



The City University of New York
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**Testimony of Interim Senior University Dean
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**The New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Hearing on the Humanities as a Viable Academic Path for CUNY Students**

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

Good afternoon chairperson Dinowitz and members of the City Council Higher Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the current scope of humanities education at the University. I am Anne Lopes, Interim Senior University Dean for Graduate and Undergraduate Programming. I am joined today by my colleagues Karin Beck, Associate Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Lehman College and Dionne Miller, Associate Dean and Program Director for the Liberal Arts at LaGuardia Community College.

Introduction

Associate Dean Karin Beck's recent article, "The Humanities Aren't Hurting Everywhere," published on June 14, 2023, in *Inside Higher Education*, raises capacious, enduring, and timely questions about humanities education in general and at the University. I am here to very briefly summarize some context information, focus on the extent of humanities education at CUNY, summarize student-focused activities and offerings that are informed by the humanities, and identify workforce-related purposes of the curricula at the University.

Contexts

Debates on the role of the humanities in higher education span the institution's history and have intensified most recently with increased democratization, the need for an engaged citizenry, the increased cost of higher education, labor market needs, and the rise of STEM education. Informed by racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and human rights movements since the 1970s, the traditional disciplines and approaches of the humanities have been challenged as new, more representative, and expansive areas of knowledge and the diversity of human experiences have come to the fore.

The humanities teach both specific areas of knowledge and habits of mind. Through humanities courses, students learn to think critically, understand themselves and their values, appreciate multiple perspectives and diverse cultures and people, apply problem-solving skills, communicate effectively, develop capacities for ethical-reasoning, historical-thinking, spurring innovation and creativity, among other inter-connected learning goals that are related to meaning and what it is to be human, what it means to be a person contributing to the world and participating in it.

As the humanities disciplines opened to the diversity of human experiences, the study of humanities subjects became increasingly interesting to students from all backgrounds. The curriculum now provides not only a window into human experiences that differ from that of our students and their ancestors, but it also reflects their experience and embraces the histories of the ideas and deeds of their ancestors. This has helped increase the representation of faculty in the

humanities who come from underrepresented gender, ethnic, and racial groups. Indeed, according to research conducted by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, across the humanities disciplines, cultural, ethnic, and gender studies were the most likely to award an advanced degree to a member of a traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic group by a wide margin. In 2015, 39.6% of the students earning master's degrees and 38% of the students receiving doctoral degrees in these fields were members of a traditionally underrepresented group. Across other humanities fields there have also been increases in diversity. The percentage of graduates from traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups who received master's degrees and doctorates was larger in 2015 than in 1995, with the share increasing by 29% or more for the master's degree and 4% for the doctorate.

The humanities have been a well-spring of learning for political leaders and activists from FDR to Huey Newton to Sonia Sotomayor and for business luminaries from Steve Jobs to Arundhati Bhattacharya.

CUNY's own Upton Sinclair, A. Philip Randolph, and Ruby Dee, and current State Senator James Sanders, New York City Council member Oswald Feliz, and New York State Assembly member Kimberly Jean-Pierre --to name just a few of our public leaders--have cut some of their intellectual and leadership teeth chewing on the ideas of the humanities and honing the disciplines' skills- and mind-sets.

The Scope of Humanities Education at CUNY

At CUNY, the humanities disciplines formally include English, Classics, Creative Writing, History, Judaic Studies, Modern Languages, Literature, Linguistics, Philosophy, Religion, Rhetoric, and related cross-disciplinary areas such as Liberal Studies and Translation and Interpreting. Currently, CUNY offers 22 associate's, 94 bachelor's, 44 master's, and eight doctoral degrees in the humanities. Enrolled in these programs, as of 2022—the latest year for which complete data is available--are 17,745 students--11,742 associate degree students, 4,534 bachelor's degree students, 925 master's degree students, and 544 doctoral candidates. Between 9-10 percent of all bachelor's graduates over the last five years have majored in the humanities.

These figures alone, however, do not reveal the broad reach of humanities training and offerings at CUNY. Undergraduates can elect a humanities double major, minor, or concentration. Further all undergraduates take general education courses—between 30-42 credits worth--which include a full array of humanities offerings as do their elective courses, which complete the undergraduates' degree plans.

In addition, the humanities disciplines are present in a wide array of interdisciplinary knowledge areas that have appeared for the first time as majors over the last half-century. From areas of study focused on locale, race, and ethnicity---such as Africana Studies, American Studies, East Asian Studies, Ethnic Studies, Caribbean Studies, Italian American Studies, Jewish Studies, Judaic Studies, Latinx Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Latin American Studies, Latin American Area Studies, Latin American Caribbean and Latina/latino Studies, Latino Studies, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies--to Disability Studies, Drama, Film Studies, Food Studies, Gender Studies, Gerontological Studies, Health Sciences Administration, Human Services, Human Services and Community Justice, Humanities and Justice, Interdisciplinary Studies, International Studies, Journalism, Journalism and Media Studies, Law and Society, Latin and Greek, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Liberal Studies, Management, Marketing, Media Arts, Media Communication Studies, Music Composition, Religion, Science, Letters and Society, Theater, Theater and Dance, Women's and Gender Studies, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, Writing and Literature--over 45 new and emerging areas that integrate the humanities are represented at the associate's and bachelor's levels alone.

Added to this, many programs of study in the arts have blurred boundaries between arts practice and pure humanities content. For instance, a course in cinema arts includes the history of different film media, theories of communication, the impact of cinema on people and their behavior, the impact of technological change on human interaction, and

specialized practitioner skills in the discipline. This may not be coded as a humanities course, but the offering includes rich humanities' content and skill development.

The expansive reach of the humanities and their disciplinary dispersion at CUNY have been in part propelled by the increasing diversity of our faculty who studied disciplines that reflected their experiences of themselves and the world and who have brought that learning to our students and to curricula development at the University. Across the University underrepresented faculty new hires increased 8.2% between 2010 and 2022. The humanities saw higher rates of increase. Thirty-four percent of the newly hired faculty in English, 60% of newly hired faculty in Modern Languages and Literatures, 37% of newly hired History faculty, and 25% of Liberal Arts faculty are from federally protected minority groups, and between 52% and 60% of all the faculty hired between 2010 and 2022 are female, increasingly reflecting the demographic characteristics of our students.

Student Experience

The student experience outside the classroom includes exposure to and practice in humanities knowledge and skill areas. Student clubs such as debating societies, cultural and multi-faith clubs, Greek letter clubs, civic and community engagement associations, language clubs, clubs for neurodivergent individuals, Model UN, human rights clubs, altruism clubs, internationalist clubs, are all informed by interest in the humanities and students who participate frequently are advised by our humanities faculty. Indeed, we know from alumni memoirs and public testaments that these club experiences have often introduced them to specific careers informed by the humanities.

In addition to clubs, many initiatives in the humanities enrich the student's collegiate experience. The CUNY Humanities Alliance, funded since 2016 by the Mellon Foundation, places doctoral students in various humanities roles at four CUNY community colleges. The graduate fellows – including one member of the NYC Council who is pursuing her PhD in Social Welfare – teach courses, mentor undergraduates, develop online and experiential learning opportunities with faculty, students, and staff and organize conferences and special events related to the humanities. The CUNY Humanities Alliance demonstrates how humanities learning happens inside and outside of the community college classroom and shows that doctoral students should be trained to navigate these diverse spaces.

Also humanities informed is a 3-million-dollar initiative to reimagine CUNY programs in Black, race and ethnic studies, a key aspect of the University's commitment to inclusion and to the scholarship of the vast multiplicity of cultures represented by CUNY students and New York City as a whole. The project, the Black, Race and Ethnic Studies Initiative, commonly referred to as "BRESI," includes a **BRES Collaboration Hub that brings together CUNY faculty and doctoral students interested in inter- and multidisciplinary education and research in Black, Race and Ethnic Studies.** The HUB is currently supporting the development of a multidisciplinary **Ph.D. Program in Black, Race and Ethnic Studies**, with faculty collaborators in the humanities and other disciplines from across the entire university system.

