

## **Testimony of the Professional Staff Congress CUNY Funding in the NYC Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2015**

*Delivered by Dr. Barbara Bowen  
March 7, 2014*

Good morning, Chair Ferreras and Chair Barron, members of the Council, and friends. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify. On behalf of the 27,000 faculty and staff of CUNY represented by the Professional Staff Congress, I congratulate you on your appointments and look forward to productive discussions on the critical role CUNY plays in the transformation of our city. The City Council's continued advocacy has made a real difference for the students, faculty and staff of CUNY—and for the communities we serve. You have been often the difference between survival and elimination of critical programs. I am confident that under the leadership of both of your committees and with a new mayoral administration, the Council will be able to go beyond rescuing essential programs, and be empowered to work with us in reinvesting in CUNY as a linchpin of the City's attack on inequality.

The PSC views the mayor's preliminary budget as a starting point for discussing CUNY's budget. We want to concentrate today on a larger vision for CUNY, rooted in Mayor de Blasio's ambitious plan for the University, but first a few comments on the preliminary budget.

- The preliminary budget funds CUNY at a slight decrease from FY 2014 (a \$3.6 million reduction in base funding and over a \$3 million reduction in Council initiatives). Discussion of the final budget should start with the premise that those funds must be restored.
- We deeply appreciate that some of the “budget dance” that has been part of past negotiations has been avoided, but the preliminary budget continues the previous practice of not base-lining important City Council initiatives such as the Creative Arts Team, the Dominican Studies Institute, the Murphy Institute for Worker Education, and funds to fill in gaps in State and federal financial aid. Those initiatives should be base-lined and restored.
- In addition, many important City Council initiatives, such as the Vallone and Social Safety Net aid, have been defunded over the past five years and hence no longer even appear as reductions. These critical programs for students should be restored and made permanent parts of the budget.
- The PSC hopes to see these areas addressed in the executive budget, as the preliminary budget does not yet support the expansive vision the Mayor has laid out for CUNY. We believe it is possible to realize that vision, and we would like to enter into a partnership with the City Council, the Mayor, and CUNY Administration to make the vision a reality.

In his position paper *Jobs for All New Yorkers*, then-candidate de Blasio called for major new investments in CUNY. Now as mayor, de Blasio has reaffirmed that commitment at speeches on the budget and his administration's future, including the State of the City address, delivered at La Guardia Community College. De Blasio's pledge to increase City funding for the University by \$150 million per year—a more than 50% jump—represents the biggest increase in CUNY's City

funding since the 1970s. We must not lose this moment. The PSC, informed by the real lives of faculty and staff at the colleges, close to the students and their needs, committed to a progressive future for this city, offers a set of proposals that we believe will advance Mayor de Blasio's vision, reflect the values of the new City Council, and allow CUNY to reach its potential as a force against inequality.

We propose the following strategic investments, which together would enable CUNY to meet the ambitious and essential goals the Council and the Mayor have enunciated:

- Increase City funding for the community colleges so that per-student support is at least equal to what it was in 2008.
- Hire 1,000 new full-time faculty and student-support staff in targeted programs to ensure that CUNY students graduate and are job-ready.
- Introduce new need-based student scholarships to assist students who are not covered by existing State and federal financial aid programs.
- Invest in STEM programs and applied arts and science programs, and in scholarships in high-demand employment sectors.
- Support an ongoing taskforce on *CUNY and Economic Inequality*.

We will focus the first three of these proposals today.

If the problem in New York City is inequality, the solution—as Mayor de Blasio recognized—is CUNY. New Yorkers know this already. CUNY is setting community college enrollment records right now, at a time when low- and middle-income New Yorkers' incomes are stagnant and wealth has been concentrated among the very rich. There are more than 71,000 full-time equivalent students at the CUNY community colleges this year, 21% more than five years ago. (I am concentrating on the community colleges because of their close relationship to City funding, but the trends cited here appear throughout the University.)

Record numbers of New Yorkers are turning to CUNY because they know CUNY creates opportunity, especially for poor and middle-income New Yorkers and people of color. Eighty-three percent of CUNY community college students are people of color. Forty percent are immigrants, 65% have family incomes below \$30,000 per year, and 46%—nearly *half*—are from families with household incomes below \$20,000 per year.

The new administration and the City Council have already made real advances in addressing inequality on the employer side of the economy: you have passed paid sick day legislation, are pursuing a higher minimum wage, and are seeking to redirect subsidies toward sectors that will create good middle-class jobs. CUNY can play a critical role on the labor market side of the fight for economic equity; it can be a catalyst for shared prosperity in an economy with well-educated workers and good-paying jobs. Mayor de Blasio recognized this during his campaign, as he made investment in CUNY a pillar of his economic development plan. In August, he told our union:

*I want to restore CUNY as the central gateway to a quality education and a good job. Decades of State and City disinvestment have undermined CUNY's historic role as a*

*stepping-stone to the middle class for more than a generation of working-class youth. We need to put CUNY on a more solid budgetary footing, to make sure it can provide high-quality and affordable higher education for all New Yorkers.*

