

Frank Cioffi, Professor of English, Baruch College

In 2006, I went up for and received tenure and promotion at Scripps College, a private, liberal arts college just outside of L.A. Two days later, I received a phone call from the Baruch English department, wanting to interview me for the position of Writing Director.

The preliminary interview went well, though a faculty member responded to one of my ideas about improving writing instruction by saying, “Well, that’s great, but you’ve got to realize that it’ll be met with the response all such proposals get at CUNY: ‘There is no money.’”

I did an on-campus interview and shortly thereafter was offered the job. I went to the president of Scripps College, to give her the opportunity to make a counter-offer. She said that Scripps did not do counter offers. She went on, “But surely you’re not seriously considering leaving tenure here to take a job at CUNY?”

I said I was, and she replied, “Well, it seems only fair to tell you that CUNY is the most politically acrimonious college in the country. It is constantly riven with controversy and disputes.” She paused. “They didn’t offer you tenure, did they?” I said they did.

That was close to twelve years ago.

Scripps could not make a counter offer, but they were so sure I would *hate* CUNY that they put me on leave of absence without pay and still listed me as a faculty member at Scripps for the first two years of my appointment at Baruch.

In short, CUNY has a reputation. It’s no secret what’s been going on; even people at small colleges in southern California had heard over a decade ago that it was a bad place to work.

Part of the problem, I think, is that we are not fully funded. And, further, we are not getting sufficient support from you, the Board of Trustees, in our efforts to get reasonable compensation to work here, in one of most expensive places to live in the country.

Our core mission at CUNY is simple: teaching. We want to impart knowledge and want to provide our students with skills. But with the pay for adjuncts so low, many of our teachers must teach six or seven days a week and as many as eight courses a semester. The effect of this on students is that their teachers are simply too busy to really work with them individually, comment on essay assignments, or even require long papers.

As for the full-time faculty, at the current salary levels, many simply leave for greener pastures. We lose one faculty member after another. Just one example might suffice: why do professors at Rutgers-Camden (a public IIA college) make close to \$20k more than professors at CUNY senior colleges?

Our students deserve better. Please advocate strongly for a substantial increase to CUNY's budget, so that adjuncts can move off the poverty line and full-time faculty will not want to leave for jobs at peer institutions. We want to give our students a sound educational experience. Please advocate for us all. Let us be an institution that lets its faculty make a decent living. I call on you as trustees to oppose austerity for CUNY. Take a public stand for a contract that is fully funded, includes real salary increases for all, and that raises adjunct pay to \$7k a course.