

Chancellor Rabinowitz and trustees, thanks for hosting this meeting. My students inspire me but I'm also terrified for them. Life is objectively harder for this generation of students than it was for ours. Many of my students juggle their coursework with paid employment. With the cost of housing and health care, more of them are caring for their parents, their siblings, and their own children. Family incomes, after inflation, are about the same as they were thirty years ago. And yet CUNY's tuition is 500% higher.

Where generations past were defined by our hope, optimism, brash ambitions and dreams, our students are beset by uncertainty, precarity, the gig economy, climate change, and the resurgence of fascism, both globally and at home. When I was an undergrad at Queens College, I thought I understood the metaphor of Yeats's "The Second Coming": "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

I didn't know shit about "The Second Coming." For our students, there is no metaphor. It's literally happening in front of us.

Maybe that's why this generation is so politically aware to sexism, racism, and crony capitalism. MeToo, Black Lives Matter. They call it being "woke". What does "woke" mean"? It means it will fool no one if you are not doing your part. It will be clear if you praise our adjuncts' "hard work, dedication, and commitment" and then cry over your own poverty when it's time to talk 7K per course. It will be clear if you have your picture taken signing off on the course reduction to give students more individual attention from their professors, and then turn around and cut the tutoring budget by 16%.

Don't worry about history judging us; we should be so lucky. Our students are judging us right now and it will be plain as day if you self-censor your own budget request. At best they will lose faith in us, and at worst they will emulate our example. We will know your commitment to CUNY and to this city by the message you choose to send upstate. Remember that every disgraceful concession the governor asked of CUNY in the last three years, he has withdrawn and disavowed in the face of solidarity and organizing. So we all are the ones who need to be full of passionate intensity and we can no longer afford to lack conviction. Your budget request can send a signal that you at least are fighting as hard as you can for a better university, one the working class, women, people of color, and immigrant students of this city need and deserve. 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 7K per course.