

**TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF
HIGHER EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH CIVIL SERVICE AND LABOR**

Dr. Barbara Bowen, President, PSC/CUNY

November 12, 2020

Oversight - Adjunct Faculty Employment at the City University of New York

Thank you, Chairs Barron and Miller and members of the Committees on Higher Education and Civil Service and Labor, for holding this oversight hearing on adjunct employment at CUNY. Adjunct employment at CUNY urgently needs your oversight.

I am honored to be here today with my PSC colleagues to speak on behalf of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY and to represent the thousands of talented, dedicated adjunct faculty and staff at The City University of New York. CUNY's over-reliance on adjunct labor is an issue for every member of the faculty and professional staff at CUNY, whether we are employed part-time or full-time, and it is an issue with serious consequences for students.

I want to talk about three things today:

- 1) the alarming trend toward *increased* part-timization at CUNY;
- 2) the pernicious way in which CUNY's system of part-time labor allows the University to pretend that massive budget cuts are tolerable; and
- 3) what needs to be done.

Higher education has one of the worst labor systems of any industry, and certainly the worst in the professions. According to a 2018 [analysis of federal data](#) by the American Association of University Professors, nearly three-quarters of all faculty positions are off the tenure track. They are on short-term, contingent, and/or part-time contracts; most have little or no job security, many have few benefits, and almost all are underpaid.

Imagine a comparable employment situation in any other profession: medicine, law, engineering or public school teaching. Under successive neo-liberal governments of both Democrats and Republicans, the United States has systematically hollowed out the profession of college teaching.

Even within a scandalous national labor system in higher education, CUNY is an outlier: CUNY is one of the largest employers nationally of adjunct faculty and—increasingly—adjunct staff. And the proportion of part-time to full-time faculty and staff is growing.

You will hear today about the damage that system inflicts on individual lives, on education and on the profession. I want to reflect for a moment on how the adjunct system works to legitimize and facilitate massive cuts to CUNY's budget. We have seen the system at work this year.

The political position of the CUNY administration has been not simply to *accept* devastating cuts in State and, to a lesser extent, City funding, but to *make cutting easy and routine*. By employing

thousands of academic staff and faculty on short-term contracts, the CUNY administration can claim that they are simply not renewing those contracts every time they are asked for a cut. Instead of resisting budget cuts and demanding what our students need, the CUNY administration uses its system of precarious labor to facilitate and invisibilize massive budget cuts. The message is that CUNY can withstand cuts—no problem; we will just decimate our labor system by replacing thousands of secure, decently paid jobs with insecure, underpaid ones.

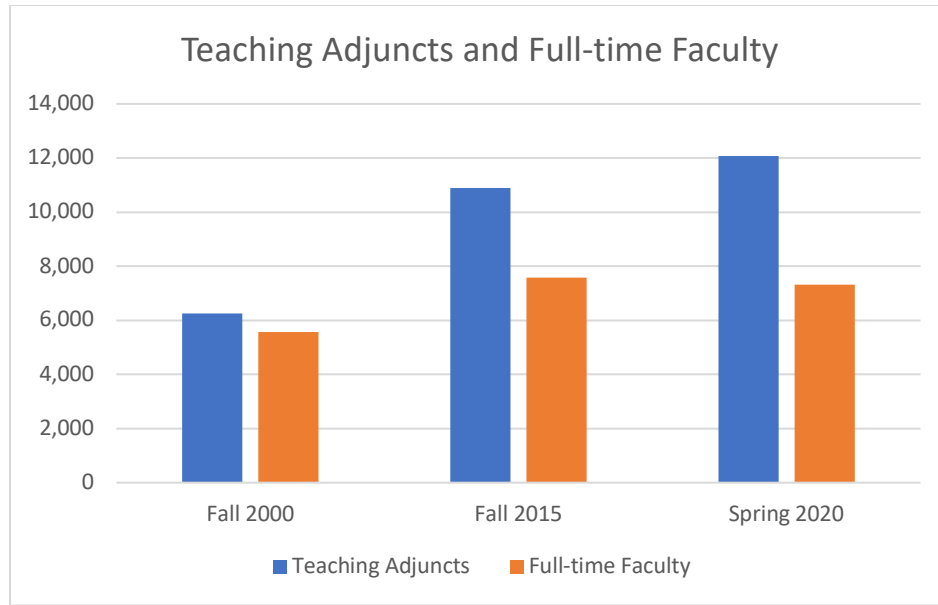
The PSC is well aware of the current State and City budget situation, explained at length by CUNY's Vice Chancellor Sapienza today. But Mr. Sapienza presents the budget as an immutable fact. Budgets represent choices, and the CUNY administration has chosen to hide behind its horrible system of adjunct labor to normalize massive and unsustainable budget cuts. The PSC calls on CUNY to make the choice to demand full funding—not provide an easy pathway to applying cuts that make more and more people part-time.

