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My introduction to Pathways was particularly traumatic; as a member of the English Department at Queensborough Community College, we were directed to change our 3-credit, 4-hour composition classes to 3-credit, 3-hour classes to make them fit into Pathways. Voting our collective conscience, thinking about the needs of our students and their goals, we voted to maintain our classes at 4 hours. What followed is part of the public record: the threat to fire all full-time and adjunct faculty, the warning that the English Department at Queensborough would be closed and students would have to fulfill their English requirements elsewhere. Pathways has run roughshod over faculty and made a mockery of shared governance. But ultimately this is not about faculty; it is about students.

Pathways threatens to gut the CUNY undergraduate degree in order to enhance graduation rates. This proud institution, which has served so many so well for so many years, is in danger of becoming the symbol of the “pretty good” or “good enough” education. Proponents argue that CUNY would still be a pretty good education for minority, working class, immigrant and first-generation college students. My vision of CUNY is as a stepping-stone: to other colleges and universities, to other programs, to graduate school, to professions. Our students have the same potential as other college students. If rigor is taken out of their degree in the form of foreign languages or lab requirements – if working in a recognized academic discipline is replaced with satisfying requirements for various “buckets” – it is the students who suffer. Their ability to move forward is jeopardized. Students are being advised to try and get a “real” college degree somewhere else. If they haven’t satisfied pre-requisites or done work that can be recognized by other institutions, they are looking at funding more undergraduate study somewhere else, but they will have used up their TAP and financial aid. They will have a useless CUNY degree that is nothing more than a piece of paper. Faculty have gone to the wall to fight for students. We must keep opportunity alive for CUNY students.