

Greetings. My name is Jessica Burke. I'm an adjunct lecturer and I've been teaching Freshmen Comp at the College of Staten Island for the last 13 years, although I have been teaching for 25 years. I am a product of the CUNY system and I decided to dedicate my teaching to CUNY because I love the university and I love the students. Nothing gives me more joy than seeing a student who has struggled elsewhere earn not just a passing grade, but an exceptional one.

Teaching has been a joy, but the past two terms? They've been the most difficult of my career, and before coming to CUNY, I taught intermediary school where hearing gunfire in the neighborhood was an unfortunate norm.

In a regular semester at CSI, class size is already an issue and in my college's Writing Program, we've fought to keep the class size to 25 because of the labor-intensive nature of our program. Just so you have an understanding, our normal curriculum assigns 4 essays per student with 3 drafts of each essay. The largest essay clocks in at about 7 pages and the shortest a little over 2 pages; on average that's between 30 and 70 pages of material *per student per term*; and that's just the essays. Add to that conference time, administrative duties, and add to all that already bustling schedule, there's teaching and prepwork. After doing an extensive workload assessment several years ago with the Adjunct Faculty Assembly, an offshoot inspired by PSC-CUNY, we came to the conclusion that in my program, adjuncts work on average about 20-30 hours for non-teaching coursework every week. Unpaid non-teaching coursework. Every week. For a class of 25 students.

But, that was before the pandemic.

Since March? Still with a class of 25, I work on average 10-12 hour days, 5-6 days a week. Actual classroom time, which used to be 7.5 hours when we had in-person teaching, that now takes about 4-6 hours again 5-6 days a week. So what used to take a little under 4 hours per class, per week, now takes that much time *every day for every class*.

For this term, there was some recalibration of the curriculum in my program-- and I'm not talking about what everyone did last Spring, which itself was a massive unpaid recalibration of the entire situation. This reassessment of our Writing Program's curriculum for Freshmen Comp trimmed the number of drafts down to 2 and the number of essays down to 3. But, I still work the same schedule. If anything, I'd say I work more, this term, with one week blending into the next.

I have to be available for my students at a moment's notice, regardless of when my so-called office hours are, which I must remind you consist of only 1 paid hour per class per week. So on average, I'm working a 50-70 hour workweek and I still get paid for only 9 hours. And that's before I discovered that not only won't I be getting my 2% contractually obligated increase for the Spring term, but I may be losing the 2% increase I did receive for this past term? So, increased work for yet another pay cut.

Over the last 3 weeks, I was able to take "off" exactly 3 days and only because of Thanksgiving obligations in my small household. And "taking off" didn't stop me from corresponding with students as their essays were due or offering a quick comment or word of encouragement when a question was posted to our discussion boards. Taking off meant I wasn't grading or planning (or recording or posting or.....)

If you aren't a teacher, you may have difficulty conceptualizing how much labor is involved to effectively teach a class online. Last term was my first wholly online class. I opted for asynchronous teaching to give my students the best possibility and last term, I had 80% of my class not just finish the term, but finish with good grades. It takes time to plan effective lessons and translate those lessons into a remote-learning environment. But, I must've done something right, because my students themselves did well.

As it stands now, for my 25 students, I don't have enough time to dedicate to each of them. I barely have time to keep up with the students I have and I can't imagine the class size increasing. As it stands it takes me an extra week to grade papers, where in person learning it took maybe 10 days. And grading doesn't mean just slapping a grade on a paper. My grading time is my conference time. Grading time is my 1:1 workshop time where my goal is to help that one student do the best she/he/they can do. Now? It takes 2-3 weeks PER essay; and that's when Blackboard is cooperating with me.

If class sizes got larger, something would suffer and ultimately that would be my students. Already, in this environment, I'd say that a good quarter of my students have been struggling to remain connected and engaged.

CUNY is banking on the idea that teachers teach because we're called by On High to do so, that teaching is our calling and we'll teach regardless of how jam-packed our classes are, regardless of how our income is cut, regardless of how many of our colleagues find themselves without a job because of cutbacks, regardless of how our students struggle through no fault of our own. CUNY is banking that we'll just carry on and be thankful that we've got jobs at all. But, can you for a moment consider how vital we are –part-timers and full-timers-- to our students and to the very integrity of the university? In this climate, CUNY needs to retain students and what better way to do that than to offer MORE classes than less? More classes with fewer students would show them that CUNY cares about them.

CUNY also needs to retain its faculty; so instead of trim the budget on our backs, how about the top earners in the CUNY system get pay cuts, lose some of their freebies and extras in order to fund faculty, which would in turn fund our students? CUNY is not a business and shouldn't be run with the same callous concern for the bottom line.

What better way to serve our students than to rehire all the laid off adjuncts-- adjuncts who were tested during this pandemic and rose to the challenge. We saved CUNY. If it wasn't for us, CUNY wouldn't have survived this crisis. What better way to reward those contingent faculty who dedicated so much than to not reappoint them? Rehire them and offer more classes with fewer students per section.

Consider this as a test for when in-person classes go back in session. CUNY will have NO CHOICE but to offer more classes with fewer students to accommodate social distancing. There will no longer be jam-packed physical classes-- so why jam-pack remote classes now? Students will lose. Faculty will lose and ultimately CUNY will lose.