

Testimony of Lorraine Cohen, Professor of Sociology

LaGuardia Community College

Before the Board of Trustees at

Queens Public Hearing

April 19, 2017

I am Lorraine Cohen, Professor of Sociology at LaGuardia Community College. I have served as Academic Chair of the Department of Social Science, Chapter Chair of the LaGuardia Chapter of the PSC, and I am currently PSC Vice President of Community Colleges. I also was a member of the bargaining team that negotiated the contract with CUNY management. For years, in each of these positions, teaching load has been among the issues of greatest concern to the full-time faculty. The bargaining team was gratified that for the first time management recognized that teaching load was a serious issue and needed to be addressed in the final contract agreement.

I want to explain why this reduction is critical to improving the quality of education for students and the level of job satisfaction among faculty. First and foremost, faculty will have more time to work with students. As community college faculty, serving the students is the most important work that we do. Community colleges have a very wide range of students, from those who are educationally disadvantaged, to honor students. Regardless of where they are on that spectrum, individual time with students is one of the most important ways that faculty helps support their students' intellectual growth, their educational and career choices, and personal development. It is a very different experience for the student to interact with a faculty member who is standing in front of the classroom and meeting that faculty member face-to-face in her office. Many of our students have a great deal of anxiety about their ability to meet the academic goals of the course.

Many have questions about the programs they are in and the choices they should make to achieve their career goals. I have sat for hours helping students frame topics for their research paper and directing them to sources that they would otherwise not pursue. Students face many family and economic issues. I can help them figure out whether they need a professional counselor, or whether a discussion will help them figure out strategies for addressing those issues. For more advanced students, I have talked a great deal with them about their intellectual and professional aspirations and the educational path that will allow them to realize them. This kind of connection to faculty is essential. I know from personal experience that I would not be where I am without that kind of mentoring when I was an undergraduate.

This one-on-one work requires large quantities of time and energy. Given a teaching load of 27 credit hours with class sizes that in my department can run up to 38 students, it is impossible to give every student this kind of mentoring. Faculty are exhausted. Many complain of the lack of time with family, or just personal time to recover. In surveys, personal and department discussions, and union meetings, faculty report on the stress they experience because of the many responsibilities that they have. Teaching is only one of them, the others are departmental and college service and publications that are peer reviewed.

The issue of teaching load has resulted in losing some very promising faculty to other colleges whose teaching load is less onerous. One such faculty member, a historian, left my department last year while I was serving as chair; he told me that teaching load was a major factor in his decision. I discussed this issue with chairs from other departments. Many of the chairs reported that teaching load seriously affected their ability to recruit excellent candidates for teaching positions. Though most were attracted to LaGuardia because of its diversity of student body and

faculty, several candidates who were offered a position mentioned teaching load as a reason that they declined the offer.

In the final analysis this is not about the arguments for reducing the teaching load. The arguments were strong enough to persuade the lead negotiators for CUNY's administration that reducing the teaching load was an educationally sound idea. This is about money. CUNY has been underfunded for so long. We need your support and willingness to use whatever resources you possess to make sure that this and other top priorities, such as increasing the adjunct pay level, will be achieved. Thank you.