

Testimony from Penny Lewis, PSC Secretary and Professor at the School of Labor and Urban Studies

The CUNY Board of Trustees is being asked at its meeting next week to approve an expansive and accelerated vision of a new CUNY Online initiative. This project involves creating or revamping over a thousand courses for dozens of new *wholly asynchronous online* degrees. I emphasize wholly asynchronous, the modality insisted upon by this vision.

- The Professional Staff Congress is opposed to the Board taking this action. As we communicated with CUNY weeks ago, CUNY would be hiring an outside firm for work currently performed by our members, undermining our bargaining unit and violating our contract. Additionally, how will the work of our current members be affected by the launching of this major project? Online asynch is labor intensive to develop, teach, revise, and support. The 3-year period of the proposed start-up phase would create workload issues for current employees by expecting them to do their regular job while also training others to be able to launch CUNY Online programs. Select online program support offices and staff are *currently* having their time redirected from supporting instruction happening now to attend meetings around the creation of new, asynchronous courses.
- Before the Board approves this contract, CUNY is legally obligated to bargain with us to reach an agreement ensuring that the terms and conditions of our work, workload, compensation, appointment, evaluation, technical supports, and academic freedom are protected at all stages of development and implementation.

But our objection also stems from deeper, core questions and problems that we foresee. CUNY's mission is to provide high-quality education to the people of New York. From what we see in the RFP, and what we hear from CUNY, CUNY Online is ill-conceived and will undermine our core mission, and the university itself. Here are a few key concerns, among others:

1. With mixed research on its overall effectiveness, online asynchronous instruction works for a limited number of students and in some programs better than others. Many students will be drawn to it because of its convenience but they are unlikely to succeed.
2. This massive online initiative will draw resources away from other, proven teaching modalities at CUNY. Central anticipates tuition revenue from the programs will allow campuses to ramp up needed supports, but they've offered no projections on when those profits might be realized, what kinds of supports might be necessary, or when these issues will be addressed

3. CUNY has no stated strategy or resources for refreshing, reviewing, or revising courses after they're launched, which will result in rigid outdated curricula, stifle academic freedom, and diminish the quality of education provided to our students.
4. Teaching will become de-professionalized, with ready-made course curricula, assignments, and pre-programmed modules.

CUNY has not taken its vision of this massive project to the campuses for collective review—most of our colleagues don't even know it's coming. This makes a mockery of true shared governance. Rigorous academic governance review of this project must be completed before it is approved. CUNY imagines it will come late in the game to online asynch degrees and quickly recruit new working adult students. We must not sacrifice the promise of CUNY for the possibility of needed dollars. We are deeply concerned that this fast, misguided endeavor will have major negative repercussions on our colleges and students. The board should postpone any vote until they have met with the PSC and faculty governance bodies to address contractual and pedagogical issues.