

Testimony of Diane Peters Auslander, MA, MPhil, PhD
History Dept, Lehman College
CUNY Board of Trustees Meeting – Oct. 22, 2018

My name is Dr. Diane Peters Auslander and I have been an adjunct in the history Dept. at Lehman College for over 11 years. I call on you as trustees to oppose austerity for CUNY. Take a public stand for a contract that is fully funded, includes real raises for all, and increases adjunct pay to \$7,000.00 per course. I am a bit surprised that so many of us have to come here to ask you to do this as it seems to me it is your job to make sure CUNY has the funds it requires to fulfill its function of educating our students and providing them with the tools they require to be fully functioning adults able to participate in governing themselves. That is what a liberal arts education is for: not just to turn out good little worker bees, but to turn out thoughtful, analytical adults who possess the skills necessary for a free people. This requires a faculty with the time to invest in mentoring and encouraging students, which, in turn requires an investment of funds to ensure that students acquire the skills that will give them choices and allow them to make good decisions in all areas of their future lives.

I have spoken to this body before about my advanced degrees, experience etc. I have also spoken of the financial hardship of working for the third-world salary paid to adjuncts at CUNY and have detailed the humiliation and anxiety involved in trying to survive from day to day on this shameful pay. I will not dwell on any of that tonight as I am tired of feeling like a pathetic beggar. I am just asking for what is right and just, not for anything I have not already earned many times over. Instead, I will address some facts. In the classroom it is impossible for the students to tell which of their professors is full-time and which is adjunct – we do the same job after all. When they need personal support and mentoring, however, adjunct professors – i.e. the majority of the teaching staff – are often working extra jobs to supplement their poverty wages. We are only paid for the time we spend in the classroom, after all, plus one extra hour for those of us who teach more than one course, meaning we are not paid at all for most of our other work - grading, preparing syllabi, answering emails and certainly mentoring students. Adjuncts do all this out of a sense of responsibility to their students, but they also have a responsibility to their families, thus we lose a lot of talented teachers who can't afford to teach at CUNY. At Lehman full-timers are 79% of the budget, while adjuncts who comprise over 65% of the faculty and teach over 55% of the courses are only 13% of the budget. I am certainly not saying that full-time faculty should be paid less – that would be a disaster as we are already losing talented junior faculty due to the uncompetitive salaries CUNY offers. No, fully funding CUNY means paying everyone a competitive wage, even adjuncts. 7K is a start toward that goal. If you do not fully fund CUNY and pay adjuncts at least most of what we deserve, CUNY will not be able to attract or retain the best and brightest teachers as our students deserve, and a CUNY degree will lose credibility no matter how high our graduation rates. You need to make sure that we all have what we need to do our jobs – isn't that your job? Truthfully, I'm not entirely clear on what your job is, but, apparently part of it is to sit here and listen to us for hours and hours and for that, I thank you.