

December 5, 2003 Testimony
Presented to the New York City Council Higher Education Committee
On Executive Pay Raises at the City University of New York

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Honorable Council members:

There are many questions to ask today about the recent destructive-to-morale salary increases given to CUNY CEOs. I will use my time—the first formal opportunity CUNY employees have had to comment on this precipitous and secretive executive decision—to ask a few of these questions.

The first—Why with every state in the Union in the red for the first time since the Great Depression, with no relief in sight, does CUNY's Board of Trustees choose to give the Chancellor of the University a 40% salary increase, I repeat 40% increase, with several college presidents receiving raises of 9%? Every one of these administrators was already receiving six-figure salaries, and the Chancellor receives on top of this a \$90,000 housing stipend that is alone triple the starting salary of a full-time instructor. These unconscionable increases make the gap between administrators and faculty wider than at any time in the history of CUNY.

This gap reflects the growing anti-democratic trend in larger corporate America. Whereas in 1980, the average CEO received 40 times the average American worker's salary, today he receives over 500 times. This starkly contrasts with less than 25 times in Germany or Japan. And as we know from Enron—the largest corporate bankruptcy on record, so far, --and all the other recent and numerous disgusting corporate scandals, that this economic gap between manager and worker signifies an even greater moral bankruptcy on the part of management. Why then do the trustees seek to ape this immoral trend? As guardians of the sacred canons of the teaching arts they should be setting standards, not pandering to socially destructive tendencies.

I say "immoral" and "socially destructive," because the majority of CUNY's faculty, part-time with few benefits, and virtually no Bill of Rights protection, receive less than a living wage. Yes, the majority of CUNY's

teaching faculty are forced into part-time positions in order that they might receive less than a living wage. It is these adjuncts who should be receiving the 9% salary increases since it is they who deal with the students on a day-to-day basis under administratively stressful circumstances. After all, adjuncts now do 60% of all the teaching in CUNY, the highest percentage in the history of a university that goes back to its founding as City College in 1847, when tuition was free from then until 1975!

This leads me to another set of questions. Why the secrecy? Where is the transparency? If these CUNY administrators are doing such a splendid job, the trustees should be crowing about their record of accomplishment, individually, by name, and by listing each and every deed. Instead, these salary spikes amounting to \$2.1 million were hidden away as an addendum to a monthly report to the Board of Trustees. Does this action in itself not signify that the Trustees feel some shame? That they knew they were doing something wrong?

Why was advance notice not given?

Where is the right of the public to hear specific reasons for specific administrators of a tax-payer supported institution receiving hefty salary increases in a time of belt tightening when, for example, 46% of Bronx Community College student households receive less than \$20,000 in annual income.

How does paying chief executives more money improve teaching? Please explain.

As a native New Yorker, graduate of Columbia College, and author among other publications of a book on race and class politics in New York City for which I was designated a centennial historian of New York City by the Greater New York Centennial Celebration five years ago, I would like the City Council, not only to begin to ask these questions, but to get some answers, and, most importantly, take some action in redressing the growing gross disparities between performance and position in CUNY.

Thank you.