June 26, 2020

CUNY Board of Trustees Special Meeting

The Covid 19 pandemic will forever shape the way in which CUNY students and faculty think of disparities that affect the education system in New York. I would like to address two issue today which I addressed briefly in my previous statement to the CUNY Board of Trustee when they met last year at Lehman College on the Social Inequality of Higher Education at CUNY. Firstly, adjunct lay-offs and the increasing cost of a CUNY education. Recently, my main CUNY campus where I have worked as an adjunct sent me a non-reappointment letter about May 15, 2020. Immediately, I contacted York College where I started working as of last fall. They agreed to offer me 3 courses. At first, two courses were offered and showed up on my CUNY First account and while waiting for the third class to be added, my department at York College sent out a notice that they were being forced to cut adjunct course offer down to 20%! If CUNY depends on the services of its adjunct faculty as a “lifeline” to keep costs down, why would adjunct faculty be laid off at such an alarming rate? Just yesterday, after about three weeks of filing for unemployment from NYS Department of Labor, I received a letter that I would receive “$0” benefits and for the fall, it is uncertain if I will be employed by CUNY as departments are being forced to cut adjunct employment.

Unfortunately these are not the times that adjunct faculty at CUNY should be laid off as many of our students are depending on their “favorite” professors to continue to instruct them in the fall and other semesters which will be dependent on motivational factors for many students to enroll in future CUNY courses which can mean a difference in enrollment increases or decreases. Many students lack the social support structures at home and often depend on the mentorship of adjunct faculty who take the time by working hard to support their student academically, emotionally and mentally. As a woman of color I have often shared my own higher education inequality struggles in which I have faced foreclosure and had to apply for unemployment in between the academic year.

Secondly, I would like to address - free or extremely lower cost of education especially in public schools like CUNY will open doors of opportunities that can provide a positive benefit to many communities. Private Higher education is unaffordable for the average low income student in the United States which in most cases includes the population of CUNY students, regardless of programs like ASAP and College Discovery, College Now which many of our students are enrolled in but yet, there is still a struggle in meeting the day-to-day demands of obtaining a Higher Education degree. This causes a burden for those who are underprivileged, and those who already are unable to afford the cost of a higher education. The inequality in higher education has relegated many minorities to take “any” job available to take care of their families’ immediate needs. When I went to college, my tuition was $800 and believe me, THAT was expensive!. By the time I completed graduate, my entire graduate school education at SUNY was just $5000 which on average is the cost of a CUNY undergraduate education per year today!

The Social Inequality in Higher Education is that Higher education should be completely free for everyone and that adjunct faculty at CUNY should be retained to continue their employment services to CUNY. Moreover, adjunct faculty should be paid a higher and comparable living wage so that they can continue their commitments to develop the best in the potential of all CUNY students at the lowest and most affordable cost of higher education. The CUNY Board of Trustees has the power to demand fixing the higher education system in New York City so that adjunct faculty will not continue to be at the bottom of the ladder. Most importantly, I urge on the CUNY Board of Trustees to halt immediately the call for a CUNY tuition hike so that our students can deserve the best quality and most affordable education in America!

Thank you kindly for your attention.

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