

**Testimony of J. Paul Narkunas, Associate Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
Before the New York City Council Committee on  
Higher Education  
March 3, 2017**

My name is Paul Narkunas and I am an Associate Professor of English at John Jay College. As we all know public universities were established as sites of knowledge production/research and teaching for the public good, and that dual mission is no better represented than at CUNY. CUNY's mission is (to quote Chancellor Milliken) "to achieve its full potential in serving the people of New York," and I would add continue its success "propel[ing] almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all eight Ivy League campuses."<sup>1</sup> I speak before you to address how failing to restructure faculty's workload diminishes the potential for enhancing student learning and advisement, hurts the common intellectual good of the university, and embodies a business model that is not built to last, but built to lose.

Numerous research studies prove that faculty with active research agendas are the best teachers. Individual professor's passion for inquiry rubs off on students by serving as a model of life-long learning, embodying the imperatives of curiosity as force of motivation, and the joys of daring to think (*sapere aude*) for oneself.<sup>2</sup> As a result, current workload is not only unjust when put in relation to other institutions (Rutgers, SUNY) against which we measure ourselves; it's also an immensely short-sighted and inefficient business model. My college has become a revolving door for faculty who try to leave before their pre-tenure course releases run out. Already overextended faculty acknowledge that there will never be another chance for a reduced workload, and given the withdrawal of public funding for research, they go elsewhere. If we continue the status quo, CUNY funds faculty to perform research during their pre-tenure days from which other institutions will benefit when they leave. We also lose any long-term advantage of their knowledge for the common good, as well as the branding and advertising possibilities for student recruitment offered by these scholars' research.

Our heavy teaching load in the humanities (with between 80-150 students in the 3 or 4 courses we teach per semester) lessens our ability to provide the personal attention to students in their written and oral feedback, to expose students to the diversity of ideas and skills they need to succeed in the changing knowledge economy, and to motivate and advise our students given their overextended and challenging lives.

I also want to draw attention to the invisible workload for faculty that affects student learning in ways we often do not consider. With so many students each semester we live with their often unimaginable problems because of our eviscerated welfare state, loss of a sense of common good, and shift of social policies from funding schools to punitive mechanisms like prisons. Consequently, our students have been raised on Reagan/Thatcher's free market outsourcing of public responsibility, and internalized the mandate of personal responsibility with all the sense of inadequacy and self-hatred that it fosters. And they assume this nobly. However, over the course of the semester, their demanding lives become too much for them. They often have no one to talk to about their difficulties, but faculty. For example in the last four months, I have had one student explain to me that he's been missing class because he is homeless; another woman confided in her struggles to study because of domestic violence problems in her household. Still, another student was existentially terrorized because of her immigration status in light of the intensified war on immigrants since Trump took office. And, an honors student who was confronting debilitating depression came to me to discuss quitting school.<sup>3</sup> Faculty are really the face of the college for students and so our work goes well beyond the teaching and learning in our classrooms. Indeed, we listen to students in need and help them from giving up on their challenging lives. We direct students to available support services that each college offers, and keep them focused on staying in school to empower them for their futures. This is the forgotten work

of faculty as we all struggle through the ruins of the commons in the wake of our vanishing welfare state.

Please for the good of the university and to help our students improve their lives, fund CUNY and PSC's commitment to restructuring faculty workload with the Student Success Initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> See David Leonhardt. "America's Great Working Class Colleges." *The New York Times*. January 18, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/opinion/sunday/americas-great-working-class-colleges.html>. For the study Leonhardt is diagnosing, see Raj Chetty et al. "Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility." [http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/coll\\_mrc\\_paper.pdf](http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/assets/documents/coll_mrc_paper.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The connection of an active research agenda to improve teaching were central to educational debates throughout the 1990s, a moment when there was an inchoate push to separate the two activities as part of the intensified corporatization of the university. For the reorganization of the university, see among others, Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1997 and Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Universities*. Cambridge, MA: HUP, 2004. With the proliferation of the administrative class at universities, the activities have been separated as universities reorganized by professionalizing teaching as an object of knowledge rather than a practice, thereby formalizing tiers of researchers and teachers. For studies on the link between research and teaching, see Braxton, J. M. "Contrasting perspectives on the relationship between teaching and research." *New Directions for Institutional Research* 90 (1996): 5-14; Brew, A. "Research and teaching: Changing relationships in a changing context?" *Studies in Higher Education*. 23 (1999): 291-301; Brew, A., & Boud, D. "Teaching and research: Establishing the vital link with learning." *Higher Education*. 29 (1995): 261-273; Marsh, Herbert W., and John Hattie. "The relation between research productivity and teaching effectiveness: Complementary, antagonistic, or independent constructs?" *Journal of Higher Education*. 73:5 (2002): 603-641; Neumann, B. "Perceptions of the teaching-research nexus: A framework for analysis." *Higher Education* 23: 159-171; Neumann, R.. "The teaching-research nexus: Applying a framework to university Students' learning experiences." *European Journal of Education*. (1994) 29: 323-339; Webster, D. "Does research productivity enhance teaching?" *Educational Record* 66 (1985): 60-62; Webster, D. "Research productivity and classroom teaching effectiveness." *Instructional Evaluation*. 9 (1986): 14-20.

<sup>3</sup> I have altered their respective genders or the scale of their problems in my testimony to preserve the privacy of the students and their confidence. This does not alter the types of problems the students endure as part of a reformed social fabric that emphasizes individual qualities over recognition of public responsibility to those in need.