

**Testimony of Ashley Dawson, Professor of English
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Before the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education**

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Time to do research is the greatest gift that can be given to a scholar. I arrived at CUNY before the last contract, with its generous provision of release time for tenure-track faculty. Without this release time, I struggled to find time to pursue my research while also acclimatizing myself to the heavy teaching load in the CUNY system. This was the primary reason that it took me six years – rather than 3 or 4 - to turn my dissertation into a book, making for a harrowing experience when it came time to apply for tenure.

Since then my rate of scholarly production has intensified, but this is largely a result of my increasing familiarity with the CUNY system, including with interdisciplinary seminars at the Graduate Center that give one release time for scholarly work.

Such release time has made a huge difference not only to my scholarship but also to my presence in the classroom. I have been able to initiate a new research track in environmental humanities that has allowed me to bring representations of climate change and environmental justice that are of great concern to students into the classroom.

There is a direct link between the quality of one's teaching and the ability to pursue cutting-edge scholarship and publishing. By investing in CUNY faculty through a diminution of the teaching load, New York City and State will immeasurably strengthen CUNY students.