

Testimony of Elizabeth Hovey, Adjunct Assistant Professor of History, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Co-Chair John Jay Chapter, PSC; 11/12/20 "Oversight - Adjunct Faculty Employment at the City University of New York" Committee on Higher Education jointly with Civil Service and Labor.

Dear Distinguished Committee Chairs and Members,

For 20 years I have been an adjunct professor at a college that particularly attracts students and faculty who seek to serve the common good. It's an environment that brings out an extra-ordinary level of dedication in its faculty. I'm very fortunate to teach at John Jay College.

But our shrinking funding weighs heavily on me, because of what I have seen in 7 years of representing faculty within the PSC. Our students, "our most precious resource" as Chair Daneek Miller notes, are unimportant to the state of New York, it seems. Only if the wealthiest are taxed more--as their fathers and great grandfathers were--will everyone truly have a chance to gain the skills and knowledge to succeed in this economy

Accepting inadequate funding, the CUNY administrators do not challenge Albany's decisions. Instead, they bank upon the long hours and low wages of adjunct

instructors. Adjunct dedication is the actual fuel of a system that has, year in and year out, provided less real funding on a per-student basis--even as student needs grow. Adjuncts now greatly outnumber full-time faculty at John Jay College.

The photographs here show long strings of green "budget complaint slips". Hundreds of students, staff and faculty indicated on slips of paper ways in which CUNY's inadequate funding undermines student success at John Jay. Before our college was closed on Wednesday, March 11, we planned to protest the drastic underfunding of CUNY by releasing these streams of complaints on March 12. Here you see the markers of the budget protest in a newly empty campus.

The 21% decrease in CUNY's funding on a per student basis means that countless positions have gone unfilled, depleting vital services like writing centers and counseling. Staff, since they know what students need, constantly feel pressure to compensate for the shortcomings that would



Each of the green slips of paper draped around the lobby statue of John Jay expresses the anger or sadness of a student, faculty member or staff toward a particular harm to student success caused by budget injustice. March 12, 2020.

be addressed if CUNY simply maintained the budget it had in 2010, hardly flush times! In their dedication, some staff work beyond their legal hours for no additional pay. Meanwhile, administrators overrule academic priorities with dictates about “efficiencies,” favoring classes that are at capacity, discouraging enrichment over requirements. All of this was true before the pandemic hit.

In March, when we were first barred from campus, educators were suddenly forced to navigate an unfamiliar teaching universe. Transitioning to online instruction took twice as long as developing material for the traditional classroom. Then, after 8 weeks of starts, restarts, and heroic adjustments to support our students, many adjunct faculty faced betrayal. Our provost announced that *none* of the 437 adjuncts having less than 3 consecutive years in their departments would receive the typical rehire notice. This abandonment came even though Congress had earmarked for John Jay College many millions in CARES money -- “to support employment to the greatest extent practicable.”



The slips of paper cascading into the main lobby of John Jay College express how members of the college community feel about deprivations caused by CUNY's budget austerity, without a murmur of opposition from its top leadership. Adjuncts want adequate writing center and counseling staff for their students, for example.

A friend's analogy of being held up by gunpoint seems apt. Giving up your money is one thing; having to contemplate eternity for a dreadful moment is another. Those 437 adjuncts in May had to endure the stress of finishing one uniquely wrenching semester and simultaneously consider their job and health insurance prospects were vanishing, during a raging pandemic and economic collapse! That choice cannot be easily excused or forgotten. Mercifully, the PSC negotiated notice extensions. Those allowed for a partial reprieve while department chairs skillfully manipulated their schedules, and many fewer adjuncts were laid off.

The magnitude of the deprivations that have been nevertheless inflicted can only be guessed at. Chancellor Matos agreed on May 29 to terms of financial and personnel transparency that have only been breached. We leaders of the John Jay Chapter of the PSC only learn the fate of laid-off adjuncts if they themselves volunteer that information to us. Many are teaching fewer than their usual classes. Our provost will not reveal how many of our erstwhile colleagues were non-reappointed or lost their gigs in myriad other ways. He says he is following directions from CUNY central.

Several adjuncts had classes taken away from them in August, due to new minimum class sizes (which hurt students) and the priority of filling full-timers' schedules. Multiple legally "reappointed" adjunct faculty were not even assigned classes. They were told later that the appointment notices they received on June 30 were meaningless. And although national standards have been established that 12 is the ideal enrollment for an online class, John Jay's *de jure* online limit of 28 students were flaunted. Several faculty members, including myself, instead have had 36 enrolled in classes where, due to privacy guidelines, we may never see the faces of some cherished students.

I heard from a department chair that if all of the students who were stuffed into classes in excess of the 28-student limit were put in separate, new classes instead, there would be over 160 additional sections of courses being taught right now! It cannot surprise you to learn that a record number of students have dropped classes or "disappeared," this fall. Each departure represents, I believe, a crushed aspiration.

In Thursday's hearing CUNY's Senior Vice Chancellor Matthew Sapienza made a long face and lamented that "lower enrollment" necessitated job cuts. His stance conforms to CUNY leadership's general *preference for austerity*, not reality. At John Jay, among many colleges, we have a higher enrollment than normal, beyond what was planned a year ago. Summer school enrollment was its highest ever. Long before the numbers were clear, Brooklyn College* announced it was cutting 25% of its courses, casting out adjuncts. CUNY has seized on the pandemic as an excuse to wield a hatchet.

No one teaches in the CUNY system for the money. We adjuncts have continually prioritize the future of our students over our financial well-being and health†. Some adjuncts question whether our dedication is enough in a system that consistently betrays our students. The promise of a free, high quality education that was true when CUNY's student population was overwhelmingly white sounds increasingly hollow.

Thank you for accepting my testimony.

Sincerely,

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* Allison Rapp, "Cut COVID, Not CUNY, Professors Protest 25% Cut, 5/13/2020

<http://vanguard.blog.brooklyn.edu/2020/05/13/cut-covid-not-cuny-professors-protest-25-cut/>

† See Adam Harris, "Thea Hunter: The Death of an Adjunct," *Historians in the News*, History News Network, 4/18/19, <http://www.hnn.us/article/171687>, after *The Atlantic*, 4/8/19.