

**Testimony of
Amy E. Hughes, Associate Professor, Brooklyn College
before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY)
October 22, 2018**

Good afternoon. My name is Amy Hughes, and I am a tenured Associate Professor of Theater at Brooklyn College. I teach a theater-history class on Mondays at this time, or I would be here in person to offer my testimony. I've been a CUNY professor for nearly fifteen years—three years as a part-time adjunct at Hunter and Baruch, then full-time at Brooklyn College. Today, **I call on you as trustees to oppose austerity for CUNY. Take a public stand for a contract that is fully funded, includes real raises for all, and increases adjunct pay to \$7,000 per course.** I implore you to do this because our society desperately needs what our graduates have to offer: in particular, their experiences, insights, and perspectives as members of the working class, as children of immigrants, and as people of color.

I want to begin by pointing out something that is rather obvious: **New Yorkers are CUNY.** I know that *many* people in this room (myself included) have either studied at CUNY or have a family member, friend, neighbor, or colleague who did. To single out four such people in the room: I'm sure that my colleagues at Kingsborough Community College, Hunter College, and Baruch College are extremely proud to count trustees Sandra Wilkin, Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, and Fernando Ferrer among their alumni. And I'm proud to say that trustee Robert Mujica and I are fellow alumni of Brooklyn College: he completed his BA in Sociology there, and I earned my MFA in Performing Arts Management there.

As I'm sure you know, **CUNY students are incredibly—I daresay, *atypically*—passionate, inventive, talented, and, above all, diverse. Most step onto our campuses without the advantages and privileges that students at other colleges bring to bear on their education.** As a result, our students need as much time as we professors can possibly give them. This is a key reason part-time faculty need a fair, living wage, and why New York State must fully fund the labor contracts that CUNY has negotiated with the PSC, rather than forcing the campuses to cannibalize their own budgets. As a teacher, I have had countless conversations with students outside of the classroom. For example, recently I had a series of meetings with a single mother of two who was struggling in my class. We discussed essential strategies for note-taking, exam preparation, and working effectively within a team. I'm proud to say that although it was touch-and-go for a while, Amani passed my course—which increased her chances of graduating the following semester. Another time, I convened five students in my office so that I could help

them resolve a conflict that had emerged during a team project. By the end of our one-hour meeting, the students had identified the root of the conflict and created a plan for moving forward. Several of them sought me out later to thank me for investing time in their team, expressing gratitude for the way I coached them through the crisis. I invest my time in such meetings and conversations because I know that my time makes a difference. The communication and teamwork skills that I'm helping my students to develop will serve them long after our time together is over.

These are success stories. But there are an unbearable number of stories I could share about when I've failed. Way too often, I have been unable to intervene due to pressures and demands on my time. I try to take heart in the success stories. But the failures never cease to haunt me. Our students have incredibly complicated lives. They face challenges that I can hardly wrap my head around sometimes. My mission in life is to help them become the movers and shakers they hope to be: activists, artists, scientists, entrepreneurs. One day, they hope to be viewed as accomplished CUNY alumni one day—just like trustees Wilkin, Cortés-Vázquez, Ferrer, and Mujica.

All of us who teach and work at CUNY share a deep, abiding belief that we are doing the most important work we could possibly do. I sincerely hope you share this belief. If you do, please do everything in your power to oppose austerity for CUNY and take a public stand for a contract that is fully funded, includes real raises for all, and increases adjunct pay to \$7,000 per course. Thank you for your serious consideration of this call to action.

Amy E. Hughes, PhD

Associate Professor, Theater History & Criticism

Brooklyn College, 2900 Bedford Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11210

917.860.8844 // amyehughes@gmail.com

Coeditor, *A Player and a Gentleman: The Diary of Harry Watkins, Nineteenth-Century US*

American Actor: <http://bit.ly/PlayerGentleman> and <http://harrywatkinsdiary.org>

Author, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century*

America: <http://bit.ly/HughesSpectacles>

Bio and CV: <http://bit.ly/AEHughesBio>