Over 35 centers and institutes in the humanities at the University provide rich programming on a broad range of humanities topics and debates from medical humanities to public humility in mental health, human rights, racial justice, climate justice, and global ethics. The Leon Levy Center for Biography holds 20 free events open to the public annually. This fall, for example, Kai Bird, the Center's Director, will interview Christopher Nolan, the director of "Oppenheimer," which is based on Bird's biography, "American Prometheus." The Center for the Humanities will bring together students, faculty, scholars, and community members and organizations to collaborate on local climate issues and campaigns through classes, research, and in the field activities. The Ethyle R. Wolfe Center for the Humanities at Brooklyn College sponsors an ongoing series on Black Lives: Research and Action Engagement. Speakers, performers, and community members share with the Brooklyn College community research, activism, and

creative work that is related to Black lives and that is transforming Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York City, state, or national communities. Another CUNY institute provides accelerated training for scholars in Latin and Greek, a center explores the history of the City, and many others bring together faculty, students, and the public to research and consider timely and enduring questions in the humanities.

All of these educational experiences in the humanities help prepare students for their careers, for life-long learning, and for the world they will inherit. Through this training, our students learn to thrive in a world in constant flux.

Humanities education helps prepare our students for a plethora careers, from advertising, to journalism, to business, human resources, events management, advertising, writing, sales, publishing, theatre production, television, curation, social media arts, public relations, communications, and public service, along with many others, as well as for professional graduate education. We know, for instance, that there is no better training for passing the LSAT and succeeding in law school than the study of philosophy. Even in STEM-related professions, as we know from Google's famous Project Oxygen study and its Project Aristotle study, the seven top characteristics of success at Google are all soft skills: the ability to coach, to communicate effectively, to listen carefully, to have insights into others, including those who have ideas and values that differ from one's own; the abilities to feel and express empathy toward one's colleagues, be an adept critical thinker and problem-solver, make connections across complex ideas, and work on a team. In the Google studies, STEM training came in last.

The scope of the humanities at CUNY is a broad one. Declines in major enrollments are offset by the dispersion of the humanities through an increase in interdisciplinary enrollments and double majors. At CUNY we are committed to providing our students with a first-rate education regardless of means or background. The humanities help us achieve that goal and prepare students for the uncertainties of the future.

That concludes my testimony. Thank you for your time. To further describe the reach of the humanities on our campuses, I turn now to my colleague Associate Dean Karin Beck from Lehman College.

City Council CUNY Humanities

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION HEARING: HUMANITIES AS A VIABLE ACADEMIC PATH FOR CUNY STUDENTS

Testimony of Luke Waltzer

September 6, 2023

Good afternoon. Thank you to the City Council for holding this important hearing, and to PSC-CUNY for organizing this panel.

My name is Luke Waltzer. I am the director of the Teaching and Learning Center at the CUNY Graduate Center, where I also earned a PhD in History. One of my responsibilities is to co-direct the CUNY Humanities Alliance, a Mellon Foundation-funded project that supports doctoral humanities students in a variety of educational roles at four CUNY community colleges.

Students at the Graduate Center have an outsized impact on the experience of CUNY undergraduates. Our students teach more than 5k courses to 150k undergraduates every year, 1/3 of which are in the humanities. In addition to their teaching, our students work in fellowships, in libraries, and in academic support centers throughout the CUNY system. Many Graduate Center alums become full-time CUNY faculty and staff.

My job is to support our students in their teaching and other work across CUNY, and to help them think about the kinds of careers for which their experience has prepared them. We are not simply training graduate students to do narrow research; we're also helping them think about the impact their work may have, and the range of skills necessary to maximize it. Our students are studying the most pressing issues of the moment, and building community around their work that extends beyond CUNY's walls, deep into the city.

These days disciplinary training must be broad and porous, and our students are exposed to a range of methodologies within and beyond their fields from which they assemble their toolkits. These transferable skills and commitments are required to

thrive in the modern economy, and are passed through Graduate Center students to the thousands of CUNY undergraduates they teach.

I believe the study of the humanities enriches our communities and our personal lives. At the same time, it is not an opposing idea to the notion of "workforce development." Employers want graduates who are well rounded and who can communicate with various audiences effectively. The humanities are necessary to comprehend and communicate the ethical dimensions of the drivers of economic development in the 21st century, including machine learning and artificial intelligence, health care, and clean energy.

It's not news that trends in public higher education are hostile to the humanities and to the notion of liberal education more broadly, while wealthier private institutions deepen their investments in these areas. West Virginia University has redirected resources away from the humanities and towards technical and vocational programs. Institutions like BYU-Idaho and Ensign College have approved 90-credit BAs in business management and applied health by eliminating general education requirements in the humanities.

At CUNY and in New York we have a choice-- do we want to follow these trends that narrow a degree into a vocational pursuit, or do we want to double down on our mission of access by seriously considering just what we're giving the children of the whole people access to. We must welcome them into institutions that are pathways to worlds of knowledge that simply can't be accessed, comprehended, or extended without a deep and enduring commitment to the humanities.



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55th Anniversary
CUNYUFS

<http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunyufs>

Humanities as a *Viable Academic Path* for CUNY Students

Dear members of the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education.

I am John Verzani, a Professor of Mathematics at the College of Staten Island and current chair of CUNY's University Faculty Senate. For the past 55 years, the University Faculty Senate has represented CUNY's faculty in front of its Board and Central Administration. (On matters relating to the academic status, role, rights, and freedoms of the faculty, etc.)

Today's topic is timely and follows on many nationally reported stories.

For example, The question of the state of the Humanities for the elite colleges was looked at in last spring's provocatively titled New Yorker piece THE END OF THE ENGLISH MAJOR.

While that story was a nuanced piece looking at shifting enrollments and student preferences, many national stories have apparent political motivation. the most noteworthy examples:

- The hostile takeover of the humanities friendly New College of Florida by a governor following a playbook drawn up by fellows at the Manhattan Institute.
- The passing of SB17 in Texas radically restricting efforts to cultivate diversity, equity, and inclusion at its public institutions of higher ed, part of national efforts driven by the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Woodson Center.
(cf. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-political-machine-behind-the-war-on-academic-freedom>)

These have had effect, for example

West Virginia University's announcement of significant cost-savings measures targeted humanities student and faculty.

West Virginia University's announcement of intent this past summer to find savings landed on a target with planned cancellation of undergraduate degrees in languages and graduate degrees in creative writing, among others

While grounded in financial pressures brought on by wildly optimistic enrollment increases, the target for savings – the humanities – appears to be shaped – even if not directly – by politics.

My belief: if these ideas of the humanities weren't powerful, they wouldn't be under assault by well funded, nationally organized groups.

We see this locally: The NY Post gleefully runs articles at CUNY expense, even when CUNY is at most tangentially involved. The only apparent reason being to weaken the reputation of greatest engine of social mobility in the region.

The efforts are working, if not solely with half the electorate. Yesterday's NY Times article titled "Americans are losing faith in the value of College. ..." highlights,

- increased concerns over student debt – though thankfully not so much at CUNY, and thanks to the NYC Council's efforts here. (as college has gotten more expensive resulting in bigger amounts of student debt, the chance of college education paying off over the forgone income is a bit less)
- a belief that one can thrive in the job market w/o worrying about college (belied by "The fastest-growing jobs available to those with only a high school diploma, meanwhile, are mostly low-wage service jobs")
- attempts to vilify college education by partisan members of the media and political class quantified by the Republican view that college has a negative effect rising from 37 to 58% between 2015 and 2017 (the number 1 reason: the belief that colleges had become "too liberal/political.")

Then around 2015, that consensus shattered, and Republican sentiments suddenly nose-dived. In an ongoing Pew survey, the portion of Republicans (and those who lean Republican) saying colleges and universities had a negative effect on the country rose to 58 percent from 37 percent in just two years, between 2015 and 2017, while the responses of Democrats (and those who lean Democrat) held steady.

When pollsters ask Republicans to expand on why they've turned against college, the answer generally has to do with ideology. In a Pew survey published in 2019, 79 percent of Republicans said a major problem in higher education was professors' bringing their political and social views into the classroom. Only 17 percent of Democrats agreed. In a 2017 Gallup poll, the No. 1 reason Republicans gave for their declining faith in higher ed was that colleges had become "too liberal/political."

Now, are the humanities **viable** at CUNY?

Looking at declared major (BA) data, akin to the New Yorker article, At CUNY, there has been a decline in some humanities related majors, as at Harvard:

Over the past 5 years, English is 56% of what it was, History 85%, Philosophy 72%, Spanish 87%.

| Senior college data | | | | | | |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------------|--------------------|
| 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | | off by |
| 3700 | 3539 | 3282 | 2907 | 2130 | ENGLISH | 56% of 5 years ago |
| 1612 | 1497 | 1561 | 1502 | 1374 | History | 85% |
| 455 | 461 | 433 | 388 | 330 | Philosophy | 72% |

714 705 691 661 626 Spanish 87%
(Not official)

Does this signal an end? The declines to some extent follow losses in enrollment, which system wide is 80% of what it was in 2018.

