

**Testimony of Robin Isserles, Professor  
Borough of Manhattan Community College  
Before the New York City Council Committee on Higher Education**

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My name is Robin Isserles, and I have been a full time faculty member at BMCC since 2000. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

I will preface my remarks by saying that I chose to make my academic home at a community college. After teaching at BMCC as an adjunct instructor while pursuing my Ph.D., I decided that the community college was where I wanted to make my academic home. I was driven to work with community college students. I wanted to dedicate my time teaching and mentoring students who never thought they'd go to college; or are returning to school after many years—in other words students for whom college isn't a given.

I'll save why I want this to be the college student I teach for another conversation, but I'd like to share with you how much the amount that I am expected to teach hurts this endeavor.

At the community colleges, we are expected to teach nine classes a year—something unfathomable to most who teach in higher ed. In addition, we have both an expectation but also a desire to research, write and publish- to carry out what we were trained to do. Given my teaching load, I am constrained to carry out this work in January and the summer months. This means that I often have to pass up on grant applications or conference/paper submissions that fall during the semester. I just cannot carve out the necessary time and space to make room for these activities while at the same time teaching so much.

And because my research and writing happen when they do, this leaves precious little time to think about my teaching—to reflect on what is working and why, what is not working and why and what changes I'd like to make, etc. The labor involved in developing oneself as a teacher is profound. But good teaching requires this work. Good teaching requires time to do this reflection.

What would a restructuring of the full-time faculty workload offer me? It would give me some much needed time to think about my teaching, time to consider new material, time and energy to focus on learning and implementing new pedagogies. The things that make good teaching possible. I do some of this and it is always challenging. It is difficult for me to imagine the kind of teacher I'd like to be—think I could be, if I taught just a little less.

This semester, I teach five classes. In order to maintain the quality of teaching that I expect of myself, I had to cut out a short paper in two of my classes and drop an entire book from two others. You may ask why? And though it's difficult for me to admit this, I needed a way to reduce some of the grading and necessary feedback as I now had to spread myself and my time to an additional group of students. I needed to preserve the energy that I need for the class preparations, class discussions, office hour meetings, email exchanges that are a constant, and now intensified with an additional class.

If all I did professionally was teach—if I wasn't engaged in research, in college and university service, in my union, in my community, in my family—then perhaps I would not need to make these changes. Perhaps I wouldn't be testifying here for the importance of this teaching load reduction. But given these

other commitments, commitments that enhance my teaching, I am forced to give less of myself, and thus less to my students.

These students do not deserve less, in fact, they deserve more. More of me, more of my time, more of my feedback. And they deserve teachers and mentors who are institutionally supported to do the difficult work of developing themselves as teachers.