

Testimony of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

New York City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing on Higher Education Fiscal Year 2015

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Good morning, Chair Ferreras and Chair Barron, members of the Council, and friends. On behalf of the 27,000 faculty and staff of CUNY represented by the Professional Staff Congress, I thank you for the opportunity to testify here today and for your continued advocacy on behalf of the students, faculty and staff of CUNY.

Funding from the Council has often made the difference between survival and elimination of critical programs at CUNY. I'm here today to ask you to continue to fund essential programs, but I also want to step back and urge you begin a more ambitious discussion about funding CUNY—a discussion worthy of a progressive city with progressive leadership.

Higher Education Is a Public Good

President Obama has called on states and cities to invest more in college education, and legislators on both sides of the aisle in Washington are seeking ways to make college more affordable. When he unveiled his proposal for free community college, President Obama cited CUNY's ASAP program as a model. ASAP, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, has shown that by investing in smaller classes and more support for community college students, graduation rates can be dramatically raised. Of the most recent cohort, 56 percent graduated from community college within three years—a result that far outpaces national averages.

With an additional investment of \$3,900 per full-time equivalent student (FTE) above the standard community college allocations, ASAP has resources to provide smaller classes, sharply focused counseling and mentorship, free tuition and other critical supports for students. Because of these bigger up-front investments, student success skyrockets and students spend less time and resources before graduation.

President Obama initiated a national conversation about higher education as a public good. Like P-12 education, higher education should be free and properly funded. It is in the public's interest to have a well-educated and productive citizenry. I think we have learned that when education is treated as a privately acquired commodity, it benefits those with means and leaves those without proper preparation or resources at a great disadvantage and in serious debt. Under such circumstances, higher education reproduces inequality rather than promoting opportunity and a more equal and democratic society.

That is why we call on the City and State to provide all CUNY community college students with ASAP-level investments. To get there, we need Albany to do its part, but we also need to build on the investments the City has made and move toward fulfilling the aspiration for CUNY that Mayor de Blasio has articulated: to ultimately increase City funding for the University by \$150 million per year. The City Council can put a down payment on that investment by negotiating with the Mayor for operating funds to CUNY over and above the Mayor's proposed increase.

Twenty-four City Council members laid the groundwork for such a discussion last year when they cosigned a letter from Higher Education Chair Inez Barron requesting funding for two new council-funded initiatives:

- providing \$10 million to hire 100 new full-time faculty and staff to begin to address CUNY's full-time faculty shortage; and
- providing \$5 million for need-based financial aid to fill gaps in the current system of State and federal financial aid and compliment the City Council Merit Scholarship.

Those investments were not included in the final budget for this year, but the effort to establish them was an attempt to address critical needs at CUNY. It showed that a significant portion of the Council is ready to aggressively champion the cause of CUNY students, faculty and staff. The PSC urges you to renew your call for City Council investments in full-time faculty and need-based aid.

The Immediate Need for a Collective Bargaining Agreement

An urgent and essential step in restoring support for CUNY is funding a new collective bargaining agreement. CUNY faculty and professional staff have not had a contractual raise since 2009. Our salaries, already low in comparison to other comparable institutions, have now become completely non-competitive. At the end of our last contract, the average full professor at Rutgers earned \$141,000 a year; the average full professor at a four-year CUNY college earned \$114,000. The same professor would earn \$170,000 at Columbia and \$176,000 at NYU—both of which frequently vie with CUNY for the same candidates. In a profession in which universities compete nationally for faculty, CUNY is finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain the faculty we need.

Meanwhile, decades of underinvestment by the State and City have led to a massive reliance on adjuncts, whose underpaid labor allows CUNY to stay afloat as enrollment rises. An adjunct who carries a full load of courses earns less than \$30,000 a year and doesn't know from one semester to the next whether she will have a job. They are not the smiling faces you see in CUNY's subway ads, but they are doing the bulk of the teaching, especially of the highest-needs students. That is no way to run a university.

The PSC and CUNY have worked productively together in preliminary negotiations, and share the goal of reaching a contract that allows the University to offer the best possible education. It is time for this contract to be settled; we ask for your support to settle this contract and allow CUNY to recruit and retain the academic workforce it needs.

