

**Testimony of Heather B. James, Instructor
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Before the New York City Council Committee on
Higher Education**

March 3, 2017

The testimony is in support of CUNY's request for 35 million dollars to fund the Faculty Partnership for Student Success Initiative. The Initiative would allow a restructuring of the full-time faculty workload to enable more time with individual students. This would lead to greater student success and a richer educational experience.

As a social sciences professor at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), I work with some of our City's most vulnerable populations. My students are veterans, immigrants, formerly homeless individuals and a myriad of others seeking the promise of a way out of poverty via public education. These students are often unfamiliar with the college environment, lacking in basic skills, and in need of hands-on guidance as they acculturate to the expectations of an academic institution. As a first generation college student from a working poor family, it has always been my dream to teach students such as those at CUNY. I truly believe in our mission and our proven track record of income mobility. Yet, like other faculty, I face the challenge of an unmanageable workload, which makes it difficult to form the deep bonds with students that are statistically proven to guard against college dropout.

When I began teaching social sciences at BMCC, I found that many students did not have college-level writing skills. As such, each of my classes requires students to write a draft paper, which I edit, as well as a final paper, which students revise based on my feedback. I currently teach five classes a semester with 35 students in each class. This means editing 175 four-page papers each semester combined with tutoring, office hours, other grading, teaching, writing for publication, and university service. This is not a complaint but a plea for the City Council to better understand the intense commitment necessary to maintain the highest standard of education and CUNY's mission of education as a public service. A quality professor's schedule can require 80+ hours per week. I frequently work 13 hour days and still struggle to consistently update course syllabi so that my teaching is innovative and exciting. This is unmanageable and causes many promising professors to leave BMCC and CUNY.

I have already seen the benefits of individualized attention many times over. One of my students nearly failed high school but now wants to be a lawyer because our tutoring sessions helped him understand the Constitution and gain a real interest in the subject-matter. Another student was on the verge of dropout due to sudden homelessness but was connected with appropriate services due to my initial intervention. Many professors have similar examples of the power of real student investment. CUNY has included a request for funding for a 3-credit reduction in teaching load for all full-time faculty as part of its budget request of New York City. I ask you to seriously consider including this in the City's preliminary budget. We cannot hope to continue to be a leader in income mobility and educational success without retaining top-quality faculty, encouraging a culture of intensive mentoring, and allowing time for innovative teaching. Our success is unsustainable if we do not address the crisis of workload at our colleges.