

Testimony to Board of Trustees, 12/5/22 Public Hearing

Greetings to the CUNY Trustees and Chancellor Matos-Rodriguez. My name is Craig Bernardini; I'm a professor of English at Hostos Community College, where I've worked since 2004. I'm a previous chair and deputy chair of my department and a long-time member of our college senate. I'm currently serving as the Hostos-PSC Chapter Chair.

Like other PSC members, I urge the Board to fight for a CUNY budget that ensures an increase in the number of counselors and full-time faculty compared to pre-COVID levels, significantly boosts pay (particularly for the lowest-paid titles), and ensures that CUNY students have the learning conditions they need and deserve.

As at other CUNY colleges, budgetary problems have left Hostos short-staffed, impacting the college's ability to optimally serve our students. I'll cite two recent examples.

First, final exams begin at Hostos a week from tomorrow, and the college was only able to post a final exam schedule yesterday. This was actually sooner than I was led to expect; when I inquired last week, I was told the schedule would not be published until the end of this week. Among the reasons cited was "lack of local IT support."

The tardy publication of the exam schedule is deeply unfair to all our students who have in-person exams. Many (if not most) of them work, and the double period required for a final often means they have to make arrangements in their work schedules well in advance. Many of our students are also no doubt trying to make travel plans to see family over the holidays.

There is also the small matter of preparing for these exams. This preparation is partly labor (i.e., studying) and partly psychological. Being able to plan adequate study time is a question of time management, which is necessarily impacted by the unavailability of the exam

schedule. As for the psychological aspect: many of our campus student support offices offer events to help students NOT stress out about their finals. Not knowing when their exam is until the eleventh hour undermines this important work by PSC faculty and staff.

My second example concerns the terrible incident of antisemitic and homophobic graffiti our college suffered at the end of October. I would like to publicly acknowledge the college's swift response, including organizing an event to combat hate at our campus.

Such incidents—for we are not the only campus that has suffered in this way—cannot help but remind me of the dire need for robust counseling services. I cannot and would never argue that this particular incident could have been prevented through counseling; we know nothing as yet about the assailant, or how they came to embrace these ideas which have gained such terrifying currency over the last few years. However, I can and would argue that the general climate of hatred and violence, its ability to bear terrible fruit in acts like these, IS impacted by the availability (or lack thereof) of mental health and counseling services, particularly for our deeply vulnerable students, facing the twin stresses of the pandemic and the economy. Simply put, CUNY has never needed more robust counseling services than now, and that means more *full-time* counselors on staff, not just at Hostos, but at every CUNY college.

If CUNY wants faculty and staff to be able to serve our students to the best of our ability, you must ensure we have the resources to do so. Again, I urge you to advocate strongly for these resources, to give our students the material and emotional support they need to succeed. Thank you.