Such enrollment losses seem to have been stemmed with strong rebounds this fall – especially for our community colleges and our comprehensive colleges.

Perhaps instead, these shifts reflect the fruits of efforts by the City Council and the Mayor’s Office to open up computer-science gateways which are up 36% from what they were.

6303 7124 8143 8391 8729 Computer # up 36%

More likely, the declines are the result of natural diversification and specialization, and *not* a testament to the value and viability of the Humanities.

While English numbers have fallen off, the percentage amount is nearly identical to “Criminal Justice” and “Business Administration” (both with 3 times the declared students)

Along the way, many new paths have emerged: Of the top 30 degree areas by growth in students, only CS has as many students as English does now. These growing areas include Health Science, Art, and Film

As for CUNY Students, the humanities are still very viable for them.

CUNY Faculty are exceptionally strong in the Humanities.

At my home institution, with just over 300 of the over 6000 FT faculty in the system, students have had access to Pulitzer prize winners, Pushcart winners, National Book Award finalists (nonfiction), etc.;

Within the system the opportunities are even greater.

This was brought home to me last June while attending the CUNY BA graduation, where alumni speaker Micheal D. Hatten shared his CUNY origin story. A history buff who began his college journey in his early 30s with a young family at a community college. Through the CUNY BA program he found mentorship from several of the finest historians in the system through which he was encouraged to reach big and apply to the top PhD programs. He subsequently attended graduate school in the Ivy Leagues and is now director the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute.

This was one man’s journey, but every CUNY student’s possibility and highlights the viability of the humanities for CUNY students.

Thank you for your time

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**Testimony of
Karin Beck, Ph.D.
Lehman College
The City University of New York**

**New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
Hearing on “Humanities as a Viable Academic Path for
Students”**

Wednesday, September 1, 2023

Thank you, Committee Chair Dinowitz and Members of the City Council Higher Education Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony about the Humanities at Lehman College.

We need creative critical thinkers more than ever. A discourse that limits workforce needs and career opportunities to the tech and health industries, in fact neglects workforce needs as well as the importance of the creative industries and cultural sector for the thriving of our city. Studying the Humanities is not a privilege for the wealthy, it is a right and a necessity for everyone. And, with the right support, it is a great stepping-stone for a successful career. In the Arts and Humanities at Lehman College, we see ourselves as an engine of upward creativity. We strive to empower students to go beyond the limits of their imaginations.

Let me give just some short examples how Lehman graduates enhance the culture of our city:

- A recent graduate of our Journalism program is now the Bronx reporter for *The City*.¹
- A Music graduate is working for the Afro-Latin Jazz Alliance.
- A recent graduate of the English department is now working for the Doe foundation.
- A graduate of Latin American Studies won the Miranda Family Fellowship for Ph.D. in History at the Graduate Center.

¹ This news publication that has filled the gap in NYC news coverage left by the diminution of the NY Daily News and NYTimes' metro section. *The City* hired up the strongest NYC reporters from other publications, many with decades of experience - and they hired a Lehman graduate.

- A graduate of the philosophy department went on to the CUNY School of law and is now a City Council Member and serves on this committee².

In September 2022, CUNY launched, in cooperation with the City, the CUNY Inclusive Economy Initiative (CIE),³ with a focus on the tech, health and green economy sectors. A “liberal arts pilot” is financed out of private funding. Two schools are receiving funding for the humanities and the arts (Lehman and Baruch). This program at Lehman is thriving⁴. Despite its success, it is, however, not part of the continued funding of CIE

² We have recently strengthened the pre-law program by hiring a lecturer through the CUNY Lecturer Initiative who teaches LSAT and GRE prep classes as part of the curriculum. This will give our students another boost on their way to graduate school.

³ The initiative is funded with an initial funding of \$13 Million from the City and an additional \$ 3 Million from private donors.

⁴ We do have a cohort of 200 students interested in internships. Since the inception of this program our industry specialist has established partnerships with over 25 businesses and organizations and has made numerous connections. They have already placed 9 students in paid internships. Baruch is also very successful in its Liberal Arts Pilot.

(as the tech and health programs are). Furthermore, since many of the potential employers for our students are small cultural or community organizations, they cannot afford to pay the students.

An advantage of programs that pay these students a stipend is that it gives them the same chance in the workforce as students from richer institutions who can afford to accept unpaid work.

Beyond internships, we are incorporating experiential learning in our curriculum as much as possible. A class in “Latino Popular Culture”, for example, uses the new possibilities of online learning combined with learning off campus at museums, and cultural events. This does not only expose students to the cultural institutions of the city, but also to the career opportunities in arts and cultural institutions and cultural entrepreneurship.

The English department has recently updated their curriculum and centered it on underrepresented voices. These are also central in our ATLAS (Anchored in the Liberal Arts) program, funded by the Teagle foundation. It offers general education classes that focus on the reading and discussion of “transformative texts,” challenging and transform the students’ thinking. We are committed to a transformational curriculum through the deep study of texts that give students a sense of belonging to a community of scholars and thinkers and strengthen students’ intellectual development and impact their future careers.

Arts and Humanities reach all students at the college. Nursing students, for example, take classes in Africana Studies to better understand the communities that they will be interacting with. In

the humanities classes, students of all majors find their voices.

NYC needs to hear them. Upward mobility needs to be grounded in upward creativity to become inclusive and transformative.



Testimony of

Dionne Miller, Ph.D.

Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College

The City University of New York

New York City Council Committee on Higher Education

Hearing on Humanities as a Viable Academic Path for CUNY Students

Wednesday September 6, 2023

Thank you, Committee Chair Dinowitz and Members of the City Council Higher Education Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony about humanities education at CUNY. My name is Dionne Miller and I am an Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY.

As a 2-year college in the CUNY system, LaGuardia's mission is in part "...to educate and graduate one of the most diverse student populations in the country to become critical thinkers and socially responsible citizens...". Part of how we achieve this is by providing them with a robust humanities department and curriculum.

In 2022, LaGuardia served over 23,000 students in pre-college, associate degree, and continuing education programs. Consistent with the demographics of Queens, 52 percent of LaGuardia students are born outside of the United States. They come from 130 countries and speak 54 heritage languages. More than half (54 percent) are first-generation college students. Virtually all LaGuardia students are ethnic minorities (88 percent): forty-eight percent are Hispanic, almost double the threshold of 25 percent required by the US Department of Education for designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). ([LaGuardia Community College 2023 Overview](#))

To this vibrant, diverse student body, we offer an equally diverse and vibrant humanities curriculum as part of our general education offerings but also as majors. These include courses and programs in English, Creative Writing, Philosophy and Spanish-English Translation. We offer an interdisciplinary Social Science and Humanities liberal arts degree, one of the largest enrolled in the college. Within the liberal arts degree, students are able to add concentrations in Ethnic Studies, Japanese, Latin American Studies and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)/Linguistics. Starting this academic year, we are proud to be one of the first 2-year colleges in the nation to offer a concentration in Health Humanities, developed with the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). LaGuardia also offers courses in a wide range of modern languages, including American Sign Language, Bengali, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Uzbek and Haitian Creole.

Students in our humanities majors are successful, as measured by graduation and transfer rates. The 3-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time students in the 2019 cohort of the English and Creative Writing program is 66.7% (albeit a very small cohort) and the 3-year transfer rate is 81.3% for English and 75% for Creative Writing majors. While the Social Science and Humanities graduation rates are more in line with the college average (28.7%) at 27.8%, these students over three years transfer at a rate of 63.8%. Moreover, the majority of the English and Creative Writing majors, 80.2%, transfer into similar programs at their 4-year colleges such as English, English Literature, Creative Writing, Journalism and Film Studies. Our liberal arts majors, as would be expected, transfer into a wide range of programs,

including psychology, finance, English, sociology, education, English Literature and public administration.

LaGuardia's success has not been accidental but is the result of focused strategies to support our students. We have implemented at scale a credit-bearing First Year Seminar (FYS) experience that integrates discipline-based curriculum, taught by disciplinary faculty, with an introduction to college, advising, and co-curricular innovation.

