

Testimony of David Gerwin, Associate Professor

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Queens College/CUNY

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Queens Public Hearing

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I direct the secondary social studies program at Queens College. This semester we have about 45 student teachers in NY schools, another 45 or so students taking social studies methods courses to prepare them for their year-long student teaching experiences, and another 25 taking MS Ed courses. Behind these we have transfer or freshman students who need advising about coursework for next year, and applications for the post-bac certification program allowing social science majors with a BA who never took education courses to become certified and be admitted to our MS ED. I am responsible for reviewing all graduate applications. For every graduate application there are three or four potential students with whom I have multiple email exchanges.

As part of our national accreditation efforts, I wrote two comprehensive program reviews of our undergraduate and graduate initial certification programs. From last February to mid-October of this year, our department was without a field placement coordinator after a resignation. Despite a swift response that allowed hiring to proceed in the spring, a series of freezes to the position meant that this fall I had to spend a solid week on the phone and email doing nothing but

arranging student-teaching placements, even after the semester had begun. Persistent understaffing of faculty and staff positions prevents me from undergraduate teaching.

For 8 years I chaired our department curriculum committee. For 6 years I chaired the CUNY-wide education panel that makes research awards. I have served on two NYS task forces related to the edTPA, a new teacher certification portfolio submission required since 2014. I'm serving my second three-year term on the departmental Personnel and Budget Committee.

In the past year, I've published a book on the edTPA with colleagues at Queens, published a book chapter on the edTPA in an edited volume, and I'm presenting a new paper at the American Educational Research Association meeting in Texas next week, and a paper with colleagues on a six-state study of social studies teachers is undergoing revisions. A chapter I wrote with a former student needs one round of revisions, and I'm co-writing a chapter on education policy and social studies for another book.

I also serve as the Queens College PSC CUNY faculty union chapter chair.

When I was hired there were three full-time social studies faculty. When one left he was replaced. When we did not tenure a junior colleague in 2015 he was not replaced. Since then my senior colleague, Jack Zevin (hired in 1970), has taken truvia leave. I am currently the only social studies faculty member. I have two open office hours for program advising each week.

That is the only time an undergraduate will get to see me. When I am asked about college-wide honors and awards, I know that some students have a 4.0 GPA or near it, but I don't know them well enough to write such a letter. I last supervised student teaching in Spring 2015, before I took on the union role. I last taught undergraduates a course in the fall of 2010. I have expertise that is needed in teaching a graduate research course in social studies, and I understand that. I have expertise that is needed in writing program reports or admitting students. Every month I attend a meeting of all the SEYS program directors, a curriculum committee meeting, a P&B meeting, a department meeting, a college-wide P&B meeting, a union executive committee meeting, a union chapter meeting on campus, a college-wide chapter chairs meeting and the union-wide delegate assembly. I have a course release that barely matches the administrative demands. Right now I function as a program administrator with a chance to do some graduate teaching.

If Queens had replaced the faculty member we did not tenure in 2015, I would now have another colleague who could share the administrative load. At a minimum, we would have two more hours of open advising, and a lot more capacity for email inquiries and admissions applications. Too, we'd have the time to have undergraduate social studies methods in the spring and curriculum and assessment in the fall taught by full-time faculty. We'd be able to get me and my colleague back into the schools supervising student teachers. When we have these relationships, powerful collaborations develop. A student I taught as an undergraduate over a decade ago just presented at a "Complicated Conversations" workshop for our current students about her experience as a Muslim woman who wears a hijab teaching at a school whose parents and teachers mostly voted for Trump. I have written grant projects with undergraduates and

published with them. With three full-time faculty we could return to projects with our undergraduate students.

At this moment in time my program is in crisis. I'm a one-person show engaged in constant triage. Even showing up here to testify required juggling office hours and stealing time from other projects to write this testimony.

I serve on administrative duties because I must. I hate writing the accreditation report but do it to keep my program running. I've served on the state-wide edTPA panel to hopefully improve the certification process in NYS. I have a PhD in history. I'd love to engage in projects with undergraduates and history colleagues. I'd love to have a social studies methods course whose members work with undergraduates in a history lecture course to try and provide support for people who have just graduated high school and are struggling to learn history. I think that this would improve the undergraduate experience and be great preparation for teaching high school social studies. I have a PhD in American history so this even seems plausible. But the time required to devise and teach that program requires a reduction in my workload. Since I am a senior faculty member – 19 years! – in a college that lacks enough faculty to run programs, my workload is now expressed in administrative tasks. But a workload reduction that increased my full-time colleagues while also reducing my administrative burden could allow me to teach strong and innovative courses every semester, balancing my responsibilities to my program, my graduate students, and my undergraduate students, while doing the research that keeps my

teaching fresh and up-to-date in the field, and provides opportunities for undergraduate mentoring and research.

But to teach undergraduates and spend time with them, I need more faculty colleagues in my program, in my division, and at the college. I urge you to support the Faculty Partnership for Student Success Initiative.