

May 8, 2023

Dear Members of the CUNY Board of Trustees,

My name is Jack Kenigsberg. I have been a teaching adjunct in the English department of Hunter College for the last dozen years, and a non-teaching adjunct and Acting Coordinator of the Rockowitz Writing Center, also at Hunter College, for the last four.

In both of my professional capacities, as a teacher and a writing center director, I am deeply invested in the teaching of writing: how writing is taught and how it is learned. I have received grants to develop innovative pedagogical practices, and I have run professional development sessions at Hunter and CUNY-wide.

So it is with the benefit of years of experience that I tell you that one of the inevitable consequences of the planned budget cuts, particularly to adjunct faculty, will be to further erode the teaching and learning of writing at CUNY.

Students at CUNY encounter reading and writing in nearly every class they take, but they are formally taught college-level writing and research skills in the two required composition classes, which most students take in their very first two semesters. The vast majority of composition classes throughout the CUNY system are taught by adjuncts, so any cuts to the adjunct budget will necessarily mean fewer people on hand to teach these classes and, therefore, fewer sections of these classes offered. I ask you: how will the colleges ensure that all students take a required class if they are forced to offer fewer **sections**? Their inevitable solution will be to increase class **sizes** to accommodate demand.

Large class sizes may make financial sense, but they rarely make **pedagogical** sense; for a labor-intensive class like composition it makes even less sense. My students write between 50 and 75 pages for me, all of which requires timely and intensive response. But how can I keep doing that if I have more students in my classes? Adding even two or three students per section would mean adding 150 to 225 pages of student writing per section. I cannot rush through their papers or give them a cursory glance because, in a composition class, the writing **is** the class. I read every word my students write, and I give them the feedback they need to improve. All the adjuncts who teach composition do this.

And one unintended, but wonderful, result is that my students feel seen by me, because I don't just impart my ideas to them; I engage with their ideas and take them seriously as writers and as thinkers. This is why, every single year, a former student reaches out to ask me for a letter of recommendation even though I don't teach in their field and even though I haven't seen them in three or four years. They reach out to me because they still feel that connection with me. And it's not because I'm special. It's because I teach composition. We are among the very first faculty members students meet. We are their first impression of CUNY. Shouldn't their first impression be as positive as possible?

When you let adjuncts go for cost-cutting purposes, class sizes grow. When class sizes grow, it becomes that much more difficult to provide a quality education, to give effective feedback, and to form the kinds of interpersonal connections with students that make students feel at home at CUNY.

Thank you,
Jack Kenigsberg
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