I want to emphasize that CUNY adjuncts are both part-time and contingent—except for those for whom the union has struggled and won protections. The PSC is very proud of what we accomplished as a union in the last contract and previous contracts, and with the support of both full-timers and part-times. But, as you know because the two committee Chairs here today were arrested in protest with us, PSC members, students and community supporters had to campaign, and protest and take a strike authorization vote to get there.

CUNY's labor system is a disgrace, and the reasons the system exists have everything to do with racist disinvestment on the part of the State and City, and institutional silence and complicity on the part of the CUNY administration. Ultimately, CUNY's labor system undermines students. No matter how dedicated and super-committed CUNY's adjuncts are and how many unpaid hours they give to their students—and they do—students still suffer when the majority of their instructors are working without job security and without the support they need to do their best work.

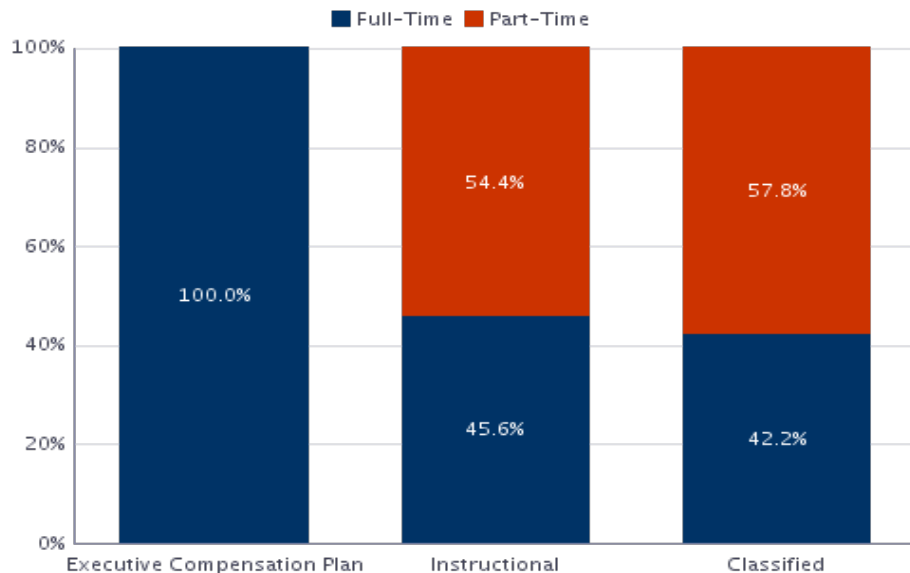
Worse, CUNY's trend is toward *increasing* part-time and contingent labor:

- In 2000, CUNY employed 5,500 full-time faculty and 6,258 part-time faculty.
- In 2015, CUNY employed 7,500 full-time and 10,900 part-time faculty.
- In 2019, CUNY employed 7,325 full-time and 12,000 part-time faculty.
- And in addition, CUNY now employs nearly 2,000 part-time professional staff.



Source: Teaching Adjuncts from Staff Facts and Full-time Faculty from CUNY First

Compare this employment pattern to the pattern of employment for high-paid CUNY managers, depicted in the graph below. While more than half of the instructional and classified staff at CUNY are part-time, precisely zero percent of the managers on Executive Compensation Plan are employed part-time. That structure speaks volumes about what the CUNY administration values and the kind of jobs they want for themselves: when it comes to top management, CUNY makes sure that every one of the jobs is full-time, with full benefits and full pay.