The Case for More Resources

CUNY is a source of opportunity for nearly a half million matriculating and continuing education students. The CUNY community colleges, which receive roughly 30% of their operating revenues from the City, have more than 72,000 full-time equivalent degree-seeking students this year, 9% more than five years ago. Another 133,000 continuing education students also attend CUNY's community colleges. These are record numbers.

CUNY's mission is to be the People's University. While CUNY senior colleges are not admitting a class of first-time freshmen that are as diverse as in the past, community colleges continue to be a major point

of access for New York City residents. Eighty-three percent of CUNY community college students are people of color. Forty percent are immigrants, 65% have family incomes below \$30,000 per year, and 48%—nearly half—are from families with household incomes below \$20,000 per year. It's no surprise that 83% of CUNY's community college students have some remedial needs.

The intellectual, civic and material advancement of CUNY's students, the knowledge, research and innovations of its faculty, and the economic stimulus generated by its graduates are all critical public goods that contribute to the success and vitality of our city and state. CUNY is a precious resource, but it has not been properly funded over the past 25 years, and it could do so much more: more to reduce New York City's income inequality and more to build shared prosperity for all New Yorkers. For this to happen, though, the State and the City have to step up with better funding.

Enrollment increases combined with cuts in State Base Aid for community colleges and relatively flat funding from the City have left CUNY unable to meet its full potential for community college students and for the City; cuts and underfunding have also led to tuition hikes (Budget Book, p. 9).

The State Base Aid rate is currently \$2,497 per full-time equivalent student--\$178 less than it was in 2008-09 when Albany made deep cuts. (Budget Book, p. 6) Since 2008-09, revenue from the State to CUNY community colleges has fallen 8%, when inflation and enrollment adjusted. Over the longer-term, the disinvestment is much worse: down 32% at the CUNY community colleges since 1990-91 when inflation and FTE adjusted.

In recent years, the City hasn't made the same short-sighted cuts to community colleges that Albany has made, but City support has failed to keep up with enrollment growth. City support for CUNY community colleges has fallen 17% since 2008-09 and 30% since 1990-91, when adjusted for inflation and enrollment growth (Budget Book, p. 7).

Student tuition has risen sharply because of continued disinvestment, and students and their families are paying a larger and larger proportion of the cost of operating CUNY. At both the community colleges and the senior colleges, tuition is slated to increase by another \$300 in the fall. When that happens, tuition will have increased by \$1,500 over five years, from 2011-12 to 2015-16. Tuition has more than quadrupled at the senior colleges and more than tripled at the community colleges since 1990-91. Over the same period, the proportion of revenues derived from tuition and fees has more than doubled at both the senior colleges, rising from 21% to 46%, and the community colleges, rising from 22% to 45% (Budget Book p. 5 and 8).

This is the fiscal context we work in at CUNY: disinvestment and underfunding. This lack of resources leads to larger classes, fewer course offerings, less mentorship and advising for students, higher workloads for full-time faculty and staff, increasing dependence on low-paid adjunct faculty and, of course, tuition hikes. All these conditions place barriers in the way of New Yorkers' access to higher education and success.

The PSC Budget Program for FY 2016

CUNY accomplishes great things; the University has talented and dedicated faculty and staff and students who are striving for a better life. But we are working to help many of our students to overcome poverty and institutional racism; and working to restore educational deficits that started in under-resourced P-12 schools. We need more resources for more faculty and better student services, and we can't wait for Albany.

We've seen more of the same in the latest State Executive Budget—no new funding for community colleges and tuition hikes and underfunding for the senior colleges. But Mayor de Blasio and the City Council have started an important change of direction for CUNY funding. This year's City operating budget (FY 2015) increased CUNY community college funding by \$14.7 million to help grow the ASAP initiative and expand Science Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs. This year's City budget also includes \$10.9 million for new merit scholarships for CUNY students. While the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY 2016 increases community college funding by another \$13 million for the same purposes, it counts on the City Council to continue to fund the City Council Merit Scholarship and other CUNY-focused initiatives.