### **Proposal 1: Base Funding**

**Our first proposal is to put CUNY on a solid budgetary footing.** If CUNY is to play a central role in bringing shared prosperity to New Yorkers, then the University's own funding base must be replenished. Inflation-adjusted, per-FTE City support for CUNY community colleges has fallen 18% since 2008-09. Relatively flat City funding has failed to keep pace with rapid enrollment growth. Meanwhile, State base aid for community colleges has fallen to \$253 less per FTE than it was in 2008-09. Disinvestment like this hurts our students and impairs CUNY's essential mission. It has led to tuition hikes and growing dependence on tuition. Tuition and fees, scheduled to increase by \$600 per student over the next two years, now provide 44% of CUNY community college income, up from 38% in 2000-01 and 22% in 1990-91. And our students are statistically among the poorest college-going students in the country; 65% of CUNY community college students have family incomes under \$30,000. Thirty-nine percent of all CUNY students experience food insecurity.

Without a significant increase in public investment, CUNY is in danger of becoming an institution that reinforces, rather than reduces, inequality. We cannot allow a university with a tradition of producing Rhodes Scholars and Nobel Prize winners to become a provider of "good enough" degrees that provide "just enough" education. Nor can we allow CUNY to fail in its historic mission to provide broad access to a college education. A priority for reinvestment in CUNY must be restoration of basic per-student funding.

### **Proposal 2: Full-Time Faculty Initiative**

But we join Mayor de Blasio and the members of the Council in believing that this is a moment for CUNY to go beyond restoration. **Our second proposal is a bold new initiative to hire 1,000 new full-time faculty and student-support staff, especially in academic programs targeted to prepare graduates for good jobs in industries the City hopes to foster as a source of economic development.** The single most important thing the City can do to invest in CUNY as what Mayor de Blasio calls "the central gateway to a quality education and a good job" is provide enough faculty and student-support staff to give our students the individual academic attention they need.

The PSC strongly supports the proposal to dedicate funding to academic programs whose graduates leave CUNY ready to embark immediately on useful, secure jobs. Such programs exist in the STEM fields and the applied science fields, such as Applied Math at City Tech, where graduates have a record of success in the marketplace. But they also exist in the humanities and the arts, in such programs as the translation program at Hunter College, which prepares students for the specialized work of medical interpreting for hospital patients. The students of this

program are in high demand even before they graduate. Our astonishingly polyglot university could develop other programs that respond to the emerging needs of this diverse city.

But the need for more full-time faculty extends beyond specific programs. What prepares students best for a life of fulfilling employment is not only specific skills, but also rich instruction in critical thought, in writing, in numeracy, in scientific reasoning. Such instruction is possible only when students have adequate time with their professors, especially when they enter college not completely prepared for college work. The key to CUNY's ability to address economic inequality is restoration of the ranks of full-time faculty and student-support staff who have the time to give students the support and instruction that is the hallmark of high-quality college education. The difference between CUNY and better-funded public institutions comes down to this: students at CUNY do not have enough time with individual faculty. In an institution as overcrowded as BMCC, where one professor reported having to stand in the doorway to teach so that students sitting on the floor can see her, there is almost no chance for sustained time with individual faculty members.

The PSC strongly supports Mayor de Blasio's vision for CUNY as a source of economic development, of access for all New York students to two-year and four-year degrees in STEM fields, of new healthcare and health systems engineering programs, of incentives for CUNY graduates to stay in the city and invest in tech start-ups —and the key to all of these programs is time with faculty.

At Kingsborough Community College, the ratio of full-time equivalent students to full-time faculty is nearly 40 to 1. At LaGuardia it is 37 to 1. Throughout the community colleges, full-time faculty teach less than half the courses offered to students. CUNY has hired 475 new full-time faculty at community colleges over the last decade, but enrollment growth has swamped these gains. The result is that CUNY relies on underpaid and overworked part-time faculty, “adjuncts,” to teach most classes. Many students don't receive the individual attention and support they need because adjuncts don't have time to provide it as they run from campus to campus in order to piece together a living from part-time work. As a result, full-time faculty have taken on a disproportionate share of extra-classroom work; they must cover advising, curriculum development and non-teaching administrative tasks in addition to teaching. When I arrived at CUNY in 1986, my home department, English at Queens College, had 88 full-time faculty and about 30 part-time faculty. Now it has 55 full-time faculty and 70 part-timers. Fifty-five full-time faculty must do all the work outside the classroom once shared among 85. At the same time, student enrollment is up by more than 25%. The result is less time for students.

The need is especially acute at CUNY's community colleges. The historical mission of these colleges is to prepare students to graduate with an Associate's degree or certificate for specific types of employment. For these reasons, full-time faculty at CUNY community college have a heavier teaching workload, requiring them to teach nine courses annually over two semesters. Budget cuts, the expanding mission of the CUNY community colleges, and the dramatic increase in student enrollments over the last decade mean that although CUNY has hired 475 additional full-time faculty in the community colleges, the ratio of student-to-faculty remains exceedingly high.

