practices” in the LEAP (*Liberal Education and America’s Promise*) model. It maximizes the potential for innovation, and its flexibility will allow colleges to retain innovation and uniqueness in their curricula.

- Second, we will identify multidisciplinary areas of the Common Core. We will use the commonalities of general education requirements at CUNY baccalaureate colleges as a starting point.
Steps 3 and 4

• Third, we will map our cross-curricular learning outcomes onto the multidisciplinary areas of the Common Core we identified. We will also develop more specific learning outcomes as needed in each area, but the cross-curricular outcomes will remain a touchstone to maximize integration across the Common Core.

• Fourth, we will allocate the 30 credits of the Common Core. Again, we will use the commonalities of general education requirements at CUNY baccalaureate colleges as a starting point. As your materials indicate, they converge on a cluster of 18 credits, and we will consider other commonalities as well.
Today’s Retreat

- Step 1: Define cross-curricular learning outcomes for CUNY.
- Want a draft set of possible cross-curricular learning outcomes at CUNY by the end of the day.
- Morning session: break into groups with a mixture of disciplines and colleges represented.
- Please think of yourselves in these groups not as representatives of the preferences of specific colleges or disciplines. Please think of yourselves as representing the best interests of CUNY students.
- Afternoon session: break into groups by multidisciplinary areas for an assessment of and contributions to the cross-curricular learning outcomes from a disciplinary perspective.
Your task: Develop a set of draft cross-curricular learning outcomes for CUNY.

The task before you is serious and ambitious. It will require careful thought and considerable energy.

Thank you!