In an Inside Higher Ed article earlier this year titled "Rewriting the English Curriculum" (April 4, 2023), by Johanna Alonso, the author notes that for English majors at LaGuardia, the program has been intentional in emphasizing the versatility of an English degree. Alonso writes:

"In multiple courses, starting in a first-year seminar students learn about different fields and professions in which they could use an English degree, such as event planning, book publishing and public relations. As a result, a high percentage of English majors transfer to a bachelor's program within one to three years of graduating."

For liberal arts students, major specific advising reinforces to students that they are gaining vital skills for academic and professional success (writing and research, critical thinking, teamwork) while retaining maximum flexibility upon transfer. A recent New York Times Guest Essay: Let's Stop Pretending College Degrees Don't Matter, (Aug. 21, 2023) by Ben Wildavsky, reinforces the point that the broad education and targeted skills humanities and liberal arts graduates obtain have significant long term benefits no matter what majors and careers these students ultimately pursue.

Lastly, LaGuardia also has a focus on experiential and co-curricular learning. Students in our English and Creative Writing programs for example, can take semester-long, credit-bearing internship courses that provide the opportunity to work closely with faculty and peers in developing the college's literary magazine (The Lit) or college newspaper (The Bridge), work with an external media organization or work on a faculty member's scholarly research project. Students can also participate in civic and community-engaged projects.

At LaGuardia, despite our successes, we know our work is not done. We continue to innovate and scale up high impact practices to support all our students. We thank the City Council for the support it continues to provide in fulfilling our mission.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

Testimony to the Committee on Higher Education

Oversight - Humanities as a Viable Academic Path for CUNY Students

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

Dear Members of the Committee on Higher Education:

For decades, the New-York Historical Society has galvanized our city and the museum world by boldly presenting landmark exhibitions that re-examine U.S. history from the perspectives of the historically disenfranchised, including Slavery in New York, Exclusion/Inclusion: Chinese in America, Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow, Nueva York and the Stonewall 50 shows.

Always rising to the challenge of bringing little-known histories to light, New-York Historical has continued to expand the public's understanding of "We the People" by collecting the materials of history as it's happening, such as ephemera from the Women's March, Black Lives Matter protests, and Pride parades.

DIVERSIFYING THE CULTURAL WORKFORCE THROUGH A TRAILBLAZING PARTNERSHIP WITH CUNY

November 2023 will mark the fourth anniversary of our trailblazing Master of Arts in Museum Studies program—jointly created by the City University of New York School of Professional Studies and New-York Historical. The MA in Museum Studies program with CUNY further demonstrates our commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion through affordable, high-quality public education.

The program was created in 2019, in part to address a 2015 national study conducted by the Mellon Foundation, the Association of Art Museum Directors, and the American Alliance of Museums that found that, at the time, only 16 percent of leadership positions at art museums were held by people of color.

In addition to teaching the knowledge, skills, and preparation necessary for graduates to engage in professional museum practice, curate exhibitions, design educational resources, fundraise, and provide museum services for all potential museum visitors, the MA program aims to diversify the museum workforce and address the interests of an increasingly diverse and engaged museum-going public.

The MA program features classes taught by museum professionals at New-York Historical and CUNY faculty. From administration and finance to curation and education, the program educates students about all areas of museum operations. Graduates of the program are prepared to work as

curators, archivists, museum technicians, educators, administrators, conservators, and operations specialists in museum settings. Knowledge and skills acquired through this rigorous program are also applicable to employment in government, higher education, and other types of public service and cultural heritage organizations.

A key component of the curriculum is the Capstone Project, which students must complete to graduate. Under the direction of two faculty members, students work individually and collaboratively to create a conceptual framework and design for a new museum or cultural initiative in ways that replicate real-world museum operations. Each student takes on a leadership role in an area of interest—such as curation, education, digital media, development and fundraising, finance, or visitor services—and designs a plan that contributes to the realization of the collaborative project. At the end of the semester, students present their Capstone Project to a group of real-life cultural philanthropists and leaders who provide feedback on the feasibility of the design.

SEEING ACTIONABLE RESULTS

Graduates have joined museums and cultural organizations across New York such as the American Museum of Natural History, Kupferberg Holocaust Center, the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, MoMA, MoMA PS1, New-York Historical, the South Street Seaport Museum, and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

Last year, a new annual scholarship was established by our board chair, Dr. Agnes Hsu-Tang. The scholarship supports students, especially those who are from historically underrepresented groups or who can demonstrate a professional commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion, to complete the MA in Museum Studies program.

The scholarship fund also supports current Museum Studies students who participate in New-York Historical's Presidential Teaching Scholars Summer Institute. The Institute is a paid ten-week career training program at New-York Historical designed to diversify the interpretation of exhibitions and scholarly voices available to museumgoers.

During the course of the program, students learn to create dynamic gallery tours committed to achieving greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility for the Museum's vast communities. The program also offers SPS graduate students in-person learning experiences and mentorships with museum professionals at New-York Historical.

Let me end by quoting some students from the program:

Paris McGruder, who interned at the Rochester Museum and Science Center in its collections department, is interested in pursuing a career in museum curation or museum education after graduation. "The Museum Studies program has taught me a tremendous amount about the power of storytelling, preserving our history and pouring into our future," she said. "I am interested in this field because it allows the stories of 'others' to be told and affirms the truth of their history.

As an African American woman, a lot of my family's history is told through storytelling and is not well documented. Pursuing this program means providing a platform for the parts of history that were not deemed important enough to put in a museum."

Kelly I. Aliano, a resident of Long Island, now works as the manager of education special projects at New-York Historical since completing the MA program. "I learned so much," she said. "I am a better collaborator, a better instructor, and a better writer because of the rigorous work in the program. The most interesting thing that I learned in my coursework was about representation: how some voices seem to be absent from the record and how we must listen to the silences in order to understand where and how that marginalization occurred."

Kristin Cuomo has worked full-time as a museum educator at the Long Island Museum throughout the degree program. "I had wanted to go back to school for a masters in Museum Studies for some time, but scheduling and cost were prohibitive," she said. "When I found out about this program, I applied immediately!" After researching Elizabeth Jennings and 19th century transportation rights movements for class projects, she and her team worked her research into a well-received virtual museum program that's been presented to hundreds of school classes and received a generous library partnership grant to share Jennings' story with a wider audience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the humanities are vital for fostering critical thinking and cultural awareness. And our joint program with CUNY actively helps diversify the cultural workforce. Your support for this program is an investment in the next generation of cultural leaders and ensures the humanities continue to enrich and transform lives. The New-York Historical Society remains deeply grateful for the important programmatic and capital funds from New York City that have allowed us to expand our resources and reach and adapt to the needs of our local community. In particular, New-York Historical is grateful for capital funds received towards our major building expansion project, which will also create new gallery and collection spaces to accommodate students in our CUNY SPS MA program. These funds are essential to our institutional goals and mission and we thank you and your fellow City Council Members for your exceptional service.

Oversight: Humanities as a Viable Academic Path for CUNY Students Testimony Notes

Overview of Pace

- University:
 - Private, mid-size regional comprehensive teaching university
 - Arts & Sciences largest school
- Student Demographics
 - 6000 NYC undergraduates, about 3,300 undergraduates in Dyson College of Arts and Sciences in NYC
 - 40% BIPOC; 95% financial aid; 25% first-gen college students
 - 83% admissions
- Faculty/Admin Demographics
 - Arts & Sciences: 250 full time/520 part time
 - English NYC: 10 tenured; 4 contract; 70-80 adjuncts

My Perspective

I am an Associate Professor of English and affiliate faculty in Latinx Studies at Pace University in NYC. Since last January, I also direct our initiative in the Provost's Office to support experiential learning throughout Pace. Pace's strengths in experiential learning run throughout our schools and our liberal arts core curriculum, which includes opportunities to participate in [classroom-based research](#) and [civic engagement projects](#).

Humanities Significance

The humanities have always been an essential component of our liberal arts core—and earlier participated in Pace's focus on preparing “thinking professionals” for participation in their careers and communities when Pace started as a business school in 1906. We are in the process of recentering the humanities as we position ourselves within the rapidly changing field of higher education.

In part, our current focus on the humanities comes from recent momentum. Since Fall 2021, each year we have seen our largest ever enrollment in humanities majors for incoming first-years, especially in English, Communication and Media Studies, and Film and Screen Studies. This past spring 2023, our English major received national attention for its growth—by about 50% over the last two years to about 150 majors, in defiance of national trends, which we credit to its place-based, experiential approach.