The result is that students do not receive the individual attention and support that we know is necessary for them to make progress in their studies, graduate or transfer to a four-year school. This is especially the case at CUNY where 74% of first-time freshman are graduates of city public schools, and 45% are not native English-speakers.

We now have evidence that increasing the ratio of full-time faculty to community college students at CUNY transforms students' ability to succeed. CUNY's celebrated ASAP initiative, Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, rests on the premise that students will thrive if given more individual time with faculty and more support. Classes are capped at 25 students. Counselors have an average caseload of just 85 students. The results have been dramatic. The program's three-year graduation rate is 56%, well over twice the rate for a comparison group in a recent study. We propose that CUNY both expand the ASAP program itself and that the ASAP model of small classes and individual attention be extended University-wide, starting with the community colleges.

ASAP shows what an investment in adequate numbers of full-time faculty and staff can do. An additional 1,000 new faculty and student-support staff positions would still leave CUNY short of the faculty/student ratios it enjoyed in the 1970s, but it would transform the University's ability to prepare students for good jobs and good lives.

Students in ASAP have their tuition covered (after financial aid is applied) and they receive Metrocards and books free of charge, so they are less likely to have to work (or can work less) while they are in school. ASAP students also get meaningful academic and career counseling. All community college students deserve ASAP-level supports, but a \$20 million investment would provide for a game-changing scale up of the program, if new full-time faculty and staff are also provided. Unfortunately, \$300,000 provided in the current year budget to help expand ASAP was not included in the preliminary budget.

An investment in full-time faculty represents the essential ingredient for promoting learning, retention and graduation of students at CUNY. Think of it as an investment in CUNY's largest-ever mentorship program. With more full-time colleagues, CUNY faculty—in STEM and healthcare, but in also all other fields—would have the a real opportunity to work with individual students outside class hours, to provide internships and supervise independent study projects, write letters of recommendation, and advise students on their course of study. Both full-time and part-time faculty do this work now, somehow finding time to comment individually on five sets of papers from four classes of 35 students, or staying up late at night offering students support by email. But the structural shortage of full-time faculty makes it impossible to offer the sustained, systemic academic support students need and deserve. The only realistic way for CUNY to reach its potential for transforming students' lives and preparing them to compete in a fierce economic marketplace is to invest in the faculty and staff they need.

We propose that this new cohort of full-time faculty and staff be distinguished as *One City Fellows*, alluding to the commitment to making this divided, unequal city closer to being one city. We also propose that a substantial number of the new positions be designated for existing part-time faculty, those most tested and experienced with CUNY students. Finally, the initiative should include the provision that CUNY make a greater effort to hire people of color, especially into the faculty positions. Although CUNY's faculty is diverse by national standards, it is far

from reflecting the demographics of the student body or the city population. And despite adding 1,363 new full-time faculty positions over the last decade, CUNY's proportion of Black and Latino faculty has stagnated or declined. To be maximally effective for all students, regardless of race, *One City Fellows* should be as diverse as the city they will help to change.

### **Proposal 3: Student Tuition**

Both the City Council and the new administration are committed to protecting and expanding college access for New Yorkers. Mayor de Blasio explicitly connected the pledge for new investment to the imperative of affordability, writing: "*Invest \$150 million each year into the City University of New York to help lower tuition and improve degree programs to provide high-quality and affordable college education to any New Yorker seeking a college degree.*"

The first step is keeping CUNY affordable. Tuition at the community colleges and the senior colleges will have increased by \$1,500 by 2015-16; it is likely to increase further after that if public investment is not increased. Holding the line on tuition takes new funding. But students need access to CUNY now; they cannot wait until tuition is restructured. **Our third proposal is to create a needs-based scholarship, expanding on the City Council program initiated many years ago by the Higher Ed Committee.**

Most CUNY students receive aid from the federal Pell grant and the state Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). Some receive significant support. But it is a myth that financial aid protects every poor student's access when tuition increases. Most part-time students, students who exceed TAP's limit of eight semesters and undocumented students cannot receive TAP. Financially independent students without dependents—including children who age out of foster care—have a hard time qualifying for TAP, and receive smaller awards when they do qualify. Faculty and student groups and the university systems are pressing the Legislature to fix these gaps in TAP, but until it does, the City should devote a portion of the new investment to a needs-based scholarship, open to all. An investment of \$10 million would transform thousands of students' lives.

### **Conclusion**

We look forward to opportunities to discuss the other elements of the union's proposal with you, offering support for the mayor's proposed investment in STEM fields, applied programs and scholarships for development of jobs in the emerging technology industry and other sectors. These are exciting possibilities for the faculty and staff; we are eager to work on them.

To conclude, we propose one way we might continue the conversation. We propose the formation of an ongoing taskforce on *CUNY and Economic Inequality*, convened to explore the multiple ways in which CUNY can be a major force in addressing economic inequality. We suggest that the City Council, the Mayor's office, the CUNY administration, the PSC, CUNY student groups and faculty governance should work in partnership to discover additional ways in which CUNY can be an engine of equality. It is a goal we share and one to which the PSC is proud to contribute.