

Testimony at the City Council Higher Education Committee Hearing on 3/3/17

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The testimony is in support of CUNY's request for 35 million dollars to fund the **Faculty Partnership for Student Success Initiative**.

Earlier this year, a study led by Stanford economist, Raj Chetty on economic status and college education highlighted a stunning finding. While reinforcing the direct correlation between a college degree and upward mobility, the study also showed that CUNY alone propelled more low income students into the middle and upper classes than six Ivy League institutions combined. The finding understandably has been a source of pride and satisfaction for both CUNY faculty and administration.

As validating as the study is to the extraordinary achievement of our institution, there is another crucial fact about CUNY that is not the focus of the study. It does not take into account the suboptimal learning conditions that our students grapple with and therefore, a six year graduation rate of under 10% at community colleges and only a little better, overall. The study tracks the upwardly mobile path of our wonderful graduates. But what about those who so often drop out because in spite of resolve and hard work, they were unable to successfully negotiate the complex pulls of family, of work and the rigorous demands of college. They could not receive the extra guidance they needed from their professor beyond the class to redraft their History paper, or re-conceptualize the arguments in their Philosophy project or work an extra hour in the Lab with their Chemistry professor. They were not able to get the necessary guidance to stay on track and complete their core requirements on time. They could also have immensely benefitted from the wisdom and knowledge of their professors regarding career choice. But mostly, what our heartbreakingly determined students rarely receive is something that is part and parcel of higher education in more privileged institutions like Columbia or Vassar or even UCLA and Michigan – the joy and inspiration that comes from ongoing meaningful interactions individually and in small groups with faculty members.

Studies show the direct correlation between graduation rates and academic and career advisement. The Chetty study highlights how well CUNY prepares its graduates to succeed in their professional lives. This is not surprising given our amazing faculty. Our faculty works under the most trying of working conditions where teaching four or five courses to classes often of 30 or more students, conduct their research and serve their institutions in other capacities. And yet, as you're hearing in our testimonies, our faculty routinely do over and above what's required to make time for students and attend to their many and complex needs. But imagine how much more we can do if this initiative is funded and our faculty receive institutional support to help students beyond the classroom.

The initiative also makes available much needed time for faculty research which contributes meaningfully to the university's commitment to the production of new knowledge. It channels such knowledge back into the quality of instruction our students receive. A restructured workload committed to teaching, advisement and research will also be a strong tool in the hiring and retention of faculty.

If CUNY has done such an excellent job in propelling its students from the lower to the higher quintiles of social class while graduating only about a fraction of its students, imagine what it can do if we transform the conditions to drastically improve graduation rates.

I urge you to fund this initiative which would be a giant step in the transformation of CUNY and its impact on the economy and the nation.