

Testimony to the CUNY Board of Trustees, Monday May 8, 2023,
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Since the last Urban Doom Loop*, 9/11, resources have flown out of the CUNY classroom into the pockets of executives, wealth in the city has continued to concentrate, and learning has become increasingly elusive.

In the past, real learning took place at CUNY, providing the city with a solid foundation of highly trained, upwardly mobile workers needed to drive recovery.

Nowadays, CUNY seems to see the bulk of students as a revenue stream, they aren't expected to graduate, and currently 70 percent drop out. Thus, CUNY sees no need to pay teachers a living wage.

But past Doom Loop shocks were one-offs. To use a cliché, we are in a perfect storm of Doom Loops – yes, falling tax base, but also pandemic loss of learning, arrival of AI, a mental health crisis, fentanyl deaths, increasingly frequent, disruptive natural disasters, mass inward migration, all resting on a hollowed out educational foundation.

Because of decisions you have made in the past, New York City has a compromised stock of human capital.

Teaching the underserved takes time. It requires patience, compassion, and empathy, as well as disciplinary knowledge. The learning environment at CUNY is beyond fragile.

Despite my contingent status, I work full time for CUNY. I earn around \$20,000.

Janitors at CUNY earn a well-deserved \$70,000 +.

What's wrong with this picture?

York College's PSC executive had to fight for over a year to ensure that when teachers and students come together to learn, they could access their classrooms. The electronic locks on the doors didn't work. Students came to class, then frustrated by the lockout, left.

The man responsible for this debacle earned \$215,000 before the last raise.

York College admin, wanted us to use hperflex, so I did. Two weeks ago, I lost half an hour of contact time because the sound in the classroom's podium wasn't working. Only two students were there in person and over 20 had joined via Zoom. Five of the Zoom students disappeared while the technician worked to fix the sound.

The person responsible for this debacle earned \$155, 000 before the raise.

What's wrong with this picture?

But it can change. You can change it. Adjuncts with three-year contracts went through rigorous selection processes. Give us a living wage and job security, smaller classes, and we can combat the fragility of today's learning environment and fill in the foundation of knowledge on which the city's future success stands.

Restructure CUNY so that the classroom returns to the center of the organization. Empower us, don't take our health insurance. Then we can all benefit from recovery this time.

*The Columbia Business School Real Estate Professor, (Stijn Van Nieuwerburgh), who coined the phrase Urban Doom Loop, meaning office workers leave, stores close, more office workers leave etc. warned that Downtown and Midtown were facing one. Later he walked it back saying that if action was taken now by State and Federal governments the downward spiral could be stopped.

Others pointed out that New York City came roaring back after other Doom Loops – Bankruptcy in the 1970s, the 9/11 attacks. What they didn't say is that each recovery positively impacted fewer and fewer New Yorkers, until today, when wealth concentration makes the Gilded Age look like an egalitarian utopia.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/08/nyregion/doom-loop-remote-work-pandemic-nyc.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>