We understand the value of the humanities from various perspectives—not just growth of majors:

- **The humanities are central to our mission as an educational institution that provides “a powerful combination of knowledge in the professions, real-world experience, and a rigorous liberal arts curriculum”:** We believe the humanities have a vital role to play in giving everyone a place in the world as makers of democracy—especially through a focus on empowering students to explore and participate in the production of knowledge about their own cultural heritage; to make sense of the history and current lived experiences of racism, sexism, and economic inequality; and to blaze new pathways for achieving social justice and creating a better world.
- **Humanities majors lead to desirable career paths:** Our English majors, for example, go on to gainful employment in publishing, the arts, media, business, education, law, and the nonprofit sector.
- **Humanities courses in our liberal arts core prepare students in our professional schools with interdisciplinary skill sets that make them competitive:** Anecdotally, our Career Services tells us that some of the best computer science jobs, for example, require students to demonstrate humanities knowledge and skills. A 2020-2021 study by the Association of American Colleges and

Universities backs this up. For example, 80% of employers believe students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts.¹

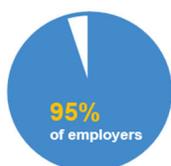
- **The humanities are key to future innovation:** We need vibrant humanities departments to contribute to new multidisciplinary programs that we believe will increasingly be the future of higher education. This includes new partnerships like the Climate Exchange on Governor's Island, in which Pace is participating. We are exploring a new climate humanities initiative through that partnership.

Challenges

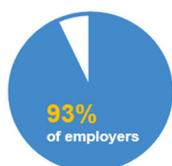
- **Metrics** – Metrics that focus on growth or majors/program revenue only tell one part of the story of the value of the humanities, and the challenge for administrative and faculty leaders is that, unlike in the direct-service area of the nonprofit sector, higher education does not have widely recognized metrics for measuring educational or social impact.
- **Investment** – My colleague Sarah Blackwood described this phenomenon in her *New York Review of Books* article, “Letter from an English Major on the Brink:” “What faculty and administrators have mistaken for a problem (declining enrollments) with an identifiable cause (take your pick), students correctly see as a story being spun by the universities themselves: this area of study lacks value, is in some sense wrong.”² Creating vital academic paths in the humanities starts with our institutions recognizing the value of the humanities, and demonstrating it to our entire university communities by investing in the humanities.
- **Changing the narrative** – We need to share our success stories within and outside our institutions to show the vital role that the humanities play in preparing students for contributions in their careers and their communities.

Opportunity

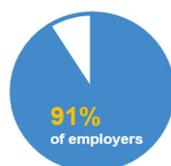
We envision a future in which the humanities are central within institutions of higher learning—and widely available within the daily lives of individuals and the shared experiences of communities. The humanities are central to making universities into sites of preparing students to become makers of the world in which they want to live.



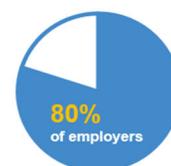
Prioritize hiring candidates with the **intellectual** and **interpersonal skills** that will help them **contribute to innovation** in the workplace.



Indicated that candidates' capacity to **think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems** is more important than their specific undergraduate major.



Indicated that, whatever their major, all students should have experience in **solving problems with colleagues whose views are different from their own.**



Believe that students should acquire broad knowledge in the **liberal arts.**

Study by The Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2020-2021

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¹ Association of American Colleges and Universities, “How College Contributes to Workforce Success: Employer Views on What Matters Most,” 15 July 2021.

² Sarah Blackwood, “Letter from an English Department on the Brink,” *New York Review of Books*, 2 April 2023.

³ Pace University Career Services chart based on Association of American Colleges and Universities, “How College Contributes to Workforce Success: Employer Views on What Matters Most,” 15 July 2021.

Hearing for the Committee on Higher Education

September 6th, 2023

Tamara Mann Tweel, Director of Civic Initiatives at The Teagle Foundation.

I want to thank the Committee on Higher Education for turning their attention to this important issue and to our partners at CUNY for their exceptional leadership in the field of humanities education. I am here on behalf of the Teagle Foundation, an institution dedicated to supporting and strengthening humanities education, which we believe is fundamental to meaningful work, effective citizenship, and a fulfilling life.

We all know that the humanities are on a steep and dangerous decline. In the last ten years alone, the study of English and history has dropped by a third. What is often missed in the media discussions and what I want to share with you today is why a humanities education is so urgent for New York City students. It is urgent for them as individuals, as community members, and as residents of our great city.

The humanities not only prepare students for jobs, they also prepare them for whole lives. In a shifting employment landscape, the essential skills of a humanistic classroom, public speaking, writing, reasoning, and open-minded thinking are more important than ever. But subjects like English and history also prepare students for full and complex lives. They invite individuals at an age of transition to confront and discuss their most pressing questions on the nature of love, the challenges of loss, and the tensions of leaving home.

In an age where loneliness and mental health are national crises, humanities classes are some of the only spaces on college campuses where students, of all different backgrounds, practice being in community with one another, through the disciplines of reading, discussion, and listening. It has also been shown, for this reason, to help with college persistence in freshman year and beyond.

Finally, the humanities are a fundamental part of an education for civic responsibility. It is in the humanities that students are taught how to empathize with lives different than their own, how to see an issue from multiple perspectives, how to engage in civil discourse and honest debate, and how to understand that the gap between our nation's aspirations and our political reality is serious and requires their commitment. No matter how many innovations we create in the scientific sphere, we will always need to learn how to organize ourselves into functioning social communities. That is the job of this urgent form of knowledge, and it cannot and must not be treated like a luxury only to be had at private

institutions. The humanities are not extra, they are a necessary means to preserve our beloved and fragile democracy.

At the Foundation, we believe that every institution of higher learning has the task of taking stock of why our democracy exists, whom it serves and what it must do to educate the next generation of students. Over the last 10 years, CUNY has been doing just that. We are incredibly proud of our partnerships with a number of schools at CUNY, including The City College of New York, Lehman College, Hostos Community College, and LaGuardia Community College, to name a few. In fact, we regularly name these places and the humanities programs they are running as models for institutions across the country. Lehman College is currently a shining example in a national program called *Cornerstone: Learning for Living*, where students participate in small seminars and discuss shared texts with a professor invested in their future. New York City Leaders Fellowship, which emerged at City College gives students who are invested in becoming public servants, courses that in addition to teaching them content, like how the city budget works, helps them understand the history of the city itself, the changing ideas of freedom, and the incredible value of self-governance. The Foundation sees these grants as a modest investment in a vital and transformative form of education, the kind that reminds us all what education is for and why CUNY is so deeply important. It prepares the next generation to invest in themselves and in our great city.

Statement to NYC Council Committee on Higher Education and the Humanities

9.6.23

Addy Malinowski

I am a doctoral student in English at the CUNY Graduate Center on 34th St. and teach first-year composition—a general education required course in college writing—to freshman students at Brooklyn College. I am a product of public education, from K-12 to various universities, in the great state of Michigan. I hold a masters in creative writing and am a poet.

CUNY students, especially those who are poor, black and brown New Yorkers, deserve the *right* and freedom to explore the humanities in their full-breadth in their educations, and not just to be placed on pipeline to become a worker in a mediocre job.

For example, students should have the funding to read and study somebody like Audre Lorde, the great Black feminist poet and essayist who studied and taught at Hunter College. They should be able to be afforded this right to study the humanities *and* get a good job after graduating, which would also mean addressing larger, economic problems the city faces, making good on the promise for economic justice, which Dr. King highlighted the need for in the years before his death. A city-wide jobs guarantee would do a lot towards this end.

We especially don't want to deny students at the nation's largest public, urban university—the great City University of New York—the kind of liberal arts education that their predominantly white and wealthy peers at the city's private college receive.

New Yorkers of all stripes have the right to learn about their own unique histories and should not be the target of politicized attacks on higher education the likes of which we are seeing across the country.

FUND CUNY like it was funded during the period of open admissions, from 1970 to 1976, when it was free for ALL New Yorkers regardless of income or race, and let's make good on the promise to "educate the *whole* people" of the City of New York.

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION HEARING:
HUMANITIES AS A VIABLE ACADEMIC PATH FOR CUNY STUDENTS**

Testimony of Professor Barbara Bowen
September 6, 2023

Good afternoon, members of the City Council, CUNY colleagues and students. It's good to be back here! I am Barbara Bowen, former president of the PSC and now professor of English at Queens College and the Graduate Center. The current PSC president, James Davis, and the other PSC officers cannot be here because of a collective bargaining session that conflicts with today's hearing. I know they're sorry not to be with us.

