

**Testimony of Sharon Preiss, Adjunct Lecturer**  
**Borough of Manhattan Community College**  
**Before the Board of Trustees at**  
**Queens Public Hearing**

**April 19, 2017**

Dear Members of the CUNY Board of Trustees:

At Borough of Manhattan Community College, I teach English Composition, a college level English course that's required of all incoming freshman at CUNY and about 90% of college freshman across the country. Almost forty-five million students will take this course in 2017, about 38,000 students at CUNY. It must be a pretty important class to require that many people to take it. Indeed, College Composition may arguably be the *most* important course any college student will take. Its focus is on developing communication, thinking, and language skills, and since all human activity and achievement is based in communication, thinking, and language, the work a student undertakes in English Composition is indispensable. One could conclude, then, that the work the professor of this course undertakes is also indispensable. Yet in the inequitable world of U.S. colleges and universities, I, as a professor of English Composition, am at the absolute bottom of pay and status scales.

I am an adjunct. At my current salary, with CUNY's restrictions on the number of hours I can teach, the most money I could make a year is about \$39,000. This is not what you would expect as the salary of a professional who's tasked with performing such an important function for our

students, not to mention the fact that it's not even a livable wage in New York City. In order to make a living, then, every semester I teach for two different university systems, barely making enough money to get by. Yet, the classes at BMCC are so obviously vital to our students and their future success. How can there be such disconnect between the value of what I do and what I'm actually paid?

Many years ago, after teaching for several years in another university system, I asked myself the same question and became so disheartened, I left teaching and worked in another profession for ten years. But I love teaching, particularly College Composition, and I'm good at it. I've been teaching for almost 20 years. This is not a part-time job for me, it is my career. Yet here I am, scrambling from campus to campus, trying to keep my worry about money and stability at bay so I can be present for my job.

My students deserve the best they can get out of their education, and for College Composition, that's me. And I deserve \$7,000 per course from CUNY so that I can keep giving my students my best.

Sincerely,

Sharon L. Preiss, Adjunct Lecturer, Borough of Manhattan Community College