

Testimony of Jeff Allred
Professional Staff Congress / CUNY
Hunter College

City University of New York
Board Public and Borough Hearing

December 07, 2020

I write today to express my disappointment at CUNY's decision to increase caps in many of its courses, including all of mine this term and, presumably, next. I realize everything is on a shoestring now, but I want to register the impact of this decision on me and, more important, on our students.

All of these courses are discussion- and writing-intensive, like all courses in our department. Each incremental student adds something like 5% to the already considerable load of grading, fielding tech issues, and the like. The increases mean a) a speedup for me at a time when my own children are likely relegated to distance learning much or all of the time, with massive demands on my time to keep them on task; or b) a marked decrease in the quality of the courses, removing the robust "active learning" components that don't scale (frequent informal writing, structured synchronous discussions, small group work) and replacing with the kinds of impersonal elements (recorded lectures, ungraded writing, "discussions" in which I have to toggle through several screens constantly while running class to see who's still there) that work (if only poorly) at large scale and that (frankly) students can find with much higher production values at slick outfits like EdX and Coursera.

All faculty and most administrators and many legislators and taxpayers know that liberal arts teaching, done right, generally doesn't scale up with canned "sage on the stage" lectures and scantrons without losing the quality that we all strive to give our students. But I have to say it anyway. Resource allocation is above my pay grade, but hiring enough part-time faculty to keep our caps where they are should be a very high priority.