I hear two questions in the title of today's hearing. First, whether studying the humanities, in an economy that worships technology and substitutes gig work for secure employment, can lead to a meaningful job. There is abundant proof that the answer to that question is yes. CUNY officials have supplied statistics, and survey after survey of employers shows that the qualities they value are the qualities nurtured by the humanities.¹ We even have the president of Microsoft writing in 2018: "As computers behave more like humans, the social sciences and humanities will become more important."²

The second question I hear in today's title, however, is disturbing. Humanities may be acceptable for students at elite institutions—students who already have the cushion of intergenerational wealth or who may not be endangered by the violence of systemic racism—but isn't a major in philosophy or English an unaffordable luxury for a student at CUNY? The answer is no. If the measure of a "viable academic path" is whether it leads to a job, then the evidence of the Queens College English Department should be enough. Take a look at the department website; it profiles recent English majors who are now oncology nurses, attorneys, teachers, visual artists, journalists, video game writers, novelists and more.

Humanities graduates do well in the fierce competition for jobs in this increasingly cruel American economy. They have the enduring skills that employers want and that do not become obsolete. But to stop with that answer is to risk accepting the premise that working-class students, students of color and the poor can aspire only to an instrumentalized education, an education whose value is measured entirely by its ability to lead to a job. The students who rushed up to me after class this week with a theory on the meaning of the Greek names in Shakespeare or to tell me how their whole experience of watching movies has changed because

¹ The annual survey of employers conducted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities shows that employers consistently rank the skills associated with the humanities as among the most important qualities in potential employees. Ninety-five percent cited "critical thinking" as a top quality; 91% cited "ethical judgment and reasoning"; and 90% cited "ability to communicate in writing."

² Brad Smith and Harry Shum, "Preface," *The Future Computed: Artificial Intelligence and its Role in Society*. Microsoft, Redmond, WA, 2018.

of our class on historicizing—these students are not approaching their education as a ticket to a job; they are thrilled by the possibilities of life, just as I was when my life was turned upside down by a class on Henry James.

“Life is so big,” Toni Morrison said when she spoke at Queens College. The humanities, as the academic area most explicitly dedicated to exploring life’s potential, are not just *viable* for CUNY students; they are *vital*. In a culture that aggressively seeks to strip many of our students of their humanity, humanistic study is a powerful act of self-preservation. James Baldwin talked about the moment he first read a novel by Richard Wright. For the first time in his life, he said, he felt affirmed in his existence. CUNY students affirm their individual and collective potential every time they grapple with a demanding novel or master a philosophical argument. We are in the midst of a revolution in the humanities, as the arts, history, literature and philosophy are being urgently remade by thinkers who demand a world safe for future humans and free of oppression. CUNY students, with their deep experience of struggle and the knowledge it engenders, are exactly the humanists we need.

I am grateful to the Committee on Higher Education for giving us the chance to refute those who would narrow and instrumentalize the CUNY curriculum. CUNY students urgently, deeply, radically need the humanities, and the humanities need them.

Testimony of Dean Ringel submitted to the Committee on Higher Education of the New York City Council;

Hearing Date: September 6, 2023

Hearing Subject: “Humanities as a Viable Academic Path for CUNY Students”

It is an honor –and a pleasure—to appear before you today. Although I have spent more than a decade teaching as an adjunct assistant professor at John Jay College, I spent more than four decades before that in the business and legal world. It is my experience in that world that I want to emphasize in affirming the value of the humanities as a viable academic path for CUNY students

I speak, of course, in a personal capacity, but based on my experience in the private sector as well as my more recent experience teaching at CUNY, the humanities are not only a *viable* academic path for CUNY students, study of the humanities also provides a clear and direct path to career success. Such studies also foster the kind of thoughtful civic virtue our City and country so need.

I have been an adjunct assistant professor in the history department at John Jay College since 2012 but for more than 40 years before that I was a litigator and for most of those years a partner at a major New York law firm where I specialized in representing the press in Constitutional issues. In that capacity, I had the good fortune to represent, among other entities, The New York Times, NBC News, Time Magazine—and Inside Edition. I hired, trained and mentored young law students and lawyers. I observed that law students and lawyers who had been exposed to the humanities: history, literature, philosophy were best able to think through the issues with which we dealt, to offer

novel solutions to difficult problems and able to express themselves orally and in writing with a confidence and skill that students who had focused on “job-readiness” kinds of courses could not.

Many of our students, whether products (as I am) of our city public schools or other systems, come to college thinking it is about memorizing a bunch of information, regurgitating that information on an exam and ultimately gaining a diploma to satisfy a prospective employer’s checklist. There is value in all that, but it grossly undervalues what a college education *can and should* provide.

There are viable alternatives to a white collar job requiring a college degree, but *if* students seek a college degree, at least in part, in pursuit of such white collar jobs, they should recognize that success in such jobs requires the ability to solve problems, to think abstractly and sometimes outside of the box, to read difficult materials with understanding, to write clearly. The humanities prepare students to do this by requiring them to grapple with the great issues the thinkers and artists of our world have grappled with over the centuries. And while my own private sector experience centered on the law, observation of clients and others with whom I dealt in the business world made plain that those who wish to advance in careers as diverse as engineering, communications or even computer science will benefit from those kinds of skills.

By way of example, most of us remember reading Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice. We remember (and my students quickly spot and condemn) its overt antisemitism. But they also respond to the exploration of the different impact of concepts of law, justice, fairness and mercy in the play. Recognizing the differences among these concepts is no small thing in considering many of the civic issues that

we face in our City and Country. This is a key value of courses in the humanities.

The highest compliment that I have ever received in my teaching career was paid me by a student after a Humanities and Justice Course I taught: "This is the first time a class made me think." That is, indeed what courses in the humanities do. And those courses provide valuable training in what it takes to succeed in careers and in life. We should not deprive CUNY students of that in a narrow focus on providing job readiness courses.

Thank you for your consideration and, of course, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Dean Ringel

Adjunct Assistant Professor, History,

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

AB Columbia College, Columbia University (1967)

JD Yale Law School (1971)

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Dear Honorable Council members:

I'm writing today to the Council to remind them of why we established colleges and what they should still do. Universities have been with us for over 2000 years--since Plato's Academy at least.

We have a great university in New York City--CUNY with a distinguished history, part of a unique and extraordinary national heritage. This country decided over two centuries ago that it might be possible to educate all of its citizens and to even provide those of humble backgrounds a superior higher education. Later these citizens included freedmen and women and immigrants and opportunities opened up for them too. Hence CUNY. That education from the start included Philosophy, Rhetoric, Classics, Languages, the study of various Literatures as well as the Sciences and Mathematics. The belief was that these studies would provide an educated public and develop local and national leaders. Were they so wrong? When James Madison spent all his waking hours when not in class in the library at the College of New Jersey, now Princeton, and remained extra year to study law and Hebrew, was he wasting his and our time? Thomas Jefferson enrolled in the two year Philosophy program at the College of William and Mary, and designed the University of Virginia as an amateur architect, should he have studied something more "practical" than Philosophy? Shouldn't students learn about Socrates and the Romans, Greek democracy and Chinese medieval and modern history? And learn about them from multiple perspectives--winners and losers? And don't our young people need foreign languages today in a global economy? What madness has come over our culture?

When our soldiers came back from World War II, soldiers like my father, and the GI Bill offered them a chance to attend college, how many tens of thousands jumped at the opportunity? They studied everything they could, not only a trade. (My father studied Art.) A college education was not merely instrumental, it was life-altering; it made one a different type of person, more subtle, grave and thoughtful with a rich appreciation of the insights of very different thinkers. Is it an accident that that was the century of American global dominance? This is a city full of museums, of theaters, and a center of publishing. We now take it all too much for granted. If we study history at all we should know that civilization can go away and has, in the not too recent past.

Reading Shakespeare, Dostoyevski, Kierkegaard, Lao Tse and Machiavelli, Cervantes among so many others, do we really think these are useless enterprises and students should spend time instead, on what? We need more Humanities, not less. We are allowing manufactured controversies to put us off our national mission. We have been dunning it into students and into the public that education is a business and that its all about money; this has resulted in country club colleges and an unnecessary debt burden on the next generation. Yes, college students do make more money and degrees matter in the workplace. But astute critical thinking, sensitivity, writing and reading abilities are what matter to all industries.

