

BoT Testimony 20 March 2023

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

Thank you for allowing me to submit my testimony in writing. I was unable to make the trip to City Tech today because I teach at Hunter at 5:30 PM. Nor was I able to testify over zoom, because the slot I was given fell during my class. Your willingness to accept my written testimony is greatly appreciated.

I would like to speak to you about the pre-emptive budget cuts that all the colleges are being forced to plan for. At Hunter College, we have been informed that much of the savings would come from a further trimming of the NTA and College Assistant budgets. That would be disastrous for me personally and for so many of the students here at Hunter.

For nearly four years, I have been the interim and part-time director of the Rockowitz Writing Center at Hunter. Both my associate director and I are paid as NTAs for what ought to be - and what used to be - two HEO lines. We run a busy writing center that is staffed by college assistants. Reductions to NTA budgets would imperil our health care and threaten to reduce our presence at the writing center, which in turn would further limit the services we could offer. Reductions to CA budgets would necessarily reduce the number of tutoring hours we could offer per week, which would necessarily reduce the number of students we could support.

The CA budget, in particular, worries me. Just a few years ago, we had a CA budget of \$180,000 with tutoring wages starting at \$9.72 per hour. In the intervening years, wages have gone up to \$15.61 and our budget has gone down, which is why we can only offer 150 hours of tutoring per week instead of 250-275. Since every student we see gets a full hour of one-on-one assistance, a 100-hour reduction in services means we are serving 100 fewer students per week than we did just 5 years ago. Now, we are facing the very real threat of having to cut our hours even more - even if our CA budget remains untouched. That is because DC-37's new contract with the city includes a provision for a minimum wage of \$18 per hour, which would be a nearly 15% increase in pay from the current minimum CA wage of

\$15.61. So, even if our CA budget remained the same, we would be forced to reduce services by about ⅓ to make up for the per hour increase. If our CA budget goes down, the cuts to tutoring services would be even more disastrous.

Realistically, if our CA budget is not increased, our only other option would be to try to reduce our administrative costs. We have two CAs, paid at a higher rate than our tutors, who help us administer the RWC. We need their help because, as I mentioned before, both I and our associate director are part time; our writing center no longer has even a single full time staff member. We could cut our administrative college assistants' hours, but if we did that, we would have to cut our operational hours because we can't leave the center unsupervised.

But let's say that Hunter decides to boost our budget and instead find cuts in other departments. If critical services like Advising lose CAs, then our already overextended HEOs will be performing clerical duties like filing instead of meeting students. No matter whose CA budgets are cut, departmental and student support services will suffer.

And if support for students suffers, whether that is the kind of academic support that tutoring centers like mine offer, advising services, financial aid, or anything else - how might that affect retention? If students are not getting the help they need to navigate the often confusing requirements of the colleges or to succeed in their classes, why would they stay at CUNY? At this moment of enrollment and retention crises, we need to make the colleges easier to navigate, not harder, and to offer students more resources to help them succeed, not fewer.

The last thing CUNY can afford is to get a reputation for being less than helpful to students who need help. Therefore, we cannot afford to balance our budget by cutting our CAs and NTAs. Instead, we must afford a re-staffing of our HEO lines, including the two lines that my writing center used to have. Anything less and we doom ourselves - and you, the people who make financial decisions for the university, doom us - to a slow death spiral of inadequate support for what ought to be a world class education.