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## **Report Points to Next Battle at CUNY**

**By KAREN W. ARENSON**

In yet another attack on the embattled City University of New York, a new study charges that most of CUNY's senior colleges are denying their students a proper academic grounding by not requiring core courses in basic areas like mathematics, science, history and literature.

The report by two conservative interest groups, the Empire Foundation for Policy Research and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, seems likely to turn curriculum into one more battleground at the university, as it grapples with criticisms that its standards are too low in other areas like remedial education, grade inflation and graduation rates.

While Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and Herman Badillo, the vice chairman of the board of the university, embraced the report, CUNY officials and some educators outside the university immediately denounced it, calling it a polemical document whose conclusions about the necessity of core curriculums were baseless.

Mr. Giuliani and Mr. Badillo said the report was valuable and that it offered one more illustration of the university's failure to set appropriate standards.

"This creates a new credibility gap for CUNY that requires our attention," Mr. Badillo said. "If and when we deal with remediation and grade inflation, then we will have to cover curriculum next."

And Mayor Giuliani, in a statement accompanying the report, said that "to become a first-class university system," CUNY must make sure that all students learn about math, science, history and many other core subjects before granting them diplomas. Other necessary steps, he said, include ending remedial education and taking attendance every day.

But in a memorandum to CUNY presidents on Friday, Louise Mirrer, CUNY's vice chancellor for

academic affairs, said the report contained "inaccuracies and misrepresentations, both in the presentation of data and in the general discussion, that lead to erroneous conclusions about the core curricula of CUNY's colleges."

Matthew Goldstein, the president of Baruch College, considered one of CUNY's strongest colleges, also dismissed the report's criticisms. "To say a university doesn't have standards because it doesn't require every student to take economics or philosophy is ludicrous," he said in an interview. "That's a big jump to make, to say that not requiring certain courses shows a lack of quality."

Some educators outside the university also challenged the report, calling it a political document based on a model of education that only 10 percent or fewer of American colleges employ.

Arthur Levine, president of Columbia Teachers College, a strong proponent of a required core, called the report a "political polemic" that was entirely arbitrary in the courses it held out as standards. Besides calling for mathematics, history, literature, composition and two courses in basic science, the report also said all students should take economics, philosophy, art and three years of a foreign language.

"Why is economics more important than politics or sociology or psychology, and why is there no technology on their list?" he asked. "Moreover, not having looked at the content of the courses, how could they evaluate the quality?"

Mr. Levine also said that by the standards of the authors, CUNY should have been applauded, since two out of the nine colleges, or 22 percent, had clearly established core curriculums, putting it well above the national average of about 10 percent.

The study gave high marks to only two colleges, Brooklyn and City, saying that they required students to take classes in most of the areas it deemed important. It said two others, York and Medgar Evers, had appropriate requirements in about half of the areas it considered important.

The study criticized the remaining colleges (Baruch, Hunter, Lehman, Queens and Staten Island) for giving their students such latitude that they could avoid courses in important areas like math or science or take courses that did not provide a broad, basic grounding in areas like history or literature.

"Allowing students to graduate with gaping holes in their preparation does a particular disservice to those students for whom a college education is a route to upward mobility," the authors said.

The idea that colleges should have a clearly defined core of learning that all students share is one that falls in and out of favor, Mr. Levine said, adding that while 3 percent of colleges impose no requirements at all, most of the rest have a menu approach in which they designate broad curricular areas, like the sciences or the arts, and let students choose what courses to take within those areas.

English composition was the only area where all nine colleges met the report's approval. The only areas where all nine colleges were deemed to fall short were economics -- none require it -- and foreign languages.

Other fields were more mixed. In mathematics, the report said that all of the colleges but City, Hunter and Queens had appropriate requirements. In philosophy, only Brooklyn and City met its standard for a required survey course. In the arts, Brooklyn, City and Medgar Evers were the only ones requiring a broad survey course. And in literature, the report approved of the requirements at Brooklyn, City, Medgar Evers and York.

In the sciences, Lehman, Queens and Staten Island all fell short. And in history, the report said that only Brooklyn, City, Medgar Evers and Staten Island had appropriately broad survey requirements.

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**Organizations mentioned in this article:**

City University of New York; City College of New York; Brooklyn College; Empire Foundation for Policy Research; American Council of Trustees and Alumni

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