But instead of rethinking this anti-intellectual boorishness, we are doubling down. I remember working with an administrator at CUNY who told me that he couldn't understand why I would pursue a subject such as intellectual history. To him it seemed an abstruse waste of time. Somehow people who think like that have gotten into the upper echelons of higher education. They see their role as dodging day-to-day political conflict at all costs by acquiescing and pandering to fads, rather than understanding what they are or where they come from and what strength of mind actually looks like. For that you need the study of Philosophy, Literature and History, and so on. The human race has been around for a while and did some thinking before we arrived. Let's support giving them a listen.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Burg, PhD, LaGuardia Community College
Philosophy BA, Queens College 1976
Philosophy MA, University of Minnesota, 1978
History PhD, CUNY Graduate Center

Prof. Fern Luskin's testimony regarding Humanities as a Viable Academic Path for CUNY Students

Think of Humanities as a healthy tree with deep roots and many branches that metaphorically offers CUNY students multiple career options to pursue. My former art history students have become professors of art history, artists, journalists, historians, engineers, and have held various positions in business and government. That's because my students learn the impact that various religious, historical, cultural, philosophical, economic, scientific events and/or innovations, and movements had on art, including famine and disease, revolution, civil war, invasions, the rise and fall of various ancient empires, cataclysmic natural disasters, and inventions. Students also learn to compare the style, composition, colors, etc. of different images, which helps them stretch their thinking muscles. Being able to do research and write about their discoveries is another skill that puts them in good stead once they graduate. Students enrolled in other Humanities courses such as Music, Industrial Design, Photography Film and Television, New Media, Theatre, likewise contribute to the rich tapestry of jobs that are available in New York City.

I am led to believe that there are those in this body who would suggest that we do not need the humanities in higher education for the citizens of the City of New York. I could see how that argument could be made. Another argument that we could make is that there is no need for human beings on this planet. That the world would survive without us, even though we can't live without bees and many other creatures. We're slowly learning this as they disappear. But the universe would get along just fine without us, which is sad to believe. But if you are against the proposition, that the universe would be better off without us, then you must then also agree if we're going to be here we should probably be the best that we can be, all of us, because I'm sure there is no one in this body who would suggest that there are those of us who should be here and those of us who should not.

I work in the Humanities Department of LaGuardia Community College, and I've been there for almost 30 years. My department was once asked to define the humanities as succinctly as possible. I said, "It is those things which make us human." It is our cultural memory, our aspirations in every form that we have learned to communicate, and it is what makes us unique as a species, to not only be admired but to be envied. Today, the number one fear in higher education is not the loss of humanities education but the fear that artificial intelligence will replace human thinking. I've read essays by students who use these programs, and they are vacuous, because though a computer can cite a poem about love a computer has never kissed someone, a computer can find an essay on family, but they've never seen a child come into the world made-up from its own DNA. Our children come to us in the classroom with their own personal experiences which are rich and diverse, but in order for them to become part of the greater human community they need to learn and be exposed to our achievements.

I am left speechless that in the home of the Met, or the Metropolitan Opera, or the Chelsea arts community, or Silver Cup Studios, or Broadway, all industries that bring jobs, and dollars, and tourists, and something that any politician can understand, tax revenue, to the City of New York, that we would even question the value of humanities education in public, out loud, without fear of infamy. But I guess the question isn't its denial to all, just the many. We can't afford it, supposedly. Yet public education is the most poorly subsidized piece of the educational industrial landscape. Private institutions, where the rich and influential send their children, are reaping the greatest number of public sectors subsidies in order to perpetuate their aspirations educationally, without question. If you call yourself a human being you will support the humanities in higher education. I'm not really worried about it. The last time New York City stopped supporting the arts in public education Hip Hop was born and our marvelous subway system became a rolling tapestry of public art.

My name is Hugo Fernandez, and I am a professor of Fine Art Photography at LaGuardia Community College. The humanities saved my life. Like many of our students, I grew up with socioeconomic struggles, the son of a single parent, but I was never denied the humanities. My mother was an immigrant and knew nothing about this country, so she bought me an encyclopedia so I could look things up. She always found a good school on the edge of a lousy neighborhood. I grew up in New York and Boston and South Florida and somehow I found myself in gifted programs, until high school, when peer pressure and recreational drug use ended my career in mathematics. I used art as a way to transition into higher education and though I had no interest in the commercial arts practice I found other things to study, like journalism and broadcasting and eventually photography, to hold my interests. I took my own gap year of sorts after my associates and saw the American West and then went back and got my bachelors, adding creative writing, poetry, British literature, the history of art to my toolbox and eventually received a BFA in Fine Art Photography, along with a minor in British Literature and Art History. I studied abroad participating in an archaeological dig in South America and became involved in political aspects of the arts communities in the United States. But eventually, I got my master's in fine art photography at the Yale School of Art. From there I went to LaGuardia Community College where I've taught for 30 years, beginning in the photography program, and branching out into art appreciation. I once had the notion that I had no business teaching poor kids how to be artists, that they couldn't take care of themselves. Finally, a colleague told me, "Even poor kids have a right to be artists." I spend most of my days trying to instill the notion that not only is art part of everyday life, but that we all have a stake in determining which is valuable and needs support. So, you see, if we are ever to make it out of our humble beginnings and get to that place that we want to be, the humanities are going to take us there. The leaders of this country tend to be English Majors or the Liberal Arts students. They can communicate. They can think critically, because they have the repository of all human aspiration within their grasp and use it to develop new ways of doing and thinking. We are long past the industrial revolution, smack dab in the information age, and while I have no interest talking someone out of the career with a blue collar or in the laboratory, I can tell you now those studies will only take them so far and if they want to achieve their greatest self they are going to have to sit in some approximation of my Intro to Art course. The average CUNY student graduates and finds themselves in a job bring in \$20,000 a year less than somebody with the same degree from another institution. Why? To be a supervisor you have to be able to think critically and communicate. If you don't have those skills which you learned in the humanities, you will always work for somebody else and make less. \$20,000 a year over the course of the average person's working lifespan it's \$1,000,000. Are you going to deny that of students in public education, Higher Ed in New York City?

From: Lauren Mancía <l.mancia@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, September 4, 2023 3:55 PM
To: Testimony; Dinowitz
Cc: hbjames@gmail.com; slewis@pscmail.org; abedford@brooklyn.cuny.edu;
michelle.anderson@brooklyn.cuny.edu; Philip Napoli
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Testimony on Humanities at CUNY (for hearing on 9/6/23)

Dear Councilman Dinowitz, and City Council Members of the Higher Education Committee,

I wanted to pass along an op-ed on the value of the Humanities, *written collectively by Brooklyn College History majors last May 2023*, published in the Brooklyn College *Vanguard* newspaper.

A highlight from that piece is this quote written by the students:

"To be a humanist is to question everything, to study everything, to search for meaning, to experience as much as possible, to try and fail and try again, to dare to be spectacular, to recognize one's limits, to forge bonds with others, to feel everything, and to defend one's humanity with all your might. Brooklyn College has become hostile to humanists. *College should be a place where interests are nurtured and supported, but it has been taken over by a larger societal checklist culture... A proper college environment should respect our humanity and care about making us the most well-rounded people possible.* It shouldn't want us to become apathetic commodities... Do not put a skill-set for a job before a skill-set for yourself. Enriching your mind and soul will bring you more satisfaction than any vague idea of a high-paying job ever could. *College is not just a stepping stone to the beginning of life, it is one of the most valuable times to realize yourself and your community.* Perform a revolutionary act. Be a humanist, and proudly reclaim your humanity from a society that wants to beat it out of you."

Full op-ed is here:

<https://vanguard.blog.brooklyn.edu/2023/04/26/a-humanists-manifesto-words-from-bcs-historical-society/>

I'm available to speak more in detail about the value of the Humanities from a professor's point of view, but I wanted to pass along these words from CUNY students themselves.

Many thanks for your time and attention, and for your advocacy for CUNY,
Lauren Mancía
Associate Professor, History, Brooklyn College
Associate Professor, Medieval Studies, The Graduate Center, CUNY

My name is Maura McCreight, and I am an Adjunct at Brooklyn College, the NYC College of Technology, and previously also Bronx Community College. I teach art history courses to undergraduate and graduate CUNY students. The humanities at CUNY desperately need and deserve funding for student aid, improved campus conditions, internship, and job support, academic and specifically writing support. CUNY students are the lifeblood of this city. As the nation's largest urban public university, CUNY communities include middle-class, first-generation college students, immigrants, students from communities of color and other historically underserved groups. CUNY's mix of quality and affordability propels almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all the Ivy League colleges combined. CUNY dominates national rankings in terms of race and ethnicity. Brooklyn College, according to a 2022 US News study, has the highest diversity index among public regional universities, closely followed by Hunter and Queens.