Source: [Staff Facts Fall 2019](#) from CUNY's Office of Human Resources Management

The current administration, under Chancellor Matos Rodríguez, has gone even further to eroding job security:

- CUNY rushed to lay off thousands of adjuncts this spring even before cuts were applied.
- CUNY refused to use the CARES Act money to keep adjuncts employed. VC Sapienza's testimony left out the provision in the Act that stipulates keeping people employed. Instead, he just recited the less formal "guidance" from Betsy DeVos. What is more student-centered than keeping their instructors?
- CUNY failed to ensure adherence to the PSC agreement to protect adjuncts on health insurance and those eligible for three-year appointments.
- And now CUNY is stonewalling and not even providing the union with the names of those who have been laid off.

The PSC thanks the two Committees holding today's hearing for your deep support on labor issues and education issues at CUNY. We suggest that the Committees:

- Give CUNY a one-week deadline to produce the names of the adjuncts who were laid off in the spring and those whose assignments were reduced. The union wants to reach these former members and discuss ways we can support them—CUNY won't even give us the names.
- Demand that CUNY use \$30 million in CARES Act money now to put those adjuncts back on payroll, regardless of the pressure they are getting from the Governor's budget director, who has been installed on the CUNY Board.
- Demand an account of how Chancellor Matos Rodríguez held colleges to the June 30 agreement with the PSC on notification of adjuncts.
- Bargain with the union on the impact of changes in class size.
- Take a public stand; tell CUNY to stop providing a way to disguise the effect of cuts and instead demand that Albany implement revenue measures. Waiting and hoping for a stimulus bill is not enough.

CUNY must take a stand against the cuts Governor Cuomo has implemented. The CUNY administration should be the strongest advocate of keeping its budget whole, not the partner in finding ways to suggest that further cuts are sustainable. They are not. This is not the moment to stand down. It is the moment to stand up for the public university New York deserves.

Submitted for November 12, 2020
Committee on Higher Education jointly with Civil Service and Labor
RE: Oversight - Adjunct Faculty Employment at the City University of New York

Blanca Vazquez, Hunter College, Adjunct Associate Professor, Film and Media Studies, Professional Staff Congress
Executive Council
BA, Tuition free CCNY
Masters, Education, CUNY
Journalism, Columbia University

Honorable City Council Members,

It's November, it's late in the term, and students have registered for the spring 2021 semester. Last week we began to see alarming emails on adjunct list serves of sudden cuts in spring classes and dramatic increases in class sizes.

On October 29, 2020, department chairs were instructed to (some sample directives):

In English:

X level class— cancel 2 sections and raise caps on remaining sections to 28

XX level class— cancel 11 sections and hold an additional 3 sections as tentative; raise caps to 30 in remaining sections. Additionally, class sizes are being raised in English composition classes, which are labor intensive for adjuncts,

A music adjunct reports that the student cap in a music course more than doubled, going from 35 to 80.

Another reports that two lab classes were combined into one and another increased from 25 students to 40 students and that “all these increases are basically making me teach double the students for half the pay I should be receiving.”

An adjunct notes that this is “so wrong on so many levels,” and worries what effect these increases will have on students' GPAs, retention, and graduate rates — and ultimately our mission at Hunter.

New Yorkers don't know that this is happening to the workforce at CUNY and how quickly our working conditions are being eroded.

Because of the federal administration we have and because of the racial inequities in all of American history, the pandemic has fallen hardest on those at the bottom, and disproportionately on people of color. And here we go again. Cuts at CUNY are falling hardest on the lowest tier of CUNY's labor structure: the part-time faculty who teach the majority of courses at CUNY. Layoffs have already fallen on college assistants, CLTs and Non-teaching Adjuncts who are the support system for successful classes. Losing classes also means the loss of health care in a pandemic. From the start of the COVID emergency, the PSC has urged CUNY to protect those on health insurance — and they have not. Instead CUNY has laid off adjuncts and then doubled up classes for those who remain. This is exploitation pure and simple: to do twice the work for the same pay and to do this in this chaotic way, without consulting the labor union, without transparency, without fairness and respect.

