

Testimony of Herbert Hartel  
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I have taught art history at various branches of CUNY for over twenty year and at Queens College, my alma mater, for over three years now. Class sizes were already larger than I remembered as an undergrad thirty years ago when I started at Queens College and they've gone up considerably in just a few years. This summer one of my fall classes was canceled in June even though it already had at least thirty students enrolled. Around August 1, we were told all of our classes were having their enrollment limits raised by 20%. I now have 50-60 students in each class at a time when most faculty and students are new to completely distanced / online teaching.

This adversely affects the quality of teaching in many ways. Synchronous classes do not work at all well with classes of 25, let alone 40 or 50 students. I don't use them. I have tried to supplement the in-person experience with audio clips for my PowerPoint slide lectures on art historical objects. Ironically, since the audio-video demands of art history are greater than average and with audio added to the visual images they become even more demanding, so I need to get the maximum memory allowed for each Blackboard class shell in order to handle a full semester art history class online with these supplements. Many students and faculty don't have the computer equipment or experience with online teaching to handle this new way of teaching and learning. I went through the online teaching program in CUNY back in May and it was very helpful, but there are still things for faculty to learn. Providing useful feedback on written assignments is not as easy with online teaching platforms as some might think and reading the papers in such large classes requires a lot more time that adjuncts like me are not paid for. Clearly, the pandemic has allowed the administration to think classes can be packed like virtual subway trains and that this is acceptable or somehow nobody will notice or mind.

As a QC alum, I take these problems personally. I know the value of a liberal arts education at a public university where the tuition is far lower than any private or parochial university or college. I hate to see the quality deterioration right in front of me.