

Testimony of Joyce Timberlake
Professional Staff Congress / CUNY
Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College

City University of New York
Board Public and Borough Hearing

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To the Honorable Board of Trustees of City University of New York:

My name is Joyce Timberlake and I teach at the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College. A decision to increase class sizes cheats students, jeopardizes CUNY's reputation, and risks declining university revenue.

My pedagogical concerns about an increase are related to the successful use of student teams during academic terms. Learning to function as a team member is an essential skill. The capacity to work cohesively in teams is important for achieving success not only in corporate settings, but also in community groups, international alliances, and even inside domestic governments. World leaders can see the impact on the United States of a leader—Donald Trump—who apparently never learned to work as an effective and cohesive team member or team leader.

In my courses, I create teams of students who develop team-building skills the entire semester. Students learn, and practically apply, important concepts from the textbook using the classroom ecosystem—albeit now a virtual one—as a practice lab.

Increasing class sizes would lead to lower efficacy in learning this skill and the negative implications are clear. Large teams are less cohesive. This creates feelings of isolation in some students. If these students drop the class, this leads to lost revenue for the university. Overall, the outcomes are unjust for students and faculty. Of course, you might suggest that creating more teams of fewer students is a solution. This, however, is unlikely to achieve any useful results since in a class that is too full—like an overbooked aircraft—some students (customers) are likely to request service repeatedly before actually receiving any attention. This scenario in any business is called poor customer service and leads to lost revenue.

Surely, the use of teams as a pedagogical tool is widely applicable across the university and not only in my classes.

Yes, my argument is a simple one unfettered by impressive theories or the jargon of academia. Yet, if Donald Trump had learned to work effectively in teams prior to serving the office of U.S.

President, maybe friends and foes of the United States—and even citizens within our own borders— would not be asking the question, “Is America still a democracy?”