As the City Council knows, CUNY has been underfunded for decades now. But we are now at a critical juncture and there's no return to normal. At a critical time in history, we need to establish real priorities: Prop up Wall Street or the streets of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Harlem? Education is a priority and CUNY has to be a priority. It is not only an economic engine for the City's recovery, it is an economic engine for working families, for new immigrants and for the poor. Families whose children go to CUNY schools do a lot better in life -- it is as I have always said, the only college my working class parents could afford. This is not the time to make it more difficult for our students to survive. And a 5-day furlough from CUNY administrators does not begin to cover an adjunct's out-of-pocket health care when one class is cut and the remaining class has double the number of students. It should not happen and it is not something a great university can be proud of. There has got to be a better way.

Why hasn't CUNY administration consulted with the University's faculty and staff, with campus governance bodies, and with student leadership groups on how to best manage budget constraints? Faculty and staff are in the best position to figure out how to best serve our students and do the least damage. Slashing classes and jamming students into online classes — which are supposed to be smaller not larger — does harm to our most vulnerable students, many of whom come from communities hardest hit by the pandemic. We are asking for our elected representatives to oversee what is happening under the radar at CUNY and to fight for a New Deal for CUNY.

Thank you.

Monika Pacholczyk

New York City Council Committee on Higher Education Hearing

November 12, 2020

November 13, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Monika Pacholczyk. I have worked as an adjunct lecturer at The English Language Center (TELC) at LaGuardia Community College since January 2000 and as a CET at Baruch College in the Continuing and Professional Studies (CAPS) department since summer of 2007. Now I am among hundreds of adjuncts across CUNY who have been laid off and who face grim prospects for the future. There are two points I'd like to address:

1. I have been working at TELC for 20 years, but because I started very part-time, my 20 years of service have not generated enough hours to meet the criteria for retirement. When I started working at TELC, seniority was a decisive factor in the number of hours a new teacher could get. I accepted that, and it made perfect sense to me. Now I am not at a retirement age yet, but I would like to at least have an opportunity to build for it. In the meantime, I have not worked at TELC since June and at CAPS since April of this year. I have finally started to receive my unemployment benefits, but I have lost my health insurance and simply cannot afford to enroll in any reasonable plan at the moment; precisely at a time when my neighborhood, Astoria, is among the zip codes that have reported a spike in positive cases of COVID-19 in recent days. This situation is both inconceivable and unconscionable. I am scared, I am lost, and I am really not sure what I am supposed to do next. I feel futureless, vulnerable, and powerless, and I do not understand what happened with the concept of seniority at CUNY and rather very basic humanity. Are educators like me really that completely expendable?
2. In the spring, during the height of the pandemic, my and my colleagues' role was not only to provide language instruction to our students but also to simply help them cope with the situation. Many of our students are international students, living here without their families and often in isolation. During the lockdown, we, the teachers, and our painstakingly prepared lessons provided the focal points the students could rely on. We are still in the midst of the pandemic. Many of our students still need these focal points, but at this time, so do we, their unemployed teachers.

As Chair Barron said in her closing remarks at the November 12 hearing, “Every problem has a solution.” So let’s please work on that!
Thank you for your time and attention.

Testimony of Robert Farrell,
Associate Professor, Lehman College
Chapter Chair, Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Before the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
jointly with Civil Service and Labor

Oversight - Adjunct Faculty Employment at the City University of New York.

November 12, 2020

Good morning, I'm here to speak about the situation of Non-teaching adjuncts (NTAs) in CUNY, specifically those in the CUNY libraries.

- As Senior Vice Chancellor Sapienza noted, NTAs perform work identical to full-time faculty in their areas including counseling, advising and librarianship. Yet NTAs are paid at an extremely low rate -- 60%, not of their full-time peers, but of teaching adjuncts, who themselves make a fraction of full-time wages. Many of these employees are in the academic "gig economy" and so in desperate need of even this form of exploitative employment to survive.