Funding the humanities means funding departmental initiatives that support student success such as one on one sessions with writing centers, professor support during office hours, spaces to conduct research, humanities libraries, exhibition funding, and additional funding to give to students who achieve a high degree of academic success.

The humanities encourage participation in society – the humanities (the arts in particular as I've witnessed as a professor at three different CUNY schools) makes it possible for students to see themselves in roles they themselves have a say in, to be more than just a cog in the wheel, but to understand themselves more fully and that their own stories and experiences are something contribute to the making of a more authentic world, not something to hide. CUNY Students are incredible resilient, intelligent, and, as new Yorkers, they know how to hustle. However, without financial support, students will continue to face burn out, as has happened since the pandemic, and not be able to graduate or make the connections they need to thrive.

In my experience as a professor at CUNY, I am continuously floored by the contributions of my students. In my classroom, it is not uncommon that a student sitting in my Islamic art class will be able to help translate an Arabic text, or a student who, when looking at Picasso's Guernica, is inspired to apply for a curatorial fellowship on anti-war art history. I have had students go on to receive jobs at the Jewish Museum, Internships at the Whitney Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art and receive Mellon grants for travel to Brazil. The students who received these opportunities felt supported by faculty and staff who, with funding, can encourage students and give them clear goals to reach to progress in their academic and arts careers. Without city support, these one-on-one experiences that lead to contributions to the arts are not possible.

Remysell Salas Testimony

Committee on Higher Education Hearing on the Humanities

September 6, 2023

Hello everyone, my name is Remysell Salas, a professor at the Department of Ethnic and Race Studies in the CUNY Borough Manhattan Community College (BMCC). I am honored to address this committee hearing, where I shall emphasize the profound significance of CUNY's academic offerings and their role in propelling individuals, including myself, out of poverty towards a brighter and more promising future.

In my capacity as an educator in the field of Humanities, I possess a profound appreciation for the pivotal role these programs play in shaping our students' journeys from the classroom to the professional world. The Humanities foster critical thinking, analytical prowess, and a profound sense of creativity. They empower students to explore the shared threads that bind humanity together while also highlighting the nuances that set us apart. Moreover, the Humanities offer a wealth of practical applications that enhance one's professional skill set.

Drawing from my personal experience as a former city hall and city agency employee, serving in policy roles, I can attest to the indispensable role that my Humanities education played in my early career trajectory. My proficiency in writing, honed through Humanities coursework, greatly contributed to my professional advancement. As a dedicated professor, I have had the privilege of witnessing numerous students discover their own strengths and successfully apply them in academia and the professional area. A significant number of my former students have ventured into sectors such as technology and finance, where their global perspectives and effective communication skills have set them apart.

Nonetheless, it is imperative that we do not confine our discourse solely to job prospects, as this risks perpetuating the notion that working-class students, individuals of diverse backgrounds, and those with limited means should pursue education solely for employment purposes. Many students are driven by a genuine passion for the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. They are fueled by their curiosity and a thirst for the boundless possibilities that life offers.

Our academic curriculum must cater to these aspirations, and the Humanities are uniquely positioned to do so. They afford students the opportunity to explore the very essence of human existence, fostering a deep understanding of what unites us and what distinguishes us from one another. Simultaneously, the Humanities offer tangible, real-world applications that enrich one's professional skill set.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Committee on Higher Education for affording us this invaluable opportunity to counteract any attempts to narrow the scope of the CUNY curriculum. The Humanities are not only viable but absolutely indispensable for *CUNY students, who, in turn, are essential champions of the Humanities*. Together, we shall continue to uphold the profound importance of **a diverse and comprehensive education that empowers individuals to flourish both intellectually and professionally.**

Thank you!

My name is Sara Rychtarik, and I hold a BA in English and French Studies from Barnard College, and a PhD in French from The Graduate Center, CUNY, where I also worked as Writing Across the Curriculum Fellow and taught at City College. I recently completed a one-year grant funded position at John Jay College of Criminal Justice devoted to improving the retention and skills-building of students in the humanities.

In this most recent role, I wrote and revised curriculum and designed and led workshops that incorporated experiential learning, evaluated and developed culturally responsive programming that engages and supports students at the college, and created communication materials to promote the humanities program to prospective students. I also made an applied humanities open educational resource and produced a series of videos featuring current students and alumni who share their college-to-career stories of impact.

CUNY has recognized that two-thirds of its incoming transfer students each fall are students transferring from CUNY community colleges to CUNY baccalaureate colleges. Graduation rates of these students are extremely low, however, with only 16% obtaining a bachelor's degree. In the Humanities and Justice Transfer Project (HJTP) at John Jay, I worked to establish relationships between community college partners and faculty and staff in the humanities programs at John Jay to increase student retention and college completion by providing a seamless transfer pathway from liberal arts associate degree programs to majors in the humanities disciplines.

In the HJTP, I developed and implemented programming in the humanities to help undergraduates gain the academic and essential skills they need to succeed in their coursework and in their post-college lives and careers. I taught and helped redesign an experiential learning applied humanities course called "Humanities in Action," which explores the connections between real-world justice issues, the humanities, and professional pathways. Students identify potential applications of skills and knowledge from major coursework that align with the NACE Core Career Competencies, collaborate with guest faculty to explore and apply scholarly and activist frameworks for addressing justice issues, and create an educational and professional portfolio. I also worked with students to identify and apply for internships and career opportunities in fields that connect to their interests and their majors in the humanities. Students often dismiss their lived and professional experiences, and I worked with them to approach research and writing using a Scholarly Personal Narrative framework that encourages them to tell their story.

Students begin to understand the humanities as an essential framework for life, one that helps us think consciously and critically about the world around us, engage in problem-solving in a focused and meaningful way, collaborate with others, and share our knowledge and experience, especially as a means to expand access of knowledge and information to society as whole. Without access to humanities degree programs, CUNY students will not develop the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that they need to actively participate in civic life and pursue careers in law, politics, journalism, and the arts – fields that shape our society. CUNY students deserve a seat at the table. Expand the humanities programs at CUNY colleges.

My name is Sarah Chinn and I'm a professor in and former chair of the English department at Hunter College. My esteemed colleagues have been or will be talking about the various kinds of crucial work that the humanities do for our students: prepare them for a career that will almost inevitably require the skills that the humanities equip them with; give them access to the almost limitless array of arts and media venues and job opportunities the city provides; build their capacities for qualities that are hard to quantify, such as empathy, problem solving, analysis, and self-expression. These are all central arguments for the importance of the humanities, and I share their enthusiasm and advocacy. I'd like to take a slightly different tack in my comments, however. I want to talk about class, equity, and joy.

College is probably the last – maybe even the only – place in which our students get to choose to do what inspires them. Throughout their school years they've been subjected to standardized tests, city-wide curricula, the influence of peers, and, of course the pressure to get into a college that they can afford and that meets their needs. Once they leave college and embark on a career, their lives will be determined by the dictates of the marketplace. The decisions they make will be shaped and set by managers, bosses, clients, and the like, not to mention their need to pay rent, support a family, and – let's hope – thrive, whether in New York or elsewhere. College is a brief respite in which students could – and I would argue should – have the space to experiment, to stretch themselves, to challenge their assumptions, to enter into other ways of thinking and seeing.

Equally importantly, why should our students be denied access to those intellectual goods that their more privileged counterparts take for granted? After attending New York City public schools, my own children chose liberal arts colleges because they recognized that being immersed in literature, history, languages, art and art history and the like was essential to a meaningful education. How much more crucial is access to the humanities for our students — the children not of college professors but of working people, immigrants documented and undocumented, families of color — who too often are told, both explicitly and implicitly, that

they should limit themselves intellectually, focus on practicalities, not feel like they are entitled to the same education as kids at NYU or Columbia?

To my mind, offering a rich, full, multilayered humanities curriculum to CUNY students is a question of equity. Elite institutions are not debating the value of the humanities. They take for granted that their students need, deserve, and *want* a broad and deep education. The students I teach are no different. They are hungry for *more*: more knowledge, more context, more novels and poems and essays and plays by writers they would never have encountered otherwise; more joy. In the classes I teach I see not just their work but their pleasure in intellectual engagement with new narratives and new ideas. How can we deny them that gift?

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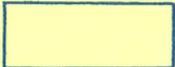
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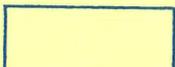
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