The PSC, understanding the full needs of the students who we serve and informed by the real lives of the faculty and staff who we represent, offers a set of proposals that we believe will advance Mayor de Blasio's big-picture goals for CUNY and reflect the values of the City Council.

Continue support for CUNY's traditionally Council-funded centers and initiatives (\$15.9M)

Council-funded centers and initiatives are an essential contribution to CUNY. They support the University's access mission and expand its research and service to students. The PSC believes these important endeavors should be fully funded and ultimately baselined into the overall City budget for CUNY. We also note that flat funding for the merit scholarship means that each student will get less as new cohorts become eligible. So, additional funding for the merit scholarship will need to be provided. To fully fund the centers and initiatives in 2015-16 at last year's levels would require:

- City Council Merit Scholarships (\$10.9M)
- Civic Justice Corps (\$2.8M)
- Dominican Studies Institute (\$970K)
- Center for Puerto Rican Studies (\$970K)
- Creative Arts Team (\$200K)
- Murphy Institute for Worker Education (\$100K)

CUNY's One City Fellows: Fund 100 new full-time faculty lines now (\$10M) and support the addition of 1,000 new full-time faculty and professional staff lines.

The single most important thing the City can do to invest in CUNY is provide enough faculty and student-support staff to give our students the individual academic attention they need. Improving the ratio of full-time faculty to students is a proven way to increase graduation and retention rates. CUNY increased the number of full-time faculty by 23% between 2004-05 and 2014-15, but enrollment growth

swamped the gains, and the ratios of full-time faculty to students remain abysmal, especially at the community colleges. At Kingsborough Community College, the ratio of full-time equivalent students to full-time faculty is nearly 40 to 1. At LaGuardia, it is 37 to 1.

Almost 275,000 students are working toward a college degree at CUNY, yet the University employs only two-thirds of the number of full-time faculty it had in 1975, when enrollment was 250,000. With too few full-time faculty, CUNY relies on low-wage adjunct faculty with no job security and meager benefits. CUNY needs a 1,000 new full-time faculty and staff to give students a level of attention and support that students receive at better-funded institutions. A larger CUNY faculty would mean smaller classes, more course offerings, and workloads that would support greater mentorship to students and new faculty research.

The PSC proposes calling this new cohort of 1,000 faculty CUNY's One City Fellows to honor the role they would play in increasing opportunity and reducing inequality in our City. It would take roughly \$100 million to support 1,000 new full-time instructional staff, two-thirds of the overall increase that Mayor de Blasio envisioned for CUNY. But no other single investment could do more to ensure the future success of CUNY's students.

A City Council investment of \$10 million this year would pay for 100 full-time faculty lines, just three or four new positions per campus. But it would signal the City's readiness to tackle CUNY's biggest need and would set the course for greater investments in the coming years. And the money could be used by CUNY to create full-time opportunities for qualified adjuncts and to hire black and Latino personnel to address the disparity between the ethnic composition of the faculty and the students they serve.

Fund need-based financial aid to cover students' unmet needs and compliment the City Council Merit Scholarship (\$5M)

Most CUNY students receive aid from the federal Pell grant and the State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). Some receive significant support. But it is a myth that financial aid protects every poor student's access when tuition increases. Most part-time students, students who exceed TAP's limit of eight semesters and undocumented students cannot receive TAP. Financially independent students without dependents have a hard time qualifying for TAP, and receive smaller awards when they do qualify. Faculty and student groups and the university systems are pressing the Legislature to reform TAP, but until it does, the City should fund a needs-based financial aid program, open to all, so CUNY can target aid to students who fall through the gaps in TAP. Twenty-four City Council members supported a call for a \$5 million need-based scholarship program last year. That is an investment that would transform the lives of thousands of students.

The PSC Supports CUNY's Capital Budget Request

A New Direction

The PSC is here to ask you, and every member of the City Council, to take a public stand to redeem the possibility of a free, well-resourced higher education for the students and families of this city. Adopting our proposals would be a vital step toward a new direction. President Obama has opened up a discussion on the future of higher education by calling for free community college. New York should engage this idea and remember that the promise of the 1847 Free Academy still remains to be fulfilled. To engage this idea means to make the needed investments now and in the future.