- In the libraries, NTAs provide essential reference, instruction and other library services. As full-time staffing levels have dropped and as the hiring freeze has been extended, NTAs have been essential in maintaining any semblance of normal service levels for the CUNY students and faculty who depend on the libraries for their academic and scholarly success. Additionally, they have been at the heart of CUNY's Open Educational Resources -- OER -- initiatives. OER seeks to increase student learning outcomes by giving students open access to resources rather than having to purchase expensive proprietary textbooks.

- As a result of CUNY's voluntary and unnecessary decision to follow Betsy DeVos's optional guidance and the University's failure to act independently to use CARES Act money to keep workers on payroll as Congress intended, many NTAs have had their hours cut.

- NTAs were one of several titles in the PSC to experience harrowing month-to-month employment prior to CUNY adopting a temporary budget and they may be in that position again going forward. The precarity our adjuncts experience is already terrible and the level of precarity inflicted on them in recent months is wholly unacceptable. It must not happen again.

- In addition to having hours cut and receiving monthly contracts, some NTAs were from the onset of the semester only given work until the end of October.

- Other library NTAs, particularly those working in the area of OER, were reappointed but haven't been called back to work yet due to state allocated funding not having yet come through.

- It's shameful that the most vulnerable employees in CUNY are bearing the brunt of CUNY's DeVos guided choices. It bears noting that despite the current crisis CUNY enrollment is near an all-time high. We need investment in CUNY not only to keep our NTAs on the job and in the service of our students, but so that we can fill full-time vacancies with these amazing librarians and grow our services to meet the needs of our record-breaking enrollments.

Thank you.

Testimony of Rosa Squillacote, Vice President of Part-Time Personnel
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

Before the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education
jointly with Civil Service and Labor

November 12, 2020

Good morning Council Members and thank you for your time today.

My name is Rosa Squillacote, Vice President of Part-Time Personnel. I've been an adjunct for almost 9 years, and I am also a graduate of Hunter College, where most of my classes were taught by adjuncts.

It is not an exaggeration to say that CUNY runs on adjunct and part-time labor. CUNY relies disproportionately on adjuncts to teach classes, as well as part-time workers like non-teaching adjuncts, continuing education teachers, and college laboratory technicians. All these people (almost half of the CUNY workforce) work tirelessly to provide support and a world-class education for their working-class students and students of color. You don't become an adjunct at CUNY unless you care about your students -- what adjuncts need are better working conditions and protections so that we can provide the educational and emotional support our students need. By helping with difficult coursework, making time to listen to students' concerns, or connecting students with other resources they may need.

Every adjunct knows students who have experienced the death of a family member, or faced job loss, or became sick themselves. We cannot support our students if we ourselves are worried about losing our jobs and health insurance, or if we are juggling 5, 10, 20 or more students a class. (Best practices for online teaching suggest about 12 students a class.)

Part-timers at CUNY deserve to be recognized and respected for the work we do to make CUNY what it is, and yet we are treated as disposable. We are neither paid sufficiently for our work nor given job security.

In fact, CUNY administration made the decision to lay off almost 3,000 part-time workers in the immediate aftermath of the COVID pandemic. Thanks to the union's advocacy, some workers were able to regain their jobs, but many others are left without income and without any insurance during one of the most serious health and economic crises of our time. COBRA is simply not a financial option for adjuncts, as the cheapest option is about \$900/month. On top of this, at Medgar Evers College and Bronx Community College, CUNY fired dozens of adjuncts who had previously been offered a three-year contract, one of the few sources of job security offered to adjuncts. This was an insult both to workers and to the union.

We are demanding that laid off part-time workers get their jobs and health insurance back. The CUNY administration would have us believe they are strapped for cash, but other university administrators have taken meaningful pay cuts - more than a mere 5 day furlough - that have allowed their universities to continue to function. We have seen no such decency from CUNY, who have not even used federal CARES Act money to preserve our jobs.

