

## **Board of Trustees testimony**

**Monday, December 9, 2019**

### **Lehman College**

My name is Sharon Utakis. I am a full professor in the English department at Bronx Community College, where I have taught since 2000, and I am also the PSC chapter chair at BCC. I will address item 7.

I want to call on you to request **full funding** for CUNY, and to do it without tuition increases or added fees. Do not accept austerity! Do not balance the college budgets by cutting maintenance or increasing class sizes! I support the request for a \$250 increase in per student FTE, but it's not enough!

I hope you have all carefully read the report by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams (<https://www.politico.com/states/f/?id=0000016e-d7f0-deca-af7e-d7f802640000>), which points out the systemic underfunding of CUNY, and the kind of funding that we need to demand from the state and the city.

Over the years I have been at BCC, I have seen the effects of austerity. CUNY has been severely underfunded for decades. BCC has been severely underfunded for decades. You can see it in the years of low faculty and staff salaries, in our over reliance on underpaid part-time faculty positions, on the effects on our infrastructure and the lack of basic maintenance on campus.

BCC has a beautiful campus, but there are a lot of problems: leaky roofs, broken bathrooms, and rodent and insect infestations. Last year, as you may remember, there was a problem with a water pump in one of the buildings on campus, Colston Hall, where my department and my office are. Water collected in pipes, the pipes froze, and then when the heat came back on, the pipes burst. Not just one pipe, but several pipes throughout the building! As a result, there was extensive flooding in several places. When the semester started a few days later, over 500

classes had to be relocated, along with many department and faculty offices. It took weeks for the building to be reopened. This was an incredibly disruptive event, which I'm sure had a negative effect on our retention of students. And one of the things that came out in an engineer's report was that the heating coils that burst had been installed in 1984, but had a life expectancy of 20 years, which means that they were 15 years out of date!

More recently, cuts have affected maintenance on campus. There are fewer custodians, which means cleaning happens less often. Students and faculty complain about trash overflowing in classrooms and hallways. Bugs and rodents are more prevalent than in the past. Just last week, the department assistant in my department found rodent droppings all over her desk and office when she returned to work after the weekend. She later found out they were rat droppings. She was asked to leave the droppings there until the exterminator came on Tuesday, so for a whole day she sat in a room with rat droppings everywhere.

CUNY can, and should, be better than this. We deserve better, and our students deserve better.