

Testimony of Susan Fountain, Adjunct Professor

CUNY School of Professional Studies

Before the Board of Trustees at

Queens Public Hearing

April 19, 2017

I have been an adjunct at the School of Professional Studies since 2007. I currently work three part-time jobs, but in 2015-16, I worked 5 different part-time jobs, my adjunct teaching being but one of them. Do you know what it is like to work for five different employers – to put notes next to your alarm clock to remind you of where to go when you wake up? To juggle the deadlines of multiple employers that come due at the same time, meaning some nights you don't even bother to set that alarm clock because you know you won't have time for sleep? To delay necessary medical care because your CUNY health insurance disappears if one of your two courses doesn't run?

I know what all of these things are like. And more.

And that is why I am here tonight to say that the CUNY Board of Trustees must ensure that in our next contract, adjunct pay is raised to a minimum of \$7,000 per course (a modest demand in view of the Modern Language Association research that indicates that real pay parity for adjuncts would result in \$9,670 per course). Adjuncts deserve to be paid for one office hour per week for each course that they teach, because I can assure you that one hour per week does not begin to cover the time we spend supporting students outside of class. And adjuncts must be given

priority in the hiring process for any new full-time faculty lines that are created – because it’s the right thing to do.

In short, I want to see CUNY live up to its progressive values, to reject the injustice inherent in maintaining a two-tiered system of instruction that has led to a permanent faculty underclass, and to embrace what should not be a radical idea -- “equal pay for equal work”. I want the Trustees to take bold action against the systematic underfunding of public higher education that underpins this system of contingent labor, because we know that what is lacking is not dollars, but political will.

And if the moral argument for ending the reliance on adjunct labor is not enough, let me leave you with a few more questions: As contingent labor increases, what happens to scholarship? What happens to a leading university system when half the faculty are too busy running between part-time jobs to conduct research? When they are ineligible for research grants because of their contingent status? When they can’t even afford the travel and fees for professional conferences? What are the longer-term consequences for scholarship, for our students, for CUNY’s strong academic reputation, and for this city? On those sleepless nights, these are the questions that run through my head. Hardworking adjuncts deserve better than this, and so do the hardworking students we serve!