October 21, 2013

Dr. Héctor L. Delgado
Executive Officer
The Society for the Study of Social Problems
901 McClung Tower
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-0490

Dear Dr. Delgado,

Thank you for your letter to Chancellor William Kelly, who has asked me to respond on his behalf.

The primary purpose of Pathways is to ensure smooth transfer among the 19 undergraduate colleges of CUNY for our more than 240,000 students. Our students transfer frequently among the colleges. Considering only fall semester data, over 10,000 CUNY students transfer from one CUNY college to another. Further, over 50 percent of the graduates of each of our senior colleges consists of transfer students. At the same time, over 50 percent of our undergraduates receive Pell grants, indicative of our students' significant financial need, and new regulations concerning New York State's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) require students to progress expeditiously through their undergraduate education or they will lose their TAP.

In this context it is CUNY's responsibility to offer first-class degrees—degrees that provide an excellent education within the number of credits recognized by the New York State Education Department for that degree. Unfortunately, in the past, CUNY has too often inhibited that possibility. When students transferred among CUNY campuses (to continue from an associate's to a bachelor's degree, or because their interests changed, or because of personal circumstances), all too often their general education or major credits from their original colleges were counted as elective credits at their new colleges, or were not counted at all. Consequently students had limited access to electives and, not infrequently, needed more time to graduate and lost financial aid.

Pathways, which is now fully in effect at all CUNY undergraduate colleges, addresses these issues. Students who take a Pathways course receive full credit for that course when they transfer to another CUNY college. In this way a student can start his or her general education curriculum or major at any CUNY campus and continue it seamlessly at any other CUNY campus.

What I have just outlined is the essence of what the CUNY administration, as directed by the CUNY trustees, has required of the colleges. Please note that this outline contains absolutely nothing about the content of the curriculum. That is because the June 2011 Pathways resolution of the CUNY Board of Trustees contains absolutely no direction on curricular content. The resolution specifically states that the curricular content is to be developed by the faculty.

Following the June 2011 CUNY Board of Trustees resolution, two committees, consisting almost entirely of faculty from across CUNY, developed the learning outcomes that should be attained by students taking the Pathways general education courses. Other CUNY-wide faculty committees (one for each major) recommended the courses that should lead into those majors. In terms of general education, it was then up to the faculty of each campus to designate the courses that would satisfy the specified learning outcomes; each campus's faculty picked somewhat different courses for this purpose. Then several additional CUNY-wide committees of faculty reviewed those courses to determine whether or not they met the specified learning outcomes. Campuses were
also permitted to designate major-related mathematics and science courses for the Pathways general education curriculum. To date, over 2,000 Pathways general education courses have been approved. Every one of these courses has been developed and approved by CUNY faculty, and many hundreds of faculty have been involved in these processes. The work continues, as faculty continue to develop and modify courses that they wish to be part of the Pathways general education and major curricula.

Within the Pathways framework, campuses have significant latitude in how they design their general education curricula. For example, one campus requires each student to take at least two courses in a language other than English, another requires a traditional laboratory class, and another campus's courses all have a justice theme. The Pathways framework is flexible, allowing each campus to institute its particular curriculum.

Because Pathways is based on learning outcomes, for the first time all general education curricula at CUNY can be held accountable for achieving certain learning outcomes for students. Not only will this benefit students, but it will benefit CUNY in that our major accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), has, in the past several years, become extremely strict in specifying that all of its accredited institutions must measure student learning outcomes and use that information to improve student success.

The Pathways general education learning outcomes require that courses emphasize a variety of skills and types of knowledge, including written, oral, and critical thinking skills. Faculty are now working together with campus learning assessment specialists to determine how best to assess the achievement of these outcomes, work that is essential for student success and for accreditation by the MSCHE.

Whereas previously there was little national notice of CUNY's general education curricula, leaders in higher education across the country have been lauding Pathways (see, e.g., http://www.cuny.edu/academics/initiatives/pathways/about/archive/Pathways_brochure.pdf). Pathways is now completely in effect at CUNY. Some 16,100 sections of the over 2,000 different Pathways general education courses are being offered this fall, and there are 362,000 seats occupied in these sections. Approximately 43,000 new CUNY freshman and transfer students are taking these courses, and if and when they transfer, for the first time each one of them will receive full credit for the work that they have done under the direction and guidance of the CUNY faculty.

CUNY is one university according to New York State education law. As of this fall, CUNY students will for the first time reap the full benefits of that law, and a great many CUNY faculty are working together to ensure the delivery of those benefits.

I hope that this information has been helpful to you. However, should you wish any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Alexandra W. Logue
Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost

c.c.  William Kelly, Interim Chancellor
     Julia Wrigley, Associate University Provost