More generally, part-timers simply need to be paid a decent wage. Currently, if I were to work 'full-time' as an adjunct (and I make on the higher range of what adjuncts make), teaching 6 classes a year, I would make 30,000 a year pre-tax - about \$19 an hour -- despite the fact that I have a law degree, and despite the fact that I have a family to provide for. Adjuncts should be paid at least \$7,000 per class, should have meaningful job security, and should be given the ability to transition to a full-time position. What CUNY really needs -- specifically what the workers and students need -- is a free and fully funded CUNY. It is past time to invest in public institutions like CUNY, through legislation like millionaires' tax and the New Deal for CUNY. Our dignity and safety demand it. New York's recovery demands it.

Thank you for your time.

Testimony of Scott Cally, Chapter Chair, Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

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Good afternoon. My name is Scott Cally, I am a Professor of Theatre Arts and Chair of the Professional Staff Congress Chapter at Kingsborough Community College. This past summer, more than 100 part-time positions were eliminated at Kingsborough and many others have had their hours severely curtailed. Among these positions were advisors, laboratory technicians, library assistants and other student support positions – some of whom had worked at Kingsborough for more than 20 years. No committee or any other form of shared governance were consulted in the decisions to non-reappoint at KCC. Chair Barron, your concerns about transparency and accountability of the college presidents are well founded. There is very little.

Community college students are among the most disadvantaged in New York City and the least prepared for college. They need more individualized attention, not less. CUNY is making up for the lost adjuncts by crowding students into larger classes – lowering the quality of their education. Case in point: The Spring 2021 English Composition 1 at Kingsborough is capped at 29 students while at Baruch, the same English Comp classes are capped at only 15 students. I ask the Council to consider the following question – why is it that CUNY sets course caps at one of its flagship campuses in line with national norms yet has no problem with crowding Kingsborough's students into classes almost twice the size? CUNY repeatedly publicizes its commitment to equity. I ask the Council Members – does this sound like equity to you? That CUNY is an institution where inequity is allowed to flourish is obvious. The time has come for our elected officials to demand answers from the decision makers as to why they have allowed this to happen. Kingsborough's students are not less than, and it is time to stop treating them as though they are.

The use of contingent labor is inexorably linked to the deprioritization of community college students at CUNY and this is evidenced by the diversion of funding from the classroom and student support. We all know that the upcoming budget cycle will be among the most difficult in recent memory. Beyond the need for adequate funding, it is imperative for our elected officials to examine the budgetary priorities of the CUNY management and ensure that the funding is spent on students, not on more senior administration and not on increasing contingency. In the five years leading up to the COVID crisis Kingsborough increased spending in real dollars on Executive Compensation Plan Employees by 57.6% while during same period our enrollment declined by 26% when measured by FTEs. As a proportion of FTEs Kingsborough increased ECP spending by an astonishing 112% in five years. Now since the beginning of the

crisis Kingsborough has decreased ECP spending somewhat due to the resignation of two senior administrators but now that the Council will be facing very difficult choices in the coming budget cycle it is more important than ever that the Council take steps to insure that the resources that are allocated to CUNY are spent wisely and that they are devoted to directly serving our students – not feeding the administrative bloat. The disadvantaged students of New York need their elected officials to stand up for them and force CUNY to make the right decisions - decisions that will be contrary to the administrative ethos that has dominated CUNY for years – an ethos that continues to fail our students every day.

Thank you for your time.

Chair Barron, in your opening remarks you asked a question – one that CUNY did not answer. Allow me to. Why are we marginalizing our black and brown faculty? Because that's what we do with our black and brown students. For example: in spring 2021 Kingsborough students taking English Comp 1 will be crowded into course sections capping at 29 students – many to be taught by adjunct faculty. At Baruch, students taking English Comp 1 will enjoy class sizes limited to 15. Why the disparity? Kingsborough students are more likely to have special needs, more likely to be more unprepared for college, more likely to be housing and food insecure, more likely to have connectivity issues and yes, more likely to be black or brown. Why does CUNY allow this disparity, which has existed long before COVID to exist? Does this sound like CUNY's core mission of high quality education? Does this sound like equity?