

MEMORANDUM

To: CUNY Faculty, Staff, and Students
From: Lexa Logue, Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost
Date: October 7, 2010
Subject: The CUNY Proficiency Examination (CPE)

CUNY has administered the CUNY Proficiency Exam (CPE) for a decade, and students pursuing both associate and baccalaureate degrees have been required to pass it as a condition of receiving their degrees. The CPE was developed with the full involvement of CUNY faculty to insure that CUNY students were qualified to advance to upper division work. Over the past year, the Central Office has initiated discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the CPE as an assessment tool and also about whether its value outweighs its cost. After extensive deliberation, a CUNY Proficiency Examination Task Force prepared a report, submitted in September 2010, which recommended that CUNY discontinue the use of the CPE as a required certification exam.

The Chancellor and I support this recommendation. The CPE served a valuable purpose at one stage of CUNY's development. It helped to spur many forms of writing instruction at the CUNY colleges and also enhanced instruction in quantitative reasoning. Such programs and forms of academic support are now firmly in place at CUNY. Further, ten years of experience with the CPE have shown that nearly all students who maintain a 2.0 grade point average pass the CPE, making the test redundant as a means of certification. The exam itself also has weaknesses. Given that it is unique to CUNY, we cannot use the assessment results to join the national conversation on learning outcomes. Equally importantly, we cannot use the CPE to measure learning gains, because the test is designed to be taken at only one point in time. Finally, the CPE has become very expensive to administer. The costs of test development cannot be shared with other institutions because only CUNY gives this test. The high-stakes nature of the exam also increases costs, because new exams must be prepared each year and, to insure fairness, the completed exams are graded by multiple readers. These elements of the testing situation lead to an anticipated future CPE cost of at least \$5 million a year.

A resolution to end the CPE will come before the Board of Trustees' Committee on Academic Policy, Programs, and Research at its November 1, 2010 meeting. If the Committee endorses the resolution, it will then go before the Board of Trustees at its November 22 meeting.

If approved at the Board's November 22 meeting, the resolution will apply immediately to all current and past students. Students will no longer be required to pass the CPE as a condition of receiving their degrees. If the CPE is eliminated, campus registrars and CPE liaisons will be sent detailed information on administrative steps that will need to be taken to properly close down the exam.

In terms of the longer run, if it is decided that the CPE no longer serves CUNY's needs, we will put a committee together to identify a different test to assess student learning at CUNY. We will be looking for a test that is nationally normed, psychometrically sound, allows measurement of the value added by a CUNY education, and allows CUNY to participate in the national conversation on assessment of student learning.

Although a change in Board policy regarding the CPE may occur in November, the decision is entirely within the purview of the Board and cannot be presumed. The current Board policy requiring the CPE remains in effect and the CPE is being administered in October as scheduled.

If you have questions about any aspect of the potential change to the CPE, please direct them to Karrin Wilks, University Dean for Undergraduate Studies, at 212-794-5367 or Karrin.Wilks@mail.cuny.edu.

c.c. Chancellor Goldstein